

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

**Mr CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome to today's Estimates Committee hearing.

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

## **MINISTER UIBO'S PORTFOLIOS**

### **TREATY AND LOCAL DECISION MAKING**

#### **ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

#### **DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET**

**Mr CHAIR:** I welcome you, minister, to today's hearings and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you this morning.

**Ms UIBO:** I also acknowledge that we are on Larrakia country today. I thank the Larrakia for their custodianship of this beautiful country and pay my respects to elders past, present, emerging and future Larrakia leaders.

The senior officials accompanying me this morning are Ms Emma White, Deputy CEO Regional Services and Communities; Ms Maree De Lacey, Deputy CEO Territory Regional Growth; Mr Robert Pocock, the Director of the Treaty Unit; Mr Anthony Shelley, Executive Director Strategic Aboriginal Policy; and Ms Shaneen Tilmouth, Director Strategic Aboriginal Policy.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement then I will 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 the specific outputs.

Prior to moving on to the outputs, before we hit the whole-of-government questions, if there are any questions that anyone on the Estimates Committee would like to confirm regarding which output, that would be time to do it.

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

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement regarding Treaty and Local Decision Making and the Aboriginal Affairs portfolios?

**Ms UIBO:** Mr Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to make an opening statement in regard to my portfolio responsibilities of Aboriginal Affairs, Treaty and Local Decision Making.

These portfolio responsibilities have a vital role in supporting the social, economic and cultural aspirations of Aboriginal Territorians. This is deeply relevant to supporting every Territorian because we all live in a vibrant and tightly-knit Northern Territory community.

At the heart of our approach is engaging in meaningful and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal Territorians and communities, and working with our fellow Territorians on significant Aboriginal Affairs' priorities, strategic Aboriginal policy matters and key projects, some of which I am pleased to outline today for the committee.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Leadership and Governance Forum is an annual event designed to create space for sharing, learning and exchanging. It is a crucial place in which First Nations people and organisations can grow and assert their leadership and governance skills, ensuring the endurance of the strong culture, strong people and the strong places we have in the Territory, which is at the heart of decision-making and achieving community and cultural aspirations.

In 2022 over 300 Aboriginal leaders and delegates from across the Northern Territory and interstate, including elders and emerging leaders; senior members of Aboriginal organisations and businesses; and heads of

corporate, government and community organisations, gathered in Mparntwe—Alice Springs—to hear and learn from each other.

Further support of mentorship is also provided to emerging Aboriginal leaders from remote communities across the Northern Territory through the First Circles Leadership Program. This program brings new and quiet voices into the conversation. Participation ensures that Aboriginal Territorians from remote areas are engaged and can confidentially and directly speak to, negotiate with and influence government about matters affecting their lives, families and communities.

With over 70 First Circles Leadership Program alumni members from across the Territory, this flagship program is designed to help participants influence and contribute to change and transformation for their communities by supporting leadership, learning and development. This is achieved by actively expanding their leadership skills, increasing their personal governance capabilities and learning more about the impact of government and public policies and programs that relate to their communities.

The aspirations of Aboriginal communities are also guiding the transition of government service and some programs to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations through local decision-making, also known as LDM. LDM is helping to facilitate a new working relationship and partnership between Aboriginal communities and government agencies in order to support self-determination.

There are currently 11 LDM agreements that are signed in various stages of implementation, with another 22 that are under development. Aboriginal communities are further supported through our Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan, with the latest progress report which was launched a couple of weeks ago on 6 June 2023. The action plan identifies 10 key areas where short, medium and long-term actions are being progressed with land councils, traditional owners, the Commonwealth Government and other key stakeholders. The aim is to better coordinate Aboriginal land and native title matters across the Northern Territory and ensure Aboriginal land and sea ownership delivers on the economic and social aspirations of our Aboriginal Territorians.

Other actions that continue to be progressed in a collaborative partnership relate to Closing the Gap and our Northern Territory Implementation Plan. This process is proving to be a powerful learning experience in working alongside and in partnership directly with the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory—APO NT—as well as the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory—LGANT. A second implementation plan of the Northern Territory for Closing the Gap will be finalised in the coming months.

Work is also progressing towards the commitments in the Territory's Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy, which is focused on Aboriginal families, children and communities. It reflects the importance of ensuring that people and place are at the centre of government policy, design and service delivery and are empowered to determine their own futures.

It is also important to recognise the work being done by the Aboriginal Interpreter Service—AIS—towards the improvement of service delivery, interpreter training and development, and building and maintaining the interpreter workforce which is a critical part of the Northern Territory.

A refresh recruitment campaign was recently undertaken by the AIS with the aim of inspiring Aboriginal language speakers to join the AIS and become professionally trained interpreters. The campaign is using a mix of communication products and was promoted through various platforms such as social media, local television, radio and posters.

Importantly AIS provides interpreting services in 18 Aboriginal languages throughout the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia assisting to alleviate the language barriers faced by many of our fellow Aboriginal Territorians. I am proud that this work is co-designed to ensure that Aboriginal Territorians have a leading role in decision-making regarding their lives, families and communities.

By building our confidence and skills; strengthening the communities in which we live backing our Aboriginal organisations to lead seeking and supporting Aboriginal-led solutions to the challenges that are faced directly by Aboriginal Territorians and across the wider Territory, we can only have a stronger Territory.

That is the empowerment and the self-determination which Aboriginal Territorians demand and deserve. It is the process in which Aboriginal Territorians seek to ensure that we have a better place to live. It is good government of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to ensure that we listen and act on those desires.

I express my appreciation to everyone championing these changes, not just in the government we hold, but for the many decades of Aboriginal leadership by people who are no longer with us. Capability and capacity building, ensuring that the government has a culturally-responsive public sector, is vital to a thriving Northern Territory community. I am now happy to take questions from the committee.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** One of the key areas of the Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy is keeping Aboriginal Territorians safe. It says:

*Why safety is important: Aboriginal Territorians deserve to feel safe in their communities and engage with culturally appropriate social services.*

What are you doing to keep Aboriginal Territorians safe?

**Ms UIBO:** The framework relates to ensuring that we listen to the community-led solutions and support the governance and leadership of Aboriginal organisations and corporations, particularly when it comes to the safety of First Nations Territorians.

The work is accountable in being able to track an annual report. It is a 10-year strategy. The strategy aligns with Closing the Gap national refreshed strategy targets. It will be reported on every year in November in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.

This work shows that there are some gaps, which is what we need to track and put resources and development into those areas. It also shows areas where the measures are tracking, strongly progressing and successful.

Some of the work we have done on safety is create peak forums which involve the Northern Territory Government, the Australian Government, usually through the lens of the National Indigenous Australians Agency and our peak Aboriginal bodies that represent particular sectors. For example, the tripartite forum which has a focus on health, and AHNT, the Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory, which is the peak organisation involved in the joint steering committee on homelands and Aboriginal housing. Having peak Aboriginal organisations as part of the high-level strategic policy is important. We are ensuring that we reflect the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal Territorians, whether they are living in remote, very remote, regional or urban areas.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** One of the measures under that strategy is to reduce the incidence of domestic and family violence for Aboriginal Territorians. What have you done to deal with that matter?

**Ms UIBO:** This is an area of policy that we coordinate. Responsibility for the reduction of family, domestic and sexual violence sits with my colleague, the Minister for Territory Families, Kate Worden. My agency plays a coordinating role. Through the Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy, we provide the opportunity to track and measure progress in those areas. We play a supportive role in the coordination of our Territory policy, but we are not the lead agency for that area.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has there been any reduction in the incidence of domestic and family violence for Aboriginal Territorians?

**Ms UIBO:** I am not the lead minister for that area. I am happy to take that question on notice and give you the latest data that we have for our reporting figures.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.1

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has there been any reduction in the incidence of domestic and family violence for Aboriginal Territorians?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** Part of that safety strategy says that there will be minimal crime and adequate policing. Why is there no police station at Alpururulam?

**Ms UIBO:** I cannot answer that question because I am not the Police minister.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Are you responsible for the Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy?

**Ms UIBO:** We are the coordinating policy agency; we collect the data from other agencies. You have asked a specific question that is operational for police.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Do you have the answer somewhere?

**Ms UIBO:** I am not the Police minister, but we can take the question on notice and get the Police minister to respond.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.2

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The objective is to have minimal crime and adequate policing. Why is there no police station at Alpururulam?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** Under 'Justice' in the Aboriginal Affairs strategy, it says under measure 9.1, 'establish and support Aboriginal law and justice groups'. How many have been established?

**Ms UIBO:** I do not have the exact figures because it sits with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. In the budget that was released in May, six law and justice groups are budgeted for establishment. I am happy to clarify that with the Attorney-General, but I believe it is six by the end of this year. A lot of work is well under way.

There has been great work in my electorate of Arnhem, in Groote Eylandt in particular, and a couple of local decision-making agreements have started to include justice. The focus on that area is a key pillar of the Anindilyakwa local decision-making agreement. Other developments of LDM drafts also include justice as a key focus for those communities and regions.

You would have to talk to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice about the exact number of law and justice groups that have already been established.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Are you responsible for the Aboriginal Affairs strategy?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, I am; we are the coordinating agency. We collect the data from other agencies so that we can report as the whole-of-government, but my agency is not responsible for the implementation of those law and justice groups. That sits with the ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The strategy was released in 2019 ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Barkly, let the minister finish and then continue.

**Ms UIBO:** The strategy sits with the Attorney-General in the Aboriginal Justice Unit. Mr Robert Pocock has been working in partnership throughout that coordination process, and he will be able to talk on the question at hand.

**Mr POCOCK:** There is currently work to establish six law and justice groups in the Territory. The budget has allocated funding for three in the coming financial year and a further three in the following financial year. At

this stage law and justice groups are well progressed at Groote Eylandt, Maningrida, Barunga and Wugularr. Work is being undertaken to progress groups in East Arnhem across five communities, Yuendumu and in the Barkly region around Tennant Creek.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The answer is that three have been established. Is that correct?

**Mr POCOCK:** Yes.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** They are fully operational?

**Mr POCOCK:** No. The implementation framework is still being developed through which the groups will eventually be approved by the Attorney-General.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** This strategy was released in 2019 and there are still no fully functional law and justice groups in the Northern Territory. What is the delay?

**Ms UIBO:** I know you spent a lot of time on the Attorney-General and Justice yesterday. I am not sure why these questions were not asked in that section.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I thought you were responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, minister.

**Ms UIBO:** I am, but it would mean I would do a third of the work of every other minister. We are talking about 30% population of Aboriginal Territorians. My agency is the coordinating agency for policy and measurements in order to track to see what we do against our targets as well as the national Closing the Gap targets.

I am the responsible minister, but it is a coordination role collecting all the data from every other agency and the responsible ministers, not just because it is about Aboriginal people and organisations. It is a whole-of-government response.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** You are right; some of those questions were put to the Attorney-General yesterday. We were told that six had been established. You are now saying that only three have been established.

**Ms UIBO:** I believe that six have been funded in the budget. The Attorney-General would have the figures on what has been established. As Mr Pocock said, some of them are in the implementation phase but would need to be a written question to the Attorney-General. The budget is for six.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Alcohol management has been a big issue over the last 12 months. What amount of funding has been committed to working with remote communities to develop alcohol management plans?

**Ms UIBO:** I understand—and I know you are well aware—that this area of policy sits with the Chief Minister. I believe that she was asked the question and has taken it on notice.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Where does the local decision-making policy sit in regard to alcohol management?

**Ms UIBO:** Local decision-making agreements are about the transfer of services to Aboriginal communities, organisations or corporations. Alcohol management plans sit with the responsibility of the Chief Minister who holds the portfolio and who is responsible for that legislation, the Northern Territory *Liquor Act*. Local decision-making agreements are about the transfer of government services to Aboriginal control.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Who from your office is talking to people about the development of alcohol management plans in communities?

**Ms UIBO:** We have our regional network. We have six regional networks across the Northern Territory that do remote outreach. Staff of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet are also based in some of our remote communities.

A lot of the work being coordinated on alcohol management plans in our remote areas is with the support of the regional director network in each region. The process, engagement and consultation occurs differently in every community, as it should because the needs and aspirations are different. Some of the challenges are similar, but the desire to work on alcohol management plans can differ from community to community and region to region.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How many alcohol management plans have been developed through that regional approach?

**Ms UIBO:** That sits under the Alcohol Policy remit of the Chief Minister. You would need to provide a written question to ask her for an answer.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How many participants are in the First Circles Leadership Program at the moment?

**Ms UIBO:** That is a great question because it is a great program. We have 70 alumni, people who have participated ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Just at the moment, thanks.

**Ms UIBO:** The current program is open to 30. Ms Shaneen Tilmouth can give me the exact number, but I believe it is in the twenties.

**Ms TILMOUTH:** The program has 27 participants in this cohort. The number varies as participants sign up. Over the course of the year some, unfortunately, are unable to continue the program through changing life circumstances et cetera.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Could you tell me a bit about the program? Does it involve participants coming to Darwin for workshops or is activity or development happening in their communities?

**Ms UIBO:** The program is twofold. Some workshops that are centralised are held in our regional centres; for example, Darwin is the closest regional centre for the Top End. We have had workshops in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

There is also work to support the participants in their communities. We have outreach whereby the staff in the Office of Aboriginal Affairs physically visit and support the participants in community, particularly with their community projects. The reason why they signed up is to work to develop a community project that will enhance the lives of their fellow community members.

Workshop 1 has been completed across the Top End, Central Australia, East Arnhem and Big Rivers regions. There will be a follow-up workshop 2, which has been finalised. The two regional workshops will be moved—one into Darwin and one into Alice Springs—to support those participants.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** At the local level, if a participant is in a community, what development is provided in that community for that individual?

**Ms UIBO:** A lot of the support for individuals in communities is about mentorship and connecting them to the networks that will enhance their community project. It ensures that they have the ability to identify some of the areas in their community project that could link in to advocacy roles—for example, obtaining grants for projects or to lobby for something in their community as part of the project.

Shaneen Tilmouth has a direct feed into that program and can give you further detail.

**Ms TILMOUTH:** Part of the way the program works is that at the community level, through our regional network that the minister mentioned, there is support through the Chief Minister's department for participants. We connect participants with existing and previous alumni of the program, which is about strengthening, creating and establishing.

Although most of our community participants already have strong networks in the regions, it ensures that a clear pathway is made available to them to raise issues, progress community action and pursue and strengthen their leadership within the community. It ensures that when opportunities arise, they can build on that. For example, at the last Aboriginal Leadership and Governance Forum held in Alice Springs, one of the First Circles program participants was a panellist in a breakout session.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How much money is in the budget for the First Circles program?

**Ms UIBO:** Our 2022–23 expenditure as of 31 March is \$207,000. Our estimate for the forecast in Budget 2022–23 is \$250,000.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is the connection between the First Circles program and local authorities in the communities where participants are based?

**Ms UIBO:** There definitely could be a stronger connection in that sense, but I know that some First Circles participants have been local authority members. Vice versa, local government has also championed and shared the network of the First Circles program on behalf of the Northern Territory Government to encourage regional and remote community members to apply. Some members have been successful through those links and networks at the local government level.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is there a formal connection between First Circles and local authorities whereby a participant can automatically be a member of that local authority to help with their leadership development and governance skills?

**Ms UIBO:** There is not a direct relationship because, obviously, becoming a local authority member requires meeting the local government criteria. That is not something the Office of Aboriginal Affairs through NTG determines, but it is strongly encouraged. I have seen many participants on both forums.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** It is possible, by the sounds of it, that First Circles operates in isolation from local authorities and communities. Is that correct?

**Ms UIBO:** We are talking about two different governments.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** We are talking about development skills, leadership and governance. Why is there no formal connection between First Circles and local authorities in communities?

**Ms UIBO:** First Circles is a Northern Territory Government program and local authorities are a local government mechanism.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** That are controlled by the Northern Territory Government.

**Ms UIBO:** They have their own act and are governed under that.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** In fact, the government instructs councils where they are to have local authorities. That is the extent that government is involved. Why is there no formal connection between First Circles and local authorities in communities?

**Ms UIBO:** We want to engage with diverse remote Aboriginal participants and not just people who may already have access to membership or a leadership role that may be elected or unelected. We want to ensure that we have an open and available program that is accessible, regardless of whether someone has been exposed to government processes, policy and programs in the past or has no experience whatsoever. We do not want to cut out anyone from our programs.

It is up to community members to nominate. Local governments have strongly encouraged their members, but we do not want to limit it only to people who are engaged in local government in remote communities.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Do you have any KPIs for the First Circles program?

**Ms UIBO:** I do not have any KPIs in front of me. Ms Shaneen Tilmouth can talk about how we assess the program and the support that is vital for our program participants.

**Ms TILMOUTH:** There is a regular evaluation of the program for KPIs. We work with the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre to regularly review what the program delivers, how it is delivered and where we can strengthen parts of the program.

The participants are regularly engaged to provide feedback. It is an outcomes-based program. We can count the number of participants we have for KPIs. The program looks to the individual experiences of participants. It is more an iterative approach to evaluation. It is making sure the participants had a meaningful experience engaging with the program.

The program adjusts yearly. That is dependent on the experiences and work history of the participants in each individual year.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** It sounds like there are no specific KPIs. Can you give us some examples of the outcomes that have been achieved through the First Circles program?

**Ms UIBO:** We mentioned that 70 alumni have been part of the First Circles program. We are dealing with individuals. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs maintains a connection with each of those to see how they are going. You do not just complete the program, then that is it, off you go; the mentorship and connections remain with the Aboriginal Affairs Office regarding providing mentorship, connections we spoke about earlier and pathways to connect First Circles members to other opportunities.

Ms Tilmouth mentioned becoming panellists on forum conferences and connecting to leadership, governance, development and mentorship programs—not just within the Aboriginal Affairs space, but outside. I spoke about the key advocacy role earlier.

Each individual is different and each of their community projects are different. For individuals who come from the same community, often they have had different projects, challenges and aspirations they want to hone in on. It is hard to measure something that can be personal in professional development for individuals from communities—some from the same communities and some from different ones. Overall, it is about improving, strengthening and supporting Aboriginal leadership and governance across the Territory, not just for people who have already been exposed to leadership roles.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I am trying to get a sense of developing that pathway. At the end of the program do participants receive a certificate? Is it accredited training?

**Ms UIBO:** Ms Tilmouth can discuss the final program qualifications and notifications.

**Ms TILMOUTH:** At this stage the program is not accredited, but we want to pursue that and are engaged in discussions with the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre on how we can seek accreditation for this course.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How long has First Circles been operating?

**Ms UIBO:** It started in 2015.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** At this stage, eight years down the track, there is still no formal accredited pathway for participants?

**Ms UIBO:** Not at this stage. One of the alumni became the Aboriginal Affairs minister, so that is not a bad leadership pathway.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** When do you think this accreditation will be completed so that there is certificate that can be used to further a participant's education if they choose?

**Ms TILMOUTH:** I do not have the time frame in front of me, but I am happy for our office to provide you with a briefing on the First Circles program and the pathway discussions we are having, if you think that would be useful.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You spoke about local decision-making agreements in your opening statement, minister. You said that 11 are in place and 22 were under development. Where are the 22 under development?

**Ms UIBO:** The 22 under development are across communities and organisations. We have Maningrida, Tiwi Islands, Gunbalanya, a second process working with Gunbalanya and Palumpa/Nganmarriyanga.

We have a combined Darwin Aboriginal organisation in the urban area. We have a second Darwin focus with one Aboriginal organisation. We have the Bagot advisory group in Darwin, the Larrakia Trust local decision-making heads of agreement in Darwin and the greater region. We are also working through individual local decision-making agreements through the Larrakia Trust. The Friends of Kahlin and the compound site is here in Darwin.

The Numburindi LDM development is in Numbulwar. The Urapunga Aboriginal Corporation is in Urapunga community.

I am trying to get a location for the next one, Member for Barkly, because it may be a regional one.



We also have a Yolngu regional development LDM in the northeast Arnhem area; the Santa Teresa LDM development; the Bonya LDM agreement development; Ingkerreke in Central Australia; Ngurratjuta, which covers a region in Central Australia; Titjikala; and Yuendumu. Another one in Central Australia is (inaudible) Aboriginal Corporation.

They are all in the development phase.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** It goes without saying—what about the Barkly?

**Ms UIBO:** The work we do is in the manner and pace that communities and organisations would like to engage in the local decision-making agreement process. Julalikari already has a signed local decision-making agreement in Tennant Creek—one of the 11 already signed. In regard to other Barkly communities, I know from a recent visit that there is a community in your electorate that is interested. It had a list of areas that it wanted to focus on. It was basically a blueprint and a map for local decision-making. I have seen something similar in some of the smaller communities across the regions.

It is a new and exciting space to work in, and to make government think in a different way. There are communities connecting with other communities already engaged developing an LDM. They are looking at how they could engage in local decision-making and learn from the agreements already in place.

We also have the Barkly Regional Deal, of which you are very aware. That is a whole-of-region focus on local decision-making. The big partners in that are the Australian federal government, the Barkly Regional Council and the Northern Territory Government.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You spoke about the Julalikari Local Decision Making Agreement. How long ago was that signed?

**Ms UIBO:** That was signed in March 2022.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Nearly 15 months ago. Given that the agreement was signed, is there a finalised implementation plan in place?

**Ms UIBO:** I am happy to pass to one of my senior officials for that detail. Once an LDM is signed, implementation plans are also agreed upon. Some LDMs are in their third development stage of implementation planning. They were signed several years ago. We sign them for three years, so it was three plus three plus three ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I am just after the Julalikari one. Has the implementation plan been signed?

**Ms UIBO:** Maree De Lacey can answer.

**Ms DE LACEY:** As of 23 February implementation working groups were established for three priority areas in this particular LDM agreement—housing for independence, health and wellbeing, and economic growth and viability. The working groups have met and reviewed the terms of reference and they have commenced the implementation planning. The next working group meeting is scheduled for mid-July.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What does the economic growth involve?

**Ms DE LACEY:** It would be fair to say that they have only just begun scoping what this may look like from a community perspective, because it is always driven by the community.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The minister just spoke about the Barkly Regional Deal that has an economic growth strategy. Is it possible that there is now duplication, given that there is focus on economic growth through this local decision-making agreement? There is focus on economic growth and workforce development in the Barkly Regional Deal. Can you explain what is going on here?

**Ms UIBO:** If that is an area that has been identified by a particular organisation, it may be a focus for the family groups et cetera who belong to the organisation or corporation. It may be limited to that scope for the LDM, but it could complement what is happening in the regional sense, particularly in the example of the Barkly.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is the connection between the Julalikari local decision-making agreement and the Barkly Regional Deal?

**Ms UIBO:** Can you clarify what you are asking in terms of a connection?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You are telling us that the Barkly Regional Deal was essentially based around local decision-making. Julalikari will now have a local-decision making agreement. Is there a connection between economic development with Julalikari and the regional deal or are they working in isolation?

**Ms UIBO:** Ms Maree De Lacey has some operational information on that connection that you have asked for.

**Ms DE LACEY:** The economic growth strategy with Barkly Regional Deal is a whole-of-region strategy. It would take into account what is happening with individual organisations and what aspirations there might be. As the minister has explained, we expect that the Julalikari economic growth plan—which is only in its early stages—is focusing on Julalikari.

Membership of a number of these bodies is consistent, so there would inevitably be a connection. I cannot imagine that there would be a duplication as they have a different focus, with one being focused on the entire region and the other having an organisational focus.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Who is driving the Local Decision Making program in the Barkly and when can we expect to see some further agreements in place?

**Ms UIBO:** A lot of the work is done by our regional network staff. Their role is to coordinate and ensure that we have multiple agencies across government working and sitting at the table listening to the community or organisation that wants to explore in a possible local decision-making agreement. They then work out the formal steps required to consult either a community, organisation or corporation about what they would like to see in the developmental stage of an LDM.

There is a thorough process to coordinate agencies. Some local decision-making agreements involve land councils and some would like to see further engagement with the local government level. Each one is different. Our regional network staff are the key people who do the on-the-ground work and have the relationships in the regions.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What structure is in place to drive delivery of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan?

**Ms UIBO:** The structure is the national agreement, which was agreed to a couple of years ago. It took a two-year period to get those refreshed targets agreed upon nationally. During that time, the Northern Territory took the lead and developed our Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs strategy, so we were not sitting around waiting for the Commonwealth to agree on something. That was the catalyst for us to ensure we had that accountability.

The national Closing the Gap refresh structure is a joint council, consisting of the federal minister on behalf of the Commonwealth; her National Indigenous Australians Agency; all jurisdictional members across the country; and the joint council, which is made up of the coalition of all the peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the country.

The development of that structure of having the peak bodies and governments across each jurisdiction has also been mirrored in the structure of the Northern Territory Executive Council of Aboriginal affairs. We have also mirrored what they do at the federal level. The Northern Territory Government, the National Indigenous Australians Agency and LGANT work in partnership with the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory.

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

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill that relates to Treaty and Local Decision Making and to Aboriginal Affairs. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I have one that might fit in this—the Barkly Regional Deal. I have heard that there are other agencies involved. What is happening with the Barkly Regional Deal? Are you responsible for its implementation?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, it sits within my remit ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** That might be the first whole-of-government question we have got in.

**Ms UIBO:** Well done!

The work is coordinated across many agencies, as you correctly observed a moment ago. The work is over a 10-year process, as you are aware from your former role as the Mayor of the Barkly Regional Council, which is a signatory to the Barkly Regional Deal.

We are looking at the process of tracking. We have that available, so if you have any specific questions on any of the initiatives, we would be happy to take those.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Yes. One of the initiatives relates to government investment and service system reform, which essentially is an assessment and review of government investment and services across the Barkly to determine whether there is any overlapping or duplication of services to identify the gaps in services so that money can be directed to where it is needed most. Can you tell me where that initiative is up to at the moment?

**Ms UIBO:** For initiative 14 the government investment and services system reform, the current status is we have held government partner meetings as recently as last week, 13 June 2023, to review progress and develop project implementation plan, consideration of decisions at the scheduled August Governance Table meeting.

We have completed the initial mapping service provisions specifically for youth programs and services that are offered in the Barkly region. In response to the initial finding, the Northern Territory Government and the Commonwealth Government agencies are negotiating with local youth service providers in order to provide additional after-hours support for diversionary youth.

We have completed a desktop review of previous work that has followed transfer of the initiative from the Commonwealth to the Northern Territory Government, as well as a review of similar projects that have been done in places like Alice Springs.

In October last year the Governance Table agreed that youth services needed to be the first sector of reform and initialled focused on Tennant Creek and Alpururulam, and to stand up a working group for this initiative, noting it needs to be community-led.

In 2022 government investment dashboard was developed showing social services that are funded by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments. This is not public yet because there is a point in time for the data and no agreement was made about how you keep the data updated. It is not sensitive enough to show services by specific remote communities. There is a risk that information could be used out of context or misunderstood for this dashboard. Work is continuing.

We acknowledge that there were delays in the initiative which was originally due to be completed in quarter four last year in 2022. The Governance Table acknowledged that this initiative would be delivered over the 10-year time frame of the deal up until 2029.

The initial proposal to establish a community steering committee to guide the implementation of this initiative was not taken up by community, which caused the implementation model to be reviewed and revised, hence causing some of the delays.

The next step will be the commencement of data collection and analysis of Tennant Creek youth programs and services. That is due to be completed by the end of this calendar quarter two 2023.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The regional deal was signed on 13 April 2019. It sounds to me like little progress has been made with this initiative. Why has it taken so long?

**Ms UIBO:** I just talked about some of the delays. I will not repeat any of those.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I will reframe that. Who is leading this work?

**Ms UIBO:** You are well aware that the deal is across governments—the federal government, the Northern Territory Government and local government. There are 28 initiatives as part of the Barkly Regional Deal ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I am talking about this one relating to government investment service system reform. Who is leading that initiative? It has taken over four years. It sounds to me like little progress has been made. When it comes to government investment into places like Tennant Creek and the Barkly, my view is that money should go to where it is needed most. After four years, you still have not identified where the duplication is and where the gaps in services are.

**Ms UIBO:** Ms Maree De Lacey can provide some of the operational update. I make a point on part of the question that you asked. If everything could be solved with money, we would be in a better place in being able to do things with a quick fix ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I have never said that it could be solved with money. In fact, I have always said that there is plenty of money in the Barkly. We need to identify where it is going.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Barkly, please cease interjecting. Let the minister answer the question. We are almost at the end of two weeks of Estimates. You know the rules.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I have never said that money will solve anything. There is plenty of money there.

**Mr CHAIR:** You will get a chance to put that on the record. Let the minister finish.

**Ms UIBO:** Part of your question pointed to why this cannot be solved with resources. One of the areas that I responded to was the hesitation by community to engage in a part of the community steering committee. It is not something you can force.

This means that any level of government—federal, Territory or local—needs to change the way it does the business and planning regarding this process and initiative because it is not something that can be community-led if community is not engaged in a process or initiative.

If things could be fixed with money, there would be a quick fix. Whether that is the right outcome for the community would be debatable—whether the outcomes you have are community led.

**Ms DE LACEY:** This is a project being led by the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory Governments. With the structure, it is very much community led through the governing structures relating the Barkly Regional Deal.

It is a complex project so the decision was made to break it down to focus on youths in Tennant Creek and Alpururulam.

The Governance Table has also made a decision—it is reflected in the original document—that this is likely to be a 10-year project. It is complicated. It has been slower than planned but it is moving through a process.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You mentioned that some of this work will be up on a dashboard. When will we see that information publicly available?

**Ms UIBO:** Recommendations and options will be presented and considered through the Governance Table which will consider its decision to progress the initiative of the dashboard. That is expected in quarter three of this year.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is happening with the other initiatives under the regional deal? What are the priorities for this year?

**Ms UIBO:** There are 28 initiatives; they are all priorities. If you have a particular interest in one initiative and want an update, I am happy to provide that. If you want a more detailed briefing, I am happy to offer that to you and other members of the committee.

It is a matter of managing what areas may progress sooner than others. Where there are challenges, we look at community-led solutions and ensure that each of our government agencies—all three tiers—are best placed to complete, resolve and enhance those initiatives.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is happening with the economic growth strategy?

**Ms UIBO:** The economic growth strategy is the eighth initiative. In April 2023, the Governance Table endorsed merging the regional workforce strategy working group, economic growth and support working group and the new joint economic and regional workforce development working group to identify initial priorities under the regional workforce strategy and economic growth strategy for implementation.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Does merging those initiatives include the initiative relating to improvements to the CDP program?

**Ms UIBO:** Ms Maree De Lacey has the technicalities of discussions in that area. It is a federal Labor government commitment to restructure the Community Development Program. I imagine this is a key focus for the region and the working group.

**Ms DE LACEY:** Yes, that is confirmed. There is a decision by the Governance Table to merge the workforce development working group and the workforce strategy and economic growth strategy. They are all connected and the intent is to do them together.

However, the regional economic growth strategy was initially endorsed by the Governance Table but it sent it back for further work and consultation. Although it endorsed it, it wanted more work done. It is intended that the economic growth strategy will be launched publicly this year, but it is up to the Governance Table to approve it. Because there are so many connections for the project on jobs, as identified by the minister, the intention is for it to be aligned with this.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I do not think that answered my question. Has the initiative relating to improvements to the CDP program been included with the cluster of initiatives on economic growth, workforce development and the Aboriginal workforce strategy?

**Ms UIBO:** We will take that question on notice to give you up-to-date information from the working group.

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### Question on Notice No 8.3

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has the initiative relating to improvements to the delivery of the Community Development Program been included with the cluster of initiatives relating to the economic growth strategy, maximising Aboriginal employment and the workforce strategy?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is happening with the Tennant Creek youth centre, which does not appear to be open yet?

**Ms UIBO:** The initiative is to increase youth infrastructure in communities to provide more activities for children and young people. Some of the current status updates include:

- the finalisation of the occupancy certification for Tennant Creek youth centre for the electrical and fire safety system testing has to be undertaken
- we have engaged the YMCA to deliver the September and October 2023 school holiday program, which is anticipated to be held at the Tennant Creek youth centre. Initially the YMCA was engaged for the June and July holidays, but this has been deferred due to the youth centre not being ready because of the electrical fire safety systems that are required for occupancy
- there has been a recruitment of a new youth sport and recreation coordinator at the Barkly Regional Council who will manage the Tennant Creek youth centre
- we are finalising the designs in order to obtain the required approvals to commence construction of the Ali Curung youth centre

- funding allocation for the Tennant Creek cycle and walking path is to be determined, noting additional cost to deliver the Ali Curung youth centre
- the new Alpurrurulam skate park was completed in 2021.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is the delay with the Ali Curung youth centre?

**Ms UIBO:** It is the designs and required approvals to commence the construction.

Ali Curung youth centre delays have included:

- the redesign process following identification of a significant tree that is on-site. It is not in the AAPA certificate and requires changes to the planning application that has been identified through the design process
- during COVID-19 the community requested remote travel restrictions to the community
- there were leadership changes at the Barkly Regional Council
- the contractor undertaking the internal restructure also caused delays for the Ali Curung youth centre.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is happening with the initiative relating to crisis youth support, safe places and accommodation which sits with the Northern Territory Government?

**Ms UIBO:** The crisis youth support is under initiative 15. The initiative is due to be completed in quarter four of this year in accordance with the deal implementation plan. In April this year the Governance Table noted that Julalikari youth training facility on Wattle Street is not viable for the initiative, as it will be cost prohibitive due to the cost of service delivery and available funding at hand.

This month the crisis youth support working group met to review the scope of this initiative and develop options and recommendations to put to the Governance Table for its August meeting for a decision in order to work out how to proceed.

Some of the delays for this initiative, which is due to be completed in quarter four this year included:

- using the Julalikari youth training facility which was originally identified and facilitated between Patta Aboriginal Corporation and Julalikari to be facilitated by the backbone team
- protracted consideration of the lease amendment between Patta Aboriginal Corporation
- Julalikari also informed it is no longer pursuing the Julalikari youth training facility.

In 2021 the crisis youth support working group researched similar models that were mapped and available crisis youth services in Tennant Creek in order to conduct a community survey and develop a draft service model.

The next steps will be the working group preparing options for the Governance Table and recommendations on how to progress this initiative.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** After four years, there is still no identified safe place for young people in Tennant Creek? Has that initiative still not been implemented?

**Ms UIBO:** Not at this stage.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Rather than going through all these things that clearly have not been implemented, can you tell me what has been implemented under the regional deal?

**Ms UIBO:** We have some of that information. Ms Maree De Lacey from the department can give the overview of the completed processes under the 28 initiatives.

**Ms DE LACEY:** The projects that have been completed are the Alpurrurulam airstrip, the weather radar and there is some advice going to ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Sorry. You said the weather radar has been completed. I can assure you it is not there.

**Ms DE LACEY:** I am sorry; it has not; that is incorrect. The airstrip has been completed. You are right; the weather radar has not been completed.

Advice is going to the Governance Table about some of the remaining projects and whether they can be considered—for example, the aged-care services in the Barkly region, project number 21. At the end of this year, after a little more work, there will be advice going to the Governance Table to seek its views on whether that can be marked as being completed, noting the aim of the initiative, which is increased aged care ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is it not completed?

**Ms DE LACEY:** It has been achieved.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Will it be completed by the end of the year?

**Ms DE LACEY:** It is not yet completed—not until the Governance Table says so.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is that it?

**Ms DE LACEY:** That is it on my list of those that are completed.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Out of those 28 initiatives, the Alpururulam airstrip was finished, just as the regional deal was being signed in 2019. It sounds like very little has been achieved over the last four years. How do you explain this, given that it sits in your portfolio?

**Ms UIBO:** As mentioned earlier, to ensure that the processes of government and community engagement are genuine in partnership and being community led, there is also something you probably have forgotten about, which is the global pandemic that affected all works across the Northern Territory ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What a great opportunity to do some desktop work—a very good opportunity.

**Ms UIBO:** ... for two years. As was highlighted in one of the examples for the delays, communities restricted access to their communities in order to keep community members safe—and rightly so. We came out of COVID in the position where we avoided an extreme loss of life.

I acknowledge the work has been delayed. It can be frustrating because you want to see those initiatives delivered. I understand, particularly with your former and current roles in advocating strongly for the Barkly.

It is not something that we take lightly or that is forgotten. The work that is being progressed also needs to be acknowledged, as do the many people who have spent their community, personal and professional time in making sure there is still progress and momentum towards the initiatives being completed.

There are delays, especially when you have such a large volume of work across three tiers of government, as well as having multiple communities, community agencies and individuals involved.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is there any intention to conduct a review to see what is happening and look at a better pathway forward? Clearly, what has happened so far has not delivered the initiatives. Is a review planned to understand what has happened and a better pathway forward?

**Ms UIBO:** I take your point, but there is constant review in what is working and what is not in regard to each of those initiatives and, of course, the Barkly Regional Deal as a whole. It is not something you want to stop work on to review what is not working. It is constantly changing, it is fluid and it is agile.

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

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

**Mr GUYULA:** Are there any funds in this budget for the re-establishment of the Treaty Commission? When will the Treaty Commission be re-established in the Northern Territory?

**Ms UIBO:** I know this is an area that is dear to your heart, and the region you represent is very interested and focused on the work of the Northern Territory Labor government in regard to treaty. I can reassure you, Member for Mulka and others listening, that our momentum with treaty has not stopped. We established the Treaty Unit, which sits within the Officer of Aboriginal Affairs under the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet in order to ensure that we progress treaty in the Northern Territory.

Some of the remit for the Treaty Unit is looking at the Voice model and truth-telling process, which are national processes in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs space. Once the Treaty Commission finished in the middle of last year we established the Treaty Unit to ensure that the momentum was not lost.

The main engagement and process of the Treaty Unit is to work on behalf of the Northern Territory Government and our four Aboriginal Land Councils—Anindilyakwa, Tiwi, Northern and Central—regarding progressing treaty from the process that occurred with the Independent Treaty Commission and the First Nations forum. This work began after the Treaty Commission produced its independent report.

At the end of last year government produced its initial response to those recommendations. Funding commitment has been sought by the Northern Territory Government from the Commonwealth Government for truth telling—an area that we find is linked to the national conversation.

We have put in place our estimated budget for 2022–23 as \$500,000; in the 2023–24 Budget it is \$1.5m.

**Mr GUYULA:** I do not think it is appropriate for government to be doing these consultations about treaty because this is a dispute between government and First Nations people. There should be an independent body sitting in the middle. Why is this not happening?

**Ms UIBO:** I take your point. The work demanded through the Barunga Agreement in 2018 was about how to work on treaty in the Territory, being a small, diverse jurisdiction rich with First Nations Territorians, clans, culture, kinship, language, identity and country.

The work being done by government is concerning the recommendations made by the independent body. We cannot do the work with the frameworks that were recommended in the Treaty Commission report without the four Aboriginal Land Councils. That is why we are working in partnership on how this progresses through the First Nations forum. The Director of the Treaty Unit, Robert Pocock, can speak about the work that has commenced so far in his unit.

We know that treaty will be negotiated between governments—whether it is treaty or treaties. Through those recommendations there is a responsibility for this government to show what is possible and do due diligence concerning the legal framework and parameters of treaty in the NT. That has been questioned a lot in the past because as an independent jurisdiction we are a territory, not a state. We have the support of the federal government to progress treaty and treaties in the NT, despite not being a state.

**Mr POCOCK:** Regarding the work of the Treaty Unit, I will outline the work of the Treaty Commission in delivering its final report in the middle of last year. That provided a recommended way forward in relation to treaty in the Northern Territory. As with all reports of that nature, those recommendations need to be socialised with the people they will impact the most; that is, Aboriginal Territorians.

We are working with the four land councils to determine the most appropriate way to engage Aboriginal Territorians on those recommendations—whether they are content with the framework that has been recommended or they have different views, and to seek their views about the Voice-related matters and truth-telling processes for the Northern Territory. That work has been ongoing since the New Year.

We are also working on matters relating to the Voice, supporting what is happening at the Commonwealth level and doing some preliminary work on what that could be like at the Territory level. We are also investigating options for truth-telling processes for the Territory. We will take the initial information that we gather and feed that into any engagement with Aboriginal Territorians broadly on treaty, truth telling and the Voice.

**Mr GUYULA:** I asked that question because of my confusion. The word and the process *Makarrata* is in amongst working towards treaty and truth telling. In *Makarrata*, there is a process that an independent body always works on. That is why I asked that. You would know that as well because it comes from our area of peacekeeping.



**Mr BURGOYNE:** Aboriginal coastal licences have been spoken about regarding engaging local people and trying to create financial opportunity. How many Aboriginal coastal licences have been issued in the last reporting period?

**Ms UIBO:** We have an Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan that we have been reporting on for the last two years. Some of the areas that have been identified regarding Aboriginal economic development in land and sea areas have also been worked across other agencies. I know you asked a question about it last night as well.

Mr Tony Shelley, our Executive Director in that area, can give an update on the coastal licences.

**Mr SHELLEY:** The Aboriginal coastal licences are administered through the Fisheries Unit within the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. There are approximately 20 licences issued for around the coastline. They are all licences that have been in existence for a few years now.

The changes that occurred to them in the last 12 to 18 months under the Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan and the Blue Mud Bay Implementation Action Plan were to enhance guidelines on the species that could be fished and taken in those licences.

Originally, the licences were restricted to the taking of mullet, effectively, and the commercial species were not able to be taken.

If people have those licences for communities, they can take mud crab, barramundi, threadfin salmon and a number of the other commercial species that normal commercial fishermen would be licensed to take. That has enabled some holders of those licences to expand their operations and provide a wider range of product into the Darwin market.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** A range of fishing gear that can be used by people with Aboriginal coastal licences is outlined. Is there an understanding of how much netting or a breakdown of what fishing gear is being used by people with Aboriginal coastal licences? Or is the licence granted and you can use whatever you want?

**Ms UIBO:** Mr Shelley can answer, but I believe that is part of those conversations.

**Mr SHELLEY:** My understanding is the enhancement of the licences was limited to—I would have to get the exact measurements from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade—200 metres of a certain dimension of gillnet and 10 mud crab pots. If you are a recreational fisher, the 10 mud crab pots is the existing limit. Recreational fishermen could not use a gillnet.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I also believe you can operate with 100 metres of net with a mesh of 65 millimetres or less. Is that part of it?

**Mr SHELLEY:** That is my understanding, yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do we understand how many of the 20 licences are using that form, or is it not a condition of their licence? That is what I am trying to better understand.

**Mr SHELLEY:** It is not a condition of their licence that they have to use them. As to what is being taken or how that is measured, I would need to get information from the relevant Fisheries Unit in the department.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you know the locations where these licences have been issued?

**Ms UIBO:** Mr Shelley can say whether that is with our agency or it sits with DITT.

**Mr SHELLEY:** We do not have that on hand. We could get it from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade and provide it to you.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.4

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you please provide the locations for where Aboriginal coastal licences have been issued?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Changing tack slightly, there have been a lot of reports in the media about what has been happening at Peppimenarti. I am wondering whether any programs have been established through your department to provide a safe environment in that community.

**Ms UIBO:** There has been unrest in the community of Peppimenarti. Some of the work my agency does is to play a coordinating role with other agencies. It is not just an issue for the Office of Aboriginal Affairs; it is a whole-of-government response when a community or township experiences unrest or disharmony.

There has been some careful work, mostly led through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, in regard to the on-the-ground workforce with the regional network to support agencies that have a footprint in Peppimenarti. This is specific to the safety plans for community members and workers. That work is being led through DCMC.

There are currently areas of safety concern in Peppimenarti, and my agency supports the role of the coordination and the task force that works across all agencies, including Police, Health, Education and any other government services—whether they are local or federal government services. Of course, they also work with organisations and corporations that operate in communities such as Peppimenarti.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have any Aboriginal Affairs employees on the ground in Peppimenarti?

**Ms UIBO:** Our closest on-the-ground regional network staff member lives in Wadeye.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** That concludes Output Group 1.0.

## **OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – TERRITORY REGIONAL GROWTH**

### **Output 2.1 – Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Interpreters**

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now move to Output Group 2.0, Territory Regional Growth, Output 2.1, Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Interpreters.

**Mr GUYULA:** Has there been an increase in the resources for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service? How many full-time employees are employed by the AIS? How many of these are accredited interpreters?

**Ms UIBO:** I will start with the first part of your question. The Aboriginal Interpreter Services, which sits within the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, received some Commonwealth funding in regard to legal interpreting services. We saw an increase in the funding agreement, which is still to be signed after the May 2023–24 Budget. I will get some information for you on that, Member for Mulka.

The expenditure, as of 31 March, for Budget 2022–23 for the Aboriginal Interpreter Services was \$4.278m. The extra Commonwealth funding will increase the estimate by about \$2m, so it will be \$6.283m.

Our budget for the 2023–24 year is \$4.337m, noting that change and the decreases of the funding of the legal interpreting service that has been received from the Commonwealth.

You asked two other parts of that question. Could you repeat the second and third? I think it was asking how many are accredited.

**Mr GUYULA:** I will ask the question again to make it clear for you.

Has there been an increase in the resources for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service? How many full-time employees are employed by the AIS? How many of these are accredited interpreters?

**Ms UIBO:** I will go the second part; I answered the first part. We have seen an increase in interpreters available to undertake interpreting and training activities from the 2021–22 year by 78. We have seen an increase to 110 interpreters available to do that work.

I go to the other part of the question about accredited training. Training is provided by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters for the certification of translators. For the 2021–22 year we had 32 interpreters nationally accredited. The number has increased by two in the 2022–23 year, which has seen 34 nationally accredited AIS workers.

**Mr GUYULA:** The media release from 29 December last year stated that the AIS would manage the truth-telling hearings for the NT. What resources have been provided in this budget for that purpose, and how will this work?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Mr Pocock, we will take a break at 10 am and you will have 15 minutes to prepare your answer on your return.

We have a tie competition this week—the Members for Barkly and Namatjira are very keen—but the Chair has not implemented it. I will now implement it. Anyone who has been watching Estimates all week, please text your three, two and one to [Editor's note: phone number suppressed]—with three being the best, Bill Yan or two J Burgoyne. Someone will collate the votes and it will close at 4 pm.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Welcome back to Estimates 2023. Before the break we had a question from the Member for Mulka.

I would like to give out that number again for any votes. It is [Editor's note: phone number suppressed]. We had a conversation in the break. We should open the votes to not just the best tie, but the best dressed. That allows everyone a chance, including people giving evidence, those who attended and Mr Brown who has not worn a tie all week. We want to be inclusive.

Member for Mulka, do you want to ask your question again? Then Mr Pocock will be ready.

**Mr GUYULA:** The media release from 29 December last year stated that the AIS would manage the truth-telling hearings for the NT. What resources have been provided in this budget for that purpose and how will this work?

**Ms UIBO:** The Aboriginal Interpreter Service is a very important and critical resource in the Northern Territory for service delivery, particularly for supporting Aboriginal Territorians who do not speak English as their first, second or third language, ensuring access to information regarding government services.

Some of the work done by the AIS is fee-for-service, which means we require other agencies to pay, making it a highly-qualified and in-demand service. It is recognised as a professional workforce. Large volumes of work have been performed across different government agencies that is sometimes specialised; for example, technical terms in the health sector and justice and legal services. I highlighted that whilst I had the opportunity.

The Treaty Unit Director, Mr Robert Pocock can give an insight into the question regarding the truth-telling aspects, noting that there are several national areas of conversation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs space, including Voice, treaty and truth telling. I am conscious, particularly as the Northern Territory is a small jurisdiction, of not overcrowding or diluting the conversation in any of the three areas. I note there will be a national referendum later this year about Voice, the Australian Constitution and the proposed amendments.

**Mr POCOCK:** As the minister highlighted earlier, the Territory has written to the Commonwealth in regard to its capacity to provide funding for truth-telling initiatives in the Northern Territory. That funding discussion is ongoing. In regard to the Territory budget, \$500,000 has been allocated towards pursuing truth-telling initiatives in the Territory in 2024–25.

I highlight the fact there is a lot happening in this space. We are cognisant of consultation fatigue, and whilst it is our proposal to discuss what truth-telling looks like with Aboriginal people, and how they see that working in the Territory, the Voice is taking the stage in regard to people's priority and attention. That is why we are working with the land councils on what engagement in this space looks like and how truth telling should be developed.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How much funding has been allocated per region to pursue local decision-making in each region?

**Ms UIBO:** Local decision-making is not a standalone budget in regard to the agreements. The negotiation and development of local decision-making agreements is progressed through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs as part of our working routine.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** If there is no overall budget, do you have a breakdown of how many staff are allocated the responsibility of pursuing local decision-making in regions?

**Ms UIBO:** That is a difficult question to answer in the sense that it is a cross-agency approach. While the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet leads those discussions, consultation and the work that happens across our six regions of the Northern Territory, it also intertwines with other government agencies. For example, regional coordination committees meet every six weeks across each region. That involves all of our senior officials in that region across all government agencies.

It also involves coordination and meetings with local government officials and other organisations that may be pertinent for that meeting—and collaboration on any of the topics being addressed across the region—for example, Big Rivers region, where I live. In Katherine it may involve the Katherine Town Council, as a local government member of the regional coordination committee. It may also involve one of the local Aboriginal organisations such as Kalano Community Association, if we are talking about Night Patrols or youth programs in Katherine and surrounding areas.

In regard to a breakdown of how many staff are allocated for LDM, it is a process of government business where we do things differently now. It also involves other agencies, not just my department.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is it a shared responsibility?

**Ms UIBO:** It is, because it is a whole-of-government approach.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is that written into each department's strategic plan or whatever business plan they may have? Is it written down what their responsibilities are under the Local Decision Making policy?

**Ms UIBO:** We have made it a whole-of-government policy. Depending on what the conversation is in a community, region or homelands, it will involve the agencies required to be involved.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has that whole-of-government policy been implemented across government? How was it implemented?

**Ms UIBO:** In 2016 when the Territory Labor government came to power, we made the decision that it would be a whole-of-government policy—we took that to the election—and have been implementing it ever since.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How many interpreters are there per region across the Northern Territory at the moment?

**Ms UIBO:** Ms De Lacey from the department has that information.

**Ms DE LACEY:** By region, Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield has 40; the Top End has 26; Central Australia has 22; Big Rivers has 13; East Arnhem has 11; Barkly has four; and the cross-border region has two.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Are those numbers positions, or is that how many staff are on board actively working at the moment?

**Ms DE LACEY:** They are numbers of staff working at the moment, which includes contractors.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Are there any positions vacant?

**Ms DE LACEY:** I do not have that information with me.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Do you know what the overall staffing numbers are for the interpreter service?

**Ms DE LACEY:** In the last reporting period of 2022–23 to 30 April 2023 there were 110 interpreters available.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Who do the interpreters report to in the regions?

**Ms UIBO:** The Office of Aboriginal Affairs is the division in which the interpreters sit under from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The reporting requirements depend on their jobs. For example, we have full-time based interpreters who are specifically engaged and supported by the Department of Health and based in the hospitals and clinics around the Northern Territory. They are often specialised as accredited trained and nationally recognised interpreters.

If their jobs are required at a particular agency, they would report to that agency. For example, court interpreting would be the Attorney-General and Justice.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** If they report to the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, does that mean in places such as the Barkly they report to someone outside of the Barkly?

**Ms UIBO:** If they are place based, we have started to integrate our services. In the Barkly—with Tennant Creek being the regional centre—if we do not have a footprint through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, they would be supported and report to the regional executive director of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. For example, the Barkly would report to the regional executive director of Tennant Creek, and Big Rivers would report to the regional executive director of Big Rivers.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** We heard before that one initiative, out of 28, was implemented under the Barkly Regional Deal. I understand there is a backbone team to assist with the implementation of the initiatives under the deal. How many staff are employed in the backbone team at the moment?

**Ms UIBO:** During the morning tea break we found an error in the number of completed initiatives for the Barkly Regional Deal. I have been informed that four have been completed. I apologise for providing the incorrect information prior to the break, but I am happy to correct the record.

We will be taking that question about the backbone team on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.5

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The Barkly backbone team is funded to support the implementation of the Barkly Regional Deal. How many funded positions are there in the Barkly backbone team? How many vacancies are there currently?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** At the moment what stage is the high school boarding facility at under the Barkly Regional Deal?

**Ms UIBO:** The current status of the student boarding facility, which is initiative 18 in the Barkly Regional Deal, is that the tender was released this month, in June 2023, for engagement of design consultants to undertake and facilitate consultations with regard to the facility's design. There has been a student boarding facility working group established that is focused on the planning stakeholder engagement process.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has a location been identified for the boarding facility?

**Ms UIBO:** I will take that question on notice, please.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.6

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has a location been identified for the construction of the Tennant Creek school boarding facility; and, if so, what is that location?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Can you give us an update on the construction of the Tennant Creek visitor park?

**Ms UIBO:** Through this Northern Territory budget process for 2023–24 we have secured additional funding to the amount of \$5.8m for the Tennant Creek visitor park, which is initiative 13 of the Barkly Regional Deal. This is to supplement the existing \$5m of capital funding that has been received under the Barkly Regional Deal. It will be \$10.8m in total to build the Tennant Creek visitor park.

To update the committee, the current status is 20% of the designs have been planned and this has increased the budget, which has been confirmed. This will be to incorporate cultural considerations and community priorities, which were raised in the community engagement forums that were completed in February this year. There is planning to present the updated 20% designs of the Tennant Creek visitor park working group in July, next month, for consideration in regard to priority setting of the amenities and the features of the park within the available project budget.

We have also undertaken the monitoring of remediation on the community-selected site on Undoolya Road, Lot 1238, Town of Tennant Creek, to mitigate any contamination as a result of the site's previous usage. We are looking to undertake planning to subdivide the community-selected site to create four lots and a road, including power, water and sewerage systems for the Tennant Creek visitor park.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** In total, I think you said \$10.5 million.

**Ms UIBO:** I said \$10.8m.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Have you included an additional \$4.5m?

**Ms UIBO:** In total, it is \$10.8m. There is \$5m existing capital funding from the deal plus \$5.8m from Budget 2023–24.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The original estimate was \$9.5m. Why has the cost gone up to \$10.8m?

**Ms UIBO:** That was mentioned earlier regarding the design plan. The increased budget has been confirmed to incorporate the cultural considerations and community priorities raised through the engagement that was completed in February this year.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is that an additional scope of works?

**Ms UIBO:** It is part of the engagement and design plans. There may have been areas that have been identified through community consultation relating to separating the site.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** When can the residents of the Barkly expect that project to be completed?

**Ms UIBO:** Anticipated completion of the site remediation will be quarter one 2024; anticipated commencement of the construction will be quarter two 2024; and anticipated commencement of operation will be in mid-2025.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.1 and Output Group 2.0. On behalf of the committee I thank the officers who assisted the minister today.

**Ms UIBO:** I thank my department and agency for the great work they have done. It takes many weeks and months to do Estimates preparation. I appreciate it very much and give a big shout out to all of those listening back of house, particularly all in the regions and the regional director network doing fantastic work for the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I love the work that

everyone does. I am very proud to be leading that team and the great work happening across the Northern Territory.

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The committee suspended.

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## RENEWABLES AND ENERGY

### DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome back. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Renewables and Energy portfolio.

**Ms UIBO:** Accompanying me this morning is the Office of Sustainable Energy from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. I have with me the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Shaun Drabsch; the Deputy Chief Executive Officer Mining and Energy, Ms Anne Tan; the Executive Director of the Office of Sustainable Energy, Mr Matthew Sargeant; and the Chief Financial Officer, Ms Joanna Frankenfeld.

The Territory government is committed to meeting our 50% renewable target by 2030. In the Darwin/Katherine system this will result in decreased electricity system costs to help achieve estimated annual savings of about \$30m per annum by 2030.

Budget 2023–24 highlights this government's continued investment in order to deliver affordable, clean, reliable and stable energy for all Territorians. We want to ensure Territorians have access to the latest and best technology as we build stronger, more resilient power systems for Territory households and businesses.

The Office of Sustainable Energy is implementing a number of plans, strategies and programs that are supporting achievement of the renewable energy target and improving the delivery of electricity services for Territorians.

The defined renewables target of 50% of the electricity consumed in 2030 from grid-connected installations includes behind-the-meter generation and all Aboriginal communities supplied by the Indigenous Essential Services, or IES. Based on current growth trends in electricity consumption and renewable generation, renewable electricity consumption of 15% is expected to be achieved this year.

Like the rest of Australia, a number of challenges need to be addressed in order to realise our renewable energy future. In Australia's other major electricity markets—the National Electricity Market on the east coast and Western Australia, which has a standalone electricity system like ours—increasing the penetration of renewables has prompted major reforms of electricity industry and market regulation and greater interventions by governments.

The Territory has a different industry in our market structure, and already plays a significant role in electricity supply through our government-owned corporations, which the committee will be talking to tomorrow—Power and Water Corporation, Territory Generation and Jacana Energy. These need to ensure that these arrangements continue to be fit for purpose.

In Budget 2023–24, the government earmarked \$5.4m to progress electricity market reforms to achieve our renewables target. Our Territory Labor government continues to work with the Australian federal Labor government to accelerate renewable adoption in the Territory. This includes advocacy to ensure Territorians benefit from the Australian Government's initiatives, including First Nations community micro-grids, solar banks, community batteries for household solar, rewiring the nation, capacity investment scheme and hydrogen head-start programs.

The Territory government has secured up to \$30m from the Australian Government through the bilateral energy and emissions reduction deal to contribute to the cost of construction of the Darwin/Katherine electricity system battery and delivery of renewable micro-grids in our remote communities.

The Australian Government has announced the Territory will benefit from a further \$4.7m to deploy solar banks in the Territory. Solar banks will allow Territorians who do not have access to rooftop solar, such as renters and apartment dwellers, to have equity in the clean energy transition.

The Australian Government has its own target to achieve, which is 82% renewables in the National Electricity Market by 2030. Our government is mindful that the Territory has unique challenges when achieving the renewable target such as the specialised nature of its renewable resource endowment and the small size of its electricity system. This is also affected by the national industry issues including equipment supply chain and workforce issues. This challenging area is also an exciting area but we are fully committed to ensure that we meet this target.

The Darwin/Katherine electricity system must transition over the next decade in order to achieve our 50% renewable target by 2030. This includes the establishment of a renewable energy hub as part of the Territory government's Darwin/Katherine electricity system plan.

The system plan is staged over 10 years and has three key stages:

- the 'ready' stage, 2021–23, involves planning for construction of renewable energy hub operating the first security battery and connecting committed large-scale solar
- the 'set' stage, 2024–26, is where the solar farms are connected to the renewable energy hub, the second security battery commences operation to maximise solar generation and virtual power plants are established at a limited scale
- the 'go' stage, 2027–30, where more solar is connected and expected in regard to the renewable energy hub and the large storage batteries, a third security battery commences operation and large thermal generation is retired and replaced with smaller and more agile machines.

In the 2022–23 Budget, funding was approved to progress the broader actions of this system plan within the first two stages. There is an outline here to let committee members know, if there are questions on that later. The budget also allocated a further \$1m to support the development of business cases for the renewable energy hub. The hub will support government's renewable energy target by facilitating investment in large-scale renewable solar farms to deliver clean and affordable power to Territorians.

When it comes to large-scale solar, the Territory's power systems are evolving as transitional generation is increasingly replaced by renewable generation such as solar. This provides capacity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase opportunities for external investment, but it requires the frameworks governing the power system to change to ensure that security and reliability of the power system is not compromised.

It is critical that these new energy providers meet the requirements clearly laid out in technical codes to ensure that the security of the existing power system is not put at risk. Our government continues to proactively work with proponents such as Eni and Merricks to facilitate and expedite these new connections.

Renewable energy investment is important when it comes to the new energy technologies in order to contribute to the 50% renewable target by 2030 while delivering electricity reliability and security at the least cost to consumers and taxpayers.

The Territory government is continuing to invest in renewable energy and hydrogen, including a \$77.2m long-term contract for Jabiru township solar hybrid power station which commenced operation in February 2022; and \$45m for the battery energy storage system for the Darwin/Katherine grid to be installed at Channel Island Power Station. The tender for construction was awarded in December 2021 and contracts for the civil and building works have been let and work is under way. The battery is expected to be operational in the first half of 2024.

There is \$8.6m over four years towards renewable remote power program. This includes \$6.1m towards the Wurrumiyanga Solar Infill and Energy Storage Pilot Project on Bathurst Island in the Tiwi Islands. The contract has been awarded to Circular Solutions, which will replace some of the current diesel generator power supply in regard to renewable technology. The works are expected to be completed in April 2024.

There is \$2m over two years to advance the delivery of clean and reliable electricity to remote communities across the Northern Territory.

There is \$7.3m for the Home and Business Battery Scheme to the end of January 2022, and a further \$5.2m in the 2022–23 budget to fund the installation of batteries to enable households and businesses to maximise bill savings from rooftop solar and their systems while contributing to grid stability and reducing power system costs. The scheme, which was introduced in 2020, will continue in 2023–24.



The Electric Vehicle Charger (Residential and Business) Grants Scheme was introduced on 1 July 2022 with a total value of \$300,000, providing 100 residential grants of \$1,000 and 80 business grants of \$2,500 to applicants, halving the cost of the purchase and installation of most chargers. The Territory will also waive stamp duty fees for the sale of electric vehicles up to \$50,000, providing a saving of up to \$1,500.

Hydrogen investment and the international community seek to look at innovative pathways to reduce carbon emissions. Growing demand for clean, reliable and flexible energy sources like renewable hydrogen is something the NT is interested in. Exploring renewable hydrogen is a promising energy sector, which is why Budget 2022–23 allocated \$5m over four years to accelerate and expand the Territory's hydrogen industry.

The Territory government is facilitating major hydrogen projects such as in August 2022 Provaris Energy Ltd was awarded major project status for its \$4.5bn Tiwi H2 hydrogen project. Provaris intends to export up to 100,000 tonnes per annum of green hydrogen from the Tiwi Islands, with the first hydrogen export targeted to commence in late 2026.

Also in August last year, the Territory government signed an MOU with Total Eren, an international renewable energy company, to develop a new green hydrogen project in Darwin.

Solar and wind energy are the cheapest and most readily available resources for use in renewable energy generation and renewable hydrogen production. While the Territory's world-class solar resources are already well recognised, the Territory could also have strong wind resources potential, but this is less well understood at this point.

To continue development of new renewable energy industries, \$1.7m has been allocated in the budget to collect wind resource data. Wind resource assessment mapping is an immediate priority focus for us, and specific wind resource assessment mapping activities will be informed by expert consultancy advice due for delivery in quarter three 2023.

Our remote power system strategy will go towards our 50% renewable target because it includes Indigenous Essential Services. Seventy-two remote communities and 79 outstations or homelands are home to nearly 40,000 Territory residents. This is the provision of power, water and wastewater through IES. It is a not-for-profit subsidiary of Power and Water Corporation. Currently, the majority of electricity supplied to IES communities is through diesel-generated power. Our remote power system strategy aims to facilitate an average of 70% renewable energy penetration across the IES community portfolio, which is expected to contribute to five percentage points of the overall 50% renewable energy target.

The Wurrumiyanga project is part of that, as well as the Solar Energy Transformation Program, or SETuP, to enable procurement and installation in a shorter time frame. High-level business case for the Wurrumiyanga project includes a saving of 12 million litres of diesel fuel and 34,000 tonnes of greenhouse emissions over the next 20 years of the asset's life.

Finally, the Alice Springs Future Grid project is focused on removing barriers to further renewable energy penetration in the Alice Springs power system. The project is an action under the government's renewable energy target implementation plan, and the NT Government has put in \$5m over three years, with \$12m total funding.

The project consists of five subprojects, including modelling, commercial micro-grids, community solutions, tariff reforms and future grid deployments. All subprojects are progressing, and the Alice Springs Future Grid project is scheduled for completion by the end of October 2023.

As you can see, the Territory Labor government is investing in clean, affordable, reliable energy for Territorians and their future. Renewable energy makes sense for the environment and our economy. Our Labor government is working hard to deliver these initiatives in renewable energy to achieve that 50% target by 2030. We acknowledge that there is a lot to do in order to reach this target. That is why we are investing in more innovative projects to see that work continue.

I am happy to welcome questions.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You spoke in your opening statement about this 'ready, set, go' strategy. I find this extraordinarily interesting. You spoke about the solar being connected. As we know, there are a number of solar farms which have not been connected for a number of years. When was this strategy set up? In regard to the implementation of the 'ready, set, go' plan, are other proponents aware that you are not planning on connecting solar until the time lines you have outlined?

**Ms UIBO:** The Darwin–Katherine Electricity System Plan was published on 5 October 2021, which is the document I hold here. It addresses targets, and those three stages are outlined in the plan with scenarios relating to the different time frames. Getting ready is small-scale to drive the transition of renewables and looking at what is different, scenarios in regard to large-scale solar, primary mechanisms and the delivery for those targets. Scenario three, Sunshine for Sale, looks at the demand for electricity, which we know is strong, and large-scale solar which deploys at a different mass.

In regard to the processes we have outlined for those three areas—ready, set and go—we have staged that process to ensure we have our mechanisms in place and have learned from procurement processes as well as the technical aspects. Your background, Member for Braitling, is an interesting area of connectivity and electricity.

It is a balancing act to ensure we do not destabilise the grid and lights stay on for Territorians and businesses. We must get right in order to lead towards the connection of large-scale solar.

Mr Drabsch, our CEO, can provide further detail.

**Mr DRABSCH:** As the minister indicated, the stage of ‘ready’, which we are in now, relates to the period of 2021–23, ‘set’ goes from 2025–26 and ‘go’ is 2027–30. The idea is to get to 50% by 2030. It will not necessarily be a linear path because we need to have the infrastructure and arrangements in place to effectively integrate this energy into the system, while maintaining affordability and reliability of power supply across the Territory, particularly the Darwin–Katherine system.

In the ‘ready’ stage we are at now, we are progressing with the development of the renewable energy hub, which will form the site for the installation of large-scale solar. We are looking at places which are close to Middle Arm and existing transmission infrastructure to minimise the cost of integrating the additional capacity into the system.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We have been told for years that the large-scale solar farms are waiting to be commissioned. We are now being told that as part of ‘ready, set, go’ they will be commissioned, but the large battery at Channel Island will not be ready until the first half of 2024. Is it not true that the large-scale solar will not be able to be brought online until the battery at Channel Island is completed?

**Ms UIBO:** That is not correct. The large-scale solar is separate. It is anticipated it will be completed by the first half of 2024, the new financial year.

There have been some delays. I have visited the site with some colleagues and the Chief Minister and saw the progress. It is an impressive setup. I receive regular updates from government-owned corporations, particularly TGen which oversees the project.

With the large-scale solar connections, some stages and steps are required for the stability of the grid and the commissioning and checking phases. For committee members’ interest, there are four main steps, which are connection phase, energisation phase, commissioning stage and the compliance stage. They rely purely on the technical aspects of the particular site. The proponents, as well as the government-owned corporations, work through any technical issues and negotiate the parameters of firming before any connection to the main grid is completed. It would be different for every site for the large-scale solar which we currently have.

The large battery on Channel Island will not be delayed.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Does your office have an expectation on when large-scale solar farms will come online?

**Ms UIBO:** If we had it a couple of years ago, that would have been ideal. With the technical nature of connection, we do not want to put the stability of the grid for Territorians or businesses at risk. The work for the connection of the large-scale solar involves experts from many different fields—from the proponents as well as our government-owned corporations.

I get regular updates. We want those connections as soon as possible, but it would be without safety and with a risk to the stability of the grid and causing blackouts for Territorians. We do not want to see that. We would rather get it right and step through all the issues, as opposed to rushing and causing a larger issue for any connections.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is exactly the point. You have used that term 'risk to the grid'. Are you saying that if those solar farms were turned on today, they would risk the stability of the grid?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to the department for some more operational and technical updates. One of the solar farms has been commissioned. It has worked through that process. It has collected data over several weeks and now we are at the compliance stage to make sure that there is no risk to the overall system.

In terms of the opportunity and the work that is being done to connect as safely as possible, we do not want to have our existing power systems put at risk. Those four clear steps that I outlined need to be followed—and rightly so. We continue to work with our proponents to make sure that those connections are facilitated.

**Mr DRABSCH:** Katherine Solar Farm is undergoing compliance testing and the onsite battery is being commissioned. The issue of stability goes to the availability of firming as well as the capacity of that particular generation facility to respond to network events. The detail of that can probably be asked of PWC. They are the issues that we are working through.

For a period of eight to 10 weeks prior to the end of March 2023, Katherine Solar Farm was being dispatched at 6.25 megawatts under test conditions. We are now working with Eni to ensure that it has the firming arrangements in place for generation to occur from that site on a conventional basis.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is three years for compliance and commissioning an acceptable time frame for the proponents to be working to?

**Mr DRABSCH:** No, it is not acceptable. It has taken far too long. The issues go to the process of connection, the application of new network technical codes and a regime for connection that was governed by the Utilities Commission. There have also been technical issues about the capacity of the actual infrastructure to respond to events. These are detailed and complex matters.

The Under Treasurer and I have been meeting regularly with proponents and PWC on these matters for an extended period. We are confident that we are getting towards the end of that. We hope that we will be in a position very shortly where firming is provided and solar energy can be provided into the system on a more consistent basis.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you confirm that the Home and Business Battery Scheme has been cut from \$6,000 to \$5,000?

**Ms UIBO:** So that we could continue the scheme and so that it was equitable and accessible for Territorians, we made the decision not to cut the scheme and to continue it. Grants are available up to \$5,000 for the Home and Business Battery Scheme.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Were the scheme grants previously available up to \$6,000?

**Ms UIBO:** That is correct.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In my language, that is a bit of a cut.

**Ms UIBO:** It is more about the sustainability of the scheme, knowing that Territorians and our small and medium businesses are taking it up. To spread the money wider and to ensure that we have more people accessing it, the decision was made to make the grants \$5,000 per application.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The cost of all those technologies, with inflation and everything else, is staying extraordinarily high. Have you seen a reduction in people applying for the Home and Business Battery Scheme in this last financial year?

**Ms UIBO:** When any type of scheme or grants process comes out, there is usually a rush. That is great because it means Territorians are very keen for the scheme or grant. There is obviously a natural plateau because once you have the battery in place you are not getting a second and a third necessarily, so there is a natural plateau in the data.

What we have seen in the data collection—I will hand to the department for information on the numbers—is Territorians continue to take up the schemes, as do businesses. The benefit economically is more Territory businesses entering the field and becoming providers of the scheme. The Chief Minister and I visited a business last month—a great Territory story of two proud Territory born and bred business owners who

started a business and are focused on the installation of batteries. Their business is further enhanced because people are taking up the grants, and they have now employed more people in their business, which started off with just two of them.

We have some great stories that are also offshoots of the scheme, but I will pass to Mr Shaun Drabsch to talk about the numbers.

**Mr DRABSCH:** It is worth pointing out that the Home and Business Battery Scheme is the only continuing jurisdictional battery grant scheme in Australia, with all other schemes having closed or transitioned to interest-free loan schemes.

In terms of the flow of applications, over the course of this year there was a bit of a peak in demand after the reduction of the Premium FiT scheme. Some people responded by storing their electricity rather than trying to sell it into the grid.

In the months since October last year up to April this year, the number of applications has been pretty consistent between 40 and 60 a month. We anticipate that pattern of applications will continue into the next financial year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** How many were you seeing per month in the previous financial year?

**Mr DRABSCH:** As in the 2021–22 financial year?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In 2022–23.

**Mr DRABSCH:** I was referring to 2022–23, which we are still finishing off now.

Overall since July 2022 we have had 872 applications and 669 approved, and that is up to 2 May. The scheme has delivered almost 2,000 approved applications since it was established in April 2020.

**Mr MALEY:** Have you had any complaints about the installation of the batteries?

**Ms UIBO:** I am not aware, but I will pass to Matt Sargeant, Director of the Office of Sustainable Energy, to confirm whether the department received anything.

**Mr SARGEANT:** We have received a small number of complaints from consumers about the batteries they received. Those complaints are generally referred to either NT WorkSafe or the Consumer Affairs area.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the Home and Business Battery Scheme you spoke about maximising bill savings and it being a contributor to stabilising the grid. As you said, there has been a plateau in the uptake. Would it not make sense to continue the scheme at \$6,000 rather than reduce it? Do you expect to see a further reduction in uptake as that amount of money reduces?

**Ms UIBO:** No, we do not necessarily see it in that sense. Every year when you have a scheme or a grant, you need to reassess. We are a very small division of a large department, so we have to be mindful and work within the budget to provide that for Territorians. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia that has a continuing grant scheme in this area. I highlight that we are one of the most generous when compared with previous jurisdictional grants available in Australia, which is a great story for the Northern Territory. That change to \$5,000 is making sure we are within budget and that it is still accessible for Territorians.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is the amount of money contributed to the scheme reducing or is it staying the same over the next financial year?

**Mr DRABSCH:** We anticipate this year that the expenditure will be \$3.5m. We are anticipating that next year it will be just over \$3m, so fairly consistent.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Is there an allotted amount of money you are providing to the Home and Business Battery Scheme? The figure was \$3.5m previously and is now just over \$3m.

**Mr DRABSCH:** The funding for this program is drawn from our departmental budget. We will be responding to applications as they arise. We anticipate we have resources to cover an expected expenditure of \$3m next year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You spoke about the Future Grid project in Alice Springs and the money that has been spent—I heard you say a total of \$12m—and that is due for completion in 2023. Can you explain to the committee what has been achieved for that \$12m over the life of that project?

**Ms UIBO:** As an Alice Springs resident, you have a keen interest in this area as well, which we welcome.

The work that commenced for the Alice Springs Future Grid project is exciting in the collaboration that is involved. It is focused on removing barriers in regard to accessing renewable energy, particularly for the Alice Springs power system, which is a smaller system than the Darwin/Katherine electricity system.

The project also involves external funding sources and in-kind contributions from participants. The total of the project is estimated at about \$12m. The project consists of five key subprojects. They are: project one, modelling; project two, commercial micro-grid; project three, community solutions; project four, tariff reform; and project five, future grid deployments.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** At the end of 2023, will you be continuing to fund this project as a result of the outcomes to date? I am trying to ascertain what outcomes have been reached and what you will be seeking to do into the future with the Future Grid project.

**Ms UIBO:** Ultimately it is about ensuring Alice Springs and Central Australia have a stable and reliable energy source so that we can bring renewable energy online without disrupting any of the current energy sources. We look at those different subprojects, as already mentioned, doing things differently from a technical nature, as well as benefiting Territorians socially and economically.

I will pass to Mr Shaun Drabsch in regard to the sequence of the years in the \$12m allocated funding.

**Mr DRABSCH:** Regarding the question of what happens after October, we will develop an electricity system plan for Alice Springs, drawing on the learnings from the Future Grid project. Although it took a while to get going, we have been encouraged by the progress that has been made and the capacity to finish this by October.

I acknowledge the leadership of Desert Knowledge and the other contractors, and PWC and (inaudible) in running that process.

For the actual split-ups of the \$12m, I will pass to Anne Tan. Anne, do you have those on hand? We do not have that at hand, but we would be happy to take that on notice.

**Ms UIBO:** Member for Braitling, we can get the breakdown for you, if you would like to put that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.7

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Please provide us with a breakdown of the \$12m and what has been achieved as part of the Future Grid project for that investment.

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr BURGOYNE:** A key part of that Future Grid project is utilising home battery storage to release power to the grid at certain times of the day depending on the demand. It is also looking into the time-of-day tariffs, which you spoke about in your opening statement. Will any of these proposals be adopted by the government?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes. The subproject for the tariff reform is a trial of shadow tariffs that incentivise consumer behaviour, which will support increased renewables into the Alice Springs power system. That process is still under way in terms of the trial. I believe the last number I had was 48 members of the Alice Springs community are involved in the trial. That will then inform some of the data.

There is a process that is nationally configured with ARENA, Australian Renewable Energy Agency. The data will be collected this month and July. We are looking to extend that process of the data. Jacana Energy is keen to have at least a 12-month set of data for that. With the change of weather in Alice Springs, from extreme cold to extreme heat over the 12-month period, that will be very informative.

They also have a live process of the virtual power plant trial that is afoot at the moment. I had a look online yesterday and it is really interesting for those of you who are keen. It is publicly accessible and it shows real-time data. They are taking snapshots every 30 minutes for data collection. During the day you can see when the solar PV spikes and the batteries reduce. When there is cloud cover in Alice Springs, you can see the data change during the day. It is very interesting. I had a thorough look at that yesterday.

It is that type of information that will inform our government policy and will provide an Alice Springs version of the electricity system plan.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You mentioned in your opening statement the current percentage of renewables in the Northern Territory. Am I correct that you said earlier we are currently sitting at 15%?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes. That is our expected target this year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Do you have a time line of when we will reach certain targets in regard to 20%, 30% and 50% over the next seven years?

**Ms UIBO:** That is part of the work I have tasked the Office of Sustainable Energy to do. Not having a technical background, it has been quite helpful for me seeing what the government-owned corporations have in terms of their tracking mechanisms. I would love to see the collation of data provided in a portal or on a dashboard and we are working with the GOCs to see what is viable. Each of them has different remits.

We have processes where we are expecting to see peaks and outlines. Those expectations are also in the electricity system plan under the 'ready, set, go' sequence. The current expectation is on page 62 of the Darwin-Katherine Electricity System Plan. This year we are aiming for 21%. We will not hit that at this point, but we have the ability to track what we expect versus reality in the set period. As we phase into that in 2024 we are looking at 25%, then 29% in 2025 and 32% in 2026 and so on. We have the models expected under those three stages and we are tracking to make sure we have the actual percentage as well each year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I think you have highlighted exactly the point I was trying to make. We are currently 6% behind where we would like to be.

Did the Sun Cable solar farm make up any of those four projections that you are relying on?

**Mr DRABSCH:** Sun Cable was not factored into that because it has the potential to bring 800 megawatts or more. What we are exploring with Sun Cable is how we can establish a wholesale supply of large-scale energy to large-scale users, such as at Middle Arm.

In regard to the fact we are 6% behind the target, I point out that the existing capacity that has been established but has not been connected would take us up to 19%. That gives us the extra energy to pursue that rigorously. As we establish the renewable energy hub and resolve the connections issues, up to 180 megawatts of solar energy will come on through the renewable energy hub. That is part of the plan. At the same time, there is continuing increase in rooftop solar, which adds to that contribution, and smaller players like at Robertson Barracks and the airport.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes questions on the opening statement.

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

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill as they relate to Renewables and Energy. 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 3.0 – MINING AND ENERGY**  
**Output 3.4 – Office of Sustainable Energy**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will consider Output Group 3.0, Mining and Energy, and specifically Output 3.4, Office of Sustainable Energy, because Outputs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 are the responsibility of another minister. Are there any questions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I always like to ask this question. What vehicles do the Office of Sustainable Energy have in its fleet, and does it have any electric vehicles?

**Ms UIBO:** I will have to pass to the department for this one.

**Mr DRABSCH:** We do not have a fleet, as such. A number of executive officers have vehicles as part of their package. I am not aware of any of those being electric vehicles at this stage, but there is a whole-of-government policy process pointed in that direction over time.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.4 and Output Group 3.0. This also concludes consideration of outputs relating to Renewables and Energy.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for coming in this morning. Some came back after a late night. I thank all the staff behind the scenes for all their work.

**Ms UIBO:** We are a small division of a large agency, but a very robust division. I thank the team at the Office of Sustainable Energy, those who appeared with me this morning and those who work behind the scenes, particularly those who offer technical insights and briefs. They have been very helpful over the past 14 months while I have held this portfolio. I look forward to Renewables and Energy taking a brighter stance in the Territory's footprint.

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will take a break before considering questions relating to Housing and Homelands.

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The committee suspended.

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**HOUSING AND HOMELANDS**

**ESSENTIAL SERVICES**

**DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES**

**Mr CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. We will recommence. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding Homelands and Housing.

**Ms UIBO:** Accompanying me this morning is Mr Ken Davies, the Chief Executive Officer; Mr Brent Warren, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer Housing; Ms Kim Charles, our Chief Financial Officer; Mr Dwayne McInnes, General Manager Housing Program Office, as part of DIPL; and Mr Jared Collins, Executive Director Market Reform and Programs.

I know there will be lots of questions in regard to every output for this department, so I am keen to get on with the questions. I forgo my right to make the opening statement and will table a copy of it instead.

**Mr CHAIR:** The minister will table her opening statement.

**Mr MALEY:** Do we get to ask questions on a tabled document? I do not see why not; it has been tabled.

**Mr CHAIR:** You can if you can read it now. We will get it circulated. We just have to get the copies.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you have three copies?

**Ms UIBO:** No. We only have the one, which is all you require to table.

**Mr CHAIR:** Would you like to go to agency-related questions or wait for the copy?

**Mr MALEY:** We will go to the whole-of-agency questions, but I would like an opportunity to read it. It is unfair, without being given notice, to ask questions of a document we have not seen. That is my concern.

**Ms UIBO:** You have seen the outputs, which is what you would usually ask questions on for the budget.

**Mr CHAIR:** I appreciate this is the first time it has been done in this Estimates, but as part of the process the minister can table her opening statement and move straight to outputs or whole-of-agency fiscal questions. I am offering you the opportunity to choose. I understand you need to read it. Do you want to move to outputs?

**Mr MALEY:** How many pages is it; how big is the document?

**Ms UIBO:** It is 13 pages.

**Mr MALEY:** I would like a quick look, please.

**Ms UIBO:** This is so we can go straight into questions because I know there is a lot of questions on Housing.

**Mr MALEY:** We have an opportunity to ask questions on the opening statement, but without reading the opening statement, we cannot ask any questions.

**Ms UIBO:** Mr Chair, if it is helpful, I will un-table the document. Then we can go straight into the outputs.

**Mr MALEY:** You cannot un-table the document, as it has already happened.

**Mr CHAIR:** We will still table it and we will move to the outputs. Member for Nelson, I appreciate your point.

**Mr MALEY:** I will ask the first question anyway. When we get it, I will read it.

There is a \$1.1m decrease in the budget. How much is allocated to non-government partners that provide tenancy support and homelessness services to peak partners?

**Ms UIBO:** The change of the operational funding is attributed to the decrease of \$1.5m in the Barkly Regional Deal and the visitor park deal which has moved to the outer years. It is a revote in the funding. Once the visitor park is built, this is the operational money to have it working.

**Mr MALEY:** Due to the decrease, will there be any services cut in relation to Homelands or Housing?

**Ms UIBO:** No.

**Mr MALEY:** How many properties are there in the private rental accommodation programs and how many people do they support?

**Ms UIBO:** Are you referring to urban housing leasing?

**Mr MALEY:** Accommodation programs that you are aware of.

**Ms UIBO:** How many are private rentals?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

**Ms UIBO:** We have 618 dwellings that are leased homes as part of the urban housing program for the financial year 2022–23. That number is out of 5,927 dwellings that are owned or operated through the urban housing program.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Under the Barkly Regional Deal, how many new builds will there be in the budget cycle?

**Ms UIBO:** Under the Barkly Regional Deal, funding has been contributed to Venture Housing to construct up to 11 dwellings for affordable housing in Tennant Creek.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** When will those 11 new homes be built?

**Ms UIBO:** We can take the question on notice.



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**Question on Notice No 8.8**

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Under the Barkly Regional Deal, you have indicated that 11 new homes will be built in Tennant Creek. When will they be built?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** Are any other new homes being built under the Barkly Regional Deal?

**Ms UIBO:** We have some public housing dwellings that are on the list for development and construction in Tennant Creek specifically. I will pass to Mr Brent Warren for that detail.

**Mr WARREN:** As well as the Venture project, there are two other department-led constructions in Tennant Creek at the moment. There is one at 74 Peko Road, which will be a six-dwelling complex. It is being released for tender directly to Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation. The dwelling at 86 Peko Road was released to public tender. It is under assessment at the moment.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** In relation to the six-dwelling complex that has been released directly to Julalikari, was that an open tender process or select tender? How did that work?

**Mr WARREN:** It is a select tender process on the basis that Julalikari is the LDM entity for Tennant Creek, so it was provided with an opportunity to bid on work first. It is required to submit a tender response that is then assessed. If it is suitable, it can win the work.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** This morning we heard that the implementation plan under that local decision-making agreement had not been finalised, but here you are allocating six houses. Where are we at with that local decision-making agreement?

**Ms UIBO:** There was discussion through that agency about the process for the implementation plan. We can take that on notice, but it would be through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, as opposed to Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Who is the contract with? Is it with Housing or another mob?

**Ms UIBO:** There is no contract at this point. As Mr Warren has expressed, it has been a process to bid through a select tender and that will be assessed through the normal procurement lens.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** To clarify, there has been a select tender but there has been no contract awarded as a result. Is that where we are at?

**Ms UIBO:** That is correct.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** When do you expect that contract to be awarded?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to Mr Dwayne McInnes from DIPL, who is working very closely with Housing. We may have to take that question on notice.

**Mr McINNES:** The tender process is currently under consideration. We are waiting for a formal response from Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation. Once we get that formal response, it will be about a four to six-week time frame to go through the assessment and award.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** At this stage, the proposal to build a six-dwelling complex has not been received in full yet; is that correct?

**Mr McINNES:** That is correct. We have not received a response from the proponent.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** When did that select tender process commence?

**Mr McINNES:** The original one was closed on 28 April. We granted a number of extensions and we were still in discussions. We have recently been advised by JCAC that it would be submitting this week.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How many extensions have there been?

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

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**Question on Notice No 8.9**

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** In regard to the select tender process for the Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation, it has been awarded the select tender. How many extensions have there been to submit its proposal?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** I think you mentioned 86 Peko Road. What is the situation there? Has that tender closed?

**Mr McINNES:** That tender has closed and is currently under consideration. There were five responses received, so we are going through the assessment process. That is about all we can say on the procurement process at this time.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** When did that tender close?

**Mr McINNES:** It was on 31 May.

**Mr MALEY:** That tender shut on 31 May. How long do you expect for that tender to be released?

**Ms UIBO:** Do you mean awarded?

**Mr MALEY:** Awarded, sorry.

**Ms UIBO:** It will go through the process of assessment. I could ask Mr McInnes to talk about the time frames they look at, acknowledging that procurement can sometimes take longer than anticipated for various reasons.

**Mr McINNES:** We generally like to turn around the assessments in a four-week time frame.

**Mr MALEY:** This is over that because you said 10 May and it is now 21 June, so you have already breached your deadline; is that correct?

**Mr McINNES:** No, that is not necessarily correct. It closed on ...

**Mr MALEY:** I will go through the dates. You said it shut on the 10<sup>th</sup> and you said four weeks.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, let the department agency staff answer.

**Mr McINNES:** It closed on 21 May. There is a procurement process that is gone through to make sure they are all valid tenders. Once it is handed over to the assessment group, it takes up to four weeks from that time.

**Mr MALEY:** When do you expect it to be handed to the assessment group?

**Mr McINNES:** I cannot talk to that at this time. It is still part of the procurement process.

**Mr MALEY:** The reason I am asking these questions is that I hear lots of people put in tenders and it then takes months and months for the government to award the tender. In that time, construction prices go up and the cost of labour goes up, yet there is no allowance for that in the tender. These private companies that tender for these put in the hard work and then it takes a significant amount of time before it is awarded. How can you combat that? These people are trying to build a house essentially, yet it takes at least two months to get approval and the costs go up. Is there an allowance for that in the tender?

**Ms UIBO:** There are pressures for various reasons why tenders may not necessarily hit the average expected time frame. I know that the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics works closely with the proponents that tender for projects. Ideally, we have those time frames to try to hit the mark and, unfortunately, sometimes they do slip for various reasons.

After COVID, the cost of steel increased by 30%. Obviously, that is not within the Northern Territory Government's hands and influence, but there are areas in which the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics works closely with my department to ensure that we receive value for our dollar in the Territory.

**Mr MALEY:** I do not think you can blame COVID anymore for that. I am talking about five tenders for building four houses, yet you cannot award the tender in a reasonable time frame. Do you think that is unreasonable?

**Ms UIBO:** This process is a current one and we have not slipped on the time frame, so you are talking about hypotheticals.

**Mr MALEY:** I am not talking about hypotheticals.

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, you are. You are saying it has gone over the time frame ...

**Mr MALEY:** It has.

**Ms UIBO:** ... and we are actually in the procurement process, so the time frame has not even started.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think that is acceptable? I am not asking a hypothetical; I am asking whether that is acceptable.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, the minister states that she will not answer the question because she believes it is hypothetical. I will be honest that I missed that question. Can you rephrase the question in such a way that the minister can answer it without a hypothetical?

**Mr MALEY:** I want to go back to the other tender where you could not tell us how many extensions there have been. You have issued a select tender to Julalikari Aboriginal organisation. They missed various deadlines in relation to putting in a proposal. Would you not think that you could open it to the general public for private companies to tender for it?

**Ms UIBO:** We have taken that question on notice.

The question you asked previously about time frames that have slipped—the question from the Member for Barkly was about a procurement process that closed on 31 May. Do your maths; today is 21 June, so that is three weeks. It is under the procurement process stage before it goes through that four-week period that Mr McInnes highlighted as the normal routine—the average that we expect for those procurement processes. No, it has not hit the four-week mark in that question that was highlighted by the Member for Barkly.

The processes are closely monitored. If there are changes, each of the procurement applicants are usually notified. Regarding the select tender that you questioned earlier, if they do not submit, it goes to open tender.

**Mr MALEY:** You gave this Aboriginal organisation a select tender and they missed the deadline for the proposal on at least one occasion—perhaps two, because you took that question on notice and could not tell us how many times it has been extended—so you have not even received their proposal yet. Is that correct?

**Ms UIBO:** Whether it is a select tender or an open tender process, strict guidelines are followed by the procurement process. This is managed by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics and the staff do a fantastic job of ensuring they meet time lines. As mentioned several times before, there are various reasons time frames may slip.

Our government is committed to building the capacity of our Aboriginal businesses and enterprises, hence the processes when we work closely with an Aboriginal organisation, particularly in this case—a local decision-making agreement which has that priority built in for the organisation to build the capacity and opportunities. When a select tender is not granted, it opens up to an open tender process.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** One of the biggest complaints I receive is about roads, particularly in town camps. What is happening with the roads in the Borroloola town camps? Quite frankly, they are an absolute disgrace. I have written to the government—I do not know how many times—about the condition of the roads in the Borroloola town camps. What is going on? Is there any money in this budget to fix the roads so that people can get into their houses safely?

**Ms UIBO:** We acknowledge there are areas that need improvements for infrastructure and work to support our town camp residents across the Northern Territory. As a government we have highlighted that town camps are important. We continue to focus on supporting town camps' needs, particularly in areas where there may be some complexities around land tenure, land access or road access—Borroloola, Garawa 1 and Garawa 2—and frustrations with the area that are not only held by you as the local member but by residents.

I will hand to Mr McInnes for an update on road access for those town camps.

**Mr McINNES:** We have always had a commitment to make sure those roads are remediated once the housing program has been completed in the town camps. Discussions are ongoing about the access roads and what needs to be done. It is about 4.7 kilometres of road that needs to be addressed. We are talking probably about \$5m for that.

There is a commitment to discuss with council and the community about those access roads. We are having discussions about how we best fund that. There is an element of funding available to remediate the roads within the town camps.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How much funding is available to remediate those roads?

**Mr McINNES:** It is \$1.2m within an existing program.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is that in the current budget?

**Mr McINNES:** Yes.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Will it be \$1.2m next year to remediate the Borroloola town camp roads?

**Mr McINNES:** Yes.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Who will be doing that work?

**Mr McINNES:** That is yet to be decided.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Will that money be allocated to the homelands provider or to council? Will it be a tender process or will it be select tender? Where is it?

**Mr McINNES:** As I said, it is yet to be decided. The preference would be to go to an open tender process to remediate those roads.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How far do you think—how much was it?

**Mr McINNES:** It was \$1.2m. That should go a long way to address the existing roads within the town camps. It will not be anywhere near enough to do the access roads.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You quoted 4.7 kilometres, which will cost about \$5m, but now there is only \$1.2m.

**Mr McINNES:** The \$1.2m is for internal roads and infrastructure within the town camps, not the access roads to them.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The internal roads for all the Borroloola town camps is roughly six kilometres, costing about \$6m. The \$1.2m simply will not cut it.

There are people living in those houses where the road is washed away and they cannot even drive onto a concrete driveway. That house has been put there by the Northern Territory Government and people cannot even access their driveway. What will be done about this?

**Ms UIBO:** We continue to work closely with the local Aboriginal corporation ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** This has been going on for months.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Barkly, let her finish.

**Ms UIBO:** ... the Roper Gulf Regional Council and across our two agencies—Territory Families, Housing and Communities, as well as DIPL.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is being done in the interim so that people living in houses in Garawa can access them and drive a car onto their driveway? At the moment there is a house where it simply cannot be done. Why can that not be fixed?

**Ms UIBO:** We continue to engage with some of those other organisations and across our two different agencies to try to work on solutions.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** This has been going on for months. I do not know how many times I have identified this problem. There is still no money going to the Borrooloola town camps to fix the road problem. We are now saying there is \$1.2m, which might be available after 1 July.

**Ms UIBO:** It will be available because it is budgeted—not might be; it will be.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** At the moment, has it been costed to fix all the roads in the town camps in Borrooloola?

**Ms UIBO:** That continues to be part of the work we are doing across the two agencies, as mentioned. You are talking about roads. I am not the Infrastructure minister for the roads. For housing ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Are you responsible for homelands or not?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, but we are also talking about the different land tenure. We have to sometimes work with the land council that is responsible or the Aboriginal organisation that may be the provider of services in homelands on the funding ...

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Last year there was a minister for town camps who told me he was not responsible for town camps.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Barkly! You need to let the minister finish answering your question. I would hate, on the second-last day of the Estimates, for you to go on a warning. You have been so good. Minister, please answer the question.

**Ms UIBO:** I know this is a passion of the Member for Barkly, so I understand the frustration and acknowledge it. I have areas in my electorate as well where I want to see that big change happen.

I can reassure the Member for Barkly and those listening—particularly those residents from the town camps in Borrooloola—that our government is committed to working with the Roper Gulf Regional Council on the immediate, medium-term and longer term road remediation works happening in the town camps and also on upgrading or building new houses for Garawa 1 and Garawa 2 town camp area. I understand the frustration; it is duly noted and we will continue to work with the other entities to ensure that there are positive outcomes, better roads and better houses for the town camp residents of Borrooloola.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** At the moment the school bus cannot get into Garawa to pick up students for school. We have been told it will be after 1 July, but this is urgent now. Why can the work not be done now?

**Ms UIBO:** I am not aware of that and it should be directed to the Education minister.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** This is a homelands infrastructure issue in the town camps. You said that there will be \$1.2m coming after July, but the issue is current today; students cannot be picked up and taken to school in Borrooloola because of the condition of those roads.

**Ms UIBO:** I am not aware of that because I am not the Minister for Education. I have outlined our commitment to improve roads in our town camps and we have a \$1.2m commitment for this new financial year. We also have an Aboriginal organisation that is contracted to do repairs and maintenance on the town camp roads. Funding is already available through the municipal and essential services side of town camps.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How much money is available?

**Ms UIBO:** I will take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.10**

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

**Mr EDGINGTON:** How much money is available in this current financial year to fix the roads in the Borroloola town camps?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mrs LAMBLEY:** I do not spend much time in the town camps of Alice Springs these days, but I have been to two town camps over the last six months and was appalled by the state of the roads in those camps. How much money is in the current budget to fix the roads in Alice Springs town camps?

**Ms UIBO:** We will work on getting a breakdown specifically for the Alice Springs town camps, as we have a whole funding bucket.

**Mr MALEY:** Last year you said that the NT had the highest rate of homelessness, 12 times the national average. You mentioned this again in your opening statement, which you tabled. Could you tell us the rate of homelessness this year, as a percentage of the national average?

**Ms UIBO:** We are working on the same figure of 12 times the national average.

**Mr MALEY:** You have had a year to work on this and it has not changed?

**Ms UIBO:** We continue to advocate for this area at the highest level with the federal government. If the Northern Territory is to ever get ahead and reduce homelessness, or the risk of being homeless, we have to be needs-based funded.

It is not acceptable that the federal government continues to give the Northern Territory funding for a per capita percentage of the population. It means we are only ever able to access 1% of the total pool of Australian funding towards reducing homelessness in the country. It does not work for the Northern Territory because of our rates that we mentioned. It does not work for our context because our service delivery over a large geographic area needs to be taken into account. We have hardworking homelessness services that deliver those important services for vulnerable Territorians, but if we are only ever funded at 1% of the population base in Australia, we will not reduce it. We can only do as much as we can with the funding we have.

In saying that, the Northern Territory puts in a large amount of our own funding to work with important service providers. Unfortunately, there is a large number of Territorians who are either homeless or at risk of being homeless. We put in our own funding, which in the next financial year is a budgeted commitment of \$31.085m in the grant funding spread across 19 non-government providers. That is a delivery of 58 specialist homelessness services in urban and regional centres across the Northern Territory. That includes over \$2.1m for visitor accommodation; over \$5.7m for short-term and emergency accommodation; almost \$6.5m for medium-term and transitional accommodation; and over \$500,000 for private rental programs. It also includes over \$7.5m for tenancy sustainability programs for supporting tenants; over \$1.5m for support services; almost \$1.4m for our peak body funding—our important peak bodies that advocate at the highest level that we should be funded on needs and not on population; and over \$1m for our drop-in centres and service hubs. There is also \$4.7m for the Batten Road integrated homelessness support accommodation service.

**Mr CHAIR:** How underfunded are we compared with other states? Needs-based funding is exactly what we need. So that people understand how much we are underfunded by the federal government for the need we have—you have explained what we do—what is the gap?

**Ms UIBO:** The Northern Territory contributes 67% of the total funding and the Commonwealth contributes 33% of the funding of our homelessness services. I continue to advocate that we are severely underfunded at the federal level. The work that non-government organisations provide in this space is critical to supporting vulnerable Territorians.

**Mr MALEY:** You did not answer my question. To confirm, a year ago we were 12 times the national average. We have had a year of targeted programs and you just confirmed we are still 12 times the national average. The homelessness rate has not changed, even though your government had a year of targeted programs. The answer to my question is either yes or no. I understand all these things that you spoke about, which are irrelevant. The question is pretty simple. We have 12 times the national average and a year of targeted programs. Is it still 12 times the national average?

**Ms UIBO:** It is not irrelevant. We are talking about vulnerable Territorians ...

**Mr MALEY:** Answer my question. My question is specific; it is either yes or no.

**Ms UIBO:** ... who do not have access to safe and adequate housing. That is not irrelevant when we are talking about the safety and the access to adequate housing or services for Territorians ...

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think it is acceptable?

**Ms UIBO:** None of it is irrelevant. It is all linked ...

**Mr MALEY:** It is irrelevant to my question.

**Ms UIBO:** If we could alleviate homelessness tomorrow, we would, but we cannot do that without funds that are needs based versus population based. Our peak organisations—NT Shelter and Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory—advocate at the highest level for needs-based funding for the Northern Territory in regard to homelessness and housing. It should not be population based.

**Mr MALEY:** The answer is that it has not changed. It is still 12. It was 12 last year. Is that correct?

**Ms UIBO:** No, because we are still population funded.

**Mr MALEY:** I accept that, but the national homeless rate has not changed. It was 12; it has been a year and it is still 12. That is correct. I will move on.

You mentioned Batten Road. How many people have used that service in the last year?

**Ms UIBO:** Sorry, before I move to the Member for Nelson and get him to repeat that question, Member for Araluen, we have the figure for you. Thank you for waiting patiently.

In regard to Alice Springs town camp roads, we have a municipal and essential services allocation of \$1.07m.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Which, as the Member for Barkly has indicated, will not go far.

**Ms UIBO:** That is for roads maintenance and repairs.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Across the 20 town camps?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, the 17 town camps.

**Mr YAN:** Who will administer that \$1.07m for internal roads for town camps?

**Ms UIBO:** That will be Tangentyere community Aboriginal town council.

**Mr MALEY:** Back to Batten Road, how many people have used that service in the last year?

**Ms UIBO:** From the figures and the data we have for the reporting period of 1 July 2022 to 31 March 2023 a total of 50,695 nights of accommodation have been provided through Batten Road.

**Mr MALEY:** What was that figure again?

**Ms UIBO:** It was 50,695 nights. That is equated to 3,102 individuals and families who have accessed the Batten Road facility.

**Mr MALEY:** How many rooms are available there each night?

**Ms UIBO:** There are 191 rooms that we use for our operational purposes.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the 50,000-odd nights and the 3,000 families, how much does it cost per night to stay there?

**Ms UIBO:** Per room it is \$40 per night.

**Mr MALEY:** What services do you get for that?

**Ms UIBO:** The idea of the Batten Road facility is to ensure that there is access to wraparound support services for individuals, couples or families. There are several different organisations that provide onsite services or connections to services for people who are staying in Batten Road. For example, in the past we held a 'super Wednesday' event where Births, Deaths and Marriages; Centrelink; Medicare; the Motor Vehicle Registry; DIPL and other government department; and non-government services are available for people staying at Batten Road to connect with.

We also have a very close partnership with Larrakia Nation, which has been providing cultural support and access to return to country services. The facility is co-operated by Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation and Mission Australia as a partnership process.

**Mr MALEY:** My question was on what services they get. Is it cleaning, breakfast, lunch and dinner? It was about those types of services, but thank you for outlining the other stuff.

**Ms UIBO:** There is a meal service; I understand three meals a day are included in the cost. Cleaning services are also provided. We also have a satellite school that operates on site so that families with school-age children are supported. Some of the surrounding schools such as Sanderson high school have a relationship through the Department of Education to ensure that children and young people access education while they are staying at the facility.

**Mr MALEY:** If you stay there for one night and pay \$40, you get breakfast, lunch and dinner, a cleaning service and access to wraparound services on a Wednesday. Who collects the money?

**Ms UIBO:** Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation.

**Mr MALEY:** Is there any money outstanding in relation to rent? I am not sure what you want to call it—boarding or rent?

**Ms UIBO:** It is a pay-as-you-go service. The cost goes back into the facility.

**Mr MALEY:** Yes. My understanding is if it was 5,000 nights at \$40, it is almost \$2m. Is any of that money outstanding?

**Ms UIBO:** Are you inferring that there is a profit?

**Mr MALEY:** No. I am just saying if you stay there for ...

**Ms UIBO:** Or a deficit, arrears or something?

**Mr MALEY:** Who actually collects the rent? We will call it rent, for our conversation's sake.

**Ms UIBO:** It is payment.



**Mr MALEY:** Yes, payment. If you go there and you stay there two nights, you are meant to pay \$80. Who do you pay it to? That is my first question. Over the year, is there any money outstanding where people have said they will stay two nights and pay when they leave, but when they leave they have not paid? How much of that is outstanding?

**Ms UIBO:** I know this because I have family and constituents who access this facility. The payment goes directly to Yilli Rreung. It is not a debt model of collection either. You usually need to prepay for your stay or pay on the day if you are going to extend. NGO providers, Aboriginal organisations or land councils may also support people who are staying in the facility for a longer term, but there is a process for anyone staying at the facility to pay Yilli Rreung directly.

**Mr MALEY:** Are you involved in the collection of that payment?

**Ms UIBO:** No. It is Yilli Rreung, not the NT Government.

**Mr MALEY:** What cost to the department is there in supporting that facility? How much taxpayers' money is spent—the \$2m-odd goes back into wherever and if they do not collect half of it or whatever—to support that facility?

**Ms UIBO:** The 2022–23 budget estimate for the Northern Territory Government's contribution to the Batten Road facility is \$9.293m.

**Mr MALEY:** Does that mean next year you are going to spend \$9.2m?

**Ms UIBO:** Next year is very similar. The change is that our budget figure is \$8.918m.

**Mr MALEY:** Does that include security or is that on top of that? Is that everything? The \$9.2m you spent last financial year, is there anything on top of that such as security or extra costs that may be incurred?

**Ms UIBO:** I am informed that anything like security is already budgeted into that whole figure.

**Mr MALEY:** What about damage to the property? How is that dealt with? If there is a criminal act and someone damages a property, just like at Howard Springs, how is that dealt with?

**Ms UIBO:** If there is property damage to a room or part of the facility, Yilli Rreung is the property contract manager and would deal in the first instance with any damage.

**Mr MALEY:** If there is damage, is any taxpayers' money used to repair that damage?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to Mr Brent Warren for the technical side.

**Mr MALEY:** It is over the last 12 months.

**Mr WARREN:** How do we pay for the repairs if it is deliberate damage? In the first instance, Yilli would put into effect repairs; it is the property manager for the site. If a person can be identified as responsible, Yilli could enter into a relationship with that person for repayment. If someone committed deliberate criminal damage, there is the option to go to police and report it as a crime.

**Mr MALEY:** How much has been spent on repairing damage over the last financial year?

**Mr WARREN:** I will have to take that question about damage on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.11

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell us how much money has been spent on repairing damage at the Batten Road property over the last 12 months?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.9**

**Ms UIBO:** To date two extensions have been provided to Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation. The first extension was provided on 19 May 2023 and the second extension on 2 June 2023.

I reiterate the point that our goal is to ensure that we support any Aboriginal entities, businesses and organisations, particularly through the local decision-making agreements that we have signed to build capacity and support governance.

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**Mr MALEY:** Has anyone been charged for damage at the Batten Road facility?

**Ms UIBO:** That would have to be a question on notice and maybe a written question to the Police minister because you are talking about charges. That is not something that we would keep track of.

**Mr MALEY:** Can we take it on notice?

**Ms UIBO:** I think it might be a written question to the Police minister.

**Mr MALEY:** I understand your view, but we are here to ask questions. If you cannot and that is your answer, I will put it on notice now. How many charges is your department aware of?

**Ms UIBO:** I do not accept the question.

**Mr CHAIR:** The only other option is to put a written question to the minister for Police.

**Mr MALEY:** Does the minister have to give a reason why she will not accept a question?

**Mr CHAIR:** No, she does not.

**Ms UIBO:** Because it is not my department, Mr Chair.

**Mr MALEY:** Is your department aware of any damage to the Batten Road property over the last year?

**Ms UIBO:** That changed.

**Mr MALEY:** That is my question.

**Ms UIBO:** I will accept that question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.12**

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

**Mr MALEY:** Are you or your department aware of any damage to the Batten Road property over the last year?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr MALEY:** Are you aware of any recovery of costs in relation to damage at the Batten Road property by your department?

**Ms UIBO:** That goes to the point made earlier that Yilli Rreung is the property manager, and it would go through their assets in terms of being the property manager.

**Mr MALEY:** I am asking whether you or your department is aware of any cost recovery in relation to damage at the Batten Road property.

**Ms UIBO:** I will take it on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.13**

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

**Mr MALEY:** Are you or your department aware of any cost recovery in relation to damage at Batten Road. If there is, what has been recovered?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr MALEY:** Have any staff at the Batten Road property been assaulted?

**Ms UIBO:** Mr Chair, they are not Territory Families, Housing and Communities staff, so I would not have that detail. It would be Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation staff who would have that information.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, before we go back, while the minister for Police accepted all the questions on assaults at the Howard Springs facility and they will provide you with the data, if you ask a question of the minister and she does not answer, there is the opportunity to put it to the Police minister in writing.

**Mr MALEY:** I will change the question. Are you or your department aware of any staff who have been assaulted at the Batten Road facility?

**Ms UIBO:** I am not aware, but I would have to take it on notice for my department.

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**Question on Notice No 8.14**

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

**Mr MALEY:** Are you or your department aware of any staff who have been assaulted at the Batten Road property?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr MALEY:** Do you or your department provide any staffing for the Batten Road property?

**Ms UIBO:** No.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the maintenance of the Batten Road property, is that a taxpayers' expense or is that all incorporated in that \$8m that we spoke about earlier?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, that is correct. It is incorporated in that global amount we mentioned.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Have there been any one-off payments to assist with any repairs and maintenance at that facility?

**Ms UIBO:** Not that we are aware of.

**Mr MALEY:** Are any other facilities across the Northern Territory used by your department in relation to reducing homelessness?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to Mr Warren because it is operational.

**Mr WARREN:** We fund organisations across the five major centres to provide homelessness services. They include outreach-style services as well as accommodation. In the greater Darwin region it includes locations like the Garaworra facility in Berrimah, which is run by Anglicare, and the Crerar Road facility run by CatholicCare. We have medium-term accommodation run by St Vincent de Paul and other hostel-style accommodation run by the Salvation Army. I could provide that information across each region if you would like.

**Mr MALEY:** Could you tell us how much money is spent in providing those services to those extra, other than Batten Road?

**Ms UIBO:** I would like some clarification. We have visitor parks and homelessness services that are not necessarily attached to a location; it could be a mobile service. What information are you seeking?

**Mr MALEY:** How much in total does the department spend on homelessness in the Northern Territory? We were talking about Batten Road and then you mentioned others. I accept there is a long list. I am trying to work out how much of the whole budget is spent on that.

**Ms UIBO:** Our global figure for homelessness services is \$37.764m.

**Mr MALEY:** Was that for this financial year or next financial year?

**Ms UIBO:** That is in the budget.

**Mr MALEY:** How much was it in the reporting period just gone?

**Ms UIBO:** For the reporting period just gone the estimate is \$38.898m.

**Mr MALEY:** It has been reduced by about \$1m.

**Ms UIBO:** No, it is because we have not finished the last quarter. That is the estimate.

**Mr MALEY:** In the last quarter you will spend more. It is an estimate of \$38m, but we do not have a quarter, so it could go to \$39m or \$40m, yet you said your budget for next year is \$37m. That makes it worse. Let us say you spend another \$2m in the last quarter; in round figures that is \$40m budgeted for homelessness. You said next year it will be \$37.7m.

We are 12 times the national average, as we were last year, yet you will reduce the budget by X amount of money—we are only talking estimates, but \$40m minus \$37m is \$3m. Can you explain how you will decrease our homelessness rate and make it better when you are cutting the budget by an estimated \$3m?

**Ms UIBO:** You rattled off the top of your head a few figures, but we mentioned earlier that there was a decrease of \$1.5m in the budget for the Barkly Regional Deal and Tennant Creek visitor park, which has moved to the out years because that will be the operational cost. The facility is not up and running yet, hence the operational costs have not been included and have moved to the out years, which would explain the discrepancy in the figures.

**Mr MALEY:** Is the \$3m reduction as a result of the Barkly Regional Deal?

**Ms UIBO:** The figure was a \$1.5m Barkly Regional Deal change because of the out years operational figure.

**Mr MALEY:** There is \$38.8m in the reporting period up to 31 March, so we know that will increase.

**Ms UIBO:** I have some extra information from Mr Brent Warren for you so that you do not have to keep repeating yourself.

**Mr MALEY:** I have to because you do not answer the question.

**Mr WARREN:** The two main figures that have had an effect on the change in homelessness funding are the move forward of the Barkly visitor park operational funding and a late payment, which was agreed to by the Commonwealth, in relation to extending the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement—approximately \$1.5m—which will be paid in the new financial year but was not approved until after the budget was settled.

**Mr MALEY:** That money has been approved but not spent. I understand \$2bn of Commonwealth funding was announced and the Territory will receive \$50m to build 100 new homes, which is \$500,000 per home in urban and remote areas, but I do not believe a home could be built in a remote location for \$500,000. Can you explain how we will have 100 homes out of \$50m?

**Ms UIBO:** It has nothing to do with the current outputs. That announcement was made by the federal government last week, which we welcome. That is specifically for urban housing. We have our own remote housing package and investment of \$2.1bn, which is an output if you would like to follow that up after.

For the briefing and the outputs at hands, that is new money that the Northern Territory has only been informed we will receive. The \$50m is very welcome. That is not population-based funding; it is needs-based funding. We thank and acknowledge that the federal Labor government is listening to us in that regard.

The Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania are also receiving \$50m. They are smaller jurisdictions and I know they welcome that increase, which is not based on population but is based on need.

It will be for urban dwellings, but it has nothing to do with the current budget process. It will be added to the books once the first ministers and Treasurers of the country agree to the terms of that money being transferred.

**Mr MALEY:** In your opening statement I am reading, you said: 'Over time, we will transfer up to 40% of our urban public housing to the sector'. Is that the private sector you are referring to?

**Ms UIBO:** It is community housing providers.

**Mr MALEY:** Who are they? Can you give me an example of a community housing provider?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes. It is part of our Community Housing Growth Strategy to include and have more community housing providers. We have a list of the entities that are already working in the Northern Territory that have the allocation and responsibility for community housing provision. We have 15 providers. I am happy to read out the list or if you prefer, I can table it.

**Mr MALEY:** Just read them out.

**Ms UIBO:** Our 15 community housing providers that are registered under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing to operate in the Northern Territory are:

- Aboriginal Community Housing Ltd, a tier two
- Anglicare Northern Territory Ltd, a tier three
- Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation, a tier two
- AUS Projects NT Pty Ltd, a tier three
- Believe Housing Australia, a tier one
- CatholicCare NT Resources Ltd, a tier two
- Community Housing Central Australia, a tier two
- Community Housing Ltd, a tier one
- Julalikari Housing Inc, a tier three

- Mission Housing Australia, a tier one
- The Salvation Army Housing, a tier two
- Top End Association for Mental Health Inc, a tier three
- Venture Housing Company, a tier one
- Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation, a tier two
- YWCA, a tier three.

Of those 15, five are Aboriginal community housing providers.

**Mr MALEY:** In your opening statement, you said you planned to transfer over time. Can you give us a better idea of what sort of time frame we are talking about?

**Ms UIBO:** It is part of our Community Housing Growth Strategy. A process is in place for time frames. For this year, coming up for the financial year 2022–23, we are looking to transfer in the greater Darwin area, 320 affordable housing dwellings and 78 social housing dwellings at John Stokes Square to a community housing provider. That has already been awarded to Venture Housing as the community housing provider.

Also, providers that are not yet confirmed for the Darwin greater area is 502 social housing dwellings. That is in the final stages of negotiation to be transferred to the provider that is successful.

In the upcoming financial year 2023–24, negotiations for a provider are under way regarding transfers. We are anticipating 500 social housing dwellings and 296 Alice Springs town camp dwellings.

**Mr MALEY:** By when?

**Ms UIBO:** By the 2023–24 financial year.

**Mr CHAIR:** We have hit 12.30 pm. We will break now for 30 minutes for lunch and come back at 1 pm.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr MALEY:** In relation to homelessness, you mentioned earlier that we were 12 times the national average last year and we are still 12 times the national average. Last year you spent roughly \$9m trying to fix that. That equates to about \$175,000 a week. Territorians are listening to this. Can you explain to them whether you think that is a good outcome?

**Ms UIBO:** Because of that dire statistic, we treat the support programs address homelessness in the Northern Territory very seriously. Having such a small population but having 12 times the average national rate is unacceptable.

We continue to ensure that the Northern Territory Government budgets some of its own money. As mentioned, 67% of the funding for homelessness service is provided by the Northern Territory Government and 33% is provided the Commonwealth Government.

We would love to see more in this space. Our peak organisations and homelessness services would also love to see more of the needs-based funding that is absolutely critical to alleviating the pressures of homelessness and being at risk of homelessness in the Northern Territory.

We continue to work in that space. We can only do so much with the resources that are at hand. The Northern Territory Government is proud to put in a majority of the funding. Over two-thirds of funding for homelessness services is Northern Territory Government money.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think spending \$173,000 per week last year without any change to the homeless rate is acceptable?

**Ms UIBO:** I understand the point you are trying to make. I want to ensure that the Territorians who are listening are aware that the work that we are doing is directly with the Commonwealth Government. We have sought an extension for the current National Housing and Homelessness Agreement—NHHA—by 12 months to 30 June 2024. This is a proposal that the Territory has agreed to in principle. It is waiting for ratification of the extension for a bilateral agreement through the Council on Federal Financial Relations in June 2023.

We are looking to negotiate a new five-year agreement. This is expected to begin in late 2023 in order to be guided by the proposed National Housing and Homelessness Plan. In September 2022 the Productivity Commission review of the NHHA was produced.

We are working with some of the investment that has been made nationally to look at what is mandated to address governance for the HAFF, which is going through federal parliament. It may or may not get through; we are not sure. It will affect the ability of the Northern Territory to either incorporate it into a future budget or work with the resources that are at hand.

We are closely associated with what is happening at the national level. There was a 10-year deficit with the Liberal-National Coalition government that did not have a focus on housing whatsoever. We welcomed the federal Labor government in May last year, which has a federal Minister for Housing; Homelessness. That is Minister Julie Collins. I have met with Julie Collins and spoken with her several times to reiterate the stress of the Northern Territory with regard to housing, homelands, town camps and homelessness services. I continue to advocate for needs-based funding for the NT.

**Mr MALEY:** Thanks for highlighting what you will do next year. You have increased the budget by roughly \$200,000 to \$9.2m. There was \$9m last year. You spent about \$173,000 every week last year on homelessness. It was 12 times the national average and it still is. Do you think that is acceptable? What would you say to Territorians who are listening today who now know that you spent \$175,000 every week and the outcome is exactly the same? Do you think that is acceptable?

**Ms UIBO:** Obviously there are different reasons and various causes of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness. The idea of the work that we are committed to fund in the Northern Territory is to address individual, couple or family concerns. We consider the circumstances concerning the individual or family and their needs. It is not just about building a house and putting someone in; we are trying to look at some of the root causes of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness.

A large portion of our funding is dedicated to the infrastructure side of housing and we work with DIPL to create more homes, identify more dwellings, have that transfer of services from community housing providers to take on that responsibility and offer a more holistic approach to tenancies to address complex issues that an individual or family may be experiencing. There is whole raft of measures to support vulnerable Territorians; this is just one part of the department's focus. It is jointly driven with our non-government organisations who deliver the services.

I mentioned key numbers in terms of the number of programs. Our grant funding goes to 19 non-government service providers and is spread across 58 specialist homelessness services programs. That is across urban and regional centres.

**Mr MALEY:** I will let Territorians make what they want of that non-answer.

Homelessness was 12 times last year and is still 12 times the national average this year. Has crime in the Northern Territory had an effect on the homelessness rate in the Northern Territory?

**Ms UIBO:** In what specific way?

**Mr MALEY:** There is number of ways, but the first way is the money spent from your budget on repairing property damage. There is also money spent from your budget dealing with crime and also the money spent from your budget in relation to dealing with the damage caused by crime. Crime in the community has caused more people to become homeless. That has also affected your budget because I can only assume there are more people becoming homeless because of the level of crime.

Has crime affected your department in relation to its homelessness services; and, if so, how?

**Ms UIBO:** I think that is a very loaded question. It has a lot of different areas attached to it. In terms of the core business ...

**Mr MALEY:** Answer as you see fit.

**Ms UIBO:** Thank you.

In terms of the core business of my department, the provision of services concerning the funding that I mentioned—over \$36m of funding and for the next financial year \$37m ...

**Mr MALEY:** Can you relate it to crime, though?

**Mr CHAIR:** Let the minister answer the question.

**Ms UIBO:** I thought I was able to answer as I see fit, as you advised me, Member for Nelson ...

**Mr MALEY:** Relate it to crime because that was the question. I do not want you talking about the ...

**Ms UIBO:** ... in directing me how to answer questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, it is on the record that you said that the minister could answer the question as she sees fit. She is answering your question. Let it go.

**Mr MALEY:** You know what my next question will be.

**Mr CHAIR:** That is fine. It can be whatever it needs to be.

**Ms UIBO:** I wish I could work the way your brain works, but that is fine. I will wait for the next question.

In terms of the service delivery components around homelessness—we have outlined that several times already—we have several different service types. There is visitor accommodation, short-term and emergency accommodation, medium-term transitional accommodation, private rental programs, tenancy sustainability programs, support services, peak body funding, drop-in centres and hubs and, as we have already spoken about, the Batten Road integrated homelessness supported accommodation service. That is specifically under this output and line item in terms of the budget.

In terms of the work overall in my department, there is urban housing and remote housing, town camps and homelands. It is a large department.

I cannot necessarily stipulate anything for your question regarding what areas are affected by crime. You would need to be specific and able to provide specific questions to something, because the department is large. We deal with multiple programs, infrastructure, service delivery and provision. You would have to be more specific.

**Mr MALEY:** Okay, I will give you one. Has the crime or property damage affected the ability of your department to service homelessness in the Northern Territory?

**Ms UIBO:** I do not believe so. I know not just the department but our service providers continue to support vulnerable Territorians.

**Mr MALEY:** Has crime not affected your department in relation to homelessness services?

**Ms UIBO:** You would have to talk to the 4,276 clients who are already participants through some of the services to get that data as individuals or family groups who interface with homelessness services.

**Mr MALEY:** Not unless those 4,000 people actually manage your budget. I am talking about your budget and I am sure those 4,000 people do not have access to your budget. Does crime affect the bottom line of your budget in relation to homelessness services? If you want, I can make it broader into housing.

**Ms UIBO:** Disadvantage does. If disadvantage is linked to the effects of crime, the answer would be yes. If it does not, it would be disadvantage and vulnerability without that connection to crime. It is not a question you can quantify if you are not talking about individual or family circumstances.

**Mr MALEY:** In your opening statement, you said that the increased cost of the private housing rental market is putting a demand on urban public housing. Do you think crime is making a growing demand on urban public housing?



**Ms UIBO:** I do not believe so.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think crime is growing the demand for remote public housing?

**Ms UIBO:** In what effect?

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to not being able to provide properties, homes or bedrooms to people in remote communities because of crime.

**Ms UIBO:** I do not believe so. The key issues in our remote housing and public housing space are about overcrowding and alleviating the pressures of overcrowded homes.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, before you go on, I remind you of Standing Order 109 about opinion. This is tinkering on opinion. Please try to avoid it wherever possible.

**Mr MALEY:** You said that crime has not put a growing demand on remote housing. Can you explain to me how the crime at Port Keats where approximately 100 houses were damaged as the result of crime did not put any pressure on the public housing in Port Keats?

**Ms UIBO:** You have adjusted the question a bit. When we spoke about homelessness services and the pressures there ...

**Mr MALEY:** I am talking about public and remote housing.

**Ms UIBO:** Now you have morphed it into public ...

**Mr MALEY:** I am allowed to ask any questions I want.

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, but you are now quoting me from a question that was specifically about homelessness services and the effect and impact on homelessness services and vulnerable Territorians. Now we have moved on, but you are using a quote and reference ...

**Mr MALEY:** I will read the exact words:

*The increased cost of the private housing market is growing the demand for urban public housing ...*

All I have done is substitute the word 'urban'—I have asked that question as well—with 'remote'. That was my question. I am quoting you directly from your opening statement.

When you try to say we were talking about homelessness, no, we were not; we were talking about urban public housing. I asked that question and I did not change it to the next one, which is remote public housing. I am coming directly from your words in your opening statement. When you try to twist it around and say we have changed the subject, we did not.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nelson, can you restate the question so that I am aware of where you are going?

**Mr MALEY:** How did the damage at Port Keats of the 100-odd houses—which is related to crime—affect public housing in Port Keats? If you are saying it did not relate to crime, can you explain to me and Territorians how crime in Port Keats has not affected your ability to service Port Keats?

**Mr CHAIR:** You have asked the question, let the minister answer.

**Ms UIBO:** This is a new question and is not linked to the previous answer. I put that on the official record.

The pressures of what happened in Wadeye is a complex area. The work that my department has done in partnership with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics in being able to repair homes and return families to their homes in Wadeye after what happened at the end of last year is a large piece of work that we have done over a short period. I thank my department and DIPL, as well as the coordinating agency, Chief Minister and Cabinet, for the work they have done with the task force, ensuring that those affected and displaced Territorians from the Wadeye community had access to support services, whether it was in their community, outside of it or in other parts of the Northern Territory. I acknowledge the trauma of the community from what happened.

I am happy to report to the Estimates Committee that the 125 homes and dwellings identified for repairs and maintenance have all been completed. In regard to repatriating community members who left the community—particularly in relation to safety issues—pressures have been taken off, with community members returning to their homes.

The department of Housing in partnership with our Aboriginal Interpreter Service, the local government entity West Daly Regional Council and TDC—the Aboriginal Corporation partnered on the task force with government services—have done a phenomenal job supporting displaced Territorians because of a very significant and complex community issue in terms of safety and wellbeing. The infrastructure side of the repairs and maintenance for homes has been expedited so that people can return to community if they had to leave.

**Mr MALEY:** I feel for anyone who is a victim of crime, whether it is property crime, assault or whatever. I am not saying anything against the victims.

I asked you a question—if crime had affected your bottom line or your budget—and you said no. I then asked how the damage at Port Keats affected people. The 125 homes were damaged as a result of crime. How can it not affect your ability to add services to people who are living in remote or urban areas?

I will ask some questions about Peppimenarti soon, but right now I am focusing on Port Keats. You have just mentioned there are 125 homes that have been repaired or damaged. How can that not affect your services? You just said it did not affect your services. How can you explain it to Territorians? One question is about repatriating those people living in those homes for a period of time. The second question is the cost of repairing those homes. How can you say that crime has not affected your department, yet in Port Keats alone 125 homes have been damaged as a result of crime?

**Ms UIBO:** When you asked the original question, it was still under homelessness services, and I provided the answer.

You have given specific context in terms of the area that you are focused on and it has been a pressure point. We have not shirked our responsibility or tried to hide it. The work was done in a short amount of time to support residents who were displaced for safety or wellbeing reasons. The department has done a great job with DIPL to return community members to their homes, whether they have stayed in community with family or reached out and accessed other services.

The department is always flexible and agile to address any key pressures that we have experienced. It is not a normal event that occurred. It was a very traumatic event for that community. The work that has been done across agencies and with organisations, specifically the local Aboriginal organisations and local government, in Wadey has been phenomenal. I will leave it at that.

**Mr MALEY:** You said earlier that crime has not affected your department's ability to offer services. Can you explain how the crime in Peppimenarti has affected your department? I am not talking about alcohol-related crime; I am talking specifically about housing and damage to property, which is your responsibility and comes under your department. How can that level of crime and property damage in Peppimenarti not affect your department?

**Ms UIBO:** I am starting to hear your key themes in terms of effect.

The department works to address the needs of Territorians, whether that is overcrowding pressures, homelessness services, new infrastructure or repairs and maintenance. There is a multitude of areas that our large department covers. We have areas of responsibility across the particular themes that I have mentioned. A multitude of things are happening at one time. When you use the word 'affect', the department changes and is agile to address the needs of Territorians regarding housing and homelessness services.

I acknowledge the example you used in your question. The area of need is the area that the department responds to. If you want to use the word 'affect', it has created an opportunity for the department to focus on a particular area. We continue to be a fluid and agile department that provides a pipeline of works, programs and initiatives. When we need to adjust to a critical crisis point or services need to be provided in a short time frame, the department has been phenomenal in providing those services to Territorians.

**Mr MALEY:** How much did it cost your department to fix the 125 homes that were damaged in Port Keats?

**Ms UIBO:** For Wadeye community, the works orders to repair the 125 houses cost \$11.5m; that was the expenditure as at 31 March 2023.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you have the figure to 1 July 2023?

**Ms UIBO:** We have not got to 1 July yet, so I cannot give you that figure.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the figure up to 1 June 2023?

**Ms UIBO:** Do you want a figure for between 1 April and 1 June?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes, so we can know how much money has been spent on work orders at Port Keats for the last financial year.

**Ms UIBO:** An amount of \$11.4m has been the total cost estimated.

**Mr MALEY:** Instead of going through each one individually, can you give me the total cost of property repairs as a result of crime for all properties in remote areas under your control?

**Ms UIBO:** Can you repeat that so that we can understand whether we can answer it now or later?

**Mr MALEY:** We found out that you spent \$11.4m on repairs to the properties damaged in Port Keats. I can go through all the major communities or you could give me the total figure that your department has spent on repairs as a result of crime to remote houses in your control. Is that easier or do you want to go through them one by one?

**Ms UIBO:** We are talking about 5,544 remote community assets and dwellings and you are asking for a breakdown of the repairs ...

**Mr MALEY:** Just in relation to crime.

**Ms UIBO:** In my understanding of how we budget for repairs and maintenance, it would be attributed to the cost of the repair, not necessarily the cause of the repair. If you wanted that, you would be waiting many months for us to go through 5,544 remote housing assets to ascertain what repairs and maintenance, logged work or contract work, or local repairs have been done to each one and the cause of that repair. It could be a child breaking a door handle or something more severe. You are asking for quite an unrealistic expectation of what could be reported for that question.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell the committee how much money your department has spent on repairing crime-related property damage to remote housing? If you cannot, that is fine, but I want to ask that question. If it is too much, it is too much, but I am trying to work out how much money has been spent on repairing crime-related property offences in relation to social housing or Territory Housing.

**Ms UIBO:** I understand. It would be too much to ask my department. I would much rather they get on and deal with being able to support Territorians in housing—whether that is remote, urban, homelessness, town camps or homelands—as opposed to digging through data and statistics just for a question you have thought of off the top of your head in the Estimates Committee.

The work done is taken seriously. There is a lot of accountability in regard to every dollar that is spent to support remote and urban Territorians. It is inappropriate for me as a minister to ask my department to put off work and service delivery for Territorians to answer a question that will require a huge amount of work and many hours across DIPL, Territory Families, Police and other agencies that may have input to providing you with a clear picture of what you are asking.

**Mr MALEY:** I will make it easier for you. Can you tell me how much of your overall budget is being spent on repairs and maintenance for Territory Housing homes?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, we can answer that. I will pass to either Mr Brent Warren or Mr McInnes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Do you want it for the reporting period, which we have generally done, from July to the end of March?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

**Mr McINNES:** As at 30 April 2023, the repairs and maintenance budget in remote areas was \$46.9m of which we have spent \$44.9m.

**Mr MALEY:** Have you spent \$44m on repairs and maintenance?

**Mr McINNES:** Correct.

**Mr MALEY:** That was in the last financial year. How much have you budgeted for next financial year?

**Mr McINNES:** What is in the budget papers at the moment for next financial year is not reflective of what the final budget will be. In the budget papers we have \$13m for remote housing, but that does not include the recent negotiations about the new agreement for remote housing, which will bring it back to similar levels to this year.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give us the difference between wear and tear and tenant responsibilities?

**Mr McINNES:** Yes, that is possible to do, but we would have to take it on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.15

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please tell us the difference between wear and tear and tenant responsibilities in relation to your repair and maintenance budget?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr MALEY:** In relation to Port Keats, where you said you spent \$11.5m repairing the damage to 125 houses, have you recovered any money for the criminal damage to those houses?

**Ms UIBO:** I am of the understanding that if there has been a police report or incident report regarding any criminal activity related to damage for any of the 125 homes, my department would seek through the Victims of Crime process costs for the repairs to damage.

**Mr MALEY:** That damage was about a year ago. In the last financial year, have you recovered any costs for the damage to property at Port Keats?

**Ms UIBO:** I will take that on notice, Member for Nelson.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.16

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

**Mr MALEY:** In the last financial year, has the department recovered any costs for the damage to property at Port Keats?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr MALEY:** Over the last financial year, have you recovered costs for any property damage to assets owned by your department?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes. In terms of quantifying that, I would have to take the question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.17**

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

**Mr MALEY:** How much money has the department recovered for any property damage as a result of crime over the last financial year?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr MALEY:** You said yes to the first part of the question, but you could not quantify it. Can you explain to me why you said yes but cannot quantify it?

**Ms UIBO:** We are aware that there have been police reports on criminal activity that may have affected property in the Northern Territory Government asset portfolio. In terms of the cost, which is what you have asked about, we will have to take that on notice.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell us how many you are aware of?

**Ms UIBO:** We will take it on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.18**

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

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to cost recovery, how many times has your department attempted to recover costs incurred resulting from property damage?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr EDGINGTON:** When does the National Partnership for Remote Housing expire?

**Ms UIBO:** The current agreement expires on 30 June 2023. The 12-month extension, which is about to be signed, will take us through to 30 June 2024.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Does that extension involve additional funding being provided by the Commonwealth Government? If so, how much?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes. It is \$111m.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What were the targets under the original National Partnership for Remote Housing? How many houses were to be built?

**Ms UIBO:** Are you talking about the life span of the agreement or what has been built in the reporting period for this Estimates?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The National Partnership for Remote Housing was for five years. What was the target number of houses to be built under that five-year agreement? How many were actually built?

**Ms UIBO:** From 1 July 2022 to 31 March 2023, 1,253 bedrooms have been completed that are eligible to claim under the agreement, with the target of 1,950 required by 30 June 2023, which is the end of the current agreement.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** My estimate is that you are 707 bedrooms short. Why is that?

**Ms UIBO:** I appreciate the opportunity to clarify this. My department has been working closely with the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Commonwealth.

The delayed commencement of the agreement has affected the deliverables. Although on paper our National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory started on 1 July 2018, there was more than a 12-month delay for the approval of the initial capital works plan and the first payment of the agreement. The Australian Government's contribution did not commence until we were well into the 2019–20 financial year, which resulted in the delivery of the agreement being truncated to less than four years as opposed to five years.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Is the actual agreement based on bedrooms rather than homes? Is that the only requirement under that agreement?

**Ms UIBO:** That is correct.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Given that is about to expire, has there been any formal review of that agreement?

**Mr WARREN:** As we approach the expiry of the current agreement, the position negotiated with the Commonwealth is that they would enter into a one-year bridging agreement. The purpose of the bridging period is to do a fulsome review of the agreement and develop the terms of a new long-term agreement, which is likely to start in 2024–25 financial year.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Has the review commenced?

**Mr WARREN:** Yes.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Who is conducting the review?

**Mr WARREN:** It is being done through our Reform Management Office. There has been a series of pieces of project work that have been identified that have been shared amongst the members of the joint steering committee, who are the partners in the national partnership agreement. That includes some work being done by the land councils, Aboriginal Housing NT and each level of government.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** All the work is being done internally rather than externally. Are there any independent consultants on board helping with that?

**Ms UIBO:** AHNT is not a part of government, although we support them as a peak organisation. The land councils are also not a part of government. Therefore, external involvement of stakeholders is covered through that partnership.

**Mr WARREN:** I think the question is whether there has been any external oversight or other parties involved.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Yes.

**Mr WARREN:** The minister is correct; Aboriginal Housing NT is part of that external focus.

Recently, the Australian National Audit Office conducted a review of parts of the agreement from a Commonwealth perspective. There is a range of ways that the agreement is looked at and examined. The purpose of the one-year bridging agreement is to ensure that we set a new arrangement in place that meets the land council, Australian Government and NT Government requirements for a long-term agreement.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Can you tell me whether there has been any specific consultancies to assist with this review of the national partnership agreement?

**Mr WARREN:** The National Indigenous Australians Agency has engaged a consultant for part of the review work.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Who is that consultant?

**Mr WARREN:** PwC's Indigenous Consulting—PIC.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What involvement has your department had with PwC so far?

**Mr WARREN:** The process so far has been about the scope of the review being developed and PIC coming in and speaking to each of the parties to the agreement, which includes the role of the land councils and Aboriginal Housing NT.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** What is the cost of that contract with PwC?

**Mr WARREN:** I do not know. It is an agreement between the Australian Government and that organisation.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** When was that agreement put in place between the Australian Government and PwC?

**Mr WARREN:** I cannot make a comment about their procurement of PIC.

**Mr MALEY:** Regarding that one-year extension, my understanding is that there is \$1.1m additional funding in relation to that agreement. How many more rooms are meant to have been agreed in relation to that extra \$1.1m funding for the next financial year?

**Ms UIBO:** My understanding is it will be 157 houses.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that houses or rooms?

**Ms UIBO:** Houses—they have changed it through the extension period.

**Mr MALEY:** We are already 700-odd rooms short from the previous year. In this financial year we have to do the 700-odd rooms, plus another 157 houses. Is that correct?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to Mr Dwayne McInnes for the details on that question.

**Mr McINNES:** Relating to the current delivery I have some updated numbers as late as last night. At the end of May we are at 1,411. We expect that it will end up being 1,577 compared with the 1,950 by the end of June.

In terms of moving forward to the new agreement and meeting the obligations under it, we are still in negotiations with the Commonwealth about the current shortfall. We are well placed to deliver that next year. To put that into perspective, at the end of the last month we delivered 229 homes in remote communities to the end of May. That has been, by far, the biggest delivery over the last 12 years. In addition to that we have 621 homes that have been contractually awarded or are under way. We are well placed to meet the existing obligations and the future obligations of that agreement.

**Mr MALEY:** When you say that you are well placed, are you well placed to build an extra 157 houses this financial year? Will they be new houses? If one is found that is uninhabitable, will you push it down and build another one? Will that be counted as one or is it just brand-new houses?

**Ms UIBO:** Member for Nelson, before I pass to Mr McInnes, I clarify from your comment that the 157 is part of that extension period.

**Mr MALEY:** For next year, sorry.

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, but you just said this financial year and that would mean only one week left.

**Mr MALEY:** Next year you have to build 157 houses. Will they be new houses? If you have a house that is damaged and needs to be rebuilt, is that counted as one? I am trying to get how many actual new houses there will be compared with just replacing houses?

**Ms UIBO:** If a house is demolished and rebuilt, that is still considered a new home. I know what you are talking about, and I will pass to Mr McInnes in a moment for him to talk about what is increasing the housing stock. To clarify the wording, a new home is still an infill. When a house is demolished and rebuilt on the same lot or extended on the same lot, that is still considered a new house. I believe your question is about increasing the housing stock.

**Mr McINNES:** Yes, the minister is correct. A demolition and a replacement is counted as one of the 157; it qualifies. We focus on making sure we do not replace like for like and that we build to meet the requirements of the households. If we knock down a three-bedroom home, we do not necessarily replace it with a three-bedroom home; we could replace it with a duplex, depending on the family or the community consultation and whether they want to split the blocks or what have you. It is never like for like.

For the current year, to give you a bit of an indication, of the 229 homes we built, 130 of those were additional and 99 were replacements.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the rent received for remote homes, is there any outstanding rent from last financial year; and, if so, what is the amount?

**Ms UIBO:** On 6 February 2023 we enacted the new remote rent framework and that is now being implemented. Rent collection has changed for our remote assets and housing. The focus of this is a simplified model through the framework to allow a certain amount of rent collection, either per asset or family, so that people are able to budget accordingly.

The old system was calculated on a global household income figure, which was quite a tedious process of collecting data. It had to be collected every 12 months, which was administratively burdensome.

The remote rent process that has now been enacted is for simplified collection. In the future we will be able to hand the simplified remote rent framework collection to Aboriginal or community housing providers should they enter into that space.

**Mr WARREN:** The amount of rent charged in the year to date has been \$27m for the remote housing part of our network. Of that amount charged, we have collected \$20.2m year to date.

**Mr MALEY:** Does that leave about \$7m outstanding?

**Mr WARREN:** That is correct; it is \$6.8m.

**Mr MALEY:** What has been done in relation to collecting that rent? This is only remote we are talking about.

**Mr WARREN:** That is correct.

**Mr MALEY:** What has been done to collect that rent?

**Mr WARREN:** In relation to rent collection, every tenant has a relationship directly with the department. Where we identify people whose payments have stopped for some reason, our tenancy staff make contact with the tenant to reactivate their payments or clarify why the payments have stopped. Sometimes there may be a hardship aspect.

One of the tools we have to deal with the hardship component is a safety net rent rate for remote tenants. Normally they would pay a standard full rate. If we identify a hardship issue, we can move them onto a 25% of household income protected rent rate so that they can keep making their payments.

Where tenants miss payments and they accumulate a debt, we have an agreement-to-pay process that allows us to sign up a repayment program for tenants.

The other part to this is about developing a tenant's life skills in managing their tenancy. We have a network of funded providers who provide tenancy support in remote areas. Part of their role is to help build the skills of tenants in engaging with the landlord and the payment system.

Nearly all of our tenants make their payments through the Human Services Centrelink payment scheme run by the Commonwealth. We have a good relationship with them, where they give us data on a daily basis about payments that drop off.

**Mr MALEY:** You said on 6 February it changed to the remote rent framework. Can you tell us how much rent was outstanding on 6 February 2023?

**Ms UIBO:** I have the figure here. I make the point that the simplified system for our remote rent framework that has been enacted will make it an easier job for our housing officers to work with families. If they are behind, we do not want to see anyone get into rent arrears, particularly in our remote areas and urban areas.



It is a simplified calculation to provide an opportunity to work directly with families who may fall behind in rent. We have a safety net that is built in to ensure that no-one pays more than 25% of their income for remote rent, and that can be accessed through the support service with our housing and tenancy officers.

In light of your question, is prior to 6 June the correct time frame?

**Mr MALEY:** No, 6 February.

**Ms UIBO:** The amount was \$69.7m over a period of up to 10 years; it is accumulated debt.

**Mr MALEY:** My understanding is that last year you wrote off a large chunk of outstanding debt.

**Ms UIBO:** That is the amount.

**Mr MALEY:** You had \$69m outstanding as of 6 February. How much did you write off?

**Ms UIBO:** That amount is the amount—\$69.7m.

**Mr MALEY:** When did you write that off?

**Ms UIBO:** That was on 28 June 2022.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell me how much rent was outstanding from 1 July last year to 6 February this year—this financial year?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to Kim Charles, Chief Financial Officer.

**Ms CHARLES:** The accumulative debt amount after that write-off till 31 March is \$12.6m.

**Mr MALEY:** From 1 July 2022 to 6 February 2023, was there \$12.6m?

**Ms CHARLES:** That is correct.

**Mr MALEY:** What happened to that debt? Has it been written off? You said earlier that outstanding now is \$6.8m, yet at 6 February there was \$12m outstanding. That does not add up. How does that work?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to Kim in a moment. Part of the first question earlier was what rent had been collected as opposed to debt and arrears.

**Mr MALEY:** My question was about how much is outstanding from 1 July to 6 February 2023. Sorry for the misunderstanding.

**Ms CHARLES:** The amount of \$12.6m that I gave is from 13 December through to 31 March, and the amount this financial year only is \$6.8m—that is 1 July to 31 March this year. Of the \$12.6m, \$6.8m relates to this financial year.

**Mr MALEY:** I am confused. How much is outstanding in relation to remote rent now? Is \$6.8m total?

**Ms CHARLES:** At 31 March, it is \$12.6m.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that outstanding now?

**Ms CHARLES:** At 31 March, that is correct.

**Mr MALEY:** As of 1 July last year what was outstanding? I am trying to work out how much has not been collected this financial year. How can we get that answer?

**Ms CHARLES:** To clarify, the waiver happened as at 13 December 2022. It was accounted for in the books of the 2021–22 financial year, so it was accounted for in June but the period that it was waived up to was for December. Since 13 December ...

**Mr MALEY:** Is that in 2022?

**Ms CHARLES:** Sorry, it was 2021.

**Mr MALEY:** The year before in 2021. Can we do this financial year?

**Ms CHARLES:** This financial year we charged a total of \$27m, collected \$20.2m, and there is a debt outstanding of \$6.8m.

**Mr MALEY:** That is about \$130,000 a week outstanding, if we divide \$6.8m by 52. I am not good at maths, but I think that is about right.

**Ms CHARLES:** It is approximately \$800,000 per month.

**Mr MALEY:** There is \$800,000 per month outstanding rent that has not been collected by your agency. What attempts will you make to try to collect \$800,000 per month? I am only talking about remote here. I will go to urban next. This is about \$800,000 per month of uncollected rent.

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass to Mr Brent Warren for the details of what we are doing operationally on that. The breakdown of the data per region shows that a majority of public housing tenants pay their rent. We are talking about seven out of 10.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you confirm that \$800,000 per month remains outstanding?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes. I am making the point that the majority of our public housing tenants do the right thing. There is a small minority who are either not doing the right thing or struggling. That is where we have the mechanisms built in such as the safety net to be able to work directly with a tenant or tenants to find out what the issue is with their rental payments and whether they can be supported. If they are not doing the right thing, we can ensure that they understand there are consequences for not paying the rent and we have the ability to support those tenants to ensure they are paying.

**Mr WARREN:** Operationally in relation to rent unpaid, a range of things occur. At a central agency level we receive reporting each day from the Commonwealth Department of Social Services in relation to clients whose payments have stopped, which allows us to make contact with those clients and reinstate payment again.

We have tenancy officers based in each of our regional teams, including in some areas in remote communities, whose job is to interact directly with tenants from day to day, including having conversations with them about reconnecting their payments if they have stopped.

**Mr MALEY:** Has anyone been evicted for not paying rent?

**Mr WARREN:** People have been evicted for not paying rent.

**Mr MALEY:** How many?

**Mr WARREN:** I would have to take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.19

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

**Mr MALEY:** How many people have been evicted from their public housing in remote areas for not paying the rent in the last financial year?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

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**Mr YAN:** The \$6.8m of debt in arrears has accumulated in eight months?

**Ms UIBO:** It is nine months.

**Mr YAN:** Is it for the reporting period?

**Ms UIBO:** That is correct.

**Mr YAN:** We ended up with \$69.7m in accumulated debt that was written off in June last year. In just nine months we are already at \$6.8m in debt in arrears on rental. The new rental framework was supposed to simplify the rental collection and rent for residents. How is this working if you have already created \$6.8m debt in nine months? If you extrapolate that for the financial year, it will be close to \$10m in arrears in 12 months.

**Ms UIBO:** A large volume of the work being done under the new remote rent framework is to ensure that tenants are properly signed up. From the department working directly with tenants, we know there may be a single tenant who is signed up for a dwelling but there may be more family members or residents of that dwelling who have the ability to go on and become tenants. A lot of the work is making sure we have people signed up properly to their tenancy agreements.

We have discovered there have been a lot of changes across all of our communities with family members moving to different parts of the community or to different communities. Where there have been changes we make sure that people are signed up properly. If someone has moved to another community or an urban area, we make sure that they are signed up appropriately or that their tenancy is transferred to the property they are residing in. This is to reflect those payments. We need to ensure that the correct people are paying the rent or if more tenants could be added to a dwelling, that it is recorded appropriately to have the right data. We also require the correct data from the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Social Services.

**Mr YAN:** I understand and accept your explanation, but I do not accept that it is working if we racked up that much debt in nine months. I have just done a quick extrapolation, and it is over \$9m for a 12-month period. If we continue down this vein, it will not be long and we will back to \$69m or over in arrears. I do not think the new rental framework has been particularly effective.

**Ms UIBO:** The historic debt was over a period of 10 years. We had never changed the calculation to remote rent before; this is the first time.

The arduous process I outlined earlier—every 12 months a household collective income was calculated to become a percentage of the rent—caused the delays in identifying the rent collection and the need for a particular house or tenancy. Our housing officers had to go house to house to find information such as who is in the home; what the collective income is; whether the paperwork was in; and if they were earning, how that went into the pool of people paying rent and the collection. As you can imagine, adding that together and providing a percentage of the overall income for 5,544 homes every 12 months was quite a process.

We have created a simplified context in the rent framework. We have a standard calculation that is simple to administer and easier for our tenants to understand. It commenced on 6 February 2023, but there were delays because we were working with our peak bodies on how to implement it and get the information to remote tenants—particularly in First Nations language—for them to understand the changes.

From 6 February onwards we have a simplified process where the standard calculation remains the same, whether people are earning or receiving Commonwealth benefits. The simplified collection makes it easier to identify whether someone is at risk of or enters into rental arrears and to work directly with the family, rather than go every 12 months to a community with 300 homes and go to each of those 300 homes to get a percentage of the overall income for a particular rental.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** But it is not working.

**Ms UIBO:** We only started on 6 February.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** When you decided to write off the \$70m in remote rent, it was alleged that the Northern Territory Government had bungled remote rental debt amid a legal battle with some communities. Is that why you wrote off the \$70m of debt?

**Ms UIBO:** I will pass your question to our Chief Financial Officer for some detail.

**Ms CHARLES:** The write-off was a result of accumulated debt, not a legal battle. It was rent unpaid over a long period of time. The action was recommended on the basis of having a smooth transition into the new remote rent framework to keep it simple for tenants. It is true that the debt accumulates as we are dealing with the most vulnerable families in the Northern Territory with the lowest incomes often. The Northern Territory Government has a broad policy for people in hardship to provide repayment options and from time to time we write off debt.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It is an incredibly generous thing to do, but some have also claimed that this move was paramount to pork-barrelling, trying to endear your government to remote voters. Is there any truth in that?

**Ms UIBO:** I dispute that. This has been a long-term issue experienced in the Northern Territory. With that transitional process that we spoke about in going to a simplified model, we believe that this will provide more stability for our remote rent tenants. Our department will be able to collect debt and identify sooner if someone is at risk of or goes into rental arrears. Under the old system that was very hard to identify, hence the large amount that accumulated over those 10 years.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It was a bureaucratic convenience to alleviate people of \$70m worth of debt. I find that astounding, given that we are paying \$1.5m a day in debt repayments. Just giving away Territory taxpayers' money because it feels good and it is bureaucratically convenient is astounding.

Where is the transparency and responsibility? Every minister has a responsibility to manage the public purse responsibly. Is that responsible management of our money—\$70m just being written off with the stroke of a pen because it was convenient bureaucratically?

**Ms UIBO:** I will emphasise the response that Ms Charles made. We are talking about some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable Territorians in regard to living conditions. The work we have been doing across Housing like new and upgraded infrastructure; better programs to support in-housing tenancy maintenance and support services; and the transfer of housing repairs and maintenance services through local decision-making agreements all ensures we have a strong housing representation in our urban and remote areas.

For the money that goes back into remote housing, we needed a simplified process to have accountability of rent and ensuring that our tenants—remote or urban, but in this example tenants in remote areas—understand their obligations under their tenancy. When they enter into those areas of risk or fall into arrears, we work with them directly. That was not possible in the more targeted sense under the old system because of the arduous administration to collect information and provide the percentage of the rent that needed to come from an overall household income, and having to do that every 12 months.

We would love to see some clear data for the next 12-month period since the 6 February commencement this year. I look forward to that in Estimates next year. The ability to pull this data out quickly over a couple of months will mean that in 12 months' time it will show the work of my department in being able to identify and work with families.

Mr Brent Warren has a couple of comments he wants to make.

**Mr WARREN:** Regarding the debt waiver and the collection process, we sign people up on what is called an 'agreement to pay', which is a repayment program so that they pay back their debt whilst they are paying their rent. One of the challenges on families with very low income is we cannot sign an agreement that puts them into such stress that they cannot afford to live. Those agreements, when signed up, are often for small amounts of money so that the tenant is explicitly paying off what they owe, but it can be over quite a long period.

When you look at the big debt that was cleared, you see that part of the thinking was about the potential to ever recover on the agreement-to-pay model and the impact on tenants and the potential to ever fully recover.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** Why was it left to spiral out of control to the extent it did? Seventy million dollars is a massive amount of money.

**Mr MALEY:** That is a lot of money to get into arrears.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** It does not pass the pub test in terms of the average Territorian who is also under strain these days to pay rent.

**Mr MALEY:** Can we move on to ...

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Mulka, I know you have a couple of questions. We have 20 minutes remaining; we are finished at 2.30.

**Mr MALEY:** My question is on the rent write-off for urban housing. Basically, I would like to do the same process for urban housing as we just went through. Can you give us a figure that is outstanding in the last reporting year?

**Ms UIBO:** There is a small amount of urban rent collection debt and arrears. Nine out of 10 urban residents in public housing dwellings pay their rent, so it is a small percentage of people who are not paying for various reasons. There is no write-off in the urban space.

**Mr MALEY:** What is it?

**Ms UIBO:** The outstanding balance is currently \$4.575m.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that just rent that has occurred this reporting year?

**Ms UIBO:** I understand it is accumulative to date—sorry, it is multi-year.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you tell us what the outstanding rent is for just the last reporting year? We know there is \$4.5m-odd accumulative.

**Ms UIBO:** We will take it on notice.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you not have that information?

**Ms UIBO:** No, we only have the total.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.20

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please tell the committee what the outstanding rent for urban properties is for the last reporting period?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

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

**Mr MALEY:** When we were talking about remote earlier, you mentioned that there was \$800,000 per month not collected. Can you give us a figure of non-collected rent for urban per month?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** I think the minister outlined that there was \$6.8m outstanding, not that they were not collecting \$800,000 a month. It was just extrapolated to be \$800,000 a month.

**Ms UIBO:** That was the total figure. That is correct, Mr Deputy Chair. Sometimes someone may go into arrears and other times they may recover that and fully pay, so you could not do it month by month if you are talking about individuals and communities.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give us the figure for urban? You came up with the average of \$800,000 a month for remote. What is the average figure for urban?

**Ms UIBO:** It is your average figure, not ours.

**Mr MALEY:** Do I just divide \$4.5m by 52 or by 12?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** I think that is what the minister was saying; it is the total.

**Ms UIBO:** It is multi-year. That is the total. We will take the question on notice. It is multi-year and not just for the reporting period.

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**Question on Notice No 8.21**

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

**Mr MALEY:** What is the average outstanding rent not collected per month for the reporting period?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.21.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 8.10**

**Ms UIBO:** In 2022–23 the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities provided Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Indigenous Corporation with \$359,073 in grant funding to deliver municipal and essential services across the four Borroloola town camps. Please note that Mabunji provides repairs and maintenance only to internal roads of Mara town camp.

Roper Gulf Regional Council is responsible for the internal roads of the remaining three town camps—Garawa 1, Garawa 2 and Yanyula.

Funding is provided by the Australian Government financial assistance local roads program managed by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

In addition, the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics Housing Program Office is currently undertaking a housing upgrade program in Borroloola town camps. DIPL has committed to remediating Garawa community road on completion of the housing program. The scope and full cost will not be known until the housing program has been completed; however, as we mentioned earlier today, \$1.2m has been committed to Garawa for community roads.

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**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The Member for Mulka has a question.

**Mr MALEY:** Can I have one question first? It is quick.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** I do not want the Member for Mulka to miss out.

**Mr GUYULA:** One question is for Output 4.1 and I am also waiting for Output 4.3.

**Ms UIBO:** We are just on the statement, so the Member for Mulka will be able to ask his question now, I think, because we are not on outputs.

**Mr MALEY:** What was the outstanding rent at 1 July 2022 in relation to urban housing?

**Ms UIBO:** We will take it on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 8.22**

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

**Mr MALEY:** What was the outstanding rent for urban houses as of 1 July 2022?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.22.

**Mr GUYULA:** Is there a coordinated across-government approach to support people who are homeless and people who are long-grassing in urban areas that does not involve giving out fines? How is government respecting people and ensuring that vulnerable people are safe?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, there is a whole-of-government approach. One of the areas we have identified as supporting Territorians who are homeless or at risk of being homeless is to improve support services like visitor parks—we mentioned earlier today the Tennant Creek visitor park—in urban areas. There is a visitor park in Alice Springs. Work has been done to scope a visitor park in Katherine in the centre of Big Rivers. There are several different facilities and services available to people in Darwin and the Palmerston greater area.

The budget we have for the Northern Territory for visitor parks as part of support services is just over \$11m.

**Mr GUYULA:** That is the only question I had for Output 4.1, but I have more for Output 4.3.

**Mrs LAMBLEY:** We have only 10 minutes to go.

**Mr GUYULA:** I will let it go and ask some written questions.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The minister has indicated she is happy to take the question. We are still on whole-of-government questions, so I suggest—if it is okay with the minister—you ask the question, as you see fit, regardless of the output at this point.

**Mr GUYULA:** During the recent coronial inquiry into Kumanjayi Walker, Dr Simon Quilty referred to the design of government housing in Yuendumu as ‘thermally moronic’. I have great concerns that across our communities the new houses are very hot and require people to run air conditioning all day and night, impacting on the cost of living and the environment.

What consultation is happening about the ongoing building of houses in our communities? Why are we seeing houses built that do not have more undercover outdoor living spaces? We also need bigger bedroom spaces for families and more bathrooms included in housing designs, as well as cooling for houses. Is there ongoing consultation about housing design? Will the design issues be addressed, given medical experts are raising concerns about health?

**Ms UIBO:** The Housing department, in partnership with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, has definitely matured in terms of the types of designs that are available for our remote areas. A key feature of the work that we have been doing, particularly through the remote housing partnership with the Australian Government, is to adjust designs so that they are more suitable for the residents and the families who are moving in.

It has not always been that way. It has taken a little while to change. You will now see that the designs of homes in our remote areas have really changed. They are trying to meet the needs of the residents with more amenities, like extra bathrooms. That can be more culturally appropriate in some places where certain family members are not supposed to share bathrooms because of cultural reasons. There are more outdoor living spaces, outdoor veranda areas and outdoor kitchens. These are areas that have been identified by families.

Something that I have seen in my role over the last 14 months is some of the similar designs that we have seen rolled out in communities. We have received feedback on design, such as extra storerooms internally that are lockable, wet spaces where you can prepare food, as well as have in the Dry Season, for example, areas where you can wash down that are covered and closed.

We have seen those designs mature over the life of the national remote housing agreement we have with the federal government. When we talk about things like room to breathe as part of that program, we have seen changes and upgrades to existing dwellings that meet the needs of the family who are in that particular house and not based on what someone from outside who does not live in that home expects. We are really tailoring it to the needs of the community members or the residents and the tenants who are in those homes.

I will pass to Mr Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Housing, who has been involved in the works and worked across with the other agency on what we expect as a department to reflect the needs and aspirations of those remote tenants.

**Mr WARREN:** I was involved in the coronial inquest, giving evidence on behalf of the department. I acknowledge the feedback that we had from Dr Simon Quilty during the inquest.

A couple of the things that we talked about were design guidelines for the construction of new dwellings in remote Northern Territory. We review them from time to time. We invited Dr Quilty to provide feedback to us about how he would like to input into those guidelines as part of the coronial. We are in the process at the moment of doing a review anyway.

One of the things that you mentioned that came up in the coronial is energy efficiency. We talked a bit about the fact that across the program, particularly in our modular housing, we are seeing an over seven-star energy efficiency rating as the result.

The other thing you mentioned was air conditioning. I acknowledge that we have had feedback, particularly from Central Australia, the Arid Zone, regarding the need to move away from swampies, evaporative cooling, to a better solution. We have a program now to start installing a split-system air conditioner in the living area of each of those remote houses. That helps us out in places with water scarcity because it takes a load off the water source in those remote communities.

**Mr MALEY:** What is your policy for dealing with problem tenants who are causing problems in the urban area?

**Ms UIBO:** We have a strict laid out policy on antisocial behaviour in public housing. The area of reporting within our agency has been improving. Our relationship with other agencies in government to report antisocial behaviour ...

**Mr MALEY:** Has anyone been evicted for antisocial behaviour from public housing?

**Ms UIBO:** I would have to take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 8.23

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

**Mr MALEY:** Has anyone been evicted from urban housing as a result of antisocial behaviour?

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

**Ms UIBO:** Yes.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.23.

**Mr MALEY:** What effect does outstanding rent have on your budget?

**Ms UIBO:** It means that we have less money to put back into all the programs related to housing. The ability for us to collect rent, whether it is urban or remote, means that we can put it back into urban and remote housing.

**Mr MALEY:** Are you saying that outstanding rent affects your bottom line?

**Ms UIBO:** Yes, it does.

I will get Ken Davies, the Chief Executive Officer, to talk on that.

**Mr DAVIES:** Revenue is an important side of the budget equation for us. The budgeted amount for expected rental collection is \$86m. Because of the issues of disadvantage and the historical nature of it, we do not budget for a 100% collection rate.



I go to the point that Brent Warren made earlier. One thing we are doing is ramping up the number of tenancy officers to get into places where there are rent arrears. We have that data so that we can get people signed up and make sure that when they delist with something like Centrelink, we can re-engage them as quickly as possible.

Rent is important to the agency. Understanding it is a public asset, we expect people to pay rent. We need rent in our base to make sure that we can sustain the properties. A national issue in public housing is people with disadvantage. We are ramping up our efforts to collect as much as we can, because it comes in as part of our revenue base.

**Mr MALEY:** Is the problem so large that you allow for it because you know you will not collect all the rent?

**Mr DAVIES:** The way we factor it is that we calculate our rental return by looking at historical rental returns. As part of the new rent framework, we are looking at an uplift in the rent we collect. We do not expect to collect every single cent that we have from the full 10,000 set of properties, understanding that people are in extreme disadvantage and that it is not appropriate to put in that we will collect every cent we seek.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the new framework, what is the average rent now? Will it reduce the rent?

**Mr DAVIES:** In terms of the new rent framework, nothing has changed in the urban context. In a remote context, it is a per-bedroom rent rate, so every family knows what they will pay per bedroom. It is \$70 up to a maximum of \$280 per house. In an urban context, if you are paying rent on a public housing property and you get a job, your income can increase so that you are ineligible for public housing and you have to go into the private rental market. That does not apply in remote areas.

**Mr MALEY:** When you go per bedroom, if there is only the one tenant and four bedrooms, you have to collect four lots of \$70 per week and that just comes from that one person's income; is that correct? You do not have any contracts with anyone else in that house who can pay the rent.

**Mr DAVIES:** The head tenant is responsible for making sure that everybody contributes the amount that is required. It may not all be coming directly from the one head tenant, but there is now somebody in that house who is responsible for the rental payments.

**Mr MALEY:** Does your agency collect the money? Let us say it is \$280 per week. Does that come from just the head tenant and then the head tenant is responsible for collecting the moneys?

**Mr DAVIES:** We collect individually from that household.

**Mr MALEY:** The head tenant is on the lease, but each person who stays there has to pay their \$70. Do you collect that from each person?

**Mr DAVIES:** That is correct. It will depend on the calculation that is set with the tenancy officer and how that works, but, yes, there is an expectation. At the end of the day, the new rent framework makes the head tenant responsible for running that household and for the rent collection.

**Mr MALEY:** I am hearing stories that the head tenant has the \$280 a week hit out of their income, yet the other people do not pay back the money to the head tenant, so the head tenant is the one who suffers when there is a whole group. You are saying that everyone who has a bedroom will have income collected.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Member for Nelson and Mr Davies, I am a stickler for time and I apologise, but it has clicked over to 2.30 pm. That concludes consideration of the outputs of whole-of-government. It also concludes all the outputs that we were to get through today.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you, minister, for your appearance and to your dedicated departments and staff.

**Ms UIBO:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Chair and committee members. I have been proud to sit here as the Minister for Housing and Homelands and of the great work that my department does, acknowledging the partnership with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. There is a huge volume of work that we are responsible for as an agency, particularly the Housing remit. I acknowledge everyone who works in the Housing space across the Northern Territory. I give a big shout-out to all of our regional housing officers and the tenancy and repairs and maintenance officers who work directly with tenants, especially tenants who are vulnerable, and support them as professionally as possible. Thank you to the department staff, particularly

my senior officials here, but everyone in the agency. I appreciate the work you do, and it is an honour to represent you as the minister.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Minister Ah Kit will be coming in shortly, and we will have a short recess of about five minutes or so.

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The committee suspended.

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## **MINISTER AH KIT'S PORTFOLIOS**

### **DISABILITIES**

### **MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS**

### **DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES**

**Mr CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone. Welcome, minister, to today's hearing. I invite you to introduce your officials accompanying you.

**Ms AH KIT:** Thank you, Mr Chair and the Estimates Committee. Today I have with me from the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities: Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer; Kim Charles, Chief Financial Officer; Samantha Livesley, General Manager Community Participation and Inclusion; and Deborah Butler, Executive Director Disability and Social Inclusion.

**Mr CHAIR:** I invite the minister to make a brief opening statement. We will then call for questions relating to that statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions, before moving on to output-specific questions.

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Mr Chair, thank you for the opportunity but I will not make an opening statement. I will give the committee the opportunity to get straight to the outputs.

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

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill as they relate to Disabilities and Multicultural Affairs. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy? We had one today that was a good one.

**Mr MALEY:** We have some questions on Multicultural Affairs. Do we ask them now or do we go to Output 1.4, Social Inclusion? I do not want to miss it. Where would you like to take those questions on Multicultural Affairs?

**Ms AH KIT:** We can tidy up all the Multicultural Affairs questions under Output 1.4, Social Inclusion.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions.

## **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – COMMUNITIES**

### **Output 1.4 – Social Inclusion**

**Mr CHAIR:** We now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Communities. Outputs 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are the responsibility of other ministers. Minister Ah Kit has responsibility for Output 1.4, Social Inclusion. Are there any questions?

**Mr MALEY:** Have you had any feedback from those in the multicultural community regarding their safety?

**Ms AH KIT:** I pride myself on having conversations with many people in my portfolio responsibilities; therefore, I catch up with Territorians of multicultural backgrounds on a daily basis. We have a number of conversations and sometimes people raise safety as their concern.

**Mr MALEY:** What are the concerns raised?

**Ms AH KIT:** General conversations relate to community safety and also input into programs, policies and what they would like to see and happen in the multicultural space. It is often communication at different events and when I catch up with community groups responsible for our multicultural groups throughout the Territory.

**Mr MALEY:** When they talk about community safety, can you expand on that? What do they mean when they do not feel safe in the community?

**Ms AH KIT:** Many conversations relate to facilities and the events that community groups are hosting. It is the beautiful Dry Season and there are many events around; you attend many of them. In regard to community safety, we have a number of conversations on the work my government is undertaking, such as the multicultural framework and the multicultural advisory committee, that relates to my portfolio of Multicultural Affairs.

**Mr MALEY:** You said that they were informal. Do you have any formal conversations or correspondence you have received about community safety from people in the multicultural community?

**Ms AH KIT:** As a minister I do not often see all pieces of correspondence, and I rely heavily on my ministerial staff to acknowledge all correspondence. Often, my office will work on the draft responses for my consideration. At this point in time, over the last 12 months as minister, I have not signed a lot of correspondence formally. I think that relates to the number of formal meetings that I have. It would not be so much as me as Minister for Multicultural Affairs waiting for the community to write to me about community safety or any other issue. It is about me going out and working with those in the portfolio area and communicating with them about my work, the work of my government, getting their input into the work that we are doing as a united entity and trying to develop the Territory that we all want to live in.

**Mr MALEY:** You said that you do not get many pieces of correspondence. Can you give us how many pieces of correspondence you have received from the multicultural community in relation to community safety over the last reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is something that I would not have on me. I would hazard a guess to say that it is a small number of formal correspondence matters.

**Mr MALEY:** Will you take it on notice?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am happy to take that on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.1

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please explain to the committee how many formal pieces of communication in writing you have received in the last reporting period from the multicultural community in relation to community safety?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 9.1

**Mr MALEY:** Have these concerns or conversations increased since the brutal killing of Sifat?

**Ms AH KIT:** The conversations are broad and varied. There are 137 incorporated multicultural bodies across the Northern Territory. A lot of times it is at those events when we sit down with the Chairs of the community

groups that they do raise issues, including community safety. I would not say that it has increased. It is a regular conversation that we continue to have. I like checking in to see how they are faring in their own areas. I spend a lot of time travelling to Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine, having those conversations broadly with those groups. They continue to raise a number of issues. Community safety seems to be one of those.

It is really good that I have the Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs. It is a really great group. We recruited throughout the Northern Territory, so we have representatives from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin and Palmerston. Some of the work that people spoke about when we met recently, about three or four weeks ago, included community safety. It was great to have Sachin Sharma from Northern Territory Police talking about some of the stuff that police are doing. We met upstairs in Parliament House in the Litchfield Room. It was great to hear their input, ideas and, more importantly, how they as leaders in their multicultural communities are actually improving community safety on a regular basis.

One of the key points that did come across—we will dive into it deeper to ensure that multicultural communities have their voices heard—was on domestic and family violence. That came through quite clearly in our recent MACMA meeting.

**Mr MALEY:** Have those concerns or conversations increased since the brutal killing of Sifat?

**Ms AH KIT:** The number of conversations continues to vary. People are always raising a variety of issues, whether it is from them or me asking about their safety and wellbeing in the community. I would not say that it has grown. I have tried to pride myself on meeting with as many of those 137 multicultural groups out there as I can.

**Mr MALEY:** Have any groups met with you about the killing of Sifat or around community safety in relation to that? Soon after that event, did you meet with any multicultural bodies?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes. That would be both the formal and the informal—attending events or seeing people out and about in the shopping centre and having a conversation, following the passing of Sifat. It is not just that incident, but following the passing of community leaders in our multicultural space, catching up with a number of multicultural leaders and community members who are left to carry the flag of the great work of those people and their legacy. I am having communications, passing on my personal condolences, trying to help with the legacy going forward and supporting the community in their time of need. As minister I have been able to do that a number of times over the last 12 months. It is important to catch up and support any community through the loss of life they are feeling.

**Mr YAN:** Did you meet with the High Commissioner to Australia from Bangladesh last Friday?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, I did not; I met with him on Thursday.

**Mr YAN:** Sorry; I was out by a day.

The High Commissioner was here about concerns of safety for the Bangladeshi community after the death of Sifat. I know that you cannot divulge the discussions you had, but I take it he raised specific concerns about the safety of the Bangladeshi community in Darwin.

**Ms AH KIT:** I had a good meeting with the Bangladesh High Commissioner. It was fruitful for not only my portfolio but also others and the work of my government. I have met many times with the Bangladesh community and other community representatives. We continue to have those conversations going forward.

I will not go into the details of our conversation, but the Bangladesh High Commissioner raised community safety. I raised it with him and spoke about the work we are undertaking to improve community safety in the Northern Territory.

We also spoke about development and employment opportunities. I gave him the breakdown of our 137 multicultural groups, my priorities as Minister for Multicultural Affairs and how I am working with all the groups across the Territory to ensure we have places of worship and celebration of culture. He was happy to hear, as a territory with a small jurisdiction, how close we all are and how much our communities support one another. It was a productive meeting.

**Mr YAN:** You would have to agree that it is a fairly serious concern that a High Commissioner would come to the Northern Territory Government to raise issues about community safety of the country and multicultural community he represents.

**Ms AH KIT:** I will not put any words in the mouth of the High Commissioner. We had productive conversations. I understand that a number of my Cabinet colleagues also met with the High Commissioner in regard to a number of matters relating to business and employment. It was about building relationships between our countries. He was impressed with the way the leadership has been forthcoming from the Bangladesh community. It really is not just left up to one or two people; we have our incredible two CDU student associations working together and we have the broader community. He was impressed by the way our community members rally around people in their time of need.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think that the increase in crime has affected the multicultural community in the Northern Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** That question would be best placed with the community. I can tell you about the work I have been undertaking. I will not divulge all the communications I have with multicultural groups. Inclusion is part of the remit that I work under for Multicultural Affairs. It is making sure we look at the entire spectrum of our community. I understand community safety is a huge priority; it is a priority for every elected member at every level of government.

A number of leaders are working in that space to create the community we all want. A lot of my conversations and focus with the multicultural community continue to be on the future and how we build that together. We have a good plan of ensuring Territorians of multicultural backgrounds get to celebrate their culture, feel comfortable in their communities and contribute wherever they live. There are so many incredible Territorians with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who contribute to our Territory every day.

**Mr CHAIR:** I remind members that we are not asking ministers or public servants for opinions.

**Mr MALEY:** Is your department taking any steps to deal with the increase in crime rate in the Northern Territory and its effect on the multicultural community?

**Ms AH KIT:** As a minister and an elected official I continue to play my part in making sure that our community is as safe as it can be every single day. With the portfolio responsibility in Multicultural Affairs a lot of that comes back to working directly with our multicultural constituents. Within our many groups we also have a number of groups that are not incorporated, so we ensure the communication is there. For all of the issues, including community safety, we will continue working and supporting them.

**Mr MALEY:** Is your department doing anything in relation to the increase in crime rate and the impact it may have on the multicultural community in the Northern Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** I as minister, my department and the two peak bodies we fund to engage with multicultural communities in the Top End region and Central Australia do extensive consultations and engagements. There is a whole bunch of information sharing. It is getting everybody on the same page to see how we can address any issue together and making sure that the input from the people comes back up the chain and we can continue working together to improve the state of the Territory. It is not just for community safety but it is on every issue that multicultural Territorians face.

**Mr MALEY:** Is your department doing things extra in relation to the increase in crime rate, like the things you just mentioned?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am answering the question again. You can ask it six different ways but my answer will not change. I will keep talking to you about the engagement that my department and I continue to do with our multicultural communities to ensure we are as responsive as possible and working so that they have the quality of life in the Northern Territory they deserve.

**Mr MALEY:** You are saying what you are doing moving forward. In the last reporting year has your department done anything different in relation to the increase in crime rate and its effect on the multicultural community? You are not answering that; is that right?

**Ms AH KIT:** We continue to engage with the multicultural groups on a range of issues.

**Mr MALEY:** Not continue—I am talking about previously. I am talking last financial year, not previous or into the future. I am not talking about what you are doing in the future; we are talking about what you have done in the last financial year.

**Ms AH KIT:** When I say ‘we continue’, that is a continuation of the work that we have already done. It covers the reporting period of Estimates from last year up to 31 March. We will continue the work we have done to engage with multicultural community groups and with leaders on a variety of issues to ensure that we achieve the outcomes we all want. Social cohesion, social inclusion and community safety are all a part of that.

**Mr MALEY:** You are taking steps to deal with the increased crime rate and its effect on the multicultural community and you will continue those steps next year.

**Ms AH KIT:** In regard to the work we have done, I can give you some specific examples if that would help.

**Mr MALEY:** If they relate to crime, yes please.

**Ms AH KIT:** When I engage with multicultural community groups and leaders, it is not always focused on crime. My job is not to be ...

**Mr MALEY:** My question is focused on crime, so can you relate it to crime?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, and I will answer it the way that I see fit.

My job is not to go out only when crime is around. My job is to go out to ensure that every Territorian from a multicultural background gets to live the best quality of life in the Northern Territory. It is very clear that they have chosen Darwin and the Northern Territory over anywhere else in the world. They have chosen to live here, to grow their families here and to contribute here. My role right now as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs is to ensure that they get the best quality of life that they can. When I talk to the hundreds of multicultural community groups, it is always about how they are faring, how their community is faring, what their concerns are and what things are working. I look at advice that I can take back, work I have control of and what I can work with my colleagues on at a local, NT or federal government level. It is always a holistic conversation; it does not always come back to crime.

**Mr MALEY:** You mentioned earlier that you fund two peak bodies. Who are they?

**Ms AH KIT:** The Top End peak body is called the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory, the acronym MCNT is often used. In Central Australia, based in Alice Springs, there is Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia—the acronym is MCSCA, but people call it ‘miska’. If you hear that in passing, I am sure the Member for Namatjira has heard MCSCA, it is a lot shorter than saying the entire name.

**Mr MALEY:** Can you give us an idea of the funding for those two peak bodies?

**Ms AH KIT:** Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia in Alice Springs receives funding of \$190,748. Multicultural Council of the NT—MCNT—receives funding of \$360,874.

**Mr MALEY:** The Vice-Chancellor at CDU, Scott Bowman, has said that he no longer feels comfortable in saying it is safe to come to the Northern Territory to study at CDU. Have you had feedback from the international student community about his comments?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is an International Education-related question, which sits at Output 7.5. We are covering Multicultural Affairs at the moment.

**Mr CHAIR:** We will carry that over to Output 7.5.

**Mr MALEY:** I will rephrase the question. Using the first part about no longer feeling safe to come to study at CDU, have you had feedback from the multicultural community about those comments?

**Ms AH KIT:** I have spent a great amount of time with Vice-Chancellor Scott Bowman and his incredible team at CDU, providing support and listening to their ideas going forward. The multicultural community continues to have close engagement and conversations with me and many other elected members on community safety in general.

**Mr MALEY:** What ideas has he given you about community safety?

**Ms AH KIT:** That question would be best posed to the vice-chancellor. I am not sure whether the conversations that we have had have been in strict confidence because I have not sought his approval. It has just been for my understanding as minister to see how I can best serve and provide support in International Education.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you know how many members of the multicultural community have left the Territory in the last six months?

**Ms AH KIT:** Some of the data that I will go through here may not be the exact information. I will share it with you. If there is anything further I can take on notice, I would be happy to.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs collaborated with the Northern Institute of Charles Darwin University to compile demographic data of people with multicultural backgrounds in the Northern Territory from the 2021 Census. The institute provided government with the final data on 30 May 2023, which will assist government with future policy decisions.

The 2021 Census data showed that Territorians born overseas make up 22% of the population. Between 2016 and 2021, the Northern Territory's population of overseas-born people increased by 12% overall; however, the main non-English speaking countries' population grew by 23% in the same period.

I do not have the exact number of people who have actually left the Northern Territory between those two Census periods. I am happy to take a look and see whether we can bring that back to you.

**Mr MALEY:** Do those two Census periods cover the last 12 months?

**Ms AH KIT:** No. The censuses are done every five years.

**Mr MALEY:** We do not need to take that on notice.

I have been hearing reports that people have been leaving. Have you heard the same reports about people from the multicultural community leaving the Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, I have through a couple of conversations. My last visit to Alice Springs was about three weeks ago. I had some people talking to me there about people leaving. In the same sentence, they also mentioned and introduced me to a family that had just arrived in Alice Springs. I am getting the word that people are leaving and more people are coming to the Territory as well. I am not sure of the breakdown. I would not have that on me.

**Mr MALEY:** Do they give you a reason for leaving?

**Ms AH KIT:** Some have mentioned community safety, job opportunities, change of weather and a change of scenery. Moving from Alice Springs to the Sunshine Coast, I could not question that.

**Mr MALEY:** Is crime one of the reasons they have been telling you they are leaving, along with other reasons?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, crime was one of the reasons they mentioned. Sorry, I want to reiterate, this did not come from the people who were leaving; it came from the community leaders I spoke with who were passing on this information to me during my visits.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think there is a decline in membership of the multicultural groups in the Northern Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is an interesting question. I am not sure whether my Office of Multicultural Affairs keeps a membership list. That would pretty much be the responsibility of the community groups. I am happy to find out more information on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.2

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

**Mr MALEY:** Can you please tell us if there has been a decline in membership of multicultural groups across the Northern Territory over the last 12 months—to limit it for you so you do not have to spend time?

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

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 9.2.

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**Mr MALEY:** Do you know whether your department is reducing any services that you offer to multicultural groups due to a decline in number?

**Ms AH KIT:** No. Did you start the question with ‘Do you know’?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes. Does your department ...

**Ms AH KIT:** I wanted to make sure. You asked me if I know, and yes, I know that my department is not decreasing services.

**Mr MALEY:** One of your objectives in your multicultural strategy is to strengthen cultural and language learnings. How are you doing that across the Northern Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is a key output within the multicultural affairs strategy. There is a couple of things I will go through.

We have a great language school in Ludmilla, the Darwin Languages Centre. There is a number of classes being delivered there. I was visiting one of the classes not long ago. Strengthening language and culture for any group of people is critical.

We have been supporting those language groups. They are often run through the Department of Education. Kevin Northcote and his team at the Darwin Languages Centre do an amazing job.

I could not tell you off the top of my head, but I might have a briefing here about the number of different language classes are offered.

I was talking to the President of the Nepalese Association of the Northern Territory at the Nepal Festival the other week. They are running classes at the Darwin Languages Centre and in Palmerston for the Nepalese community. There is a number out there.

I also understand that in the federal budget there has been multicultural language funding, so I have been in contact with the Member for Solomon to find out how much comes to the Northern Territory.

I am engaging with multicultural groups to see whether they would like to share and preserve their language and try to facilitate an access pathway to funding.

**Mr MALEY:** Recently we spoke to a multicultural group that can no longer provide its language classes due to its lack of membership. Have you heard that sort of feedback?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, I have not. The Department of Education in the Northern Territory funds the language school here. I have never heard that it is based on member population. I am happy to get more information on that.

However, we have multicultural grants that I am in control of in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. We have people applying for different programs so that they can preserve and celebrate their culture. That would definitely be an avenue.

I will throw to Sam Livesley, general manager, to confirm if a multicultural group dwindled in numbers, would that exclude them from applying for a grant.

**Ms LIVESLEY:** No, it would not. As long as they are an incorporated association and they are active in the community, they would not be excluded from applying for a grant.



**Mr MALEY:** Point two of your multicultural policy talks about boosting and retaining our migrant population. What are you doing to boost it? Do you have a goal set? What is a KPI for that?

**Ms AH KIT:** I do not believe I am working towards a KPI. I think our numbers have been steady and great in the Northern Territory in that one in four Territorians were born overseas or have a parent born overseas, which is fantastic. My job is to ensure that our CALD communities have the opportunity to celebrate their own culture. We try to facilitate access to places of worship so that they can carry out their cultural rituals in a safe environment. We continue to provide a suite of support through grants and funding for events, not only for our communities to celebrate their culture, but to share and promote it with everyone.

**Mr MALEY:** Is increased crime in the Northern Territory having a negative effect on your goal to boost our multicultural population?

**Ms AH KIT:** No. Having those conversations with the multicultural communities and hearing their feedback about people leaving and new people arriving—not through my work over the past 12 months. I have done a lot of engagement and communication with a variety of communities.

It is focused on how we can make sure the Northern Territory is the most inclusive and best place people can live, where they feel respected, their culture is respected and they can celebrate it as they go about their life accessing opportunities.

**Mr YAN:** You recently spoke about a safe environment for our multicultural communities. I want to briefly speak about the Muslim community in Alice Springs. The mosque has been specifically targeted by, effectively, criminals over the last six to 12 months to the point where the imam and his family have left Alice Springs and will not come back until the matter is dealt with. What support has your department given to the Muslim community of Alice Springs in relation to what has taken place at the mosque?

**Ms AH KIT:** It was heartbreaking to hear about the targeting of the mosque. I visited the mosque a few times and spoke with the imam a couple of weeks ago when I was there for Big Day Out in Harmony. When I heard about this, I worked with my colleagues, visited the mosque and sat down for a good conversation. Rock throwing, targeting and deliberately trying to hurt others or make them feel unsafe is absolutely not okay. It is a beautiful mosque and has been a key part of Alice Springs for a very long time.

**Mr YAN:** It is the second oldest mosque in the country.

**Ms AH KIT:** There you go. It is a beautiful sight. Sitting there, talking to the imam and others who operate the mosque was very insightful. It was important to hear from them about what was happening. I visited the mosque most recently about three months ago. I asked them about the most recent rock throwing and talked about the work my government had been undertaking.

We spoke about engagement and inclusion within the broader community. When I spoke with the imam at the Big Day Out in Harmony a couple of weeks ago, he told me that over the last five or six weeks the rock throwing and incidents had basically disappeared. I was very happy to hear that.

I asked the imam why he thought that was. When I visited, I took my adviser, Jaya. We had local staff from DCMC and Territory Families there. We sat in the mosque and talked about local ways of working to get inclusion in the community so that people could understand the mosque is a place to be respected, where people go to celebrate and practice their culture. One of the good ideas the imam followed up on was to engage with the local school, which they continue to do.

Sharing information; letting people into your life; and learning more about you, your practice and culture helped to make a difference. I would assume that is one of a suite of measures that the mosque and other agencies have undertaken. I was pleased to hear that the rock-throwing incidents came right down. I guaranteed the imam that I would continue my work through my Multicultural Affairs lens to keep supporting the mosque and engaging with the local community to ensure the rock throwing would stay away.

**Mr MALEY:** In relation to the petition you tabled, signed by hundreds of international students fearing for their safety, can you tell the committee what is happening with that?

**Ms AH KIT:** That relates to International Education at Output 7.5. We are in Multicultural Affairs.

**Mr MALEY:** That petition is signed by not only a lot of international students but also multicultural members of the Northern Territory. Can you tell the committee what you have done with the petition? I am taking away the reference to international students.

**Ms AH KIT:** The petition relates to International Education, because it was the passing of an international student. I am happy to answer any questions relating to the petition at Output 7.5.

**Mr MALEY:** Has the increase in crime rate in the Northern Territory affected your department's budget in relation to Multicultural Affairs?

**Ms AH KIT:** No.

**Mr MALEY:** Earlier you touched on the ministerial advisory council. How often does that meet?

**Ms AH KIT:** The committee meets twice a year.

**Mr MALEY:** What advice do they give you in relation to Multicultural Affairs? Do they talk about crime?

**Ms AH KIT:** Earlier I mentioned that MACMA met a few weeks ago and that domestic and family violence was a key topic being discussed. Community safety was one as well. We have a big group. Sachin Sharma was there. It was great for Sachin, as a Northern Territory police officer, to engage with the group and hear directly about their ideas. A lot of the meeting was spent on planning for the future to see how all those leaders around the table could work together to create the best multicultural Territory. A lot of the focus was on their leadership and what they are doing within their communities to help make the Territory a better place. It was great for them to inspire the others and share the idea of, 'We can be part of this. We found a way to make it better and we did.'

**Mr MALEY:** When did you meet with them last? It was only in parliament—what did you say?

**Ms AH KIT:** I think it was last month. It was 30 May. Our next meeting will be in November. I will be inviting the MACMA members to meet in Alice Springs.

**Mr MALEY:** During the meeting in May there was talk about crime and what could be done to increase community safety. Is that correct?

**Ms AH KIT:** This was an initial meeting of a new group. It was held over a couple of hours in the Litchfield Room of Parliament House. There are 16 members on MACMA. When trying to divide the time, a lot of it was about welcoming and introductions; and me, as minister, trying to get everyone on the page of 'What is your passion?', what passion projects they would like to undertake, how to group them together and, even though we are only meeting physically together twice, how I can facilitate the information they are looking for so that they can give me advice on their passions to make the Territory a bit better. People were talking about job opportunities.

It was great to have representation; Janine from Tennant Creek was able to talk about her work at the women's shelter. People were able to bring key points from their lived experience around the table. There are 16 people who have the opportunity to go around the table and contribute to key targets within our multicultural framework. It was also an opportunity for me to talk about the stuff that my government is doing to build the Territory and make it a better place. It was a good open discussion where they could raise a topic and we could unpack it. With 16 people over a couple of hours, a lot of the communications happened before and after the meeting about the focus.

**Mr MALEY:** Was crime and community safety raised as an issue at that meeting?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** Has the ministerial advisory council helped you develop policy in relation to Multicultural Affairs over the last reporting year; and, if not, the year before?

**Ms AH KIT:** I had one meeting with the previous members of the multicultural advisory committee. My understanding is—I think there was a gap in the meetings during COVID, if I am not mistaken. We have the multicultural policy for the Northern Territory, so I will be working with this committee to make sure ...

**Mr MALEY:** Which is this?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, you have a copy. I will be working to make sure I can achieve my work and my responsibilities under that. I am not a culturally or linguistically diverse Territorian. That is why I have expertise on that committee. Working with them, we have the outcomes we need to achieve, relying on MACMA to advise me the best way to go about it.

The good thing about that—and I am still trying to get a member from the Nhulunbuy and East Arnhem region. I went out trying. Janine in Tennant Creek can tell me how best to achieve something in Tennant Creek and Apajok and Mona can tell me how best to achieve things on the ground in Alice Springs. We have a swag of people from Palmerston and Darwin and a representative from Katherine as well, which is great.

**Mr MALEY:** How much has been allocated to provide grants to multicultural groups in the budget? I see \$5m in social inclusion. Is that \$5m the budget for Multicultural Affairs?

**Ms AH KIT:** There is a \$2.4m budget. Member for Nelson, you are looking at social inclusion?

**Mr MALEY:** Yes.

**Ms AH KIT:** That is part of Minister Moss's social inclusion area. I have Multicultural Affairs that sits as part of that unit. My budget is \$2.4m. I am happy to give you the breakdown if you would like it.

**Mr MALEY:** Out of that \$5m, you get \$2.4m which is dedicated to Multicultural Affairs?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is right.

**Mr MALEY:** How much of that \$2.4m was spent last financial year, and how much is budgeted for next financial year?

**Ms AH KIT:** The full budget was spent—\$2.4m.

**Mr MALEY:** What is the budget for next financial year?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is \$2.4m.

**Mr MALEY:** It stays the same?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, it stays the same.

**Mr MALEY:** Effectively, even though there is no decrease in money—it stayed at \$2.4m—because of the cost of living and inflation you will not get the same goods or services for \$2.4m next year that you got this year. Is that correct?

**Ms AH KIT:** In regard to event delivery or grants that we are dispersing ...

**Mr MALEY:** If you run an event and it cost you \$100,000 last year, this year it will cost you \$110,000, let us say. Even though there is no cut in the amount of money, effectively there will be a cut in relation to the money for events or services multicultural communities can deliver because of inflation and the cost of living.

**Ms AH KIT:** I am glad you asked that question because I have been doing a large amount of work with my colleagues to try to figure out the best way to support multicultural communities to celebrate their culture.

I have a small bucket of funds that support multicultural events ...

**Mr MALEY:** Is it \$2.4m?

**Ms AH KIT:** No. The \$2.4m includes employees, admin and \$1.444m for grants. I have been trying to elevate multicultural events out of my smaller bucket of funds into community benefit fund grants where they can be funded for multiple years under the Attorney-General and the Minister for Justice.

There is also the festivals bucket of funds under NT Major Events Company that sits in the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade ...

**Mr MALEY:** Do you know how much that festival bucket of money is?

**Ms AH KIT:** I was told recently it is \$3m to \$4m, but you could confirm that with Minister Kirby.

The idea is I have this smaller bucket of funds and want to make sure that every Territorian from a multicultural background, no matter where they live—remote communities or East Arnhem Land—should be able to access money to celebrate their culture, whether it is Harmony Day or anything like that.

An example is India@Mindil. The Office of Multicultural Affairs used to fund India@Mindil, then this year they received three years of funding under community benefit fund grants. Now they have come out of my bucket I can use that.

My idea is I want to help the next festival to grow. Once they grow and they can grow their numbers and their model, then we get them into community benefit fund for sustainability, then we get them into the big festivals bucket of funds of up to \$4m, which is my understanding.

Hopefully, we can grow it that way.

**Mr MALEY:** Where does the \$1.4m you spend on grants come from? Which budget line does that come out of?

**Ms AH KIT:** It comes out of the social inclusion budget.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that on top of \$2.4m?

**Ms AH KIT:** No. The total is \$2.4m; the \$1.44m is for grants, within that budget.

**Mr MALEY:** And \$1m is for administration expenses, or something like that?

**Ms AH KIT:** Employee costs are \$687,000, \$269,000 is for administration and \$1.44m is for grants.

**Mr MALEY:** And that whole \$1.4m was spent last financial year?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr MALEY:** And is the budget for next financial year \$1.4m?

**Ms AH KIT:** Last year it was \$1.454m, and this year it is \$1.444m. It was still the same overall budget, which was \$2.4m last financial year and the same for this financial year.

**Mr MALEY:** Mr Chair, I have more questions but I think they are for International Education and you are not taking them now, so we need to do them at Output 7.5.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.4.

### **Output 1.5 – Disability Services**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 1.5, Disability Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** Recently people with disabilities have been victims of crime and are being specifically targeted. Would you agree they are particularly vulnerable to opportunistic criminals?

**Ms AH KIT:** For any vulnerable Territorian to be picked on or targeted is unacceptable and appalling. When you asked if I believe they are the most vulnerable, what is the language you used there?

**Mr YAN:** That they are particularly vulnerable to opportunistic criminals.

**Ms AH KIT:** I think they are vulnerable, but they are not the only cohort in the community. I speak to senior Territorians every day, people who live on their own, people who do not have family nearby and people who like keeping to themselves. Yes, people with disabilities are vulnerable, but so are a number of other people in our community.

**Mr YAN:** In March this year a 76-year-old man in a wheelchair was attacked in his home in Alice Springs. He was knocked out of his wheelchair and had to be taken to hospital. What is being done to protect vulnerable Territorians, particularly those with disabilities?

**Ms AH KIT:** My role in Cabinet, as the Minister for Disabilities, is to support Territorians who live with disability to live their fullest life. I am not across the details of this incident. Is this gentleman on an aged-care package or the NDIS? If he is on the NDIS, what sort of supports are in place? Does he live in public housing, private housing or is he renting? Is he in supported independent living?

It comes down to his needs and asking if they are being met. If this gentleman needs extra support in the home, perhaps to have carers living with him due to his vulnerability and disability, I am happy to follow up and see if I can make that happen.

A lot of communication continues to go around to let Territorians who live with disability know—whether you are on the NDIS or you are one of the majority of Territorians who is not on the NDIS—if you are not getting the level of support you deserve and are living with disability, the system is there to help change that.

If you would like to share those details with me, I am happy to follow that up.

**Mr YAN:** Thank you, I will. You spoke about his needs and whether they are being met. What would your department do to make sure those needs are met?

**Ms AH KIT:** There is a bunch of work going on in the disability sector to ensure vulnerable Australians living with disability are being cared for as well as possible. You would know there is a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. I understand that they held hearings in Alice Springs. I commend all Territorians who have been involved for providing your lived experience because that can be something really difficult.

I believe that the royal commission report is being written and recommendations will go back. My government has worked with the sector and encouraged people to share their stories. We also have a review for the NDIS that has been commissioned through the Disability Reform Ministerial Council on which I sit as the NT Minister for Disabilities.

A few weeks ago we welcomed Dr Bruce Bonyhady, who is co-chairing the review of the NDIS. Dr Bonyhady was one of the key people who actually designed the NDIS, and they spent a full six days in the Northern Territory visiting communities. We finished in Alice Springs last Friday. I extend a thank you to the panel members. They went to Maningrida and Groote Eylandt, and they had an engagement session with the sector in Darwin that night. They then went down to Ali Curung and Tennant Creek and finished in Alice Springs.

It was important for them to hear directly from Territorians in urban centres and remote communities about the NDIS, how it is working, what is not working and what needs to be fixed. There were a lot of lessons learned there. What became clear that Dr Bonyhady shared with the Alice Springs gathering last Friday was that the NDIS is not easily accessible in delivering what it should be doing for Territorians living in remote communities. That is something that we continue to provide input.

The NDIS was rolled out nine or 10 years ago, and the Barkly region was our trial site for Australia. Dr Bonyhady said it himself: it was sad to hear that, almost a decade on, the people in the Barkly area were no better off and some were worse off. That was hard to swallow, so instead of focusing on what is not working and the blame game, we continue to push forward.

I came up with a deep dive concept with the disability sector in Darwin. I have commissioned my department to undertake a deep dive in Maningrida as a Top End remote community and Yuendumu as a Central Australian remote community. The idea is that instead of waiting for the federal minister, Bill Shorten, the NDIS review and the royal commission to tell us the way forward to fix the NDIS in the Territory, we know what will work and what does not because we have been living that for the last decade.

We have been to Maningrida and spoken to the traditional custodians, the leaders of the community, council and Mala'la Health. We spoke with disability providers and those who were flying in and out to deliver services, and we spoke to participants and their families. It became clear that they are not receiving the level of support and the quality of life they deserve.

As an example, there are about 73 participants at Maningrida and 43 registered NDIS service providers. We have a total package value for all 73 participants of \$4m, and less than \$1m is being drawn down. There is

\$3m worth of services for Maningrida alone for people on the NDIS who cannot live the life they deserve because the system has not worked for them there.

While all the work is being done at the federal level, and I thank everybody for their commitment, we are working with the community; the disability sector; the NDIA, which administers the National Disability Insurance Scheme; the community; and the people and participants. We are all at that same level having a look at what works and what does not. Basically we are creating a community plan for the people of Maningrida to get the NDIS back on track.

My understanding is that is how the NDIS was supposed to work from the get go. Communities were supposed to be supported to create a plan so that the scheme would suit their needs. We are playing a bit of catch-up, but I thank Manuel Brown as the local member and everybody at Maningrida providing input into this. You can feel that everybody is a little more hopeful about the good change because they have a seat at that table to make things better.

**Mr YAN:** What programs, grants or other services are available to Territorians with disabilities to secure and strengthen their homes before an assault happens?

**Ms AH KIT:** There are a couple of things there. If people living with disability live in public housing or social housing, they are considered to be a Housing tenant first and foremost. It is a responsibility of the Housing entity to ensure that they live in a safe and supportive environment. I have had conversations with Minister Bill Shorten about the NDIS and remote Aboriginal homelands and outstations. It is a bit of an outlier with how the NDIS was created.

I do not have a yes or no yet, but they are not public housing; they are a house built under Aboriginal trustees on remote outstations and homelands. I understand that Minister Uibo will be able to confirm the number, but I think there are around 600 of those.

Where we have vulnerable Territorians living with disabilities on their homelands and where the housing exists under a trust, I am trying to navigate a way with federal Minister Bill Shorten to see if we can get them assessed and deemed eligible for an NDIS package, then the improvements to their home on their outstation should be covered under their package. They are not public or social housing under the Northern Territory Government. They are a bit of an outlier under this system that has been in place for 10 years.

I just confirmed with Sam Livesley that if you are a Territorian on the NDIS, you own your home and are living in your privately owned home, under your package you can include home improvements to secure your property.

**Mr YAN:** If you are on an outstation or in a private dwelling you can only access upgrades through your NDIS plan? There is nothing within your department to assist anyone outside of what would be covered under social housing, then?

**Mr DAVIES:** Part of the work we do in the remote housing footprint is making sure, where we need to, that there are ramps to all of the houses and that they are built to a standard where disability is looked at, such as wider doors and showers that can accommodate people with disability. Acknowledging that there are people in communities with disabilities is important; we are making sure the infrastructure we build has a direct eye to standards around disability services.

The new John Stokes units that have been opened in Nightcliff include a floor where there are six standalone disability access units that were purpose built for people with high disability needs. That is part of the future and what we are now doing, making sure that the housing we provide is safe, secure and accessible to people with disabilities. If there is a security issue where someone with a disability is assaulted or the house is broken into, we have a good look at what is required. If we need to, we install things like Crimsafe, extra lighting and so on.

**Mr YAN:** That is what I was going to. We agree that people with disability are vulnerable and can be subject to criminal activity. It is about what they can access to make themselves feel safe in their own homes before something happens, rather than post the event.

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely. If people are living with disabilities, they have a number of support agencies. If you are on the NDIS, you have a coordinator of support, and a number of people are being paid out of your package to ensure that you get to live a safe and great quality life. For those not on the NDIS, they still have access to a number of services that will be there to support them.

**Mr YAN:** We know there have been a number of Territorians with disabilities targeted. In one incident a man was attacked in his home by four intruders; they stole his wheelchair and car. I believe that this man has since left the Territory because of that incident. He was a born-and-bred Territorian, as I understand it.

Are there any enhanced penalties for people who attack and commit offences against a person with disability?

**Ms AH KIT:** I would not be aware of that as the Minister for Disabilities, but I think it is something that could be addressed by the Attorney-General as the highest law officer in the Northern Territory.

**Mr YAN:** Would you advocate for increased or enhanced penalties for people who attack or target persons with disabilities?

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely. The disability royal commission's final report will provide recommendations to reform laws, policies, structures and practices to better protect the human rights of people with a disability and promote a more inclusive society.

A number of Australians, including Territorians, have shared awful stories of how they have been victimised when they are already vulnerable, as you pointed out. I have no doubt that the disability royal commission will include fantastic recommendations on how we can better look after Territorians with a disability.

**Mr YAN:** What specific support does the department provide to NDIS participants? How do participants access those services?

**Ms LIVESLEY:** We do not deliver the NDIS. That is delivered by the National Disability Insurance Agency. As states and territories of the Commonwealth, we are all co-funders of the scheme. Our support is not client facing, but if we are aware of people with a disability, we provide information on how they can make a request of the NDIA for eligibility assessment and, potentially, a funded plan.

**Mr YAN:** Does the department have the ability to assist NDIS participants or prospective participants in drafting plans or preparing for plan assessments?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is covered by the NDIA, the agency that administers the scheme. However, when we come across Territorians who disclose that they live with a disability, we promote the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We can point them in the right direction to receive an assessment.

As a local member I have spent a lot of time meeting with my local participants to get them ready for the NDIS. We went through the workbook before it was rolled out in Darwin, gearing them up to understand the complexities of the NDIS and making sure people understand that if at any time they find the system hard to understand—because of the acronyms, for example—they can come to my office, as the Minister for Disabilities. My fantastic Disabilities adviser, Martin, will work with Sam and her team in the department. We are happy to assist. Although we do not have direct responsibility for or carriage of it, these are our Territorians that we are working to support.

**Mr YAN:** That is what I was getting to. How do we help people who are looking to access, or who are accessing, NDIS? You are right; it is a minefield. It is complicated and confusing. I deal with people who are out bush and trying to deal with this stuff all the time. There is a role for government to play in assisting Territorians to navigate NDIS.

**Ms AH KIT:** I could not agree with you more. I continue to work closely with the sector. The good thing about the peak body for the disability providers in the Northern Territory—National Disability Services—is that it has so much skill and knowledge. It understands the NDIS front and back. I meet with it regularly and hear its concerns about the gaps in the system and how difficult it is for people to navigate.

I also meet regularly with disability service providers and people who are considering starting up an NDIS-registered company. I hear the concerns of people from across the Northern Territory and keep those lines of communication open. If you cannot navigate the system yourself, or the person you have gone to is finding it difficult to support you, come to us or the Office of Disability, and we will help you on that pathway.

It is difficult. To those who understand the ins and outs of the NDIS and how to help people, thank you. Keep promoting it to everyone else because it is really important.

**Mr YAN:** Does the department assist people with their plan reviews?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, that is part of the system that we do not oversee. We provide funding through grants to Darwin Community Legal Service, Integrated disAbility Action—IDA, which is a disability peak body that does advocacy—and the Disability Advocacy Service. We fund these so they can do the advocacy. If someone reaches a bit of a block in the NDIS system, these people are fantastic at gearing up because they do it all the time. Many of them have lived experience.

They take up the courts and hold the person's hand as they navigate the system. They ensure a person puts in their request if they need the plan reviewed and can follow it up from there. If at any time any of these advocacy agencies hit a blockage, they are encouraged to raise it with me. I continue to work with the NDIA locally. In the Northern Territory they have a great office of locals who understand the complexities and are here to ensure that Territorians who are eligible for the NDIS get quality of life and can draw down on their plans.

It is great that in our jurisdiction everybody is on the same page to make sure Territorians are looked after.

**Mr YAN:** The reason I ask these things is to find out—the annual report says that 830 Territorians were assisted with securing an approved NDIS plan. How did the agency assist those 830 Territorians in securing an approved plan if we are saying the department only funds external providers?

**Mr DAVIES:** For children in care, of which there are 850 in the Northern Territory—and for youths going into our youth justice system—we have a specialist assessment team that sits with young people and does assessments for their disabilities. Part of the job we do in regard to their case planning and management, given they are often in care and the Chief Executive of Territory Families, Housing and Communities is the parent—we have a team that makes sure they access the right support through the NDIS and have a package, particularly when they leave the youth justice system.

For children in care, we make sure that if they have a disability and are with kinship, foster carers or paid care, the package is built around their needs. When the assessments are done, we work with the NDIS thoroughly to ensure those kids have a plan going forward and are accessing the services they are entitled to.

**Mr MALEY:** Do any of those children leave without having a plan, or is there a 100% success rate?

**Mr DAVIES:** Many of the youths who come to youth detention are on remand, so we start the work with Danila Dilba and Congress health services. They are the services provided in the youth detention centres. If the work is only partly done, it follows them out of the centre and we keep working with them to ensure they get a package.

I cannot guarantee that 100% of the youths take up those packages, but we work hard to make sure that where there is a disability, we have the NDIS linked into the supporting structure they need.

It is a work in progress and goes to much of the work the minister has described in this area, but there is a concerted effort in Territory Families, Housing and Communities to ensure the children and youths we are dealing with have access to that scheme if entitled to it.

**Mr MALEY:** They are Territory Families children?

**Mr DAVIES:** Yes, or they may be children we know about in our youth outreach services who are with families that are struggling. We would work with them through our youth outreach teams to make sure they get the disability support they need.

**Mr MALEY:** Then it is up to that child or youth to take up that package when they leave, because I am guessing it is their choice after that.

**Mr DAVIES:** If we are working with them, we keep an eye on that, but that is true. We link them in with the services that are necessary, then those services have a responsibility to keep an eye out to make sure they are delivering the services needed.

**Mr MALEY:** If they are in your care, you can ensure those services are connected and stay connected, but if they are not in your care, you cannot?



**Mr DAVIES:** With the children we have statutory responsibility for, we do that. For children and youths we are encountering through our youth outreach teams, part of what we would do is make sure the service is accessed, and we keep an eye on that. At the end of the day, the disability services have a responsibility to make sure they are tracking and dealing with the youths as well.

**Mr YAN:** Out of the 830 Territorians in that annual report, we are specifically speaking about youths with disabilities?

**Mr DAVIES:** That is right, youths and children.

**Mr YAN:** Have you had any feedback for those kids and their families, who you helped with providing NDIS services? Do they find the services appropriate and sufficient?

**Ms AH KIT:** Nothing has come across my desk specifically from any of the families or young children who have been supported. I will check with my department to see if they are aware of any issues that have come up and any support we have provided to families or children.

**Mr DAVIES:** That is a good question. I do not have that detail with me. All of those children in care would have case workers who are looking after and working with the carers.

In regard to feedback, the effectiveness of the services and where there are gaps, I do not have specific detail on that. If you want me to do more work on that I could take it on notice and we could get further advice.

**Mr YAN:** I appreciate that, Mr Davies. It is a difficult one to take on notice.

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### Question on Notice No 9.3

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

**Mr YAN:** Have there been any complaints received from kids or families who have been provided with an NDIS plan about it not providing sufficient services to meet their needs?

**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 9.3.

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**Mr YAN:** Only if there are any negatives.

**Ms AH KIT:** I am happy to follow up and see what feedback came in.

We also have the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commissioner, Tracy Mackey. Tracy has a team in the Northern Territory from Quality and Safeguards. They are the reporting mechanism for the NDIS. You mentioned earlier people who are finding it hard to navigate the system. Perhaps they are not getting the quality of care they believe they should be getting, someone has overcharged—any of those. We encourage everyone to report to the Quality and Safeguards Commission because their job is to investigate those complaints and provide advice to ensure the system works as seamlessly as possible.

A good thing about Tracy is she travelled to Maningrida with her Northern Territory manager and me to start the deep dive. She is invested in how our Northern Territory remote communities can get the access they deserve and to gear up her office to be responsive to hearing the complaints and promoting the wonderful education material they produce for everyone to understand.

It is clear that a lot of people are not clear on their roles in the NDIS.

**Mr MALEY:** Where can we get the contact details for that lady? Because I have had a few people come to me and say, 'We have these complaints, and they seem to go nowhere'. It would be good to direct them to that website, a contact or something. Is that available online?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will make sure my adviser gets Tracy Mackey's details to you. Her Northern Territory office is fantastic. It recently went through a restructure so they can triage and be responsive to Territory reports.

As Minister for Disabilities, I hear some horrible stories on a frequent basis, as do you, Member for Namatjira, as the shadow minister. We try to ensure people have reported so we can back them and follow up as well. We will share those details.

**Mr YAN:** You spoke about the work being done at Maningrida and Yuendumu. We note there is a significant lack of approved providers across the Territory. What work is the Territory government doing to try to assist to increase the coverage of providers alongside the federal government?

**Ms AH KIT:** When you say approved providers, are you talking about providers who are trying to register to deliver services under the NDIS in the Northern Territory and their application has been rejected?

**Mr YAN:** I am just speaking about NDIS providers. There is a lack of NDIS providers across the Territory. I have some more on applications to come.

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is that there are over 300 registered providers in the Northern Territory. They are active, which means that in the last quarter, they received money under the NDIS for delivering some sort of service. All together we have more than 1,100 who have ever been registered, but they must not be active because they have not delivered services.

When I first came in 12 months ago, when the NDIS was well under way, there were a lot of new providers in that space. We held the All Abilities Expo a few weeks ago, and I saw the new faces of a lot of service providers and had a good conversation, finding out a lot of people are Darwin or Alice Springs based.

I take your point; there are a lot of people who are trying a fly-in fly-out model to deliver NDIS services in remote communities. It is costly if you only have one or two clients. It is not a workable model. A number of the service providers have openly shared their willingness to deliver in remote communities, but their business model will not allow them to.

We are looking at how we can propose a different model of delivery in Maningrida to the NDIA, which suits the community. There are four different models under the NDIS. You could look at direct commissioning. We are trying to figure out the services that are needed in Maningrida for the number of people there.

It may be—and I am making this up because I do not have the level of detail—30 of the 78 participants need an occupational therapist every month. The NDIS has made sure you look after yourself; it is individualised. You have your plan and stick to it yourself. It used to be block funding to the service provider, who could manage their service delivery with a bucket of funds, knowing their clientele.

We are proposing that we need to go to a different model, with community approval. The idea would be that they could say, 'We have 30 people who need a certain service', so we can go to one provider in Darwin and say, 'We want you to deliver support to 30 people'. It is different for one person as opposed to 30 people. That might give the service provider a better model to work to under the NDIS, and they might be able to send out two officers for a week or every month and deliver their service. It makes a lot more sense and makes it a lot more workable if you have a big group of people with \$4m worth of packages and can direct who comes out.

I have just been slipped a note. There are 1,044 providers registered to deliver NDIS in the Northern Territory as of 31 March. My apologies, Member for Namatjira, they are active. They have received at least one payment in the last quarter, which puts them on the active list.

I am trying to find the number of providers registered to deliver services in the Northern Territory but are not active.

**Mr YAN:** Provide that a bit later, minister; it is fine. Do you provide any support to providers or prospective providers to undertake the process of becoming an approved NDIS provider—for instance, grants to pay for audits and assistance in the application process?

**Ms AH KIT:** As a government, we have facilitated small business champions within the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade to provide online learning and information resources to support local providers wanting to expand their businesses in the NDIS market. My understanding is that small business champions travelled around to the regions and held information sessions where they could sit with people face to face

to talk them through becoming an NDIS provider and give advice on from the Northern Territory Government's perspective.

If people are looking at becoming registered providers—because it is part of the NDIS scheme—there is a suite of information on the NDIS website. I hazard a guess to say that a whole bunch of people over the phone or via email could help them register and advise what is needed to be a registered provider, but noting we also have a number of NDIS providers who do not register. You can still deliver services under the NDIS without registration.

**Mr MALEY:** Do you think there might be a chance that there could be too many providers and all the money that is meant to be going to the people who need the services is tied up with the providers? Are there checks and balances to make sure all the providers who pay for admin and rent, or whatever it might be—instead of \$4m getting into the community, \$1m gets into community and \$3m gets tied up in admin?

**Ms AH KIT:** That would be the work of the NDIS and the NDIA, but I am surprised. It feels like I see a new provider every day. I say to them clearly that if they you are here for the right reasons with a good model to support Territorians living with disability, I am happy they are here. I have watched a number of people come into this space because it is a \$30bn industry. This is supposed to be servicing and looking after our most vulnerable Australians; I get fired up. It makes my blood boil because we hear stories of roting.

We set up a fraud fusion task force as part of our work in the Disability Reform Ministerial Council. I do not know where the name came from; you can ask Bill Shorten. That was to investigate people who were unscrupulous taking advantage of people living with disability. That is the work of the Quality and Safeguards Commission working closely to ensure that, if we have any concerns about unscrupulous providers here, we tell every Territorian to report it. I can then follow it up and maintain the independence of the Quality and Safeguards Commission, which can review what is happening in the Northern Territory.

There are a number of people on the NDIS review panel with Dr Bruce Bonyhady who would ask questions of people about who their service provider was and people would not know. Remember that we have a number of remote Aboriginal community members who speak English as a third or fourth language, so if their families or a support person locally or in their community are not across the NDIS and happy to support them, it makes it difficult for them to advocate for their needs and to follow people up.

This is why I have commissioned the work in Yuendumu and Maningrida. It is giving the power to the people and ensuring that the community are a bit protected there, and hopefully it keeps out any of the providers who will not deliver.

You mentioned the \$1m and the \$3m—that speaks for itself. There is \$3m going to waste there just sitting in a bucket of funds that cannot be drawn down so these people miss out of services every day, and we have 1,044 registered and active providers.

**Mr MALEY:** Is that because there are not enough providers going to Maningrida? We need more providers in Maningrida because there is money to spend there but just no providers to provide the service.

**Ms AH KIT:** It is not necessarily more providers—having a look at different ways.

**Mr MALEY:** More services?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is the service. You might have a good service provider in Darwin, Nhulunbuy or Alice Springs—whatever the community wants—but it is the access to the service.

**Mr MALEY:** I understand.

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is that they have a lodge there, so accommodation is there. I could not tell you how expensive it is. If you were a service provider in Darwin and were asked by a client in Maningrida to look after them on a regular basis, it would be the fuel and charter costs, food and lodging with all of that included in your business model. What could happen is somebody's package gets drawn down quickly but they are not getting the regularity of their service provision. Some of the people I spoke to in Maningrida have not been seen this year, and I was there in late April.

**Mr YAN:** I will return to something we spoke about in Estimates last year; it has been raised with me again recently. I believe we spoke last year about the collaboration between Northern Territory Government and Darwin City Council for disabled parking spaces and disabled toilets. It has been raised that there is a distinct

lack of disabled parking in and around the CBD and some of the ones that people can get to are the ones at Parliament House. If you are disabled, it is a long haul to the mall, Mitchell Street, or wherever you need to go, particularly when it is raining.

Could you outline any discussions that you have had with the Darwin council on improving the access to and number of disabled parks in the City of Darwin?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is a really important question. As Minister for Disabilities, I have that lens over all of my work and everyday life, so I pick up on those parts that are missing.

Yesterday I met with members of the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory and had 11 or 12 different councils online, including the City of Darwin and a number of regional councils. We discussed my role as the Minister for Disabilities and my work promoting the Northern Territory Disability Strategy and action plan. The underlying premise is that every Territorian who is living with disability should be able to live the best quality life no matter where they are; that includes parking in the CBD.

I will continue those conversations and am trying to encourage the councils that do not have a disability strategy to have one. Then they will have to outline to their constituents their promise to address disability to ensure that services are inclusive and take on board the need for parking spaces.

I really appreciate you raising that, and I will continue to follow that up with the City of Darwin.

**Mr YAN:** Thank you; it has been an ongoing issue. I know that the City of Darwin has told the people who have queried about disabled parking that they are allowed to park anywhere and will be okay, but the problem is that those parks do not provide the space they need. There is also a problem in that getting from the car park to a footpath or something else can be quite difficult.

Disabled toilets are also on that agenda. There are some around town, but if you have a disability, your ability to get to a toilet in a hurry is not that great and there are only a few around the CBD.

I finish by acknowledging the NT Tenpin Bowlers with a Disability, who I believe are away competing at the moment. They were previously at the Nightcliff tenpin bowling centre, which is not there anymore. They have found some difficulties accessing Kingpin. Is there anywhere for disabled athletes in the Territory to get assistance through grants or whatever else to continue their sporting activities when situations change?

**Ms AH KIT:** Our best wishes are with those athletes at the moment who are very skilled. I know they will be having an amazing time. You are right; it changed from Planet when that was demolished. I understand that the bowling lanes at Kingpin are not competition or regulation size. I have not had recent conversations with the Minister for Sport, but I am happy to follow that up as well.

It is really good having the same CEO who is sitting here taking notes, so I can definitely look at that.

**Mr YAN:** I am happy for you to follow that up, minister, and the CEO can schedule a meeting about it.

**Ms AH KIT:** I cannot speak for Minister Worden, so I will follow it up.

**Mr BOWDEN:** The electorate of Johnston has a couple of vacant blocks that have been designated for speciality disability accommodation. I am wondering whether you might be able to update me because I am the Member for Johnston. I think there might be some grants programs or something along that line. Do you have information about that?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, it is pretty exciting to have specialist disability accommodation provided in the Northern Territory.

**Mr BOWDEN:** I went to one just the other day. There was an open house, and it is just in Shoobridge Street in Millner. It is incredible.

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely. We know that Territorians living with disability need to have those safe and purpose-built accommodation spaces so that they can navigate easily and do not have to retrofit homes. Specialist disability accommodation is new accommodation built for a person in mind who is living with disability. We have seen a number of dwellings in the Northern Territory and there are more providers, which is exciting.

We are doing some work in supporting SDA in the Northern Territory. If you are a not-for-profit service provider, we can help facilitate land grants. We have provided land so SDA accommodation can be built. We have some that are coming to fruition and Territorians will be moving in.

We have four listed parcels of land with construction under way, due to be completed this year. They are located in Darwin. They are at 48 Alawa Crescent, 23 Macassar Street, 14 Steele Street and 88 Tiwi Gardens in Tiwi. We have also given three additional parcels of land to Carpentaria Disability Services at 95 Ryland Road in Rapid Creek, 53 Rothdale Road in Jingili and 29 Forrest Crescent in Gillen.

We continue to facilitate those land grants, but we have private providers who are coming in and building their own SDA accommodation from the ground up. We have providers like Somerville, which I understand has purchased land from the Northern Territory Government and built their own SDA property on that land.

For all of those who were considering SDA, please do so. We need more purpose-build new accommodation for people living with disabilities.

I have been able to do a walk through. I have an array of SDA properties that are springing up in my electorate on Boulter Road. Look at the wide doors, as the CEO has said about the new Territory Housing properties going forward. The have kitchen benches where you can press a button and they go up and down so that people who are in wheelchairs can chop their vegetables and do their cooking. It is independent living.

We basically cannot build SDA properties fast enough. The first ones only came online in the Northern Territory in December. We are excited. My adviser earlier this week heard from another private provider who said that they just finished building their own. It is an interesting space to watch, and we need more accommodation.

**Mr BOWDEN:** I looked at the offering that was in Shoobridge Street with the benches that go up and down and the barn doors that are extra wide. The key plank in that property was the plunge pool that was available for the person who will use it. It is a plunge pool that they need for their area of concern ...

**Ms AH KIT:** You would have seen a hoist to help them into and out of the pool. All of the safety requirements were being met. I visited the Somerville SDA accommodation at the opening in Palmerston, and they have two properties that are connected in the middle by a breezeway with a pool. It was fantastic to talk to the new tenants and for them to show us their rooms. I love the idea of them living together so they can have company. If they want to be alone they can be in their rooms. They are all friends and can live together, which is nice.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes Output 1.5. Outputs 1.6 and 1.7 are the responsibility of another minister. That concludes consideration of outputs relating to Disabilities and Multicultural Affairs. On behalf of the committee, I thank all department staff for coming. They do a lot of work, and sometimes we do not get to every output. There are many people watching and listening, so thank you to them. More importantly, thanks for providing assistance to the minister today and in the lead-up.

We will take a 10-minute break until 3.25 pm for afternoon tea.

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The committee suspended.

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## DEPARTMENT OF CORPORATE AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

**Mr CHAIR:** We will now move onto questions relating to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

**Ms AH KIT:** I have with me Chris Hosking, the Acting Chief Executive of the Department of Corporate and Digital Development.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms AH KIT:** No, thank you.

**Mr CHAIR:** Before we move to the Appropriation Bill 2023–24 in relation to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development, was there a question on notice you want to respond to?

**Ms AH KIT:** I forgot to put this in the previous output area for Multicultural Affairs, but I have a response to question 9.2 about multicultural group membership decline.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 9.2**

**Ms AH KIT:** The Office of Multicultural Affairs holds high-level information on the multicultural community organisations which are run on a volunteer basis. Data on membership of each community organisation is not held centrally by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, so the office is unable to advise if there has been a decline in memberships of these groups.

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

No questions.

**OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT**  
**Output 2.1 – Workforce Services**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 2.0, Corporate Support Development, Output 2.1, Workforce Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** The ICAC recently put out a conflict of interest education course. Has this been incorporated into the curriculum for all new hires?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will pass to the CEO in regard to the operations of that ICAC recommendation.

**Mr HOSKING:** The mandatory ICAC training that was referred to in the sittings earlier in the week has been incorporated into a suite of essential training for public servants, which the Commissioner for Public Employment promotes through her office. All public servants are expected to complete that training, whether they are new hires or existing long-term public servants.

**Mr YAN:** What other mandatory modules for new hires are there for the Northern Territory Government?

**Ms AH KIT:** In regard to employment training for public servants, that is the responsibility of the Commissioner for Public Employment. My department administers the online training component of any training that is set through the OCPE.

**Mr YAN:** As part of the online training, what are the mandatory modules managed by DCDD?

**Ms AH KIT:** We do not have a list of all the online training, but we can get it back to you as part of this session. I could take that question on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 9.4**

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

**Mr YAN:** What are the online training modules managed by DCDD?

**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 9.4.

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**Mr YAN:** Are there different modules which need to be completed based on an employee's level? For example, is there a different set of modules for an AO2 versus a SAO2, for instance?

**Ms AH KIT:** That would be a question best posed to OCPE. We would help deliver the online component of what they ask us to.

**Mr YAN:** I was asking specifically about the online training component.

**Ms AH KIT:** I will throw to the CE. I also want to clarify your previous question on notice. Were you referring to all Northern Territory public service online training or just the digital ...

**Mr HOSKING:** So that we are clear on the question—we will have people scramble around and assemble the information for you—are you referring to essential training for all public servants to complete, as opposed to something that is role specific?

**Mr YAN:** Correct, essential training for all public servants.

**Mr HOSKING:** We can provide a list of that.

**Mr YAN:** Are there different modules for different levels of employment? Are there specific modules for specific levels, or are they generic across the public sector?

**Mr HOSKING:** In the main, the training delivered by DCDD through our digital training portal is generic in nature for public servants. There are one or two variants. For instance, there is a digital orientation program being released shortly which is specific to executive contract officers who have additional accountability obligations. We will make sure that the list we come back with later this session is specific to all of those.

**Mr YAN:** In relation to the one that you mentioned for ECOs, do you have a time line for when that will be rolled out?

**Mr HOSKING:** It will be later this year. I will make sure that we have a specific time frame in the answer we will get back to you later this afternoon.

**Mr YAN:** Thank you, I appreciate that.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

### **Output 2.2 – Employment Services**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 2.2, Employment Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** In 2020 there was an underpayment of around \$30m in superannuation. It was identified due to a misinterpretation of tax law and coding errors. Have all of the underpaid funds been paid to employees?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr YAN:** Correspondingly, there was a \$7.1m overpayment identified at that time. Has that full amount been recovered?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, that has been repaid. That was done by writing to the superannuation funds to have the money paid back, rather than going into the pay packets of employees and asking them to pay it.

**Mr YAN:** That is okay. I was wondering if that \$7.1m overpayment had been recouped. That is good to hear.

Have any additional superannuation errors been identified in the last year in over or underpayments?

**Ms AH KIT:** If you are referring to the misinterpretation that resulted in the underpayments before, the answer is no.

**Mr YAN:** Have there been any additional errors identified in the last year in either overpayment or underpayments?

**Mr HOSKING:** Part of the remediation work we did after the discovery of that misapplication of superannuation law in 2019 was to make a number of programming changes to our systems that apply superannuation treatment to people's earnings. All of those changes were successfully applied back when that matter was identified and made public. Since that time we have been fully compliant with superannuation law going forward. What took us quite some time was to do the back casting over about 10 years to do all the remediation work. We are confident that we are paying every penny of employees' superannuation entitlements as per the ATOs interpretation of those laws.

**Mr YAN:** I bet the Territorian public servants will be pleased to hear that. DCDD also overseas payroll, is that correct?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr YAN:** At present, do we have a total of payroll overpayments to NTG employees?

**Ms AH KIT:** In the reporting period, the total payroll overpayments was \$3,431,603 and that was from 1 July to 31 March 2023, which represents 0.14% of the Northern Territory Government's payroll cost for that same period. My CEO has guaranteed me that work is being undertaken to recoup those overpayments.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

### **Output 2.3 – Procurement Services**

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output Group 2.3, Procurement Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** Have any anomalies in procurement processes been identified in the reporting period. If identified, how are they handled?

**Ms AH KIT:** Can you provide a more narrow definition of what you would term as an anomaly in a procurement service?

**Mr YAN:** Any anomaly in a procurement process that has been identified to have been outside procurement guidelines or breached procurement guidelines, or has there been any errors in those procurement processes?

**Ms AH KIT:** Any breaches to the current procurement process?

**Mr YAN:** Yes.

**Ms AH KIT:** It is quite operational so I will hand to my CEO Chris Hosking.

**Mr HOSKING:** DCDD has a dual role where procurement is concerned. One in our own right—we are the second-largest procurer in the Northern Territory Government behind the Infrastructure department. We procure most of the large digital contracts, motor vehicles and all sorts of things for use by all NT Government departments. We do a lot of procurement in our own right, but we also do the processing of tenders for other departments. We do not assess and award them—that is done by the departments—but we do the administrative processing of that.

There is a large volume of tender activity. Occasionally anomalies occur in procurement. We are heavily audited by the Auditor-General on our procurement practice in both those areas, in particular on our internal procurement, a number of which are very high value. We also conduct annual Value for Territory audits to make sure that the appropriate weighting of the Buy Local policy is going towards local suppliers in the procurement process.

It is not unusual for some anomalies to arise in an audit. Generally, these may be things such as when the auditors come and do their work around being able to identify all of the correct items of paperwork in the right sequence. Within our agency, procurement is extremely robust, and we have a good report card. Where we do have anomalies, they tend to be in non-material elements of the procurement process. We also extensively use independent external probity advisors on all of our large-tier, high-value procurements. The probity advisors provide independent reports on all of those tender processes that give you a granular assessment on whether you met every procurement rule. We use those audit reports to drive our continuous improvement within the procurement governance as a department.

As to the broader procurement across government, more than DCDD, it would be a little difficult for me to answer because we tend to be the process, rather than the decision makers, and the quality or otherwise of those tender assessment processes would be on the report cards of the individual agencies, who would be scrutinised by the Auditor-General and the recipients of the report cards in those audits.



**Mr YAN:** You spoke about the advisers on the procurement process, the external ones. Who are those advisers?

**Mr HOSKING:** We source them from local accounting firms so they are completely independent from the public service and will generally be CPA-qualified accountants with a speciality in audit as a discipline. They provide an independent probity assessment report to the chief executive or the authorised decision-maker of that procurement.

**Mr YAN:** Do you have a specific team, company or group of companies that you use to source those auditors?

**Mr HOSKING:** No, we source them by procuring them from the local services sector. We will do a procurement process to source a probity adviser. That ensures there is a contestable process for their selection each and every time, rather than favouring one supplier over another.

**Mr YAN:** Do you have a cost for the reporting period for those advisors that are procured?

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#### Question on Notice No 9.5

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

**Mr YAN:** Of those advisers and auditors that are procured to assess NTG procurement activities, can I have a cost for the reporting period?

**Mr DEPUTY 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 9.5.

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**Mr YAN:** Have any procurements been referred to the ICAC in the reporting period or the past year?

**Ms AH KIT:** Not that we are aware of. That is not to say it has not been referred, rather we have not been notified.

**Mr YAN:** But there have been none referred to ICAC by DCDD?

**Ms AH KIT:** No.

**Mr YAN:** Are reports provided by the department to the Buy Local Industry Advocate on a regular basis, or can they be requested by the advocate at any time?

**Mr HOSKING:** The Department engages with the Buy Local Industry Advocate on a number of fronts. The advocate is well within his remit to ask us to provide reports and documents to him, and there are cases where he has been asked to look into a matter and we turn over our documentation for his review, so that he can be satisfied that the local procurement policy weightings are being appropriately applied.

We also work proactively with the Buy Local Advocate on a range of fronts when we are procuring major IT contracts, which are heavily contested by the ICT services sector. We conduct regular briefings to industry—three or four times a year—to foreshadow industry tendering opportunities that are coming up, and we invite the Buy Local Advocate to attend those sessions so he gets a good look at what is coming in terms of tendering activity.

When we are tendering major contracts, depending on the complexity, value and risk profile of that particular tender, we often engage with the Buy Local Advocate and give him the opportunity to pre-read our tender documents before we put them to market. Sometimes we will meet with him to simply share ideas and information about upcoming procurement action.

I also mentioned in my earlier remarks that we have a whole-of-government remit regarding managing the tendering activity for all government departments in a processing sense. Our senior director, who runs that

part of our department, meets regularly with the Buy Local Industry Advocate and works with him on some working groups that sit within the procurement framework for the government.

We engage at several levels and we try to do that in a proactive and reactive way, hopefully more proactive than reactive. Yes, we are regularly dealing with the advocate on a range of matters.

**Mr YAN:** Minister, I ask this because I am aware of a number of contracts that have gone out in the last reporting period, where a specific product was required as part of the tender process. The tender documents would not allow for an alternative or an equivalent product. That product and the person to apply that product were not available in the Territory. The product supplier would not train anybody in the Territory, so it effectively cut Territorians and Territory businesses out of that tender process. Contractors then had to buy in a service from interstate.

I am interested if there has been any feedback from the Buy Local Advocate on some of those tenders.

**Ms AH KIT:** I was not aware of that matter, but I will ask the chief executive.

**Mr HOSKING:** I am not familiar with the matters you refer to, Member for Namatjira; however, I am familiar with the Buy Local Advocate. I have a fair bit to do with him on a regular basis, and he advocates hard for local suppliers in the Territory.

I am aware of a number of instances where the practicalities of the market mean that we cannot procure from within the Territory. It happens a bit within my department, primarily for major software vendors that are located in other parts of the world and do not have a presence here. That is unfortunate, but it is a factor of the industry.

Where the service is available but purchased through a local reseller in the Territory, we try to leverage those arrangements to get local benefit. An example I might use is that several of our large software vendors are located in other parts of the world. When we tender, and there is a minimum 30% weighting on local content, in our pre-briefings before we go to market, we tell those global suppliers, 'Take this seriously, because if you do not, you will not score well. The 30% weighting is a large chunk of 100% if you do not take the local content seriously.'

We encourage them to partner with local businesses, and we have a number of large global software suppliers who partner with local Territory IT companies to provide some component of the contract or services or to be a subcontractor to the prime. In some cases we have been able to get them to open offices in Darwin and employ people in the Territory, which is terrific. It is difficult when you are dealing with big tier one globals, but we try. The Buy Local Advocate also does a good job of holding us to account on this, making sure that any time there is an opportunity to embed a local company in the service delivery model, that we do that.

There are some where we simply cannot. We try our best and do not always succeed. We take it seriously and try hard to apply the intent of the government's Buy Local policy in everything we do, sometimes even when it is not practical to do so.

**Mr YAN:** Are tenders categorised by type?

**Ms AH KIT:** Tenders are categorised by dollar value, so they are broken up into different tiers.

**Mr YAN:** And those tiers one, two, three, four and five which is over—I cannot remember now. How many select tenders were there in the last year for DCDD, and what amount of government spend does that represent?

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** Mr Hosking, while you look for that information—I know everyone has been waiting with baited breath. This might be my only chance as the Chair comes back. The votes have come in; there has been some good voting—some surprise packets.

Rob Pocock got votes as well as Tony Schelling. Clearly his staff were watching and wrote the number down when I put it out for the best-dressed competition. Even Ken Davies got a vote. The votes are in, and a clear winner is the Member for Namatjira. Congratulations. Second place is the Attorney-General. He will be disappointed. A notable mention goes to Mr Hosking. You have tied the knot down the straight running in Randwick. Well done, Mr Hosking.

Congratulations, Member for Namatjira. We will try to get that into the tabling statement.

**Mr HOSKING:** Very decent of you, Mr Deputy Chair, thank you.

**Mr CHAIR:** Back to Estimates.

**Ms AH KIT:** Member for Namatjira, my Chief Executive has some information on that question that he will share with you.

**Mr HOSKING:** I am speaking for DCDD in terms of the agency's procurement. We had 31 instances where it was done under what we call a certificate of exemption and sole select and that represents \$13.9m worth of value. To provide some context, they are nearly all procurements of software licencing where it is a sole supplier arrangement and you can only buy it from that one supplier, or in a number of cases a property leasing where the government requires a particular premises in a particular location often in the bush and there is nothing else, so a public procurement process would really not serve any purpose.

### **Output 2.4 – Information Management Services**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output Group 2.4, Information Management Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** There is about a \$1.8m increase compared to Budget 2022–2023, and the note indicates that certain FOI functions have been transferred to DCDD. What are those FOI functions?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will hand over to my CEO. The transition of FOI coming into Corporate and Digital Development is a continuation of the machinery of government changes that came. I understand there are some departments that might still keep their own FOI functions, but it has been great to bring in the FOI employees from different agencies into DCDD to respond to those FOI requests and have a coordinated approach.

**Mr HOSKING:** The centralisation of freedom of information processing is an extension of the reforms that came from the plan for budget repair in 2019 when what was previously DCIS expanded as a result of that reform to take on a number of new functions and evolved into becoming the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. Freedom of information processing was identified in the Langoulant report as one that made sense to centralise.

As you will appreciate, FOIs are sensitive matters and agencies wanted to proceed carefully and considered that. Under the fiscal review standing committee that oversaw the whole plan for budget repair process, a review was conducted to look closely at that. It was oversighted by one of the chief executives of our client agencies. As a result, 10 agencies moved to the central model.

When FOI claims are received, the claim is analysed. We look at how the legislation applies, what documentation can be released under FOI and what cannot, what exemptions apply and those sorts of things. We provide a recommendation to the decision-maker who sits in the line agency, but also prepare those documents—that is, preparing the bundle of documents and applying redactions should they be necessary. The chief executive or their delegate in the client agency gets a fully prepared bundle, and they can consider the recommendation that our team provides and sign off on it.

Two agencies sit outside that model at this point in time. The complexity of FOI requests within the Police department and the Health department bears further consideration, so the decision taken by the fiscal review standing committee was to defer that centralisation for 12 months and have a thorough look at it. We are due to have another look at that again in the near future. As you will appreciate, there are sensitivities around patient health records and policing records that need to be thought through pretty carefully, as opposed to the FOI requests that are received by a more administrative agency.

**Mr YAN:** Will this effectively make FOI requests less costly to search and bring down the cost of FOI requests?

**Ms AH KIT:** The answer is potentially. We will keep an eye on the costs involved with FOI requests. It gives us an opportunity to develop a centre for excellence by bringing together all those skilled people in the FOI system who can work together and put together those FOI requests and responses in a timely manner.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes Output 2.4. We will move to Output 2.5.

### Output 2.5 – Finance Services

**Mr YAN:** What is the average time frame for government payment? What is the average amount of time for a payment to be processed?

**Ms AH KIT:** Is that for a bill that is coming in?

**Mr YAN:** Someone has sent us a bill, and we need to pay them.

**Ms AH KIT:** It is broken down into two tiered payments. For invoices that the Northern Territory Government receives that total less than \$1m, the aim is to pay them within 20 days, and DCDD has an 85% success rate in meeting that target. For invoices that the Northern Territory Government receives that are valued at more than \$1m, the aim is to pay them within 30 days, and there is a 95% success rate in meeting that target.

**Mr YAN:** How does that compare with the average amount of days it takes to collect debt?

**Ms AH KIT:** I was just talking to the CEO about the different types of debt owed to the Northern Territory Government and the systems and processes set up to have them repaid, whether it is public housing rent or Fines Recovery Unit. He has a bit more information, but I understand it is a bit of a tricky one.

**Mr HOSKING:** As the minister points out, the recovery of debt within government is not quite as centralised as the payment of invoices. Generally, DCDD pays all invoices on behalf of all agencies. Accounts payable processing is a fairly straightforward transactional process. Once the appropriate delegate approves it, we push it through our government accounting system and expedite the payment to whoever provided those goods and services.

There are many different channels for accounts receivable. Whether it is traffic infringements, public rental arrears or people who are not covered by Medicare being treated in public hospitals, the rate of recovery differs significantly across all those different categories of debtors.

In order to answer your question with any specificity, we would need to take the question on notice and could provide you with a response that breaks it down. I do not have a number available to give you today; if I did, it probably would not mean much without some of that contextual detail. We can take the question on notice and provide that.

**Mr YAN:** Thank you, Mr Hosking. I would be interested to find out what that would be.

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### Question on Notice No 9.6

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

**Mr YAN:** Considering the 20 and 30-day time frames for payment, either below \$1m or over \$1m, how does that compare with the average number of days it takes to collect a debt?

**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 9.6.

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**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.5.

### Output 2.6 – Property Leasing Services

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 2.6, Property Leasing Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** The annual report speaks about planning for a government business services hub in Alice Springs. How far along is the planning for that hub?

There is also mention of a Barkly business hub. What work has been done there?

**Ms AH KIT:** The question is operational, and I will hand to my CEO, but I understand planning for the Alice Springs business hub is well under way.

**Mr HOSKING:** Yes, the work for an Alice Springs services hub is well progressed. DCDD looks after the property leasing component of that, but the actual project is being driven by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Our property leasing division has secured the tenancy that will accommodate the business hub, and we have finalised discussions with the building owner on the fitout and design. I am in Alice Springs on a fairly regular basis, and I noticed that the retail outlets that were in that part of the building have moved. I do not think we have started the actual fitout yet, but we are not far off.

Preparing the real estate to be an Alice Springs services hub is well progressed in terms of the planning stages and is about to move into execution. The work on the design of the services and who will sit in there and do what is being managed through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I do not have a lot of detail on that. I can assure you that the property fitout component is well progressed.

**Mr YAN:** And in the Barkly?

**Mr HOSKING:** As I understand at this point, it is in more of a conceptual stage in the Barkly and is not at the same level as the Alice Springs development. I cannot give you a tangible update on that today. I do not believe we have identified a site for fitout at this point.

The intent is that we would progressively complete centralised services hubs across the Territory so that Territorians have one shopfront counter to transact with government. The first one, the Big Rivers Government Centre, does that to some degree. We will see that improved upon in the Alice Springs project. The Barkly one would be next, but that one is not far along at this time.

**Mr MALEY:** Would this output deal with the leasing of the Howard Springs CNR property?

**Ms AH KIT:** No. I understand that is under Chief Minister and Cabinet.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.6.

### **Output 2.7 – Vehicle Management Services**

No questions.

## **OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – DIGITAL GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT**

### **Output 3.1 – ICT Network Services**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Digital Government Development, Output 3.1, ICT Network Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** There are plenty, Mr Chair.

What was ICT's role in the Health system data breach, if any?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is a digital project under Output 3.4. Could we address it there in three outputs' time?

**Mr YAN:** I am happy to address it under Digital Projects.

Have there been any other data breaches concerning Territory government systems in the past 12 months?

**Ms AH KIT:** Not within my portfolio.

**Mr YAN:** So DCDD have not had any data breaches in the past 12 months?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is correct.

**Mr YAN:** What is the threat of a large-scale cyber attack on Territory systems? Do you have a plan in place to deal with that?

**Ms AH KIT:** Cyber security is an important topic that I have had to get my head around over the last 12 months as minister. I will be careful about what I say because there is a lot at stake when it comes to ensuring that the Northern Territory is as safe as possible with our systems. We are making sure that privacy and information is stored and protected as well as possible. I can give Territorians and you the guarantee that my department works extremely smart and sensibly to ensure that we have the best mechanisms in place to protect the Territory. We do not do this on our own; we have a lot of local ICT providers. We work closely with the federal government on this to ensure that Australia as a nation is as cyber secure as possible.

We have heard a lot this year and in previous years about data breaches. Unfortunately a number of Territorians have been impacted by that. It tells us that we are not immune. Even though we are a small jurisdiction—as minister, I would like to hope that if people have malicious intent they would aim for bigger jurisdictions and leave us little people alone—we continue to do a suite of work to protect the Territory.

This afternoon I put out a media release. I am happy to mention some of this. It is titled, ‘Boost to deliver enhanced cyber security and more skilled jobs’. It is just one example of how my government is committed to investing \$7.5m annually to enhance cyber security controls and capability. We know that we need more people working in that space. CDU does a great job of training a number of students to work in the cyber and ICT industry area. We continue to invest in programs and make sure we have ways of enticing Territorians and students to those roles to help cyber security.

It is important, but I do not want to miss anything. I will hand to CEO, Chris Hosking, to add a bit more from the department’s perspective.

**Mr HOSKING:** Our department is working on a range of fronts. Your question was about the risk to the Northern Territory Government?

**Mr YAN:** What is the large-scale threat of cyber attacks?

**Mr HOSKING:** That threat is real. It will always be there. Unfortunately I cannot tell you that there is anything the government can do to completely prevent the threat of a large-scale cyber attack. The threat environment continue to intensify.

We work closely with our federal government counterparts, as the minister does with her colleagues in the digital ministers’ ministerial council. We are engaged in the national discussion about this. The reality is that there is no IT system on the planet that is completely safe from hackers.

As we have seen in recent times, the prevalence of these sorts of attacks continues to get greater. There are a number of reasons for that. One is that the sophistication of the actors is getting better. The nation state actors who would seek to steal information from countries such as Australia and its allies continue to get better.

The cyber criminals who do this as a criminal enterprise to make money get better. Cyber crime has, in fact, been commercialised. You can buy these services on the dark web now. You do not have to be a particularly clever hacker to do this anymore; you can buy it as a service the same way you buy other things as a service. It has become quite commercialised.

To a lesser extent we also see hackers or malicious actors who are motivated by their causes. Generally nation state actors and organised crime are the main players.

We have taken cyber security in the Territory seriously for a long time since before cyber security was the terminology used in everyday discussions. We align heavily with the Australian Government, which sets strong policy direction in this area. We do not comment publicly on what our cyber posture is and the protections we put in place, because to publicly do so tells the bad guys what protections you have in place and makes you more vulnerable.

For a small jurisdiction, we do not have the resources that some of the other big states and territories do. We have some fundamental positional advantages in the model we use in the Territory. I do not want to talk too much about the detail here; it is a public hearing. We have some advantages that the large states do not, and we exploit them as much as we possibly can.

As the minister said, we have had an uplift in our investment in cyber security in the most recent budget, which is terrific because all Australian governments are subject to a new legislative framework on critical

infrastructure. The regulatory framework has been lifted on us. Even though we do a lot of work now, we need to build on that and ensure that all of the Territory's critical assets are protected digitally.

The challenge about skills is real and is probably the biggest challenge we have in this area. It is not the tech; it is getting the skilled people to operate that environment. We have a compelling employment proposal here if you want to come and live and work in the Territory. Why would you not?

More and more we are having to grow and develop our own skills in the Territory, hence partnering with the local university. We have traineeships where we partner with the local industry sector. The challenge we have, like any Australian organisation, is that demand will outstrip supply, and we need to exploit all the advantages we have to resource that work.

That is a long-winded answer to your question, but I could not give an ironclad guarantee. To do so would be disingenuous. We punch above our weight in this area, and it is one we are focused on.

**Mr YAN:** I appreciate your candid answer. You spoke about the skills efficiency. There is an efficiency and an issue for employment across the Territory. In that IT world, does DCDD have the ability to bring services and people in who may not be—and I hate to say it—residing in the Territory? If we need those skills and those people, is the ability there to use people living outside the Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** It is an important question. As much as we would love to be able to employ and contract Territorians to help us in the cyber security and ICT space, it is not always possible. I will get the CEO to talk about how we have to access the qualified people who happen to live outside of the Northern Territory to help us.

**Mr HOSKING:** You have hit the nail on the head. We need to be smart about how we source these resources. It is not limited to cyber. Digital professions where we need IT expertise across a range disciplines, particularly where we contract these services from the private sector and specialist niches—it is a small percentage of the overall resourcing capacity, but we already have to buy some of that in from interstate. It simply does not exist in the Territory.

Cyber, particularly with the latest uplift in our capacity in the recent budget, requires a bunch of new technical resources. We know that we will not be able to get them here as Northern Territory Government public servants. We would love to, because it builds our internal capability.

We will end up with a hybrid model where—I am hoping—we get the bulk of those resources working here and renting or buying a house, enrolling their kids in school and contributing to the Territory. However, we will have to augment that with specialist services. Given the whole nation is facing an uplift in this area there are businesses seeking to commercially follow that path. There are specialist firms where we can buy in some of that capacity from the larger cities down south.

The trick for us over the next year or two will be getting that balance right. We try hard to preference people to come to live and work here and participate in the local digital ecosystem. We are realistic enough to know that, for some really high-end skills, we will have purchased the services through these cyber security services companies.

It is made more challenging by the fact that the Australian Government has had a major uplift in this area. The Australian Cyber Security Centre—which are the national leaders that we work closely with—have announced 1,000 new jobs in this area. It pays well, which makes it that much more challenging for us in the Territory. Exploiting the other good things about living and working here becomes an important part of the proposition to employees. Where that is not enough, we will plug those gaps with expert contracting services.

**Mr DEPUTY CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

### **Output 3.2 – Agency Business Systems and Support Services**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Agency Business Systems and Support Services. Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** Mr Hosking has been waiting for this, because I have great questions on all of these ICT projects he has running. Do you want to answer them in Output 3.2 or hold them to Output 3.4, which is Digital Projects?

**Ms AH KIT:** Output 3.2, Agency Business Systems and Support Services are where projects go once they are finalised. They go on to become day-to-day operations. If you want to talk about Acacia and other ICT systems that my department has created, then that would be under Output 3.4, Digital Projects.

**Mr YAN:** Is Care operational? Does that now fall into Output 3.2?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is a good question because it is operational, but I understand that it is not fully finalised. Let me check. It went live in March, so we can talk about it here.

**Mr YAN:** That is good to hear. Obviously the development for Care went well. What is the spend to date? How has that tracked against budget?

**Ms AH KIT:** In the reporting period, we spent \$44m of the \$64m budget on the Care system.

**Mr YAN:** There is \$20m left over from that job?

**Ms AH KIT:** There is still \$10m to be put toward the project for the final payments, and then \$10m will be remaining.

**Mr YAN:** What do you envisage doing with the spare \$10m?

**Ms AH KIT:** We will use the remaining money on the other ICT programs that my department are tasked with creating for the Northern Territory Government.

**Mr YAN:** Have there been any postproduction issues since the rollout of Care?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will hand to my CEO to discuss the detail about that.

**Mr HOSKING:** The Care system went live on Friday 26 March. That saw the legacy system CCIS discontinued and use of the IOM system, which I think you would be familiar with as the system for juvenile justice, discontinued as well.

In terms of the actual system, we have the usual minor bugs and defects that get fixed. When we go through the final testing before go-live, we try hard to test everything, but when we go out of the project environment into one where I think—testing my memory here—the user cohort is almost 700 users across Territory Families, we usually find a few little things in the first week or two. We did here, but nothing that prevented its use.

This is no idle boast: the system is nation leading in the child protection and youth justice space in Australia. It is really good.

There is still more work to do. As the minister said, in the reporting period there was a \$20m underspend, of which \$10m will be spent before the project is closed, mainly because we have contractual payments to the vendor that we backend to make sure it fixes all those bits and pieces. I am withholding a fair chunk of the vendor's payments until some of those things are finalised.

The suite of reports that the day-to-day users in child protection and youth justice use every day generally goes live with the core basics that they need and then builds out over time. We will be adding to the reporting capability over the coming months. I expect that we will have the tail end of that all wound up by the end of this calendar year.

The actual system is live and, having been involved with many of these major system go-lives over many years, I would have to say it was the quietest, most uneventful one I have ever participated in. It was pretty smooth.

**Mr CHAIR:** That completes Output 3.2. We will skip Output 3.3 and move to Output 3.4, Digital Projects.

### **Output 3.3 – Across Government Systems and Support Services**

No questions.

### **Output 3.4 – Digital Projects**



**Mr YAN:** I will go back to the question I asked in Output 3.1. What was ICT's roll in the Health system data breach?

**Mr HOSKING:** I do not like to use the word 'breach' because it was not breached to a malicious third party. That particular event has been reported in the media in recent weeks. DCDD has been responsible for delivering that project on behalf of NT Health since it originated and was funded. The matter that transpired, unfortunately, was not reported with complete accuracy in the ABC News article.

Essentially, we were going through an exercise with our clinical stakeholders in the Health department to capture all the ways that clinicians fill in information in a document, form or PDF so that that could inform the design of new screens in the Acacia system, which we refer to as 'gathering clinical content'. As you saw reported, there were tens of thousands of these items collected over a period when practitioners across the Health department sent content in. It was largely in the form of blank paper forms, PDF documents, Excel spreadsheets and those sorts of things. They were supposed to be blank templates because the whole point was to capture the many ways that this information is captured across the public health system and consolidate it into a single presentation that becomes a screen or a questionnaire in the new system.

Unfortunately, when we started the process of reviewing those to start the consolidation, it became evident that a small subset of them contained identifiable information. It was only a small minority, but, nonetheless, we should not have had that.

Notwithstanding that, those items were sent to us, usually by email, and aggregated in what we call a SharePoint environment, a document repository, that had strong controls on it. The only people who had access to that data were project teams within DCDD, the clinical practitioners in Health who provided them to us and a small subset was also made available to InterSystems, which is our contracted software partner, because its technical people needed to work on that to build the new screens in the system. Unfortunately, the fact that some of this had identifiable information meant we had information that we should not have had.

We took immediate action. We stopped the process of collecting it and communicated across the Health stakeholders to make sure that was no longer happening. We then went through and did a full review. We provided a report to the Health department as the owners of that information, and it made a decision about what to do with that and whether notification of the people whose information was in that was required.

DCDD's role was the IT component—if you like, the gathering up of that. When we started the process of reviewing it and identified that there was identifiable information, we did all the work to lock down our processes, make sure that was discontinued and permanently delete those identifiable records from our environment. We required our software supplier to delete them as well because it has contractual obligations to manage that data in a responsible way, so it was entirely collaborative in that process.

It was unfortunate that the protocol was not followed as cleanly as it should be, but the actual identifiable records were never made available to any other parties. It was unfortunate the way it played out in the media article because it was likened to the Optus and Medibank data breaches, which were in fact the work of organised cybercriminals hacking those organisations, stealing the information and trying to extort ransoms from Medibank and Optus. This was different, and it is disappointing that those parallels were drawn.

It was a breach of protocol in terms of information security but within a government environment and to a lesser degree with a contracted service provider. It resulted from human error and should not have happened. It did, and I note that the remedial action taken was of a high calibre.

The Information Commissioner spoke to this committee earlier in the week, and I reviewed his remarks in the *Hansard*. I think he made a positive assessment of the way we handled the matter. In fact, he offered a view on the appropriateness or otherwise of the decision not to notify those individuals. It is not for me to comment on that.

It was really unfortunate, and I reassure this committee that our project teams within DCDD and our software vendors take the confidentiality of patient information seriously. In an ideal scenario we would have had better checks and balances on that information as it was being provided to us. We were getting them and storing them in the SharePoint environment, locking them down and making sure that only the appropriate individuals had access to it. Had we screened them more thoroughly on the way through, we might have picked this up sooner. We take full responsibility for that.

Territorians can take some comfort in knowing that it was a small subset. To give you some idea of the relativities, close to 50,000 files were involved in this collection exercise. Some of the numbers used by the

ABC were not quite accurate. InterSystems, our contracted supplier, had access to about 3,000 of those files, and only 31 of them contained patient information. It was a small subset. That is not to say that it was not human error; it was, and it should not have happened in the first place.

Since that was detected in July 2019, we have had stringent controls around this and our data governance plans. Our governance officers within the program teams regularly audit and review to make sure that all our people are adhering to those processes. We even took it a step further and introduced strong controls on the use of things like P: drives and USB sticks to have a really sanitised information-management environment within those projects. That is hard when you are dealing with a big project full of technical IT people because these are the tools they use every day, but we have applied strong controls around that. We stick to it like glue.

**Mr CHAIR:** Just to put Territorians at ease a little, you could probably identify who has accessed the data from both sides because it would all be data controlled anyway within both the company and your department.

**Mr HOSKING:** That formed part of our review. We have full auditability of who has accessed it. Even that environment where we had SharePoint, which is a document management tool, managed by your user ID and login credentials, so we have full auditability. We know who accessed it and when, down to their user ID. I can say with certainty there was no inappropriate access to the information.

Another element that is important to stress is that, in order to deliver these big system projects, we have to access the real production patient information. All of these projects require data migration of the data from the old system to the new.

One of the things we have done with Acacia is have a read-only version of that system in use by clinicians for over two years now. Any clinician anywhere in the Territory can use that and see the treatment a patient received at Maningrida, regardless of whether they are checking into the Alice Springs emergency department. They have never been able to have that before.

To move 20 years' worth of patient information out of the old systems to the new, our technical teams need to access the information. These are people who are bound by a code of conduct and confidentiality deeds; our suppliers have contractual obligations on them. It is not possible to deliver one of these big projects and use dummy data as you might do in a testing scenario. We have to move the production data from left to right and need to check it thoroughly to make sure it is as it should be in the new system.

There was some surprise when the media inquiries came about this, that technical IT people had access to this data. That is always the case in these big projects, but it is tightly controlled and fully auditable. We maintain really strict security over it. It is a necessary component of these big system migrations. It is unfortunate—and I understand after things happening like Optus and Medibank that people are incredibly sensitive to this, but this was a different scenario.

**Mr YAN:** I know how the systems work and how the likes of InterSystems will access forms and sometimes use that data—I am not saying specifically in the systems; I am talking about other software companies—and will use a third party to help generate other work that they are doing.

What assurances can you give Territorians that, of those 36, I believe it was ...

**Ms AH KIT:** Thirty-one.

**Mr YAN:** Of those 31 identifiable documents, that InterSystems have not used, shared or that data anywhere else outside the NTG system?

**Mr HOSKING:** I can say with certainty that it has not been shared any more broadly than that. The InterSystems technical team which had access to this are based in their Sydney offices. There was some misinformation in the media article about InterSystems being a global company with offices in all sorts of exotic locations, which they are. However, the team who accessed it was in Sydney, and the computing infrastructure that it was hosted on was on sovereign soil in Australia and subject to Australian law. It has not been accessed by InterSystems people from other parts of the world, just these people in Sydney.

Under the contractual obligations they have with us, they have to manage our data sensibly and securely. I might have written confirmation from them that it has been permanently removed from their computing environment. I have that in a formal documentation that is legally enforceable under our contract. I cannot

say I watched their technicians delete it but I have what I think is concrete written assurance that action has been undertaken.

**Mr YAN:** How many projects are EPS currently managing?

**Ms AH KIT:** There are 28 projects.

**Mr YAN:** Last Estimates I noted there had been an introduction of a contractor retention scheme within EPS. Is this still in place, and has that retention scheme had any impact on the turnover rate?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, and the workforce has been pretty much stable since it was introduced.

**Mr YAN:** How is the Sage system development tracking? This was announced in 2021.

**Mr HOSKING:** The Sage project is tracking well. I just had an update on Sage earlier this week. Sage is a whole-of-government budget management system that was announced in 'A plan for budget repair'. We have had our prototype of that system in testing for a while now. My latest update earlier this week is that by August the full system solution will be built and we are starting to on-board the first agencies to start using it. In fact, I am pleased to say that DCDD will be moving onto the Sage system from the start of the new financial year.

We have our Chief Financial Officer in the room today, and they are busily preparing to go live on the Sage system. We have been doing some preliminary testing with a couple of other agencies to load their data on but they have not been using it in day-to-day production use. Sage is an interesting one because there is quite a degree of variance across NT Government agencies to how they manage their budgets. It is not like we are all coming off an old system onto a new one. We have some agencies that have an IT system, and some use a spreadsheet—it is a bit hit and miss, to be frank. This will get everyone onto a common platform, and DCDD will be going live in the new financial year.

We would hope to on-board a couple more at the mid-year budget review opportunity. I suspect that once the system is out there and in use by multiple agencies there will probably be a further round of fine tuning because the finance people will find a bunch of things that they would like the system to do, and we will probably have to develop it a little further. We are actually hoping to call the bill phase complete in August this year.

**Mr YAN:** What is the budget allocation for Sage?

**Mr HOSKING:** Budget is \$10.6m, and our spend to date is \$8.2m.

**Mr YAN:** That leaves you \$2.4m to do your final system build and implementation. Do you think that will be sufficient?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, we believe the remaining amount will be enough because then we will hand over to the agencies for business as usual and the continued rollout.

**Mr YAN:** Are there any variations on the contract?

**Ms AH KIT:** My understanding is that we have engaged a number of providers. It is not an off-the-shelf product; it is a custom build, and all those who are involved with the project are delivering as they should. There are no variations.

**Mr YAN:** Have you done any user acceptance testing to date? Were any issues highlighted during UAT?

**Mr HOSKING:** There have been some rounds of testing on the early prototype of the system. When we complete the full build in August, we will move into user acceptance testing. Because it is a bespoke build, and we are programming the system rather than purchasing it from a software provider, as we build the functionality and bolt the bits together we test it to make sure that regression testing works and things are all joined up and working as they should. Once we finish the full system build and have all the functionality the financial staff need to manage agency budgets, we will be using the finance teams to do that user acceptance testing so it gets put through the wringer by the people who will end up using it every day.

**Mr YAN:** My question is probably for the acting CE. We are talking about a system build in August, and you are talking also about going live within DCDD in a new financial year. Which version will DCDD be using?

**Mr HOSKING:** Sorry, I should have been more specific about that. The full system build we are aiming for in August includes some functionality that is specific to some of the agencies that need to come on board later. The current version that has been tested is sufficient for DCDD. Ours is not as complex a budget to manage as that of some of the larger agencies, so we are confident we can go live with what has been built and tested so far. There are some additional tranches of functionality still to come, but we are confident they are not needed for DCDD's budget. That is my error; I should have been more specific.

**Mr YAN:** I was wondering about a system built in August that you are kicking off in the new financial year. There were some disconnects.

I will move on to CCSRP and Acacia. What is the current status of CCSRP at this time?

**Ms AH KIT:** Acacia has been rolled out in Katherine and Gove District Hospitals. It is planned it will go live at Royal Darwin and Palmerston Regional Hospital in the third quarter of this year.

**Mr YAN:** I know the scheduled pilot for Katherine was November 2021 and, of course, that did not happen until November last year. Did you make that date or not? That was from the last Estimates Committee.

**Mr HOSKING:** Yes, as we spoke about in Estimates last year, we were poised for a deployment in Katherine and then the Territory's transmission of COVID started in the Katherine emergency department, which derailed that a bit.

Once we got out of the other end of the pandemic in the Territory and recommenced training and preparation in Katherine, we went live in July last year and then rolled into Nhulunbuy in November. We are in the process now of training users at Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals. They are by far our biggest sites to roll the system out to. There are somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 users we have to train, which is logistically a big piece of work.

We are running a little behind on that. We had hoped to be live in Royal Darwin Hospital at the end of July. I think it will probably be a bit after that, as there was a lot of talk on Monday when the Health minister appeared here about the pressures at RDH in terms of resourcing and patient care. We have to work around that, because it impacts on people's ability to be released to do the training if the workforce is stretched thin.

Nonetheless, we are pushing ahead and we are getting terrific support from the senior clinicians there. The clinicians are insisting people do the training, which is a delicate balancing act when you have to keep all those balls in the air. We will go live at Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals in quarter three. I would have liked to have said 28 July, but it will be a little after that.

The measures we put on these projects generally boil down to three things: do they come in on time; do they come in on budget; and do they deliver what they are supposed to deliver? We have had some time impacts on Acacia, there is no doubt about it.

If we had our time again, the proposals that were developed to secure that and approve the project—no-one ever foresaw a global pandemic. I know we are all sick of blaming things on COVID, but we would have planned things differently had that been an eventuality we were planning for or thinking of. We persevered through the pandemic. We got into Katherine and Gove. We will get live in Royal Darwin and Palmerston in the next little while.

The read-only version of this system—which our clinicians have had available for two years—in and of itself is an Australian first. There is no other state in Australia that has the entire public health system and all of their patient data—20 years' worth—in one system so that remote doctors in the bush or in acute hospitals can see, at the click of a mouse, the treatment that patient has received, their medications and care. Patients with complex comorbidities from Aboriginal communities with really detailed care plans—that gets managed in one system, and the tertiary hospitals get managed in another. There has never been any visibility of all of that until Acacia.

In terms of a tool for frontline clinicians, the read-only was an Australian first and a really powerful digital tool. We are getting the production system into the hands of our treating clinicians as fast as we possibly can. The keys things that we are measured on—getting it right, delivering a solution that is clinically safe and has clinicians trained in how to use it—is always the most important thing that will be remembered long after the project is finished. It has been in steady state.

**Mr YAN:** As part of the initial rollout of Acacia in Gove and Katherine hospitals, are we using the full functionality of that system, or is it still only partly functional?

**Ms AH KIT:** In the places where Acacia has already been rolled out, they are using the full functionality currently available through the Acacia system. There will be more tranches added to the system which will be rolled out to those hospitals as they become available, so there is more to come.

**Mr YAN:** Does that effectively mean the hospitals only have part functionality of the full functionality?

**Mr HOSKING:** Acacia is being delivered in several tranches. What is being rolled out today replaces the system used in the tertiary or major regional hospitals, which is called CareSys. We have several other tranches of functionality in Acacia that is native—remembering that Acacia is a commercial, off-the-shelf product—which we will roll out in subsequent releases.

NT Health already have a digital system for managing medication. We will replace that with a medication module which is native to Acacia, so it is a like-for-like swap.

There are also a range of processes done in hospitals today which are paper based. They do not use an IT system to support it. Acacia has the ability to manage those clinical workflows, the ordering of test results, observations, charts, scans et cetera which is currently not done in a system. We will bring those online once the hospitals are bedded down and using the system safely.

A better way to describe it is that there is further functionality native to the software which we can exploit. We are not turning it all on for day one, because the change impact for our clinicians is too great. We are managing it in a staggered approach.

The last and really important point is that Health have yet another system called the Primary Care Information System, which is used in the bush clinics. That will be replaced with further functionality in Acacia so that we have every NT Health service delivery site in the Territory using the one system.

That will be incredibly powerful, but that is separate because the other functionality we were talking about is for the big six hospitals and all of our major regions, whereas the primary care is about 50 different remote clinics. The deployment, training and rollout is different. Some of these places you cannot get to in the Wet Season, so that will probably be a sequence of much smaller deployments as we work our way through all of those remote parts of the Territory. To be clear, they are not all being delivered one after another. Some of this work is being delivered in parallel.

**Mr YAN:** If there are a number of tranches still to come, there will be more data transfer for patients et cetera. Do we have guarantees in place to ensure that the confidentiality of patient data, as it is transferred and moved around, will be maintained?

**Ms AH KIT:** As my CEO, Chris Hosking, has stated, upon reflection of the previous sharing of data outside of the guidelines of how it was supposed to be established, the department will continue to closely monitor the information that is being shared and work closely with the Department of Health to implore those who are sharing information to make sure it is non-identifiable.

**Mr YAN:** We now have effective control systems in place for transferring data?

**Ms AH KIT:** Absolutely.

**Mr YAN:** What is the current spend on Acacia, noting it was a \$259m total budget? What was our spend, considering we still have quite a bit of work to do to deliver?

**Ms AH KIT:** The spend as at 31 March 2023 is \$200m.

**Mr YAN:** We have \$59m left, and we still have a significant number of tranches of work to be done. Is Acacia tracking to come in on budget?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will ask my CEO, Chris Hosking, to answer.

**Mr HOSKING:** Obviously, that is extremely tight and, as you point out, with additional tranches to deliver. While we are well within budget at the moment, as we get closer to the end of the project that will be strained. I made that point at last year's Estimates Committee as well.

We have been repurposing internally to give ourselves some more capacity to address that. You touched previously on the fact that there was a \$10m residual in the Care budget.

One of the positive elements of the model we are in these days where DCDD manages all these reforms on behalf of agencies is all of those funds sit in my department's budget, so we have the ability to repurpose across. Had those funds existed in the individual agencies it would have been a lot more difficult to have the ability to share money across agencies.

We are taking steps to address that now so we are on the front foot with it. At this stage, I can say with certainty that we will exceed that \$259m, but I am confident we can do it by managing within our own overall allocation between ourselves and NT Health. I do not anticipate having to seek any additional funding from the government.

**Mr YAN:** What is the current status of SerPro?

**Ms AH KIT:** SerPro is being delivered later than planned. I understand the South Australian Police Force rolled out SerPro and found a few hiccups with the way the system was supposed to meet the needs of their police force. While we were looking at rolling out ours and getting it all finalised for that deployment and the training of Northern Territory Police, we were in contact with South Australia and found out from their experience.

We have learned from South Australia's Police Force and their experience with SerPro—they are using the same system—and we have tapped into their experience to make sure we do not have that.

My understanding is that the South Australian Police have had to be retrained. We can appreciate that their police force is a lot larger than ours.

I will hand it over to the CEO to talk about the updated time frames and our plans to train our police force and to roll that out later this year. We are looking for deployment in November 2023.

**Mr HOSKING:** Yes, I made some fairly bold statements about SerPro last year, so I am eating humble pie today.

**Mr YAN:** We have not spoken about Odyssey yet.

**Mr HOSKING:** That will be a short conversation.

SerPro is later than otherwise planned. We were heading to a deployment of SerPro just before Christmas last year and put the brakes on for a couple of reasons, one being we needed to go back and do more thorough testing. Our deployment schedule last year was hard up against the Christmas break. If you need to extend even a week or two at that time of year, your trip into Christmas, which means your ability to train and get everyone ready is impaired.

I should stress that SerPro will go live Territory-wide in one day. It is not a phased deployment like Acacia. There are 1,900 users in a big bang, and we have to train everyone.

**Mr YAN:** Sunday lunch.

**Mr HOSKING:** Yes, the quietest time of the week. Who would have thought?

We took a decision to defer the go-live. Rather than crash ahead, we thought we needed to spend a little more time. We spent the January–February period on some reanalysis of our planning. We were in constant contact with our colleagues in the South Australia Police, who use the same system. They had a troubled go-live where they rushed their training and made a few shortcuts to hit a time frame. They made some errors and had to go back and retrain everyone, which was incredibly disruptive.

Having engaged closely with the South Australia Police, we seconded several of its experts to the Territory, and they are working in our project team now. That is both IT and sworn officer expertise. We have several of them on secondment here. We had them critique our planning for go-live, and one of the first things they said was that we had not allowed enough time for training and were, again, pushing to meet a time frame.

We have extended our timing for training. Initially we were planning multimodal training—a combination of classroom, online and self-paced training. We have also been consulting carefully through our sworn officer colleagues with the NT Police Association, and there is a strong preference from the uniformed officers to have—excuse the expression—‘bums on seats’ training for hands-on instruction. We have agreed to that. All this means it will take us a bit more time to get all those 1,800 or 1,900 users ready.

We have recast all that and set a date to go live in November. We are achieving our weekly and monthly deliverables to get there. I am pleased to report that on this Monday coming we start user acceptance testing.

It is not just the software being delivered by our software partners, Niche. As SerPro integrates into 17 other IT systems, some national and some local, it is a digital ecosystem around law and order. That means we have 34 different real-time interfaces to those other 17 systems. Each one exchanges information in a two-way data exchange. All that has been built, tested and is good to go.

We start user acceptance testing on Monday when we will have a bunch of coppers who will sit and use it to do the types of tasks they do every day. Once we complete the testing, so long as we do not identify too many things that need a rework, we will move into a three-month training exercise.

To give you some context on that, we have around a dozen different disciplines to train because every police officer, or user, has to do foundation training to learn how to do the basics. Then we have role-specific training, whether they are a supervisor, investigations, watch house, prosecutions, forensics, property crime, et cetera. We have scheduled and booked in 5,532 training sessions between now and go-live. Police officers are rostered and locked in for those. I have around 15 police officers working in the project team and a whole new cohort coming on board in the next little while to do the user acceptance testing. We plan to be live on 27 November, just in time for Christmas.

Although it has been uncomfortable to have to pause and recut that, I am confident. I meet with the project team every week. I was in its building this morning, and the sense of optimism amongst the team and the police officers who work there is terrific. I think the learning we got from South Australia and actually putting a pause on it, going back and replanning it, doing it again and spending the time—similar to the remarks I made about Acacia—while that has extended our time frame—we would prefer that had not happened—getting it right is the thing we will be measured on the most.

Because we have to go live on one day, the training is scheduled in every regional centre around the Territory—cops are coming in from the bush stations and doing their training, getting it right the day we go live. We have to get it right because we do not get a second chance at this. Initially we might have done a small region and then built up to a big one because ...

**Mr YAN:** How is your budget looking at the moment for it?

**Mr HOSKING:** That has caused some strain, I think, in the reporting period.

**Mr YAN:** We had \$45m for the budget.

**Mr HOSKING:** Yes, \$45m was the Cabinet allocation. We have exceeded that by \$1.5m. On 31 March the spend was \$46.5m, and we still have a little way to go obviously to get to November. So far we have addressed that shortfall by absorbing it within the DCDD base budget. I mentioned the \$10m saving from the Care project which obviously we only get to repurpose once. I am not looking to count it twice here. That was distributed between Acacia and SerPro, and between that we are looking to carry forward a small surplus that we have in our 30 June year-end projection.

I am confident at this stage we can get to the go-live in November. We will be running on fumes by then, but we will not have had to seek any additional funding from the government. We will have had to scrimp and save internally within DCDD.

**Mr YAN:** Do you have a projected spend?

**Mr HOSKING:** I think we will end up about \$10m over; that is my best estimation today. Between the surplus for Care and what we can repurpose internally from within our overall agency budget we can absorb that. The agreement I have with the Police Commissioner is that DCDD will wear the financial implications of that from our base budget. The Police department is supplying all of the sworn officer resources to the project. Those numbers go up significantly between now and November, which is paid for from within the police department, and that obviously is challenging for Police because of the focus on frontline policing.

We try hard to get sworn officer participation in the project—sometimes from police officers who might have been off crook and cannot return to full active duty; they might be on desk duty, workers compensation or return-to-work arrangements. We make the best use of those. The Police Commissioner has been helpful in keeping the sworn officer component embedded in the project. My department has been able to manage the funding implications to date. Hitting that November time frame is imperative. We will get there but only just.

**Mr CHAIR:** Knowing the budget implication and the overspend, justifiable as you have already put, these will create an efficiency long term in the police operations day to day. Is that what we are seeing with this system by emigrating all their PROMIS?

**Mr HOSKING:** The business case that was signed off to approve the investment—I guess an inherent feature of that is it would be better than the old system, but to be fair, the business case and the decision government took to fund it was a risk-based one. The existing PROMIS system is fragile; it has failed once before, and we have had to basically restore it. The investment in SerPro was primarily based on addressing legacy technology debt. We accept that a modern contemporary policing system that is used all over the world should deliver a whole bunch of benefits. To be frank, it was the risk of PROMIS failing that was the business argument.

**Mr CHAIR:** Anecdotally, if you look at Defence's LAN200 \$1.5bn program, they found efficiencies through digital integration, so I think it will.

**Mr YAN:** Veritas and Odyssey—last year in Estimates you said that Veritas is on track to go live in the fourth quarter of that year. Did you make that date? If you did not, why, and what is your new go-live date?

**Ms AH KIT:** This one is a bit tricky. I will pass it to the Chief Executive to clarify.

**Mr HOSKING:** When those remarks were made at Estimates last year, we were on track to achieve and go live. Unfortunately we ran into a technical problem in the software within the Odyssey system.

Noting that it is already used in civil courts and the NT Civil and Administrative Tribunals, for criminal courts, which was the Veritas piece we were working on, the Odyssey system is licenced by an American software firm. We had a technical issue—which will sound a little silly but is important—where the date format in the system, while it had been localised for Australia, would revert to the American date format.

Where we use day and month, natively it is month and then day. That was one of the customisations we needed to apply to the system and, unfortunately, when we were getting closer to the go-live, it kept failing testing because the date format would revert to the American presentation. When you are dealing with a custodial system, it is a big deal.

We were working with the software vendor to try to rectify that because, while it sounds fairly superficial, it proved incredibly difficult to fix in a programming sense. We ended up using our commercial powers under the contract to put the project into suspension. We engaged independent technical experts to review the software because we became increasingly concerned that it was a design flaw in the actual software that was deeply embedded in the way it had been originally designed and built, and we were not sure it could be remedied. This would not have boded well, because we were close to the actual go-live and had invested a lot of effort in it.

We had an external third party undertake that review, and I am pleased to report they diagnosed the problem. It was a fairly deeply embedded design flaw in the software, but the vendor took that on board, we went through a commercial negotiation process and they agreed to the remediation proposed by the independent experts. We have taken that on and are in the process of applying those fixes now.

The project was basically put on hold while these technical remedial actions were taken. The challenge now, as you can see from the discussion this afternoon, is that this year is a peak year for DCDD in terms of project delivery. We had Care go live in March; we have Acacia going into Royal Darwin Hospital shortly; we have SerPro in November; we have a new digital invoice system going live in September; and there has been discussion around a rostering system for police.

We are at the point where this technical issue has been resolved, and I am in discussions with the Attorney-General's department about restarting Veritas. The challenge we have at the moment is picking a sensible spot to reintroduce that body of work with all the other work we have going on. I am mindful of not creating a



resourcing risk where we stretch our teams too thin. The Chief Executive of the AG's department and I are in discussions about the timing to restart that, but we have not nailed down a time frame yet.

I am extremely relieved that we were able to address the inherent deficiency in the software. For a while I was not sure we would be able to, and that would have been a showstopper for us. We have managed to get past that.

**Mr YAN:** I know the complexity of dealing with any interface with IJIS.

I want to touch on the police electronic rostering system. That is a project that has popped up now with DCDD. How is that development tracking? This was announced recently to assist police in allocating resources across the Territory.

**Ms AH KIT:** I would not call e-rostering a contentious issue, but it is one that has been around for a while. I understand that police are currently using 50 or so Excel spreadsheets to try to manage their rostering system. I give them kudos on trying to make something work with that. We are looking at creating a digital e-rostering system later this year. In regard to the minister for Police being able to allocate resources for the e-rostering, we believe we have found a way where we can deliver both of those.

I will muddle it up, so I will hand over to Chris Hosking.

**Mr HOSKING:** Yes, the police e-rostering system was initially kicked off by the Police department and handed over to DCDD in 2022. We tendered for a solution that was contested by a bunch of vendors globally. We awarded a contract in the second half of last year to a vendor called Kronos, which is a leading industry rostering software provider in hospitals and law-and-order environments ...

**Mr YAN:** I know Kronos.

**Mr HOSKING:** Yes, it is used by the South Australia and New South Wales Police and is used in ambulance services and those sorts of things. It is an industry leader.

We have been working with the vendor to get the system configured for the way police rostering is done in the Territory. As the minister stated, there are 50 different arrangements, and some of them are being managed in fairly manual ways.

To expedite the delivery of that solution, we recently revised our plans slightly in order to get as many of the police commands in there as quickly as we possibly can. Ideally, you would start with the smaller ones and work your way through to the more complex ones and learn the lessons along the way. Because we are very keen to get many police officers into it so that we can get some better intelligence and reporting about scheduling, we have recently changed our delivery approach and will be concentrating the first rollouts into the general duties policing in Darwin and Alice Springs. We will work as hard as humanly possible to get them on this calendar year before Christmas.

**Mr YAN:** Do you have a go-live date?

**Mr HOSKING:** I do not have it off the top of my head. Literally the decision to recast that delivery approach has been taken only in the last two weeks. I have a project team that doing all the scheduling of the tasks that sit behind it. My sense is we would probably on-board Darwin before Alice Springs because the logistics are easier in terms of travel. The training burden is a lot less than it is with SerPro where every copper has to use it to do their job ...

**Mr YAN:** You only have to train the people who are doing the rostering.

**Mr HOSKING:** We are putting some adjuncts around that. One of the things I will be working through with the Police Commissioner is positioning. At the moment, the administration of those rosters is done in 50 different places. We will be creating a better central administrative capacity to make that a bit smoother and more central.

**Mr YAN:** Do you have a budget allocation for this project?

**Ms AH KIT:** The project budget is \$2.3m. The spend as at 31 March 2023 is \$370,000.

**Mr YAN:** Okay, so there is plenty more to go. It would be interesting to know an estimated go-live, because I think police would probably like to know when they will get their new rostering system and when they will be able to use that.

**Ms AH KIT:** We are aiming for the end of this calendar year. We want to get it done as soon as possible. I need to be conscious of the level of work that my amazing department is undertaking, but this has turned out to be a tricky IT process to go through and to consider but we understand the many benefits. My objective—and I have been working closely with the minister for Police—is to make sure that when it goes live and we roll it out that police get paid the right amounts. Right now they are manually managed through 50 different types. We need to make sure that when this is good to go, the kinks are ironed out and we can use the system, that police get the right pay on the right pay day.

**Mr YAN:** Trust me minister, you will never iron out the kinks because I have played with one-star electronic rostering and looked at Kronos' implementation into Corrections. There is still a level of manual work that sadly will sit behind the scenes to make these rostering systems work.

**Ms AH KIT:** Thank you for sharing that.

**Mr MALEY:** Mr Hosking mentioned earlier that the other project was scheduled for December and had to roll over because Christmas makes it harder. Do you think that is a risk in relation to this project, getting into mid-December and then having to put it off because of Christmas? Do you think that is a real risk?

**Mr HOSKING:** Short answer is no, much less so in this case because we will prioritise Darwin and Alice Springs general duties commands first, which is by far the largest cohort of police officers. We will do that this year. There will still be a further series of implementations because there are lots of other little pockets of police, and we cannot bring them on all at once. We have to do it sequentially. We will achieve go-live this year, but it will then be progressive as we roll across those other commands.

Because it is done in a progressive way across all of those the number of people who need to use it to set up the rosters or make sure the coppers are rostered is reasonably small and probably less disrupted by Christmas slow down and those sorts of things. We probably would not schedule much in that December–January period because it automatically slows down, but it would just be picking up again at the end of January when school holidays finish. If we were working to a big bang deployment rather than a sequential deployment that would be a problem but, because we are doing it a bit at a time, it is much less an impact.

**Mr BROWN:** In regard to digital projects, can you please provide an update on the recently announced digital connectivity uplift for our schools in the bush.

**Ms AH KIT:** It was exciting for me in my Corporate and Digital Development portfolio to announce with Minister Lawler, as the Minister for Education, our government's commitment to a \$4m over four years to help uplift connectivity for remote schools. There are a number of schools that do not have connectivity at the moment, and it is important that Territory students, no matter where they live, have access to that digital connectivity.

It was great to be at the Open Education Centre talking with the teaching staff in a remote community. Once they have their connectivity, if the teacher is away, somebody in the Darwin office could deliver that class lesson. It is about continuity going forward. There are a number of communities in the Territory that do not have any digital connectivity. This gives us a good starting point. Over four years, \$4m gives us the opportunity to work with schools in remote communities that are not connected and to connect them, working closely with the Department of Education for the planning and the rollout to those communities.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes Output 3.4.

### **Output 3.5 – Data Services**

No questions.

### **Output 3.6 – Digital Communications**

No questions.

### **Output 3.7 – Digital Connectivity and Strategy**

No questions.

## OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

No questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** This concludes consideration of outputs related to the Corporate and Digital Development portfolio.

On behalf of the committee, I thank Mr Hosking for coming in and for the points in the suit-and-tie competition, which I did not know we were participating in. I thank you and all your officers for all their hard work. I understand that Digital Projects is a tough output and you do not know what you are getting into until you get into it. Thanks for coming in today and presenting to the committee.

## NT FLEET

### OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – INCOME

**Mr CHAIR:** Do you have an opening statement?

**Ms AH KIT:** No.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any questions?

**Mr YAN:** What has been the total cost of criminal damage to NT Fleet vehicles for the reporting period? I would like that broken down by region.

**Ms AH KIT:** I have some information here, but please let me know if it is not what you have asked for. One of the written questions that I was provided by you was: what was the replacement cost for vehicles that have been written off due to theft or criminal damage?

**Mr YAN:** No, I am asking for the total cost of criminal damage to NT Fleet vehicles for the reporting period.

**Ms AH KIT:** The answer is \$635,159, GST exclusive.

**Mr YAN:** Are you able to break that down by region?

**Ms AH KIT:** I am happy to take that one on notice.

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### Question on Notice No 9.7

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

**Mr YAN:** Of the \$635,159 in criminal damage to NT Fleet vehicles, can you break that down by region?

**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 9.7.

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**Mr YAN:** How many NT Fleet vehicles have been stolen during the reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** During the reporting period, 43 vehicles.

**Mr YAN:** Was the cost for replacing vehicles written off \$635,159?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes.

**Mr YAN:** How many vehicles have been written off due to criminal damage and/or theft for the reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** Thirteen vehicles.

**Mr YAN:** Do you have a cost for the replacement of those vehicles? I take it that would not come out of the \$635,000?

**Ms AH KIT:** That was the total—\$635,159 is the replacement cost for vehicles that have been written off due to theft or criminal damage.

**Mr MALEY:** How many vehicles have been stolen in the reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** That is 43.

**Mr YAN:** Thirteen vehicles were written off due to criminal damage or theft. How many vehicles have been written off in total for the reporting period?

**Ms AH KIT:** I do not have that figure. I would need to take that question on notice. Would that be for things like road accidents et cetera?

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#### Question on Notice No 9.8

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

**Mr YAN:** How many vehicles have been written off during 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 9.8.

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**Mr YAN:** How many vehicles do we have in the NTG fleet? Could I have that broken down by light and heavy vehicles?

**Ms AH KIT:** For the reporting period to 31 March 2023, there are 922 passenger vehicles and 1,692 light commercial vehicles. For heavy vehicles—so trucks and buses—there are 907.

**Mr YAN:** Out of that fleet total, how many are hybrid vehicles?

**Ms AH KIT:** The total number of hybrid vehicles is 119.

**Mr YAN:** How many are electric vehicles?

**Ms AH KIT:** There are 38 electric vehicles.

**Mr YAN:** That is better than last year. Has NT Fleet worked with the department to install electric charging stations at any NTG building across the Territory?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, my department has been working with DIPL. There are 39 Northern Territory Government EV charging stations and 41 charging points. Specific NT Government buildings include six at Manunda Place in the Darwin CBD; five charging points at Alice Springs Plaza; four charging stations at the Peter MacAulay Centre; two charging stations and two charging points at Charles Darwin Centre; two charging stations and nine charging points at Armidale complex; four charge points at Darwin Corporate Park; four charge points at Development House; two charging points and two charging stations at Jape Homemaker Village; two charging stations at Mwerre House; two charging stations and four charging points at Litchfield house; three charging stations and three charging points at Royal Darwin Hospital; two charging stations and two charging points at Palmerston Regional Hospital; two charging stations at Minerals House; two charging stations and two charging points at the CasCom Centre; four charging stations at the Ben Hammond Complex; two charging stations at the Hudson Creek Power Station; two charging stations and two charging points Kwiyernepe House; one charging station and one charging point Stringybark complex; and two charging stations at the Territory Wildlife Park.

**Mr YAN:** How many executive vehicles are currently electric vehicles?

**Ms AH KIT:** I will have to take that on notice. I was hoping I had it in front of me, but I will take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice No 9.9**

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

**Mr YAN:** How many executive vehicles are electric vehicles?

**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 9.9.

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**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, you have a response to a question on notice?

**Ms AH KIT:** Yes, question on notice 9.4 regarding NTPS training modules.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 9.4**

**Ms AH KIT:** The following online training modules are managed by DCDD and form part of the central training for NT Government employees:

- Appropriate workplace behaviours
- code of conduct
- foundational cross-cultural training
- introduction to ICAC and mandatory reporting
- OneNTG orientation
- executive contract officer orientation
- regional and remote orientation.

The executive contract officer orientation is the only DCDD-managed module that is specific to a position level. The department is developing a cyber security fundamentals online training module that will form essential training for NT Government employees and will be available later this year in 2023.

A further two cyber security online training modules will be available to executives and privileged users.

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**Ms AH KIT:** Mr Chair, I also have a response to question on notice 9.6 about cost of recovery of debt.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 9.6**

**Ms AH KIT:** As at 31 March 2023 the average days to collect debt is 63.5 days for the reporting period. This is measured against invoices created on behalf of NTG by DCDD.

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**Ms AH KIT:** Mr Chair, I also took question on notice 9.5 in regard to procurement costs, advisers and auditors. My department has advised me that a response to this question on notice is not able to be provided during the Estimates session due to its complexity. We need to report back outside of today's hearing, unfortunately. We will get back to you.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes the time allotted for you, minister.

**Ms AH KIT:** I put on the public record my thanks to my agencies, the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities; the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade; and Department of Corporate and Digital Development for all of their preparation for the Estimates period. As a former public servant, I know how many hours go into pulling together briefs. They are appreciated.

To every member of the Estimates Committee, thank you. I know you spend an incredible amount of time preparing, asking questions and sitting in this stuffy little room. Well done; you are almost there.

To all of the DLA staff who have helped to keep the proceeding running, thank you. I hope everybody has tuned in online and heard a lot of questions and answers that have been helpful for them.

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The committee concluded.

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