

The committee convened at 8 am.

Madam CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to today's Estimates hearings.

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

MINISTER BOWDEN'S PORTFOLIOS

INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

Madam CHAIR: Minister, could you please introduce the officials with you.

Mr BOWDEN: I introduce the DIPL team: Chief Executive Officer of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, Andrew Kirkman; Adam Walding, General Manager, Infrastructure, Investment and Contracts; and Fotis Papadakis, the Chief Financial Officer of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. We also have the rest of the team available who will swap in and out because I have taken over an entire desk this morning.

Madam CHAIR: In a minute I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal-related questions before moving on to output-specific areas. I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first, followed by other committee members. If there is a line of questioning from the opposition, the committee has agreed that other members may jump in on that line of questioning.

Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement, if you wish, regarding the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Mr BOWDEN: Madam Chair, I will bypass an opening statement because I want to get to all the outputs.

Madam CHAIR: That is in our hands. If there is no ...

Mr BOWDEN: On indulgence, sorry, Madam Chair, having chaired this a couple of times I know that at the end we rush to thank everyone. I want to say a quick thank you to all the department staff who are here and those who are in the back room in order to ensure that they are acknowledged. I would like to go through them one by one, but we do not have time for that. This is a big department, and a power of work has been done by this team.

Madam CHAIR: I know our officials are wonderful. You have thanked them before, so hopefully they provide you with everything you need, minister.

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

Madam CHAIR: Considering there is no opening statement the committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 that relate to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr MALEY: What actions have DIPL implemented in response to the budget repair strategy that has been ongoing with your government?

Mr BOWDEN: Actions taken on budget repair—is that the Langoulant report?

Mr MALEY: That started it, but there have been some updates. What have you done to repair the budget?

Mr BOWDEN: Having recently assumed this portfolio, it has been a pleasure to work with the team, especially Andrew Kirkman, Chief Executive of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. Andrew was on leave last year and missed Estimates. One of your colleagues was not too happy about that. The Member for Katherine was slightly scathing in the sense that we were hiding the chief executive officer. He had taken leave. Andrew has returned, as you can see, Member for Nelson.

We work closely together with Mr Papadakis and the rest of the team to ensure that our budget and projects are monitored and that we get the best value for money for not only the Northern Territory taxpayer but also the federal government, which funds us extensively for projects and roads—especially in remote—with an 80:20 split.

We are thankful to Catherine King, the federal minister for Infrastructure, who continues to support us. The last time we met in the House I was able to let everyone know that a phone call from Catherine King resulted in another nearly half-a-billion-dollar investment in our roads. That was after some great advocacy by the DIPL group and Rob Lee, who works in our team, and a number of other people who work diligently.

One of the interesting things about this department is the power of work that goes in behind—I hope we get to it later—the revote, because projects take a long time. We were at Tiger Brennan Drive two days ago. Yesterday we announced the banning of gillnets ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, we will allow some latitude, but you have been asked a specific question. Please address that for the committee.

Mr BOWDEN: We were at Tiger Brennan Drive announcing that project, and in the budget there is \$70m-odd. We have monitored it closely with Mr Michael Sitzler and the Sitzler group which is constructing that element of our safer and smoother passage between Palmerston and Darwin. I know that the Member for Nelson enjoys that as he drives in regularly.

Adam Walding, Claire Brown and Andrew Kirkman have a sharp focus on delivering our projects. Notwithstanding that there have been increases in material costs over time and increases in capital costs, the DIPL team have done a good job of ensuring that the DIPL budget—I reiterate that we now have a \$4.4bn infrastructure program moving forward. It will continue to be delivered with a sharp focus on the budget and a sharp focus on the delivery to ensure ...

Mr MALEY: Madam Chair, my question was specific: what actions have DIPL taken to repair the budget? I cannot see how this answer relates to that whatsoever.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, we allow some latitude, and we have had a positive committee hearing so far. Please be specific. The members have a lot of questions. You obviously have a hugely important portfolio in the Northern Territory, and we would like as much time as possible to talk about the issues that are important. Please seek some advice from the officials with you. The member asked a specific question.

Mr BOWDEN: Action taken on budget repair was the question. I am not sure how specific that is. I am trying to answer the question.

Mr MALEY: What actions have you taken to repair the budget?

Mr BOWDEN: Mr Andrew Kirkman, Mr Papadakis, Mr Walding and the officials have a sharp and clear focus on the budget. Our projects come in and we monitor them over time. Tiger Brennan is a \$165m project and the Sitzler group have monitored it closely. Two days ago Michael Sitzler said that they are doing double shifts to deliver the project. It is important that I make the point about the projects and the team which does the work behind the scenes to ensure that we deliver these projects.

Mr KIRKMAN: In terms of budget repair, the key priority that this agency was tasked with was effectively streamlining infrastructure delivery across government. That is the amalgamation of infrastructure positions across all agencies into DIPL for cost efficiency across government and to ensure that we have a streamlined asset management process for all our assets—not any one particular agency—across government and a streamlined and consistent prioritisation of investment decisions in relation to when we invest in new assets. Predominantly that was DIPL's role, following both the Langoulant report and key outcomes for budget repair. I am pleased that has gone very well.

In terms of our own budget, we did a detailed zero-based budgeting exercise a number of years ago which was led by our CFO, Fotis Papadakis. That set us up for ongoing years, including recent years, to ensure that we kept on our personnel and operational budgets.

Mr Walding, who heads up Infrastructure, Investment and Contracts, led that amalgamation across government. It is a key piece. Not much is heard about it, but we have been successful in setting up government for an efficient strategic asset management framework across agencies and a far more consistent prioritisation framework in terms of when we invest in new assets for any particular agency.

Mr WALDING: As we did the amalgamation, we created two main teams ...

Mr MALEY: What is the amalgamation?

Mr WALDING: The staff who came in from the agencies. The machinery-of-government change happened three years ago. One of the recommendations was that there be a centralised service provided by DIPL for the provision of infrastructure delivery.

We created the portfolio teams, which are the main linkage between DIPL and each of the agencies. They monitor and manage the budget allocations for the minor new works and the repairs and maintenance program. They also provide oversight of the capital works program for each of those agencies to make sure there is a consistent approach across government and that we have consistent processes and systems. It also makes sure that we prioritise the right work at the right point in time.

The other part of the work we did was on asset management. We created an asset management framework to start getting consistency so that the assets we deliver are the right assets at the right time. We work closely with the Infrastructure Commissioner in her space in this area on the infrastructure plans and pipelines.

The asset management framework looks at all sorts of things, such as the condition of our assets to identify whether repairs and maintenance should be prioritised based on risk and the condition of each asset. We do that over a three-year period, so we do 33% each year. We inspect all the assets and get a condition report. That information feeds into the repairs and maintenance program, which helps prioritise where the work goes. That is an efficiency in itself, making sure that the money goes to the right spot. All this is through the portfolio teams to make sure that we have consultation with the agencies on the way through.

Another piece of work we are doing is the strategic infrastructure plans, which is working with the agencies with their operational objectives to start prioritising what new or replacement infrastructure or alternatives to infrastructure solutions there are to meet their strategic objectives. As agencies' assets need replacing or there are new initiatives, we work with the agency to look at what that right solution is. Is it an infrastructure solution? Is there another solution where we can repurpose a building?

A lot of those works are done at agency level. It is not promoted widely throughout the piece. It is a business-as-usual practice and good practice to create the efficiency.

Mr MALEY: I am asking what actions have been taken. You have given us one. Is that all you have done?

Mr WALDING: That is not all. That is a substantial piece of work.

Mr MALEY: I accept that and I will ask more questions about it. Let us put that aside.

Minister, what else have you done to implement a budget repair strategy?

Mr BOWDEN: Budget repair strategy is a broad question, and you are saying it is specific and easy. Mr Walding is outlining the number of projects, changes and all that has gone into machinery of government. I would like him to continue.

Mr MALEY: I accept and understand that. That is one, so let us go to number two. What other actions have you done?

Mr KIRKMAN: In terms of the department's own contribution to budget repair, we undertook a detailed zero-based budgeting exercise that looks at every position in the department, what they are getting paid, whether they are at the right levels and whether we have the organisational structure correct. We looked at all our payments that went out to ensure that we could fit within the frame of the appropriation that is provided to the department.

Mr Papadakis has been able to keep us on track with that in terms of fitting within budget over a number of years. We have been successful in staying within our budget in an operational sense. That was a key piece of work for our agency to make sure we did our bit, individually, to accord with the budget repair work.

Beyond that, there was broader cross-agency work tasked to the agency. That was the amalgamation of all infrastructure-related positions into this agency to ensure that we had a streamlined and across-government view on strategic asset management.

Mr MALEY: Is that work completed now?

Mr KIRKMAN: It is in terms of the amalgamation. We did that in two stages. All agencies other than Housing came in approximately five years ago. The Housing repairs and maintenance and asset delivery team joined the department a year or two after that. The amalgamation has been fully completed and all those positions are in the agency.

The strategic asset management team is doing business-as-usual work. Needless to say, it is an ongoing piece of work to continue to improve our systems and the way we work across government.

Mr BOWDEN: The size of the DIPL budget is a key contributor to economic growth in the Northern Territory. Gross state product has grown by 2.3% in 2024–25. Treasury is predicting that it will grow and accelerate to 7.1%. To your question on budget repair, DIPL is one of the biggest employers in the Northern Territory.

Going back to the Tiger Brennan overpass, where we were the other day, there are 32 apprentices employed there. That is someone who will get a job for life because those skills are jobs for life. There were 200-odd small businesses subcontracted. There have been 1,200 workers there.

There is not just the cost side to the department; it is also contributing to the economy. We continue to grow employment. Unemployment is very low. The multiplier effect of the budget that is within DIPL—which is managed well by Mr Kirkman, Mr Walding and Mr Papadakis—is also about growing our economy, which we want to do. I will continue to work closely with the federal government because we continue to need these projects.

Member for Nelson, I am not sure whether you recall that the Darwin Major Business Group presented an economic review that talked about public and private working together. The public expenditure, which predominantly has been within the DIPL program, has continued to lead the way. It is not just keeping the Territory working; it is keeping individuals working and training individuals.

There is a laser-like focus from Mr Papadakis, as you just heard, on the costs and the management of those contracts.

This is a multifactorial agency. It cannot be isolated in one area. As we continue to develop and grow as a Territory, the infrastructure program at \$4.4bn is an absolute significant contributor to our economy. That is all part of the bigger picture when we look at the economy, growth and the way that is managed. Mr Kirkman and his team are directly involved in that.

There have been changes to the machinery of government. The machinery of government is all of government; there is a number of portfolios within the government. There is a number that I am responsible for. They all interlock and intersect. In fact, we saw that yesterday. I hope we get to some of the questions about infrastructure for fishing. Whether it is Dundee Beach or Shady Camp, the infrastructure put into that is a multiplier because we know that people go fishing. We know that when someone has a job ...

Mr MALEY: Can we move on? I want to talk about staffing. Mr Kirkman mentioned positions. Do you have a plan for that?

Mr BOWDEN: You asked a question ...

Mr MALEY: I accept your answer.

Mr BOWDEN: I have not finished.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will let the minister finish his answer, but I appreciate that it has started to go off the budget now and he is talking about fishing again.

Mr MALEY: I will have questions about fishing later, so you can save all that for then.

Mr BOWDEN: I really hope there are because yesterday we made a strong announcement about increasing our rec fishing industry. That is also relevant because it is not in isolation.

We have come here today and we have Output Group 1.0 and we are looking at the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, but I think that such a narrow focus from you is probably not reflective of the amount of work that goes into DIPL and the number of people who work ...

Mr MALEY: You were saying that my question is broad, so now is it narrow?

Mr BOWDEN: Your focus is narrow. This is a ...

Mr MALEY: I am talking about questions. We are talking about actions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No back and forth, please. Let us just finish this question, then we can get on to the next question.

Mr BOWDEN: Mr Papadakis manages it closely. Mr Kirkman, Mr Walding and Ms Brown all manage their areas with a laser-like focus. We meet weekly to go through it and we analyse the data.

It is also about growing the economy. This is an important part; DIPL is a key driver to growing the economy. Our revenue base is not large, so we have to continue to grow the economy. The multiplier effect of an infrastructure project is significant. You should take that into consideration.

Mr MALEY: According to my calculations, DIPL staff numbers grew by about 22% between 2016 and 2022, yet there seems to be a reduction in program expenditure. Can you explain that?

Mr BOWDEN: Are you saying that program expenditure has reduced?

Mr MALEY: That is my understanding. I will go on to measuring KPIs. Have you done any surveys in relation to key industry groups about the performance of DIPL? I know that ICAC did a report about the Katherine office, which I will talk about later. Putting that aside, am I correct in my calculations that staff numbers grew by about 22% between 2016 and 2022?

Mr BOWDEN: Should we just deal with the FTE question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr BOWDEN: This question comes up every year.

Mr KIRKMAN: Our staff numbers have gone up in recent years. Largely that is the result of the amalgamation of infrastructure positions from other agencies that we mentioned. A large number of staff from Housing, which undertakes property management services, now work for the agency. A number of other positions across agencies that related to infrastructure are in the department. Yes, numbers have gone up.

In respect to your question about program expenditure, I presume you are referring to personnel costs. I do not have the figures in front of me for past years to present, but I have no doubt they have gone up in accordance with the numbers of staff that have increased in the department.

Mr MALEY: As part of measuring the department's KPIs, have there been any surveys done with key industry groups in relation to the satisfaction of DIPL's performance in reacting and interacting with these key groups?

Mr BOWDEN: Since assuming this role eight months ago, being entrusted with it by the Chief Minister, I have met with so many groups and worked with them and had almost a review of the department, being a fresh set of eyes that has come in.

The Darwin Major Business Group was one that effectively reviewed the infrastructure program over time. One of the good things that came out of that—it would be remiss of me not to mention it—is that 95% of our contracts go to local contractors.

Mr MALEY: I have questions about that as well. You talked about the Major Business Group; was there not a report saying that unless something happens ...

Mr BOWDEN: Sorry, Member for Nelson, I have not finished answering that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, let the minister finish and then away we will go.

Mr MALEY: Do you want a cup of tea?

Mr BOWDEN: Would you like a cup of tea? I have nearly finished my coffee.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Let us keep going.

Mr MALEY: You can talk with your mouth full.

Mr BOWDEN: Some would say with a mouth full of marbles underwater, but I could not dare comment.

A large number of written questions submitted by you and others have gone to a number of these different areas and surveys and KPIs. The work we have done in consulting in such a small jurisdiction is never-ending. I am sure you know that if you go down the street for a cup of coffee, to the Coolalinga Tavern or to Cafe Bellissimo in your region, someone will want to talk to you about something relevant in their field. Regardless of whether it is directly relevant to your shadow portfolio or electorate, I am confident that many people come to you to give you that feedback.

Mr KIRKMAN: We meet and consult extensively with industry stakeholders—civil contractors of the NT, Master Builders, Property Council, UDIA et cetera. We set up regular meetings with them and forums to ensure that there is a free flow of information from industry members to the department and to senior executives in the department to ensure that if there are any concerns raised by the industry, we take those on. We are clear and understand that industry is our partner in the delivery of infrastructure across the Territory. We need to be close and in sync with them, so we meet regularly and stay in close contact. If any of those leads from industries approach me directly with concerns that is dealt with fairly quickly.

We do not survey them as such; we prefer that face-to-face contact. Mr Walding meets with the broader group of Master Builders quite regularly in open forums and discusses issues that members have with the way the department might do procurement or how we roll out our contracts. There are then discussions about how we can improve those services. Claire Brown, Bob Pemble and others meet regularly with the civil contractors as well for the same reasons, to understand whether there are things that are not working for industry members and how we can improve our interaction and our delivery of contracts to industry. Therefore, I am confident we know their views on most of what we do.

Mr MALEY: The answer is you do not do any surveys; you just have open ongoing discussions with key industry groups.

Mr BOWDEN: We continually survey the local environment. In fact, we have a number of areas. Procurement is an interesting part of the plan going forward ...

Mr MALEY: When did you do your last survey?

Mr BOWDEN: Denys Stedman, who is the Buy Local advocate for procurement, is a chief example of someone who is consistently surveying the market and providing us feedback. We have changes in the procurement board that will be a procurement appeals board going forward. There is a constant feedback loop.

Member for Nelson, you might remember my example of going to Bellissimo Cafe in your region and having a cup of coffee and getting immediate feedback. The Territory jurisdiction being so small enables that feedback. Not only does that occur, but also I have met with the Property Council of Australia a number of times, Master Builders and a number of different industry groups like HIA.

I will use the term 'laser-like focus' again. Because we are so small the feedback loop is very small and quick. If someone is not happy most people have my number or your number, so they can give feedback quickly.

Mr MALEY: How many building projects completed by DIPL underwent a post-occupancy evaluation with the clients?

Mr BOWDEN: Was that post-occupancy?

Mr MALEY: Yes. You build something and the project is completed and handed over. How many post-occupancy evaluations have been done with the client?

Mr BOWDEN: Elements of that are with Lands and Planning.

Mr WALDING: Yes, we have done a few. It has not happened on all the projects. At the moment we have started to roll it out on some key projects.

One example that comes straight to mind—I do not have the exact numbers—is the Dripstone Middle School STEAM building. We did a post-occupancy to engage with the client—which was Education obviously, and the school—to get feedback on how they found the process and the outcome and to make sure that we ticked the functional brief. We did some works at Taminmin and others.

Part of the strategic asset management framework, which I referred to earlier, is to start rolling it out so that it is more of a common action to do the post-project evaluation. We definitely want and need to do that for lessons learned and project improvement as we push forward. We are moving into more of that.

Mr MALEY: How does DIPL measure not just the expenditure value but also the value-for-money outcomes on projects?

Mr KIRKMAN: As we work through contracts—obviously there is a lot of work—most of the value-for-money piece for the work that we deliver, particularly for standard design and construct-type contracts, is done up-front. We will get an estimator to give us an indication of what a project is likely to cost. If we are concerned about the level of funding required we might go further into the design of that asset to ensure that we will have a better cost estimate. It provides us an indication of the likely cost that will come in from industry for tenders.

We then go to tender, and generally it is an open tender where the market will vie for building that asset. That provides us with the best indication of value in terms of how we will get delivery of the asset.

There is a number of criteria we look at when we consider who is best placed to deliver the asset when they put in a tender. It is not just about money; it is about value to the Territory. As you may be aware, Member for Nelson, there is criteria for local content of 30% in all our contracts, unless we have an exemption or a particular reason for not including that. Generally, there is a 30% requirement for local content which looks at that organisation's commitment to the Territory in terms of delivery of apprentices, engagement with the Aboriginal workforce, whether they are localised to the area in which the building is done and various other elements.

There is a number of other elements we look at, such as looking back at some of their performance scorecards on previous contracts and feedback from project managers on their performance in previous contracts to determine whether we believe what the tenderer says in their tender submission is accurate.

There is a number of ways we can look at how we get best value for the Territory out of those tenders.

Mr BOWDEN: There is 95% or more contracts going to local contractors, so there is value for money in that element, which goes into our economy. We will build a road that will give a community access to good food quicker and medical assistance, should that be required. That is value for money to the Territory. It will not be a toll road, like in Melbourne or Sydney where someone will make money out of it, but it is connecting the Northern Territory and helping people get access to the major centres. If people live remote they should have that access and have a road to drive into town. In the Wet Season, when people get cut off, the costs are a huge burden on people for them to get into town.

We are building as many roads as we can. We plan to seal the Central Arnhem Road over time. There is \$209m in the budget to start sealing that 650 kilometres. That may not be value for money in some Deloitte Access Economics ROI or other, but it might allow the Gove region, which is going through a transition, to have greater access, so they might have more tourists come in or have more people travel on a regular basis which will open up their economy.

It is multifactorial and intersects. I am here with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, but in my portfolios of Tourism and Recreational Fishing there is a lot of value for money from projects that are delivered by the DIPL team.

Mr MALEY: What is the value for money for Gunn Point Road, being \$50m or so? How is that value for money for Territorians?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I remind you that we are looking at the appropriation bill which looks forward.

Mr MALEY: I am, but I am picking up on what the minister said about value for money for roads. I accept the Arnhem road, but Gunn Point Road seems to be going to a dead end. What was the value for money for that \$50m?

Mr BOWDEN: It is difficult to measure the value to the community. Some might say—Christine Lagarde from the IMF has talked about this extensively during her time there—it is the externalities within the community. Gunn Point Road was built a number of cycles back, and we are talking about this current budget.

I emphasise that some of our projects, if you use Deloitte Access Economics or KPMG, will not spit out a massive ROI. It is for our community. As we continue to try to rectify the infrastructure deficit that we have with the number of unsealed roads and with the number of communities that get blocked off or locked out, over time we will be able to get value for Territorians. As access to healthcare, fresh food and tourism spots increases over time, that will grow our economy. It is hard to measure, I get that.

Gunn Point Road was in a previous budget. However, we continue to invest in roads across the board, and the federal government accepts that. That is why they support us. When Catherine King makes a phone call and says, 'Here is approximately another half-a-billion dollars for your roads program', I punch the air and thank the Lord that we have a good relationship with the federal government which continues to bear fruit for us, because we have that infrastructure deficit.

Mr MALEY: We are talking about value for money for roads and looking forward. Why is the Mereenie Loop not listed in the budget papers? Would that not increase tourism for Central Australia?

Mr BOWDEN: The Mereenie Loop is close to my heart. I grew up in Alice Springs ...

Mr MALEY: Did you?

Mr BOWDEN: I did. I went to OLSH on Bath Street ...

Mr MALEY: I do not care.

Mr BOWDEN: They were formative years. I went to the Catholic high after that ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: He is talking about Central Australia.

Mr BOWDEN: One of my teachers was Mr Battersby. He was very good. Mr Magic was another English teacher ...

Mr MALEY: Seriously, I am happy to have a bit of banter, but talking about your schoolteachers is ridiculous. We are here at Estimates, and this is an important issue. Territorians want to know ...

Mr BOWDEN: Member for Nelson, you asked whether I grew up in Alice Springs.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: He is answering the question, and I appreciate there is a Central Australian angle.

Mr BOWDEN: You were doubting whether I grew up in Alice Springs. I just illustrated to you ...

Mr MALEY: Territorians are listening to you. I just remind you of that.

Mr BOWDEN: They know that I grew up in Alice Springs and that I am a Territorian and I love the Territory. You are talking about something specific that supports Alice Springs and tourism ...

Mr MALEY: Can you move on to Mereenie Loop?

Mr BOWDEN: We will get to the Tourism department in Alice Springs later in the day with DITT, Shaun Drabsch and Scott Lovett.

The Mereenie Loop will add value to the tourism sector in and around Alice Springs. We hope that the Outback Way or Mereenie Loop when it is complete will lift that drive up to be one of the great drives of Australia.

Mr MALEY: Why is it not listed in the budget papers?

Mr BOWDEN: It is not happening overnight. We have gone out with the Mereenie Loop for a smaller section. Part of it is that we will be putting in about \$400m.

I spoke to Danial Rochford recently. He had just been to Uluru for the first flight that came from Melbourne with Virgin. He said that he has never seen so many caravans on the road at this point in time. This is Danial Rochford, the head of Tourism Central Australia. With our Million Dollar Road Trip coming around and the increase happening, we will see an influx of caravans and camper trailers ...

Mr MALEY: Can you tell us where the Mereenie Loop is listed in your budget papers? There needs to be relevance. It has been 45 minutes and we have been talking about schoolteachers.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, the minister is answering the question. He is talking about tourism and the interface with Uluru. The Mereenie Loop is part of that.

Mr MALEY: The question is: why is the Mereenie Loop not listed in the budget papers?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: He is answering the question. If I think he is going way off track I will pull him back in. We have done that this morning.

Mr BOWDEN: The design is under way and a tender will be released in due course. I will double-check, as I am pretty sure that the Mereenie Loop is in the budget. We are starting that.

Mr KIRKMAN: We have been working extensively with stakeholders in Central Australia, particularly the Central Land Council, on the works for Mereenie Loop. I am happy to say that we have extensive funding now for the Mereenie Loop. You will see part of that in the budget and even in the Commonwealth budget since, quite a significant amount has been announced as well.

Mr MALEY: Can you take us to where that is in the budget?

Mr KIRKMAN: It is listed under the Strategic Roads Package that is highlighted in the budget. It is part of \$415m in the partnership for that package.

Mr MALEY: How much is specifically for that road? You said it is part of the \$415m. How much is earmarked for the Mereenie Loop?

Mr BOWDEN: The Mereenie Loop is not just one road. It goes through a number of different Aboriginal lands. There are, and will be, some complex negotiations involved. The total for the Mereenie Loop is proposed at \$196m and that is for the upgrade. It is also part of the \$415m strategic roads upgrade. I hope we get to revote, because projects do not get budgeted or funded and then built in that 12 months. This project will take more than 12 months. Currently, there is \$196m proposed within the \$415m Strategic Roads Package.

Mr MALEY: What about the funding for Santa Teresa Road? Is that in the budget?

Mr BOWDEN: I did not do an opening statement because I wanted to get to the outputs. Now we are stuck on whole of government. There are specific outputs regarding roads and Santa Teresa Road.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to answer these questions in the roads output?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, if you have specific roads questions we will get to that point, given that we have a specific output, where you will have plenty of opportunity to ask those questions. We remain on whole of government.

Mr MALEY: Page 77 of Budget Paper No 3 shows that there is a new initiative for repairs and maintenance of \$30m. However, it seems that if you examine the budget papers more the actual expenditure for repairs and maintenance in 2023–24 was \$232m. The key existing initiative for 2024–25 is \$210m, so it has gone down with a cut of approximately \$22m. Does that not mean that the so-called new initiative of \$30m is simply restoring repairs and maintenance to the level of 2023–24?

Mr BOWDEN: I was going to answer the Santa Teresa Road question until the Member for Nelson asked a subsequent question ...

Mr MALEY: Please do.

Mr BOWDEN: The Chair asked and I said that I would answer it.

Mr MALEY: I am confused. I thought she asked whether you wanted to move it to the roads section and you said yes. Answer the Teresa question, and then we will go to this one. You have that in front of you.

Mr BOWDEN: No problem.

Construction has been completed on a seven-kilometre section of Santa Teresa Road as early works. To make sure we get all the numbers right, I will hand to Chief Executive Andrew Kirkman for stage one and stage two. We have been working diligently on this. I know the community of Santa Teresa wants that road sealed.

Then, Madam Chair, if it is okay we can put the roads into the specific outputs because we have lands, planning and roads, which is the second part of this.

Mr KIRKMAN: We have progressively put through a number of funding applications for Santa Teresa. We have been progressively sealing Santa Teresa Road over a number of years. Clearly, being one of the closest communities to Alice Springs, we are keen to see that sealed all the way through. That road, for complete sealing, has been funded through the Australian and NT Governments under the Strategic Roads Package as well. Part of that \$415m that we discussed was also supporting Mereenie Loop. There is \$70m in total that is now available to complete the seal for Santa Teresa, which is great news for the community.

Mr MALEY: Seven kilometres is done now. When is the next stage happening?

Mr BOWDEN: The company Fyfe has been awarded the design contract for the 20.3 to the 44.2 kilometre. We also have the expected completion in October, and there is the subsequent 44.2 to the 62 kilometre. I will hand to Andrew Kirkman and he can give some more specifics. If it is okay, Madam Chair, then we may hold other road questions for the roads output.

Madam CHAIR: If the shadow is comfortable with that.

Mr KIRKMAN: We are looking to do the seal over the next two stages, as the minister pointed out. We are looking to finalise—sorry, Member for Nelson, could you repeat the timing you are chasing?

Mr MALEY: For this year in this budget cycle, what is the money for Santa Teresa Road?

Mr KIRKMAN: Predominantly design work is happening this financial year. We sealed the latest stage which was finished in February this year. That was a seven-kilometre section of the road. The next 43 kilometres will be designed, as mentioned, over the coming months. We would hope by early next year that the design is complete and we go to market.

Mr MALEY: You said early next year. When do you anticipate work actually starting on the road? We have a Wet Season and a Dry Season. If you release a tender in, let us say, March next year—I am picking a date there; you can correct me if I am wrong—that means by the time it gets in and is assessed it will not be until later in the year when the Wet Season will be upon us ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Sorry, Member for Nelson; we do not have a Wet Season in Central Australia or a Dry Season come to think of it.

Mr MALEY: You get a rainy season.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, we do not.

Mr BOWDEN: Member for Nelson, you did not grow up in Alice Springs.

Mr MALEY: I did not. I am assuming there is a rainy season in Alice Springs—I will not call it the Wet Season—which will slow things up. When do you anticipate work will start on that section of road?

Mr BOWDEN: There is not a Wet Season in Alice Springs or a rainy season. The floods sometimes come at Christmas or Easter. The 1988 flood was at Easter, and the most recent deluges over the last couple of years have been over the Christmas period.

Mr MALEY: That is our Wet Season, Christmas to Easter.

Mr BOWDEN: Not in Central Australia, Member for Nelson.

Madam CHAIR: I will bring the committee back to the fact we are discussing the infrastructure budget, not the weather. If there are no further questions we can adjourn and discuss the weather.

Mr KIRKMAN: As mentioned, we are largely designing this financial year. We expect the first stage, between 20 and 44 kilometres of that chainage along Santa Teresa Road, will be designed by the end of this calendar year. That means we can then go to market and tender for the work. I expect that will take a few months and before the end of this financial year we will have construction started on that first stage.

Mr MALEY: In the budget paper on page 77 there is a new initiative of \$30m for repairs and maintenance; however, in the budget line for repairs and maintenance there is a cut of approximately \$22m. Does that mean that the new initiative of \$30m is bringing repairs and maintenance back to the level of 2023–24 of \$232,154,000?

Mr BOWDEN: Madam Chair, we talked about sticking to the outputs ...

Mr MALEY: We are talking about the whole of government.

Mr BOWDEN: Repairs and maintenance ...

Mr MALEY: This is about budget spending and line budgets.

Mr BOWDEN: Madam Chair, I wonder if we want to go to specific outputs and get to the repairs and maintenance. I am happy to take the question at this time, but I will take your lead on this.

Madam CHAIR: With some ministers, we have not got to the outputs but stayed in the general questions. It is up to the consideration of the committee members.

Mr BOWDEN: I would like to get to the outputs because we have Lands and Planning; Tourism; Recreational Fishing; and International Education. We have a big agenda today.

Are you talking about page 77 and a \$30m expenditure for repairs and maintenance?

Mr MALEY: In the budget paper on page 77 under new initiatives—which I assume is a good news story you are trying to sell to Territorians—there is a whole-of-government repairs and maintenance program of \$30m. In reality, further down the budget line, repairs and maintenance has been cut by approximately \$22m. Is the new initiative you have announced and are trying to sell to Territorians as a good news story just increasing the existing program to back to where it was?

Mr BOWDEN: Repairs and maintenance is difficult, especially with the number of assets that DIPL has on its books as it continues to build facilities, such as sporting clubs. Our repairs and maintenance continue to increase over time. Andrew and the team do a fantastic job in managing that repairs and maintenance budget.

Mr KIRKMAN: The repairs and maintenance program had a one-off increase last financial year, and we sought a new initiative to have the repairs and maintenance budget step up by a similar amount ongoing, which has been approved. It will be very useful in terms of us dealing with the assets we have.

I will get Fotis Papadakis, our CFO, to talk about the machinations of the movement of the cash.

Mr PAPADAKIS: Also on page 77 is the line item, 'Housing program office repairs and maintenance', which has \$28.6m. That was also repairs and maintenance and some one-off funding in that year.

Our total repairs and maintenance budget for 2023–24 is actually \$260.754m. The next financial year drops a bit in total to \$239.710m. The main reason is that we did not have a signed agreement for Commonwealth funding. We do now for roads, but at the time of the budget we could not put anything into the budget that

was not signed off officially. Now that it is signed off, in the next budget process we will be increasing our repairs and maintenance by another almost \$17m for roads, which will bring it back in line.

There are also a few one-off adjustments we often do between capital works and repairs and maintenance, so it is often not comparable. We assess what projects we have on the go and work out under the Australian Accounting Standards whether something should be an asset or repairs and maintenance, or vice versa. We then adjust between those two, so often there are a few adjustments between capital and repairs and maintenance, and it adjusts up and down between both.

Mr MALEY: I go back to my question about the new initiative of \$30m. There seems to be an understatement of the repairs and maintenance. Is this an example of the forward estimates being underestimated, when we are talking about new initiatives in repairs and maintenance?

Mr BOWDEN: It is an interesting question about the forward estimates; clearly, that is a Treasury question.

If there will be specific questions, I ask that we move to the outputs. I did not do an opening statement, so we could get to the outputs. I want to highlight a few areas within those outputs.

Mr MALEY: But we get to ask the questions and you have to answer, so if you want to bring those key highlights into your answers, feel free.

Mr BOWDEN: The outputs are a guide. I was Chair previously. They guide us through the departments ...

Madam CHAIR: Under agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy, we can talk about everything. Some ministers have gone through output by output. I think yesterday we had a minister where we did not get into the outputs as such. I clarify that for you. I know you have chaired, but 2024 is a different year, so we can ask questions in this consideration.

Mr BOWDEN: I am sure there is still no Wet Season in Alice Springs in 2024, Member for Nelson.

Mr KIRKMAN: As Mr Papadakis mentioned, there have been a lot of ups and downs, as you would expect in a program like this. Government has approved, from next financial year, an increase to our base level funding for repairs and maintenance of \$30m ongoing. There has been a real increase to that base budget, and any previous figures you see for repairs and maintenance will be subject to one-off increases.

Mr MALEY: We know that the Albanese government cut 40% of the federal government input into your road funding. How will that affect your infrastructure delivery when there is, over two years, a \$247.8m reduction?

Mr BOWDEN: I was thrilled to get the call from Catherine King advising me about an extra nearly \$0.5bn for our roads.

Roads come under the Lands and Planning Output Group 2.0. We are on the whole-of-government questions. Output Group 1.0 is Infrastructure Investment Program, Support and Delivery.

We have not had anything but increases in our roads funding. There have been considerable investments from the federal government. The relationship we have with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, the Infrastructure minister Catherine King and others within my portfolio remit has been successful in the sense of our dialogue and the investment made.

I will hand to Andrew Kirkman for the program, which I think would be under Output Group 3.0, Logistics Infrastructure and Services.

Mr KIRKMAN: As the minister pointed out, this funding comes through under the output of Logistics Infrastructure and Services.

With the review of federal funding packages under the National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects that has taken place over the past 18 months there was a review of the number of infrastructure projects being delivered across the country. The reason was the concern that we do not have the resources nationally to deliver the scale of the infrastructure projects that are in front of governments. We have known that there has been a hump for a long time and we are in the midst of that.

All of industry is feeling the effects of resource shortages, so the federal government asked jurisdictions to look at their programs and what could be moved. Obviously we have a high level of need across the Territory,

with 70% of our road network still unsealed. We believe we had a good position to argue that, in fact, we could not back off any of our program.

There were a few projects in the NT that were deferred as a result of the review. I am pleased to say that they have all been reinstated now in the latest Commonwealth funding, which is good news. Overall, even though we had a few projects deferred until later—which are now funded—our funding actually went up as a result of the review, not down.

Mr BOWDEN: I add that the forecast increases will be funding of over \$439m to the NT under the land transport infrastructure schedule across the forward estimates. Once again, our funding has gone up and our relationship with the federal government continues to allow us to attempt to, over time, resurrect some of these roads. Most recently there have been weather events through the Barkly. I drove those roads recently. We need to rectify some of the damage there and make it as safe as possible.

That is what the federal government has committed to us with this funding, as well as funding on an 80:20 split. We could not afford to do it if it was fifty-fifty, frankly. The federal government acknowledges that. With an 80:20 split we are able to deliver these roads as best we can, notwithstanding the fact Mr Kirkman outlined that there is a hump. The skills shortage across the nation and the world means that it is not possible to deliver the \$4.4bn infrastructure program all at once, but we will continue to strive to deliver that and provide those services for Territorians.

Mr MALEY: I go back to the federal budget cut. The federal budget was announced in May. For 2023–24 the budget went down from \$347m to \$290m, which is by \$83m. In 2024–25 it went from \$410m down to \$244m, which is a cut of \$164m. Over two years there will be a cut of \$247m. You are saying that since the budget was released in May 2024 there has been a change and that the money has been added back and will be paid to you. Even though the budget has only just been released, are you saying that the budget papers were wrong, and you are receiving more money now?

Mr BOWDEN: Are you talking about the federal government papers?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr BOWDEN: I am here to talk about the Northern Territory budget papers. Our funding from the federal government has only gone up. It is pleasing to have that relationship with Catherine King. We had the majority of the Australian Government Cabinet in town—Prime Minister Albanese along with 10 or 12 federal Cabinet members—and our relationship continues to prosper. Catherine King, the federal minister for Infrastructure, and I have had a very good relationship. I know she also has a good relationship with Chief Minister Eva Lawler and previous minister for Infrastructure, who has entrusted me with this portfolio.

It is also fantastic to work with the Chief Minister, who has been mentoring me and fostering those relationships through the federal government to enable us to receive the best deal we can. As Mr Kirkman said, there has been only an increase. Our forecast increase from the federal government was approximately \$439m under the NPA land transport infrastructure schedule across the total forward estimates.

As much as I would love to talk about roads I will hand to Andrew Kirkman, the chief executive, who may hand to Claire Brown, General Manager of Transport and Civil Services, who has assumed a position at the table.

Mr KIRKMAN: In real terms the funding has not decreased. We had increased funding from the Commonwealth Government. There is movement in the timing of cash, and there are different accounting treatments. I understand what is reflected in the budget papers does not reflect the reality that the program has gone up and the Commonwealth committed more funding.

Ms BROWN: As Mr Kirkman has said, the Territory is not receiving less funding when you compare the forward estimates with the 2023–24 MYEFO. During negotiations between the NT Government and the Australian Government estimated payment milestones sometimes get moved around, depending on how we are tracking with certain projects. As Mr Kirkman referred to, the three projects that were originally within the Roads of Strategic Importance program were then removed from our program following the Infrastructure Investment Program review. They were then re-announced in the 2024–25 federal government budget, so our program is going up.

Mr BOWDEN: Member for Nelson, this is good news.

Mr MALEY: The figures I have from the MYEFO is a cut from \$410m to \$244m for 2024–25. You are saying that is incorrect and there are no cuts?

Mr BOWDEN: As the chief executive and the general manager of transport and civil services said, we have not had a cut; we have gone up. The federal government continues to commit money to the Northern Territory to arrest our infrastructure deficit. As you would know from driving a four-wheel drive and going out bush from time to time, we do not have the greatest roads everywhere. We are trying to seal Northern Territory roads. We are trying to arrest the infrastructure deficit across the Northern Territory and the federal government understands and invests in it and works with us in partnership.

Mr KIRKMAN: We need to look at the full program of works when assessing whether the commitment from the Commonwealth has gone up or down. There has been some movement of cash between years. That will mean that figures go up and down when actual delivery of those projects takes place. What is important is that the overall program of commitment for the national partnership goes up and not down. That is what has happened.

Mr BOWDEN: The federal government does not just invest in infrastructure. It is across the board in the Northern Territory. Minister Jason Clare made an announcement recently around full funding for our students for the first time. Chief Minister Eva Lawler advocated and lobbied for that time and again. She said that if this is the one thing that she can do as Education minister, it would be the best thing for Territorians. The federal government is not just investing in infrastructure; it is investing in housing and part of that, of course, is remote housing. We are getting funding from the Education minister, Jason Clare. This is multifactorial. It continues to invest in the Northern Territory. There is disadvantage, under-education and areas of concern for us all in the Northern Territory. The federal government, under Anthony Albanese, continues to invest because we work with it, hand in glove.

Mr MALEY: I will talk about some projects that have happened. The Alice Springs youth justice facility had \$33m spend on refurbishment. Was that ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You are going into specific projects. We are at the whole of government as opposed to the outputs. Does the minister want to take that in the outputs because then you have the public servants you need at the table?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes, please. That will be in Output Group 1.0.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Most of the infrastructure project promises made for Alice Springs by the Labor government since coming to power in 2016 have not been delivered. If you look at what was promised and what has been delivered, the promises over the last eight years have a conservative value of approximately \$580m, from my calculations. What has been delivered and completed is less than \$100m. This amounts to a massive underspend on game-changing projects for Alice Springs.

Projects that have not been delivered include the national Aboriginal art gallery, the national Aboriginal cultural centre and a whole range of flood mitigation works. The Alice Springs juvenile detention centre has not been completed. It has not been opened, so I assume it is not quite ready. Further projects include the Arumbera industrial estate, the CBD revitalisation plan, the new rugby league ovals, the Red Centre adventure mountain bike ride and the new home for Tourism Central Australia. Millions of dollars' worth of projects were promised but not delivered. Why has your government not delivered when it comes to infrastructure projects in Alice Springs?

Mr BOWDEN: You are passionate about Alice Springs as I am, having grown up there which I outlined to the Member for Nelson earlier.

There is a wide range of projects in Alice Springs. I will hand over to the chief executive, Andrew Kirkman, to go through them methodically with you and outline those that have been completed, those that are under way and those that are yet to be completed.

Most recently, we announced a tender for the national Aboriginal art gallery which has been rebadged as ATSIAGA. Minister Paech is happy about that. That project will end up being approximately \$150m and will generate work in Alice Springs. It will be a centrepiece for those visiting Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There is a lot of talk.

Mr BOWDEN: I understand that. It has been difficult to watch this from the sidelines and to come into this portfolio now. I look forward to seeing the shovels hit the ground, as one of your colleagues would say, Member for Nelson.

Mr KIRKMAN: A substantial amount of effort has been put into Central Australia and Alice Springs over the previous years. I acknowledge that some of these projects are taking some time to get designed and be fully implemented.

Projects that we have completed over this financial year include \$8m for the Santa Teresa Road; we completed sealing of chainage 15.3 to 20.3. That opened to traffic on 16 February this year. We replaced the mobile oral health dental unit in Alice Springs during the year; that was delivered in April 2024. We did security upgrades to the Alice Springs Correctional Centre during the year; that commenced in August last year and was commissioned and finally completed earlier this calendar year.

We have numerous projects under way, including many road projects such as the Tjukururu Road that we are designing. The Plenty Highway, which we have continued to upgrade as part of the Outback Way, has had considerable work during the year.

The Tanami Road has been a great story for Central Australia, and we have funding now to seal that past the mine turn-off, which I am sure will do well for the ability of that road to handle traffic for not only the mine but also the community. The construction tender for chainage 271 to 330 was awarded to Exact Contracting in June 2022. That upgrade was completed in November last year, which was this financial year.

We have continued to work with Exact given their performance and location on that site. We expect to have another 90 kilometres of the Tanami Road sealed and complete by the end of this calendar year. We also have a design tender that Aurecon is working on now for chainage 420 to 585, which will be complete this year. We will go out with a D&C contract to continue the construction of that road once design is complete.

We have done design for the Sandover Highway during the financial year. As mentioned, we upgraded some of the Santa Teresa Road and we continue to design that. A tender was released for the Mereenie Loop road, which we discussed earlier, and GHD are undertaking that work for the 140-kilometre sealing of that, which will be great for Central Australia.

We have done a number of upgrading works. We spent \$2.5m on the Kintore Road, upgrading chainages that were impacted by flooding and wet weather. We spent \$5m on the Mt Denison Road—flood repairs also—and that work will start soon. We have done some work on the Willowra Road. We continue to finalise the design for Schwarz Crescent in Alice Springs, which is anticipated.

We have done extensive work in Alice Springs town camps on housing. We have 83 new or replacement homes being constructed across 14 town camps in Alice Springs. Seventy-nine of those 83 have been completed, and the remaining four are under construction; we will finish those this year.

In Santa Teresa we are building 17 new or replacement homes, with construction of five homes under way and will be completed this year. There is a number of Room to Breathe extensions to improve overcrowding for a further 16 homes, which will achieve another 18 bedrooms in the community.

We have finalised six new or replacement homes in Titjikala ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: My question was only for Alice Springs. I acknowledge that Alice Springs is in Central Australia, but it was specifically about Alice Springs.

Mr BOWDEN: I take your point; it is the region and it is part of that.

Mr KIRKMAN: Specifically in Alice Springs, other than what I have mentioned, we have been working on the revitalisation of the cityscape and that is substantially complete.

We have been working on the Alice Springs Correctional Centre and increasing its accommodation. We have a number of modular accommodation units now onsite, and we will be completing them for the Corrections facility in Alice Springs this year.

We have awarded a tender for \$6.7m to scope building for the Alice Springs Hospital day procedure unit to construct the hybrid operating theatre at Alice Springs Hospital. We are expecting to complete that project

this year. We have done some critical infrastructure upgrades to the air conditioning in theatre one at Alice Springs Hospital. Those works are expected to be completed this month, and that was half-a-million dollars.

We are working on a new visitor information centre and designing a centre at the old Shell depot site which we acquired a couple of years ago. That is \$5m.

We are heavily into design for the Kilgariff sporting precinct and extensions to the Kilgariff residential development, with an increase of headworks to facilitate residential and sporting infrastructure.

In terms of total expenditure in Central Australia—I do not have this for Alice Springs—by the end of March this year we spent \$328m.

Mr BOWDEN: I will talk about Anzac Oval because it is topical, and it came up earlier this week. The Member for Brainting asked questions about it.

The ATSIAGA works are about to begin. That has been awarded to Sitzler. Therefore, the rugby teams will be moving to Jim McConville Oval near the Gillen Club.

That work has begun. It has been awarded to local company Blueprint Construction. The goalposts and scoreboard at Anzac Oval were moved in May. They are due for installation at Jim McConville Oval before the end of June.

The existing cricket pitch was of concern to me. Jim McConville Oval has a concrete cricket pitch. When I was in Alice Springs recently I made a very special trip to Jim McConville Oval. I used to call it Larapinta oval back in the day when I lived in Alice Springs. I had a look and, yes, it was still there. The concrete cricket pitch has been removed, which is pleasing. They used to cover it in sand. We would play a game of football on Larapinta oval—now Jim McConville Oval—with a concrete cricket pitch covered in sand. Rest assured; we played down the wings for most of the games.

Some trenching has been done already for the scoreboard and some lights. There will be future lighting; that is good. In the next fortnight the goalposts will be erected and the field survey marked. The on-field works are due for completion in June 2024. Off-field trenching works for the future lights will hopefully be done by the end of July. The tender for the sports lights closes on 17 June, so hopefully we will see light towers installed there before the 2025 rugby season.

Ultimately, there will be more sporting facilities built at Kilgariff. There has been a huge amount of money invested in Kilgariff. With the number of people who are taking up the opportunity to move into Kilgariff, we think that will be a well-used sporting facility and we will invest in that in the medium term.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much is the total expenditure for Central Australia—\$300m-and-something?

Mr KIRKMAN: It is \$363m.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can I get a breakdown of how much of that directly comes to Alice Springs?

Mr BOWDEN: We will want to take that one on notice, because that is probably best.

Before we do, the Kilgariff sporting precinct is under design. Works have been awarded to Jacobs—I am not sure if you know it. We look forward to seeing that project come to fruition. I have toured Kilgariff a few times. This will go on the record. We toured Kilgariff and the little sporting park there was lovely with some climbing equipment and others, but it is not enough for a suburb ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Chair opened that.

Madam CHAIR: In a past life.

Mr BOWDEN: ... that big. I was slightly concerned that there were rugby posts in that little green space.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is beautiful; it is very nice. We are lucky. We are appreciative.

Mr BOWDEN: It is nice place and we look forward to it ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: We do not get much and we are grateful ...

Question on Notice No 7.1

Madam CHAIR: Member for Araluen, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Of the total infrastructure expenditure for Central Australia that we are told is \$363m, how much of that directly relates to the town of Alice Springs?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.1.

Mr MALEY: My question is in relation to the Alice Springs youth justice centre. We know that ...

Mr BOWDEN: Shall we go to outputs which ...

Madam CHAIR: We are still at whole of agency. The Member for Nelson has indicated that after these couple of questions he will go to outputs.

Mr BOWDEN: Okay.

Mr MALEY: I have some questions in relation to the \$33m. Was that on time and on budget?

Mr BOWDEN: I thank the Member for Araluen for focusing on Alice Springs. I enjoyed getting to Alice Springs; while I have been in this portfolio I have visited on several occasions.

I will hand to the Chief Executive Andrew Kirkman who will handle that.

Mr KIRKMAN: I will hand to Adam Walding.

Mr WALDING: Can you ask the question again, sorry?

Mr MALEY: It is in relation to the Alice Springs youth detention centre; we know that approximately \$33m was spent on the refurb and rebuilding of that facility. Was that on time? If not, what sort of delays were involved? Also was it on budget?

Mr WALDING: Both youth justice centres were bespoke models and highly complex builds. The methodology and how they were designed was to meet a specific need of care that youth justice wanted for their service. As DIPL, we provide the service and try to build it to meet their strategic need.

Those projects, as you heard last week ...

Mr MALEY: Can you focus on Alice Springs?

Mr WALDING: This is both. In principle, they were the same design done at the same time ...

Mr MALEY: When you say the Darwin one, is that the one at Holtze?

Mr WALDING: Correct.

Mr MALEY: My next question is about that as well.

Mr WALDING: This might help with the next one as well.

When we did the designs, obviously Alice Springs had an element of refurbishment. In Darwin the design was for a greenfield site, as you are aware. The Alice Springs one took additional time to go through. We did the initial build for the new facility out the front. Have you been there, Member for Nelson?

Mr MALEY: No, I have not been to Alice Springs, only the Darwin one.

Mr WALDING: The front building, as such, was the new build which is the administration building, the entry point and a new admission space, some classrooms and a medical centre. That was part of the new build. We isolated the centre so that we could do the new build. The children remained on the back side, then we did the back side for the refurbishment in those buildings.

Through that process we found some additional things to work through, such as firewalls and things like that which we had to rectify, so that created additional time. During the COVID period it was difficult to construct, so that added to the time as well. As we know, after the COVID period, pricing increased across the board, as well as the supply of materials and labour.

Over that time, the \$33m you mentioned, Member for Nelson—that is the figure. We are still finalising the contract with a contractor.

Mr MALEY: What was the original quoted tender?

Mr BOWDEN: Is that specific to the Alice Springs youth justice facility? I will hand to Adam Walding.

Mr WALDING: It was \$20.2m.

Mr MALEY: When was the expected completion of that in the initial tender?

Mr WALDING: I will take that on notice; I do not have the original date here.

Question on Notice No 7.2

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

Mr MALEY: When was the original completion date for the Alice Springs refurb reconstruction of the youth justice centre?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.2.

Mr MALEY: It was originally \$20m and now it has gone up to \$33m. How many beds are in that facility? Has that changed from the original tender to what it was when completed? How many youths did it house?

Mr WALDING: No, it is the original numbers.

Mr MALEY: I understand there was some damage there recently, a riot on the King's Birthday weekend. Do you know what the damage bill for that is?

Mr BOWDEN: We are talking about the budget up to 30 March. When you say recently ...

Mr MALEY: King's Birthday weekend.

Mr BOWDEN: What date was that?

Mr MALEY: It was 10 June.

Mr WALDING: It was asked last night as well; it was approximately \$30,000.

Mr MALEY: Has there been any other trouble or damage to that facility, other than on the King's Birthday, since it has been opened?

Mr BOWDEN: Is that in the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: Since it has been opened.

Mr BOWDEN: We are only doing this year's budget.

Mr MALEY: It opened recently.

Mr BOWDEN: Could you be specific?

Mr MALEY: The government spent \$33m. Has there been any money spent on repairs and maintenance or fixing damage to that facility since it has been opened—other than the \$30,000 on the King's Birthday weekend, which we already know about?

Mr KIRKMAN: Other than the recent damage, we have not been made aware of any significant incidents by the agency responsible, Territory Families.

Mr MALEY: Can you give an update relating to the Darwin youth justice facility? Can you advise what the original tender was, were there variations, the cost now and the expected completion?

Mr BOWDEN: Recently I had a look at the centre with DCOH, the builders, and they have done a good job. My understanding is that there is a little more work to be done before they can hand it over. It looks like a good product. I understand that it will be a phased approach when youths move in; obviously not everyone goes in at once.

Mr WALDING: The original contract was issued in 2020 for \$50.1m. We are still working through variations on the project. We have had the same issues on projects over time, relating to COVID and cost escalations. At this point in time I cannot provide a final close, because we are still negotiating those points.

Mr MALEY: What have you done so far in your reporting period?

Mr BOWDEN: Up to March.

Mr MALEY: I do not need a final close. When was it expected to be completed?

Mr WALDING: I do not have that date.

Mr MALEY: I will take that on notice. This is a different facility.

Mr BOWDEN: When I toured the facility there was not a fixed completion date. As Mr Walding will be able to outline, there are still a number of things to complete.

Mr MALEY: When it was originally started in 2020 for \$50m, there would have been an expected completion date and a media release. Has there been a delay and what is the cost?

Mr BOWDEN: It may be easier to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.3

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

Mr MALEY: What was the original expected completion date for the Darwin youth justice facility at Holtze?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.3.

Mr BOWDEN: Madam Chair, instead of circling back, the amount ...

Madam CHAIR: No, we are after the date.

Mr BOWDEN: We have the figure.

Mr MALEY: The figure was \$50m; what is it now?

Mr KIRKMAN: As Mr Walding pointed out, we are not able to provide a figure on the contract at this point. Expenditure on the facility since starting includes design and other works beyond the work that Halikos has been doing under the \$50.1m contract. There have been extensive costs around design and other things. I predicate this answer by noting that this contract was let virtually at the outset of the COVID pandemic. That caused considerable delay in terms of availability of resources and increased costs. Nationally costs have gone up approximately 40% since the time this started; in the Territory it has been significantly more.

Mr MALEY: Give me the cost; I am ready for it.

Mr KIRKMAN: We added an additional 10 bedrooms to the original contract—that was a substantial variation to the contract—and an extra four beds for an isolation facility, which was a significant addition.

Expenditure to the end of the March on the whole facility has been \$113m.

Mr MALEY: It is not yet completed. It started in 2020, and the original cost was \$50.1m. We do not have a completion date. We know that there are 10 extra beds, and the cost in this reporting period is now \$113m.

Mr BOWDEN: As Andrew Kirkman said, we know that costs have increased. I think the Reserve Bank outlined that. The Property Council of the Northern Territory's most recent report talked about significant increases in costs. Yesterday I met with Warren Ebert from the Sentinel group. He was talking about the costs escalating through the roof. It was more of a comment or a statement that you made. Yes, costs have gone up in the building industry.

Mr MALEY: You sound like my wife trying to buy a new car.

Mr BOWDEN: Madam Chair, I think it is out of order in this forum for the Member for Nelson to be sledging his wife. I hope she is watching. You said that Territorians are watching, so I hope she is watching and I hope she gets the new car.

Mr MALEY: We are talking about the youth justice facility. My summary was: it started in 2020 and the original cost was \$50.1m. An additional 10 rooms have been added. The cost now is \$113m. We do not have a completion date. The costs are still coming because it has not been completed yet.

Mr BOWDEN: Mr Walding talked about the completion date, and Mr Kirkman has outlined the current expenditure to 31 March 2024. I will hand to Mr Kirkman to expand on that. As I was saying, the costs of construction have increased. When there are variations to the contract costs increase.

Mr KIRKMAN: Just to clarify, the \$50.1m construction contract was awarded to Halikos in 2020. As you mentioned, it did not include the 10 extra bedrooms, the four isolation rooms and a number of other design elements that have been added to this bespoke facility over time. It also did not include some of those other costs that the department has directly borne around design and other elements that did not go directly to that \$50.1m.

In terms of completion the original completion date—whilst we could not answer that—we can say that the facility will have a certificate of occupancy in July this year.

Mr BOWDEN: To an untrained eye, I was very impressed by the facility. There were a number of different areas within the facility where youths will be. The basketball court I think ...

Mr MALEY: Can we move on to the current Don Dale centre?

Mr BOWDEN: ... will get an award for architecture. The other most important part there—you will love this being a Southern Districts Football Club member was ...

Mr MALEY: I have been there. I understand what you are saying, but I have had enough. I want to talk about the Don Dale centre.

Madam CHAIR: Can I interrupt? We have been doing so well. We will not talk over the top of each other. Minister, I will let you conclude, but keep your comments short. I will then hand to the Member for Nelson.

Mr BOWDEN: We toured the site recently with Mr Walding and the builders. It was pleasing to see that it was close to completion because then there will be the transfer of youths to the facility in a staged approach.

Mr MALEY: My next question is about the current Don Dale youth justice facility, which was formerly the Darwin prison. How much money has been spent on repairs and maintenance on that facility in the last financial year?

Mr BOWDEN: This has been confusing in the public domain to a degree. There is the old Don Dale site, which we are demolishing; Mr Walding has had carriage of that. My recollection is that a million-dollar demolition contract has gone out. You are talking about the current youth justice facility, which is sometimes being confused with Don Dale.

We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.4

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

Mr MALEY: Can you provide the committee with the repairs and maintenance costs for the current youth justice facility located at Berrimah?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.4.

Mr MALEY: Earlier this year there was a riot and a fire at the facility, can you update the committee on the costs in relation to repairing that facility after that event?

Mr BOWDEN: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.5

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

Mr MALEY: Can you provide the committee with information in relation to the damage caused and the cost of that damage regarding a recent riot at the youth justice facility located at Berrimah?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.5.

Mr MALEY: When do you expect that facility to be handed back out of youth justice? I think it will be used for a re-education program or something. What is the cost associated with handing that back? How much will be spent on getting it ready to hand back in the forward estimates?

Mr KIRKMAN: At this stage, the facility will be mothballed when it is handed back. We expect it to be handed back to the department, probably under our Crown lands portfolio, over the coming months.

There will be a completion certificate for the new youth justice facility at Holtze next month. Then there will be two or three months' commissioning for Territory Families to get into that facility. At the end of that commissioning period they will hand the facility back to us to hold as, effectively, an asset no longer required by an agency. There is no cost associated with that at this time.

Mr MALEY: My understanding of that facility is that once the youths are moved to the new youth justice facility at Holtze, it will be refurbished and the excess prisoners who are currently held in watch houses across

the Northern Territory—I found out this yesterday in Estimates—will be housed there to free up the watch houses. Are you saying that is not the case; it will be mothballed and no further use?

Mr BOWDEN: As Mr Kirkman has outlined, the department is not aware of future uses. I am not sure where your understanding has come from. I missed a bit of Estimates yesterday; we were making an announcement about recreational fishing. You may have seen that we are banning gillnets. Under Standing Order 109, we are not in a position to announce future policies here. The chief executive of the department is not in that position either.

Mr MALEY: I will rephrase my question. There is no forward planning for next financial year in the budget to refurb that facility for a future use.

Mr BOWDEN: I think you are making political commentary.

Mr MALEY: No, I am asking what is planned.

Mr BOWDEN: The Treasury department does a fantastic job with Under Treasurer Craig Graham, Tim McManus and the team. They do forward estimates over four years. To say there is no forward planning is disingenuous and wrong. What I am saying to your comment—not a question—is that the chief executive of DIPL is not in a position to make a statement to you about future policy; nor am I at this point in time.

We are dealing with the costs associated with that youth justice facility. We are talking about the new youth justice facility. We are not announcing future policies. As the chief executive just said, we are mothballing that facility once youth justice moves out.

Mr MALEY: I am confirming that facility will be mothballed once youth justice hands it back to you and the youths move out.

Mr BOWDEN: You are making political commentary about something.

Mr MALEY: I am just asking you to confirm.

Mr BOWDEN: We are talking about the cost of the youth justice facility. There are specific questions we are answering or taking on notice. Under Standing Order 109, we will not be making future policy announcements here.

Mr MALEY: Can you tell me the plans you have for the current youth justice facility in the forward budget?

Mr BOWDEN: You are again asking for future policy decisions for a facility. Chief Executive Andrew Kirkman has outlined to you succinctly and clearly the position of the department.

Mr MALEY: Mr Kirkman mentioned that it will be mothballed. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Mr BOWDEN: Do you not understand what 'mothballed' means?

Mr MALEY: No.

Madam CHAIR: I will allow some latitude. Minister, if you could perhaps provide an explanation, your officials might be able to help you. You are getting a bit repetitive, Member for Nelson. Minister, I will get you to provide a short response and then we will go to our break.

Mr BOWDEN: Member for Nelson, can you ask the question again so that I do not get this wrong.

Mr MALEY: Mr Kirkman mentioned that the facility will be mothballed. What does that mean?

Mr BOWDEN: What does 'mothballed' mean?

Mr MALEY: No, I am asking you to explain. The CEO said that the facility would be mothballed. What did he mean by that?

Mr BOWDEN: Future decisions about this facility are not in the hands of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics; they are in the hands of the government. They are a matter for Minister Paech, who is the Corrections minister and Attorney-General.

The fact that you have put on record twice now that you need someone to explain to you what ‘mothballed’ means ...

Madam CHAIR: I will pull you up ...

Mr BOWDEN: ... and this morning you said that Alice Springs has a Wet Season is a little ...

Madam CHAIR: Let us not get into personal comments across the floor. The minister, through his staff, has advised that they will mothball it.

Mr MALEY: What does ‘mothballing’ mean, as Mr Kirkman referred to with this facility?

Mr BOWDEN: I will give you an example. Your jacket, which is sitting on the back of your chair, if you no longer use it ...

Madam CHAIR: I will not allow this to continue. Member for Nelson, do you want the question on the written record?

Mr MALEY: Yes, please.

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

Mr MALEY: Chief Executive Andrew Kirkman said that the facility would be mothballed once the youths move out. Can you explain to the committee what that means?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: No, I will answer the question.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, you do not have that privilege. You can either accept the question for the written record or we can move on with new questions. It is unusual not to accept a question.

Mr BOWDEN: I am happy to answer the question. I am not sure why it has not gone on record.

Mr MALEY: You were not happy ...

Mr BOWDEN: I was giving you an example about your jacket ...

Mr MALEY: You were playing dodgeball.

Mr BOWDEN: No, I am happy to answer the question. I have written down, ‘What does mothballed mean?’ Now you want to put it on the record. The department ...

Mr MALEY: This is ridiculous.

Madam CHAIR: Let us pause and take our break. When we come back, the Member for Nelson will have the first call. You can re-ask the question. If the answer is not what you are satisfied with, we can see whether the minister will take it as a question on notice.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: Before the break, I said that I would come back to the Member for Nelson to ask that question. I do not plan to spend much time on this. Minister, if you would like to take the question on notice you can, or you can give us a short, prompt answer.

Mr MALEY: I will start by saying that I will move on. My question is now in relation to the Coolalinga-Stuart Highway upgrade. Can you update the committee on what is happening in relation to that?

Mr BOWDEN: I think the previous question—the Attorney-General was on earlier this week; he and Corrections are responsible. The Chief Executive of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics

is not in a position to announce policy, but the government has a number of medium-term, long-term and short-term plans in regard to prisons. There will be no announcement ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I am not sure if you heard the question. The Member for Nelson said that he was happy to move on from that topic, and he has asked you a question about the Coolalinga upgrade.

Mr MALEY: The Coolalinga-Stuart Highway upgrades. Back in 2019, I think, it was done. The information I got from your website said that completion of design was 2021; advertised tender October 2021; construction 2022. That is a bit more than two years ago, so I am asking why that work has not started and what is the delay?

Mr BOWDEN: I heard the question, but I wanted to illuminate the Member for Nelson about the fact that the Attorney-General and Corrections minister was here ...

Mr MALEY: Coolalinga.

Mr BOWDEN: ... earlier this week, and again the chief executive might like to clarify so that we make sure.

Mr MALEY: We can move on; we are up to Coolalinga.

Mr BOWDEN: I would like the chief executive to clarify. Then we will get to Coolalinga and the 2019 upgrades you are asking about.

Mr MALEY: There is not a question.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, there is not actually a question before the committee.

Mr MALEY: The question is now in relation to ...

Madam CHAIR: It is specifically about the Coolalinga upgrade.

Mr BOWDEN: Okay.

The outgoing Member for Goyder asked this question in the House. I know that area reasonably well. I was talking earlier about Cafe Bellissimo, where I go regularly for a cup of coffee and get regular feedback. I am not sure if you have been there and whether Tony has given you some of that blunt, honest feedback. I am sure he has; the hair stands up on the back of your neck sometimes when Tony lets loose.

Mr KIRKMAN: The Coolalinga road project has been under way for a number of years now. Largely, the work was proposed due to safety concerns on that part of the highway. We have been consulting with stakeholders on both sides of the highway about the best solution. During 2021 we had some extensive consultations, which enabled us to get design consultation under way. There are two important elements of this project; one is the direct interface works with the highway and how best to get effectively between the two commercial precincts, particularly the two shopping centres.

Mr MALEY: Is the design not already done and dusted? I have seen plans. I think the plans are on your website.

Mr KIRKMAN: Yes, we have had some plans in mind for a while. We re-looked at those in consultation with the owners of Gateway. Some potential queuing problems were identified with that design, so we have gone back to look at the design in terms of that interface, particularly as the road network interfaces with the highway and the service road that currently services Gateway.

There is no perfect solution there. What we need to avoid, though, which the current design probably would not avoid, is cars queuing there and potentially blocking access. We are looking at that. We have a redesign happening, and we are planning consultation with key stakeholders during this year around that revised design.

Importantly, we are also talking to landowners who connect with the other part of the road upgrade through to Noonamah. From my perspective, most stakeholders are very interested in that connection and making sure that comes to fruition. We are also prioritising our discussion with the landowners to get to a point of being able to acquire that land so that we can do that connection back into Noonamah.

Mr MALEY: Are you talking about the Weddell highway—it might have been a nickname for it? We are talking about Coolalinga. Are you talking about the road behind Virginia that will connect Jenkins Road through to another entry point?

Mr BOWDEN: That was the question from the Member for Goyder. Are you alluding more to the safety concerns about the back and forth at Coolalinga Central? It is a very difficult road. You would not want to try to cross those three lanes.

Mr KIRKMAN: I should clarify I had my locations incorrect. I should have been referring to the Coolalinga shopping centre and not Gateway. I have that on my mind at the moment.

Mr MALEY: You were talking about Noonamah. I have seen plans for a road from Noonamah, Jenkins and into Palmerston.

Mr KIRKMAN: It is the road that will come back from the United petrol station area, across from Coolalinga, back through to Virginia.

Mr MALEY: One of the major problems is there is only one way out of the Coolalinga Central site, through that roundabout on to the lights, which gets blocked up around the lights, around the roundabout, back down towards that service station on the Coolalinga Central site.

Mr BOWDEN: Having spent a bit of time out that way, I understand the traffic concerns there. It has changed over time where there have been some additions and some subtractions. You cannot turn right anymore if you are coming down Girraween Road.

This is clearly not on the whole of government. We are back into specific budget outputs again, being transport planning and delivery. I want to keep moving if possible.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT PROGRAM, SUPPORT AND DELIVERY

Output 1.1 – Infrastructure Investment and Delivery

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Infrastructure Investment Program, Support and Delivery, Output 1.1, Infrastructure Investment and Delivery.

Mr BOWDEN: I will make a comment about Outputs 1.1 to 1.3. Considering I did not make an opening statement, I will make a couple of key points.

I thank the people who work in the IIC team, covering Outputs 1.1 to 1.3 under Infrastructure Investment Program, Support and Delivery. I introduce Adam Walding, the General Manager for Infrastructure, Investment and Contracts. This division is responsible for planning, management and delivery of the Territory's infrastructure program and strategic management and maintenance of the NT Government's assets.

In the last financial year the department has recorded an infrastructure program of over \$4.4bn and has achieved a record spend of over \$1bn—when I say spend, that is cash—with 99% of these contracts going to Territory businesses.

Investing in our regions is a priority. We have made some really good investments with \$78m through the Barkly Regional Deal, with the Barkly youth camp at \$7.05m due for completion in 2024; the visitor park short-term accommodation at \$10m, with designs at 75%; the Tennant Creek student boarding facility at \$16m and a tender for design has been awarded with works to progress in 2024–25; and the Tennant Creek watch house upgrades at \$11.5m.

Works are under way at the Katherine High School STEAM centre, which is fantastic news with the award of a \$15.4m contract to local business M&J Builders. The Member for Katherine will be very happy with that.

We also awarded \$2.7m for works to commence in July on the Tennant Creek streetscape upgrades that will see the installation of seating, landscaping and garden beds and wayfinding signage on Paterson Street.

We have also awarded stage one early contract involvement for the \$154m to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Gallery of Australia. We have called it ATSIAGA, Member for Araluen. It was formally the NAAG, the national Aboriginal art gallery in Alice Springs.

The gallery will be a centrepiece and showcase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture in Alice Springs in the heart of Australia. It will include galleries, a public reception, a cafe, events, retail, landscaping and car parking.

Territory business Sitzler has been awarded the initial contract, which is great. The Sitzlers grew up in Alice Springs. Johnny Sitzler was mates with my brother, Rhett. It is good to have an Alice Springs family building that monumental piece.

We are also continuing works at the purpose-built Darwin youth justice centre, as we have just been discussing, which is why I wanted to get on to the outputs and the Alice Springs youth justice facility. In Darwin the contract went to Halikos—it is now DCOH—to build a new facility that will accommodate 46 youths. In Alice Springs the tender was awarded to Asbuild. It will accommodate 18 youths with up to 24 beds.

Progress works as part of the \$30m arts trail is continuing and is expanding on our regional galleries across the Territory with various upgrades undertaken. There is the \$6.5m contract for the Godinymayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Culture Centre, which is due for completion in mid-July.

In Darwin we have continued the Richardson Park redevelopment, with the playing surface due to be open to the public in mid-2024. I have been there a few times. The Ludmilla staff and families were pleased when we opened the Kiss and Go. It was completed by Jaytex Construction. The outdoor gym and playground was \$1.4m.

This government is continuing to grow the economy by investing in the right infrastructure in the right place at the right time.

There are some significant works in 2024–25. There is \$25.1m for continuing upgrades at RDH, the mental health inpatient unit, which I toured recently. I spoke with some of the contractors, and I was amazed by the drilling. The piers went down to 18 metres, with a power of work going on. It was good to see and have a sense of the RDH precinct. It is like a little city. The tunnels under the hospital were quite steamy and hot.

We have also put in \$20m to construct a new health centre and morgue at Gunbalanya; \$26.9m to construct a new ambulatory care centre in Alice Springs; and \$37.4m for a new multipurpose police centre in Maningrida, including residential housing, visiting officer quarters, a multi-function room, courthouse, storage sheds and communications. We were there recently for a community Cabinet. We met with police and the leaders who were pleased that this is happening because they needed that investment in infrastructure.

Significant investments include \$2m to plan and commence design for residential aged care near the Palmerston Regional Hospital; \$20m for a new health centre in Borroloola; \$57m for correctional facility improvements and the provision of temporary facilities; and \$24m to progress the cyclone shelter construction program, with builds being planned for Maningrida and Milingimbi.

When we were in Maningrida it was fantastic to meet and talk with the community. Chief Executive Andrew Kirkman was there. We talked about the old youth hub community centre being beyond economic repair and needing to be demolished. The community—I do not want to confirm this—was receptive of the idea of building the cyclone shelter, a sports centre and a community area in that same area. We will be sympathetic to the fact that it was built by locals, and we will make sure that, should they agree to build it on that site, we will commemorate in some way, shape or form those who built the previous one. That is yet to be confirmed. However, the budget of \$24m has been confirmed.

We have \$19m to construct a multipurpose police complex in Peppimenarti, which includes housing and supporting site infrastructure. We have \$125m over the next five years for the police infrastructure program that will be delivering new projects and upgrades across the Northern Territory.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I have let that one go in terms of the opening statement, which was meant to be at the start. It is very good that we now open up into some questions on the output groups.

Mr MALEY: I want to ask some questions on that opening statement.

On 6 June there was an incident just south of Elliott on the Stuart Highway where a caravan hit a large pothole and jackknifed. I understand that the vehicle rolled and there were injuries. What do you say to the driver of that vehicle who basically had their holiday cancelled because of the state of the road south of Elliott?

Mr BOWDEN: Within this portfolio I am also the Towards Zero road safety minister. I feel deeply for anyone who has an accident, whether it is a major accident or a small accident. I was at the Street Smart presentation the other week where young Territorians get information and learn how to drive.

Mr MALEY: Can you limit the answer to the accident near Elliott, please?

Mr BOWDEN: I am aware of that accident. We have had correspondence with those parties through the department, not directly with me.

As you know, our roads deteriorated severely during the most recent weather events. We had one two Christmases ago, and we had one again. On the east coast two main cyclone systems came through, which went through the Barkly. We had significant damage to our roads. I have driven those roads to get a feel for it. Yes, they need a lot of work. Sally O'Callaghan and her team in the Barkly have done a power of work. I visited Tennant Creek and drove the roads and it is of concern.

The open road speed limit in the Northern Territory is 130 kilometres an hour. Anyone who has an accident runs a risk of severe injury or death. We have too many fatalities. Our fatalities at the moment are well above the average of previous years. Unfortunately, we had another fatality—a cyclist—on our roads in the last couple of days.

It is a significant burden on our community because our community is so small, when there is an accident or a fatality it deeply impacts across the community. Anyone who had an accident on the road ...

Mr MALEY: Can you answer the question about the accident six kilometres south of Elliott?

Mr BOWDEN: ... I feel deeply for them. I pray and hope that they are okay ...

Mr MALEY: Did you know about the damage to the road? Why was it so bad?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, we have been doing so well. If we let the minister speak, I will ask him to be short.

Mr MALEY: But he ...

Madam CHAIR: No, you can have your question or comment later. Minister, please respond perhaps keeping it a little tight. The Member for Nelson is keen to have a follow-up question, possibly a point of order, but we will roll with it.

Mr BOWDEN: We are aware of the incident. The department has been working with the people impacted by this. Any accident is something we want to try to avoid. I think the accident was not long ago. We will work with those involved.

We will attempt to repair any flood-damaged roads. We have reduced speed limits across the board. When I went north and south of Tennant Creek there were areas where I had to slow down.

I encourage everyone driving on our roads to slow down. The open road speed limit is 130 kilometres an hour. That is higher than any other jurisdiction in Australia. We continue to have too many road accidents and too many road fatalities. We have to build as many roads as quickly as we can. We are doing that in conjunction with federal Minister Catherine King ...

Mr MALEY: What about maintaining the existing roads?

Mr BOWDEN: We need to maintain and repair. We need to add culverts and bridges if required. That is in partnership with the federal government. That ...

Mr MALEY: Madam Chair ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I ask you to conclude your comments there. Member for Nelson, you can ask a follow-up question.

Mr MALEY: My original question was: what will you say to the owners of that vehicle? That was a result of damage to the road that is under your care.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, be concise with your response, please. Then we can have a lot more interaction.

Mr BOWDEN: First of all, I would check on their welfare, Member for Nelson, and see how they are doing. Anyone who is in an accident, regardless of the severity ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, of course that would naturally happen. The member of the Estimates Committee is asking a question of your responsibility as a minister. What would be undertaken, I think, was the question.

Mr MALEY: Yes. Ultimately, did you know about the damage to that road, and why did you allow it to get that bad that it caused someone on holiday to write off their car and caravan and suffer injuries as a result of the road, which was in such a state that it caused the damage? I have seen photos of the potholes; they are massive.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, you have made your point clear. Minister, you can take the question on notice or refer to your officials. This is of a sensitive nature, so I urge caution for anyone who responds or asks further questions. Minister, would you like to take it on notice or refer it to your officials, or are you comfortable to answer?

Mr BOWDEN: I will happily respond to the member's question. He clearly asked what I would say to those involved in the accident. I would say that I hope they are okay and would check on their welfare, if I were to meet with them. When the department was made aware of this on 5 June, we responded to that and are trying to repair the road and the pavement. The department rang contractors who attended the same day to patch the potholes.

What I was alluding to was the speed on the road. On the road I drove through, there were a couple of damaged areas north and south of Tennant Creek where speeds were reduced to 40 kilometres an hour because of the damage. We must exercise caution on our roads.

If I were to speak to those involved in the accident, I would certainly check on their welfare, and we will work with them for any claims they may be making.

Mr MALEY: Have you and your department contacted the people involved in the accident?

Mr BOWDEN: We were made aware of this on 5 June. I will hand to the chief executive to give a more detailed response in relation to how the department liaised with those involved and how they responded to rectify the road damage and the pavement and reduce the speed limits.

Madam CHAIR: I remind the committee that we are talking about sensitive matters at times. If you need to go into a closed hearing, we can do that, but I caution that some of these matters might be live under investigation from a number of authorities.

Mr KIRKMAN: Yes, there is work we are doing on this section of road. We were made aware of the incident on 5 June. We are working with that motorist in terms of any claims they may have on the department in response to the incident. That is all I can say given that it is a claim under review.

Mr BOWDEN: I will add ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I will pull you up. We need to move through the questions. You and your officials will get a chance to respond, then I will pull the committee to the next question.

Mr MALEY: I am changing the topic now. I want to move on to uncertified buildings that exist.

Madam CHAIR: Correcting you, Member for Nelson, we are on Infrastructure Investment and Delivery under this output.

Mr MALEY: Yes. It relates to that because there is an investment. There are 298 buildings that are not certified. Can you give us an update? I will start with TIO stadium. What is happening with that?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, if you feel this is under another output—I would look at Output 1.3, but I am not an expert in this—you can seek advice and advise us if there is a better output to ask this question. Are you happy to answer it now?

Mr BOWDEN: I am waiting for the question.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been asked; it is about TIO buildings. Is it under this output or another?

Mr MALEY: The question is about uncertified buildings. There are 298 uncertified buildings in relation to the certificate of occupancy. I will ask about others, but I am starting with TIO. I understand that some work is being done; what is that work, how much will it cost and where are you at in relation to issuing a certificate of occupancy for TIO?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, you can change the officials at the table if that would be helpful for you. We are comfortable with people moving up and back.

Mr BOWDEN: Member for Nelson, you are talking about the TIO Stadium, which is dear to my heart. Thank you for raising it. I worked there for a couple of years and then worked in the Infrastructure department when we hosted ...

Mr MALEY: I am asking about the certification, not ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I ask you to refrain. The minister is getting to answering the question. I have allowed latitude with some commentary from both of you. I will let that continue until it annoys me, and I will then pull up both of you.

Mr BOWDEN: As I was saying, we hosted the Rugby World Cup match there. Member for Nelson, you might recall when Australia played that. I was responsible, with a couple of people in this room and listening, and we came across the issue of certification and worked through it.

Certification has been an issue across the Northern Territory. As you would be well aware, there is a number of buildings that are uncertified. I will double-check with my chief executive whether the building we are in is currently certified. We brought in the Building Regulations for residential in 2006 and for commercial this year, and there is a number of exemptions for buildings. The TIO Stadium and a number of other buildings across the Northern Territory which were built a long time ago have had exemptions.

Mr KIRKMAN: We have been working on TIO Stadium's certification issue for a number of years. We do not have some of the early inspection records of a number of our older buildings which would have been required to help us. As the minister pointed out, there is a number of buildings which have now been exempted as we continue to work through to ensure we can get certification to an appropriate level. Regardless of that, we have been doing work at TIO to ensure that the fire safety is as good as it can be.

Mr WALDING: Over the period of time we have done substantial work at TIO. There are new fire indicator panels. We have replaced air conditioning and done other essential works. The most recent work we are doing at the moment is replacing the fire booster pumps and fire hydrant tanks. That work is nearing completion. I am expecting an occupancy permit for that within the next week. That is the final part of the puzzle for those works. The building has been exempt under the act, as you are aware. The fire piece finishes and you get your certificate of occupancy for that piece of work.

Your final occupancy permit for the TIO Stadium—it is already exempt under the act. Because it is a place of public gathering you need an occupancy permit. Under the act, we cannot achieve that; because of the way certifiers do their insurances the best they can get is what they call a certificate of substantial compliance, which is one tier down.

As part of the building compliance work, the Building Compliance Taskforce was implemented; key people from agencies sit on that task force. We are going through the legislative requirements to modify that so that we have a pathway to achieve the certification. The intent is that for the buildings that have been given the certificate of exemption—the 290-odd you mentioned earlier—we follow this pathway to get them all to have an occupancy permit under the act and we remove the certificate of exemption.

Mr MALEY: You said that you will never get a certificate of occupancy; you will only get a substantial certificate for TIO.

Mr BOWDEN: As Mr Walding said, there are two enormous tanks that you can see as you go to the car park on the airport end. There are exemptions. Other areas of concern have been highlighted. Work has been done at TIO concerning building permits that have been resolved regarding the fire indicator panel. You may recall at one of the AFL matches one year ago that just before the game there was a fire alarm and everyone ended up on the field. There has been an air conditioning replacement and high-voltage electrical ...

Mr MALEY: How much have you spent on that building so far?

Mr WALDING: Under the exemption we do not need the occupancy permit as per the act.

The costing for the latest piece of work with the tank hydrant assembly is approximately \$850,000.

Mr MALEY: You are saying that because it has been exempt it does not need to have a certificate. Why are you doing the fire repairs if it does not need a certificate?

Mr BOWDEN: I will use the example of around the time that I was working in the department of Infrastructure around the World Cup match. Safety is paramount. At that time, I think there were over 14,000 people using the facility that night. We must do everything we possibly can to keep Territorians safe, especially when they congregate in large buildings or stadiums. I recall for the World Cup match we installed 50 or 60 CCTV cameras—in every room and every corridor—because of the safety concerns.

Mr MALEY: You are saying that it is exempt, so it does not need a certificate. If it is exempt, why are you doing the fire work?

Mr WALDING: If you have a building and it has been identified there are safety issues or there have been concerns, you address them. The other part with that is as we do future upgrades to that facility and future works, we will need to put it in.

Mr MALEY: You mentioned earlier about it being for public assembly purposes. I read through the legislation briefly and my understanding is—I want to be corrected if I am wrong—that if it is a building for public assembly you cannot exempt it under the act anyway. It does not give you the power. That is section 66.

Mr BOWDEN: As Andrew Kirkman and Adam Walding have both articulated, there has been an exemption granted for a number of buildings in the Northern Territory. I believe that TIO Stadium was built in the 1990s and pre-dates even the *Building Act 1993*.

Mr KIRKMAN: The minister can exempt any buildings they wish, is our advice, under the act. That building has been exempted. That said, as Mr Walding has pointed out, if there are ever safety concerns raised, particularly if those concerns are raised by the fire service, then we will act and do whatever is necessary to make those buildings as safe as possible.

As Mr Walding noted, any future upgrades to that facility at TIO would require extra support around fire safety. That will accommodate any future works.

Mr BOWDEN: I reiterate the point that the government has a number of facilities that we continue to upgrade; it is a continuous improvement scheme where we are trying to make it as safe as possible. For instance, sometimes the safety regulations change, so it is imperative that we maintain the infrastructure but upgrade as it needs to be. We must make sure that Territorians are safe. We have a number of facilities on our books—as in the Northern Territory Government and DIPL—that we continue to make as safe as possible.

Mr MALEY: I have the act in front of me. Reading through it, section 66(1) and (2) talk about not promoting a public assembly unless there is specific occupancy. If you are talking about a public assembly, which is a footy match, is it not against the act if you are promoting that when the act says specifically that you cannot do it?

Madam CHAIR: We just heard from the chief executive that there can be an exemption. We know well that this is a legacy issue. What the department is articulating to the committee is that it has tried to put safety first and retrospectively take measures. It cannot take the full measure, so it is trying to take measures that compensate and allow safety, but at the same time do not just ignore the issue.

Mr MALEY: At the same time, the rule of law applies—no-one is above the law. If the power is there for the government to change the law—the law is what it is at the moment—you have to ...

Madam CHAIR: We heard that there is an exemption the minister can apply ...

Mr MALEY: Yes, but I am saying that under section 66 if you promote it—that is the law at the moment. If the government wants to change the law, it is within its rights to change it. The upside about being the government is you can change the law.

If we were talking about a private contractor, that contractor could not be exempt; it would be told to do it and there would be a certificate and bans and people would not be able to use it.

Why does the government have the luxury of having this certificate when no private person does, and the government is above the law? The law says that you cannot do it. The rule of law applies to everybody.

Madam CHAIR: Perhaps some examples of both public and private buildings might be of use, minister.

Mr BOWDEN: To be clear, it was on 9 March 2022 that the then Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics made the declaration under section 65(1)(a) of the *Building Act 1993* that occupancy certification is not required for TIO Stadium.

Mr KIRKMAN: The minister made a declaration under the act, which has exempted this building from certification.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I remember either last year or at some point being told publicly that the existing fire hydrant system met all the necessary standards for flows and pressures. Now we have been told that \$850,000 was spent on upgrading the fire hydrant system. What is all that about?

Mr BOWDEN: Are we are still on TIO Stadium?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr BOWDEN: I reiterate the point that the government has to continuously improve. Maybe at one point it was okay but now there needs improvement.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It would not have been last year; you were not here last year. It must have been at some other point; sorry.

Mr KIRKMAN: It has been going for a while.

Mr BOWDEN: There were issues in 2015 when we put on that Rugby League World Cup match. There have been issues since 1990 when it was built.

Mr KIRKMAN: It is fair to say that there was quite a bit of discussion on this matter as to what was required for fire safety at TIO. In the end we agreed with parties that were concerned about the current levels of fire safety, so we have effectively done what is required to make it as safe as possible; I would say belts and braces in this regard. As Mr Walding pointed out, it sets us up for any future works at the site, which would have required this in any case.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That \$850,000 worth of work did not go out to tender. Can you explain why?

Mr BOWDEN: That is a procurement question which, under the tutelage and mentorship of the Chief Minister, we steer clear of that, so I will hand to Adam Walding.

Mr WALDING: No, we did not. Purely for principle I wanted to get it in, so to expedite the works to get it put in. Once we had the design completed to put it in we used the period panel contracts that we have in place, so it was still under a contract, just a different methodology.

Mrs LAMBLEY: KPMG was awarded a contract to undertake a review into the current NT building administration arrangements.

Madam CHAIR: I might just jump in there, Member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is a general one; I have moved on.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any more questions in regard to this specific issue?

Mr MALEY: Yes, there are. I have a list of all the properties, and I want an update in relation to a couple. Can you give us an update of the Alice Springs Hospital on that list?

Mr BOWDEN: We had robust debate about the Alice Springs Hospital in the House not long ago. There has been an extensive amount of work done at the Alice Springs Hospital over the journey. You might recall my story about being stung by a bee then being saved by the Alice Springs Hospital. I think you enjoyed that story in the House, so I will not make you sit through it again.

Mr KIRKMAN: Just to clarify, was your question whether it is on the list?

Mr MALEY: It is on the list, because I have the list. Can you give us an update on where we are at in relation to getting a certificate of occupancy for the Alice Springs Hospital, and the amount of money spent so far?

Madam CHAIR: You are welcome to take it on notice if that would be more appropriate.

Mr KIRKMAN: Yes, there has been considerable work done on the hospital over many years, and there will continue to be work, no doubt, on our big hospital facilities every year. I will pass to Adam Walding to talk specifically about the work we have been doing on Alice Springs Hospital and to see whether we have costs associated with that.

Mr WALDING: Alice Springs Hospital is slightly different. Over many years we have been doing fire upgrades at the hospital already. We did refurbishment works with the fire separation in the walls a few years ago.

The team of people I have working on this at the moment are looking at approximately 190 different assets. So far, they have closed down 101 outstanding permits. Because we are looking at 190 assets at the moment, I will need to take that on notice and any others you want the detail on to find out where we are up to.

Our approach for this is that we have a panel of consultants on board through the Building Compliance Taskforce. We have prioritised the list, so Alice Springs Hospital will be one of the top ones. As we have put the panel on board, the hospitals will probably be the most complex ones to work through from a building compliance perspective. Again, I would need to follow up on where we are with that one specifically. We are trying to tackle it on the priority list based on what the compliance task force has agreed to.

Mr MALEY: I have a list, so to save going through each one, why do we not take it on notice? I will read through the list and put it all in one question.

Question on Notice No 7.6

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

Mr MALEY: Can you provide the committee an update in relation to the certificate of occupancy or the issuing of the certificate of occupancy and the cost and the amount of work done on the following buildings: Alice Springs Hospital; Alice Springs Local Court; Alice Springs Police Station; Berrimah Fire complex; Bakewell Primary School; Bees Creek Primary School; Darwin Fire Station complex; Darwin Supreme Court; Darwin Waterfront northern precinct; Girraween Primary School; Government House; Government Printing Office; Humpty Doo Primary School; Katherine education precinct; Katherine Courthouse; Millner Primary School; Moil Primary School; Ludmilla Primary School; Leanyer School; NT Emergency Services complex, Alice Springs; Nichols Place, which I assume is the Darwin Local Court; the sobering-up shelter in Nightcliff; Stuart Park Primary School; and Royal Darwin Hospital?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.6.

Mr MALEY: Have you thought about changing the way you do your civil tenders to allow businesses to start work at the start of the Dry Season?

Mr BOWDEN: We have done extensive work on procurement. The procurement part of DIPL is highly contentious. Being a small jurisdiction, everyone knows everyone in the building game. When someone misses out on a job, they talk—and they talk a lot. We have reformed the procurement processes—Chief Minister Eva Lawler and I talk regularly about this—where ministers stay clear of procurement. It is also within the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade—DITT—and procurement will stay there. Procurement is something that ministers stay out of. Yes, we try to get the flow right, but sometimes there are delays.

Mr KIRKMAN: For the timing of our civil works in the north—the Top End—we try to line it up so that they commence, if they are new projects, as soon as the Dry hits. Obviously that can vary in terms of access to certain remote roads if they are flooded and we need water to recede. Sometimes it is May or June before we can even get into some of those roads.

In other areas of the Territory it is more difficult to tell when the rain will occur. We get on with projects when we can.

We also have multi-year projects under way. The Carpentaria Highway is a key one that we are now upgrading to a two-lane highway standard, similarly with the Tanami and Central Arnhem Roads. Once we get into those multi-year contracts they will continue to roll through the Wet Season. They do their best to accommodate the Wet. We saw the Carpentaria this year. It has been problematic trying to work through, effectively, flooding while those projects are under way.

Wherever we can we try to align those contracts, even if they are awarded well before the Dry, for work not to commence until they are able to get onsite, otherwise we will waste time and cause ourselves some issues.

Mr MALEY: Ultimately, 1 July is the new financial year. Some people are waiting for the next budget cycle to start spending money. Unfortunately, in the top half of the Territory where we have a Wet Season, by the time that happens and the tender goes out and is won, the person cannot start work—because the Wet Season has started—until the Dry Season in the next year. There is a long delay in relation to that.

Have you thought about trying to change the way you do it so you can program the work and they can win the tender? They might not start until July or be paid then. Can you try to make it easier for these people?

I am not talking about the multiple-year ones; I accept that. I am talking about the smaller ones that can be done, like the upgrade of the intersection at Marrakai Road and Stuart Highway or the Lake Bennett road intersection. I guess it is a big job, but it can be done in one hit.

Can you change the way you do that so the contractors know they will get the work and can get started and start getting their money so that they can get it done quickly in the Dry Season to save them waiting the whole Wet Season?

Madam CHAIR: I think the question was answered in that sense, but I will hand back to the minister.

Mr BOWDEN: Procurement is an area I steer clear of, but I will hand to Andrew Kirkman.

Mr KIRKMAN: Yes, we look to get projects out in line with when the Dry Season kicks off, or at least part-way through. It does not always happen that way because of negotiations with tenders and how long things take to design.

Ms BROWN: We try to align procurement processes as much as we can so that works commence in the Dry Season. There are other matters in play that influence final detailed design. Some of those relate to land tenure negotiations and clearances, which can take some time and impact on final design completion, which then impacts on when we can procure those works.

One thing to note in terms of the negotiations that we have been involved in with the next federation funding agreement is that there is likely to be additional support for jurisdictions for planning works. It is our intention that if we can have more time and Australian Government resources to be put toward planning and business case development, a lot of those questions in relation to availability of extractive material, other resources we might need and tenure et cetera can be worked through prior to then actually tendering for the construction of works, so those works can then get under way straightaway.

Mr MALEY: You talked about construction material. The Territory has been building roads for a long time. I am not a civil contractor, but I am sure they know where there are gravel pits that they can get gravel from for jobs. Is there a way we can shore up so that gravel is available and make sure the gravel is of the right

standard? People have told me that they win a tender and say that the gravel is available at point X and when they go to get it, it is not the right gravel.

Who has to wear the cost of that? Why is that work not done by the department in the Wet Season, so it is all ready to go when the Dry Season comes? The tender can be put out in the Wet Season. As soon as it dries out, the tender is won, the material to build the road or intersection is available—it has been tested and is ready to go—to get the civil contractors on the job more quickly.

Again, it is not the multiple-year ones; we are talking about the smaller intersections or parts of roads where you might do one, two, five or seven kilometres of road, where these smaller contractors go. It is their bread and butter. They can do one or two a year and that makes them money to employ apprentices, trainees and keep their staff on the books.

In regard to the timing of those tenders, what are you doing to make it easier for those tenderers? How can you make sure the materials are available and if they are not available, who has to pay for it?

Mr BOWDEN: I think what you are alluding to is the construction materials and supply chain issues we have had over the last while.

Mr MALEY: What I am leading to is that we have been building roads for a long time, so I am sure people know where the material is available for roads and what standard it is. I am sure some of those gravel pits are coming to an end. Has work been done to identify new gravel pits so that when the work is available in the Dry Season and you run out of gravel at gravel pit A, gravel pit B is here, all the approvals have been obtained and it is ready to go. You can finish this one off then move over there—just to keep the pipeline of work happening. Then they will not have to do all the surveys to find new material pits.

Why is that not done now to make it easier for the contractors to get started and keep working without having to wait because of delays for material?

Mr BOWDEN: The construction materials and supply chain issues that have been impacting the globe cannot be put down to one factor.

Mr MALEY: Can we just link it to Darwin? I do not really care what happens in the rest of the world. I care about Darwin and the Northern Territory and the supply and tenders done here so that civil contractors can get to work and make some money.

Mr BOWDEN: I was just about to hand to Claire Brown, the General Manager of Transport and Civil Services. You will be aware that there has been a just-in-time supply chain process, which has been worldwide. Think about Amazon ...

Mr MALEY: Who cares? We are talking about building roads in the Territory.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I will pull you up. Refrain from interjecting, please.

Mr BOWDEN: We have seen issues with supply chain in the Northern Territory.

Ms BROWN: Yes, we do work closely with industry to try to identify appropriate gravel sources where we can. Through our tender processes, in some instances, it is up to the contractor to nominate those gravel sources, then we work through that process as part of the tender process.

We work closely with the Civil Contractors Federation NT. There is a working group specifically relating to gravel and construction materials, and these matters are discussed in that forum. Most recently, we commenced a project; we are looking at our processes in regard to sourcing extractive materials for projects. That is looking at the current processes in association to tenure, access and proofing those resources. That is a big body of work we are looking to do in order to consider those matters.

Mr MALEY: You said, 'looking to do'. We have been building roads for years, and the government has been in power for eight years. Why are you looking to do it now? Why would you not have that ready to go so that next year the contractors who are going to do the Marrakai track intersection know where the dirt is. You would have already done the research of access and the approvals. Why are we always saying that we are 'doing it'? Why has it not been done?

Mr KIRKMAN: We work closely with civil contractors on how we best deliver road networks and source materials, particularly gravel and sand. We have 30,000-plus kilometres of road in the Territory; we do not know where the best gravel or sand is for every part of the road network. We work with our contractors to identify those in some cases. We would prefer to do it in all cases, to get out there in front, identify the gravel and sand and make it available to the contractor. The reality is that neither us or our contractors have the resources for the perfect world solution to get in front of that.

On many occasions we put in the contract to identify the sources because physically we do not have the ability to look at every part of the road. Some civil contractors mention the roads we need to upgrade, not seal necessarily, but lift the standard. There is an ongoing panel that often run for our projects that will deal with elements of our road network. It is in that contract for them in an ongoing manner to identify where the best sources are.

We would love to do it before every contract, but it is not physically possible for our officers to do that work ahead of time, so we put that in the contract and negotiate it as part of the price. That is how we move forward with it.

Mr MALEY: These questions are coming from civil contractors, not me. Do you accept that maybe you are not doing a good enough job in relation to that? These people are coming to me with questions about supply material, which is important as roads cannot be built without material. It is such an important issue. Why do you not focus more on that to get these contractors to have this resource available? There is a lot of dirt out there, I am guessing it just needs to be found.

Madam CHAIR: I am not sure that question is in order, but I will allow the minister and his officials to respond. You have made your point clear to the officials, and it sounds like they have adapted things in the past and perhaps taken on board the points you made. I will allow them to respond, and ask you to keep the questions to the output.

Mr BOWDEN: There is a lot of commentary there. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics do a very good job and work diligently on all areas. If you look at the outputs, you see that they cover a wide range of infrastructure projects across the board.

Having met and spent time with a number of civil contractors over the last eight to nine months, I too know how hard they work. They will drop everything—like some of them did in Tennant Creek to build firebreaks during those terrible fires which went through the Barkly Region—and will go above and beyond to do what is required.

I do not think you should cast aspersions upon this department for their role in getting materials to market in a supply chain. As Mr Kirkman just outlined, it can be difficult at times. We have a wide expanse of road network and other projects for which we are looking for materials. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics do a fantastic job. Yes, we would like to build things quicker and get more materials to market, but a just-in-time supply chain is not able to be achieved in such a difficult market.

Mr KIRKMAN: We will continue to work with civil contractors on the best way of sourcing material. For many in the civil contracting industry, their concern is not necessarily the obligation on them to find the material—they are happy to do that—but they are concerned about the risk being on them if it takes longer, if they have to dig deeper or if the material they source is of a poor quality and they have to find somewhere else. That is wasted time and money which they put in to identifying material.

Discussions that both Claire and I are having with civil contractors is how to best allocate the risk between government and contractor. We acknowledge that at times it is a shared risk and at other times we will put the risk clearly on the contractor, then they will price in that risk. Their preference is that we work with them on identifying the source ahead of time. We will continue to work with them on that.

Mr MALEY: We are talking about sharing the risk. Some of the information that the civil contractors get is inaccurate or incomplete, which makes it hard to tender. I know you all work hard, but some of these internal priorities could be a bit different to be able to make it so that the work is done. If the tender says that there is dirt type A over here and they go there and it is dirt type C, what happens then? You have to share that risk. How can you make it easier to share that risk?

We want value for money. If you have to price the risk into the tender that might mean that the contractor will say, 'I will just double the price because I have to risk it'. That is value for money for the Territory. Instead of getting one kilometre done, you might get 500 metres of road done. If you could work out a way to share the

risk, there would be value for money to Territorians who will have longer bitumen roads done better because the risk is not borne by the contractor.

How can you make your processes better? Could you put more resources into internal priorities regarding identifying contractors and that correct information is given in those tenders? This is so that it is not at the point where the contractor goes there and it is not type A but type B; type B is not suitable—go and find your own.

Mr BOWDEN: There was a lot of commentary and hypotheticals there. I am not sure how to answer the question with the number of hypotheticals about processes to get materials and the supply chain. If there is a specific question, I am happy to take it.

Mr MALEY: What about the rego and stamp duty of plant vehicles? Some of these vehicles are expensive. They are not driven on the road. The contractor has to buy it for a particular job and pay stamp duty on it when it is not driven on the road.

Madam CHAIR: We could discuss the rego under the transport output. Stamp duty is a question for the Treasurer. Minister, would you like to make comments here, or would you like to deal with it under the transport output?

Mr BOWDEN: The question on stamp duty is for the Treasurer. We have Output 3.2, Registration and Licensing.

Mr MALEY: I have heard from civil contractors that they do all the work, put in a tender and win the job, but they do not get access to that particular for a number of weeks or months. Is there any way that you can speed that up so that if the tender is successful, they can get in there and get it done?

Mr KIRKMAN: We are always trying to get contractors on site as soon as contracts are awarded. It takes some time for various reasons. Usually, negotiations with landowners are key. Wherever we can, we try to accelerate that.

Mr MALEY: People are coming to me and saying that it is taking too long to get the job happening. Do you accept that your processes are not working and they could be sped up and made better?

Mr BOWDEN: It is again hypothetical. You are asking whether we can speed up the process. In an ideal world, we would be able to get things done as quickly as possible. We would be able to get the materials needed as soon as we need them. We would be able to do all these things, but it is hypothetical. You are making a whole heap of hypotheticals and commentary about the construction and civil industry.

Mr KIRKMAN: We will continue to work with civil contractors—if this is where it has been raised—to get them access as soon as we can. I ask that they reach out if there are contracts that they have concerns about.

Mr MALEY: Have you done any internal audits of your department to make sure that the right people, qualification-wise and with the right skill set, are doing the right jobs so that it goes through your department quickly and smoothly ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I will pull you back to the questions before the committee. We have a hardworking team here. You went into this space yesterday. Please be careful in your questioning.

Mr MALEY: I am just asking because civil contractors have reached out to me. I am sure you have all seen the document I have; it is my resource document. This is straight from their election platform. I am trying to ask questions on behalf of the civil contractors because it is raised in their information about what their concerns are. Industry has come to me. I am sure you have seen it ...

Madam CHAIR: I do not know if your leaders met with them. Minister, I will allow some latitude. You can respond to the question if you wish or we can move on to the next output.

Mr BOWDEN: It has been a pleasure in this role to meet with the civil contractors and a number of different groups and individual businesses and work with them on a number of these issues. I think there are a lot of hypotheticals; that is a document from the civil contractors. Potentially you might want to go out with that at some stage.

Mr KIRKMAN: We have some great resources in the department, with very experienced, highly skilled people who do a great job. Would we like more resources? Would we like more people with the necessary skills, like all of industry, including civil contractors? We are all chasing the resources ...

Mr MALEY: Would you like a better minister?

Madam CHAIR: Let us respect the independence of our public servants, please, Member for Nelson.

Mr KIRKMAN: We have agreed with the Civil Contractors Federation that the best way to move forward is in partnership and working together. When we identify gaps and how we can work better together, then let us raise that and get that relationship continuing to happen as it should.

Mr BOWDEN: As the Minister for Business and Jobs, and for Skills, we are always trying to upskill our population. We are always trying to get more people into training. There is \$109m in the budget to be invested in training. If you want to be a construction worker, that is a job for life.

It was wonderful to be at the Women in Engineering event last night at Parliament House and hear from Elisha Harris, who is one of the Chairs of our board; she is making great strides. She runs a business in the Northern Territory.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, keep the commentary to short comments. We are at Output 1.1.

Mr MALEY: I want to talk about the ICAC report that was done into the Katherine DIPL office. I think we have all seen a copy of the report.

Madam CHAIR: What has the ICAC DIPL report got to do with the budget output?

Mr MALEY: It is talking about the delivery of an infrastructure program. This report spoke about ...

Madam CHAIR: When was the report from?

Mr MALEY: October 2023.

Madam CHAIR: We are talking about the budget for 2024–25.

Mr MALEY: It is all last year. We are talking about the accounting period from 1 July to 31 March.

Madam CHAIR: I will allow some latitude. Keep your comments and questions short and tight, and they may be ruled out of order.

Mr MALEY: I will not go through every recommendation, because there are 18.

Madam CHAIR: I would not allow that. You have been given the opportunity to ask a question. I would do so quickly before I change my mind.

Mr MALEY: Can you update the committee on what you have done in relation to the report? What steps have you taken to address some of the concerns raised in that report?

Mr BOWDEN: You are referring to the procurement review issue that was raised by ICAC in December 2021. The Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption notified DIPL that there was a review to commence in relation to the procurement. Is that the one?

Mr MALEY: I am just trying to get the date. The report is dated ...

Madam CHAIR: You told me it was from 2023, so I allowed the latitude.

Mr MALEY: It is dated 16 October 2023.

Mr BOWDEN: Is that the final report? In 2021 there was a review of the Katherine regional office. Is that the one?

Mr MALEY: I am talking about the correspondence from the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption dated October 2023, which has 18 recommendations.

Mr BOWDEN: Yes. I wanted to go back to when the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption notified DIPL of the review, which was in 2021. The report was handed down in 2023.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you want to repeat your question?

Mr MALEY: This report dated October 2023 has 18 recommendations. What has your department done in relation to receiving the report and dealing with the recommendations outlined in it?

Mr BOWDEN: As I understand it, the report had 46 responses tied back to both the initial observations and final recommendations.

Mr KIRKMAN: In relation to the ICAC review of procurement in Katherine, I note that review was quite a bit broader than the Katherine office; it related to procurement around the department. A number of recommendations, 18 in total, were delivered by the ICAC. We have accepted them in full, and we have developed an action plan to make sure that we keep on track with our responses to them.

We have 46 individual responses that relate to the 18 recommendations. Of the 46 responses, 24 have now been completed since the recommendations were released.

We have also prioritised planning of projects and delivery of projects to address the other outstanding matters, including:

- a new mandatory annual disclosure of conflicts process for directors and designated officers
- updates to the internal conflict of interest policy, including linkages to the procurement declaration process of the gifts and benefits policy
- updates to the conflict of interest online register for improved dashboard reporting in consultation with the Department of Corporate and Digital Development
- a review of internal training material
- a review of procurement work instructions and communications to staff and procurement panel members.

It is important to note that we have been keen to take on any improvements that the ICAC has raised in regard to this review. It was heartening to see that no individual was put forward as not doing the right thing in any respect; it was about improvement of process. We put that up on our website to make it clear to all that we are very open about what we need to do to address the recommendations. We are well under way with that.

Mr BOWDEN: There was a highlight from the ICAC report where the ICAC Commissioner said that the DIPL team were cooperative and that the ICAC team received excellent cooperation from the DIPL team and staff. That is commended.

Mr MALEY: In relation to that report you talked about conducting reviews. What have you done? Are there any positive steps in changes in relation to the office that have occurred?

Madam CHAIR: The question was answered, but I will allow the minister and his officials to provide you with a little more commentary.

Mr BOWDEN: Extensive work has been done. The recommendations have been accepted, and the responses to the recommendations are ongoing.

Mr KIRKMAN: The items that I listed previously are the actions we have taken, which were the annual mandatory disclosure of conflicts of interest; updates of internal conflict of interest policies and linkages to the appropriate procurement declaration processes; and gifts and benefit policies et cetera. We put online registers for conflict of interest to make it easier for people to do that. We have reviewed all our internal training material to pick up on any of the necessary pieces that people needed to understand in their training to tick off on the recommendations put forward by the ICAC. We have reviewed all our procurement work instructions and communications to staff and procurement panel members to ensure that they understand what they need to do now.

Mr MALEY: This is in relation to the general report that was handed down in 2024. In that report it talks about the ICAC Commissioner saying that he previously had asked all public bodies to ...

Madam CHAIR: Which report are you talking about?

Mr MALEY: The general report handed down in May 2024.

Madam CHAIR: Okay, go ahead.

Mr MALEY: Basically, in his report he says that he asked all public bodies to conduct an audit of personnel records of public officers whose employment is contingent upon holding a particular qualification. He made that public statement on 18 May 2023. In that report he goes through who has done that work. Your department, minister, is not on that list. Why have you not complied with the ICAC request made in a public statement on 18 May 2023?

Madam CHAIR: Is this the report in relation to qualifications that people claim they have?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: I will allow it, but I will not allow any further questions or commentary. The minister and his officials can respond to that direct question.

Mr KIRKMAN: I have responded to the commissioner in respect to this matter. We have instigated some thinking in regard to that.

I must say that this is a whole-of-government matter that is led by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment in terms of advice as to how far we would go in reviewing this. Clearly, going to every employee we have and rifling back through past recruitments that may pertain to them and working out whether they had correctly or incorrectly put down their qualifications is not something that I would resource; we have work to do. However, going forward I am expecting the Commissioner for Public Employment to give us advice about how we deal with that ongoing.

Madam CHAIR: I will not allow further questions. The Minister for Public Employment appeared before the committee earlier. Perhaps a written question might provide you with more answers.

Ms BOOTHBY: The Mungkarta school and Newcastle Waters School are badly in need of urgent upgrades. How much money is being allocated this year to upgrade both schools? What will the infrastructure upgrades consist of?

Mr BOWDEN: The two schools you mentioned are among a number of government assets we continue to upgrade. We will have to get that level of detail for you, so we will have to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.7

Madam CHAIR: Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record.

Ms BOOTHBY: The Mungkarta school and Newcastle Waters School are badly in need of major upgrades. How much money is being allocated this year to upgrade both schools? What will the infrastructure upgrades consist of?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.7.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Brennan, we have the Education department later today, so you might wish to ask your question there.

Ms BOOTHBY: In 2020 a sum of \$3.175m was promised for the design and construction of 12 one-bedroom units for NT Health staff in Tennant Creek. It has now been four years since the decision was made to build

safe, secure and modern accommodation to help attract and retain Health staff at the Tennant Creek Hospital, but so far our former Infrastructure minister, who is now our third Chief Minister, still has not put a shovel in the ground. I note there is only \$1.275m allocated in this year's budget. What is happening with this project?

Mr BOWDEN: Having recently visited Tennant Creek and the Barkly region, I know a lot of work is going on there. There is a lot of commentary there, Member for Brennan, but we will ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, it is my job to rule the commentary in or out. Please answer the question or get your officials to.

Mr BOWDEN: You spoke about the \$3.175m budget for accommodation in Tennant Creek. Having recently visited there, I know a lot of work is going on. Sally O'Callaghan, the regional director there, has her shoulder to the wheel.

Mr KIRKMAN: Yes, we have been working with the Department of Health for some time on the staff accommodation that is required in Tennant Creek for nurses and other staff at the hospital. The site location took us a bit of time. The site we settled on, where the old basketball or tennis courts were underutilised, is a good location. It is secure and within the site, so I am really happy that we landed on that with Health.

In terms of where the project is at, I will pass to Adam Walding to talk to that level of detail.

Mr WALDING: The design has been completed. We anticipate it will go to tender in the second half of this year, with works to commence in March next year.

Ms BOOTHBY: There is a huge difference from the budget that was announced in 2020, which was four years ago. We heard that the design has just been completed and we might see something later this year. Why is there such a big difference in that announcement in 2020 compared with the actual budgeted number of \$1.275m in this year's budget? It seems incredible that it is four years later and has been reduced so much.

Mr WALDING: It was originally tendered in 2021, but the prices came in extremely high against the Value for Territory Assessment. We went back through the design to see whether we could find some more efficient design pathways. We have done that. Then we got the location right, being on the basketball courts onsite.

As we spoke about earlier, prices have continued to go up across the Territory and the country, hence the additional funding to go with it. We have now resolved the funding and it is going out to tender.

Mr BOWDEN: This is something we discussed this morning about value for the Territory and the laser-like focus that the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics has on projects to get the best value for the Territory. Mr Walding, Mr Kirkman and their team should be commended for doing this. Unfortunately, at times that means it does not start as quickly as possible, but Mr Walding has worked diligently on multiple projects and tried to get the best value for the Territory.

Mr MALEY: I want to talk about the Civic and State Square revitalisation. Can you give us an update on how that is going in relation to whether it is on budget? If it is not on budget, how much over budget is it?

Mr BOWDEN: That is in a different department, with the Chief Minister in the machinery of government. The Chief Minister has control of those bigger projects. We have looked after some important projects across the Northern Territory, but there is a delineation between the two. Unfortunately, we do not have those numbers on hand.

Mr MALEY: Is Liberty Square in your remit?

Mr BOWDEN: That is part of the State Square revitalisation and therefore not within our budget. As you would be aware, I made an announcement about it recently and talked about the number of people working on the project. This sits within the State Square and the Chief Minister's remit.

Mr MALEY: To confirm, you cannot answer any questions in relation to Liberty Square because it is not in your remit.

Mr BOWDEN: I am advised that we do not have those numbers on hand because it is separated.

Mr MALEY: Is it not on hand or not in your remit? Can we take it on notice if you have them?

Mr BOWDEN: I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.8

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

Mr MALEY: Is the Liberty Square project on budget? If not, how much over budget is it? Is it on time? If not, how much over time is it?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.8.

Mr MALEY: Can I ask the same question in relation to the art gallery in Darwin?

Mr BOWDEN: That is a different portfolio. You should have asked the Chief Minister earlier this week. It has been clear that the Chief Minister has carriage of that.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, are you willing to take that question on notice?

Mr BOWDEN: It is a different portfolio. I am happy to take it on notice, but I wanted to be clear with that.

Madam CHAIR: Do you have a bunch of these projects, because maybe we can list them together?

Mr MALEY: The art gallery is my main one. I am conscious of the time.

Question on Notice No 7.9

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

Mr MALEY: Is the State Square art gallery project on budget? If not, how much over budget is it? Is it on time? If not, how much over time is it?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.9.

Mr MALEY: Can you provide information in relation to the ship lift?

Mr BOWDEN: The Chief Minister was here last week. This has been known by everyone ...

Madam CHAIR: I will jump in. Member for Nelson, the ship lift is not in this output. We spoke about it last week. I know it has been a long week, but I will rule that the question is not for this output.

Mr MALEY: How much money has been spent on repairs and maintenance for the shade structure in Cavenagh Street?

Mr BOWDEN: It is good to see the Gumatj timber that is ageing nicely on the structure. I believe that we ...

Mr MALEY: Will you replace it soon?

Mr BOWDEN: It is ageing as expected. It is what that type of timber that has come from Gove will do. The Gumatj mob produced that from the country. It is jobs on country.

As of 31 March 2024 we have spent \$77,675 on maintaining that. The budget is approximately \$150,000. The Sterling group does the maintenance. Because it is a busy street in the CBD, this done on a Sunday evening which also increases the cost of that, due to penalty rates et cetera.

The Gumatj timber is ageing nicely on that structure. We are hoping that the vine will have rapid growth very soon. We might put in some new vines and see whether they can catch up.

Madam CHAIR: I have just sent you a letter with some tips from someone in my electorate on getting that vine going.

Mr MALEY: In regard to that \$77,000, what time frame are we talking about? Is that from 1 July until 31 March?

Mr BOWDEN: That is the reporting period. In 2023–23 the expenditure was \$155,302. That is for the maintenance. It is after-hours. Sometimes they have to close the road. It is also for the dehumidifying watering system. I am still trying to come to grips with that. Member for Nelson, one of your colleagues called it a dehumidifying watering system. I am not sure how they came up with that.

Mr MALEY: The year before was \$155,000 for repairs and maintenance. Now it is \$77,000. Why has there been a reduction?

Mr BOWDEN: That is the reporting period. We still have another quarter. The 2022–23 figure of \$155,000 was for 12 months.

Mr MALEY: In relation to the Tiger Brennan overpass, can you provide us with the latest costing for that? It was \$60m and now it is \$157m. Has it gone up?

Mr BOWDEN: We were there the other day because both lanes coming from the rural area will be opening. If they have not already opened, they will be opening very soon. They have opened; thank you, Member for Brennan. Hopefully, your trip in this morning was a bit smoother and a bit safer.

Ms BOOTHBY: It was 60 kilometres all the way.

Mr BOWDEN: That is part of the initial phase where you start at a lower speed. It is part of the plan. It has reached 70% completion. That project overall has a budget of \$165m. To date we are at \$84m. It is a significant project in the Northern Territory. Thousands of people use it every day. There are 32 apprentices who have been in training and utilising that project.

Mr MALEY: What does the \$84m cover?

Mr BOWDEN: That is the amount in this reporting period. It is a \$165m project all up. There is an element of revote in there. I can get it for you. It is at the back of BP4; I have it marked just for you. It is on page 36 of BP4.

Mr MALEY: Have your Weeties for lunch because you might get some questions after lunch.

Mr BOWDEN: It is capital works initiated in previous years carried forward into the budget year.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us an update on how much has been spent on the Tanami Road? Is there anything over budget in relation to that?

Mr BOWDEN: Chief Minister Eva Lawler was out at the Tanami with Catherine King. She tells a good story about how they went there and got a photo, and Catherine used it on her Christmas card last year.

To date the capital works, including the road and safety program for that, expended total is \$159.82m. I want to talk about this quickly. Of that \$159m, \$135.465m was from the federal government. This is the 80:20 split. We invest \$24.355m.

I will ask Claire Brown to give us a further run-down. It is a good example of a road that not many people would honestly know where it is, as they probably have not used it. We are investing and trying to get value for Territorians. The federal government continues to partner with us on that project.

Ms BROWN: In total, under the current national partnership agreement, there has been \$828m allocated to the Tanami Road. Of that, a 58.7-kilometre section has already been completed, which is the Vaughan Springs section. The next section that Exact is working on is the Chilla Well section, which is expected to be completed at the end of this year. As the minister referred to, the total expenditure to date has been nearly \$160m on the program, with \$64.889m this financial year.

The subsequent stages for Tanami are in design, and also having dealings with the Central Land Council in regard to obtaining clearances for those works.

Mr MALEY: Can you give an update on the Alice Springs art centre? Is that in your remit?

Mr BOWDEN: Absolutely. Formerly known as the national Aboriginal art gallery, it is now ATSIAGA—the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Gallery of Australia.

It took a long time for us to get to this position. In March 2022 the Territory government compulsorily acquired lot 678 in the town of Alice Springs. It was very difficult for the government to deal with the town council. The former CLP candidate for Lingiari, Damien Ryan, was the mayor at that time. I did not have any direct dealings at that stage, but many others had and they got very frustrated.

The gallery's design was publicly revealed on 28 July 2023. It is now at 95% design, so it is getting close.

We made an announcement last week that Sitzler had been awarded the tender for construction, and that work will start very soon. Hopefully, we can get all the materials on time and as required. Michael Sitzler and the Sitzler group are proud to have that project, being an Alice Springs family. We are hoping and expecting the construction to conclude in late 2026. There will be about six months to build and install exhibitions before it opens, so there is still a period to go.

The development was considered by the DCA, the Development Consent Authority, which is the expert panel that decides on these things. That was done on 8 May 2024 and the consent for the development was provided.

The budget is around \$150m. The initial contract has been awarded to Sitzler.

This will be a central piece in the Alice Springs tourism economy. The visitor information centre has been budgeted for. This is a good news story for Alice Springs on top of the Million Dollar Road Trip that was announced recently. As Daniel Rochford said, the intensity of caravans on the road is such that he has never seen before.

Madam CHAIR: Being 12 o'clock we will pause. We thank all the officials and committee members who have joined us. We will resume at 12.30 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, when you answer questions on notice make sure you say the number so that we can record it.

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.5

Mr BOWDEN: The question was about the cost of repairs following the recent riot at the current youth justice centre in Berrimah. The answer is that the estimated cost of repair would be \$310,000.

Madam CHAIR: We are on Output 1.1. Are there any more questions on Output 1.1?

Mr MALEY: Yes. In relation to the residential youth justice facilities, can you provide an update on those facilities in Darwin, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Katherine?

Mr BOWDEN: The youth justice facilities—did we not do that previously? We went through ...

Mr MALEY: We did the prison; we were not talking about ...

Madam CHAIR: No, we talked about youth justice this morning ...

Mr MALEY: Yes, but we talked about Don Dale. I am talking about the residential youth justice facilities in Darwin, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Katherine.

Madam CHAIR: I thought you talked about Alice Springs.

Mr MALEY: I will start with Katherine. Has the site been identified?

Mr BOWDEN: The youth justice camp for Katherine has had \$5.5m allocated. There will be an eight-bed youth justice camp that will be constructed offsite as a modular building. It will replicate the one in Tennant Creek. Currently the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities and DIPL are in discussion with Jawoyn Association about the possibility of facilitating the facility and it being located in Jawoyn homeland about 30 kilometres north of Katherine. There is potential for a grant to Jawoyn to construct and deliver, but that is potential. These buildings have been ordered.

Mr MALEY: I will unpack that a bit. The site has not been identified.

Madam CHAIR: We spoke about this last night. I think the infrastructure aspect would be a question for this minister, but as the minister just said, the location work is the responsibility of Territory Families.

Mr MALEY: Let us focus on the construction. What is the construction costs in relation to this?

Madam CHAIR: He just said that figure.

Mr MALEY: Is the \$5.5m for the one in Katherine?

Mr BOWDEN: It is \$5.5m. It is to be constructed offsite as modular buildings.

I can hand to Andrew Kirkman, chief executive, or Mr Walding the general manager of Infrastructure, Investment and Contracts. Mr Walding heads up this space. He took me on the recent tour of the new soon-to-be Holtze youth justice centre.

Mr WALDING: We are working with Territory Families on it. As Madam Chair said, it was discussed last night. The intent is for the ones in Katherine and Alice Springs to be basically a copycat of the Tennant Creek facility with the modular buildings. The site at Katherine is being finalised with the Jawoyn Association, which was mentioned last night. Alice Springs is looking for a site. It was discussed last night as to where that location will be.

Mr MALEY: In relation to the cost of each of those, what are your department's costs?

Mr WALDING: The budget for Katherine and Alice Springs is \$5.5m allocated for each.

Mr MALEY: Will that be the total cost for the build?

Mr WALDING: That is the build and site location. In Katherine, for example, if the Jawoyn Association sites them and stumps them, some of that cost will be transferred across for it to do that through a grant or some other process that is to be discussed.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us an update on your department's involvement in the Katherine agribusiness hub?

Madam CHAIR: Do you have a specific element to that? It is a big project which is not the responsibility of this minister.

Mr MALEY: That is why I asked: what is your department's involvement?

Madam CHAIR: That might be a question for Minister Monaghan later today.

Mr BOWDEN: Yes, Minister Monaghan has Agribusiness.

The way that I have termed it is the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics does the building. For instance, in the case of the Katherine or the Tennant Creek camp, Territory Families will come to us and say this is what we want you to build and this is the location and we will build it.

Mr MALEY: Has no-one come to you to build anything yet?

Mr KIRKMAN: A project that we have been working on for some time is the Katherine Logistics and Agribusiness Hub. The site off the Victoria Highway is adjacent to the rail terminal.

We commenced a number of offsite works to bring headworks to the site. Some of those include external power. They were completed by Power and Water Corporation in 2023. The trunk water main in the Victoria Highway from Bicentennial Road was awarded to DCT Australia and is expected to be complete over the coming couple of months.

External intersection designs have been completed and an internal subdivision design is due for completion later this year.

We have signed a deed of acquisition with Katherine Town Council for 1.63 hectares to enable ground-level water tanks that will supply water to the hub.

The bit that is most complex is the land tenure. This is part of the broader land claim that is under way in Katherine in terms of native title.

Mr MALEY: Are there any native title issues?

Mr KIRKMAN: Yes. We are working with the Jawoyn and Katherine families to look for a solution to resolve the land tenure ahead of a native title resolution. Ideally, a native title resolution for the broader town and this area will make it much easier, but in the absence of that we will work with both parties. We have worked with the pastoralists, and we have an agreement with the pastoralists regarding the site, but we need to work with native title holders to ensure that they are comfortable with what we are doing there. We are still proceeding and making sure that as soon as we resolve the native title piece we will have the headworks there, the intersection will be ready to go and we will be able to get on site and do the subdivisional works.

We are also working with the Australian Government on regional logistics hubs—the Infrastructure Commissioner could talk to this—but it will also have some interplay into this important logistics hub for the Katherine region.

Mr MALEY: Can you provide an update on the ferry terminal at Mandorah?

Mr BOWDEN: The Mandorah terminal sits within the Chief Minister's portfolios that were discussed in a previous hearing.

Mr MALEY: Does your department not have any involvement in the Mandorah construction?

Madam CHAIR: That is what the minister said; it sits with the responsibility of the Chief Minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The federal government allocated \$250m in March last year to address crime and safety in Central Australia, and \$5.6m was allocated to housing. Has that money gone to you and, if so, have you spent any of that? What have you used it for?

Mr BOWDEN: Is the question: how much has been allocated outside of the \$250m?

Mrs LAMBLEY: According to my records, \$5.6m was allocated for housing. You talked before about the housing on town camps—79 have been completed of the 83 new and replacement homes. What has happened to the \$5.6m for housing? Obviously, it has gone to you. The feds do not build houses.

Mr BOWDEN: There has been a national push by the federal government. The million homes or more has equated to 11,000 in the Northern Territory. Allan McGill is leading the group for an implementation plan. There will be 2,700 of them in remote. I know intimately the town camps in Alice Springs and the quality or lack of quality of the housing in town camps. We have to always be respectful in working with the people who live in the houses.

Member for Nelson, to your question about Katherine, there are two groups that have native title claims. We have to be sensitive to the needs of the community and the native title holders.

For clarity, we will take that on notice and then come back to you as quickly as possible.

Question on Notice No 7.10

Madam CHAIR: Member for Araluen, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Of the \$250m of federal funding that was given to Central Australia in March 2023, according to my records \$5.6m was allocated for housing. Where has that gone and what has it been used for? Has it gone to pay for town camp housing?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.10.

Mr MALEY: In July 2023 the then Infrastructure minister issued a media release about a consultant appointed to make recommendations about the current governance and oversight of the arrangements in the construction industry. In July Master Builders came out in support of that, and there was some legislation this year. I think KPMG was engaged to consult with you about whether there should be an independent commissioner. Can you give the committee an update in relation to that report? Has it been completed? Will it be made public?

Mr BOWDEN: I think that is in Output Group 3.0. Yes, KPMG was appointed as a consultant. We should get to that in the outputs ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, you can ask about that in Output Group 3.0. Do you have further questions for Output 1.1?

Mr MALEY: We have about three questions to go on the whole output, other than asking the minister about some rec fishing. If you are happy to let me ask these last few questions, we can skip through all the outputs and be done with it. We are in your hands.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, the Member for Nelson is trying to confuse you. He has asked you all your questions now. He has a few more, but then he will have none for the individual outputs.

Mr MALEY: In relation to the KPMG consultant that was engaged to give advice on the rollout of the building commissioner, has that report concluded? Do you have it? What are the recommendations? Will you release it?

Mr BOWDEN: The KPMG report has come to me in a draft form only; it is not final. There are a number of recommendations, one of which you alluded to about the building commissioner. We have not received the final report on that as yet. We will work through those recommendations when they come.

I will hand to Leah Clifford who is the Deputy Chief Executive of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics who will have a greater insight to that report, which came to us a couple of weeks ago in draft form.

Ms CLIFFORD: We received a draft report from KPMG. The consultant has been engaging with agencies, boards and committees in relation to the body of work they are undertaking.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us the cost of that report?

Ms CLIFFORD: The total contract value of KPMG Australia to undertake consultancy was \$205,336. They were appointed in September last year.

Mr MALEY: When do you expect the final report?

Mr BOWDEN: Having just received the draft report, I envisage that it would not be too far away. We will be in a position, hopefully, to release that report once we receive it. KPMG has been, as Ms Clifford said, contracted to undertake the consultancy at \$205,000.

Once we receive the final report we will consider it. Understand that under Standing Order 109, there will be no future policy decisions made or committed to here today. We will consider that report once we get the final report from KPMG.

Mr MALEY: In relation to Passenger Transport, have there been any assaults on transport inspectors or the bus under that heading? I am just trying to get to the effect of crime on ...

Mr BOWDEN: In the recent budget, we committed to fund the transit officers for another two years at \$8m to support those people who do an invaluable service on our bus network. That will be in the budget.

Mr KIRKMAN: It is a tough job that the Transit Safety Unit has. Its staff come into conflict with some poor behaviour. In terms of incidents, there are quite a number. Up to March this year there has been slightly in excess of 1,000 incidents reported on the bus network which are addressed by our officers and, where required, by police.

Mr MALEY: Have any of your transit safety officers been assaulted?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes, up to 31 March there have been 23 transit officers. They do a really good and an invaluable service. I was riding the bus network recently, engaging with the transit safety officers, the bus drivers and the police. We continue to invest in police as well as transit safety officers to make the network safer. It is not just the transit safety officers that are in this budget. We are also investing an extra \$570m in police, which you no doubt heard yesterday from the Police minister.

Mr MALEY: I missed it. How many were assaulted?

Mr BOWDEN: The total number of incidents with transit officers up to 31 March 2024 was 23.

Madam CHAIR: There are cameras on the buses. Are they monitored, or do you review them if there is an incident?

Mr BOWDEN: We are constantly meeting with the TWU and the bus drivers regarding their safety. That is paramount. I emphasise that we need to ensure that we are looking after our bus drivers because they do an invaluable service. Unfortunately, there is a number of incidents on our buses and our Transit Safety Unit statistics are not good. We do not want these numbers to be near 1,000 or that there were 23 incidents with transit officers.

The cameras are not monitored in real time, but they are used to review post-incident. We have had a number of incidents; unfortunately that happens. We utilise them to review post-incident. To resource a number of people to be monitoring them all the time would be difficult in any CCTV system. They are certainly there for post-incident review.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I received a letter from a local Alice Springs taxidriver. The crux of the letter is concerning the safety of taxidrivers and vehicles in Alice Springs. To read a bit of what he said:

'We understand taxis must comply with standards, which is a taxi meter certificate, camera certificate, tyres, interior and also being responsible for customer safety, but outer damage of the taxis is really hard to maintain. The department is fully aware of the situation in Alice Springs. If the department wants taxi services at night and cares about the transportation of people, then outer makeup of the taxi has to compromise, otherwise we cannot operate at night.'

He goes on to say how an inspector gave him a notice of seven days to clear all the dents on the exterior of his taxi, but they refused to give him an assurance that there will not be any incidents and damage to his taxi. You can get the gist of this story.

The ongoing damage to the exterior of taxis is to the point where local taxidrivers who provide a service at night—a critical service, a community service and a crisis service in some respects—cannot keep their taxis on the road because of the ongoing cost of maintaining the exterior. Can you cut some slack for these drivers in Alice Springs so that they continue to remain on the road? Do you intend to change any rules and regulations around this so that we can have taxis operating in Alice Springs at night?

Mr BOWDEN: You are right; the taxi service is imperative, especially in Alice Springs. The changes in the transport system over the last five to 10 years with the advent of Uber have seen an upheaval in the taxi industry. It has happened across a number of industries; with accommodation and taxis we can see what Uber and Airbnb have done. The biggest property business in the world does not own a property in Airbnb and Uber do not own a car, so the impost on taxidriviers to own a car and maintain it under the regulations is important.

Ms BROWN: I am not across the details of that particular circumstance. I am happy to potentially provide more advice in relation to that after this process.

The in-service maintenance standards were reviewed following industry consultation in 2002 to take into consideration cosmetic standards. As you are probably aware, we extended the maximum age to 13 years for point-to-point vehicles as a temporary measure to be reviewed in 2027.

Acknowledging some of the damage that is done through antisocial behaviour, we are working closely with police and other organisations to review our Respect Your Driver campaign. That is not just targeting the bus transport system but the public transport system in general to try to raise increased awareness in terms of the damage of these incidents.

For the particular details, I will have to take that on notice.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is putting an impost on taxidriviers. There is no time in between fixing their car and it being damaged again. Effectively they are struggling to keep their car on the road because of the damage and because of the time lines given by your department to fix them up. No-one wants tacky taxis driving around, but the reality is that these guys are driving within a war zone in Alice Springs half the time, driving through the night, driving through chaos and getting damaged frequently. Is there any intention of your department to cut them some slack?

Mr BOWDEN: We need them to be safe and we need them to be practical. Obviously there are parameters. I am happy to take it on notice and come back to you, Member for Araluen.

Question on Notice No 7.11

Madam CHAIR: Member for Araluen, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is there any intention of this government to cut some slack for taxidriviers in Alice Springs who are subjected to ongoing damage to their vehicles through crime and antisocial behaviour so that they will be given more time to repair the exterior damage to their cars and, therefore, can stay on the road and provide a critical service to the community?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.11.

Madam CHAIR: The minister said that he would be practical, but we need to be safe. I thought we were going to get the specifics of a specific case with that question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is not about safety; it is about being able to function as a business operator. These guys are self-employed.

Madam CHAIR: I thought you were talking to a specific case, and we were going to get those details.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No. If you can get back to me, I can let the whole industry in Alice Springs know in about five minutes. They are all connected, and I know most of them.

Ms BOOTHBY: We have had lots of feedback from Territorians that when they go to a Darwin MVR—Motor Vehicle Registry—there are massive, long queues, often out the door, and very long waits. Can you let the committee know what the average wait time is at the Darwin MVR?

Mr BOWDEN: I understand the question, but will you make it more specific to an MVR?

Ms BOOTHBY: The one in Stuart Park.

Mr BOWDEN: For customers served within 15 minutes in 2023–24 we have an 80% rate. Obviously, that is the target again in 2024–25. I do not believe we have information specific to that MVR at Goyder Street in Stuart Park.

Madam CHAIR: That is your target. Do you have a figure of what the actual is?

Mr BOWDEN: The target is 80%.

Mr KIRKMAN: We do not have the specifics, so we will take it as a question on notice, if we can.

Ms BOOTHBY: That was specifically for Darwin. Do you have the overall wait times for the whole Territory? Either way, I can ask it on notice.

Mr BOWDEN: You could make it a general question and ask that it be broken down.

Question on Notice No 7.12

Madam CHAIR: Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record.

Ms BOOTHBY: Can you state the average wait times for Territorians when they attend the Motor Vehicle Registry offices across the Territory and break it down into each of the MVR locations?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.12.

Mr MALEY: We have received reports that your department damaged a sacred site or some type of Aboriginal land issue on Alpururulam in the Barkly in relation to building a road. Can you give the committee information about that? There might have been a compensation payout that you had to pay.

Madam CHAIR: That may have been a question for the minister for Aboriginal areas, sacred protection ...

Mr MALEY: No. The reports I have received is that this department caused the damage in building a road and it is going through negotiations or court or something in relation to it. It was damage caused by this department in relation to a sacred site.

Mr BOWDEN: As we have been discussing in the last half an hour, it is important that we make sure that we are sympathetic and engaged with those. We have seen some very public issues around sacred sites. I think the ones that come to mind are around mining companies.

On 17 November 2022 the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority filed a complaint against DIPL alleging that the department carried out work on a sacred site in the homeland of Arlparra. That incident is now a legal matter which we are working through. That makes it difficult to further comment on at this stage. It is listed in the Local Court in Alice Springs for 3 February 2025.

Mr MALEY: Have there been any compensation payouts in relation to that matter from your department to anyone?

Mr BOWDEN: It is a legal matter now. It is listed in February 2025. It would be inappropriate to comment further.

Mr MALEY: I am not talking about the legal matter; I am talking about a compensation payout.

Madam CHAIR: More generally?

Mr BOWDEN: On this specific one with Arlparra?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr BOWDEN: It is before the courts.

Mr MALEY: Yes, but if you paid money before it is irrelevant to what happens in the court.

Mr BOWDEN: On 17 November 2022 a complaint was filed, and this matter is listed for trial in Alice Springs in February 2025.

Mr MALEY: Are you not willing to say anything about any compensation payouts or any other payouts at all between November 2022 and now?

Mr BOWDEN: It is a legal matter, Member for Nelson; I am sure you know how they work.

Mr MALEY: I know exactly how they work. It makes no difference.

Madam CHAIR: I do not think there would have been a payout before ...

Mr MALEY: Can you confirm there has been no payout, then?

Mr BOWDEN: The department has engaged solicitors for this matter, and it has been listed for trial in the Local Court in Alice Springs in February 2025.

Mr MALEY: What are your legal fees to date?

Mr BOWDEN: I am advised that the legal budget is not broken down case by case. If you want to put it on notice, we will be happy to take it on notice.

Mr MALEY: What did you spend on legal fees this financial year? Then we will break it down.

Mr BOWDEN: I am advised by Mr Papadakis, the chief financial officer, that the total number is in the budget, but it is not normally broken down. It was also a written question. The total amount of legal costs is just over \$1m.

Mr KIRKMAN: To 31 March 2024 it was \$1.048m for all of our legal costs. We do not have that specific case broken down, so we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.13

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

Mr MALEY: Can you provide the breakdown of the legal cost for the case that results from the incident that occurred on 17 November 2022 at Arlparra?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.13.

Mr MALEY: We now have some questions about rec fishing. Where shall we ask them?

Mr BOWDEN: Rec fishing sits in DITT, which is next.

Ms BOOTHBY: Next to crime, the cost of living is the number one issue that Territorians are faced with. Can you confirm that you are flying in the face of dealing with cost-of-living pressures and increasing registration for Territorians on 1 July?

Mr BOWDEN: I have travelled the Northern Territory in the last eight months. In my Business, Jobs and Skills portfolios we have held Business Summits across the Northern Territory. You are right; the cost of living or the cost of doing business has been one of the top three issues that has come out of those Business Summits. We will probably get to talk about the Business Summits more in the DITT outputs, because it is important.

One of the important things the Northern Territory Government is doing is the Back to School vouchers and Sport Vouchers.

Ms BOOTHBY: I asked you about the registration of motor vehicles.

Mr BOWDEN: I will get there, do not worry. Cost of living is an important question that you raised. Within the Power and Water budget, through this government we provide up to, if not more than, \$1,000 of subsidy to everyone's power bills. The Northern Territory Government has kept power bills to a 2.7% increase ...

Ms BOOTHBY: Is this your justification for increasing registration costs?

Mr BOWDEN: ... which is below inflation, and we have additional money from the feds. There will be \$300 for individuals and \$325 for businesses. Cost of living is a serious issue.

Ms BOOTHBY: Which is why I am asking about registration.

Mr BOWDEN: That is why I am answering it.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Brennan, do not interject. Minister, I will ensure she does not interject if you respond to the question. Her question was about rego. There is some latitude with a preamble, but let us keep on track.

Mr BOWDEN: I am trying to illustrate the work I have done in consulting with Territorians and businesses. Specifically, one of the top three has been cost of living and cost of doing business. You probably should not have sold TIO, because one of the issues is insurance going up. What the Territory government has control over is the MVR and registration rates, as well as Power and Water, because we own those entities, so we are giving every Territorian a subsidy. The increase for MVR is 1%.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is an increase; can you confirm that is from 1 July?

Mr BOWDEN: As you would be aware that is, on average, less than \$10 per registration. When inflation has gone through the roof and when the Reserve Bank held interest rates yesterday at 4.35% after increasing them 13 times over 18 months, there is an inflation issue within our economy.

What we are seeing is this government keeping some of the costs that we control—because we do not control TIO anymore; you sold that. We cannot control insurance costs, but we can control power prices and registration fees.

Ms BOOTHBY: But you are increasing registration.

Mr BOWDEN: Less than inflation by 7%—if you use a headline number of 8% inflation over the period—a 1% increase, which is less than \$10 on average for the Motor Vehicle Registry ...

Ms BOOTHBY: I am hearing that it is increasing. What percentage of people renew their driver's licence every 12 months?

Mr BOWDEN: That is a specific question on the type of behaviour in the market. This government would be hard pressed to check that. We would probably have to do that manually. I just re-registered my car and there is a number of options. My son just got his learner's and had to get his plates. To go into that minutiae I think shows a level of transparency to the fact that you are not actually worried about the big-ticket items in the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, which is a \$4.42bn program; you are worried about how long and how many people register their cars.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is a question from Territorians, so, yes, Territorians would like the answer.

Mr BOWDEN: Then you filter those questions, which is your opportunity to represent people and demonstrate the level of aptitude and understanding of things that are putting pressure on. We are talking about a \$4.42bn budget. If you like, we could take it on notice.

Ms BOOTHBY: Do you not have the answer?

Mr BOWDEN: Remember that the 30% increase in power prices was under the CLP. For MVR I think it was an 18% increase. That is a scant disregard for your constituents over the journey. People will not forget, nor will they forget you sold TIO. That has increased insurance premiums because the government does not have control over it.

I am happy to take it on notice, but I find it interesting that was your final question.

Question on Notice No 7.14

Madam CHAIR: Member for Brennan, please restate the question for the record.

Ms BOOTHBY: What percentage of people renew their driver's licence every 12 months?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes. I hope everyone renews their licence.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.14.

Mr KIRBY: We have heard a bit about some individual projects. As far as the broader infrastructure program goes, can we hear a bit about the strategic planning that goes along with that and the policy relating to it so that people have a bit of understanding about the \$4.4bn outlay?

Mr BOWDEN: It is a massive program at \$4.42bn. The cash outlay was \$1bn or thereabouts, which goes to Territory businesses and Territorians' pockets, notwithstanding the fact that approximately 99% of the money stays in the Northern Territory because we give those contracts to local businesses. I talked about Sitzler earlier. I was hoping we would get to Holtze—a really good project—where the Halkitis Brothers and the AKJ group have come together to form the Holtze land development.

We could get Dave Ritchie up to talk about lands and planning, since we will not get to that output. I would like to hear from Dave about the planning for strategic land release and others because it is a really important question.

The Holtze development at \$43m will see 550 or so lots come to market soon. We have heard about the aged-care investment for planning in the same region, next to the Palmerston Regional Hospital.

This is value for the Territory. Member for Nelson, you were asking—it was your sixth question this morning—about value for the Northern Territory. A strategic planning process with some experts, like Dave Ritchie, paints a picture. We sometimes get into the weeds, asking questions about how many people renew their licences on a 12-month basis.

I will hand over to Dave Ritchie, Chair of the NT Planning Commission, who I have enjoyed working with immensely over the last eight or nine months. We have just gone out to consultation on a new planning framework. Dave can articulate and illustrate that if given the opportunity.

Member for Port Darwin, would you ask the question again so that Dr Ritchie is clear?

Mr KIRBY: We have heard a bit about individual projects through the course of this morning, but could we hear more about the strategic policy and the planning that goes into that for the broader infrastructure spend that we have happening?

Dr RITCHIE: The Planning Commission is charged with managing the strategic planning under the Planning Scheme. The purpose of the Planning Scheme is to ensure that land use planning for the Northern Territory is done strategically. It specifically says that strategically means three basic things.

The first thing is—it is reiterated three times in the purpose of the scheme—that it is done in full engagement with the community that is affected by planning. The second thing is that there is intergenerational equity,

meaning that what we do now will benefit future generations. Thirdly, it refers to 'environment' and 'sustainable'. The act specifically says that we will preserve natural systems.

When you combine all that with the overall objective that we do the strategic plans in advance of the more detailed plans that are done by the infrastructure teams, we have to have this done five, 10, 15 years out from when it is needed.

We have just completed a couple of major pieces of work, one of which is the greater Holtze plan. That area became available for residential use when the Defence department ceased using the Kowandi farm area. That process has taken several years.

We go out with the general proposition that here is an area of land. Government holds strategic land reserves around the cities. This area is close to Palmerston. The original area that was potentially usable for high-density residential use was substantial if you work out how many lots which could have been turned off from that area.

In consultation with the community it became evident that the other thing we are charged with is that when you are building for the future, you also want to hang on to what is valuable and is valued by the communities living there today. In the case of this greater Holtze plan, over the three years of intense engagement with the community about this, it was changed dramatically.

One of the areas we assumed would be good is the now abandoned for commercial purposes cypress pine plantations which all look like perfectly good areas. There have been proposals in the past for them to be used for higher-density development. All the areas have been retained for recreational use because of the high value that people in that area held them. Similarly, there are a number of properties that have been there for a long time—they valued the amenity they had in them and expected to live there and pass their properties on to their children. We were able to provide buffers around their properties. In the midst of all this we looked at how to manage the amenity of the natural environment. The riparian corridors and the natural systems will now be incorporated in the new plan.

This plan has been through three stages of consultation. It has been on statutory exhibition, we held the final public hearing and that now is before the minister. It is an example of how, over time, a plan has been influenced by the community that will be affected by it, but also responds to all those strategic principles in the Planning Scheme of intergenerational equity, engaging the community and protecting the natural systems in the area, with the principles of resilience and sustainability.

We are now just starting the process of doing something similar south of The Gap in Alice Springs. Again, it is an area that has a lot of issues and sensitivities, including the bore fields that supply Alice Springs with water and cultural considerations, other environmental considerations and native title.

Mr BOWDEN: You can see why I have enjoyed working with Dave over the last eight or nine months. It is because of that strategic planning and long-term vision that he and his team at the Planning Commission have and how it intertwines and interlocks in with the delivery of today's projects, not just for today but into the future.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Infrastructure Planning and Governance
Output 1.3 – Building Asset Management

No questions.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – LANDS AND PLANNING
Output 2.1 – Land Development
Output 2.2 – Crown Land Estate
Output 2.3 – Development Assessment Services
Output 2.4 – Lands Planning
Output 2.5 – Building Advisory Services
Output 2.6 – Land Information and Spatial Analytics
Output 2.7 – Northern Territory Planning Commission

No questions.

Madam CHAIR: Output 2.7, Northern Territory Planning Commission, we just dealt with under the general area. The commissioner spoke to us, and we thank him.

That concludes consideration of Output 2.7 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – LOGISTICS INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

- Output 3.1 – Passenger Transport**
- Output 3.2 – Registration and Licensing**
- Output 3.3 – Road and Water Safety and Compliance**
- Output 3.4 – Transport Planning and Delivery**
- Output 3.5 – Transport Assets**
- Output 3.6 – Strategy, Policy and Legislation**

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – HOUSING PROGRAM OFFICE

- Output 4.1 – Capital Program Delivery**
- Output 4.2 – Program Planning and Engagement**
- Output 4.3 – Housing Maintenance Services**

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

- Output 5.1 – Corporate and Governance**
- Output 5.2 – Shared Services Received**

No questions.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, it was frustrating at the start because we did not go to outputs, but you got the benefit post-lunch when all the questions had been asked in the general fiscal budget outlook. We thank you sincerely as that concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

We thank the agency staff who provided advice and thank you, minister.

Mr BOWDEN: Madam Chair, it would be remiss of me not to thank Andrew Kirkman, Chief Executive of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics and the entire DIPL team. Leah Clifford who I have worked with closely in Planning—it has been a pleasure. Adam Walding, as you can see from his contribution today, does a power of work. Adam, thank you. I thank Claire Brown and Fotis Papadakis and everyone who does the work in the background. Dwayne McInnes nearly got a run up the front but missed out at the starting line, maybe a false start. I thank Danielle Cross; Jenny Henwood; Doug Lesh, we should have let him off the leash but we did not today; Mark Meldrum; Graeme Finch; Dave Ritchie, whom we heard from but I do not think we heard enough from him; Cindy McDonald; Chandan Kalase; Bob Pemble; and all the secretary staff who have just done an absolute power of work, as you can see.

A very special mention to Jade; Rob Lee; and the team upstairs who work with me and have accommodated me over the last eight or nine months, especially Caleb Johnston, who has done a power of work. He does not just support me; he supports the team. He supports the fifth floor and is a highly valued member of our team. I have forgotten one person who is ...

Madam CHAIR: They will be very cross with you, and we now only have two-minute break.

Mr BOWDEN: I forgot Tegan Berg, who has done an absolute power of work. Thank you, Tegan, for your work.

The committee suspended.

**BUSINESS AND JOBS
SKILLS, TRAINING AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
RECREATIONAL FISHING**

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mr BOWDEN: From the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, I introduce: Shaun Drabsch, Chief Executive Officer; Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer; Catherine White, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Business and Workforce; and Gae Mackay, Executive Director of Business. Gae and I travelled the entire Territory recently, doing the Business Summits that I talked about earlier.

Madam CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement about your portfolios? This is the only point you can make an opening statement.

Mr BOWDEN: Yes, it is important to put a couple of things on the record.

Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the Northern Territory, and it has been a great pleasure to be the Tourism and Hospitality minister over the past eight or nine months. Tourism creates thousands of jobs and job opportunities, and it supports hundreds of local businesses across our regions. This is why the Territory government has boosted this year's Tourism budget with a \$68m investment in 2024–25, including \$6m extra funding. I was pleased to get that through the budget process.

It has been a tough couple of years for tourism and the hospitality sector. While overall visitation in the Territory remains lower than in pre-pandemic years, total expenditure is now 14% higher than it was pre-pandemic. I have heard numerous times about the unicorn year, which has made it very difficult to compare apples with apples over the last few years.

The extra funding boost will build on the work of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade that has already been done, as well as investments made in the last year to support the sector. I thank the entire department at the outset, and hopefully we get a chance to do that at the conclusion.

Let me go through some highlights in order to demonstrate the commitment this government has to tourism and the keen focus that I have had since I came into this role, as well as the amount of stakeholder engagement and consultation that we have undertaken in order to respond and reflect the needs of industry.

The Territory Tourism Discount Scheme is a prime example of that. Earlier this year the government launched the Territory discount scheme. Tourism and hospitality are important to the economy. That is why we invested \$1m to support local businesses who rely on the industry.

It was popular. The scheme offered 25% off tourism packages until 30 April across the Territory to encourage locals to support our tourism operators during the quieter shoulder seasons. Member for Nelson, we have a Wet Season in the Top End. Member for Araluen, not so much in the Centre.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, let us save the sledging.

Mr BOWDEN: We are trying to encourage local operators and locals to scale up during that shoulder season. This scheme has since been extended. It was to 30 April, but it has been extended to 30 June 2024 for the Red Centre to provide more support for the Alice Springs businesses and providers. They have obviously gone through a tough time. It was extended to Alice Springs, Yulara and Tennant Creek. Danial Rochford and the Tourism Central Australia team rolled out that and did a very good job. I thank Danial and his team for their work.

In 2023 the government invested \$10m into the Territory Aviation Attraction Scheme—TAAS—to improve aviation access and connectivity to the Territory. More flights create more work for Territorians, increase visitor numbers and improve airfare competition.

We were keen to get the competition up. We saw the supply and demand issue. We had a failing in that space where one of our providers crashed and burned. We were keen to improve airfare competition for those living here. Those in Alice Springs took it up, which clearly demonstrates there is a market in Alice Springs for a low-cost carrier or for our current carrier to provide much cheaper airfares.

Developing ongoing aviation access for Territorians is one of our six key priorities in the Tourism Industry Strategy 2030. We are pleased to already have secured commitments from a variety of airlines for Darwin, Alice Springs and Uluru. The most recent flight into Uluru from Melbourne was well received. In fact, Mr Rochford, the CEO of Tourism Central Australia, drove there and, in his words, he has never seen before the intensity of the caravans on the road, a part of our Million Dollar Road Trip that I will get to shortly.

In the past 12 months the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade has provided significant support for industry with some of the highlights including the Visitor Experience Enhancement Program—VEEP. Round seven saw 49 businesses awarded nearly \$3m in funding. Successful applicants included 34 from the Top End, with funding totalling \$2.07m. There were 14 projects from Central Australia totalling just under \$800,000. One project supported both regions, totalling just under \$60,000.

Round five of the Aboriginal Tourism Grant Program had six Aboriginal organisations awarded approximately \$503,000 for projects that deliver new Aboriginal cultural tourism products. The Territory is one of the must-do destinations, and 80% of people who come to the Northern Territory are looking for an Indigenous or Aboriginal cultural experience. Approximately six of the same programs or seven businesses from the Top End and one from Central Australia were awarded over \$590,000. To date, this grant program has supported 53 Aboriginal tourism businesses with grants totalling over \$2.23m.

I visited Standley Chasm recently. I met with Nova and her team. They are doing a wonderful job, providing a cultural experience. The walk up into the chasm takes about 15 minutes. We had a young Aboriginal man as our guide. He said that he did not like public speaking before he started as a guide. Through demonstrating to guests the cultural significance and experience that his family and culture has and passing that on, he has gone from strength to strength whereby next he wants to run his own business, which is sensational. If you ever get a chance to go to Alice Springs, get to Standley Chasm and join Nova and the team for something to eat and that pleasant 20 to 30-minute walk into the chasm.

In March this year applications for the Aboriginal Tourism Development Support Grant Program closed, and approximately \$289,000 in grant funding was awarded to 10 successful recipients across the Territory.

Marketing is a key priority of the NT Tourism Strategy 2030. It is to grow the value of the holiday market in the Northern Territory through strategic marketing activities. There have been too many to mention individually, a testament to the brilliant work by Tourism NT, which does a great job taking to market that the Territory is a must-see or must-do destination. However, I will highlight a couple:

- The Summer Done Differently national campaign commenced mid-July 2023 until September 2023. It was focused on driving sales for the low season with the support of trade partners offering enticing discounts to incentivise travel.
- A content and PR shoot featuring Daniel Rioli—Member for Nelson, he plays for the Richmond Football Club; go the Tigers—as the Tourism NT ambassador promoting the NT as a holiday destination featuring Kakadu, Darwin and the Tiwi Islands. In fact, I think Daniel just got engaged, so congratulations to Daniel and his partner.
- Another New Zealand campaign from June 2023 to August 2023 targeted high-value travellers to visit the Territory.
- In November 2023 phase two of Backpacker Academy launched in the UK and German markets to continue increasing awareness of working holiday experiences in the NT, targeting working holiday-makers and youth leisure travellers to work and live in the NT.
- A further working holiday-makers international campaign commenced on 19 March 2024 targeting youths on the east coast of Australia to work in the NT and boost our seasonal workforce.

I will turn to our trade events. Twenty-eight Territory tourism operators attended the NT Muster this year to showcase NT tourism products to domestic travel consultants, product managers, inbound tour operators and online travel agents in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney.

Twelve NT-based operators participated in a UK Europe travel trade mission in March 2024 covering Manchester, London, Frankfurt and Munich. Going over and attracting that overseas market is a good investment in our time.

In Melbourne this year ATE24 will provide 31 NT operators meetings to establish new and build on existing relationships, while buyers will be given the opportunity to experience Australia's tourism offerings firsthand through pre and post-event familiarisations.

The work the agency does is guided by the NT Tourism Strategy 2030. Last year it was updated to reflect the current state of the tourism industry. The revised plan sets an ambitious target of up to 2.8 million visitors accounting for an associated spend of \$5.3bn by 2030.

In addition, Tourism NT held the Aboriginal Tourism Forum in Alice Springs in 2023, where the third progress report on the Northern Territory Aboriginal Tourism Strategy 2020–2030 was released to key stakeholders and industry representatives.

How good are cruise ships? I know CBD retailers love to hear about our cruise sector. I met with the CBD retailers recently and talked about the 100-plus cruise ships that have been and will be into our port. Our biggest cruise season ever is 2023–24, with 103 cruise ships expected to have visited the Darwin port by the end of the financial year. That is only a couple of weeks away. That is contributing an estimated \$65m to the local economy. It translates to approximately 60,000 people.

An interesting fact is that not only the passengers but also the crew are disembarking every time they land. I was not sure of that, but found that to be the case when we toured one of the cruise ships. These ships can carry over 3,500 passengers—for instance, the *Royal Princess*. This was the largest ship to grace our shores this year. The crew also disembarked, which was another 1,000 people. Its arrival was estimated to contribute \$1.5m to \$2m in direct spend in the CBD during a one-day stopover in Darwin.

The NT Cruise Forum was held in May and offered local businesses the opportunity to directly connect with the cruise industry, ground handlers and other key stakeholders. I met one jumping croc provider who wanted to put on another bus and boat because of the 103 cruise ships expected to visit Darwin port by the end of this financial year.

The Northern Territory Cruise Tourism Strategy 2022–2025 sets the direction to capitalise on the growth of our cruise sector. We have a fabulous port. It is very well received, and I know that those who operate the cruise ships enjoy coming to Darwin and the ease of transport once they disembark to go see our great Northern Territory in the Top End.

International education has been a very important part, with the \$250m we have invested in the city campus for CDU. In December 2023 international students enrolments rose 29% year on year compared with December 2022. This is the highest record enrolment data for the Northern Territory. As of 2023 there were 5,592 international students enrolled with Territory international education and training providers.

The Territory's target is to attract 10,000, and these international students will hopefully be here by 2030. We had previously targeted that for 2025 but this ambitious target was released prior to COVID-19. The time frame has been adjusted as a consequence of losing several years of momentum while international borders were shut. We are advocating strongly with the Minister for Education, Jason Clare; the Minister for Skills and Training, Brendan O'Connor; Clare O'Neil, Minister for Home Affairs; and Minister Giles for an increase in our international students and migration levels.

We know that to attract 10,000 international students we will need to build accommodation, which we have done recently in doing a 'do not deal' with CDU for a parcel of land behind the CDU city campus.

Export income generated by the international education and training sector—IET—in the Territory was \$165m. The sector supported 590-odd jobs in the Territory in 2022. That is the latest available data, and I suspect it is more with more students here.

Study NT delivers a range of programs and activities designed to market and promote the Territory as a destination of choice for international students. A new standalone Study NT website was launched in December 2023 incorporating a marketing toolkit, downloadable assets and the agent training course. The new website provides a greater user experience for our three stakeholder groups. Feedback so far has been incredibly positive.

Study NT held an agent seminar in Jakarta to coincide with Minister Ah Kit's visit to Indonesia in November. Seven providers joined the seminar and approximately 40 agents participated. Study NT also had an overseas delegation to Vietnam earlier this year with seven international education and training providers

hosting agent and student events across Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang and Hanoi, meeting more than 140 prospective students and families and over 120 international education agents.

In 2023–24 the international student wellbeing grant program supported 19 projects. Since 2018 over \$800,000 in funding has supported 120 activities and engaged more than 8,900 international students across the Territory.

Other grants distributed in the last year include the Study NT International Student Accommodation Grant, which supports international students with relocation to the Territory; the Study in Australia's Northern Territory Scholarship program for international students studying higher education and vocational education and training; and the International Student Travel Grant to help support international students with their relocation costs to the Northern Territory from overseas.

NT Business Events has supported business around the Northern Territory. The NT Business Events Support Fund continues to support local industry with over \$2m invested to attract domestic and international business events that generated \$42m in estimated delegate expenditure in 2023–24. NT Business Events partnered with 13 local industry partners to exhibit at the Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event in Melbourne in February, the largest NT contingent at an AIME in several years. NT Business Events partnered with Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair at AIME to showcase Indigenous Fashions Projects with a stand activation featuring First Nations textiles from seven Aboriginal art centres across the Territory. The activation drove buyers to the stand, allowing industry partners a further opportunity to engage and connect.

Darwin staged several international association conferences in 2023 that will result in the NT's first ever International Congress and Convention Association ranking, a prestigious accolade for destination marketers seeking to attract international conferences.

Recreational fishing plays a significant role in the Northern Territory economy and community, and we know that the NT is home to some of the best fishing in the world. This is why we continue to invest in this important sector.

Earlier this year we announced half-a-million dollars in investment through the new round of the NT Recreational Fishing Grants Scheme for fishing initiatives or organisations. This government has been running the scheme since 2018 and provided more than \$800,000 to successful recipients.

Since 2017 the Territory government has spent \$31m to enhance recreational fishing, with a further \$14.8m committed to proposed projects. This has included investing in new infrastructure and improving opportunities for recreational fishing across the Territory. Some of the highlights include:

- installation of four artificial reef complexes at Dundee, North Gutter, Lee Point Wide and Adelaide River; this is an \$8.5m flagship project that will continue to provide new recreational fishing opportunities for many years to come
- upgrading the Shady Camp and Daly River boat ramps and facilities
- installation of CCTV cameras at the Dinah Beach boat ramp and East Arm boat ramp
- installation of new toilets at Dinah Beach boat ramp
- sealing of the Middle Arm boat ramp car park.

In 2023 the Territory government released the recreational fishing development plan to guide further enhancement of recreational fishing over the next decade. The recreational fishing development plan will be the key guide to strengthening the recreational fishing sector over the next decade, with plans to support the diversification of an abundance of fish stock as well as facilitate accessibility projects so that everyone can enjoy a fishing experience.

We were recently out at Dudley Point to announce the tender for the design of the Dudley Point fishing structure, or jetty, which will be accessible to all Territorians. Not everyone can afford a boat or has a mate with a boat, so it is a great opportunity for Territorians to get out, have their say on the plan and once it is constructed, go and wet a line at that lovely place, just further down the road than Pee Wee's restaurant and Lake Alexander.

The consultation and engagement undertaken during the development of the RFDP highlighted that in addition to its economic contributors, recreational fishing provides a broad range of social and cultural health and wellbeing benefits.

I also note that yesterday we announced that a re-elected Lawler Labor government will implement a ban on commercial fish nets in all Territory waters for barramundi fishing. This announcement signals the Lawler government's intent to lock in the Territory as the premier recreational fishing jurisdiction in Australia. The barramundi is the most prized recreational fish in the Territory, and recreational fishing contributes about \$270m to the Territory's economy. The removal of gillnets will also address concerns raised by conservationists and traditional owners by delivering greater protections for threatened and endangered species within the fishery.

Commercial fishing is a very important industry to the Territory and this announcement safeguards the future of commercial barramundi fishing. Gillnetting is the only gear permitted for commercial licence holders, and reform is necessary to address access, economic and social sustainability and conservation issues in the barramundi fishery. Under a Lawler government gillnets will be phased out over four years to 2028 with commercial licence holders to be compensated through a licence buyback program. Buybacks offer the chance to reset and relaunch the fishery in 2028 with alternative gear.

Removing gillnets recognises the changing social and environmental concerns in the community. This announcement comes after extensive consultation with stakeholders from recreational fishing, commercial licence holders, fishing tour guides and meetings with traditional owners.

Business and jobs are as important as any in the Northern Territory, and the government is contributing to support industry, businesses, employers and employees. For the Territory to achieve a \$40bn economy by 2030, we need to build our workforce and continue working to attract skilled and agile workers here. This workforce needs to be responsive and adaptive to the needs of Territory businesses, delivering programs that support Territory businesses to become more resilient and innovative through the delivery of fit-for-purpose programs.

It is important to highlight the support this government has given businesses over the last 12 months to address community safety. This is a real concern to Territorians, and it is why we have taken the deliberate action to do whatever we can to support our business community.

The Alcohol Secure and Safety Grant expenditure of \$217,992 as at 31 March supported 21 liquor licensees to access works to protect their workers and secure products. This funding contributed towards \$533,000 in value of completed works in the Territory. A further \$478,000 of works are currently under way.

The Northern Territory Government administers the Business Re-secure program, of which the department provides \$250,000, with Victims of Crime. This program provides immediate support to businesses to resecure their premises after a break-in. As of 31 March 2024 there were 191 unique businesses this financial year that had accessed the Business Re-secure program. The Central Australia region accounts for 50% of the claims for the Business Re-secure program.

Business Security and Safety Audit expenditure of \$645,500 as of 31 March 2024 has resulted in 150 business premises being provided with specific information to assist improving their security measures.

The Biz Secure program continues with the NT Government introducing this program to enhance the safety and security of business premises against break-ins and crime by providing financial assistance for businesses to undertake works using Territory businesses. As of 31 March expenditure of \$1.49m has supported 219 businesses to undertake works to enhance the safety and security of their premises against break-ins.

In the Business Innovation Program 2.0 the agency delivers a suite of services and programs to develop a \$4bn innovation ecosystem to support a \$40bn economy in the Territory by 2030. As of 31 March 2024 the innovation program directly supported 121 Territory businesses, including through the Business Innovation Program, the Business Acceleration Program, the Digital Partnerships Program, delivery partners and Territory Innovation Challenges Program.

The Territory Innovation Challenges Program is an innovative procurement method. It was launched on 21 February 2022.

The winner of the first Territory Innovation Challenge, the Array, officially opened on 22 February 2024. It was a pleasure to attend that event held at the Vic Arcade in the mall. This is the Territory's first co-located digital games and eSport—electronic sports—centre. You would have to go and see it in the mall to believe it, but it was here in the CBD and a wonderful event.

The Territory Innovation Challenges Program aims to position the Territory for future investment, leading to jobs and economic growth and accelerating development of a more innovation-driven economy.

The Territory Business Summits—as I spoke about earlier—were held between February and April 2024. Six Business Summits were held in Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek. I thank Gae Mackay for helping facilitate them. In addition to this we had two Indigenous Business Summits that were facilitated through NTIBN in Alice Springs and Darwin.

The Territory Business Summits have given the NT Government an opportunity to hear directly from around 140 Territory businesses. More than 160 businesses were represented with their challenges and their ideas for creating a resilient and small business sector. Attendees have been actively engaged in a constructive discussion about the challenges their businesses are facing and the opportunities to help overcome this.

Summits are an opportunity for me to hear the voice of Territory businesses and understand their needs so that the government can provide the right support to help them thrive. Bringing Territory businesses together to share their knowledge and ideas will help maximise the opportunities that will support and grow our economy. I am proud of that small project we have done in such a short period of time.

We also have our small business champions. Up to 31 March 2024 the small business champions have engaged with 2,146 businesses throughout the Territory—what a fabulous effort.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, have you got much to go?

Mr BOWDEN: No, Madam Chair.

The Territory government has undertaken a review of its Aboriginal Procurement Policy to inform its delivery and direction over the next three years. The policy's targeted approach is part of the Northern Territory Government's procurement framework.

Our work for skills and training is to support NT businesses and to support the NT workforce with critical skills shortage areas that remain a key priority for this government. The National Skills Agreement—with the Member for Port Darwin doing a power of work on that—has been implemented. This was a record investment into skilling Territorians to take advantage of new industries. Commencing in January 2024 the skills agreement will provide up to \$155m over five years. It is a great partnership between us and the federal government.

Construction of a new trades training centre at Charles Darwin continues. This has a heavy equipment precinct, an assembly area, an industrial sandpit and classrooms. It was great to be there recently to check out the progress. We provided \$4.8m towards the new centre, which will help strengthen vocational education and training pathways.

Fee-free TAFE will invest \$50m into CDU. There is \$109m in the total budget for training. This also interacts with Closing the Gap with jobs and skills. In the 2023 calendar year the department funded 5,100 Aboriginal students to undertake VET training. This is an increase of 7%.

We also have the Northern Territory Designated Area Migration Agreement. The government has extended the Northern Territory DAMA II, a bespoke NT employer-sponsored migration program, to better support Territory businesses experiencing that skills shortage.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, can I check how many pages you have to go?

Mr BOWDEN: Just one, Madam Chair.

Madam CHAIR: Do you promise? You might be pleased to know you have achieved the record for the longest introductory speech at Estimates.

Ms BOOTHBY: We have not asked one question.

Mr BOWDEN: The Northern Territory Government remains committed to prioritising jobs for Territorians first and workers from interstate before businesses seek workers from overseas.

We continue to promote the Northern Territory as a desirable place to live and work at country expos such as the New Zealand Work and Live in the Northern Territory Jobs Expo.

We now have more than 9,000 job seekers registered on the Territory's WorkerConnect platform. This platform enables job seekers to load their CVs for Territory businesses to search. It provides Territory businesses with a free recruitment platform to advertise job vacancies. I encourage all Territorian employers to log their jobs on WorkerConnect now so that their vacancies can be discovered by job seekers.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the statement?

Mr MALEY: In relation to the \$50m RecFishing Futures Program, how much of that money is left?

Mr BOWDEN: The RecFishing Futures Program has been well patronised and we have a small amount left. I will ask Shaun Drabsch and probably call Jed and Matt straight up, because they are dressed to the nines and ready to go, to talk about the RecFishing Futures Program. It has not been fully subscribed as yet. If my memory serves me correctly there is a small portion remaining. It is around about \$5.5m remaining.

Mr DRABSCH: With the \$50m recreational fishing infrastructure fund to date over \$30m has been invested by the Territory government, with benefits to flow to recreational fishers' specific projects, including:

- the installation of four artificial reef complexes at Dundee, North Gutter, Lee Point Wide and Adelaide River
- upgrading the Shady Camp and Daly River boat ramps
- installation of CCTV cameras at the Dinah Beach boat ramp and East Arm boat ramp
- installation of new toilet facilities at the Dinah Beach boat ramp
- sealing the Middle Arm boat ramp car park
- sealing six kilometres of the Corroboree Billabong road
- grading 12 kilometres of the Point Stuart access track, with culverts installed to improve access in low-lying areas
- grant funding to the Nhulunbuy Regional Sports Fishing Club to enhance boat ramp facilities at the Mud Wharf
- a new containment net at Manton Dam
- production of juvenile barramundi at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre for stocking waterways, including Manton Dam, Palmerston lakes, Rum Jungle south lake and McMinns Lagoon, with trials also taking place in Bundilla Lagoon
- four rounds of the recreational fishing small grants program, with another round scheduled for this calendar year
- a 12-month Territory-wide recreational fishing survey, going back to the 2018–19 financial year.

Approximately \$5.6m of RecFishing Futures funding remains and will be allocated to actions under the recreational fishing development plan 2023–2033 where possible.

Mr MATZ: Of the \$5.6m, some recommendations have been made to the minister's office for those expenditures. They are currently under consideration.

Mr MALEY: Once the \$5.6m has been spent, is there any budget line to top up that money? Will there be a top-up of the RecFishing Futures program?

Mr BOWDEN: You are asking for a future announcement of some description, but the budget is currently as it is. Shaun Drabsch has gone through it. There is \$5.6m remaining.

Mr MALEY: Is it in the budget to increase that amount of money to top it up?

Mr BOWDEN: There is \$5.6m remaining in the RecFishing fund.

Mr MALEY: What about to top it up? We have had \$50m since 2016. Is there a budget line to top up that program?

Mr BOWDEN: The budget for the RecFishing fund has \$5.6m remaining. There have been some ideas put forward. There is no top-up fund because the budget has been set over next four years in the forward estimates.

Mr MALEY: Once that \$5.6m is spent, is that the end of that futures program?

Mr BOWDEN: We are heavily invested in rec fishing as you have seen with our recent announcement. We have consistently engaged with stakeholders. As it is a \$270m industry, we will continue to invest in it. You will see that in the budget. This Lawler government is invested in rec fishing, the downstream impacts it has and the economic drivers that it has. You have seen that with our recent announcement and consultation with industry.

Mr DRABSCH: In Budget Paper No 4, under the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, there is a reference in our infrastructure program to 'Enhance recreational fishing infrastructure across the Territory' of \$19.7m. There was \$30m invested to date and a number of those other projects which I mentioned are still under way and under construction. For the forthcoming budget year of 2024–25, that \$19.78m is likely to largely be consumed, including a potential allocation of \$5.6m. I anticipate that in the next budget process for 2025–26 there may be future allocations, but that is speculation at this point.

Mr MALEY: Is the \$19.7m extra and above the \$50m?

Mr DRABSCH: No, that is a part of the \$50m. It goes to the amount of expenditure which is likely to occur in the financial year.

Mr MALEY: Is there no budget line to increase the RecFishing Futures program in the current budget?

Mr BOWDEN: In yesterday's announcement we also committed to a pool of \$15m that will be put towards rec fishing. That is a policy announcement for a re-elected Lawler government.

Mr MALEY: I missed that bit. What was it?

Mr BOWDEN: It is a pool of \$15m which will be incorporated into the transition and the phase-out of gillnetting. That will not be in the budget papers because it has just been announced. The policy announcement that we made about banning gillnetting and phasing out and transitioning that part of the economy has a \$15m pool. That is an approximate amount of money at this point in time and it will not be in the budget papers.

Mr MALEY: That probably answers my question. In regard to the announcement yesterday about the phasing out of gillnetting, is there \$15m in the kitty for that policy?

Mr BOWDEN: In consultation with the commercial fishing industry and from some learnings that we have taken out of Queensland and Victoria, we have estimated and put a pool of \$15m into our policy commitment to enable those buybacks and that transition. If we are re-elected we will work diligently with the industry to ensure there is four-year transition, the gillnets are banned and phased out and that there is new gear used in the commercial fishing industry.

Mr MALEY: In your opening statement you spoke about barra, does it include threadfin salmon as well?

Mr BOWDEN: This is barramundi. As you know, there is some bycatch within the gillnetting and the commercial industry.

Mr OSBORNE: I will take the question as: does the barramundi fishery also catch threadfin salmon? Yes, the barramundi fishery also targets and captures threadfin salmon.

Ms BOOTHBY: The Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that overseas visitors to the Territory had dropped sharply by 10.5% in March 2024 compared with March 2023. Overseas visitors are down 57.6% in Labor's eight years since September 2016. This has been the feedback we received. In Katherine the caravan parks are down 40%. In Alice Springs the caravan parks are down between 40% and 50%. You only have to walk around Darwin city to see that the cafes and restaurants are not as full as we know them to be.

Do you admit that our reputation as a crime capital is making it near impossible to rebuild and grow our tourism numbers?

Mr BOWDEN: I introduce Scott Lovett, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Tourism, Services and Hospitality, Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade; and Valerie Smith, Executive Director of the same department. Scott and Valerie spoke with me, and we worked through that the unicorn COVID year is very hard to go through as apples for apples in our comparisons.

We know that tourism has been difficult. We know that we have to market aggressively and that we have to advertise. As I said in my opening statement, we know that we have to send delegations overseas.

A delegation will be going to China to try to get back one of our biggest overseas markets that has dropped off significantly. In September I think the department asked for a certain number. I said, 'Why can't we send double?' We want to get back that international visitation; it is one of the key elements of our market that we need to get back.

We have the eighth wonder of the world, Uluru, in the Northern Territory. What a fantastic drawcard that is. We have had flights recommence with Virgin from Melbourne to Uluru. That will increase our visitation.

I will hand to Mr Lovett to talk about the overseas visitation and the general Tourism theme and how difficult it has been. Danial Rochford is getting a hell of a run today, because I spoke to him not long ago about the intensity of the caravans that he has never before experienced.

I went to Hidden Valley a couple of times over the weekend; I am sure that the Member for Brennan did as well. As I drove past the Hidden Valley caravan park I saw that it was full. The G'day caravan park that I recently visited is booked out. A number of caravan parks have reported to us directly that they are booked out and are experiencing some of the highest demand in history.

That is part of the partnership that we have embarked on with Caravan Industry Association of Australia. That was part of our Business Summits where we got together Brendan Heenan, well-known Alice Springs advocate and caravan park owner, with Stuart from Caravan Industry Association of Australia. He said, 'What can we do to continue to drive this market in such a competitive environment?' They all put their hand in the pocket and came up with some money. We matched it as the government and here we have a Million Dollar Road Trip offering that has seen visitation jump dramatically.

I will hand to Scott Lovett to talk about the overseas visitation, the delegations overseas and the upcoming China trip. I think Scott may be on that. We are aggressively marketing and going for those overseas visitors because they also spend more than local visitors. I think the multiplier is much higher. I am sure that Scott will be able to advise us on that amount of spend.

Danial Rochford has never seen that intensity before.

Mr LOVETT: There was quite a long introduction. I will try to answer the question.

The international market in broad terms is coming back. We have recovered about 60% of our international market using the December 2023 data, which is the latest year-end data that we have.

The ABS data to which you referred looks at overseas arrivals and departures. That captures about 5% of our total visitors because that is coming off the passenger cards where you tick where you intend to spend most of your time. Most international holiday visitors will come to the Northern Territory as part of a broader Australian trip. It would be rare for someone from Germany or the US just to spend their entire trip in the Northern Territory.

We interpret those numbers through the International Visitor Survey which comes from Tourism Research Australia. We have seen that we have recovered 60% of our visitation and about 80% of our spend. One of the biggest challenges we have had, as the minister correctly said, is we are missing China and Japan, which

was our number one market in 2019. It was a bit of an aberration in 2019 because we had the climb closure at Uluru which stimulated a huge amount of visitation from Japan. Nonetheless, Japan has always been a pretty significant market.

Australia overall has recovered to 75% of its international holiday visitation, so it is a slow rebound. Those numbers are being impacted by individual markets, the largest one being China for Australian inbounds. We are seeing real challenges in that space. The sooner the Australian international visitor economy grows, the better off we will be. We are just behind pace in terms of our visitor market.

From a domestic perspective, as the minister rightly said, we have seen in the last few weeks the spike in the self-drive market come through. Domestically, holiday visitation is extraordinarily challenging across the Territory and Australia. We have cost-of-living pressure like there is no tomorrow. The Tourism Research Australia data shows that the length of stay and expenditure is being crunched.

Looking at the narrative, people are staying closer to home. When people have to find another \$2,000 on average for their mortgage payments, rent payments are going up, petrol is going up and groceries are going up, they are prioritising travel and leisure, yes, but they are staying closer to home. We are seeing that people are looking for value when they travel.

They will travel to places like the Gold Coast where there are plentiful flights and cheaper family options. The Territory is a long way away; we do not have as many flights as we would like. We are an expensive proposition and destination compared with others.

Combine that with the fact that outbound travel has increased at a rapid rate of knots. We are now well in excess of pre-COVID numbers of Australians travelling outbound. You only have to check social and traditional media feeds looking at Luxury Escapes, Webjet and other travel providers to see you can stay in Bali and get airfares and cheap accommodation in five-star resorts for \$1,000 to 1,200 for a week. That is a compelling argument. There are some challenges in the domestic space.

I was with Danial in the last couple of weeks when we went to Uluru to see the launch of the Virgin flights—with Valerie as well—and it was wall-to-wall caravans. We had a warm start to winter in the southern states. As soon as winter really kicks in for the southern states that is when our caravan self-drive market really kicks in, so we are hopeful that we will have a good season.

All told, we are seeing our accommodation numbers hold up in good fashion. We are seeing changes in the market and crunching of our lead times; if you talk to most hotels they will say that 50% of their business is built within the first 30 days of the month.

There are challenges; we are well aware of that. We are working extraordinarily hard to address those through a market-led—Valerie and her Industry Development team do a fantastic job in building up and promoting the fantastic natural and built assets and experiences we have.

Ms BOOTHBY: The department and the officials here today do a fabulous job; year after year, whoever is the Tourism minister sits here and tells us that they are hopeful for future tourism growth and that the next year will be better. They are positive, which is fantastic because we need that positivity in tourism and in the Territory.

However, you and your predecessors as Tourism minister have not spoken about reputational damage to our tourism industry because of the levels of crime. Do you believe that crime is a factor when Australians or international visitors decide to come to the Territory? Yes, cost of living is an issue, but we are competing with every other jurisdiction in Australia and people are going to other destinations; that is a fact. Why can you not admit that crime is an issue for our tourism sector?

Mr BOWDEN: Scott just outlined that it is tough in the trenches, there are shorter stays, later bookings and the average spend is down. There is a highly competitive market.

We are positive because we have to be and we have to invest in this space. One dollar invested today—you do not know when you get it back. There was a good story at a Tourism Australia conference I went to a couple of years ago where a European retiree held on to a *Reader's Digest* coupon, and when she retired after 30 years, she then took the trip to Australia. That was a marketing decision made by someone in the Australian tourism marketing department who said, 'Let's invest in some marketing space in the *Reader's Digest*'. I think it was in Germany, but I am sometimes mistaken.

We have to invest, and we have to be positive. There are a couple of former Tourism ministers sitting in the room, who have been consistently positive in this space because that is what we have to do. We must market aggressively and advertise.

Yes, there are issues with perception, which is why Stuart from Caravan Industry Association of Australia, Brendan Heenan and I had a private meeting that went back to the tourism group in Alice Springs to ask what we can do because we have serious concerns about our image. What did we do? We aggressively marketed and advertised the Million Dollar Road Trip.

Yes, reputation is a defining factor in people's decision-making. It is the decision-making funnel. When you get all the information in the funnel it then comes out the bottom, which is when you make a decision. Of course there are elements of crime, but as the Minister for Police outlined extensively yesterday, we are investing more money than anyone in the Northern Territory ever has to address these issues.

We cannot see them in isolation, but an extra \$570m into the Police budget, an extra 200 police and an extra 25 in the call centre, plus \$68m in our Tourism budget—which includes an extra \$6m—means we are working our butts off to get this economy going in the tourism space. Scott, Valerie, Shaun and the team do a remarkable job in what has been a difficult environment.

Let me paraphrase what Mr Lovett said: it is tough in the trenches. There are shorter stays and later bookings, and the average spend is down.

You started talking about cost of living—we increased the Motor Vehicle Registry fee by 1%. Interest rates have gone up 13 times over the last 18 months, and that might be an extra \$2,000 on your mortgage repayment. Some people came off fixed interest rates after an 18-month or two-year period, and that came crashing down on them.

As Mr Lovett said, they are staying closer to home. We are trying to get people here from China. We have a significant amount of that market. We are also trying to attract people from interstate. What Mr Lovett has not articulated, which I am sure he will shortly, is the amount of money other states are putting into their Tourism budgets.

Our budget is about \$9bn, give or take. Other budgets around Australia, such as Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia—one of the richest states—have significant budget allocations for tourist attraction. That is what we are also competing with. Thankfully, we have the million-dollar barra, the Million Dollar Road Trip, Uluru, Kakadu, Kata Tjuta, the Outback Way and all these must-do destinations in the Northern Territory that we can leverage.

Scott Lovett and his team, under the tutelage of Shaun Drabsch, have done a fabulous job to get us into a position where we can compete not only on a national scale but an international scale in a very competitive market.

Ms BOOTHBY: My question was about the crime and reputational damage.

Mr BOWDEN: I thought I answered it extensively.

Ms BOOTHBY: Seeing as you are going everywhere else except there, can I ask you another question about ...

Madam CHAIR: He answered the question. Minister, would you be willing, in the interest of time, to take another question from the Member for Brennan?

Mr BOWDEN: Of course. I am wondering if Mr Lovett can ...

Ms BOOTHBY: You had a very long opening statement where you outlined a lot of information, so I feel like we can have some short answers to our short questions.

Madam CHAIR: Mr Lovett will keep his comments short, I am sure.

Mr LOVETT: It is extraordinarily competitive. I could not tell you exact numbers off the top of my head, but the reality is that our larger jurisdictions are fighting tooth and nail to invest significantly in this space, and not just in direct tourism marketing but aviation attraction and development. The Queensland Government, for

example, has its \$200m co-contribution fund with Queensland Airports. It is an extraordinarily challenging environment in that space and keeping pace, so investment is critical.

Ms BOOTHBY: We have asked these questions in previous years, so hopefully you have the information to hand. Do you know what tourists are googling before they come to the Territory? How high does the subject of crime rate in those Google searches?

Mr BOWDEN: I think it was our very first couple of meetings with Scott and Tony Quarmby, who does a raft of analytics and data analysis around the decision-making set and the funnel—the holy trinity of segmentation, targeting and positioning. TQ is an expert on all those marketing elements. The three Cs, the four Ps, you name it—TQ, Scott Lovett, Valerie and the team are across this.

Because of those issues it is tough in the trenches. People are booking later; we are seeing this. That hurts with airfares. If you try to book late with airfares they will not be the best price that you can get. Some of the indicators are showing that the worm is turning.

As to what tourists are googling before they make their decision to come to the Northern Territory, I will ask Chief Executive Shaun Drabsch or someone in the operational element of the department whether they have that level of data about the Google search engine.

Mr DRABSCH: I reinforce what the minister said. We closely monitor the social media activity of our potential markets and client bases. I will throw to Scott for the detail of what we are finding in that space.

Mr LOVETT: We survey. Specifically what people are googling, I could not tell you, but I can tell you what we know from our destination market tracking survey and what people say about us in the various phases, whether they are just aware of us or are more seriously considering us.

Safety and security comes up number eight for people who are considering the Northern Territory. It could be crime. We also see that number spike around general safety when we have croc stories and other things like people getting lost. We are a big, wide open space. That does come up.

For our international visitors in the survey that Tourism Australia does safety and security comes up number one for Australia. It is the number one considered thing for international markets coming into Australia. They want to know that they are safe, secure, can get around and know where to go as they are coming through. Globally, it is a thing that people think about when they are coming to Australia.

Ms BOOTHBY: Given the information we have just heard from your deputy chief executive officer about international tourism being down as low as it is, the fact we have to increase it, it is coming back to Australia as a general rule and that safety is the number one issue for overseas visitors coming to Australia, why are you not addressing crime and safety as the number one issue for these overseas tourists as they are researching their future holidays?

Mr BOWDEN: The data says that the Northern Territory safety is number eight and in Australia it is number one.

Ms BOOTHBY: For people overseas.

Mr BOWDEN: That is for people overseas. What are we doing? Minister Potter was here yesterday. The Chief Minister Eva Lawler has outlined and committed to this in the budget in forward estimates at \$570m into the Police budget.

Ms BOOTHBY: You have had eight long years to address this. We ask this every year in Estimates.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Brennan, can you let him answer the question? You asked a question. Let the minister answer it.

Mr BOWDEN: I love the fact that you are passionate about this, but your negativity is one of the issues that we deal with regularly. Tourism ministers are positive and they talk the place up. We advertise the great things about the Northern Territory and Australia. These are really good things that we want people to make a decision about. We want them to come to Australia and the Northern Territory.

It is not normal for someone who would come from overseas to just be visiting the Northern Territory. It would be one of a number of stops. You can probably guess the other two. They are the Great Barrier Reef and the

Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House. That is the top three when it comes to the data of what people visit.

We are addressing a range of issues that deal with the localised criminal and antisocial behaviour. Mr Potter outlined that extensively yesterday. Chief Minister Eva Lawler has done that. We have committed to that in the budget going forward with an extra \$570m, an extra 200 police and an extra 25 in the call centre. We know that it is an issue.

We are addressing because it when the 103 cruise ships arrive and passengers disembark and come up the mall, we want them to have a good experience. Word-of-mouth advertising and advocates are something that we need.

Your negativity and the way that you talk the Territory down does not support the tourist operators or the Darwin retailers. When you peddle propaganda about the Territory not being safe and tell lies publicly ...

Ms BOOTHBY: I take exception to that.

Mr BOWDEN: When you go on live radio—I was sitting with you that day and you told a bold-faced lie about the Northern Territory ...

Ms BOOTHBY: You are the only person in the Territory who does not believe that crime is an issue for our tourists and our businesses.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Brennan, he is answering the question. After he finishes answering the question, you will have an opportunity to ask another question.

Ms BOOTHBY: He is calling me a liar. I take exception to being called a liar.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, the member takes exception to being called a liar. Would you withdraw the term 'liar'?

Mr BOWDEN: I withdraw. When you went on live radio, you sat opposite me and you told a blatant mistruth. You continue to ...

Ms BOOTHBY: Madam Deputy Chair, that is the same thing. He is trying to peddle misinformation to Territorians.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will get the minister to continue to answer the question and to be mindful of some the language he uses when he answers the question. I remind you that he is answering the question. After he finishes answering the question you have the floor. You will be able to address what he says and ask your next question.

Mr BOWDEN: We are addressing crime and antisocial behaviour with the greatest investment the Territory has seen in the space of police and enforcement. We are also addressing education. As the Minister for Education will speak about, we have had full funding from the federal government guaranteed going forward. That is an enormous determining factor into whether a child will be able to read and write. Whether a child can read or write is also a determining factor of whether they will be on the straight and narrow during their life.

There were 40,000 people at the Supercars. It was broadcast and beamed nationally. I did an interview with Mark Beretta, who has been with Channel Seven for years. I know Mark Beretta from my time in Melbourne. The positivity that came out of that interview was beamed nationally.

Potentially, if you ever got to do an interview like that, you would talk the place down. You would say, 'Do not come here'. It is crazy to see your demeanour and questioning and the way that you talk down the Territory because that is not what we need.

We need tourism to talk up the place. We had 16,000 at BASSINTEGRASS. I went down there. Everyone was happy. We had a huge number of interstate visitors to the Supercars. It was over 35% interstate visitors to BASSINTEGRASS. We are looking for advocates to come to the Northern Territory and have a good time, enjoy themselves, then go away and be advocates for the Northern Territory. That is why we pay influencers and why we do marketing. We have Daniel Rioli as one of our ambassadors because we are invested in the Northern Territory and want to continue to grow the economy through this sector.

We acknowledge that there is crime and antisocial behaviour in our community, but that does not mean we should not invest \$68m into the tourism industry. We are investing \$570m more into police. Commissioner Michael Murphy, who was here yesterday, is working as hard as anyone to implement the strategy of arresting the crime statistics to change the way that we behave. We are investing in transit safety officers; we are investing in all these different things.

Tourism, which we are talking about today, requires positivity, and we must market our assets. We must put incentives into the marketplace because we know that incentives work. That is what the 25% discount scheme did in the shoulder season. We are seeing an overwhelming number of people driving up here because we put in the Million Dollar Road Trip. We saw so many people come to the Territory.

I went to Fishing and Outdoor World on Cavenagh Street on a public holiday not long ago. They had six people working on the floor and four people in the warehouse unpacking items for sale because they could not keep the shelves stacked. I spoke at length to George and his team—in fact, my son was grabbing me by my T-shirt saying, ‘Dad, we need to go’, because we were there buying some fishing gear for him because he wanted to go fishing on that public holiday. George and his team have benefited from the Million Dollar Fish and benefited from that investment from this Territory government into the tourism space.

These are all positive things we are doing; when you talk down the Territory it disappoints me, frankly.

Ms BOOTHBY: You can say what you like about me, but Territorians know that tourists are turning their backs on the Northern Territory because we have not been able to address our reputational damage when it comes to crime and antisocial behaviour. Eight long years of every minister under the sun talking about how they will fix crime and strengthen laws, and you have not done that. There is no amount of talk and money you can throw at it this late in the piece when we are so close to an election. That is what it all is. It is just bluff and wind to try to win an election because Territorians know that you have not delivered on community safety. They know that tourists are down and that we are not seeing the numbers ...

Mr BOWDEN: Madam Chair, is there a question?

Ms BOOTHBY: My question to you ...

Mr BOWDEN: It seems to be a statement or a rambling ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I think the member has just come to the realisation that she has to ask a question eventually.

Ms BOOTHBY: I can ask my question for as long as it takes. I am asking the questions, so thank you for allowing me to ask these questions.

I want to ask you about Bonza because Labor failed to deliver cost-of-living relief or cheaper flights for Territorians. Last year your government signed off on a \$20m fund, which was \$10m of taxpayers’ funds to get more flights for the Territory, including Bonza airlines. Now, just months later, the airline has collapsed leaving thousands of Territorians, tourists and local travel operators hundreds of thousands of dollars out of pocket. How many millions from the fund went to Bonza?

Mr BOWDEN: As I outlined in my opening statement, the Territory Aviation Attraction Scheme—TAAS—was there to improve aviation access and connectivity for Territorians.

We saw a very quick uptake, especially from those in Alice Springs. I was there for the launch. I was also there for Airnorth when it did its first trip. We have Airnorth flying from Perth to Alice Springs. The Members for Braitling and Namatjira were there. This was a welcome announcement in Alice Springs, and the uptake was significant. We saw a lot of Centralians taking the opportunity. A number I spoke to were going to Melbourne to the footy; they thought, ‘For \$150 there and \$150 back, what a great weekend’.

More flights is the supply side of the issue. Demand was there, so we needed to put in more flights. Clearly Bonza had a few issues, with capital funding, ownership, the multifactorial nature of it and the different jurisdiction it was in. It caused, no doubt, a number of issues for Bonza. It was unsustainable. It was a startup. This will never detract from the fact that we will aggressively target air carriers so that we can put more supply into the market.

We know that Territorians, particularly Centralians, are keen to travel on a low-cost airline. Members may recall Tiger was in Central Australia for a time.

We will continue to utilise the TAAS. The specifics of the TAAS are commercial-in-confidence. Yes, the quantum of \$10m in the TAAS to improve that aviation access is in the budget line, but a number of the agreements we have are commercial-in-confidence.

I will ask Shaun Drabsch and Scott Lovett to expand on the Bonza situation. I know it went into voluntary administration, and we only paid per customer retrospectively, so the taxpayer or the Northern Territory Government were not out of pocket because we were paying our bills as they were due ...

Ms BOOTHBY: Were there no funds paid to Bonza from the Territory taxpayer?

Mr BOWDEN: As each person took the trip, we paid that. It was a retrospective payment. The Northern Territory Government was not out of pocket in the sense that the subsidy was not paid if someone did not fly with Bonza.

We thank the other air carriers that picked up those Territorians who, unfortunately, had their flights cancelled. It was pleasing to see Qantas and Jetstar jump in and ensure that Territorians who had booked were able to get home at the same price. There was no increase in price, so that was pleasing.

I make no apologies for us aggressively targeting air carriers to try to attract them to the Northern Territory. As Mr Lovett has just said, we need to attract our international market back. More flights coming out of Asia, Europe and the Americas direct to the Northern Territory can only mean one thing—more people coming to visit our great Northern Territory.

Yes, a number of startups fail. Bonza clearly did not have all its ducks in a row.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is about the amount of money paid.

Mr BOWDEN: As I said, it is commercial-in-confidence. The quantum is in the budget.

Mr DRABSCH: Aviation support is a critical contribution that DITT and the government are making to improve the liveability of the Territory and to help attract tourists here as well.

We have successfully secured two additional weekly Jetstar flights between Sydney and Ayers Rock Airport, resulting in daily services in the northern summer. Also, on top of that, Jetstar have added seats on the Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Bali to Darwin routes operating throughout April to October 2024. Together with the additional services, Jetstar will add 54,000 new seats—a 12% increase—for the Territory.

That is the impact that these programs can have through a co-contribution arrangement with the airport group, ADG, and the government contributing to create incentives to create new routes and supplement existing routes to Central Australia.

Virgin Australia will commence two new routes, Melbourne to Uluru and Brisbane to Uluru. Airnorth has commenced its new route between Perth and Alice Springs. There is a number of examples of the success of this program.

I acknowledge the work of the former minister for Tourism, the Member for Wanguri, and her commitment in establishing the TAAS scheme.

With Bonza it was disappointing that despite the fact that there were strong numbers, particularly on the Alice Springs to Melbourne route and on the Darwin to Sunshine Coast route—which I flew on just before they went into administration. There was strong demand and appetite for those services, which is improving the quality of life for Territorians.

In regard to the Bonza particular circumstances, I might throw to Scott Lovett or Valerie Smith.

Mr BOWDEN: I will pass to Valerie Smith. Just to be clear, not one dollar has been paid to Bonza. Part of the TAAS is that the subsidies go to the airport. Not one dollar has gone to Bonza in this case; I want to make it clear that Bonza has been paid nothing.

Ms SMITH: The NT Government's agreement in relation to TAAS are made with the eligible airport, so in this case it would be Airport Development Group for Darwin and Alice Springs, or Voyages Indigenous Tourism for the case of the flights to Uluru.

The government's arrangements in relation to TAAS are that it is a cooperative fund. We put in a certain proportion of money and the airport puts in a proportion. The airport may put in funding outside of TAAS towards getting a new airport route. That might be things such as marketing at the airport itself on its own assets or outbound marketing from the Territory. Often they provide no-cost or low-cost office space, for example. Those negotiations take place directly between the airline and the airport.

In relation to the Bonza deal, the NT Government's relationship with Bonza was through ADG in this case, because it applied to both Darwin and Alice Springs Airports. Payments were made retrospectively for flights that operated between November and up until when they ceased operation in April. All those passenger numbers were provided to us by the airport, and we paid a contribution towards those passengers once they had flown to the Territory.

Ms BOOTHBY: When you talked about Bonza and the success, you talked about the demand and how it was positive to see there was demand. I want to make the point that the demand you mentioned—you say this often—was for Territorians leaving the Territory, going from Alice to Melbourne, Darwin to Sunshine Coast or Gold Coast. What Territorians hoped this scheme would do, but it did not do, was encourage tourists to come to the Territory. Can you see how that is such a different thing?

I will not go on about it. I have 20 minutes to ask questions.

Mr BOWDEN: I would like to respond to that briefly, if that is okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I have a quick bit of housekeeping first. We have just over 15 minutes, several other outputs and several other portfolios—just a gentle reminder to the committee.

Mr BOWDEN: Can I respond to that briefly? I do not know what is wrong with Territorians getting cheap flights outbound.

Ms BOOTHBY: There is nothing wrong with that; this is a Tourism output.

Mr BOWDEN: Flights go both ways. You can get a return flight. Flights out and flights in mean we have opportunities for tourists to come to the Northern Territory. Cheap flights for Territorians—I will give that a tick, because we wanted more supply in the market, and there was a demand.

There is also demand for tourists coming to the Northern Territory. You are being negative again, saying that Territorians should not have cheap flights out of the Territory.

Ms BOOTHBY: I did not say that.

Mr BOWDEN: I left Alice Springs as a 17-year-old. I went to Melbourne and was homesick all the time. I went there to pursue a goal that I did reasonably well at, but I always wanted to go home to see mum and dad.

Ms BOOTHBY: What you are really good at is putting words in my mouth. Minister, can we move on?

Mr BOWDEN: I always wanted to get on that flight to go home to see mum and dad. You can google this ...

Ms BOOTHBY: All you are doing is telling stories ...

Mr BOWDEN: ... I appeared on *The Footy Show*, and Sam Newman ...

Ms BOOTHBY: ... personal stories, not talking about Territorians. You are just talking about yourself!

Mr BOWDEN: ... the terrible person, asked me, 'What will you do in the off-season?'

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not care. Madam Deputy Chair, this is getting beyond ridiculous.

Mr BOWDEN: I said, 'I'm going home to Alice Springs to see my mum and dad, and I'm going to utilise these flights'.

Ms BOOTHBY: All he is doing is talking about himself.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: He is about to wrap up his comments, but he is entitled to respond to what you were saying.

Mr BOWDEN: I am disappointed that the Member for Brennan does not want cheap flights for Territorians and does not quite understand that the flights are return flights, so we have more opportunities for tourists to come to the Northern Territory. If it is a reduced fare or a cheap carrier, they will be able to get to the Northern Territory on a budget.

You have spoken about the cost of living during these hearings. Cost of living is a serious issue, so if we can attract another low-cost carrier with this \$10m that we continue to invest in Territorians, I will be punching the air with glee. Territorians will get lower prices for their airfares, whether they are holidaying out of the Territory or, like me as a young bloke going to Melbourne, coming home to see family and friends. We know lots of Territorians leave the Northern Territory at some stage to either study or just go abroad and work. We want them to come home as often as possible, and a cheap airfare is a good thing for Territorians.

Ms BOOTHBY: Johnn Johnn's ice creamery in Darwin city will close this Dry Season due to ongoing concerns with staff and customer safety. Char Restaurant closed recently, citing the ongoing costs of repairing smashed windows. Lucky Bat Cafe in Nightcliff also said that they could not deal with crime any longer. How many more businesses need to close before you stop trying to strengthen the windows instead of strengthening the law? How many Territory businesses have closed down since 1 July 2023?

Mr BOWDEN: As a former small business owner, I know how difficult it is to run a business. For the issues at Johnn Johnn's, Lucky Bat and Char, I think that has to be acknowledged; they are very difficult circumstances to work through.

We have increased our funding for Biz Secure. In fact, it is now the business growth and resilience program because part of our Business Summits when we travelled around the Territory talking with businesses was about how they cannot just survive but thrive. It is one of the important things.

Small business is really difficult. As a general comment, I have seen more businesses open than close in recent times, by region—that includes Darwin and Palmerston. We have seen business sentiment and confidence rise a little bit, but not in Alice Springs. We have seen a drop in business confidence in Alice Springs over that period, and the curfew implemented by Eva Lawler, taking decisive commonsense action there, did have a detrimental effect on business confidence.

Mr DRABSCH: I can advise the committee as at 31 March 2024 there were 16,362 businesses operating in the Territory, which was an increase of 456 businesses, or 2.9% over the year. From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, 3,237 businesses entered into business in the Territory, while 2,675 businesses exited. The business entry rate in the Territory was second highest at 20.4%, the same as Victoria and just below the ACT at 22.8%.

In terms of regions, for example, the greater Darwin region had 11,907 businesses as of 30 June 2023—an increase of 3.1%—so 361 more businesses than a year ago. The number of large businesses with 200-plus employees more than doubled in that same period from six businesses in financial year 2022 to 15 businesses in financial year 2023.

Mr BOWDEN: I want Catherine White, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Business and Workforce, and Gae Mackay, Executive Director of Business, to add to that because it is a story we need to continue to tell around small businesses opening up. Not every small business is successful. I ran a small business; it is one of the hardest things I have ever done.

We are investing over \$109m in Business, Jobs and Skills. Like tourism, we will continue to invest in this space because we need to upskill Territorians so that we can deliver the product. Regardless of what the product is, we need to deliver quality products to visitors and locals so that we can all enjoy it.

Ms WHITE: It is interesting that we have had more businesses enter the market than leave, and that is across the Territory. Very few had to close for purposes as in liquidation. We know that crime is a real challenge in the Northern Territory and the whole of the country.

We do as much as we can to support businesses to stay open. Territory businesses tend to be innovative and creative, thinking about ways of working. We know that small businesses are the backbone of our

Territory. The minister, through the summits, has been listening to business and trying to adapt, change and ensure our services, support and small business champions are there when they need an ear. There are plenty of businesses starting up in the Territory.

Ms BOOTHBY: The data you are giving us is from the ABS; I have the same data. Does it concern you that 2,675 businesses across the Territory have either moved interstate or closed altogether? That number is telling, even though we have new businesses starting—I accept that—should we not be doing more for existing businesses to stay in the Territory and be able to grow and thrive?

Mr BOWDEN: Yes, I am very interested in supporting businesses. We—Gae, me, Trish from the team, Rob Lee and a number of others—have travelled the Territory over the last eight months, listening and talking to businesses. The amount of support for businesses in the Northern Territory, I think, is unparalleled across the country. Our small business champions, the grants available, the department led by Shaun and Cathy—it is exceptional to think there is that much support.

That was one of the elements within our summits that I wanted to get across. When we attended the small business summits we had an overwhelming response. Gae, you might give me a nod? Maybe not. All of a sudden we had all these businesses showing up—not-for-profits, NGOs, for-profits and a range of businesses.

First, we thank them for giving up their time because they took time away from their business. Secondly, it was important for me to say as a former business owner in Victoria where no-one—no small business champion, grants officer or Victorian Government department of industry and trade or business, skills and jobs—turned up. The only person who turned up to my little restaurant cafe in north Carlton was someone from the Yarra City Council telling me to take down an advertising sign that was breaching the heritage component of my building. That is the only help we got when trying to sell cups of coffee. It was the toughest six years of my business life, with a lot of learnings but no support given.

I will hand to Cathy or Gae about the amount of support and the work the small business champions do to continue to develop businesses, hence why we reinvested \$109m in Business, Jobs and Skills and why we are investing in Biz Secure, which is now the business growth, resilience and security package. We want businesses to thrive, not just survive.

As Mr Drabsch outlined, the numbers have increased, which is pleasing. I want the Territory economy to grow. We want to get to 2030 with a \$40bn economy—97% of our businesses are small to medium-sized enterprises.

We support businesses in the Northern Territory because we want the Territory to do well. We are positive on this side.

Ms BOOTHBY: I feel like you went through all that in your opening statement. With all due respect to your amazing department staff—if you want to throw to them, that is fine—of these businesses that have closed, how many were Alice Springs businesses?

Mr BOWDEN: I have been waiting all day to do this. I will handball that one to Shaun Drabsch and let him answer that question.

Ms BOOTHBY: Are we allowed to have props in the Estimates Committee, Madam Chair? I know we are not allowed them in the House. It is typical of his behaviour, though. He does not take this seriously.

Mr BOWDEN: I can replace my nameplate with it, Member for Brennan.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I ask you to remove the football. Training is a little later today.

Mr BOWDEN: The Gold Coast Suns women's team will be training at Nightcliff Oval from 4.30 to 5.30 pm.

Ms BOOTHBY: We are here to talk about business. How many Alice Springs businesses have closed down?

Mr DRABSCH: I am glad I did not fumble it, minister!

I will answer the question about Alice Springs, but also you mentioned the 2,576 businesses that had exited. A lot of those were due to just cancelling their ABNs. Only 46 Territory companies went into liquidation in the 12 months from April ...

Ms BOOTHBY: Is that the same as closing down? It is quite different technically in terms of liquidation versus closing down.

Mr DRABSCH: A business may close down but might operate in some other areas. In terms of liquidation, people going out of business, 46 Territory companies is the official stats.

As of 30 June 2023 Central Australia had 2,020 businesses, a decrease of seven businesses, down by 0.3% from a year ago. Employing businesses dropped by 5.6% from 927 to 875 businesses. Non-employing businesses increased in the region by 2.2% during the same period.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many businesses closed in Alice Springs? You have 2,675 exited across the Territory. How many closed in Alice Springs in the last reporting period?

Mr DRABSCH: I do not have the direct regional split up of the total number of businesses that exited; I just have the aggregates—2,020 businesses, a decrease of seven businesses in net terms.

Ms BOOTHBY: I have a question from a Territorian. I think it is under the Workforce output. The minister mentioned it in the opening statement, so I hope he can assist.

The registered training organisation Seafood and Maritime Industries Training—SMIT, as people call it—provides training for coxswain, marine engine driver, master in near coastal et cetera. There is a bunch of courses that it does. SMIT was funded by the Northern Territory Government to subsidise student training in some of those courses I gave as examples, yet this year without notice the funding has been cut. I wanted to find out on behalf of this Territorian why the funding was cut and why that team did not know that the cuts were on foot.

Madam CHAIR: Obviously, the minister funds a lot of organisations. Minister, in the 30 seconds or so we have left, I am not sure if you ...

Mr BOWDEN: I will handball this one ...

Madam CHAIR: No. I think Mr Drabsch is ...

Mr BOWDEN: ... to Catherine White to finish.

Ms WHITE: SMIT is an important RTO and has been delivering training and funded by the Northern Territory Government for over a decade that I have been there. We have been moving with RTOs that had traditionally received recurrent funding—regardless of what they delivered or whether they were priorities or should be a fee-for-service market. We had been refunding SMIT with some recurrent funding. This year we have been moving from that, with the RTO's knowledge, for the past three years. Their funding was not cut; it was changed. I believe the funding envelope is the same amount. All we have done is work with SMIT to identify priority occupations that should be funded by government as opposed to a fee-for-service model.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, we are on our time. Minister, the world's quickest thank you; these staff are just as important as your other staff, but time is against us.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you and your staff.

Mr BOWDEN: Importantly, I thank Shaun Drabsch who is retiring as the CEO, and all the other staff in the department. I have a parting gift for Shaun. On behalf of the office at suite two—Lee Harris has done a power of work for us, Trish Sigston and all the team. Here is a parting gift on behalf of the Northern Territory suite two. Good luck.

Madam CHAIR: The committee will adjourn now for a couple of minutes to change over for the next minister.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER MONAGHAN'S PORTFOLIOS

**AGRIBUSINESS AND FISHERIES
MINING**

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

Madam CHAIR: Welcome, minister. I ask you to introduce the officials accompanying you at the table.

Mr MONAGHAN: To my right I have Shaun Drabsch, CEO of DITT; and Joanna Frankenfeld, CFO. On my left is Jed Matz, Deputy CEO of Agriculture, Fisheries and Biosecurity; and Andrew Baylis, Acting Senior Executive Director of Agriculture.

Madam CHAIR: I will invite you to make a brief opening statement and then I will call for questions relating to the statement before we consider whole-of-government budget and fiscal-related questions. I will invite the shadow minister each time to respond and ask questions, but other members of the committee may join in on that line of questioning. Then we will head into the outputs.

Do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

Mr MONAGHAN: No, thank you.

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

Madam CHAIR: I now call for questions on the whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy before we move onto specific outputs.

Mr BURGOYNE: How is the department working with the Northern Land Council to ensure areas can be open for both commercial and recreational fishers?

Mr MONAGHAN: We engage across the years with the Northern Land Council about many issues across my portfolios, and recreational fishing and fisheries is one of those areas. Ultimately at the end of the day, the Northern Land Council's decisions and the traditional owners' decisions about access is theirs.

Mr BURGOYNE: When was the last time the Fisheries department met with the Northern Land Council?

Mr MONAGHAN: The CEO, Mr Shaun Drabsch, will give you some detail on that operational question.

Mr DRABSCH: The Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade meets with the Northern Land Council officials on a regular basis. My strategy and policy division has been meeting with them over recent weeks.

In terms of the Fisheries area, Matt Osborne will indicate the recent engagements he had with the NLC.

Mr OSBORNE: The Northern Territory Fisheries department works closely with the Northern Land Council. The response around recreational and commercial access to waters is being led by the department of the Chief Minister through the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty. A negotiating team has been formed which has representation from both DCM and NT Fisheries. We have been working closely in government to work with the Northern Land Council and traditional owners to understand the concerns that have been raised around recreational and commercial fishing access into waters. We have been meeting with traditional owners through the land claims to understand and present offers. In terms of working closely with the Northern Land Council, we have regular meetings to talk around operational and policy matters. There are also members on a number of different fisheries management advisory committees.

Mr MONAGHAN: Access to Aboriginal waters is being provided through a mix of opportunities through permit-free access where existing long-term access arrangements are already in place—places like Wadeye, Daly River, Bynoe, Cox Peninsula, Nhulunbuy and McArthur River regions; recreational fishing permits where they are required for other areas that are not closed and are currently free and automatic through the Northern Land Council website; or through section 19s for commercial operators. They are the three ways they can access various Aboriginal waters.

Mr BURGOYNE: Last year Mr Curnow spoke about the Mini Mini area. Does that area remain closed?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We have an output for Fisheries. Are you comfortable taking this in whole-of-agency, minister?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes, it is a good point. I think we will provide some latitude, but possibly we can go into further detail in the output that is relevant to the particular area.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do we have a whole range of Fisheries questions that can wait until Output 1.2?

Mr BURGOYNE: We have a whole range of whole-of-government questions which I am asking.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Continue with your question and we will see how we go in placing that question.

Mr BURGOYNE: Last year there were conversations in regard to access to Mini Mini and negotiations were ongoing. How have negotiations gone with the Fisheries department in gaining access to the Mini Mini area? We were told last year that area remained closed.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will indulge this last question that is out of the output, but after that we will restrict them to the outputs.

There is currently no access to the Aboriginal waters in the Finniss or Mini Mini/Murganella regions.

Mr BURGOYNE: What is the progress with the barramundi fishery review?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the sake of structure and keeping an orderly presentation of our public servants who are here, I suggest we continue with whole-of-agency questions. As this is a Fisheries-specific question we can move it to Output 1.2. Is that okay?

Mr BURGOYNE: Madam Deputy Chair, I can see the Senior Executive Director of Fisheries sitting before us, but if you want me to move it to the outputs I can do that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That would be wonderful. Whole-of-agency questions to continue.

Mr BURGOYNE: Recently mango twig tip dieback has been in the headlines, with further farms reporting to be affected by the disease. What are you doing to protect the mango industry in the Northern Territory, which is worth \$70m?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If we are going into agriculture, do you want me to move to the outputs now so that we get to the Agriculture output, which is next?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am asking questions which affect the whole-of-government responses. The Senior Executive Director of Fisheries is before us, as well as the Senior Executive Director of Agriculture. I am happy to work with the committee, and if going through the outputs would appease everyone I am more than happy to do that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is more just me trying to keep an orderly fashion, making sure we have the right people at the table.

Mr BURGOYNE: They seem to all be at the table.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes. Do you have more whole-of-agency questions?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will continue to ask the questions, and if the minister wants me to direct them through the outputs, I can do that.

As a whole agency what are you doing to protect the mango industry, which is worth \$70m in the Northern Territory, from mango twig tip dieback?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, if you would like to answer in this output of whole-of-agency questions.

Mr MONAGHAN: No, that is not to the output we are currently on.

Mr BURGOYNE: This is ridiculous, Madam Deputy Chair. Let us just move to the outputs. If the minister does not want to answer the questions, let us keep going.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND BIOSECURITY
Output 1.1 – Agriculture

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0, Agriculture, Fisheries and Biosecurity, Output 1.1, Agriculture. Are there any questions?

Mr BURGOYNE: Recently, mango twig tip dieback has been in the headlines, with further farms reporting to be affected when it comes to the disease. What are you doing to protect the mango industry in the Northern Territory, which is worth \$70m?

Mr MONAGHAN: I have met comprehensively with the mango industry, most recently was at the AGM. One of the important things for the industry is that our biosecurity officers work closely at the facility in Berrimah. It is an amazing facility where they are at the forefront of ensuring the mango industry is not only successful but thrives. We produce over 50% of Australia's market, so it is vital that we ensure it is healthy going forward.

DITT first received information about the mango twig tip dieback infection through samples in 2017–18. Since then MTTD remains an ongoing research agenda, with the operational plan of the horticultural group in the Darwin region.

DITT and AMIA have developed a comprehensive mango surveillance program. It is important that we ensure we get early notification through these surveillance programs in the Top End and Katherine regions. That commenced in May and June this year.

What have we done so far? A substantial amount of work has been conducted over several years. Five hundred thousand dollars has been invested in research and diagnostics; 200-plus cultures have been grown for identification purposes in labs; 39 different species of fungi and bacteria have been isolated; and 1,000-plus cultures have been analysed to examine the impact of a number of fungicides.

There is more work to be done, and we continue to work with my department and their research teams. There is continued research on the identification of what is causing MTTD and how it is transmitted from plant to plant. Lab-based trials will be conducted to investigate whether any chemical controls are effective. There will be field trials for chemical controls and investigation into whether it is possible to identify dieback early in the progression in order to improve the chance of successfully managing that disease.

The government understands research and development is essential to growing our agribusiness sector. As such that is why we have committed \$8.8m to replace the ageing Berrimah agriculture laboratory building with new and improved facilities. I highlight that will raise our capacity to also work with our federal colleagues and interstate colleagues at times, depending on what biosecurity issues might be at the forefront.

Add to that the direct investment in the mango twig tip dieback research. I am proud to back the work of our researchers who work tirelessly in this area to ensure that this problem has a resolution.

Mr BURGOYNE: Is there a risk that in five years many of the mango trees in Darwin could have reduced yields if a treatment plan or cure for this disease is not found soon?

Mr MONAGHAN: Madam Chair, that is a hypothetical.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a real risk. We have mango trees that are being affected by mango twig tip dieback. You have no idea what is causing the disease or how it spreads. Are we currently seeing reduced yields as a result of mango twig tip dieback?

Mr MONAGHAN: We are seeing intensified research in this space to ensure that any biosecurity threats are minimised to the industry. I will pass to Lorraine Corowa who is the Senior Executive Director of Biosecurity and Animal Welfare who leads these teams.

Ms COROWA: Any disease that impacts upon the trees obviously impacts their growth and yields. We have seen some reduction in yields as this disease threatens. We are working hard in this space to get on top of what is causing this disease. We are working closely with the mango industry on this.

Mr BURGOYNE: Similar to banana freckle, has the mango industry set up a fund to assist government in combating and looking for solutions in regard to this disease?

Ms COROWA: The mango industry is working collaboratively with us on this. At the recent mango industry meeting they agreed to start putting more funding towards this.

I think your question goes to whether it qualifies for a national response such as the banana freckle. That is covered underneath the deeds. At this stage we are working on ascertaining exactly what is causing this disease. If it is a disease that would qualify then we would escalate that to the national level. At this stage it has not been.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has there been any research done to map the spread of the disease?

Ms COROWA: Part of the research we are working on is looking at exactly where this disease is showing up and working with industry very closely on surveillance around this. We understand there is a great amount of concern about this, and we are prioritising this work.

Mr BURGOYNE: Can you confirm that you are prioritising the work to map the spread but have not yet mapped it?

Ms COROWA: It has been difficult to map. We need to work on surveillance, and we are currently prioritising that surveillance work.

Mr BURGOYNE: I appreciate I was recently briefed by your department on this disease. It was mentioned that there are some growers who are genuinely concerned about having people come onto their properties and possibly finding the disease. What is the department doing to work with current growers to ensure that mapping, that crucial work that needs to be done to ensure that we know how far this has spread, is being done? How are you working with the industry to ensure that you can gain access and check the health or otherwise of the mango industry in the NT?

Mr MONAGHAN: It is an important question not only from a research point of view but also the ability to then respond quickly to any outbreaks. We have a range of processes.

Mr MATZ: The industry works closely with NT Farmers and the NT Mango Industry Association in communicating what we know about this disease. We put out regular communications through the mango industry advisory groups. We attend their committee meetings and we talk about this disease at every meeting. It is important that we only tell them what we know and that we do not advise of the things we are not sure of. It is based on science.

We are working closely with the Australian Mango Industry Association as well and are trying to encourage them to invest more mango industry levies into this disease. The NT Farmers were successful in elevating this, as Lorraine mentioned, recently in Cairns at the mango industry conference.

It is a difficult disease to understand. We have some of the brightest people in the Territory working on it, but it is important that we do not give misinformation. It is very much a joint process, partnered hand in hand with industry.

Mr MONAGHAN: I have seen firsthand some of the successful relationships the department has with the producers in the industry. That has enabled a much more collaborative approach to getting these outcomes.

Mr BURGOYNE: As it stands, how many trees have been affected by mango twig tip dieback in the Northern Territory?

Mr MONAGHAN: We would have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.1

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

Mr BURGOYNE: Currently in the Northern Territory how many mango trees that we are aware of have been affected by mango twig tip dieback?

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

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.1.

Mr BURGOYNE: The Katherine agribusiness hub has once again rolled over in the budget books. Is there any light at the end of the tunnel? Will we ever see the agribusiness hub built?

Mr MONAGHAN: The responsibility for that sits with the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are you aware which state or Territory is the leading jackfruit producer of the nation?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the record, I have to say, Member for Braintree, awesome question—best so far.

Mr MONAGHAN: We are aiming to be the world-leading global supplier of jackfruit, but I will pass to Mr Andrew Baylis to give an update of phase two that we entered into.

Mr BAYLIS: I do not have a firm answer on who the leading state is.

Mr BURGOYNE: I can tell you if you would like. It is the Northern Territory, with 70% of all jackfruit production.

Mr BAYLIS: Aiming to be and continuing to be.

Mr BURGOYNE: I think you know where I am going with this. Minister, on 31 May you put out a media release that said:

The Northern Territory could soon be the leading Jackfruit supplier of the nation, with a trial underway

Is that statement misleading?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am glad you look at my media releases so closely. The message in that media, I remember vividly, was that we were entering stage two of the trial. I look forward to the conclusion of stage two.

Mr BURGOYNE: A bit of a non-answer there.

Budget Paper No 3 includes a KPI for change in value of the Territory's agriculture and fisheries production, with a 4% goal. What was the change in value over the last financial year?

Mr DRABSCH: What is the indicator or measure you mentioned from last year?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is 'Change in value of the Territory's agriculture and fisheries production', so I imagine you are wanting to increase it year on year. You set a 4% goal, and I am trying to figure out if this is something you are setting as a goal. What was the change in value over the last financial year?

Mr DRABSCH: This financial year just ending we estimate it at greater than 4%. We are estimating it will be 4%; the statistics are still flowing through, so we will probably not know that for a number of months. In 2022–23 we estimated a change of value in agriculture and fisheries production of 4% and the actual outcome was growth of 7.3%.

I am not sure if there is any anecdotal evidence we can give about the pattern of agriculture production in this financial year at this stage.

Mr BURGOYNE: That is all right. Do you have a current value? We are obviously seeing that value increase, which is good news. What is the current value of agriculture and fisheries in the NT?

Mr DRABSCH: I understand the current value of agriculture production is about \$1.3bn.

Mr MONAGHAN: It encompasses the overall agribusiness strategy which has come out of the TERC report that we embraced. It looks at ensuring we have detailed engagement, including workshops with stakeholders across the pastoral, agriculture and fishing industry, land councils and relevant agencies. We followed up them having their say to ensure that we can set those targets through the annual report to progress achieving

the strategy's vision of an economic contribution of \$2bn per annum. The strategy highlighted the Territory's sustainable approach to develop the agribusiness sector.

In my short time as the Agribusiness minister, I am confident that all the sectors are working to grow the industry with our support, whether it is our biosecurity support or experts in the field working week by week, including industries which we will talk about later—like the blacklip oysters—which are new research projects that are going into commercialisation stages. At the forefront our department is ensuring those industries can grow and reach that \$2bn target.

Mr BURGOYNE: I think part of that is the agricultural precincts. Page three of the agribusiness strategy talks about the establishment of sustainable agribusiness development precincts by identifying and releasing new land for development—it talks about Keep Plains, Larrimah and Wildman River—to private developers. How many of these precincts have been released to private developers in the last five-odd years?

Mr MONAGHAN: It is a key strategy to grow the agribusiness industry through the precincts. We have DIPL taking the lead in building and creating those precincts. Where we are at as far as the expansion of some of those aspects go is we are working collaboratively with the Northern Territory Land Corporation to progress the development of the Wildman River, Larrimah and the Spirit Hills Ord River expansion in the NT. The lead in that space is DIPL in developing and realising those under our strategy.

Mr BAYLIS: There are four active precincts we are currently working with. Three of those are under the administration of the Northern Territory Land Corporation, which are the ones the minister covered—Wildman, Larrimah and Spirit Hills. Two of those have active proponents in place at the moment and the other is imminent. The fourth precinct is the Gunn Point agribusiness development site, which is a DIPL-led precinct at Gunn Point across 260 hectares. It is aimed at being a commercial trial site.

Mr BURGOYNE: What has been the department's involvement with the Larrimah Farms development? How are you supporting them to develop further?

Mr BAYLIS: Larrimah are currently working through their approvals. Our involvement with them has been a facilitation role around their water licence and other regulatory approvals which they are progressing.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Fisheries

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Fisheries. Are there any questions?

Mr BURGOYNE: Where are we at with the progress of the barramundi fishery review?

Mr MONAGHAN: The barramundi fishery review is a very important piece of work we are undertaking. The review of the barramundi fishery is an action under the Blue Mud Bay Implementation Action Plan, signed by the Territory government and Northern Land Council in 2020.

It was a comprehensive review of the barramundi fishery. It commenced in late 2020 and has been undertaken as a staged approach. All the key fishing stakeholder groups are involved in that review process through the establishment we had with the Barramundi Fishery Management Advisory Committee to provide coordinated advice to develop a new management framework and harvest strategy. The most recent meeting of that committee was back in July 2023.

Two key outputs of that meeting were the harvest strategy, which is an important strategy to ensure we were not taking too much barramundi in various regions around the Northern Territory, and the threatened, endangered and protected species management strategy for the commercial sector. Both these strategies were implemented in 2024 during the commercial barramundi fishing season.

The next phase of the review is to consider resource sharing.

Mr OSBORNE: To expand on the comments provided by the minister, when he said that the last meeting of the barramundi fishery MAC was in July 2023, I also bring other items to the committee's attention. After that there was a number of working groups established by BFMAC members to work through different aspects. One of those was to finalise the harvest strategy and the TEPS strategy, which were released later that year for the 2024 barramundi season.

We also have a meeting scheduled for the Barramundi Fishery Management Advisory Committee for July.

Mr BURGOYNE: Have any members walked away or are no longer attending meetings in regard to that review?

Mr MONAGHAN: No-one has written to me to say that they have withdrawn.

Mr OSBORNE: That is correct; the membership has maintained its role. There have been issues with availability in setting previous dates, but I am led to believe that the upcoming meeting will be attended by the appropriate representatives.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Biosecurity and Animal Welfare

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Biosecurity and Animal Welfare. Are there any questions?

Mr BURGOYNE: What has been the Territory's advice to the federal government as it relates to footbaths at international terminals to protect our agriculture industry from myriad diseases on our doorstep?

Mr MONAGHAN: This has been a recent change for people entering the country.

Mr DRABSCH: Last week Jed Matz and I attended the agriculture senior officials group meeting in South Australia at which we raised our concerns with the federal government about a proposal to remove the foot mats. We believe that while the recorded incidence of foot-and-mouth disease in Indonesia has dropped from the peaks a couple of years ago, there is anecdotal evidence that there is still presence of FMD in Indonesia, and we believe the biosecurity controls that were in place should continue. We have communicated to the federal government that those foot mats should continue to be in place.

Mr BURGOYNE: I am very glad to hear it.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is critical to our industry to ensure we protect it. Whilst there are different reasons for including or excluding things from around the country, we have specific ones here for a specific important industry, particularly our pastoral industry. We will do everything we can in that place. I cannot call the praises enough of our biosecurity teams under Lorraine and the work that they do to ensure that every day our industries have confidence that they are doing their darndest to ensure they remain safe and can get their product to market.

Mr BURGOYNE: It was touched on there, but has the federal government advised why they have taken those footbaths away? You spoke about the fact that FMD—foot-and-mouth disease—has reduced, but was a reason given for why they believed it was safe to remove them?

Mr MONAGHAN: The reason conveyed to us is that the risk profile has reduced. Obviously, we have a different opinion.

Mr BURGOYNE: Banana freckle is another biosecurity issue and continues to affect growers in the Northern Territory. How many commercial operators are there in the NT and how many have been affected by the latest outbreak of the disease?

Mr MONAGHAN: Plant Biosecurity is leading two nationally cost-shared eradication programs for banana freckle and the browsing ant.

Specifically to your issue about banana freckle, this was first detected at Batchelor—Rum Jungle—in May 2022. An initial six-month response plan was approved by the National Management Group to contain and delimit banana freckle and inform ongoing feasibility of eradication, with a budget of \$1.533m. In February 2023 a revised response plan, version three, was approved, extending the program to October 2024. As of the reporting period 122 properties have been identified as infected properties. It is likely that the program will not be finalised in October 2024. As such, an extension will be requested under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.

Might I say, the Territory does particularly well out of these deeds. If we had to respond to these with our own budgets on the scale that the Territory has with the small population and much smaller fiscal arrangements

that we have, we would find it particularly challenging. At the moment, these deeds are worth their weight in gold.

Ms COROWA: The 122 properties are mostly residential properties. Two commercial properties have been impacted by banana freckle, both of which qualify for an owner reimbursement compensation payment. For both we have resolved that amount and we are in the process of providing that payment back out to them.

Mr MONAGHAN: The total cost of version three was \$6.48m. Within that cost the Australian Government contributes \$5.1m so that shows you the great benefit we get from that arrangement of those deeds.

Mr BURGOYNE: Will those two commercial properties affected—it was touched on—now be reimbursed and will all their trees be destroyed?

Ms COROWA: The eradication of the disease requires us to remove all the banana plants on all infected properties. We have done that with both commercial operators and also with those residential properties that have been impacted. On those 122 properties all the banana plants have been removed.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do we know how widespread the most recent outbreak has been? Have we had trees affected in Fannie Bay or is it down around Batchelor and Rum Jungle, as you spoke about? How far and wide is the current outbreak?

Ms COROWA: We are lucky with this current disease outbreak. It has been confined to the Rum Jungle area, Marrakai and the Humpty Doo/Howard Springs area. There are some infected premises on the Tiwi Islands. They are the only areas.

We have had ongoing surveillance. I just reviewed the surveillance with the Australian banana council on Monday morning. A lot of surveillance has been done in the Palmerston region, throughout the northern suburbs and into the greater Darwin region. There have been zero occurrences of banana freckle in those areas. We are lucky that it is in a quite contained area.

Mr BURGOYNE: What monitors are in place for early detection of FMD and lumpy skin disease in the Northern Territory?

Mr MONAGHAN: DITT continues to place a high priority on its preparedness for an FMD outbreak. In addition to a program we call Exercise TREAD, which included a full-scale exercise in the response to that in March 2023, my team continue to liaise with the industry such as compensation during an outbreak; scenario planning for individual properties; and general preparedness through the biosecurity management plans. These biosecurity management plans are particularly important to ensure that everybody is aware of what their role and responsibility is during that.

We have provided the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association with feedback following Exercise TREAD, including the recommendations that were made in the post-exercise review. The review has not been published as it may negatively impact some of our trading partner views.

Australia and the Territory remain FMD free.

Mr BURGOYNE: To the specifics of the early detection, are there sentinel herds on some of the islands in the Tiwis? How are we ensuring at the first sign of FMD or lumpy skin that we are able to respond?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am aware there is a number of relationships we have with people in places like Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea.

Ms COROWA: For the surveillance programs that are in place we work closely with NAQS—the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy. There are sentinel herds where bleeding of those animals and sampling occurs. We also have our own sentinel herds that are placed throughout our research farms, and we conduct regular surveillance of those animals.

The types of surveillance that we will need are much broader than just that. We will need everybody in the Territory with their eyes open to spot unusual signs in animals and call in the disease. I like to call it the three essential questions: what am I looking for? Why is it important to do something? Who will I call? If we could mobilise Territorians to do those three things, then we have a greater surveillance system in place.

We have been working closely with our counterparts in Queensland and Western Australia to establish what we call the Northern Australian Coordination Network. We were able to get some funding from the Commonwealth Government for this.

Over the past 12 months we have been working closely on improving our communications, getting messages out there to the non-traditional target markets—the travellers, hunters, fishers, bushwalkers, anybody who is moving in and around our landscape—and increasing their awareness of the need to do something when they spot animals with unusual signs. Those things are happening.

We are also working closely with the NTCA, as the minister mentioned, on biosecurity management plans, which is an important part of preparedness and surveillance.

Mr MONAGHAN: We also run a range of relationship building with our trade partners to ensure that their knowledge and understanding of the industry and some of those biosecurity risks are heightened.

Recently we had the Indonesian–Australian biosecurity exchange. We also run these exchanges with Timor-Leste. This includes a lot of the Timor-Leste Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries veterinary lab technicians undertaking that exchange with the Berrimah veterinary lab to further develop their technical skills in diagnosing accurately the early signs in the animals. We have relationships with Vietnam. We had a delegation recently from the industry there. I had to talk direct to camera to their YouTube channel in Vietnam which surprisingly had 250,000 hits. It surprised me how interested they are in our industry and that relationship.

Important work is being done across nations that is being led by the teams here. You talked about the sentinel herds. They are being established in Timor-Leste. They are being monitored for FMD, blue tongue and lumpy skin disease. That will provide information on the vector species present in Timor-Leste that could potentially blow into northern Australia.

I would say it is probably some of the most vital work that we do in that space where we lead that sector educational piece.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many animal welfare officers are there currently?

Mr MONAGHAN: An important area of the Biosecurity and Animal Welfare branch is the administrative arm of the chief executive officer. Animal welfare officers are appointed under the act, providing them with the powers and functions to assess whether persons are complying with the act and to investigate and gather evidence of suspected offences against the act. Animal welfare officers are also providing the function of the registration and regulation of scientific uses of animals.

Some of the highlights in that space include the *Animal Protection Act 2018* commencing in November. We had a process of review which went to a Have Your Say to the community and relevant stakeholders, and public submissions in that space were invited.

We currently hold 120 registrations for persons who use or allow an animal to be used for a specific scientific purpose. These registrations are current for three years.

Going to the actual number of welfare officers, we have six working in that space, including one in Alice Springs.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you have any positions vacant regarding animal welfare officers?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am informed that we do not.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many reports to the department are there in the way of animal welfare concerns?

Mr MONAGHAN: For the reporting period the Animal Welfare Unit investigated 464 complaints received from a variety of sources with respect to animal cruelty, suffering and abandonment. During the reporting period we engaged some veterinary consultants and treatments. Some of those animals had to be euthanised, so there were costs with that. Usually we have about 570 per annum. Under the reporting period, which is a reduced reporting period, it was 464 complaints.

Mr BURGOYNE: Do you have a breakdown by region in relation to those reports?

Mr MONAGHAN: We have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.2

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

Mr BURGOYNE: Of the 464 reports to the department in regard to animal welfare, can you please break those down by region?

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

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.2.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is an important area that is critical to everything we do in the animal welfare space.

Mr DRABSCH: If you would indulge me, Member for Braitling, I acknowledge the great work that those six animal welfare officers undertake. They go into a variety of difficult circumstances. It is a stressful job, and the quality of their professionalism and the dedication that they apply is incredible and a real testament to the team and its management. We are proud of them in the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. Many of them have extensive skills in investigation. There are a number of former police officers who are part of the team, for example. We are lucky to have them in that role, so I acknowledge them for the purposes of the committee.

Mr MONAGHAN: In that reporting period the Animal Welfare Unit conducted nine commercial premises inspections, comprising three boarding kennels, two camel farms, two crocodile farms and two roadhouses. These inspections were to ensure compliance was adhered to in association with the relevant animal welfare guidelines and standards. They also conducted joint inspections of the greyhound racing track kennels and the thoroughbred racing track stables. They also supported the evacuation of animals during cyclonic events this year.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many animals have been seized by the department?

Mr MONAGHAN: We have to take that one on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.3

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

Mr BURGOYNE: How many animals have been seized by the animal welfare department in the reporting period?

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

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes, with the qualification of part of it. We had one matter involving five horses. That was resolved through the courts and resulted in the horses being forfeited to the Animal Welfare Unit.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.3.

Mr BURGOYNE: This is another that you may need to take on notice. How many animals were seized but no prosecution proceeded to the court?

Mr MONAGHAN: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.4

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

Mr BURGOYNE: How many animals were seized by the department but no prosecution proceeded?

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

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes. We must also be aware that some of those prosecutions may be current, but we will get you that data.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.4.

Mr BURGOYNE: You spoke earlier about how difficult these roles can be and how, unfortunately, in some instances animals have to be euthanised. How many animals have been euthanised in the reporting period due to animal welfare concerns?

Mr MONAGHAN: Is this all animals that you are talking about or specific animals?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am asking in regard to animal welfare. We had a question sent through and I thought I would ask.

Mr MONAGHAN: We need to take that on notice. Could we have the specifics so that we can get you the right information about what you are asking for? There are companion animals, livestock—a whole range.

Question on Notice No 8.5

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

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding animal welfare, how many animals has the department had to euthanise as a result of failed animal welfare?

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

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.5.

Mr BURGOYNE: It has come to my attention, and I am happy to be corrected, that for some abandoned animals on properties the department provides a meals on wheels service instead of in some instances taking the action of seizing the animal for whatever reason. Is that the case? Can you confirm that meals are provided for animals that may have been abandoned?

Mr MONAGHAN: My understanding is that it is only during emergency events like a cyclone where that has had to be the case.

Mr BURGOYNE: I could talk about agriculture all day, but in the interest of time and knowing there is a range of outputs, I thank the department staff for coming in to talk about agriculture. I am finished with questions in relation to that output.

Mr MONAGHAN: I also thank the department officials for the agriculture sector for attending. I appreciate their hard work in putting the responses together.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3 and Output Group 1.0.

The committee suspended.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – MINING AND ENERGY Output 2.1 – Resource Industry Development Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Mining and Energy, Output 2.1, Resource Industry Development Services.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will forgo an opening statement, and introduce the officials. To my right is Shaun Drabsch, CEO of the department; Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer; Ian Scrimgeour, Senior Executive Director, NT Geological Survey; Denise Turnbull, Acting Senior Executive Director, Mines; and James Pratt, who will come up when we get to the relevant output.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: The Resourcing the Territory program is roughly \$9.5m. Have the recipients of round 17 been announced yet?

Mr MONAGHAN: Member for Barkly, I know you are a great supporter of the resource industry, like me and the Deputy Chair. We love the resource sector.

The Resourcing the Territory initiative is an important initiative for being able to get exploration out the door and ensure that we find more minerals in the Territory. We closed the most recent round of that in April, I think. We announced some recipients recently at a press conference.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: We recently announced the successful recipients for round 17 of the Geophysics and Drilling Collaborations Program under Resourcing the Territory. This included grants to 41 projects, the highest number we have ever given out, to 29 companies across the Territory. The total amount of grants pledged in the round was almost \$4m, which is the highest we have ever allocated.

This was for a range of categories. We also introduced new categories to advance critical minerals projects in the Northern Territory. This will support companies that wish to undertake early stage test work on recovery of critical minerals or reanalysing existing samples for critical minerals. We had a good uptake of that.

There is strong interest in the program with more than 60 applications. We are pleased with the standard of applications that were awarded funding.

Mr MONAGHAN: One of the key initiatives this year, and increasing this year, is that we had some of our participation through many countries—Japan, Korea, investment proponents from there, and India. Having some of our projects more aligned—the Critical Minerals in the Northern Territory we translated into those languages, which is important in spreading that opportunity.

It is a real credit to the work that Ian does with his team to ensure we have record numbers. We are chasing WA for the record next year—we got pretty close this year—around the record investment that comes from those processes.

Mr EDGINGTON: Mr Scrimgeour said 41 projects, 29 companies overall and \$4m. Is there a total of around \$9.5m? Are there two rounds, with another round to come?

Mr MONAGHAN: There is not another round to come, but a number of proponents had a number of different projects; they put in multiple applications for various different projects.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is in the fund, \$4m has been allocated, and what happens with the rest of the money?

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: The grants program is just one component of the Resourcing the Territory program. Apart from the grants which make up \$3m to \$4m of the program, we also have a range of pre-competitive geoscience programs that we undertake across the Territory to try to stimulate exploration. This includes geophysical surveys, geological mapping and a lot of collaboration with our partners at Geoscience Australia and CSIRO to bring in expertise and try to understand the Territory's resource potential. We have a number of programs under way that really are looking at ensuring that we are de-risking the Territory overall for resource exploration.

We are also capturing all the past data that industry has collected and getting it into digital databases and making that freely available. We are getting out and promoting the Territory for its exploration opportunities as well. Whilst the grants are a very important part of Resourcing the Territory, it is just one component of a much broader program to try to stimulate the resources sector.

Mr EDGINGTON: According to my records, there have been about 17 rounds all up. How many recipients have there been altogether in 17 rounds? Do we have that sort of information?

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: I do not have that information with me right now, but we certainly have that information and am happy to take that if the minister wants. We have that information but not at hand. It has been running since 2008, so there has been a large number of projects funded over that time. It has been gradually increasing over the years. It started off as an \$800,000 program, now we are giving out \$4m per year.

Question on Notice No 8.6

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Barkly, please restate the question for the record.

Mr EDGINGTON: There have been 17 rounds of funding under the Resourcing the Territory program. Can you list the number of recipients, who they are and the total amount expended under that program so far?

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

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.6.

Mr MONAGHAN: The exploration spend has now exceeded the 12 months last year. We are up to \$231m for another record, which is fantastic. It shows that many of those exploration companies who are out there looking know that the Territory has opportunity to not just find the minerals they are looking for but to move to production, producing new mines or whatever is extremely viable. It is testament to the success of the program where you have such small investment with such a massive return to the Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: Getting back to the Resourcing the Territory program, over the life of the grant program, how many of the recipients have moved from the exploration stage to an operational stage as a result of that funding?

Mr MONAGHAN: Over the life of that program—we will struggle to have that data here ready for you. We will talk about some of the others and if there is gap in what you want then please put the question on notice.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will put that question on notice.

Mr MONAGHAN: To give you a full response to that question, I will ask Mr Ian Scrimgeour, senior executive director, to talk about a number of them.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: Yes, a number of the recipients over the years have moved into production. Core Lithium, for example, in its early days was the recipient of exploration grants. Similarly, Tennant Mining which is now in construction also received grants for deep drilling underneath the Nobles Nob deposit. That has helped it firm up the viability of that project.

Mr EDGINGTON: They are not operational yet.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: They are not operational yet, no, but they are ...

Mr EDGINGTON: They are getting close.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: They are getting close.

Mr MONAGHAN: And lots of money probably.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: These are not projects that are now in production, but we have been excited over the past few years. Last year we helped co-fund the first drilling for graphite in the Northern Territory that is now defined as Australia's largest graphite deposit. In the last two rounds, co-funded drilling has led to the discovery of new rare-earth resources in the Northern Territory. Last year we also co-funded a company drilling for magnesite near Batchelor, helping them prove up the viability of that resource.

We are helping build that pipeline of projects. I cannot give you right now the exact number that have moved into production. Obviously, that will not be a large number.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.7

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Barkly, please restate the question for the record.

Mr EDGINGTON: Over the life of the Resourcing the Territory program how many grant recipients have moved from an exploration stage to an operational production stage?

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

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.7.

Mr EDGINGTON: During part of that earlier response you mentioned that Core Lithium has moved to a production stage. I think you mentioned TC mining is getting pretty close. Have they received any additional funding support from the government to move towards an operational stage?

Mr MONAGHAN: That great question allows me to talk about one of those which is important, which is Tennant Mining. It accessed \$10m from the Local Jobs Fund to ensure that it was able to progress to what is now the construction phase. Unfortunately, I did not get to catch up with you last week when I was onsite ...

Mr EDGINGTON: I missed you.

Mr MONAGHAN: We always miss each other, sadly.

It is an important mine for the region. Obviously, it is staging its mine at the moment. The first stage will be looking at dealing with the old tailings that have been left there. It is wonderful to see a project like that. It is currently building its processing plant with its earthworks onsite at the moment. Then it will move to processing those tailings which is the ore—the gold in there is lower grade but still very profitable—before it moves to stage two of going underground in the pit, which is a very exciting opportunity to come out of this process.

Mr DRABSCH: In regard to Core Lithium there was potential support under the Local Jobs Fund for that project, which was not taken up. There may be further exploration activity Core is undertaking; they have advised us that while they have gone into care and maintenance with the existing mine, they continue to explore actively in the Finnis and Barrow Creek areas. I think there is one grant supporting that, which I signed off the other day, the contract. If your question was: are we providing any financial support for Core Lithium to try to get back to production in its current mine? The answer is no.

Mr EDGINGTON: Getting back to Tennant Mining, you said \$10m under the jobs fund. What is that \$10m for?

Mr MONAGHAN: It is a concessional loan that we open up to proponents to ensure they can support their employment or engagement with local people in their business around their strategies in that space.

Mr DRABSCH: The Local Jobs Fund is administered by Investment Territory in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, but I am aware that it was a \$10m loan on three-year concessional terms, so it is paid back within a short period. It is a similar structure to the loan that was provided to the Asia Pacific aviation service in Alice Springs Airport, so a similar arrangement with concessional terms but a quick payback.

Mr EDGINGTON: Core Lithium got to an operational stage. What was the overall return to the Territory? How much has Core Lithium paid back to the Territory in royalties, given it got to an operational stage?

Mr MONAGHAN: While your question goes to Treasury, and royalty payments are commercial-in-confidence, I reiterate that in setting up Core Lithium's mine they spent \$300m in our economy. It was an amazing venture for them. They are having issues with the price of lithium on the market now, so that is why

they are in care and maintenance, but the detail of royalty revenue is commercial-in-confidence and sits with the Treasury.

Mr EDGINGTON: In addition to the financial support, what about additional support around infrastructure? Has there been any investment in roads? We talk about Tennant Mining; is there any additional support around upgrading infrastructure around Tennant Creek?

Mr MONAGHAN: There is some further support to upgrade some of the road infrastructure, but that is a question you need to direct to the department of Infrastructure for detail on that.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are you aware of any?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am aware that we are upgrading some of the infrastructure, but that is not my portfolio.

Mr EDGINGTON: Answer the question then.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: He just did. You are not accepting the answer.

Mr EDGINGTON: You told me to go somewhere else. You said you know the answer, but you want me to go somewhere else.

Mr MONAGHAN: One of the aspects of Estimates is that I appear for portfolios I am responsible for. It is a great question, but it is an Infrastructure question.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is mining; it is all related.

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you give us an update on the Verdant Ammaroo project and Nolans Bore?

Mr MONAGHAN: Verdant Minerals' Ammaroo project is 270 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs and 220 kilometres south-east of Tennant Creek. The project contains over one billion tonnes of phosphate ore. It is the largest compliant phosphate resource in Australia and one of the largest underdeveloped phosphate resources in the world.

Verdant successfully completed their feasibility study of the export of phosphate concentrate from Ammaroo in late 2018 which confirmed the technical and economic potential of the resource. In 2019 Verdant was delisted from the ASX under the 34.4% ownership of Washington H. Soul Pattinson and the new majority shareholder CD Capital Natural Resource Fund with a 66.6% shareholding.

The project is subject to the ILUA and the granting of mineral licence, approvals and finance processes. To date the exploration authorisation has been approved. Some rehabilitation has been completed and is undergoing assessment.

The project is subject to the NT EPA assessment report and approval decision under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*, which was issued in 2018. In November 2022 Verdant referred to the NT EPA proposed alterations to the project to process the Ammaroo resource into phosphate concentrate, with further value-adding steps to produce phosphoric acid and ammonia in the project.

I will ask Shaun Drabsch to talk about the Nolans project with Arafura.

Mr DRABSCH: I am pleased to advise that the Arafura Rare Earths project is progressing at a good pace this calendar year. It is well advanced in its achievement of raising debt. It has received support from a Korean export financial agency and from the EFA. NAIF have also committed substantial resources to it. This places it in a good position to finalise debt arrangements with its banks within the next month or two. We met with the new CEO and executive officer earlier this week.

They are also seeking equity support through a range of investors, including from overseas, through the National Reconstruction Fund, which is a federal government agency. There is potential for equity involvement there. I have been working with the Department of Industry, Science and Resources to pursue that possibility. There will also be a public raising.

I am advised by Arafura that they are hoping to achieve final investment decision by the fourth quarter of this calendar year. As you are probably aware, they have already built a construction work camp on the site and are undertaking some early works. All their approvals are in place and we are optimistic the financing will fall

neatly into place over the coming months and that we will, potentially, see some construction happen before the end of this calendar year.

Mr MONAGHAN: Having visited the project down there I know it is an exciting project. I spoke to Stuart and Darryl the CEO as early as this week and they have given us an update. It is pleasing to know all the debts have been covered off and that they are equity raising. I remember when I was down there at the site. It is hard to imagine how big this will be for the region, until you go and visit. It is an amazing opportunity and as quickly as we can get those critical minerals out of the ground there and to market the Territory will benefit for many decades.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has the Northern Territory Government provided any support around enabling infrastructure such as roads or rail sidings to assist with those two projects?

Mr MONAGHAN: I will pass to Mr Drabsch who will outline the support they have had outside of the application and permit process that they have engaged in over the years and the support they have gotten from our department, particularly Nolans as a major project.

Mr DRABSCH: We are talking about a \$1.7bn project in capital expenditure. The contributions the Territory government will make are small in comparison with the actual investment.

I know the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics in undertaking their planning program for road construction and maintenance are ensuring there is effective connectivity with the Nolans site, which is not too far from the Stuart Highway. They are incorporating that into their planning, but the detail of that would be a question for DIPL.

The amount of expenditure that Arafura will be undertaking is considerable, at something like 680 jobs in construction and 370 jobs in operation for a mine life of 38 years. There is the potential for expansion and development of a processing hub that other rare-earths mines might be able to utilise, which would strengthen the role of that in our critical minerals activity across the country.

Mr EDGINGTON: Moving to Verdant Minerals' Ammaroo phosphate project, what is being done to support that project from an NT Government perspective? Is there work planned for any enabling infrastructure? What needs to be done to get that project off the ground?

Mr DRABSCH: Our major engagement with Verdant at this point in time is the mining approval process. They have just lodged their mining management plan and have been working in collaboration with officers from mines services in my agency in preparation of that plan. I am advised it is in good shape and will be under consideration over the coming months. Once that is assessed and a decision is made in relation to approval or otherwise, the mining management plan will provide Verdant a strong position of having approvals in place to engage with the market and complete its financing processes.

In terms of the infrastructure and so forth which support that, there have been discussions but there are no actual commitments the government has yet made in that regard. Of course, we work actively with Verdant and other mining proponents to ensure that the Territory government supports them in every possible way we can.

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to the Fraser Institute annual survey geological database, a couple of years ago the NT plunged from seventh to 32nd. What does that database do? Why did we plunge from seventh to 32nd?

Mr MONAGHAN: You are right about the Fraser Institute. What a great result for the Territory in that ...

Mr EDGINGTON: There is plenty of potential. It is time to get some of these projects moving.

Mr MONAGHAN: Whether it is the policy perception in the industry or whether it is mineral potential, it is fantastic. I see that the rest of the industry across the globe recognises the investment that could be occurring here and the minerals that could be found here. These are critical factors to ensure that we encourage investment. These results from a global survey encourage global investment.

When you look at things like the investment attractiveness index in that, it is a combined index ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Sorry, minister; I am just after the geological database from seventh to 32nd.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will come to that, but in the fullness of my response I think it is important that ...

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not need a fullness of response. My question was clear. We are talking about the annual survey geological database. All I am interested in is why we went from seventh to 32nd. That is it; that is all I am asking.

Mr MONAGHAN: Madam Chair, am I able to answer the question?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, it was a long night last night. As you know we have another one ahead of us. Could we please speak one at a time.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will attempt to answer the question that was put to me in full ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Sorry, Chair, I have a point of order.

Madam CHAIR: There is no point of order. I will let the minister speak, then I will come back to you for a question/statement. I will be flexible on that.

Mr EDGINGTON: We do not have all night to speak about this.

Madam CHAIR: We have another five hours.

Mrs MANISON: There is plenty of time.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, if you let the minister speak uninterrupted you will get a right of reply, which is probably not the rules, but we are flexible.

Mr EDGINGTON: The terms of reference are pretty clear for this committee.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, we have had a great few days this week and last week—haven't we, Member for Braintree? We have been flexible ...

Mr EDGINGTON: I am trying to move through a whole lot of questions, Chair.

Madam CHAIR: You have lots of questions and statements, and you will get your grabs up. If you could just play by the rules it will be pleasant for everybody, otherwise I will have to get my yellow sheets out.

Mr EDGINGTON: The rules are in the terms of reference. They are concise and relevant.

Madam CHAIR: All right. I have to get my yellow sheets out. I have only had to use these on one other member to date. Minister, the floor is yours.

Mr MONAGHAN: The Fraser Institute Survey of Mining Companies 2023 released its report in May 2024. It contains the rankings of the 86 jurisdictions globally based on industry perception of the policy and regulatory environment for mineral exploration and mining.

There is no data on how many respondents were in Australia or how many are active in the Territory. However, for the Territory to be included in these results there must be greater than 10 individuals who responded.

In 2023 survey the Territory largely maintained strong results from the previous survey, remaining in the top 10 jurisdictions globally for investment attractiveness. The investment attractiveness index is a combined index used as the headline ranking for the survey, measuring both geological attractiveness and the effects of government policy on exploration investment.

The Territory was ranked eighth globally, down slightly from sixth in the previous survey. The Territory maintains its second position in Australia, behind Western Australia—which was fourth globally—and above Queensland at 13th, South Australia at 19th, New South Wales at 30th, Tasmania at 33rd and Victoria at 48th. The global ranking of eighth in this year's survey represents consistent progress towards meeting the 2020 TERC goals to be in the top five mining jurisdictions globally.

The policy perception index, which is another index in this survey, is a measure of the perception of government mining policies in a jurisdiction. The Territory rose from 25th to 22nd globally, the highest ranking

since 2016. The Territory also rose from fifth to third in Australia, behind WA, which was 17th down from 10th, and South Australia, which was 20th down from third.

The best practices mineral potential criteria measure perceptions of a jurisdiction's pure mineral potential. We all know we have a very under-explored mineral potential in the Territory. The Territory still received a ranking of third globally, behind WA and Nevada. Queensland ranked 12th. This strong result for the second year in a row suggests the Territory is considered the most geologically prospective jurisdiction.

Particularly to the point you made about the geological database as a measure of the quality and availability of geological data, the Territory was equal first in the world with eight other jurisdictions; 100% of respondents said that the geological database encouraged or was not a disincentive from investment in the Territory. If looking at the proportion of recipients and respondents which stated that a jurisdiction's geological database encourages investment, the Territory came second.

The report's statement from an exploration company president says:

The geological database in the Northern Territory is the best in Australia. It provides much useful and abundant information ...

From the geological database result you referred to in 2022, when we were 32nd globally, we are now second, and when we were seventh in Australia, we are now first.

Mr EDGINGTON: What caused that drop to 30-something?

Madam CHAIR: You can provide a statement-ish question, Member for Barkly.

Mr EDGINGTON: That was my question. We only just got to him answering it.

Mr MONAGHAN: I just answered the question, did I not?

Mr EDGINGTON: My question is: why did we drop to 32? What was the reason?

Mr MONAGHAN: The team has looked at the stats and the data. In 2020 we were seventh; in 2021 we were fifth; in 2022 we were 32nd; and in 2023 we were second. The feeling amongst the department is that it was just an aberration in the data. Nothing was done differently from what we were doing, but for some reason the data came back with that.

The committee suspended.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much money is in the Mining Remediation Fund at the moment?

Mr MONAGHAN: The Mining Remediation Fund as at 31 March 2024 has \$88.3m.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much has been expended over the last 12 months?

Mr MONAGHAN: From 1 July to 31 March, the reporting period, it was \$0.9m.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is getting lower every year. Are you sure that is right? It seems to be going down rather than going up.

Mr MONAGHAN: The expected expenditure by the end of the financial year will be \$2.578m.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is \$2.5m out of \$88.3m?

Mr MONAGHAN: It is \$2.6m if you round it up.

Mr EDGINGTON: Over the last three years we have seen an increase in the remediation fund and an actual decrease in expenditure.

Mr MONAGHAN: I do not think that is accurate, but I will find you the detail on that.

Mr DRABSCH: It is important. The Mining Remediation Fund is a fund that is created by levies on the remediation bond that is calculated on the 1% remediation bonds that mines are expected to have.

The expected expenditure for this financial year was \$2.578m. So far this year, up to the end of March quarter, it has been about \$915,000, so the cash flow of the contracts will be expended out of the June quarter. The contract value awarded to April 2024 is \$5.4m.

The Legacy Mines Act is now in place, we have built up our establishment of staff to 10, there is another three positions to be recruited to, and we are ramping up our activities so that our forecast expenditure for 2024–25 will be \$5.1m. There has been a lot of work and attention—I also acknowledge the former Minister for Mines and Industry, Minister Manison, who paid a lot of attention to this ...

Mr EDGINGTON: I think she did. Over the last couple of years she paid a lot of attention, but there was still no increase in the amount of money being spent. I think we have heard the same story for the last two to three years but nothing has increased.

Mr DRABSCH: With respect, Member for Barkly, my understanding is the expenditure has increased compared with previous years and it continues to increase into next year.

Mr EDGINGTON: What was the expenditure in the previous years?

Mr DRABSCH: I do not have that number in front of me, but I can get it for you on notice.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am happy to take that on notice if the Member for Barkly could please articulate the years he is looking for.

Question on Notice No 8.8

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Expenditure under the Mining Remediation Fund so far this year is about \$0.9m. How does that compare with 2022–23 and 2021–22?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.8.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many legacy mines do we have around the Territory?

Mr MONAGHAN: The Legacy Mines Unit will increase in capacity from two to three positions through our budget. A significant amount of work is under way to ensure that we get a clear position. There are many old mines across the Territory. I will hand to Shaun Drabsch to articulate the areas that we are focused on and what number we have to go.

Mr DRABSCH: There is a number of historic mine sites scattered around the Territory, numbering into the hundreds. What constitutes a legacy mine is defined by any mining activity that has occurred.

We are in the process of doing an audit of small mines so that we have a stocktake of the areas where there may be danger and the opportunities for remediation. There is an active program under way around Tennant Creek to identify and remediate small shafts or mines in the Barkly area. That is an ongoing program.

As we build this team to a total FTE of 13 staff, we will have a greater capacity to undertake further audits and come to an understanding of the scope and scale of legacy mines around the Territory so that we can apply a program of progressive remediation over time.

Mr EDGINGTON: How long has this remediation fund been in place?

Mr MONAGHAN: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.9

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How long has the remediation fund been operating for?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.9.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.9

Mr MONAGHAN: The Mining Remediation Fund—in recognition of the unfunded environmental liability that was created by legacy mines in the Territory, the *Mining Management Act 2001* was amended in 2013 to introduce a 1% levy on financial securities for mining operations.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, do you have a follow-up question on that response?

Mr EDGINGTON: Are we saying it has been established since 2013?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: How long has the audit program been going on for?

Mr DRABSCH: The small mines audit I mentioned is work that has been undertaken in this financial year. It is a reflection of the fact that until now we had only about three staff in place. We have built that capacity and now, with the new Legacy Mines Act, we are in a better position to undertake a comprehensive program to understand the scale and scope of the issue.

Mr EDGINGTON: It commenced in 2013 and the audit is still going on, so it is 11 years later and the audit is still under way.

Mr MONAGHAN: I think you misunderstood. The levy was introduced then, but the audit was not.

Mr DRABSCH: The fund was established in 2013 with the 1% levy and it has built up progressively over time.

The small mine audits that I was referring to were initiated this financial year. They are inspecting and auditing sites around Alice Springs and Pine Creek. There are small mine safety works, which include remediation works of \$1.2m around Tennant Creek, and some site supervision as an additional expense there.

Madam CHAIR: To clarify, the audit started this financial year.

Mr EDGINGTON: The audit team has been there since just this year. What happened before that? What has been happening over the last 11 years with this remediation fund?

Mr MONAGHAN: My understanding is that the fund was initiated in 2013 and it has been receiving a 1% levy from mines.

Mr DRABSCH: It is important to understand that the Mining Remediation Fund is not just a fund which should be expended in any particular financial year. It is also a reserve for those mines which might have been abandoned in the past and the operators responsible for those mines have closed up business or abandoned the site, and there had not been security bonds in place. Therefore, part of the idea of the Mining Remediation Fund is to provide a source of resources that government can call upon to help address those issues. It is a reserve we have in place, but we also use some of that reserve to undertake remediation of mines.

There are places like Redbank Mine, for example, where there is an ongoing program to identify the best means of resolving that. A lot of the work that has been undertaken over the last number of years that I have

been involved in this space has been looking at those major projects, bigger mines like Redbank and Cosmo, where there have been legacy issues—old pits filled with water, often contaminated water. Of course, there is activity such as the Rum Jungle project where there was a lot of planning and work undertaken to analyse the best business case for developing that. Now we have federal government funding to pursue that rehabilitation project.

Mr MONAGHAN: Some more work around this mining fund has happened recently. Since July 2022 the fund is able to generate interest. Up until 31 March this year—the reporting period—the fund has generated \$1.73m worth of interest. Treasury allow that to be reinvested into that Mining Remediation Fund. That transfer commenced around 30 September 2022. From those points on, from those decisions being made about interest, the fund will also generate interest under term deposits invested.

Madam CHAIR: The fund was established in 2013 and it has been going into a bucket and sometimes that money is utilised to do small projects. One example is Rum Jungle, which then led to getting some Commonwealth dollars for bigger remediation work. That is the understanding of how it works.

Mr MONAGHAN: To clarify, Rum Jungle is the only one it is not used for, but I will ask Mr Drabsch to clarify that.

Mr DRABSCH: Thank you, Chair, for that clarification as well; that was a good articulation of it.

In terms of Rum Jungle, I was referring to the work of the Mines and Energy agency to pursue rehabilitation and remediation as an outcome.

Mr EDGINGTON: I think you mentioned there would be roughly \$5m for Tennant Creek. What works does that involve? I think you said that there was some committed this year. How much has been committed this year and what is the cost of the overall project?

Mr MONAGHAN: The forecast expenditure for the Tennant Creek small mines audit is \$2.8m.

Mr EDGINGTON: I think there was a tender let a while back.

Mr DRABSCH: That reaffirms the fact that the activity is wrapping up in this space with the acquisition and recruitment of the staff and team leadership. The \$5.1m I mentioned is the overall expenditure from the remediation fund in the next financial year, of which that \$2.8m for Tennant Creek small mines audit is a part.

Mr EDGINGTON: What will that project involve—the \$2.8m?

Mr DRABSCH: That is a process of contractors going to look at known sites and scanning the area to check for unidentified sites. They will use historical records, for example, to ensure we have a clear understanding of the scope and scale. As you understand in being from that area, it is an old goldmining area with a lot of small sites and shafts scattered around. It is important to understand where they are so that they are secured and safe. To the extent that there is any potential environmental impact, we have a program to remediate them and minimise that long-term environmental impact.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are these sites accessible to the public at the moment?

Mr DRABSCH: They are in the general area, so ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Pretty much all of them are accessible.

Mr DRABSCH: They could be on private property, pastoral lease land or existing mining leases. I have not scanned the area myself, so I am not in a position to be precise in that answer.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the plan overall to make them safe? Will there be a component to open them up for tourism? What is the overall plan? It is unclear what is going on when it comes to Tennant Creek. Will they be not only made safe and there will be a commitment to open these up as a mining tourism trial, for example?

Mr MONAGHAN: I will not be able to comment on the tourism plans going forward, but we will have an understanding ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Do they talk to the remediation fund or not?

Mr MONAGHAN: As I was saying, we will have the ability to provide information across government once we have completed the audits.

Mr EDGINGTON: Does the remediation fund talk to tourism, or do they work in isolation? I thought they were the same department.

Mr DRABSCH: There is a site on Battery Hill where there has been some remediation. It was a manufactured pit, it was not a mine, but it is in an area where there were mines previously. There may be an opportunity for tourism in the future, but there also may not be.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has it been considered, or are you out there just filling in holes?

Mr DRABSCH: We are filling in holes where they need to be filled in. We will undertake the audit to understand the scale and scope of the issue and the character of the legacy mines. It may be possible that there is a tourism opportunity, but I suspect not because there are pits and caverns that would not be ideal for taking tourists into. I do not want to speculate on that. We will await the outcome of the audit. There may be opportunities that arise from there. If that occurs we will be in contact with our tourism division.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is important with any plan that we get the data and research in place before we make any decisions.

Mr EDGINGTON: I agree, so when will this audit be finished?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, if you could pick up on the interjection, but I will remind people to take it in turn. The member is asking whether you have an indication of when the audit will be finished.

Mr MONAGHAN: Sorry, I am still in the headspace of what I was saying before, so I will finish that and then ask the Member for Barkly to clarify his follow-up question.

My point is that the basis for any good plan is to ensure you have the research and data behind informed decisions from experts.

Mr EDGINGTON: It was about the audit time frame. This fund started in 2013, 11 years ago it was ...

Madam CHAIR: I think it is being a bit cheeky to pretend the audit ...

Mr EDGINGTON: When will this audit be finished?

Mr MONAGHAN: The audit has been in place for just on 12 months. They have a lot of work to do in this space and that is why we are putting resources into the team to grow it. We are putting experts in place to ensure the information through the audits that they gather is responsible, articulate and on point.

Mr DRABSCH: There is a contract to the value of \$4m awarded to DAC Enterprises, a Territory company, to address over 200 small mine features around Tennant Creek.

Work to undertake similar programs of small mine safety and remediation activities across the Territory is under way with preliminary planning for remediation around Alice Springs and Pine Creek. There has been \$5.4m worth of contracts awarded in this financial year. The program is ongoing. As I indicated, the project was initiated as a result of the additional resources we have attracted to this activity.

I can undertake to give you a full response as to the nature of the audit, how it will be undertaken, when it is due to be completed and what possible outcomes could occur as a result.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am happy to take that on notice. Of those contracts, 100% were Territory businesses. It is great to see those enterprises benefiting from that process.

Mr EDGINGTON: This fund is being used to audit essentially legacy sites in Tennant Creek, but there does not seem to be any connection between the old mining sites in Tennant Creek being made safe and opening them up in that area for tourism. I do not get it. Why is there no plan for it?

Madam CHAIR: The minister and his officials said that is it probably not the safest tourism opportunity. I am sure it is something that can be referred across to the tourism ...

Mr EDGINGTON: The tourism opportunity comes from when they are made safe, so there is an opportunity once they are made safe.

Madam CHAIR: Possibly, but it is not just about making the legacy mine safe; the surrounding area would need to be safe. I will hand back to the minister, but I feel they articulated it before.

Mr MONAGHAN: Thank you, Madam Chair, you are quite right.

Mr EDGINGTON: It seems to me the department is working in silos.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, do you want me to get my yellow cards out?

Minister, you will talk uninterrupted and then we will go back for commentary from the Member for Barkly.

Mr MONAGHAN: The most important piece of work is the audit and the science investigation occurring. In order to know something is safe, you need to know the nature of the risk. These audits will identify the nature of the risk. That will, obviously, advise any future plans that may be put in place with tourism or closure, whatever it happens to be. The most important work being undertaken by the unit at the moment is to identify and get the science to work out the nature of the risk.

Madam CHAIR: Across the Territory there would be a variety of legacy mines. Some might be completely appropriate, possibly nearby, and safe for what the member is talking about, but others might have contamination or safety issues that you may have to refer to other agencies. Is that work essentially picking all of that up?

Mr MONAGHAN: That is exactly what I am talking about ...

Mr EDGINGTON: They are all the same agency ...

Madam CHAIR: They are not all the same; they are different.

Mr EDGINGTON: Tourism and mining are in the same department.

Madam CHAIR: I will let the minister go, but I think it is a narrow view if you think tourism and mining—yes, it is in the same agency, but they are different areas.

Mr MONAGHAN: I go back to the most important bit of work here is to identify the nature of the risk. You do not put plans in place, you do not open tourism ventures if you do not know the nature of the risk.

Mr EDGINGTON: We have been waiting 11 years for this.

Mr MONAGHAN: Many people listening know that places around Australia like Coober Pedy, you just do not go walking around Coober Pedy ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Nobody is saying that at all.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, please do not interrupt. I have asked you to stop interrupting, so I consider your conduct to be disorderly. I warn you that if you persist in interrupting, I will ask you to leave for an hour. No-one has had to leave this whole Estimates—please do not be the first on the last evening. It is disruptive. You are getting plenty of time to make your commentary and get your grabs up, but if we could just be respectful.

Mr MONAGHAN: I do think there will be any more to say about the science that goes into the investigation of the safety risk of these mines, and any legacy mine that we have not identified yet. There is a big piece of work to be done there. Our officers, with an increased FTE, are undertaking that work. It is important work, and it is important for any future decisions or any future plans about what happens in the region.

Mr DRABSCH: You mentioned the department seems to operate in silos. One of the reasons we integrated the industry agencies into one Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade was to in fact avoid that. The deputy CEO from mines and energy and the deputy CEO of tourism meet in my office every morning for an hour-and-a-half, and we do not operate in silos. We have divisions, but I call them boundless divisions.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, I will give you an example ...

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the vision for the Barkly?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Barkly, you are already on a warning. Let us be realistic. You are not seeming to get it. Rum Jungle Lake, for example, is an old mine. The upper part of it they turned it into a lake and we all went swimming there. Oops—it is not so safe for swimming. Imagine if you invite tourists into all these mines, if you do not do the work.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am talking about making them safe and having a vision for tourism.

Madam CHAIR: But if you do not know how to make them safe, you are putting the tourists at risk.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are leading from the Chair, Madam Chair.

Mr EDGINGTON: I never said that at all.

Madam CHAIR: Well, that is what it felt like you were implying. Go ahead and ask your question.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am trying to get a sense of what the vision is once these mines are made safe. What is the plan and the vision to open up some of these sites to increase tourism in the Barkly?

Madam CHAIR: It is CLP policy—tourism in mines.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is there a vision or not? It sits in most tourism plans around the Territory, so there is a connection between these sites and tourism. It sits in just about every tourism plan I have seen in Tennant Creek, and there has been a huge number of them, I can assure you. All I want to know is what is the plan and the vision, once these sites are made safe, to open them up for tourism in the Barkly? That is all I want to know.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is a portfolio I am not responsible for. I am responsible for my unit doing the audits to ensure that we get the data and information. I have wonderful staff within the department who have undertaken that work. That is important work for the Territory. It is important work for opportunities in some of those legacy mines, but opportunities may be reopening some of them and rehabbing some of them through investment in the Territory. We see that in the Tennant mine that has just opened, and it ran into construction to reopen. They will have a big part to play in the rehabilitation of a mine that will include an outcome of making that mine site safe.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Mines Services

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.2, Mines Services, noting we drifted in there previously. Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: Should I go back?

Madam CHAIR: We are allowing you flexibility.

Mr EDGINGTON: I still have not heard of any vision for the Barkly when it comes to completion of remediation ...

Madam CHAIR: This budget delivers more in the Barkly than any other region, I would say off the top of my head.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will move on from that to exploration licences. You announced ASX-listed group Top End Energy as the newest entrant to the McArthur Basin. When was the exploration licence application from Top End Energy received?

Mr MONAGHAN: That is not in this output.

Madam CHAIR: We are on Output 2.2, which is mines.

Mr EDGINGTON: All right. In regard to mining exploration licences, what is the average approval period for an exploration licence?

Mr MONAGHAN: I think we have passed that output.

Madam CHAIR: We are on Output 2.2, but we can be a bit flexible.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will pass to Acting Senior Executive Director Denise Turnbull to give us the data.

Ms TURNBULL: Currently the average time to grant an EL on native title-affected land, pastoral land, is 7.47 months, but that is only for a small number of ELs, which was 27. Since we started public reporting of KPIs, which was in July 2021, a total of 375 ELs on native title-affected land have been granted at an average time during that period of 9.27 months. In contrast, only one EL has been granted on Aboriginal land during this time, and that took a total time of 13 years. That highlights the difference in time frames to grant on native title land as opposed to Aboriginal land.

It is pleasing to note that we compare favourably with WA and South Australia. From October to December 2023 they were taking an average of 16 months, compared with us in that time of 8.7. They have not published their KPIs this year, so I cannot compare, but we remain competitive. In South Australia, it takes approximately 12 months to get an EL granted. If you take the applications on Aboriginal land out of the equation, we are very competitive with other jurisdictions.

Mr MONAGHAN: Part of that process is a range of factors that have to be taken into consideration that can cause slowing up of some of those, or expediency, depending on the quality of the information the applicant brings forward.

There is also a process under the *Native Title Act 1993* if an objection is lodged. There could be a lengthy delay while the arbitration body, the Native Title Tribunal, makes its decision. Applicants can also delay the grant through not undertaking landowner notifications in a timely manner or requesting consideration to stagger the grant to allow for financial implications to be spread over a period. Landowner objections may also be a factor in some of these delays.

The process is one that has a number of bits of activity that can impact the eventual outcome of the process of approval.

Mr EDGINGTON: The average is 9.27 months for a mineral exploration licence. What is the longest a mineral exploration licence has taken?

Mr MONAGHAN: The longest EL that was granted was the Aboriginal land one which took 13 years. That was the one that went through a total of 160 months.

Mr EDGINGTON: That was on Aboriginal land. What about native title ones?

Mr MONAGHAN: On native title land, I am not sure. We do not have figures for that, but we can take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.10

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

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the longest period of time a mineral exploration licence has taken to get to approval in regard to land involving native title?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: I do.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.10.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the average time to review and approve a mining management plan?

Mr MONAGHAN: A mining approval is 61 days for the average turnaround time. The median turnaround time is 58 days.

A number of factors impact approvals of mining. There is the associated risk. Smaller mines may not have as much risk as longer-term, bigger mines, so the simpler projects can take less time to approve and assess. There is the location of the project and the complexity with some of those operations and the environmental management systems to be implemented to mitigate some of those risks.

Prior to a mine management plan being lodged for a mine, an applicant may need to secure environmental approvals subject to the *Environment Protection Act*. For matters such as flora and fauna requiring special advice—for example, when a threat to flora and fauna is assessed—the operator may be required to undertake further studies such as on ground. This can delay the assessment as well.

There are some major factors. Looking at the complexity of the application and of the mine will determine some of those time frames.

Mr EDGINGTON: On average it is 61 days. What is the longest a mining management plan has taken to approve?

Mr MONAGHAN: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.11

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

Mr EDGINGTON: On average a mining management plan takes 61 days to review and approve. What is the longest period of time a mining management plan has taken from application to approval?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: I accept the question.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.11.

Mr DRABSCH: We have a target to turn around MMPs within 90 days and our target is that should be undertaken at least 85% of the time. We are currently achieving 96% of the time. For the reporting period, 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024, 96% of the MMPs were turned around within the 90-day period. There might be one that extended beyond the 90 days, but it would be an outlier. For context, that is on top of 89% achieved within the 90 days in the previous financial year.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many mining management plans are we talking about over the last 12 months?

Ms TURNBULL: Looking at the statistics I have, in 2024 there were 148 mining management plans assessed. That is across a broad range of activities, including exploration, extractives and mines. In 2023 there were 160 mining management plans.

Madam CHAIR: That first figure you gave us would have been to 31 March.

Ms TURNBULL: No, this is up until 31 May 2024. They are updated figures that we have.

Madam CHAIR: From 1 January or from 1 July?

Ms TURNBULL: From 1 July.

Mr EDGINGTON: Out of those 148, do you have a breakdown per region of where those mining management plans are?

Ms TURNBULL: I do not.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.12

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Out of the 148 mining management plans assessed so far, please provide a breakdown per region of where those mining management plans are.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.12.

Mr EDGINGTON: Given the range of mining activity around the Territory at the moment, are there plans to relocate any staff to Tennant Creek?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am not aware of plans to relocate any staff, but I will hand to the chief executive officer.

Mr DRABSCH: We have an office in Alice Springs with geoscientists and mining service operations officers working there. There is a complement of 10 to 12 who cover the Central Australia area and up to the Barkly. They are regularly in the Tennant Creek area, working with companies such as Verdant at Ammaroo, Tennant Mining and Northern Iron. There is quite an active presence in the Barkly region from our Alice Springs office.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many staff are based in Alice Springs; what was that number?

Mr MONAGHAN: While we are talking about staff, I will talk about how good our staff are in the mining area. They amaze me every time they deliver me some information.

Mr DRABSCH: It is around 10 to 12.

Madam CHAIR: They have indicated a dozen; did you want a specific figure taken on notice, or are you comfortable with that?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, we will get some specific figures, perhaps some figures across the Territory, if possible, and where they are based.

Mr MONAGHAN: By region?

Mr EDGINGTON: There are none in Tennant Creek at the moment. If they are outside of Alice and Darwin, we could break it down by region.

Mr MONAGHAN: We will take that on notice, but we have officers for the wider DITT in Tennant Creek.

Mr EDGINGTON: We are not a suburb of Alice Springs.

Question on Notice No 8.13

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many mining staff are based in the Northern Territory, and in what locations are they based?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.13.

Mr EDGINGTON: Given that there are staff based in Alice Springs, how often are they present in Tennant Creek and across the Barkly?

Madam CHAIR: I think the minister explained that with his officials a minute ago.

Mr MONAGHAN: The staff based in Alice Springs are responsible for Tennant Creek and visit regularly.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Energy Development

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.3, Energy Development. Minister, we will welcome the officials who have joined us and thank the others.

Mr MONAGHAN: I thank Denise, the acting senior executive director, and I welcome Mr James Pratt, Senior Executive Director, Energy Development.

Madam CHAIR: Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: I want to ask about solar; does that fit into Energy Development?

Madam CHAIR: No, it is the Office of Sustainable Energy. We had these questions the other day. That was Minister Worden.

Mr EDGINGTON: What about wind generation?

Madam CHAIR: That is sustainable energy.

Mr MONAGHAN: I might help. Member for Barkly, you had a previous question about Top End Energy.

Mr EDGINGTON: Thanks for the reminder.

Madam CHAIR: Look at this camaraderie! You will be a comrade soon, Member for Barkly.

Mr EDGINGTON: Thanks, comrade!

On 6 May you announced Top End Energy as a new entrant in the McArthur Basin. When was the exploration licence application from Top End Energy first received?

Mr MONAGHAN: You are right; I announced that recently. It is exciting to have a new proponent in the Beetaloo with their exploration permit, because it is a mark of the confidence in the sector and in the exploration and viability of what will become one of our biggest resources in the Territory, with its flow of natural gas.

Mr PRATT: Top End Energy was granted that permit in May; you are correct. They took control of that permit application in April 2022 and proceeded through the native title requirements, fit-and-proper persons test and other administrative processes that the department holds. The minister granted that permit in May this year.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is just over two years. It was received in April 2022 and granted in May 2024.

Mr PRATT: This one is a little more intricate than that. The way petroleum works is exploration permit applications are granted first, or companies have the right to exclusive native title arrangements or negotiations. Top End Energy did not acquire that initial right; a different company called NT Gas had an exploration permit application in train for about 10 years. That company took a very long time to get motivated to progress its application for consideration by government. Top End Energy then took control of that application in April 2022.

Mr EDGINGTON: I think you said 'lack of motivation'. Why has it gone on for so long?

Mr PRATT: Once a company is granted an exploration permit application they are in control of their own destiny, so to speak. If it is on native title land they have exclusive rights to commence negotiations through a land council with the traditional owners to gain the appropriate agreements to then let the minister consider whether to grant the permit.

There are many factors at play as to what contributes to that process going smoothly or not; part of it is the company's desire and activity to get motivated and engage with the appropriate land council. There is also a part to play for land councils and traditional owners to be part of that conversation. The department is not in control of those functions; that rests entirely with the company and the relative land council.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the government's role? They issue the exploration permit. Is it a hands-off approach until they come back to you, or is there some follow-up or support provided during that period?

Mr PRATT: Companies are selected on the best application to be the company deemed to have that exclusive right, so no other company can go and talk to a land council to get access to that land on an exploration permit. We give them that exclusive right through the minister's approval, and they then have carriage of that to speak with land councils. We actively engage with them; we speak with them for progress updates on how they are tracking. We also speak to the relative land councils on how they are tracking. The legislation does not allow us to force parties to come together to reach an agreement.

Mr EDGINGTON: At what point then would government provide or facilitate that support and engagement between the parties? Is there a role for government?

Mr MONAGHAN: As Mr Pratt indicated, that happens along the process. As you would expect, our department is keen to get new exploration and operations off the ground.

Madam CHAIR: Did you have a further question or perhaps an example, Member for Barkly, because I think the information is ...

Mr EDGINGTON: This is the example. Why has it taken so long, given the department has played this role over the last 10 years?

Mr MONAGHAN: I disagree that it has taken so long. It is a very quick process that has occurred.

Mr EDGINGTON: Let us go back to when the first permit was issued.

Mr MONAGHAN: James Pratt has been the leader behind this team to engage, so I will ask him to answer the question.

Mr PRATT: I will explain how a single company took 10 years, NT Gas, in taking its time—if I can phrase it like that—to get motivated and obtain a permit with the relative approvals through the NLC and the minister.

A second company called Top End Energy took control of this process in April 2022 and completed it within two years. That demonstrates how a company, if it wishes to proactive, respectful and have true engagement, can get a permit approved in a quick space of time.

Mr EDGINGTON: What I am getting at is to understand the eight years before that. What happened there? What was the involvement of government to make that happen, or is it just the company?

Mr MONAGHAN: You are right, Member for Barkly; it is a matter for the company. Some people put in exploration processes, get their permits and then decide not to take it up for a range of reasons. I am sure the recent flow rates Tamboran realised in the Beetaloo Sub-basin has encouraged a number of other proponents to probably engage and try to get exploration permits. They realise the viability of the sector and the resource and they all want a piece of the action.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the policy on this? If this other company took eight years, is there a use-it-or-lose-it policy for these permits?

Mr MONAGHAN: Not an application, no.

Mr EDGINGTON: When you say 'an application' did they have a permit to proceed or not? It was just an application that sat there with no further ...

Mr MONAGHAN: They needed a permit to explore. They did not pursue that.

Mr EDGINGTON: The application never progressed to that. Is that what you are getting at?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: That gives me a better understanding. Are there any other exploration applications sitting dormant like that one was? How many on the books are just sitting there and how long have they been sitting there?

Mr MONAGHAN: There are 120 exploration permit applications; 38 exploration permits that have been granted, with Top End Energy just receiving theirs; three retention licences; two production licences; and three production leases. Of the 120 exploration permit applications, 88 are on Aboriginal freehold land, 29 are on native title-affected land and three applications are on both forms of tenure. These applications are progressing with either the consent to negotiate process under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the right to negotiate process under the *Native Title Act 1993* with the relevant land council.

To facilitate some of the work and compliance with those title holders, DITT processed the following applications for the reporting period: 43 transfers of title and registration dealings; 19 variations, suspension or extension of work program commitments; 87 search requests for information from clients; and nine publications of Gazette notices.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the longest an application has been sitting on the books?

Mr MONAGHAN: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.14

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

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to the 120 exploration licence permits, what is the longest period an application has been sitting on the books?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.14.

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to Top End Energy, what other permits have been granted? How many permits did you say are in existence at the moment?

Mr MONAGHAN: There are 38 exploration permits in existence:

- EP98, EP76 and EP117 in the Beetaloo basin are held by Falcon Oil & Gas Australia
- EP115 in the Amadeus Basin is held by Frontier Oil & Gas
- EP127 in the Georgina Basin is held by Global Oil & Gas Ltd
- EP198 in the Carpentaria Basin, EP167 and EP168 in the Beetaloo basin, EP169 in the Carpentaria Basin and EP184 and EP187 in the McArthur Basin are all held by Imperial Oil & Gas
- EP153 and EP154 in the McArthur Basin and EP144 in the Georgina Basin are all held by Jacaranda Minerals Pty Ltd
- EP176, EP190, EP191, EP192, EP171 and EP174 in McArthur Basin are all held by McArthur NT Pty Ltd
- EP105 in the Amadeus Basin is held by Merlin Energy Pty Ltd, Santos and Peak Helium
- EP134 in the Eromanga Basin, the Amadeus Basin and the Pedirka Basin is held by Peak Helium
- EP112 in the Amadeus Basin is held by Santos, Frontier and Peak Helium
- EP82 in the Amadeus Basin is held by Santos and Peak Helium

- EP125 in the Amadeus Basin is held by Santos, Ordiv Petroleum and Peak
- EP97, EP93 and EP107 in the Pedirka Basin is held by Simpson Energy
- EP136 and EP143 in the Beetaloo Sub-basin are held by Sweetpea Petroleum
- EP161 in the Beetaloo basin is held by Tamboran Resources and Santos
- EP145 in the Amadeus Basin is held by Triton Energy
- EP126 in the Bonaparte Basin is held by Vintage Energy
- EP200, EP205 and EP207 in the Wiso Basin are held by Wiso Energy
- EP222 in the Georgina Basin is held by Wiso Energy.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many staff are allocated to dealing with these exploration applications and permits?

Mr MONAGHAN: There are six dealing with titles.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many of the 38 exploration permits in the NT will involve horizontal fracturing?

Mr MONAGHAN: It depends on where they are located. Some in the Amadeus Basin do not require horizontal fracturing.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is it a requirement as part of the application for an exploration permit to describe exactly how you intend to mine?

Mr MONAGHAN: No, not on an exploration permit; that is about finding the resource.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Will some exploration permits involve horizontal fracturing?

Mr MONAGHAN: Down the track if they want to pursue that they need to get environmental permits and it would be a part of that process.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is my understanding that as a part of exploration, depending on where you are exploring and what you are looking for, it quite often involves horizontal fracturing; is that correct?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes, horizontal fracturing is used as part of the process in some.

Mr PRATT: The geology of the area covered by a permit will dictate the type of activity to flow gas to surface. In the Beetaloo Sub-basin that is generally what is called tight shale and requires hydraulic fracturing. In general terms the Amadeus Basin does not require hydraulic, or horizontal, fracturing because the gas can flow through pressure.

I will address your comment about permits. A permit gives you a right of access to the land in terms of a company having exclusive right of access; it does not allow you to undertake any regulated activity, such as seismic surveys or drilling of wells. For that, you must obtain an environmental management plan approval, which is where you would outline to the environmental regulator the form of activity that you wish to undertake.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Even if that is just during the exploration phase?

Mr PRATT: Correct. It is a critical approval required.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many of those exploration permits are within the Beetaloo Sub-basin?

Mr MONAGHAN: There are three exploration permits entirely in the Beetaloo Sub-basin.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many companies are producing gas in the Beetaloo Sub-basin at the moment? How many permits to produce are there?

Mr MONAGHAN: No-one is currently producing gas.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is there some gas flowing in the Beetaloo at the moment?

Mr PRATT: All wells in the Beetaloo are what we call shut-in; there is no gas flowing to surface at the moment. Tamboran's Shenandoah South 1 well, which had the record flow rates in the media in the past few months, was shut in about six weeks ago.

Both Tamboran and Empire are gearing up for their on-ground exploration activities for this Dry Season. Tamboran are expected to spud their first well in the next six weeks and Empire, subject to regulatory approvals, should do theirs in late quarter three this year as well.

Mr EDGINGTON: When we say that there is no gas flowing at the moment, has there been gas prior?

Mr MONAGHAN: Tamboran have been monitoring the flow rates from one of their wells. They have had 30, 60 and 90-day flow rates.

Mr PRATT: Empire and Tamboran have both had successful flow rate opportunities and activities from wells drilled in the Beetaloo since the lifting of the moratorium in 2019.

Empire has had successful flow of gas to surface from its Carpentaria 2H and 3H wells. Both have returned what we call commercial rates of at least three terajoules per day. That company is looking to progress their activity through a Carpentaria pilot project later this year.

Tamboran had a successful flow rate with its Shenandoah South 1 well. That well was drilled and flow tested last year. Results came through in the first two quarters of this year. They have returned about 6.2 terajoules per day. If we use three terajoules per day as a commercial effort, the Shenandoah South 1 well has changed the world's outlook on the Beetaloo Sub-basin and attracted great interest. Tamboran will be looking to drill two more wells this year in close proximity to the Shenandoah South 1 well and a further two wells next year as part of its pilot project.

Mr MONAGHAN: I make the point that these are unoptimised flow rates. I ask James Pratt to explain what the opportunity is if they are optimised.

Mr PRATT: The Tamboran well has been flow tested for approximately 90 days and returned a successful flow rate. Generally, companies would like to see wells flowed for far greater periods to get certainty on their flow rates which also then lets them to prove up the resource, helps them plan further on where the next stages of wells could be drilled and helps them and their investors understand the opportunity for that.

When we say 'unoptimised' it is using standard well equipment. When they head to production they will be using production tubing which will optimise the flow rate in theory even higher out of the well than the 6.2 or three TJ that has come back. Exploration wants to see the gas come to surface at a commercial rate which proves up that they can flow gas to surface and that the flow rates are of commercial needs. It then helps them plan and gain investment to develop the fields.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When I asked you whether gas is being produced in the Beetaloo you said no. Is there a technical difference between what you just described and production? Can you explain that?

Mr PRATT: I did answer you on a technical basis because I wanted to have the record clear that there is no gas being produced.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What does that mean?

Mr PRATT: A production licence is granted to a company when they are in production, and that is the term you used. Production means the commercial sale of gas. If I use the Amadeus Basin and Central Petroleum as an example, they are the only onshore-producing gas company in the Northern Territory. Alice Springs gets its power from that source, so that is production.

Madam CHAIR: When did that get put in place?

Mrs LAMBLEY: A long time ago.

Mr PRATT: They have had gas commercially flowing since 1982–84.

Production is a commercial sale and government gets royalties. You can only do production through a production licence, although I note the government amended the legislation last year to allow the appraisal use of gas which also provides companies and the government the opportunity to utilise the gas rather than flare and vent it into the environment.

Madam CHAIR: At the exploration stage.

Mr PRATT: At the exploration stage, subject to many regulatory and traditional owner approvals.

Mr MONAGHAN: But I clarify that is not happening yet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Tamboran and Empire are ...

Mr MONAGHAN: At the exploration stage.

Mrs LAMBLEY: And gas is coming out.

Mr MONAGHAN: They have drawn gas under their testing procedures. Mr Pratt just outlined for Tamboran the three monitoring stages they use. They cap that well as they move on to ensure other wells have the same flow rates for a commercial opportunity. They have 15 more ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Did you say that Tamboran will start production in six weeks?

Mr PRATT: No, Member for Araluen. I did not say they would start production; I said they will commence spudding of their well. It is a technical term for when the drill bit breaks the dirt for the first time and commences the drilling of a well. They will not be producing in six weeks; they will be commencing their next phase of well development activities.

Madam CHAIR: Is that continuing the exploration phase?

Mr PRATT: Yes. Exploration and appraisal is the phase that industry is currently in. Exploration means drilling a hole and looking for gas. Appraisal means appraising the rates, flow and quality of the gas, which is what Tamboran and Empire are currently in the stage of.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When are Empire and Tamboran due to start production? Are you aware of the time frames they have set?

Mr DRABSCH: The exploration and appraisal phase will occur for Tamboran and Empire over the next couple of years. There will be some appraisal gas which, as James indicated, is the beneficial use of that gas; rather than flaring it there will be containment of the gas. There is a purchase agreement that Tamboran has with the Northern Territory Government to supplement our gas supply, and that will be after the appropriate environmental approvals.

That appraisal process will prove up the gas to a point where they can go to market and raise capital to undertake a full production facility, which will involve a number of wells over a number of well pads. You get about six to eight wells per pad, and a pad is the size of a couple of hectares at most.

The final investment decision for production is planned by Tamboran for 2026, which will enable the development of the commercial fields and the production of gas from 2027–28 onwards.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Final investment for production is planned for 2026, and what did you say after that?

Mr DRABSCH: Then they would have to roll out the construction and establishment of a series of well pads and wells to scale up to a full commercial production rate.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is that by 2027–28?

Mr DRABSCH: Over those years, yes, with the idea of getting substantial volumes of gas flowing by about 2030.

Mr MONAGHAN: They will make a commercial decision about how many of those pads they roll out and at what stages they roll them out. They will not all come online at once; it will be part of their rollout to that process.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You mentioned that Tamboran has signed the deal with the Northern Territory Government to supply gas even before the appropriate environmental requirements have been met. Is that usual?

Mr MONAGHAN: Tamboran have reached their environmental permits. Any gas that will be sold under the agreement will be flared gas, which was mentioned before.

Madam CHAIR: But it is exploration gas that is being sold, not production.

Mr MONAGHAN: It will be 2026 when the exploration assessment will occur and that flared gas is able to come into the Territory grid.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is not what you said before.

Mr MONAGHAN: Mr Drabsch, clarify what you said for the record.

Mr DRABSCH: The process is that exploration has to take place. There are EMPs in place for those wells, and there might be subsequent wells with further EMPs.

Mr PRATT: Yes, there are 14 wells in the current EMP.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Will Tamboran have 14 wells?

Mr MONAGHAN: In the current EMP.

Mr DRABSCH: As I said before, there is a number of wells to a pad, so it is not 14 pads.

There is a number of conditions to that gas sale agreement. They still have to raise equity to undertake that exploration program. They are about to go to the market for that initial phase. They are confident of raising that capital. They will be producing the gas by about 2026. That is a supply of gas that the Northern Territory Government could readily use.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Will the 14 wells that currently have an EMP supply the gas that has been signed up to with the Northern Territory Government?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3, Energy Development, and Output Group 2.0. That also concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Agribusiness and Fisheries and the Mining portfolios.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the officials who have assisted the minister and thank the minister.

Mr MONAGHAN: I thank the officials who joined me from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, particularly the ones sitting with me for the final Energy Development output.

I also highlight that this is the last Estimates that the CEO, Mr Shaun Drabsch, will appear before. I thank him and wish him well for his transition to retirement ...

Mr KIRBY: Do you have a soccer ball for him?

Mr MONAGHAN: I do not have a soccer ball. You probably racked up a record when it comes to Estimates appearances because of the size of your portfolios. I thank you for the way you have supported many ministers, including me, and our department. I wish you well for the future.

Mr DRABSCH: Thank you very much.

Madam CHAIR: Very kind words—thank you, minister.

Mr EDINGTON: Thanks on behalf of us, Shaun. Thanks for everything you have done.

Madam CHAIR: We are all one team in here, Steve.

Mr DRABSCH: Thank you very much.

The committee suspended.

EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you from the Department of Education.

Mr MONAGHAN: With me are: Chief Executive Karen Weston; Chief Financial Officer Jasmin Aldenhoven; Deputy Chief Executive of Regional Services, Saeed Amin; Deputy Chief Executive of Strategic Policy, Projects and Performance, Susan Bowden; and Acting Executive Director of Inclusion and Engagement Services, Kelly Cooper. We have other officials; as they join us at the table I will introduce them.

Madam CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement regarding your Education portfolio?

Mr MONAGHAN: No, I do not.

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

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024–25 as they relate to the Department of Education. We will go to the shadow minister first and then other committee members. We have agreed that if it is a line of questioning we can jump in. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mrs LAMBLEY: As a part of the \$250m package that the Prime Minister announced in March 2023 for Central Australia about \$40m was allocated to education. Can you break down exactly what that includes? How much has been spent? How much has not been spent?

Mr MONAGHAN: You are quite right. The On Country Learning Measure was a \$40m investment to improve student outcomes in schools in the central region. The 2024 budget allocation to OCLM is \$38.158m, with the remaining \$1.842m to be allocated in 2025. The OCLM was announced as part of the federal government's 'A better, safer future for Central Australia' plan. That commitment of \$40m over 2023–24 and 2024–25 is designed to ensure and support attendance and education outcomes in the region of Central Australia.

This agreement was signed by the ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Sorry, minister, can you please speak up? I cannot hear you. There is a bit of background noise.

Mr MONAGHAN: The additional funding is designed to address the critical areas of needs within schools to improve student outcomes and support students and their families to engage in education pathways to employment on country. In addition to the funding directly to schools, \$4.9m was allocated to provide regionally coordinated services to expand access to allied health professionals and additional teaching and learning support focused on literacy and numeracy, Indigenous language and culture, and English as an additional language and dialect.

As well as enhancing some of the pathways for students in the region, we have closely consulted these schools and they have had to provide a plan for their school which required their relevant cultural authority to sign off on. They are all published on our website. Each school was then allocated a certain amount of money under that.

Ms WESTON: All the funding for the schools out of the OCLM money has been allocated to the schools, and they are in the process of spending that. It is about \$31.9m.

The money for the non-government schools has all been allocated to them and they are in the process of spending that at nearly \$2.2m.

In terms of the regionally coordinated services, there was an allocation of about \$5m, and we are in the process of spending some of that money on the recruitment of staff and a range of initiatives—I can go through them if that would be helpful—including people who are supporting Aboriginal languages and culture across a number of schools.

We also want to recruit staff to provide allied health support to remote communities. We were unable to do that, so we have now contracted and commissioned some agencies to provide services to those remote schools. We have those contracts in place to provide those services.

The other work that was centrally managed was around vocational education and training. We stood up quite a bit of vocational education and training at Ntaria.

It is only the end of term two, so it is halfway through in terms of expenditure. We always agreed with the Commonwealth Government that we would be able to carry some of the money forward if it is not fully spent in the time. We will report in July. I will have more accurate figures when we do that report with the Commonwealth.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How was it allocated between the schools?

Mr MONAGHAN: The first criterion for the allocation was the greatest need. As I said, each school had to highlight that through an action plan about what they will use as an improvement measure to ensure they were targeting the money being given to them.

Ms WESTON: The funding was calculated by the Commonwealth Government. It was intended to move those schools to funding in Central Australia towards 100% of the SRS. It was a \$40m bucket, and they made the calculations on how it was allocated. There is a schedule to the financial agreement that is published. The information about every dollar going to every school in that schedule.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many schools have benefited from this funding?

Mr MONAGHAN: Every school in the central region benefited. The amounts they benefited under their action plan were published, but I can articulate what they were.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How far north did it go up Central Australia, like to Elliott? What was the geographical area?

Mr MONAGHAN: I will finish answering the question, and then I will come back to that one because it is an important point. Acacia Hill School got \$150,000.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Minister, it will take a while to read through those. I am happy to just grab a copy.

Mr MONAGHAN: Do you want me to table a copy?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Mr MONAGHAN: The data is published publicly anyway. I will table it.

I will hand over to Saeed Amin, the deputy chief executive, to talk about the extent and the geolocation of that.

Mr AMIN: The money went to all the schools in the central region and those schools in town in Alice itself—schools like Acacia Hill, Larapinta—and as west as Yulara and Yuendumu, Stirling, Ti Tree, Wallace Rockhole et cetera. It covered all the government schools as well as the non-government schools in the central region.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How far north did you go? Did it include Tennant Creek?

Mr MONAGHAN: No, that is the Barkly.

Mr EDGINGTON: Did it include Arlparra?

Mr MONAGHAN: No.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why not?

Mr AMIN: Arlparra is officially in the Barkly region and not in the central region.

Mr EDGINGTON: When you say 'officially in the Barkly region', are you saying that the principal at Arlparra reports to the director in Tennant Creek?

Mr AMIN: Yes, that is the case.

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to Arlparra it seems there are different government boundaries when it comes to Central Australia. Certainly, the department of the Chief Minister in some cases picks up Arlparra. Is Arlparra one of those communities that has different government departments from Alice Springs and some from Tennant Creek? Is there a boundary from a government perspective that Arlparra falls within?

Mr MONAGHAN: Before I ask Saeed to elaborate on that, I make the point that this funding was allocated by the Australian Government around the region, so they dictated where those regions were.

Mr EDGINGTON: They decided where it would be spent ...

Mr MONAGHAN: They decided where the money was going; it was their money.

Mr EDGINGTON: They told you which schools it was to be spent at.

Mr MONAGHAN: They told us the region exactly that it encompassed.

Mr EDGINGTON: They told you the actual schools.

Ms WESTON: My understanding is that the regional boundaries are consistent with those across government. In some instances different government departments have different structures. We are following the NT Government regional boundaries that have been provided across government. Our understanding is that Arlparra is within the Barkly region.

In terms of the funding from the Commonwealth, they asked us to identify the schools in the central region and surrounding Alice Springs, so we have followed in our advice the NT Government central region and identified the schools for them. Then they made the calculations.

Mr EDGINGTON: It was the NT that identified which schools, not the federal government like the minister said.

Mr MONAGHAN: The NT directed which region it was going to be in, and the regional boundaries are considered by DCMC which determines where they are.

Mr EDGINGTON: What about the Mulga Bore students?

Mr MONAGHAN: The department was following the requirement from the Australian Government to allocate the funding to that region.

Mr EDGINGTON: What about Mulga Bore and Wilora? I am trying to understand what is being funded in Central Australia. I have just been told Arlparra is not part of Central Australia; I want to know whether Mulga Bore and Wilora are part of the Central Australian boundary.

Mr MONAGHAN: The government schools in that central region are: Acacia Hill; Alcoota; Alice Springs School of the Air; Amoonguna; Areyonga; Bonya; Bradshaw Primary; Braitling Primary; Centralian Middle School; Centralian Senior College; Finke; Gillen Primary, Haasts Bluff; Harts Range; Imanpa; Laramba; Larapinta Primary; Mbunghara; Mount Allan; Mulga Bore; Mutitjulu; Ntaria; Nyirripi; Papunya; Ross Park; Sadadeen Primary; Stirling; Titjikala; Ti Tree; Wallace Rockhole; Walungurru; Watarrka; Watiyawanu; Willowra; Yuendumu; and Yulara.

Mr EDGINGTON: The two I asked for were in there.

Madam CHAIR: The NTG has the five different regions, and they are trying to have consistency across all government agencies and have representation in those regions.

Mrs HERSEY: In BP3 you show on-country learning as being a \$20m new initiative on page 208, but on page 214 it has the on-country learning national partnership agreement declining by \$20m, from 30m to \$10m. Can you please explain that?

Ms ALDENHOVEN: The commitment by the Australian Government was \$40m, so it was \$30m in one year and \$10m in the second year. That is why you see a reduction of \$20m year on year.

Mrs HERSEY: There are performance indicators on page 209 of BP3. What is the purpose of these measures and are they supposed to be stretch measures aimed at enhancing performance?

Mr MONAGHAN: The overall reason for those key performance indicators is to aim for improvement. Every school within that—whether it is primary, secondary, early childhood or whatever—has the responsibility to ensure they put in programs, quality teaching and reflective practice to meet those improvement targets.

Ms BOWDEN: Those performance measures are about improvement for our children in the Northern Territory.

In terms of the performance measures by output for 2023–24, you will see that it goes through, for example, the preschool measures and looks at enrolments and attendance for preschool. Preschool is not compulsory, but families are strongly urged to send their children to preschool. It is about how we can continue to focus on improving the outcomes for young people in the Northern Territory. For example, the total preschool student enrolments in BP3 for 2023–24 is projected to be 2,750 children. We have exceeded the status previously with an actual performance of 2,843, which is a lift.

We are continuing to look at how we can improve and grow our enrolments and attendance and the achievement of our young people in the Northern Territory.

Mr MONAGHAN: Every school has a school improvement plan at the start of the year that targets some of those measures, based on where they and their cohorts are. They will work towards improving that particular aspect of their school, in line with the much broader performance measures set by BP3.

Mrs HERSEY: For preschool enrolments from 2023–24, your projection to 2024–25 is only up by seven. What performance indicators are you putting in place? To have only seven extra students across a year seems not enough. What are you doing to engage more students coming to preschool, given that you are saying it is not compulsory? What are you putting in place to try to get students along? We know that if they do not start education early, they are behind the eight ball before they even start school.

Mr MONAGHAN: Absolutely. The earlier you engage kids in formal learning and the investment you make in formal learning is a key multiplier across the whole sector and across government in the sense of the benefit back to the community. We are doing a lot in that space.

We undertook a review into preschool delivery, which the Nous Group produced. The review aimed at identifying some of the optimal models for preschool funding and the provision across the Territory within the overarching early childhood education and care system, being aware that not all preschools are run solely by a school; they could be run in childcare settings or a combination. Parents might choose to send their kids to a childcare centre in the morning and a preschool that is close by in the afternoon. There are a lot of models in that space. A number of proponents deliver those models, be they independent, government, Catholic or in the childcare sector.

That report looked at how we optimise the access, which is critically important. The further away you get from a metropolitan city, the national data shows that engagement drops dramatically from national averages, particularly for Aboriginal cohorts. That would indicate the access component and the requirements the education system there delivers, so the review looks at how we improve that.

Some of the key outcomes, which are really evidence-based recommendations, are that we look at preschool delivery and how we bring in more local staff to engage in that space to ensure the access for the most disadvantaged groups is increased.

From that review, you will see significant changes going forward to increase those numbers and people will have better access from some of the remote parts. It is an important area.

Mrs HERSEY: Some of those measures on page 209 of those key performance indicators show no improvement. For example, I spoke about the preschool enrolments. The primary, middle and senior

enrolments show minimal increases or some declines. Is that because people have lost faith in an NT Government-funded school sector and are possibly going across to the private sector?

Mr MONAGHAN: No, I do not. There is a number of reasons. If you look at the targets from 2023 you see that they have increased, however minimally, but remember preschool is not compulsory.

Mrs HERSEY: The total number of primary, middle and senior students has decreased.

Mr MONAGHAN: They are all-of-government figures you are quoting. If you look at the government schools, you see that the 2023 projections of 2,750 are up by 93 to 2,843. Aboriginal preschool student enrolments are up. Are they as high as I want them? No. Why? Because we know if we engage young people in the education system as early as possible, you get ...

Mrs HERSEY: Excuse me, minister. You just said that Aboriginal students are up. Where are you looking at that? It is the same across here; there is no change.

Mr MONAGHAN: If you look at government education and the total preschool students enrolments, you will see the projection, the 2023 target, in BP3 was 2,750. It is up by 93 to 2,843. The other one is the Aboriginal preschool student enrolments; from 1,050 it is up by 108 to 1,158.

Preschool attendance has increased by 1% in non-Aboriginal students and we have achieved the target we have set for 53% for Aboriginal students. The improvement and engagement strategies are starting to have an impact, which is important.

Ms WESTON: The performance targets are set to be achieved. One of the challenges for preschool, as the minister mentioned, is it is not a compulsory year of schooling, so it is an optional choice for parents whether they engage in preschool. As Ms Bowden mentioned, the targets are a little higher and we are aiming to meet those targets.

There is a lot of work happening in the preschool space. Ms Bowden talked about the preschool review. One of the key things is to do more to engage our remote students, but one of the other options is to offer funding to Aboriginal-controlled organisations so that they might operate some preschools in remote areas. The evidence is that will sometimes improve enrolment and engagement in preschool.

Mrs HERSEY: Have you engaged any of those Aboriginal organisations to work in and engage those Aboriginal students?

Mr MONAGHAN: May I just check with the Chair, have we moved to the early childhood output?

Madam CHAIR: We are in whole of government. With Minister Bowden we spent all morning in the whole of government. You can ask anything in whole of government. If the shadow wants to stick in whole of government, she can do the whole evening there.

Can you repeat the question, please?

Mrs HERSEY: CEO Karen Weston explained that Education was moving to engage with some Aboriginal organisations to increase Aboriginal attendance in remote. What organisations are they? How is that working to increase the number of Aboriginal children going to school?

Ms WESTON: The review of preschool has only just been completed, so now it is work to redesign the funding model and allow other providers to come into the provision of early childhood and preschool across the Territory. It is still very early days, but that is the direction agreed to by government. That will require a bit more work on the funding model. It will require for us to do more to engage some of those priority cohorts.

We also currently have a campaign running about preschool attendance. I do not know if you have seen it. There is a lovely, bright bus in Darwin trying to encourage more preschool attendance. There are brightly coloured posters all over the place trying to encourage young children and their families to understand why going to preschool is so important.

There is much work to do to lift preschool attendance. There are conversations going on across the country around changes to preschool funding.

There is reform work that comes out of the review that will be starting fairly soon, in the next six months or so.

Mrs HERSEY: The NAPLAN performance measures are much the same in BP3, if not worse. Many of the measures are showing that you expect worse results in 2024–25 than last year. Is that because of ineffective policies? Can you explain why that is?

Mr MONAGHAN: I point out that NAPLAN is covered in government education curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, which is Output 3.4.

Madam CHAIR: We could go output by output, or every question could be answered under agency-related whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am happy to answer that question then, because if we are moving officers ...

Madam CHAIR: Unfortunately, you do not get that choice. It is the committee's choice whether they get into a line of questioning here or we move to the outputs. I asked the committee if we could move to the outputs, and they would prefer to ask this question here. Shadow minister, the minister would prefer to go to the outputs. Do you have any questions on whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy?

Mrs HERSEY: I just thought it was my choice to stay here. Would you prefer me to do that in 3.4? I am happy to work with you.

Mr MONAGHAN: It just means coordinating people, the officers who come in at appropriate times.

Mrs HERSEY: I will give you a bit of leeway there, minister.

Non-government student numbers are rising while government student numbers are falling. If more students are moving to private, is that a sign that the public system is not doing well enough, and is this related to the crime rate?

Mr MONAGHAN: I want to focus on education being about teaching and learning, not crime. I will pass ...

Mrs HERSEY: With respect, it was about the numbers falling.

Mr MONAGHAN: Hold on, I am answering the question.

Madam CHAIR: Let us not interrupt each other.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will pass to Susan Bowden to outline and give some understanding about those numbers in private and independent, and I assume you mean Catholic and the conglomerate of non-government schools?

Mrs HERSEY: Non-government.

Ms BOWDEN: A range of factors influence the rise and fall of enrolments. These factors can be population growth or movement of students. We continue to significantly invest in improving enrolment and attendance at our schools. There is a range of measures that we put in place to ensure we engage families and community in schooling across all stages of schooling and at all year levels. In regard to the ebbs and flows of enrolment, we also see in the non-government sector that enrolment and attendance can go up and down.

What we are seeing in our government schools, from our Budget Paper No 3 projection of 29,600 there was an increase of 209 students enrolled in schools, which exceeded our status which was 29,809.

For Aboriginal children enrolments in primary, middle and senior schools, the budget projection for 2023–24 was 13,100 and the performance was actually 13,172 which was an increase of 72. Again, it exceeded the status.

There is a lot of work going on in enrolling our young people in our schools.

Mrs HERSEY: I see there is a slight increase in those total primary, middle and senior student enrolments. However, the projected will go down. Can you explain that?

Ms BOWDEN: As I said earlier, there is a range of different reasons that the numbers go up and down. We try to be as accurate as we can in our predictions when we are doing BP3. We are realistic. We look at the

trajectory in trends of what is occurring, but we always ensure that we are putting targets in place so that we are focused on our strategic improvement of our schools, but also ensuring that we are clear in what we are going after in the agency as well.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you tell me the incidence of police being called to public and private schools?

Mr MONAGHAN: You would have had to ask the Police minister for that. We do not keep data on the incidence of calling the police.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you tell me whether that is recorded at a school level?

Mr MONAGHAN: Individually they would make the phone calls to the police, but they do not record the data. We focus on teaching and learning and the police department focuses on what it does.

Mrs HERSEY: I understand that the focus is on teaching and learning, but there has been a number of incidents happening in school settings. Do you not think it would be important to find out how many calls they have made to keep students safe in a school environment?

Mr MONAGHAN: What is important is that we focus on the safety and the wellbeing of students. We get on with that. The primary responsibility for the wellbeing and safety of students lies with the teacher. Teachers have a range of programs they put in place to ensure student wellbeing and safety. External incidents that require police to be involved is a matter for the police department to record the statistics.

Mrs HERSEY: Key performance indicators on page 209 for government schools and page 210 for non-government schools have total primary, middle and secondary student statistics. The totals are 40,503 students in 2023–24 and 40,550 students in 2024–25. It is only about a 1% increase from 2023–24 to 2024–25. In Budget Paper No 2 on page 29, it has the population increase of 0.9%, which is nearly 10 times greater. Is it credible to believe that student numbers will rise by that much lower growth rate than the Territory population?

Mr MONAGHAN: Growth rates and identifying the enrolments in schools do not necessarily correlate to population growth. A range of factors impact that. If you are asking for my opinion on that, it is probably not appropriate at an Estimates hearing that I give my opinion.

Mrs HERSEY: I am asking on the data that you have given. In Budget Paper No 2 the population increase is nearly 10 times greater than your increase of students getting into the school environment.

Mr MONAGHAN: Population data does not reflect directly student growth in numbers. It does not correlate directly.

Mrs HERSEY: If the budget is based on these student numbers we were just discussing and they show an unbelievably low growth rate, does it mean that the forward estimates are materially understated?

Mr MONAGHAN: As you provide more service and more programs to respond to some of the most disadvantaged kids in Australia in education, we continue to invest in those kids and continue to invest in our budgets for those kids more than ever. As you know, we are negotiating a national partnership agreement to reflect that, which will add about \$1.1bn over five years into the pool for revenue. You will continue to see our budgets go up over the next five years in particular to fully fund schools. We will continue to address some of the needs of the most disadvantaged kids in the country. You will also see that reflected in the on-country response in Central Australia, which is now fully funded under the \$40m extra money.

Ms WESTON: The department is funded based on enrolment but also on needs of the students. The Territory has some of the highest needs in Australia, so the way the funding works from the Commonwealth and our funding models work is related to loadings for those needs—things like disability, students who speak English as an additional language, Aboriginal students and indexes of socioeconomic disadvantage. On all those measures the NT's areas of need are the highest in the country and, indeed, some of the highest in the world.

The department and the minister are delighted to have the additional funding from the Commonwealth to offer programs in the future that will respond to need to address effective enrolment and provide enrolment-based funding and additional funding to remote schools, secondary in remote locations and all the amazing things we hope to do with the additional funding that has been provided by the NT Government and the Australian Government.

Mr MONAGHAN: We do not set our budgets on population. We set our budgets on need, as you have just heard, because population could be a fickle figure. We have seen the population in the Territory grow by 1.9% last year and 1% has been articulated for next year. That is made up mainly of migration coming into the Territory from outside Australia and those people do not always bring kids and families. You cannot set budgets based on population. You have a figure of what you expect your student enrolments to be, and you set your budgets based on the needs of those students to actually meet those needs. Another factor we all know is that some students in the NT go to boarding school, so if we did it based on population, we probably would be way off the mark.

Mrs HERSEY: I want to go back to a previous question I asked. You said that you do not collect the data; the police collect the data on the incidents in schools. I will read out to you something that happened at O'Loughlin. It says:

'I am not sure if you are aware or if this incident will even be addressed on social media for people to see. This morning a young Indigenous male, who is not a student, walked into O'Loughlin school with a bottle of alcohol. He punched four kids and was walking up to the fifth—my 12-year-old cousin—but, luckily, the teacher got in the way, and he did not get hurt.

'O'Loughlin immediately went into lockdown. As this person was leaving, he threatened that he would be back at lunchtime, only this time with a machete.

'No children should have to go through that fear. No parent should have to fear for their children while they are at school and no teacher should have to go through that kind of thing, ever.

'He left and was not found. Police came shortly after and were driving around to find him, with no luck.

'Along with O'Loughlin's lockdown, Holy Family primary school also went into lockdown and my five-year-old daughter was scared. They had to be locked in their class and needed their class teddy bears to help calm them down.

'I am writing to you because I did not know where else to reach out and I am hoping you will soon be able to do something about this. Enough is enough.'

When these incidents happen—these are not isolated incidents—surely that data would be collected in a school environment. I learned last year from questions I asked that 28 teachers were injured and police call-outs to schools were not recorded. Why do you continually not report when these incidents are happening? We know violence is happening in schools.

Madam CHAIR: The minister said that would be a question for the Police minister. He is happy to talk about Education, but that would be under the Police portfolio.

Mr MONAGHAN: No-one likes to hear of those incidents in a school or community, but isolated incidents in individual schools is not data that we keep systematically because it is a police matter. Police will keep records on it.

We are talking about behaviour with students. One of the places you learn behaviour is schools. One of the places you are taught behaviour is schools. One of the places you are taught resilience is schools. Those processes—we have some fantastic wellbeing and behaviour programs—are the job of schools. That is what we do; we grow young adults. Young people are not homogenous; they each come with particular needs, backgrounds and advantages and disadvantages. We all know that.

When you report an incident, you do not get context. When you pull out a report of an incident that should not have happened, how do you know that child does not have a significant disability?

Mrs HERSEY: I am not suggesting that they are.

Mr MONAGHAN: I have not finished my answer.

Madam CHAIR: I will come back to you, Member for Katherine.

Mr MONAGHAN: You do not know that context, but the school knows that context. When it is a criminal act, the police investigate it and do what they do because that is what they are employed to do.

Mrs HERSEY: I was not insinuating anything. I do not know what was wrong with the person who walked into O'Loughlin college. What I am saying is that children, parents and teachers deserve a safe school environment. I am not sure why that data is not reported, but we will move on.

Mr MONAGHAN: Absolutely. Schools have processes and practices for emergency incidents that are rehearsed and reflected in their normal school days, weeks and months. Schools take it very seriously to keep their kids safe. That is where their responsibility is. It is not their responsibility to keep account—because they do not know whether it is a crime. They are not legal eagles; they are teachers and principals. Their focus is growing children to be wonderful, respectful and engaged citizens.

Mrs HERSEY: Employee expenses are rising quite a lot. How much of that increase—this is on page 211—is due to increased staff numbers and how much is due to the higher cost per staff member?

Madam CHAIR: That would come under Output Group 5.0, Corporate and Shared Services. Would you prefer to go into the outputs or ask the questions randomly?

Mrs HERSEY: I have two more in this range of questions, so I will keep them here. Then we can move into the outputs.

Employee expenses are rising. How much of that increase is due to increased staff numbers and how much is due to the higher cost per staff member?

Mr MONAGHAN: Whilst that is in Output 5.0, I will indulge and pass onto the Chief Financial Officer, who will explain what those costs are attributed to.

Ms ALDENHOVEN: The increase in employee expenses is primarily due to new funding for the agency under the statement of intent from the Australian Government. Funding allocated to employees is usually for salary and wages, allowances and entitlements, but also increments and the increases under the enterprise agreements. The funding allocated is to support new workforce models that relate to meeting the needs of the students as we move towards enrolment-based funding.

Mr MONAGHAN: Remember that we are in a market sector and are competing against every other state and some of the overseas jurisdictions for our workforce, so we need to be competitive in those markets and ensure we remunerate the best teachers we have in the country, who we happen to have here. They do an amazing job and have no problem ensuring they are paid appropriately and competitively to ensure they come here and stay here.

Mrs HERSEY: The current grants have risen by nearly \$30m. Who has the money gone to, and what is the purpose and expected outcome?

Mr MONAGHAN: The total 2024–25 grants budget for the department is \$484.4m. The 2024–25 \$302.1m will be paid to the non-government school sector, of which \$254.1m will go onto the Australian Government National School Reform Agreement funding; \$1.5m will go to the national partnership transition funding for highly disadvantaged schools; and \$46.5m will go into NT Government funding. Grants paid by the department between 1 July 2023 and 31 March 2024 totalled \$368.2m, which included \$84m paid to non-government schools, \$274.8m to NGOs, \$9m paid to NT families and individuals to assist in their education requirements for students and \$0.4m to other NT Government departments. Of the \$274.8m paid to NGOs \$256.4m went to non-government schools.

Mrs HERSEY: Of those grants that went to NGOs—what is that for minister?

Mr MONAGHAN: NGOs include the non-government schools and other organisations that provided educational care and related services to children. Grants to the NGOs of \$18.5m include operational funding for things like the Charles Darwin University vocational education and training—VET—in schools program, where they provide opportunities for our students to undertake VET pathways, and also for engagement and mentoring and educational support programs.

Madam CHAIR: Does that mean Stars and Clontarf?

Mrs HERSEY: Apart from Stars and Clontarf, which are the other NGOs? And CDU?

Mr MONAGHAN: They are as follows:

- Stars Foundation Ltd got money. Stars looks out for the girls' engagement and mentoring program.
- NT Council of Government School Organisations regional governance got money.
- The Duke of Edinburgh Awards, NT division, was given grants.
- The Professional Teachers' Association was given grants for its work with educators.
- BLP Training and Services provided VET in schools.
- Ripponlea Institute provided VET in schools.
- Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation provided student wellbeing and inclusion program services.
- Alice Springs Softball Association provided student engagement programs.
- Quality Service Skills provided VET in schools.
- Centre for Appropriate Technology provided VET in schools.
- Vision Australia provided inclusive education support programs.
- Autism NT provided inclusion support programs.
- Brother to Another provided inclusive education support programs.
- Deaf Connect provided inclusive education support programs.
- Child Australia provide early childhood programs.
- Aviation Australia provided VET in schools.
- Riding for the Disabled provided ...

Mrs HERSEY: Minister, sorry, but for time can you just table that?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am still answering the question.

Mrs HERSEY: I know, but can you table it? You obviously have quite a bit there.

Madam CHAIR: It is the minister's; I am sure he will table where he can, but we will let him finish.

Mr MONAGHAN: I was under the impression the question required the list. I will go on:

- Riding for the Disabled provided inclusive education support programs.
- Down Syndrome Association NT provided inclusive education support programs.
- Alannah and Madeline Foundation provided student wellbeing and inclusion programs.
- Arnhem Land Progress Association provided VET in schools.
- Swinburne University of Technology provided VET in schools.
- Lesley Simpson provided student engagement programs.
- Hoops for Health provided student engagement programs.
- GTNT group provided VET in schools.
- Central Australia Community Toy Library provided inclusive education support programs.

- Wildfire Consultancy provided student engagement programs.
- Real Estate Institute of the Northern Territory provided VET in schools.
- Royal Life Saving Society of Australia provide community-based special education programs.
- Australian Children's Television Foundation provided community-based special education programs.
- Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation provided student engagement programs.
- St John Ambulance provided VET in schools.
- Housing Industry Association provided VET in schools.
- Work Skills provided VET in schools.
- Outback Stores provided VET in schools.
- Preschool Association of the Northern Territory provided early childhood programs.
- Early Childhood Educators' Association provided early childhood education and care programs.
- Academy of Interactive Entertainment provided VET in schools.
- Australian Institute of Education and Training provided VET in schools.
- Early Childhood Australia provided early childhood programs.
- AFL NT provided student engagement programs.
- YMCA of the Northern Territory provided early childhood programs.
- Tennis Alice Springs provided student engagement programs.
- The Young Men's Christian Association of the NT provided student engagement programs.
- Good Start Early Learning provided early childhood services subsidy.
- Affinity Education Group provided early childhood services subsidy.
- YMCA of the Northern Territory provided early childhood services subsidy, as did Children's Integrated Management Services; Territory Childcare Group; Kentish Lifelong Learning and Care; Little Flyers Darwin; Journey Early Learning Centre; Journey Services Group; Arnhem Early Learning Centre; Happy Trails Early Learning Centre; Humpty Doo Community & Childcare Centre; Territory Kids Early Learning Centre; One Tree Community Services; Lil' Antz Pty Ltd; Family First Early Learning; Zuccoli Early Education Centre; Tiny Town Early Learning Centre; Nightcliff Family Centre; Top End Early Learning Centre; Malak Family Centre; Driestone Children's Centre; Gap Community Childcare Centre; Goodstart Early Learning; Mother Theresa Catholic Primary Centre; Mitchell Street Childcare Centre; Stuart Park Childcare Centre; Woodroffe Childcare Centre; Scallywags Childcare Centre; Six Little Ducks Childcare Centre, Casuarina Childcare Centre; Nhulunbuy Childcare Centre Services; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress; Gray Child Care Centre; Foundations for the Life of Early Learning—you asked the question—Braitling Neighbourhood Centre; Alice Springs Childcare Centre; Zuccoli Village Early Learners; Preeti Kunju Child Care Centre; Alyangula Day Care; St Mary's Catholic Primary School; Parap Family Centre; West Arnhem Regional Council; Dragonfly Play and Learn; Yulara Child Care Centre; Alice Springs Family Day Care Centre; and Central Australia Community Toy Library.

They were all provided early childhood services subsidies.

Madam CHAIR: They were not in alphabetical order, so I could guess how long we had to go. Member for Katherine, be brave with your next question.

Mrs HERSEY: I did not realise there were so many. If I ask a question and there are so many, perhaps, minister, you could ask, 'Shall I table it?' That would be kind of you.

Madam CHAIR: Do we have more in this, or do we go to the outputs?

Mrs HERSEY: No, I will go into the outputs now.

Madam CHAIR: That is my job; I have a script to follow.

Mrs HERSEY: We are both bossy.

Madam CHAIR: We are both bossy—leadership.

That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – GOVERNMENT EDUCATION Output 3.1 – Early Years

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, Government Education, Output 3.1, Early Years.

Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: What is the total ...

Mr MONAGHAN: I welcome Ms Kerry Hudson, Executive Director Teaching and Learning Services.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the total allocation of the Back to School payment scheme?

Mr MONAGHAN: That is not in this output?

Madam CHAIR: That would maybe be under Output 3.3, Primary School.

Mr MONAGHAN: No, it is whole-of-agency.

Mrs MANISON: How much do we spend on families to help with the cost of living?

Mrs HERSEY: I have it at my early years output because it is at the start of school. Will you indulge me?

Madam CHAIR: No, early years are primary school.

Mrs HERSEY: It is primary school, not in preschool?

Madam CHAIR: No.

Mrs HERSEY: It is Output 3.3. Will he answer now?

Madam CHAIR: No, he will get you to ask it in Output 3.3. Do you have any more questions for the early years?

Mrs HERSEY: Residents in Tennant Creek are concerned that Education scrapped the early childhood quality adviser position last year. Is this true? If so, why?

Mr MONAGHAN: Saeed Amin, Deputy Chief Executive Regional Services, will be able to outline the response.

Mr AMIN: The early years position in Tennant Creek has not been scrapped. We are hoping to staff it as soon as we can.

Mrs HERSEY: Are you recruiting? Is that what you mean?

Mr MONAGHAN: If the position has not been scrapped they will be actively recruiting for it.

Mr EDGINGTON: If it has not been scrapped, how long has it been vacant?

Mr MONAGHAN: We will take that on notice. We do not have information here on each individual position across the 3,500 teachers in schools.

Question on Notice No 8.15

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you please advise how long the early childhood quality adviser position in Tennant Creek has been vacant?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: I accept the question.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.15.

Mrs HERSEY: We were advised that early childhood learning centres are needed in Ti Tree, Borroloola and Arlparra. Does the Labor government have any plans in place for these facilities?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, I know we provide a grant for the subsidy of childcare, but I would have thought that the provision of childcare was a federal government responsibility. You can choose whether you will provide a response.

Mr MONAGHAN: That is my inclination as well. Mostly the childcare centres are funded federally. That is probably a question you could ask Jason Clare, the federal minister.

Mrs HERSEY: No-one wants to elaborate on that?

Madam CHAIR: Childcare is federal government funded.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is early childhood learning, not a childcare centre. It has been spoken about a number of times over the last couple years. I think the previous Education minister said in parliament that discussion is ongoing regarding establishing an early childhood learning centre in Arlparra, Ti Tree and Borroloola.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am gauging your question. I will pass to the Chief Executive Karen Weston, because I understand that it is not in our budget for this year.

Ms WESTON: There have been ongoing conversations about childcare in Ti Tree that I am aware of. Generally across the whole of the Territory there are conversations about provision of childcare.

The Territory is a place where market-based programs do not work. We have been talking with the Commonwealth Government about other ways in which we can fund early childhood programs and childcare programs in the Territory. We have a number of services that are funded directly by the Commonwealth. They are called Community Child Care Fund restricted expansion programs—CCCFR programs. The Commonwealth makes those grants directly to those providers.

One of the other challenges, of course, is infrastructure. If you are going to provide a childcare service you need to make an application to our regulatory area for approval. You need an approved provider, a service approval and a service that complies with the education and care national law.

I can only share with you that there are no applications for those sites. I know there are conversations ongoing, and we are supporting anyone who is trying to stand up some of those facilities, but at this point in time there are no requests for new services to be regulated.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is probably worth noting that we have a FaFT service in each of those locations, so it is not as though we do not have a service for early years and early childhood and care. It is just the type of service delineated, but currently there are FaFT—Families as First Teachers—programs, which are highly successful across the Territory. They are jointly funded between us and the federal government.

Madam CHAIR: What is the value that the Northern Territory Government gives in terms of the grants to subsidise the cost of childcare in the Northern Territory to support families with accessing a lower cost of childcare? I think we are the only jurisdiction in Australia that provides ...

Mr MONAGHAN: We are. It is a huge cost-of-living initiative for families to ensure they can access childcare. The subsidy we provide at the moment is \$4,496,245. You heard some of those schools previously, so I do not need to reread them.

Madam CHAIR: You do not need to read them out. I am not doing an Adam Giles wasting time; I genuinely want to know about the program.

Mr MONAGHAN: Again, we realise the value of every dollar spent in that. The multiplier is five or six—the evidence is showing currently. It is a very good way to get good value, bang for your buck.

Madam CHAIR: Is there a breakdown per child or per centre?

Mr MONAGHAN: We need to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.16

Madam CHAIR: I have to ask myself to restate the question. Can you provide the breakdown of the childcare subsidy provided by the Northern Territory Government to childcare centres?

Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.16.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1, Early Years.

Output 3.2 – Preschool Education

No questions.

Output 3.3 – Primary Years Education

Madam CHAIR: We will proceed to Output 3.3, Primary Years Education. Member for Katherine, this is where I suggest you ask about the Back to School vouchers.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the total allocation for the Back to school payment scheme?

Mr MONAGHAN: The total allocation is \$8,524,385. That includes an increase this year that every parent loved. I know the joy of one parent who found out when we announced this at a media event at Bakewell Primary School. That parent had four children and did not realise they got it individually; it made their morning.

We know the cost of living for parents is terribly difficult. The most expensive time of year for schooling is when kids are going back to school ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, your microphone is not on.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will start again. It has to get on *Hansard*, unfortunately. The total Back to School number is \$8,524,385. It is an important cost-of-living value to parents. We announced this at the start of this year ...

Mrs HERSEY: Minister, excuse me. I was literally just after the figure.

Mr EDGINGTON: He has already answered.

Madam CHAIR: The minister can conclude without being interrupted, then I will hand back to you.

Mr MONAGHAN: The Back to School voucher was well received because parents understood the impact it had. We announced it at Bakewell at the start of the year. It was interesting to see the joy on the faces of parents there when they realised that they would get \$200 per child.

It is not the only support they get for going to school. There is also a sport voucher of \$100 ...

Mrs HERSEY: I am just after the Back to School voucher, minister.

Madam CHAIR: There are a few more questions on this voucher. Maybe if we listen to the Member for Katherine, then you can add to that.

Mrs HERSEY: How much is remaining in the 2024 allocation for the vouchers?

Mr MONAGHAN: It is my understanding that this money goes directly to schools. One of the great things I heard at the school council last week is that their revenue has increased because parents inject that money back into the school to buy uniforms and books. The school council was surprised that their revenue had increased. They could not work out why.

Madam CHAIR: If I do not use my full voucher—how much do you get per child?

Mr MONAGHAN: You get \$200 per child.

Madam CHAIR: If I do not use my full \$200 buying uniforms and packs does it stay at the school?

Mr MONAGHAN: It could go to sporting excursions at the school.

Madam CHAIR: Does it stay at the school or come back?

Mr MONAGHAN: Acquittal is under way for it, which ends in Term 1. At times some parents may not use it, but the vast majority—it was about 90% in one of the schools I was talking to. It is such a welcome addition to easing the burden of parents sending their kids to school.

Mrs HERSEY: Could you tell me how many eligible students there are for the vouchers?

Mr MONAGHAN: Every kid who goes to every school in the Territory is eligible for a voucher.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the number?

Madam CHAIR: We had 32,838 before; I do not have preschool.

Mr MONAGHAN: The eligibility for the scheme is that students enrolled and attending a NT school, government or non-government, are eligible for the scheme—public, independent or Catholic. NT home-educated students are also eligible.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you also have a breakdown of the government and non-government?

Mr MONAGHAN: The total number of non-government students is 10,845 and for the government sector it is 32,652. That is a total of 43,497. There are 154 home-educated students.

Mrs HERSEY: What was the total?

Mr MONAGHAN: Non-government students is 10,845 which was broken down to the Top End, 3,644; East Arnhem, 276; Darwin, 4,208; Central, 2,458; and Big Rivers, 259.

The government sector total was 32,652 of which 9,573 is in the Top End; 2,616 in East Arnhem; 11,593 in Darwin; 4,134 in Central; 3,528 in Big Rivers; 1,208 in the Barkly. That is a total of 43,497, plus the 154 homeschooled.

Mrs HERSEY: MacFarlane Primary School has had repeated break-ins over time and resorted to having a guard and a patrol dog on duty this year to protect the school. I am wondering where that is funded from. Is it from the school budget or the department?

Mr MONAGHAN: I expect that it is an operational decision where schools are in charge of their own budgets; it is made at a school level. I am not confirming that was the case. I take it you did that. The department funds the schools and they prioritise where they spend their funding.

Mrs HERSEY: If the school has funded then it would have been a considerable amount of money because the security and patrol dog were there for quite some time. Is there any provision for that school to be reimbursed some of that money? Obviously if they are repeatedly being broken into that is not their fault. They are having a fence built at the moment. Even with that fence they are finding they still have break-ins.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am not aware of that incident. If that occurred—the school made an operational budget for the operation of their school—and there was a substantial cost which impacted the ongoing budgets, they could apply to the department for support.

I will hand over to Saeed Amin to explain that process. Again, I do not know whether that happened, but I am accepting ...

Mrs HERSEY: I put on the record, minister, that I have emailed you about this.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am accepting if it happened then this would be the process by which schools would apply for an exceptional grant, I would assume.

Mr AMIN: As the minister said that is what would happen. School budgets would be looked at first. If there were sufficient funds to cover security over a vacation, the school would make a local decision and pay for it. If there was any shortfall for that or the school was left short, they could apply to the department through the regional office or central money would then repay that money.

Mr MONAGHAN: That is not the total cost and allocation. For instance, something like building a fence would be minor new works, and there would be an allocation made ...

Mrs HERSEY: I am not talking about the fence; I am talking about the ...

Madam CHAIR: Let the minister respond, then I will come back to you. I am genuinely interested in this point.

Mr MONAGHAN: That aspect of the fence at MacFarlane Primary School was funded to the tune of \$652,000. That did not come out of the school's budget; it came out of the minor new works budget.

Mrs HERSEY: I am aware of that.

Mr MONAGHAN: As we said before, if there is an extraordinary cost on a school—that cost can sometimes happen because of major weather events causing significant destruction to school—there is a process. Saeed can clarify further.

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry, before he goes on, you are saying that you are not aware of that, minister? I have emailed you about this. If the deputy chief executive has said that schools are able to be reimbursed, has this school asked to be reimbursed for this ...

Madam CHAIR: That is a separate question. Let us hear from the official, then you can ask a follow-up question.

What the minister is trying to tell us is that the schools are given money to run the school day to day and there are things that happen that they have to pay for, but if it is something big there is a grant bucket.

Can all questions for minor repairs be under the outputs of secondary and primary, for example? Or is there a separate ...

Mr MONAGHAN: They would be under Corporate and Shared Services.

Madam CHAIR: I have some good fence questions too. Let us hear the response, then you can ask a follow-up.

Mr AMIN: In regard to money being given to the school for vandalism or break and enters et cetera, \$12,045 was attributed to MacFarlane school for vandalism and \$17,678 for break and enters. Money from the department was also provided to the school to cover any vandalism or damage.

Mrs HERSEY: I assume that the school has asked for reimbursement.

Can you tell me how many schools have been broken into in the last 12 months?

Mr MONAGHAN: To finish your previous question, the school paid initially, and they were reimbursed by the department.

Regarding school break-ins, in 2022–23 in the Central region there were 49. In the 1 July to 31 March 2024 reporting period, there were 32 in the Central region.

In East Arnhem there were 20 in the earlier reporting period; in the current reporting period there were 25.

In Barkly there were 20 in the reporting period previously, 2022–23; in this reporting period there were 18.

In Darwin in the previous reporting period, 2022–23, there were 32; in this reporting period there were 21.

In Big Rivers 2022–23 there were 51; in this reporting period there were 60.

In the Top End there were 43; in this reporting period there were 53.

The total of the previous reporting period, from 1 July 2022 to 31 March 2023, was 215; in this reporting period we have seen a reduction to 209.

Mrs HERSEY: I am in the Big Rivers region, and I am talking about MacFarlane Primary School. There was an increase. Overall, there was not that much of a decrease. Can you tell me the cost of all the crime to the schools?

Mr MONAGHAN: Chair, have we moved from the previous output, which we gave some courtesy of going back to?

Madam CHAIR: We are in Output 3.3, Primary ...

Mrs HERSEY: It was just a follow-up.

Mr MONAGHAN: You are asking a question that is in Corporate and Shared Services.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Katherine, can you ask your second question in Output Group 5.0, please? I will remind you. You have stretched from Primary into Secondary into ...

Mr MONAGHAN: We have moved from the MacFarlane Primary School question.

Madam CHAIR: It is okay. This is what happens. We are on Output 3.3, Primary Years Education.

Mrs HERSEY: The Jilkminggan community, according to the My School website, cost \$2.7m a year. When the school was cut off due to flooding, what was the cost of using helicopters to transport teachers to teach the children?

Ms WESTON: I would not have the detail of the cost of the helicopters for Jilkminggan. The key thing there is that we want continuity of education for students. As you would know with the weather events in that area that happen in that area quite regularly; it is very hard for staff to get to school across flooded waterways. From time to time we use a helicopter to get them to school so that students can attend. Was this transport paid for by the department or was any of the cost paid from the school budget.

Mrs HERSEY: Could you take that on notice?

Madam CHAIR: We might let the Chief Executive finish her comments.

Ms WESTON: I am finished.

Question on Notice No 8.17

Madam CHAIR: Member for Katherine, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs HERSEY: The Jilkminggan community, according to the My School website, cost \$2.7m a year when the school was cut off due to flooding. What was the cost of using helicopters to transport teachers to the school to teach the children? Was this transport paid for by the department? Was any of the cost paid from the school budget?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.17.

Madam CHAIR: We are in Output 3.3, Primary Years Education. Member for Katherine, some of your questions might be more appropriate under Output Group 5.0, Corporate and Shared Services—costings.

Mrs HERSEY: I will keep that in mind as I am reading through them. I have a question about Tennant Creek, but the Member for Barkly might ask that question.

Mr EDGINGTON: During my last visit to Corella Creek the school was closed. I am advised that Wogyala and Mungkarta do not have any qualified teachers. There are also five teacher vacancies at the Tennant Creek Primary School. What is the situation, why is Corella Creek closed and what is being done to get teachers to Wogyala, Mungkarta and Tennant Creek Primary Schools?

Mr MONAGHAN: Madam Chair, can I double check we are now on the Output 3.4, regional updates? We are all over the place.

Madam CHAIR: On my outputs I have early years—childcare—preschool education—there were no questions—and we are now in Primary Years Education. I would take that as primary schools and the advice I have from the members of the committee is that this is a primary school.

Mr MONAGHAN: To be clear to the committee, Corella Creek is an Aboriginal community located in the northern Barkly Region, approximately 385 kilometres north-east from Tennant Creek.

Corella Creek School was closed in 2005 due to infrequent students in the community and water and power issues. It reopened in 2008 as an annexe of the Alice Springs School of the Air, aligned to the Central Australia Region. On 29 August 2023 then Senior Director of Education Barkly met with the traditional owner at Corella Creek and the Principal of Corella Creek School. At that meeting the traditional owner and the principal confirmed the request to return the school back to the Barkly Region. On 9 October 2023 the chief executive approved that request.

In Term 4, 2023 the then Senior Director of Education Barkly met again with the traditional owner and principal to discuss the future direction of the school with the outcome of transitioning to a homeland learning centre. The proposed model in 2024 was that CCS was to align with the Tennant Creek Primary School with a staffing structure similar to Mungkarta homeland school, 85 kilometres south of Tennant Creek, with one classroom teacher and an assistant teacher.

The principal and his wife, a teacher, retired at the end of 2023. There have been no students in the school since Term 4 2023. All members of the community left at the end of 2023 due to rain events that impacted access. No-one has returned as of 18 June 2024. The Senior Director of Education Barkly continues to liaise with the community members and has visited the community and school twice in Term 2 2024 to confirm in person if anyone has returned.

Mr EDGINGTON: He only answered the Corella Creek School. I also asked about Wogyala and Mungkarta and the five teacher vacancies at Tennant Creek.

Madam CHAIR: Can we confirm that these are government primary, because homelands schools might be under a different output.

Mr MONAGHAN: I need clarification. Are you talking about Tennant Creek Primary School or Tennant Creek secondary school?

Mr EDGINGTON: Tennant Creek Primary School, I have been advised, has five teacher vacancies. What is being done to increase the number of teachers at the school?

Mr MONAGHAN: Before I embark on the answer to that, I will give an update of the previous question that was put on notice about the cost of the helicopter to Jilkminggan.

Madam CHAIR: This is 8.17.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.17

Mr MONAGHAN: There was no cost.

Mr AMIN: We currently have one vacancy at Tennant Creek Primary School, as of week nine reported vacancies. The other vacancies have been filled for the time being.

Madam CHAIR: Before I go to more questions, we will take a break in five minutes for a few minutes. Are there any more questions from committee members about Output 3.3, Primary Years Education?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will get to my original question, which still has not been answered about Wongyala and Mungkarta. I have been advised that there are no qualified teachers at those schools.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will hand over to Saeed Amin to answer that question.

Mr AMIN: Mungkarta has an assistant teacher. There is no teacher for Mungkarta Homelands Learning Centre at the moment, but we are actively recruiting for that position.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is that the one vacancy now that it is serviced from Tennant Creek?

Mr AMIN: Tennant Creek Primary School services Mungkarta. How Tennant Creek Primary School allocates the staff will be up to Tennant Creek Primary School. I can confirm that Tennant Creek Primary School has one vacancy.

Mr EDGINGTON: What about Wogyala?

Mr MONAGHAN: I will pass to Saeed Amin to talk about that.

Mr EDGINGTON: It might be under Rockhampton Downs.

Madam CHAIR: You are always welcome to take it on notice, if you like.

Mr AMIN: There are two vacancies in the Barkly region, one at Canteen Creek School and one at Tennant Creek Primary School. They are the only two reported vacancies in the Barkly region at the moment.

Mr EDGINGTON: You have already clarified that there is no qualified teacher at Mungkarta, so that is not classified as a vacancy, and there is no qualified teacher, as I am aware, at Wogyala, and there is no vacancy there. I am not sure what the situation is.

Madam CHAIR: This was the point I asked before if they were primary schools under the outputs for homeland schools.

Mr MONAGHAN: They were said to be primary schools because we are still under output 3.3. I will pass back to Karen Weston, Chief Executive.

Mr EDGINGTON: If they are not, please correct me.

Madam CHAIR: I do not think the department is trying to mislead. We are due for a break, why do we not just take a few minutes break.

Mrs HERSEY: Are they not primary schools?

Madam CHAIR: It is, where do they sit in the outputs? As you can see there is a lot of information. Let us take a break ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Can I quickly clarify...

Madam CHAIR: Can I finish speaking? You quickly clarify, but if I am not happy with the clarification I am sticking to the plan I was on.

Mr EDGINGTON: The one vacancy at Tennant Creek—we will put the other schools aside at the moment—is that for a teacher or is it the assistant principal position?

Madam CHAIR: That is a different question. Let us take a break. The department heard you—no, you just asked about whether they were teachers or principal positions ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Let us take a break.

Madam CHAIR: ... then you can come back, if you wish, and ask the questions. No-one is trying to deliberately mislead.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: We are on Output 3.3, and we were having a conversation on the categorisation of schools, to put it generically. The department was going to provide more information. Then I will go back to the Member for Barkly if he wishes to respond.

Mr AMIN: We can clarify vacancies at Tennant Creek Primary School first of all, then I can talk a little more about Mungkartia Homelands Learning Centre.

As of 11 June we have one vacancy at Tennant Creek Primary School, but we are aware that they have advertised for three vacancies from the start of Term 3. That is a total of four vacancies they are advertising. Of course, that could change over the next week, two weeks or three weeks as people come and go.

If I misheard your question, I apologise. I thought it was current vacancies, and the current vacancy at Tennant Creek Primary School is one, but they are advertising three more for Term 2. That is our current knowledge about Tennant Creek Primary School.

Madam CHAIR: You were to provide an update on the homeland school. Do you want to jump in?

Mr AMIN: The homeland learning centre at Mungkartia is a bespoke model, so it is managed out of Tennant Creek Primary School. Bespoke homeland learning centres do not always have teachers but they always have an assistant teacher. That is up to the hub school to manage. Tennant Creek Primary School has one current vacancy, so it will be managing Mungkartia Homelands Learning Centre as appropriate.

Mr EDGINGTON: What about Wogyala?

Mr AMIN: We do not have any vacancies listed for Rockhampton Downs, but if there is a vacancy that you are aware of we can take that on board and look at it.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am advised that there are no qualified teachers there at the moment.

As a follow-on, do you have an overall list of vacancies for the Barkly?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, a follow-up question has been asked about vacancies in the Barkly region. I am not sure if that is something you have to respond to.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will hand to Saeed Amin to outline the Barkly vacancies overall.

Mr AMIN: I would like to pass on to Hayley Green.

Mr MONAGHAN: Absolutely.

Madam CHAIR: They have stayed up this late; everyone may as well have a turn.

Ms GREEN: As Saeed pointed out, we have a couple of vacancies in the Barkly region as of now. In addition we have nine being advertised in the Barkly region. I will take the opportunity to make comment about the broader vacancies because I am sure you are interested in that.

We are sitting at 59 recorded classroom teacher vacancies as of last week. That is down from 120 at the start of this year. Schools are being able to occupy those vacancies.

Mrs HERSEY: Is that number across the Territory or are you just talking about all vacancies?

Mr MONAGHAN: That is for all vacancies across the Northern Territory government schools.

Mr EDGINGTON: What was the number for the Barkly again?

Mr MONAGHAN: I think it was two.

Mrs HERSEY: Eleven.

Ms GREEN: It is eleven in total in the Barkly.

Madam CHAIR: Eleven vacancies.

Ms GREEN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: That is the nine and two figure added together? It is not two vacancies and nine being advertised for next term; it is 11 vacancies now.

Ms GREEN: Yes, it is. There are two vacancies in schools as of today, then there are a further nine—11 in total—that have been advertised. They may be starting from Term 3 onwards. As Mr Amin quoted, they can ebb and flow day-to-day as the schools continue to recruit.

Mr MONAGHAN: We are coming towards the end of term this week, and a number of teachers—obviously those nine are moving on that will create vacancies. That is why they will be advertised over the break.

Mrs HERSEY: Last year Katherine South Primary School recruited a principal to the position. I think he was there two terms—I have asked you about this in parliament. At the end of last year nine teachers left that school, but they stayed in the Katherine community. I am wondering what the recruitment process is when you recruit principals to places such as Katherine South. It used to be a school of choice, but now over 60 students have left plus nine teachers. They are struggling. I think it is in the process of getting another principal. There is a number of disgruntled parents, and teachers need to be better supported. What is the recruitment process for principals? What goes around making sure they are the right fit, if that is even a thing?

Mr MONAGHAN: There is a vigorous process for every recruitment, whether it is a teacher, admin person, principal or assistant principal, to ensure they will be the best individual for that school and school community. That recruitment process involves the school community. It generally involves the Chair of the council and someone 'at level' across the department to ensure they understand the skillset required. The school council generally provides the local flavour as to what is needed for their local school, as they are a parent in the school. A number of others are on the panel, depending on how the panel is set up. Sometimes we recruit for two principals at the same level for two different positions, so the makeup may look slightly different. It always involves identifying the best person for the job for that school, with input from the school council nominee.

You mentioned Katherine South Primary School. I will give you some background information and data which is appropriate to that recruitment process. From January 2021 to June 2024 there have been seven principal appointments at Katherine South Primary School. Recruitment has been finalised for the Katherine South Primary School principal position, with the new principal commencing at the start of Term 3, 2024.

As at 24 May 2024 there were two outgoing permanent classroom teacher vacancies at Katherine South Primary School. Both vacancies have recently been advertised through various modes. We use the modern Facebook nowadays because it seems to be the way the young teachers communicate with everything. It was not in my day, but that is the way it is now. We also use SEEK and the Teach in the Territory website.

On 14 June the acting principal advised the department that Katherine South Primary School is expecting to have up to four classroom teacher vacancies and two senior teacher vacancies for commencement of Term 3. The department is continuing to support the school to fill those vacancies for Term 3, including redeployment support.

In Term 1 2024 the school was supported by 14 full-time equivalent corporate staff who were redeployed when we had the shortage—remember, we are in a national game when it comes to attracting and retaining teachers. Every state and territory is struggling. The last I heard New South Wales was approximately 2,000 teachers short, and Victoria was approximately 2,000 short.

There is a rigorous process to ensure that we get the best fit. I will pass to Saeed Amin to talk about what that regional recruitment process looks like in a place like Katherine.

Mrs HERSEY: Did you say there are 14 vacancies for next term?

Mr MONAGHAN: I said that in Term 1 the school was supported by 14 full-time equivalent corporate-based employees.

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry, yes; 14 corporate people went to Katherine South.

Mr MONAGHAN: At the start of the year. They are teachers, but they are no longer there. That is no change.

I will pass to Saeed to talk about the regional recruitment processes that occur for the Katherine region—the one you nominated.

Mr AMIN: To go back to the 14 corporate-based redeployee teachers, that was during the course of the term. There was one redeployee teacher for six weeks in weeks one to six; two redeployee teachers for four weeks in weeks six, seven and nine; and additional teachers would come and go from Katherine South Primary School to fill that.

We have finalised the Katherine South Primary School principal position for the new principal commencing from the start of Term 3. We are looking forward to the principal starting there, and we expect it will bring some strong consistency to the school.

As the minister outlined, principal recruitments are very thorough, and we work particularly hard at trying to make sure the fit is appropriate. In rare cases that fit is not appropriate and we take on board feedback. In this case we took on board the feedback and made sure that the Katherine South Primary School new principal process was conducted, and we are pleased to say that has now concluded. The new principal starts on 15 July 2024.

Mrs HERSEY: Is that definitely happening—a new principal will be starting?

Mr MONAGHAN: As the deputy chief executive articulated, the process for the recruitment of that position has concluded and there has been an individual appointed.

Mrs HERSEY: Has the school community been notified of that?

Ms GREEN: The process for the recruitment to the position of principal at Katherine South Primary School is just in the final stages. With all the merit-based selection processes there is an appeal period. That is due to finish on Friday this week. We have been in discussions with the school community and the school council Chair about making sure that announcement is made to the community as soon as possible.

Mrs HERSEY: Have there been any appeals? Are you confident that will happen?

Mr MONAGHAN: Part of the process is there is a standard appeal period. As the ELCC senior director outlined, that is due to end on Friday.

Mrs HERSEY: Leading on from that, if there is an appeal what is the process then?

Madam CHAIR: That is a question for the minister for OCPE.

Mrs HERSEY: I am asking this minister. If there is an appeal what happens in that process?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am happy to indulge that because we are all au fait with what the process is for appealing appointments within the public service in the Northern Territory. I will pass to the senior director of ELCC to outline the process if there is appeal. There is a certain criterion under which you can appeal.

Ms GREEN: The appeal process would be managed by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, and they would look into it. If there was that process there would be a principal in situ; there would not be a situation where the school would not have a principal or leader in Term 3.

Mrs HERSEY: Were there any critical incidents or assaults on teachers in government primary schools during the last year?

Mr MONAGHAN: I will pass to Chief Executive Officer Karen Weston to outline the nature of staff injuries. I am unsure she will be able to delineate whether they were due to assaults, as not all injuries are.

Mrs HERSEY: Maybe if they were just injured?

Mr MONAGHAN: They are recorded as staff injuries. In my time I slipped in the kitchen and did my back in, and that was recorded as a staff injury.

Mrs HERSEY: I will stick to the first one: critical incidents or assaults please.

Ms WESTON: From 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024 there were 15 staff injuries reported. Seven of the injuries were caused by students or when intervening in physical student altercations. The department provides support to staff in terms of their wellbeing post any of these sorts of incidents through the Employee Assistance Program. If we define it as a critical incident, we wrap a whole team around the school to support the school and the students. I can give you a breakdown by region?

Mrs HERSEY: Just an overall total is fine—fifteen staff and how many students?

Ms WESTON: Fifteen staff injuries, but I have not given you student injuries. I said that seven of those injuries were caused by students or when intervening in physical student altercations.

Mrs HERSEY: Seven of the 15, or in addition?

Ms WESTON: The total of seven of the 15 staff injuries across the whole of the Territory for the period 1 July 2022 to 31 March 2023 was 28, and for this year 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2024 there were 15. That is a reduction overall.

Mr MONAGHAN: Just articulating for clarity, seven of those injuries—to your first question—were caused by involvement in student injury, but the final figure is for staff injuries across the board that were reported could be for other incidents like slipping on the tiles.

It is of vital importance that the department, principals, schools, policies and practices are focused on ensuring that staff safety is the number one priority. That is borne right down by the culture of the school; that is where it comes out of first and foremost. The evidence is clear that where there is a positive and happy culture within the school, there are engaged kids. That is what we are all about: teaching and learning.

Mrs HERSEY: It would be great if every school was like that, and I 100% agree with you, but that is not always the case.

What measures are you taking to ensure the work, health and safety of teachers?

Mr MONAGHAN: This probably follows on from your safety question. I am happy to say that after a critical incident occurs in a school, a critical incident response team is stood up to ensure that staff and others are supported.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 – Secondary Years Education

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.4, Secondary Years Education. Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: How many school counsellors are employed in education and, if possible, can you give a breakdown for 2022–23, 2023–24 and 2024–25?

Mr MONAGHAN: The department has 30 dedicated school counsellor positions servicing across the schools. Predominantly they are based in secondary schools or based in teams within the department. School counsellors hold a variety of skill sets, whether it is social work or psychology qualifications. The school counsellors can link and connect schools, families and students to the services when they are needed. There are no mental health clinicians within that school counsellor cohort because we are unable to provide comprehensible mental health assessments.

Schools also have access to a duty worker, particularly for schools that do not have a school counsellor onsite where a student needs support. There is always someone they can contact to respond to any issue. The duty worker also supports the schools in critical incidents that may occur from time to time, but they provide them with access to urgent consultations, principals and support agencies, a child abuse task force or any of those sorts of areas ...

Mrs HERSEY: Minister, before you go on, do you have a breakdown? The question was: how many school counsellors are employed in Education in 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25. You said that you have 30, so I assume that is for 2024–25.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will give you a breakdown of the 2023–24 reporting time frame. In Darwin there are nine; in the Top End there are seven; in East Arnhem there are three; in Big Rivers there are four; in Barkly there are two; and in Central there are five. That is a total of 30.

Mrs HERSEY: What year was that?

Mr MONAGHAN: That was 2023–24 to March 2024.

Mrs HERSEY: That was 2023–24, and it is 30 altogether. Do you have the breakdown for 2022–23?

Mr MONAGHAN: We do not have that data for the previous year. I will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.18

Madam CHAIR: Member for Katherine, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs HERSEY: How many school counsellors were employed in Education in 2022–23?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.18.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you have a number for the 2024–25 period?

Madam CHAIR: You budgeted for the same amount.

Mr MONAGHAN: It will be 30 because the budget allocation is the same.

Mrs HERSEY: How many counsellors left in that same period that I asked about? We have 30.

Mr MONAGHAN: That is an operational question we would have to take on notice. We do not have the data on people leaving in that period.

Question on Notice No 8.19

Madam CHAIR: Member for Katherine, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs HERSEY: How many school counsellors left in 2022–23 and 2023–24?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.19.

Madam CHAIR: Would you not be better off wondering if there are unfilled FTE positions?

Mrs HERSEY: I am getting there.

Mr MONAGHAN: Is that a question for the Chair?

Madam CHAIR: People can come and go, but you still have the support. I am trying to help.

Mrs HERSEY: No, you are not.

Are there any vacancies in those school counsellor positions at the moment and, if there are vacancies, could you state the region?

Mr MONAGHAN: There are vacancies in the school counsellor area because it is a particularly difficult area to recruit across Australia. We have spoken about the total number of school counsellors we have. The vacancies are: the Darwin region, four; the Top End, four; East Arnhem, two; Big Rivers, two; Barkly has no vacancies; and there are two in Central Australia.

Mrs HERSEY: You gave the number of 30 school counsellors—the total number. How many school counsellors should there be across the Territory, given that we have 14 vacancies and we have 30 already?

Mr MONAGHAN: You just answered your question, 30 positions have been allocated. I will pass to the Chief Executive Karen Weston to explain the model and how it works and looks operationally.

Mrs HERSEY: Before the chief executive answers, I want to get this straight. There are 30 positions, but in actual fact 14 of them are vacant; is that what you are saying?

Mr MONAGHAN: That is correct. There are 30 positions ...

Mrs HERSEY: Half of those positions are vacant at the moment, basically.

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes, nearly half.

Ms WESTON: It would be appropriate to explain some changes that are going on with our whole allied health workforce team. A team of about 82 front-facing staff are located in regions and in our Darwin office. We are changing the model so that all the allied health staff service all schools in the Territory. There has been a strong tradition of school counsellors only supporting secondary schools, and we know that our younger children in primary schools need the support of school counsellors as well.

We are in a time of staff shortages. We are managing that by having a central hub which virtually triages things. For example, if a primary school or a school which does not have a school counsellor needs counsellor support, we move staff around a little more than we might have done previously, with the models.

We are also building a team of other allied health professionals. We have specialist teachers, psychologists, positive behaviour implementation coaches, occupational therapists, speech therapists and the little team centrally located that does the supervision and handles the triage of the staff. We are in transition to building that into a bigger cohort of allied health staff that we hope, with the additional funding for next year, we will be able to grow.

The challenge will always be recruitment, particularly of school counsellors. They can be social workers or have a psychiatrist background.

The other areas we are thinking about are expanding our pilots and ideas about how to bring on board wellbeing coaches. The evidence says that we need to move to whole-school approaches to behaviour and wellbeing. Instead of moving to a model where you might have had one-on-one work with students—that is

something that sits in the mental health space—we are trying to build a stronger capability in all our schools to manage behaviour and student wellbeing by using the allied health staff to do whole-school approaches.

There is a significant range of other activities we are doing to address that. I am happy if the minister would like for me to hand to Kelly, the acting ED on Inclusion and Engagement, to list a whole range of strategies that we are putting in place. We will not necessarily be able to recruit school counsellors, so we are looking at all the other things that we might be able to do to support student wellbeing. There are a lot of initiatives that we are working through there.

Mrs HERSEY: You mentioned there are 82 allied health supporting all schools, what are the qualifications of those allied health people?

Ms WESTON: There are 22 specialist teacher positions, 10 psychologist positions, 30 school counsellors, eight positive behaviour implementation coaches, two occupational therapists, two speech pathologists and eight assistant directors who lead the work; in total there are 82 staff. There is a central dedicated team, which Kelly can provide details on.

Mrs HERSEY: Are some of the positions centrally located in Darwin in the Mitchell Centre?

Ms WESTON: What we are trying to do is have regionally based teams. Those 82 will be located regionally, with some, of course, for the Darwin office. I have the numbers by region: 21 are located in Darwin; 22 in the Top End; nine in East Arnhem; 10 in Big Rivers; 10 in the Barkly; and 10 in Central. They are regionally located and then there is a support team in the middle that handles the triage and covers the clinical supervision and the other things we need to do to support quality practice for these disciplines.

Mrs HERSEY: The numbers of positions you said then, are they all filled or are there any vacancies?

Ms WESTON: There are vacancies in those positions.

Mrs HERSEY: Are they different from the vacancies we have spoken about before? How many vacancies are there in the 82?

Ms WESTON: In all there are 34 vacancies, but I can give them to you by region or by discipline. You heard about the 30 and 14 for school counsellors.

Mrs HERSEY: By region, thank you.

Ms WESTON: In Darwin there are eight vacancies out of the 21 positions; in the Top End, eight out of the 22 positions; East Arnhem, five out of nine; Big Rivers, five out of 10; Barkly, four out of 10; and in Central, four out of 10. There are a total of 34 vacancies out of the 82.

Madam CHAIR: Do those figures include the school nurses?

Ms WESTON: Those figures do not include the school nurses.

Madam CHAIR: Are they employed by the Department of Health?

Ms WESTON: Yes.

Mr MONAGHAN: The other thing they do not include is that every school and every school council controls their own budget, and they have the ability to prioritise funding. Whether it is a wellbeing officer, a professional they want to attract and run in the school or a nurse, some do whatever they can add to that over and above the allocation that each school gets, but that would come out of their own school council budgeted funds.

Madam CHAIR: If the school was engaging headspace or some of the NGO organisations, is that done through this body of work, or could it be a combination that the school council has made a decision?

Mr MONAGHAN: I understand it could be a combination of both. The school prioritises its needs.

Ms COOPER: While we know there is a national allied health shortage, we are going through multiple different ways to improve our allied health services. We have recruitment campaigns; we have established a partnership with Miwatj in East Arnhem region, which is looking at different ways of looking at mental health and wellbeing for young people in schools; and we have graduate entry and career progression pathways on

foot—a partnership with CDU—regarding allied health and social worker positions being able to be brought to the agency. We are also working on a scholarship proposal for inclusive education scholarships, and we have on-country learning.

As part of the on-country learning in Central Australia we went out two-pronged with a panel contract for service delivery, and for service delivery in our own teams, knowing that we needed to approach it from every way to have the best chance of getting positions filled. We were not successful with going out and getting new allied health positions for ourselves within our regional team. We were able to establish a panel contract for speech, OT and psychology services. We have two providers for each of those services through the on-country learning. That can be accessed by the Northern Territory Government and government schools.

We are about to pilot student wellbeing officers in 14 schools. Not all officers need to be a counsellor or psychology-qualified to be able to take care of wellbeing; it is a whole-school approach. We are looking at 14 schools being rolled out in the next semester—talking in school terms—where the student wellbeing officers will be employed and line managed by the schools. They will be funded, trained and professionally supervised by our professional practice and intake team. There is a team of 104 staff, 83 of which are professional staff. That is what Karen was referring to earlier. The other 22 staff work in professional practice and intake to ensure that quality governance training and expertise is there in consistency in practice. The schools we are working with to implement that pilot are very excited about the initiative because it is so hard to fill some of our allied health and school counselling positions.

Madam CHAIR: Are those schools publicly named yet?

Ms COOPER: Not yet.

Madam CHAIR: We will wait for your announcement, then.

Mrs HERSEY: When will that be?

Mr MONAGHAN: The announcement will be made in the next couple of months.

Mrs HERSEY: Kelly, as Acting Executive Director, mentioned wellbeing officers. She must have been reading my notes, as I was going to ask that question. There are 14 wellbeing officers, is that correct?

Mr MONAGHAN: That is correct.

Mrs HERSEY: What level are those officers at?

Mr MONAGHAN: There is one Assistant Director of Professional Practice at SP1 level, and there is one Senior Project Consultant at the AO7 level. The officers are all at AO5 level for 96% FTE over 18 months.

Mrs HERSEY: Those 14 are all AO5?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: What qualifications do those wellbeing officers have?

Ms WESTON: It is an entirely new concept. We will look to work out what the training will be, but they are in the administrative stream. It will not be compulsory that they have school counselling qualifications—they are called wellbeing officers. The idea is to take away some of the basic supports provided by the school counsellors and allow them to do the professional level of work they need to do in the schools.

We hear sometimes that students have something which upsets them, but it may not be at the level that you need a school counsellor. We are trying to make tiers of structures to make sure there is planning and thinking about wellbeing at the school, that they can help implement the whole-school positive behaviour approach, and that they can handle some low-level wellbeing issues. Then the allied health staff with qualifications can handle the things they are qualified to do.

Mr MONAGHAN: There are a lot of other initiative programs which go into this whole wellbeing space. A lot of schools, such as Ludmilla Primary School, are doing pilots or are engaged in programs. The department has signed an agreement with Beyond Blue to deliver the Be You initiative, which is focused on the mental health and wellbeing students. There are a number of resources and engagement with tools and professional learning.

There are other Be You schools spread across the Territory:

- Greater Darwin area—Darwin Middle; Nightcliff Middle; Sanderson Middle; Nightcliff Primary; Malak Primary; Top End School of Flexible Learning; and NT School of Distance Education
- Big Rivers area—Kalkaringi and Ngukurr
- Barkly area—Tennant Creek High School; Ampilatwatja; Ali Curung; and Canteen Creek
- Top End—Taminmin College; Gunbalanya School—one of my favourite schools. I should not have a preference, but I do ...

Madam CHAIR: Minister, it is like children, you are not meant to have favourites.

Mr MONAGHAN: I spent a lot of time working there. I continue:

- East Arnhem—Laynhapuy homelands
- Central Region—Owen Springs and Ti Tree school
- Alice Springs—Centralian Senior College and Alice Springs School of the Air.

They are all part of the Be You school partnerships. The Be You implementation includes consultants, student wellbeing and inclusion programs which are embedded in it, and services from social workers and psychologists supporting the phase rollout, of which those 20 schools are a part.

The department has also procured a partner for its positive behaviour intervention support, in Ripple. This project has a multi-tiered system of support approach which is evidenced-based—everything we do in schools has to be evidenced-based—and will support schools to implement whole-school approaches to behaviour management and access tools and resources tailored to the NT.

In Term 2 the positive behaviour and implementation coaches commenced engaging with schools who requested support to PBIS. The PBI coaches are sharing information about the program, preparing schools and assessing school readiness to implement that program.

As I reflected at the start, the priority and the first point of response for wellbeing, care and growth of our kids are our teachers. That is why we invest in these programs, to wraparound those supports and skillsets and deliver them to our kids.

Mrs HERSEY: We have gone from having counsellors to wellbeing officers who are admin staff, and they obviously do not have the same qualifications as a school counsellor. It is great to have such a person in a school but, from first-hand experience of having a child who needed a school counsellor to get the student through to finish Year 12, it is crucial that there is a counsellor in each school.

The school counsellor qualifications are important to a school environment and student. When a student knocks on the door and wants to talk to someone, some schools do not have a school counsellor, but have an admin person, and some do not even have that. In the future will there be school counsellors rolled-out in all schools? You said that we are moving away from that and other agencies will be used.

When a student wants to talk to someone, and a mental health is an issue, with my firsthand experience—Dolly Everitt was a student in our community—I cannot express enough how important a school counsellor is. I do not think a wellbeing person will cut it.

What schools do not have a school counsellor at the moment and which ones have a wellbeing officer?

Mr MONAGHAN: At the end of the day what is most important is meeting the needs of the individual school and individual community. For some schools a school counsellor absolutely is the best response.

I have worked right across education in the Territory. For a remote location an AO5 elder in the community could be far more effective than anyone because they have a cultural position, they have cultural responsibility and equivalence and core relationships that a school counsellor who flies into the community to work in that school may not have. It is absolutely putting in place what is best needed for that school.

I have seen in some schools that a youth worker is well placed because the core of it is relationships and the ability to know when you might have to bring in some allied health to support whatever the need of that student is at the time.

There is no one-size-fits-all. At the core of what we are doing is ensuring we meet the needs of all students. That will vary from location to location and from the school cohort. For instance, what is needed in Katherine High School this year may not be what is needed in 10 years' time. We will be agile enough to respond through our teams, this multifaceted approach and a lot of these partnerships with some of the allied health as well as support services to ensure we meet the needs of kids.

Madam CHAIR: I found the experience quite positive, both as a parent and as a local member trying to engage some kids. Will these people have a role in the coordination of services, because there are so many different ones? Dolly's Dream obviously has an amazing program that goes to the schools. I feel that there are kids who need that support, and we need to make sure there is a pathway. Some of these programs are going in and having conversations with our kids, so is there a role for that coordination of some of those programs—there seems to be a lot of them—in making sure the kids get the conversations and understand their supports at an age-appropriate point? Would that be part of the role?

Mr MONAGHAN: That goes back to the cohorts, the needs of the individual schools and the support services around them. Dolly's Dream is not across the Territory, and it is not appropriate for some other areas. I will pass to Karen Weston to elaborate on the support services and what meeting the needs of individual cohorts looks like.

Ms WESTON: I was trying to articulate the need for us to build a multidisciplinary team to support schools but also to have each school have access to those multidisciplinary teams. The focus of wellbeing means that there are things to coordinate. You need to know that you have in place the whole-school approach. You have to make sure that all your staff are accessing training. You need someone helping organise the allied health staff coming into the school. The idea is to have much more of a focus at the school level on wellbeing using the whole-school approaches and access to a multidisciplinary team of experts.

Always if you have a problem you have access to the online support by phone. If we have a shortage we will endeavour to continue to use contracted allied health staff. The shortage is a reality. Tomorrow we cannot get a counsellor into every school in the Territory. Indeed, in every jurisdiction in Australia there is a shortage of psychologists, psychiatrists and so on.

As you can hear, we are doing a whole lot of things to address things here, including engaging with CDU so that we can get any staff who are on a pathway to become qualified to come in and do their work experience in the department. That is now possible because we have a practice supervision team and much more professional support. Certainly, we hope that with the additional funding we will be able to build a bigger team that is regionally based and can get to all our schools—all our remote schools and primary schools.

It is important for us to be able to respond to the needs of the schools, which is different from one term to the next, let alone year to year. Many of our schools will start to push to have some role coordinating wellbeing across the whole school. There are already some schools saying that the assistant principal might have a wellbeing role in terms of coordinating all those programs, making sure they have access to the Be You training, the Ripple training and any of the others—Dolly's Dream—and know about the things that they can do online to support anything when families and children have bullying.

All the things that are available now is a diverse field of resources. The idea is to build much more support within the school, then to try to use the resources we have to make them be used as effectively as possible, noting that we have vacancies. We are facing the reality and trying to do a number of things to support the needs of students in our schools.

Mr MONAGHAN: One of the aspects is that we have a tiered approach to the supports that go out to schools. Before I identify what that looks like I will mention the impact for wellbeing, with the multidisciplinary environments and the impacts they have—the impact that things like Clontarf and Stars have. One of the main indicators is attendance. For Clontarf and Stars, of which we run 18 across the Territory, and Stars, 90% of them—from the attendance rates in 2023—have increased in this one allocation. That is important because it is a good indication.

Regarding kids' wellbeing, the first vote from kids and whether they are engaged in the culture, teaching and learning is that if they are not doing well they do not turn up. It is great to see from the increased numbers in those spaces that we are affecting the wellbeing and the support the kids feel.

The tiered approach is critical. We have what we call tier 1, which is the universal program. That is a high-quality schoolwide academic, social and emotional behaviour program that supports and is designed to meet the needs of all students, so everybody gets that.

Tier 2 is targeted when specific needs crop up. For small groups we have standardised interventions that target academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs using the evidence-based approaches the chief executive spoke about. That validates the programs and the support for the kids we identify as being at risk.

The other ones become a tier 3 intervention, where we look at intensive intervention, and the department focuses on individualised student-by-student needs and responses. It may incorporate part of the tier 2 response, but it does not always. It can be more intensive than that.

The universal responses involve ...

Mrs HERSEY: Thanks, minister; sorry, I am conscious of time ...

Mr MONAGHAN: I am just answering the question.

Mrs HERSEY: In a very long way. With respect to you, I have a lot to get through.

Madam CHAIR: I am chairing. The minister will finish answering uninterrupted, but he is also conscious of time and will try to keep his commentary short. It is obviously an important area. I have a couple of follow-up questions, and I am sure you do too, Member for Katherine.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is a critical area to get clear about how students are supported because the wellbeing and support that goes into kids in our schools is critical to their learning.

The tier 1 response is provided, whether it is through the Be You programs that we talked about with Beyond Blue or the safe and supportive de-escalation behaviours training that happens. Tier 2, which becomes very targeted, is looking at things like trauma theory courses offered to our educators. It identifies, assesses and supports students with particular issues. Drumming for Wellbeing is also tier 2. It looks at small groups of students in an evidence-based approach. Other ones that are fairly targeted can be mental health programs that are targeted for identified individual students who need that support.

Mrs HERSEY: You touched on that it is all about building relationships—which it 100% is—and the chief executive talked about staff training and multidisciplinary approaches. Teachers are busy enough as it is, to be the wellbeing officers in the schools or the admin person, at the end of the day, is a totally different role from a counsellor. If someone has mental health issues, the wellbeing person—with respect to them—is actually not going to cut it.

Madam CHAIR: It is a tiered system, and there will still be access to that tertiary-type support, but it is about building the wellbeing. With the issues our young people face it is about making sure there is a lot of support and taking that pressure off our teachers who currently do not have any support.

Mr MONAGHAN: The critical individual in a student's life in the classroom for their wellbeing, first and foremost, is their parents; second, it is the teacher within the classroom. That is why every teacher at teachers' college does courses ...

Madam CHAIR: They do not go to teachers' college anymore.

Mr MONAGHAN: Okay, that is showing my age. At universities they have courses and units on wellbeing for their students and inclusion and courses on behaviour management as a key focus to the skillset they bring to their jobs.

Madam CHAIR: Fully qualified therapy dogs are highly expensive and need to be trained, but there are more and more dogs that are appropriate with minimal training. Is there a policy from the department to support those types of therapy pets within schools? I know this sounds a little random and very Nightcliff—my colleagues are looking at me laughing—but I know of some schools locally and interstate where, obviously

the pet is the responsibility of a teacher or staff member, but they can be really beneficial. Is that something that the department has thought about?

Mr MONAGHAN: It is a really good point. Modern therapy dogs are coming with a job description nowadays. We knew for many years the benefits of having animals and pets in classrooms and the care and looking after them taught kids a lot about care and looking after their community.

Madam CHAIR: A lot of our schools have banned dogs. My dog was banned from Nightcliff, I will own that, about eight years ago.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am sure some dogs may be banned if their behaviour becomes an issue.

Madam CHAIR: I think it is something that could be looked at as a part of this piece.

Mr MONAGHAN: We know the educational benefits of pets in classrooms. As teachers over the years we have all brought in pets, particularly to engage with some of the challenging behaviours of individuals. It is amazing the response they have when they are given the care of a pet to look after.

Ms WESTON: We encourage the use of pets and dogs, particularly if they are appropriately trained. I will share an anecdote. Saturday night I went to Taminmin College to enjoy *The Wizard of Oz*. One. A local family's little dog was involved as Toto on the stage. It gave us all a great sense of joy and made the play and musical really quite a wonderful experience. I am very confident that our schools are finding ways to use those sorts of things.

Other things like dance, music, drumming and all sorts of things can add to the wellbeing of our students. What I am flagging is that we probably need a bit more focus on it.

Madam CHAIR: Seeing the acknowledgement and the support, because sometimes we create barriers.

Mr MONAGHAN: Being aware that there is a distinction with therapy dogs, which are a particular type of dog.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, not the highly trained—they are fantastic, but that middle. It is pleasing to hear the support.

You might have heard me talking to the Health department about VSA. Volatile substance abuse has become an issue across the northern suburbs. I wanted to flag that in terms of making sure the Department of Health and the school-based nurses know about it. They are sniffing the deodorant and whipped-cream canisters.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is an important point because at the end of the day we are specialists in education, and there are specialists in the Health department.

Madam CHAIR: I raised it with them, but I need to raise it at this forum as well.

Mrs HERSEY: How many of the social workers employed by the Education department are either social workers, psychologists or counsellors?

Madam CHAIR: Thirty.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the retention rate of counsellors?

Mr MONAGHAN: We would need to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.20

Madam CHAIR: Member for Katherine, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the retention rate of counsellors?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.20.

Mrs HERSEY: Could you tell me if there are any counsellors working in schools who are not face to face with students?

Mr MONAGHAN: All counsellors are employed for a particular function for supporting school students are face to face with them.

Mrs HERSEY: Looking at your faces, you are thinking I am crazy.

Madam CHAIR: They are not sitting in the Mitchell Centre ringing students; they go out to schools.

Mrs HERSEY: If the wellbeing people are employed, will they be an AO5 admin person and could potentially be working in the front office or other work, as well as some counselling?

Mr MONAGHAN: I understand that the title of administration officer is a level we use, not a function. I will pass to Karen Weston to talk about the function they provide at that level.

Ms WESTON: There is a central team which does the clinical practice, but I will need to check with Ms Cooper.

My understanding is that there is likely to be some allied health professionals to do the clinic supervision or the supervision required by each professional stream. It is critical for the supervision to be provided for staff and to make sure the staff who are and hold allied health qualifications are doing the professional development required and are following our procedures.

I am not sure if people are aware, but we recently had a coronial inquest where we have been asked to put in place a range of procedures on suicide and attempted suicide. We need to make sure those sorts of procedures are followed, and it is important to have that clinical practice unit.

I will hand to Ms Cooper to tell you whether there are staff who would have allied health qualifications. I think that is very likely, as someone would be needed who is a speechie to supervise the speechies and someone who is a psych to supervise psych. I am hoping that Kelly will have that detail.

Ms COOPER: The professional practice and intake team has 21 positions that quality assure processes and allocate resources to schools in sporting standards, professional approaches, professional learning, training and practice reviews. Of the 21 positions, 10 are highly qualified specialists providing professional practice leadership to all of our multidisciplinary teams across the regions.

It is important to note, now that we have professional practice and intake team, that over the Estimates period until 31 March this year there were 2,099 service requests. They are not all for counselling services out of our multidisciplinary teams; for counselling services there were 748 of the 2,099 requests. We need strong whole-of-school approaches. Sometimes it is just having a safe and supportive adult who can identify that the need is a school counsellor who will work closely with our counselling service to make sure that the follow-up appointment is booked. Ensuring processes are in place, like contacting a parent for consent and things like that, are also important. I hope that answers your question.

Mrs HERSEY: Yes. How many schools have a school-based constable?

Mr MONAGHAN: The school-based constable program is there for support. The 2024–25 budget allocates \$3m to the program. It has to be remembered that this is not a budget item from Police; it is a budget item for Education. We allocate \$3m, and we pay our police comrades the allocation. The program operates in all 13 Northern Territory Government middle and secondary schools, focusing on Years 7 to 10. It aims to improve students' understanding of community and safety issues by enhancing relationships between police and young people; improving safety, community connections, wellbeing and resilience; and building understanding of personal responsibility to contribute positively to community safety.

The school-based police officer also works alongside teachers to deliver talent education programs aligned to the Australian curriculum learning areas of health, safety, wellbeing and resilience. There are currently 15 school-based officer positions in the program since 2021, comprising a mixture of remotely based constables

as well as specialist school-based police auxiliaries. These are the operational decisions that the Police Commissioner makes depending on his operational ...

Mrs HERSEY: Are you able to say where they are by region?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes, I can.

Mrs HERSEY: If it is really long, just table it.

Mr MONAGHAN: There are only 15, so it will not be that long. There is one constable each at Tennant Creek High School, Katherine High School, Centralian Middle School, Centralian Senior College, Casuarina Senior College, Darwin High School, Darwin Middle School, Dripstone Middle School, Nightcliff Middle School, Sanderson Middle School, Palmerston College, Taminmin College and Nhulunbuy High School.

Mrs HERSEY: Are they all constables?

Mr MONAGHAN: Tennant Creek High School, Katherine High School, Centralian Middle School and Centralian Senior College each have a constable; Casuarina Senior College, Darwin High School, Darwin Middle School, Dripstone Middle School, Nightcliff Middle School and Sanderson Middle School each have an auxiliary; Palmerston College and Taminmin College have two auxiliaries; and Nhulunbuy High School has one constable.

Mrs HERSEY: How many incidents were there of property damage to schools in the last year?

Mr MONAGHAN: That would be under Output Group 5.0.

Mrs HERSEY: How many students in secondary schools undertake VET classes, by region?

Mr MONAGHAN: Vocational education and training is delivered to secondary students in our schools. There is a budget of \$13.09m. Recurrent funding of \$4.1m goes to Charles Darwin University, which delivers the courses; \$2.75m is for all other registered training organisations to deliver VET to secondary schools; \$0.847m to remote and very remote schools to access VET programs through an embedded trainer delivery model; \$1.44m to the Palmerston Youth Skills Centre; \$2.272m for the department's RTO and Middle Years Training Centre; \$0.647m for the jobs skills funding; and an additional \$1.023m for on-country learning.

In 2023 there were 2,126 Northern Territory students enrolled in those nationally accredited VET courses. Of those enrolments 1,352 students—64%—completed a VET qualification; 967 of those students were female and 820 were Aboriginal.

There were 161 students in NT schools, government and non-government, who commenced school-based apprenticeships and traineeships in 2023, with 59 of those students being Aboriginal.

In 2023 there were 1,261 students enrolled in a Cert II or higher. Of those enrolments 659 students—52%—completed a Cert II or higher VET qualification; 624 students were female and 441 students were Aboriginal.

This initiative of VET delivery in schools is becoming even more important as our Territory Labor government works toward ensuring that everyone has a pathway into further education or work.

The proportion of students who utilised vocational education and training to complete their NTCET was 25.7%.

Mrs HERSEY: Could you explain the percentage of funding provided to independent schools ...

Madam CHAIR: That would be under Output Group 4.0, Non-government Education; we are still in Output 3.4.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.18

Mr MONAGHAN: The Department of Education had 30 funded school counsellor positions in the period 2022–23. As at 31 March 2023 there were 18 of those positions filled.

Madam CHAIR: There is a perception that we cannot call school fees by that name but have to call them 'voluntary contributions'. There are people who cannot afford to make that contribution, and we should respect and acknowledge that, but there are also parents who want to make that contribution but do not realise. Across the Territory are the contributions quite low? How could we possibly be more flexible?

I have friends who had no idea that they should make a contribution for their children to go, particularly when they get into middle school. Primary school I think is a little different. I wanted to ask that question because it is important for schools.

Mr MONAGHAN: It certainly is important. First and foremost, you are referring to government schools.

Madam CHAIR: Yes, under Output 3.4.

Mr MONAGHAN: The main aspect is that it is voluntary—some parents cannot afford it—and schools remind all parents of that at the start of every year.

The chief executive will outline some of the policy parameters around the voluntary contributions to ensure there is absolute clarity in what that looks like.

Ms WESTON: We need to start from the premise that government school education is free. The *Education Act* requires us to provide a quality education to all students and that all of the curriculum, resources and materials are made available to all students. All students in the Territory are entitled to that quality education.

There is a range of policies and procedures which go to voluntary fees, the way in which the vouchers and school subsidies can be used—they are quite technical answers. There is also some work going on to clarify exactly how all these fees and voluntary contributions fit together. I want to reaffirm the commitment that government school—public school—education is freely available in the Territory to all students. I think we provide very good-quality education in the Territory.

Madam CHAIR: Absolutely. As a part of that work, obviously there are Commonwealth Government tax guidelines around what contributions can be made, so it is not straightforward in that space. It is not the responsibility of your department or even this level of government.

Regarding the secondary and middle schools reviews and the plans to share with families the timing and processes of that change—which I think is very exciting and most people are welcoming—what are the department's plans in that space?

Mr MONAGHAN: A vital piece of work that the department undertook was the review of secondary education. It is a comprehensive review. We engaged consultant, Deloitte Access Economics, to partner with Charles Darwin University.

The review made key recommendations to improve secondary provision; there were 15 in total. It was collectively aimed at improving engagement, improving the education outcomes and providing pathways for all students in the NT to succeed to either go onto further education or into work pathways.

The overarching vision of the secondary review was built on ensuring that we built an excellent and equitable secondary education system that supports all students to achieve regardless of where they live in the Territory. It guaranteed a standard of local secondary school provision for all students. It also provided an opportunity for ensuring there is a learning design component that drives improvements in student outcomes, whether that is co-designing for localities around the curriculum implementations. It also ensured effective transitions for school students were improved.

Another key vision was to ensure that we had a differentiated needs-based approach to secondary provision so that every student could have their own needs looked after and particularly address whatever may be in their learning pathway.

One of the other visions was the approach to change that emphasises the whole stability, the continuity and the sustained focus.

The review highlights the good work of our schools across the Territory. I make the point that this is about improving what we already do; this is not suggesting that we are not doing. Our schools, our teachers and our provision are exemplary but, like anything, Education should probably have as a core value reviewing what it does. We ask kids to review all the time in their learning, so it makes sense that we do that as well.

It will be important that we establish processes to enable authentic community engagement and local decision-making around this. You heard me mention that this is for all students wherever they are across the Territory. There will be a process of consultation. The funding agreement I am hoping to sign with the federal government will be the catalyst for us to bring a lot of these initiatives in place, and they will enable us to move on the 15 recommendations and implement them.

The full journey reform will take time. This will not happen tomorrow or on day one 2025 because it is important that we bring people along on this journey and ensure that they understand what it might look like for them. In that sense it is looking at the locality base needs of the schools and ensuring that under this new model theirs is enhanced.

The recommendations of this review, as well as the recommendations of the completed review of effective enrolment, have been consolidated to the broader school reform. They have all come from the negotiations we had regarding the implementation of our better schools agreement with the federal government. It is the most exciting time going forward in education.

Probably the one that parents talk to me the most about is the middle school changes and the strength in what that new model will look like. We are basing those models off quality research and evidence that is current. It looks at and acknowledges that we will have to spend additional resources, particularly to deliver some secondary provision in remote settings because we said that there will be a base level of secondary provision through the recommendation. It is a comprehensive model that we will be rolling out. It will start to be undertaken with some of those aspects of it.

As the funding agreement is signed off we will begin the journey in 2025, but the key funding model changes and the model around enrolment—we will fully fund our schools on enrolment. Having experience in communities and knowing some of the transience and the movement of students, I know that this occurs for a whole range of reasons—I am happy to go into them if you like. It is not fair to the other students who, because of one arbitrary date, their funding is set for the whole year. It is not fair to principals who do not have the option of having a stable staff for the whole year to deliver the programs they planned to have to chop and change it based on an old effective enrolment model which adjusts their funding levels from term to term or adjusts their FTE from term to term.

Mrs HERSEY: Can I jump in, Madam Chair? I would like to ask some more questions on that.

Mr MONAGHAN: Great. I am not far off finishing.

Madam CHAIR: I am happy to go to your request, but I wondered if there was a date on the transitioning in the secondary review.

Mr MONAGHAN: I will pass to the CEO, Karen Weston. My understanding is ...

Madam CHAIR: I understand all of what you just said.

Mr MONAGHAN: What I have just said is that the stakeholder engagement will occur next year for a number of the recommendations.

Ms WESTON: The planning is under way for the changes that arise from both the review of effective enrolment and the review of secondary education. The critical piece is to move to effective enrolment first because that gives the schools the funding to be able to make some of the changes. One of the recommendations of effective enrolment was to provide a supplement to remote secondary schools so they would be able to hire additional classroom support if they were using distance education or other mechanisms to provide secondary in remote.

Some of the planning for the middle running to a 7-to-12 model—our school councils are having conversations, but we will need to put in place rigorous procedures to look at things like infrastructure and the legal issues, if moving school councils together—which will be the case in some scenarios. We have been asked not to have an end date, but of course we have to plan. We have a cluster of secondary schools all together that we have the planning in place for, to work out which schools might offer different programs.

For example, VET programs might be a specialist at some of the schools. We have to transition some schools that are only senior schools to go back to offer Years 7 to 12, so there is quite a lot of work on how we might move on the model. We certainly welcome the conversations happening at school councils.

Our key first step with all of the reforms is to get the effective enrolment funding out in Term 3—the usual time frame is late in Term 3—so that people can start to plan for their school year. Then we will put in place more rigorous project management control around the middle to secondary school reforms. We are very happy for the conversations to happen. Throughout all of that we will be wanting to consult with community and families and take the time to do this really well—more next year.

Mr MONAGHAN: The critical point is that none of our current schools will close. I just want to get that on the record.

**Output 3.5 – International Education
Output 3.6 – Higher Education**

No questions.

**OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION
Output 4.1 – Primary Years Education**

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 4.0, Non-Government Education, Output 4.1, Primary Years Education.

Mrs HERSEY: In March 2024 following an announcement by the federal Education minister Jason Clare that they would be fully funding for public schools in the Northern Territory, it was reported in the *NT News* that NT non-government schools were 2% shy of the school resourcing standing and that the NT is the only jurisdiction in Australia with under-funded private schools.

At the time Catholic Ed and Independent Schools indicated they would seek to negotiate funding for private schools to ensure full and fair funding for all students as a matter of equity, particularly given a number of private schools operating in our remote and very remote regions. Can you update on what negotiations have taken place, how many meetings—if they have been held—and the outcomes of those negotiations?

Mr MONAGHAN: I am the minister for all schools, including Catholic and independent. The outcome of my meetings with the federal minister is that the announcement was not made just for government schools. The Territory will have fully funded schools across the board by 2029.

Mrs HERSEY: Could you explain how much is the funding, as a percentage, provided to independent schools by the federal government?

Mr MONAGHAN: For this reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr MONAGHAN: The federal government provides 80%.

Mrs HERSEY: How much of the Territory's 15.9% contribution to independent schools is provided in full?

Mr MONAGHAN: That is 15.9%.

Mrs HERSEY: My question was how much is provided in full? Are there any deductions from the Territory's contributions, for example Back to School vouchers; are they taken off?

Madam CHAIR: Do you want to take the question on notice so that the member can get the information she needs and get through a couple more questions?

Mr MONAGHAN: I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.21

Madam CHAIR: Member for Katherine, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs HERSEY: What are the deductions from the Catholic Education and independent schools' percentage, for example back to school vouchers?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.21.

Mrs HERSEY: Were there any critical incidents or assaults on teachers during the year in the independent or Catholic schools?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: How many were there?

Mr MONAGHAN: We do not have the data for non-government schools.

Mrs HERSEY: Are you able to get the data if I ask the question on notice?

Mr MONAGHAN: No, that is with Independent Schools.

Mrs HERSEY: How many principals are on long leave with pay?

Madam CHAIR: Any particular region or non-government schools?

Mrs HERSEY: Government schools.

Madam CHAIR: You cannot ask that question.

That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Secondary Years Education

No questions.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.2 and Output Group 4.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 5.1 – Corporate and Governance

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 5.0, Corporate and Shared Services, Output 5.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: How many incidents of property damage to schools were there in the last year? Can you break them down by region? Can I take this on notice?

Question on Notice No 8.22

Madam CHAIR: Member for Katherine, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs HERSEY: How many incidents of property damage to schools were there in the last year? Can you break it down by region, and what was the cost of the damage?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MONAGHAN: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.22.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, everybody. There is nothing to stop you two from talking afterwards, but as I would have been in bed two hours ago and this is my second night, I am done. On behalf of the committee

I thank you, minister, and your officials. We appreciate all the information you have shared with us. Everyone is an expert in education because we went to school and we have kids at school, but I appreciate everything you do, particularly as a mum with two kids at public schools in the Territory.

Mr MONAGHAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I acknowledge the hard work of the department. We are a very large department; I suggest the second-largest in the Territory. Whilst you have seen a number of these wonderful officials here today at the front who have appeared, there is also a number sitting behind me and a number in the room waiting. There are also plenty who have been involved in this process in the offices in the Education department. I thank them all, and I ask Karen to pass that on to them.

I appreciate the work of the committee staying up so late to indulge our questions.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you, minister, for being so accommodating this evening; it is very late.

Mr MONAGHAN: You are most welcome; I aim to please.

The committee concluded.
