

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

MINISTER MALEY'S PORTFOLIOS

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Mr CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to today's Estimates Committee hearings. Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and the Minister for Recreational Fishing to introduce the officials accompanying you. Once you have completed that I will go through the order of questioning before you can issue your statement.

Mr MALEY: On my left I have Amelia Vellar, the Chief Executive Officer; on the left further Jed Matz, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer and head of Agricultural Division; Mr Andrew Baylis, Senior Executive Director, Industry Development and Corporate Services; Ms Lorraine Corowa, Senior Executive Director, Biosecurity and Animal Welfare; Mr Matt Osborne, Senior Executive Director of Fisheries; and Ms Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 20 minutes. 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 questions.

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

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mr MALEY: Yes, I do.

Agriculture dominates the Northern Territory landscape and is, by far, the largest productive use of land across all Territory tenure types. This is one of the reasons the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries was created; to look after agriculture and primary production, which is an economic driver and a fundamental part of the Northern Territory lifestyle.

My Department of Agriculture and Fisheries comprises four key divisions: Industry Development and Corporate Services; Agriculture; Fisheries; and Biosecurity and Animal Welfare. I will cover some of the highlights from each of these divisions in turn.

First, I acknowledge that we have experienced a significant Wet Season across the Territory—one of our biggest on record. Many parts of the Territory were impacted, including our pastoral and agricultural sectors. I recognise that seasonal conditions affect every operation differently and this year has presented its own set of challenges and opportunities for our sector. There are some properties that have never seen flooding like it before and acknowledge the impact on farm infrastructure, machinery and equipment, roads and stock.

We have also been tested by unprecedented global pressures, particularly the ongoing fuel and fertiliser supply and pricing shocks linked to the conflict in the Middle East. These are not marginal challenges; they go directly to the cost base of agriculture and fishery sectors which rely on both of the inputs to remain competitive.

Under these circumstances, it is critically important that government and industry work hand-in-hand to strengthen regional supply chains, guarantee inputs and reduce the cost of doing business wherever possible. Ensuring the Territory remains a competitive place to invest and operate is essential to sustain momentum and deliver long-term growth for Territorians.

Rebuilding the economy remains a central priority for the Finocchiaro government and 2026 is firmly positioned as a year of growth; a year to restore confidence and unlock investment across agriculture and fisheries in the Territory, with a strong focus on restoring industry confidence to invest, expand and diversify.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' focus remains on key agriculture development while also building resilience across the sectors. Our government is getting runs on the board with highlights across the sector including bringing on new agricultural land at Wildman Agriculture Development and supporting the Sweetwater Agriculture Development through its approval process.

The Pastoral Land Board has cleared the historic backlog of pastoral development applications, reducing the average processing time from 10-and-a-half months to around three-and-a-half months, with 19 permits granted over 37,000 hectares of developable land area. That is more than three previous years combined which totalled 26,000 hectares.

The year 2025 was the NT's strongest live cattle export year in over a decade, with nearly 45,000 head moving through Darwin port, up 18%, with more than 310,000 NT produced.

The department hosted successful Douglas Daly field days in April, attracting 100 attendees from the regions across the Territory and from interstate.

The Territory hosted the International Symposium on Tropical Fruits in Darwin in September 2025, attracting local and international attendees. The Territory will also be hosting, for the first time ever, the 2026 Australian Agronomy Conference in August this year.

The Katherine Research Station will celebrate its 80th birthday with a community day this Saturday. A two-field day event will be held at Kidman Springs Station on 19 and 20 August.

Importantly, the department continues to carry out extensive research across more than 70 projects in a range of areas, driving innovation and improved outcomes for industry.

The department has co-developed and is currently implementing a research program with peak industry bodies and Top End mango growers to trial different strategies for managing mango twig tip dieback. This year the department has worked across multiple jurisdictions to negotiate mango market access via a new national protocol, Interstate Certification Assurance ICA-69, providing certainty for the Northern Territory mango industry with market access to South Australia and Western Australia now possible using a systems' approach to manage fruit fly risk.

The Fisheries team within the department has delivered over 110,000 barramundi fingerlings across waterways in greater Darwin to help restock. It kicked off the Hooked On Palmerston fishing competition by stocking 100 barramundi across a number of lakes in Palmerston. It is stocking Rum Jungle and McMinns Lagoon over the next few weeks, and growing out 9,000 golden snapper fingerlings for stocking in Darwin Harbour later in the year.

Strategic development, including Wildman, Larrimah, Singleton and the expansion of the Ord River area, remain critical to growing the Territory's agricultural footprint and diversifying production.

At Wildman agricultural development, Duxton Farm continues to progress development activities, with the project now moving through regulatory approvals and establishment phases. This large-scale, mixed farming development will support horticulture, broadacre cropping and cattle production, contributing to long-term regional growth.

The proposed expansion of the Ord River irrigation into the Northern Territory also continues to progress, with AAM Investment Group advancing development and planning approvals for the Sweetwater project area.

In the Western Davenport region, the Singleton farm project continues to move through approval and development planning. Once operational, the project is expected to deliver significant employment opportunities and establish one of the Territory's largest horticultural operations, contributing substantially to regional economic growth.

The department will continue to work closely with all agriculture proponents to ensure timely progression through regulatory pathways and to support project delivery.

Our government is also continuing to identify new land and market opportunities across the Territory with a strong focus on diversification of the pastoral estate. While beef production remains a cornerstone of the economy, there is an increasing opportunity to optimise land through complementary agricultural values that build resilience and attract private investment. Supporting this priority, the Pastoral Land Board has improved performance in processing development applications, ensuring proponents can progress applications more efficiently and respond to market conditions.

Across all projects, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries remains committed to supporting industries through facilitation, market development and strategic coordination, ensuring the Territory is well positioned

to rebuild, grow and strengthen resilience in the face of emerging challenges. Expanding the Northern Territory agriculture sector is critical to driving growth in regions, growing employment and boosting our economy.

Recent flooding across the entire Northern Territory had a significant impact on broadacre and horticultural crops and agricultural systems. This, coupled with the conflict in the Middle East, has seen a tightening of supply chain inputs, significantly fuel and fertiliser, that the agriculture sector relies upon. The Northern Territory Government is working with peak industry bodies and the Australian Government to coordinate help to support the sector through the current pressures and accelerate resilience.

Earlier this year the world's largest live export ship took 17,000 head of Territory cattle from the Darwin Port, a pivot from business as usual for a sector that normally relies on regular visits from smaller vessels. Filling an order of this size requires substantial coordination, with cattle sourced from across the Territory, trucked to export yards, fed and watered at the same time.

In 2025 the NT's live cattle export trade recorded its strongest performance in over a decade, with 447,000 head exported through the Darwin Port. The NT accounted for approximately 40% of Australia's total live export.

Our other stock industries include boxed beef, buffalo and crocodile. Currently, all these are on a growth trend with further opportunities to support the Territory's economy.

The Territory continues to be the largest mango jurisdiction, and we produce more than 50% of all mangoes produced in Australia. Additional to mangoes, we produce 25% of Australia's watermelons and 11% of the nation's musk and honey melons. The Territory can also lay claim to being the largest producer of jackfruit in Australia and produces dates, grapes and a range of tropical fruits like rambutan and starfruit.

Central Australia and the Barkly, through the Arid Zone Research Institute and on farms across the southern regions, are growing horticultural crops that capitalise on different fruit sets and harvest times to sell in markets around Australia. Territory broadacre farming is adopting sustainable cropping systems rotating cotton, sorghum, corn and other sustainable crops especially suited to our seasonal conditions and with strong synergies and benefits for Territory beef cattle industry.

The Territory is also home to a wide range of native bushfoods, including Kakadu plum, bush tomato and bush apple, which have been contributing to the Territory's economy enabling Aboriginal enterprise and jobs on country. The Territory has also more than 42,000 hectares of managed plantation forestry and more than 1.7 million hectares of Aboriginal land managed native forest and commercial potential. Plantation forestry remains an important industry and is currently the second-largest production land user in the NT after cattle grazing, with more than 42,000 hectares of NT currently used to produce forestry products in managed plantations.

Our government continues to deliver agricultural research through a range of projects and partnerships on our research farms through collaborative arrangements on commercial properties. It is an exciting time for our research farms, such as the department works towards strengthening their future. Specialist agricultural consultants and bush agribusiness are providing independent review of the options that have been identified to improve the financial performance of research farms and how we can enhance their operations.

I am pleased to advise that the department has already taken action on some of the immediate priorities identified. The buffalo herd has been sold, increasing the area available on the Beatrice Hill Research Farm to focus on cattle research. That also created an opportunity for local industry to access our world first-class buffalo genetics. The department is improving pastures at Douglas Daly Research Farm to support research. Work is commencing on installing solar infrastructure on our off-grid farms.

Coastal Plains Research Farm is the department's key site for horticultural research with a range of products on established commodities like mangoes as well as research to support possible new industries such as vanilla. Beatrice Hill Research Farm continues to be a key site for the department's research on cattle and floodplain production systems.

The Katherine and Victoria River Research Stations are located within the Big River region, facilitating research, extension and adoption programs across livestock and plant industries. Together with plant and animal biosecurity and animal welfare officers providing support to industry and maintaining the Territory's freedom from pests and diseases.

Staff also provide support to Aboriginal pastoral enterprises to improve infrastructure and management. The southern region research farms are researching grazing management systems to enable the sustainable production of high-quality beef. We have more than 15 years of data showing that Central Australian rangelands can produce premium quality beef across all seasons, giving the pastoral industry confidence to invest in a strong future.

Varietal research is underway on a range of annual and perennial crops, including mangos, avocados, (inaudible), sesame, industrial hemp and cotton. Within the big regions, regional coordination is focused on further strengthening partnerships with industry and the wider community, which has included coordinating biosecurity training for NT agency staff, visiting schools and giving opportunities for school-based apprentices.

In Central Australia and the Barkly, varietal research is extended to dates, mangoes, jujubes and citrus, with growers of grapes reaping the benefits of assessing markets based on this research. Building a skilled locally trained workforce is essential to strengthening the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the Northern Territory agricultural sector. That is why the department is partnering with Charles Darwin University, and other universities in northern regions and across Australia, to support a number of master and doctoral research programs. One of these programs includes crop monitoring through remote sensing applications in the Northern Territory.

We provide access to our research infrastructure and skilled staff to assist research students in conducting in-depth research on high-priority researchable industry-relevant issues. On completing their degrees, this collaboration builds a locally trained workforce ready and equipped to drive further economic growth across the sector.

As you can see, agriculture in the Northern Territory is uniquely positioned. It is vast, diverse and full of potential.

Fisheries and agriculture are a key pillar in the Northern Territory's economy, our lifestyle and our identity. The Northern Territory fisheries and agriculture sectors contribute significantly to our economy, supporting thousands of jobs and delivering real benefits across our regions and remote territories.

Our government is taking decisive productive action to ensure long-term sustainability and profitability in these sectors. In this budget we have committed to over \$4m for two years to strengthening fisheries compliance to ensure our rules are enforced, our fish stocks are protected and the community has confidence in the management of Territory fisheries.

We are also investing over \$2.5m over two years to deliver a comprehensive golden snapper recovery plan, addressing one of the Territory's most significant fishery challenges head on. This is about protecting the resource now so that generations of Territorians continue to fish and enjoy our lifestyle.

We are backing our compliance, protection and access. We have strengthened fisheries compliance, and we are delivering visible enforcement across the Territory and working closely with Aboriginal marine rangers. This is critical for not just sustainability but also maintaining access to Aboriginal waters which underpins the future of recreational, tourism and commercial fishing.

Recreational fishing alone contributes directly to the Territory economy, and we are continuing to deliver infrastructure and stocking programs to enhance that experience.

Biosecurity is also important and the system must underpin growth in our agribusiness sector. Productivity and the integrity of Northern Territory produce in very competitive domestic and international markets depend on us having the right regulatory settings and a strong biosecurity system.

We continue to monitor a number of biosecurity threats in the regions to our north that would have significant impact on our agribusiness sector if they were detected in the Northern Territory. The team at Berrimah Farm has the ability to quickly diagnose a range of diseases, including foot-and-mouth and lumpy skin. Thankfully, the Territory remains free of these diseases.

This year Plant Biosecurity was able to negotiate a domestic protocol for the mango industry which allowed domestic trade using a systems approach, known as ICA-69, which gives long-term assurance for the mango industry. That trade is important, and domestic markets can continue.

I thank all the staff for the work they have done in preparing for this Estimates and for the work they have done over the year. The people in the department have worked hard and they are passionate. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I am happy to take questions.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, Deputy Chief Minister, for your opening statement. To all the staff behind you who do the hours of work getting prepared for today, thank you for your time.

You spoke about access to Aboriginal waters, have you met with the Aboriginal land councils?

Mr MALEY: Yes, I have.

Mr YOUNG: What land councils have you met with?

Mr MALEY: I met with the Northern Land Council and the Central Land Council.

Mr YOUNG: Noting the Central Land Council does not have access over waterways, how many times have you met with the Northern Land Council in the last financial year?

Mr MALEY: I have met with them twice.

Mr YOUNG: Regarding the Blue Mud Bay negotiations with traditional owners, where are those negotiations at?

Mr MALEY: I understand where you are going with that line of questioning, but Aboriginal Affairs is the lead agency in relation to that, so you need to save your questions for the Aboriginal Affairs minister.

Mr YOUNG: You play a role in some of the negotiations, considering that you have the NT Seafood Council, Amateur Fishermen's Association and the guided fishing industry that rely on those negotiations to have access agreements in place to ensure the sustainability of those industries. I am trying to get an understanding from your responsibilities where those negotiations are at to ensure certainty of the industry.

Mr MALEY: To get an accurate answer to your question, you need to direct the questions to the Aboriginal Affairs minister.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, minister. I will move on. Can you point the funding to the budget for the continued phase out of gillnet fishing?

Mr MALEY: The CLP's commitment for phasing out of gillnets is by 2028. If you want to look at our budget line for that you will need to speak to the Treasurer because Treasury deals with the finances for the phase out of gillnets.

Mr YOUNG: You have responsibility over the phase out of gillnets and I am trying to understand how we are expected to meet that deadline.

Mr MALEY: We are dealing with the barramundi gillnets but the funding line you have spoken about, that is a line of questions for Treasury. You will need to speak to Treasury about where the funding line is in relation to the phasing out of gillnets.

Mr YOUNG: You see yourself as having no responsibility of the funding when it comes to the licence buy back of that industry?

Mr MALEY: No. The Treasury have the responsibility of the funding and we are committed to phasing out gillnets by 2028 which we intend to do.

Mr YOUNG: When can licence holders expect certainty regarding transitioning agreements?

Mr MALEY: We are in the phase now of working out the best method and Treasury are going to provide the funds. You need to direct your line of questioning to the Treasurer.

Mr YOUNG: Minister, how many sawfish were caught in gillnets in the reporting period and how many were returned alive?

Mr MALEY: What sort of fish did you say?

Mr YOUNG: Sawfish.

Mr MALEY: We will just bring up the Director of Fisheries, Mr Osborne.

Mr OSBORNE: Matt Osborne, Senior Executive Director of Fisheries. Thank you, Member for Daly for the question. I do not have the figures on hand but I will be able to get back to you shortly.

Question on Notice No 3.1

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

Mr YOUNG: Minister, how many sawfish were caught in gillnets in the reporting and how many were returned alive?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.1.

Mr YOUNG: How are fish caught in gillnets currently being monitored?

Mr OSBORNE: The monitoring of threatened and endangered species interactions in the barramundi fishery as well as all other fisheries is the obligation of licence holders to report them as part of their logbook reporting requirements.

As they are reporting their catch, they must report interactions with threatened and endangered protected species. We are also incorporating observational coverage of the barramundi fisheries through a combination of electronic monitoring which are camera on boats as well as onboard observers.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, Matt.

Minister, you spoke about cameras being monitored on boats, what is the percentage of boats that currently have cameras on them to monitor that?

Mr MALEY: What I can say is that the program collected 68 hours of footage. The electronic monitoring program has faced some challenges in relation to implementation. The Australian maritime safety update requirements for the use of lithium batteries on vessels is one of the challenges. All the camera kits had to be recommissioned to meet the new safety standards for lithium batteries. The EM kits are now approved and have been deployed on the fishery. Currently, four vessels are wired to accept the units. Four more will have systems wired into them—in June or July—for coverage of 80% of active vessels.

Mr YOUNG: When did you say that would be to get to the 80%?

Mr MALEY: June or July.

Mr YOUNG: Is that this financial year? This year?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: What is it currently? My understanding is that it is roughly 20% at the moment—cameras on boats.

Mr MALEY: There are two vessels with cameras on them at the moment.

Mr YOUNG: Out of how many vessels?

Mr MALEY: I will pass over to the director.

Mr OSBORNE: Because you are talking about percentages around the active vessels, we will have to confirm how many vessels are actually participating at the moment to give you an accurate figure for that.

There are currently two tenders that have cameras on them live at the moment. Four more vessels will have cameras in June and July, and that will provide 80% of active vessels in the fishery with electronic monitoring coverage.

Mr CHAIR: Are you happy to take that on notice, minister, for the percentages?

Mr MALEY: Member for Daly, are you happy with that answer?

Mr YOUNG: There is still a gap with how many commercial fishing boats currently have cameras.

Mr MALEY: Two.

Mr YOUNG: Two, but out of how many boats? You were not able to answer how many boats there are in total.

Mr MALEY: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.2

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

Mr YOUNG: How many commercial boats are there right now, and how many of those commercial boats have cameras on them to monitor?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: I can answer that two have them now, but I will take on notice the question of how many are active right now.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.2.

Mr YOUNG: Will you make critical habitats commercial gillnet free as a first step in phase-out—for example, around the Daly and Roper—given the reduced monitoring?

Mr CHAIR: Can we rephrase that so that it is not asking for a new announcement. 'Is it current policy?' could be a way to structure that.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, Chair, for your guidance.

Given it is your current policy to phase out commercial gillnets, will commercial gillnets be provided free as a first step to phase them out, particularly for the Daly and Roper?

Mr MALEY: I still do not understand your question, sorry. Can you rephrase the question?

Mr YOUNG: You are looking at phasing out commercial gillnets. Will you give commercial operators a first step to phase it out, kind of free, to ensure the viability of their longevity?

Mr MALEY: No.

Mr YOUNG: I will move on to compliance for fisheries. The budget includes an additional \$4m funding for fisheries compliance. Will any of this funding be used to support partnership with Aboriginal marine ranger groups undertaking monitoring, surveillance and compliance-related activities?

Mr MALEY: This money is for operational funding. You want to know whether that funding will be used to work with Aboriginal marine rangers. The answer is yes.

I will just correct that. There is additional money for marine rangers.

Mr YOUNG: Is that additional money outside of the \$4m?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: How much additional money is that?

Mr MALEY: I will pass on to the CEO.

Ms VELLAR: Marine ranger programs have \$420,000 per annum. The \$4m is for fisheries compliance officers, which is separate funding.

Mr YOUNG: No problem. Do you know roughly how many ranger groups that would spread across?

Ms VELLAR: It is currently nine ranger groups.

Mr YOUNG: Would you have a breakdown of that \$400,000 into the funding to each ranger group, or is it an overall cost? I assume it is through the Northern Land Council ranger groups.

Ms VELLAR: It is \$60,000 per ranger group.

Mr YOUNG: Is the additional fisheries compliance funding intended to support enforcement of unlawful access to Aboriginal waters or is it limited to offences under the fisheries legislation?

Mr MALEY: It is for offences under the fisheries legislation.

Mr YOUNG: The marine ranger grant program has provided funding to Aboriginal marine ranger groups for more than 20 years. Will funding for Aboriginal marine ranger groups continue in 2026–27 and under what arrangements?

Ms VELLAR: Yes, the marine ranger program will continue, but it is in a different form to what it has been previously, so I will get the director of fisheries to outline the changes.

Mr OSBORNE: The marine ranger program delivered by Fisheries has been ongoing since the early 2000s. It has fantastic partnerships with ranger groups, delivering really good outcomes across the Territory. It enables the building of compliance capability, research and getting their involvement in Fisheries' work. That arrangement has been static for that duration, whereby those same nine ranger groups received funding for similar activities.

Moving forward, we are opening that opportunity up for more ranger groups to be engaged in the work that we do with Fisheries by allowing it to be a competitive process and allowing other ranger groups, which have not been previously involved in the work that we do, to be engaged in the research, compliance and other activities that are going on. That change has been communicated to impacted ranger groups and the land councils. We are working through that transition to roll out in the early new financial year.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a list of those new ranger groups that may be coming on regarding that research and compliance?

Mr OSBORNE: I do not have a list, but it is open to all coastal ranger groups and Aboriginal corporations to apply. It will be a competitive process, so we are not limiting it to any individuals.

Mr YOUNG: What consultation has been undertaken with Aboriginal marine ranger groups and land councils regarding any proposed changes to the ranger funding agreements?

Mr OSBORNE: As outlined, the department has engaged with all the ranger groups that were currently receiving grants, as well as all the land councils, leading up to this change. We will be rolling out more communication for ranger groups that now have the opportunity to be part of that new grant arrangement that we are rolling out. That has involved conversations and emails.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.1

Mr MALEY: There were 109 sawfish interactions reported in the 2025 fishing season, 1 February to 30 September; 103 were reported as released alive.

Mr YOUNG: Recreational and commercial fishing stakeholders have been taken by surprise by a number of decisions you have made without notice or consultation—for example, the golden snapper recovery program and your tarpon take increases. There was also very little public information on where the gillnet phaseout is at. Do you agree you should be doing a better job of engaging with stakeholders and Territorians more broadly on issues that have a significant impact on their lives and livelihoods?

Mr MALEY: Recreational fishing is a major part of the Territory lifestyle and we were elected on a platform of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our Territory lifestyle. There has been a lot of work done in relation to recreational fishing and we have had meetings and consultation with many people across the board. I disagree with you saying there has been a lack of consultation.

We are continuing to work hard. We have the Have Your Say out there recently and there has been a number of submissions in relation to that. We have had submissions in writing outside that program. I will give you the numbers. We have also had major boat ramps on the busy periods, we have had five local weekend markets including public holidays, two major shopping centres, 17 tackle shops and boating stores. In fact, I have been to the tackle shop. We have had a speaking engagement at two Darwin fishing clubs with golden snapper information packs provided to four other fishing clubs.

The Have Your say commenced on 27 March and closed on 26 April and that information is now being collected and we will work through the results of that. In relation to the four fishing tracking devices were trialled to provide more pelagic fishing opportunities. We continue to work with Territorians on providing information to make sure that fishing is there for generations to come.

Mr CHAIR: We will just note the question did ask for an opinion but it got through.

Mr YOUNG: Going back to resolving the Blue Mud Bay negotiations—it is critical for the future for recreational fishing and commercial fishing operations as well as providing certainty and economic opportunity for traditional owners on their sea country. How can you sit here and say that you have no interest in these negotiations as the Fisheries minister?

Mr MALEY: I have never said that.

Mr YOUNG: You were not able to talk about where those negotiations were at on behalf of the Seafood Council and Industry and the Amateur Fishing Association and the NT Guided Fishing Industry Association but also on behalf of traditional owners. You brushed off the question.

Mr MALEY: You need to direct your questions to the relevant agency which is Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr YOUNG: Surely as the minister you would be across that, would you not?

Mr MALEY: You have to direct your questions to Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr YOUNG: As you would be aware we have seen widespread flooding across the Katherine region, the Douglas Daly region and even the Daly River region. Are you aware that rural producers in those regions say that they felt overlooked during the recent flooding that has devastated and affected some of their properties?

Mr MALEY: Are you asking for my opinion in relation to that?

Mr YOUNG: It is not an opinion. It is a statement asking are you aware of how devastating it has affected people's properties due to the recent flooding?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Gen Metts; he can answer about the work we have done in relation to assisting the agricultural industry because of the floods which have been widespread. It has flooded twice in Alice Springs, through to the Barkly, Katherine, Douglas Daly and throughout Daly. In the rural area there has been flooding. This has been an unprecedented area of flooding, and we know that a lot of the Territory was impacted.

Agriculture is a major part of our economy and they were affected by it. We are working hard in relation to working with our agriculture. Under existing policy, the pastoralists can apply to have their pastoral payments exempted or reduced and I know a number of them have done so—I am sure we can get you the numbers if

you want to know how many. We have worked hard with the industry because we know how important it is and we know how impacted it was by these floods which were unprecedented across the Northern Territory.

Mr YOUNG: What direct support has your government provided farmers who have lost livestock, fencing, crops and infrastructure? How many were able to access that support?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Jed Matz.

Mr MATZ: Disaster recovery assistance is delivered under the Commonwealth and Territory Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) and administered by the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations on behalf of the Territory government.

Under the DRFA, current settings are that small business recovery grants of up to \$10,000 for cleanup and reinstatement are available. That has been activated under Category C measures for small businesses only, which excludes primary producers.

For primary producers, the only active support is the Category B freight subsidy which is 50% of eligible freight costs up to \$5,000, which is largely designed around pastoral operations and does not align well with non-pastoral industries.

The DRFA does not provide Category B cleanup and reinstatement grants. These are only available under Category C. A Category C primary producer program was not activated for these events.

We activated the pastoral rent relief opportunity for all pastoral producers. Sixteen properties have accessed that opportunity to date.

We also provide assistance directly to producers through advice and knowledge. Through these floods, soil and pasture damage is quite significant. Our experts are available to all producers at any time to assess their pastures and soils and give them advice on how best to instigate recovery and get back into production.

Mr YOUNG: How many have access to that support?

Mr MALEY: Sixteen properties have accessed it, totalling \$200,000.

Mr YOUNG: Are any still waiting for that support?

Mr MALEY: There are none waiting.

Mr YOUNG: Has everyone who applied for that support grant received that grant or funding arrangement?

Mr MALEY: The people who have applied have received it. Sixteen have been issued, totalling just over \$200,000. They need to be eligible. There needs to have been flood impact. A station that was not impacted cannot apply for rent relief.

Mr YOUNG: How many applied and were not eligible?

Mr MALEY: All of them were eligible. Everyone who applied received rent relief at different stages.

Mr YOUNG: Was there a team that went out and did assessments on those properties to understand the damage? There were many farmers and pastoralists who had widespread significant damage. Many were saying that the pressure to apply for the funding was taking a toll. Do we know if there were any that may have missed out that did not apply? Like at Darwin River, for example, when people were affected by the floods, there was a team that went out and did the assessment on each of those properties. Was there a team within the department that went out and did assessments on those properties to understand whether they were eligible for those grants?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Amelia Vellar.

Ms VELLAR: The rent relief was designed to be a fairly low threshold. It did not have an onerous assessment process attached to it.

The issues around sending teams out to assess those properties were access. As you are aware, there were issues with roads due to the significant floods. We partnered with our peak bodies—the Cattlemen's

Association and NT Farmers—to assist us as well. We were able to get enough information to process the applications that came through to the department.

I am not aware of anyone who was not able to apply because they were not able to provide us enough information, if that is the question.

Mr YOUNG: If there are people who have missed out, do they still have an opportunity to apply for those assistance grants?

Ms VELLAR: Yes, it is still active on our website.

Mr YOUNG: When is it active till?

Ms VELLAR: I am not sure if an end date has been put on it, as such, but we are talking about this financial year's rent relief.

Mr YOUNG: Is there anything in the budget that may allow support? In the Douglas Daly region there are many people who were affected—lost their fencing and roads and were struggling to put cattle through their yards. Is there any additional support that may be coming up for those people who are affected and want some assistance?

Mr MALEY: Under our department, no, but there are other government departments such as DTBAR and the office of the Chief Minister. As I said, our department focuses on rent relief. There were some category Cs and stuff. Our main contribution to bringing the Territory back on track after flooding was rent relief to those pastoral properties. We have contacted them and put the word through the grapevine that it is available, a current policy and is still open now. That was this department's role in relation to flood recovery.

For the other grants you may be referring to, I suggest other departments may have some more available that are open on their books. If you want to talk about what the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has done, our part was the rent relief.

Mr YOUNG: Have you visited any of these pastoralists or farmers in the Douglas Daly region or Daly River region?

Mr MALEY: I have been to the Daly River region. I have not been to the Douglas Daly region. I have been to the Katherine region. I am going next week.

Mr YOUNG: Great; I might join you. Is that next week to the Douglas–Daly region?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: Given the widespread flooding over the last Wet Season, which you agreed was attributed to climate change, have you reconsidered your position on having a strategy that specifically and categorically addresses climate risk and adaptation to the agriculture and fishing industries?

Mr MALEY: That is a question for Minister Burgoyne.

I can say what I said before: climate change is considered in all our considerations. We want to make sure that the Territory is here for future generations to come. We consider climate change as part of many considerations when we make decisions. It is part of everything we do because we want to make sure that we focus on making sure the Territory is here for future generations and it does not just end tomorrow. We are focused on ensuring the Territory lifestyle as we move forward.

J DAVIS: Given that commitment, has the department undertaken any modelling of the impacts of climate change on agricultural productivity, fisheries, biosecurity or water availability?

Mr MALEY: No.

J DAVIS: I note you said it is embedded through everything. Can you give an example of how it is applied through your portfolio?

Mr MALEY: For example, when we consider rent relief we consider that it is flood affected, so we look at the damage done to that area and we assess it appropriately.

J DAVIS: Can you give an example of how climate change is factored into decision-making in the department?

Mr MALEY: It is in every decision we make.

J DAVIS: Does the department assess the long-term impacts of its policies and investments on future generations? I heard you say that is something of great importance to the department. If so, how do you do that?

Mr MALEY: Through our research at our research farms.

J DAVIS: Is that research in relation to impact on future generations publicly available?

Mr MALEY: Yes. It is on the website.

J DAVIS: I have one other question in relation to recreational fishing, part of the Territory lifestyle. The Middle Arm project will involve significant dredging of Darwin Harbour with potential impacts on marine habitats, biodiversity and recreational fishing. Has the department modelled the likely impact of the project on fish stocks, recreational fishing opportunities and the broader harbour ecosystems?

Mr MALEY: You need to direct that question to the department of Environment and the EPA.

J DAVIS: Does your department of Recreational Fishing KPIs take into account any potential reduction in fish habitat, fish populations or fishing amenities associated with the Middle Arm development?

Mr MALEY: Not directly.

J DAVIS: Has the department done any research into potential impact on recreational fishing with that development?

Mr OSBORNE: The Middle Arm development is a development in itself, and—not to speak on behalf of them—I understand that they are doing their own environmental impact assessments on that development. It is within their remit rather than what we do as part of Fisheries. Our management of recreational fishing is regarding the administration of the *Fisheries Act*. That development is outside of what we do.

J DAVIS: In terms of the department of Fisheries, what kind of oversight do you have of the impact for recreational fishers with development?

Mr OSBORNE: As part of managing our Fisheries we undertake surveys of Darwin Harbour, and we have done for many years around the catch that recreational anglers take. We use that in our assessment of fish stocks to monitor the health of our environments and our fisheries. We do that as at a fishery at a stock level not at a specific development scale.

J DAVIS: Is there no research the department does in relation to potential impact of development on fisheries?

Mr OSBORNE: Again, that comes back to the developers, and it is part of their environmental impact statements to demonstrate environment sustainability of developments. We do not do that on their behalf.

Mr KERLE: Since you brought up golden snappers before, and while we are talking about Fisheries, a number of my constituents are interested in the golden snapper issue. You mentioned it before, but I would like you to expand a bit. A recent Have Your Say campaign was undertaken by the department on golden snapper stocks in the greater Darwin region. Noting it has just closed, can you provide an update on what has been done to help manage this stock?

Mr MALEY: Fishing and especially goldies is an important part of fishing. People and families go out in smaller boats into harbour and get a couple of goldies, where some of the more passionate fishos might go further out. We want to ensure that we do have golden snapper fishing in the harbour as we move forward. Have Your Say commenced on 27 March and closed on 26 April, and the department is now going through all the survey results. We received more than 1,200 responses and 23 submissions.

People are writing submissions outside of Have Your Say. As you can imagine there is a lot of information involved in that, and this is an important decision that we want to get right. We do not want to rush it; we want to ensure that we deal with the recreational fishing and focus on golden snapper correctly. The previous Labor government kicked this down and had no plan and no action in relation to it, and maybe that is how we are now. If someone had acted earlier, we probably would not be in the situation we are in today.

We need to clean up this Labor mess, and we are committed to doing that. We will continue to work with the scientists, the fishing tour operators, the commercial fishers and the rec fishos to get the correct data to ensure we make decisions moving forward. The slogan goes, 'Tomorrow's fishing starts today', and we want to get that plan right.

A part of our plan is to have an education program to show people about the breeding of fish. The golden snapper are a slow-growing and slow-maturing fish which means it takes them a lot longer compared with a barramundi to get to a stage where they can actually spawn and grow. We will also look at having areas which are closed off to ensure those fish have a space to recover. We will also talk about some artificial reefs, and there is a tender out now to expand those reefs.

We understand that fishing is a part of our Territory lifestyle. One in three people in the Territory have fished or have access to a boat. It is an important thing to get right. We do not want to rush it, but have the information from the Have Your Say site, which closed recently. We want to work with the stakeholders like AFANT and fishing clubs. I know you are in Palmerston, and the Palmerston Game Fishing Club is a big club. They are going to speak to the president regularly about his views and, importantly, that of his members.

Going out on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon with your family and catching a couple of goldies is an important part of our lifestyle, and we want to make sure we can do that. Other people have bigger boats and go out overnight and are more serious, but a lot of people do land-based fishing or take out the smaller boats to the harbour, pull up a few mud crabs and crabs, get a few goldies, chase the barra and come back. It is the lifestyle.

We will work hard to get it right, have a plan and monitor it as we move forward. That is why we are talking about putting more money into the fisheries compliance unit for their operations. One thing we have heard, and from my experience, is that people want to make sure the rules are adhered to and that people do the right thing and do not come back with a whole esky full of goldies. Compliance is an important part of that. The Labor government had decreased funding in relation to compliance and they did not fund it. They put the fisheries compliance people in and did not give them money to operate. Clearly, they had no real plan and they led by media release and said that they had their compliance officers but no money.

We are making sure we get our compliance team operating. I have been to their workshop and out with them in their boats a number of times to check out what they do. They are passionate because they know how important fishing is, particularly goldies, to the Territory lifestyle.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.2

Mr MALEY: There are 10 active tender vessels operating in barramundi fishing; two of these have cameras on board. That gives us 20% coverage. That will increase to five next month, which will give us 50% coverage.

Mr YOUNG: There are three more coming on. I thought there were four more coming on by the end of July.

Mr MALEY: It will be increased to five next month. There will be another three and then four, an increase to five in the next month.

Mr YOUNG: Is it altogether five?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: When did you say it will get to 80%?

Mr MALEY: July, the month after.

Mr OSBORNE: We have just got some updated figures which say it will be increased to five in the next month to 50%. There was mention of an increase. It may be that additional tenders came on board, and it has

affected the numbers since these papers were put together. Our commitment was to get to 10% to 20% of coverage this year. We will be well above those figures.

Mr YOUNG: Is there coverage to get to 100%?

Mr OSBORNE: There have been changes at the commencement of this season where we would get 10% to 20% coverage of vessels and review 100% of the footage that is taken.

Mr MALEY: Previously there was a lot of footage and no-one reviewed it. The department has made a decision to review all the footage, and not just have the footage and no-one watching it because, essentially, that could be a waste of time and effort. We want to have less footage, but review all of it.

Mr BROWN: What funding has been allocated during 2026–27 to support Aboriginal economic participation in employment outcomes across the agriculture sector?

Mr MALEY: We do not have a figure in relation to it; we have the fishery program, which is the 400 we spoke about earlier.

The government is working with the Commonwealth on a nationally agreed non-binding national statement on First Nations in agriculture. We are working with the feds. The parliament has been an active participant in the national taskforce in developing a process for that statement. Over 500 stakeholders have been engaged nationally, including First Nations organisations and industry bodies. The statement is nearing completion, and is expected to be finalised in mid-2026. We are working with the federal government on that.

The NT operates a range of programs supporting Aboriginal economic advancement, including the Indigenous Pastoral Program, building capacity, productivity and participation for Aboriginal landholders in the pastoral industry.

There is the fisheries grant, which I spoke about. There are Indigenous aquaculture projects, strengthening workforce participation and business capability in fisheries. The Member for Daly might know about the oysters in his area.

There are forestry partnerships with Gumatj, enabling First Nations led. I said earlier that forestry is the second-largest land use of agricultural land. A lot of that is on Aboriginal land. There are on-country enterprises. We are helping and continuing work with those partnerships in forestry.

The national statement that is coming out will complement these existing programs. There is work done with the federal Labor government, your colleagues, as well. We should be able to work together to come up with a statement to advance the Aboriginal industries in agriculture.

We cannot give you an exact amount. I do not think we can take it on notice because I do not think it is available. I will double-check.

Does that answer your question?

Mr BROWN: Yes. We are looking for a partnership with the feds in 2026–27 ...

Mr MALEY: We are doing that now, and 500 stakeholders have been engaged. We have been working with the federal jurisdiction on that. The statement is expected to be finalised in mid-2026.

Mr BROWN: In a couple of months.

Mr MALEY: Yes. Again, if you speak to your Labor colleagues, they would know about it as well because this is a federal thing with us and the federal government, which is a Labor government.

We are trying to work together because, as you know, agriculture industry—a large part of the Northern Territory is Aboriginal land. We need to make sure we incorporate that because we want to continue to grow the agriculture industry across the Territory, and it does not matter who owns the land. We want to get that growing and have the local jobs because if people living on country can stay on country with meaningful work, it allows them to stay there and build better communities.

Mr BROWN: I move on to animal welfare. Since the commencement of the amended animal protection legislation late last year, how many infringement notices have been issued under the Act?

Mr MALEY: We can take that on notice.

We deployed personnel over the multiple flooding events around Daly River, Katherine, Murray Downs, Jilkminggan, Numbulwar and Palumpa. These events were from February to April 2026 with over 45 departmental staff involved. We prepared food for animals and the checks on the pets because people were evacuated but lots of pets were left behind. The department took out pet food and fed some of the animals.

The answer to your question is one infringement notice.

In relation to that, we have investigated 595 complaints, an increase of 10%. Eighty-one animals were seized over the reporting period—55 cats, 26 dogs. Of these, 13 cats and 19 dogs were rehomed through third-party animal welfare organisations, and the remainder were euthanised by a vet to alleviate suffering.

Mr BROWN: Out of 590 complaints lodged, was there only one ...

Mr MALEY: Investigated.

Mr BROWN: Was there only one that got a compliance notice?

Mr MALEY: One infringement notice. That is right.

Mr BROWN: Is that a fine?

Mr MALEY: Yes, it was.

Mr BROWN: Have any infringement notices been issued in relation to the possession or the use of prohibitive training devices, including pronged collars?

Mr MALEY: Not at this stage.

Mr BROWN: Are there none lodged or under investigation at the moment?

Mr MALEY: I pass to Lorraine. She will be able to give you some more information about that.

Ms COROWA: We continue to take a range of complaints and enquiries from the general public regarding animal welfare incidents including those that may be in possession of prong collars or prohibited items. From that point, we investigate. We gather evidence and if there is a case to be answered, we can either issue an infringement or if it is a particularly criminal matter, we can prosecute as well.

To this point, we have not done any action with regard to prong collars. We are still in the implementation phase where we are providing education and information. My director assistant informed me that we have had nil complaints received regarding pronged collars or electrical collars at this point.

Mr BROWN: From the complaint to a fine or whatever being issued, can you give an example of why or how in regard to the compliance stuff?

Ms COROWA: The types of complaints we receive include people noticing neighbours and acts of cruelty being carried out. We may also receive from the general public concerns regarding things they have seen. Because we have to be a model litigant, we do not immediately act. We do general evidence gathering. We have six animal welfare officers. They speak to people, gather evidence and take statements from people. We gather as much information as we possible can regarding that particular incident.

If it is a matter which is prosecutable, we lodge a prosecution file and receive the sign-off from the CEO who, under the *Animal Protection Act*, has the power to prosecute. What we do then is engage legal counsel and we take it forward and lay charges. For example, we received one recently where somebody had noticed that there was somebody who had been given a court order not to possess animals, and they were seen with animals. People rang us and we gathered statements and we have taken that forward. That matter is now before the courts. That is a breach of a court order not to have animals.

Mr PATEL: We all know that recreational fishing contributes significantly to the Territory economy. What projects are currently underway outlined in the NT Recreational Fishing Development Plan 2023–33?

Mr MALEY: As we know, rec fishing is part of our lifestyle in the Territory. Recreational fishing generates hundreds of millions of dollars into the economy.

One of the programs we are talking about is the completion of the Dundee Beach boat ramp and upgrades with a new breakwall that provides better land-based fishing access which cost over \$13m. That new wall allowed people to launch their boats more safely and for people to walk across the top of the wall, without having to walk on the rocks, and do land-based fishing.

There are projects currently underway. There is a new pontoon servicing Corroboree Billabong. That will allow easier access for loading and unloading boats. At Corroboree there is a relatively small boat ramp on the freshwater. Quite regularly, there are lots of crocodiles hanging around. In fact, I have been there and seen crocodiles on the ramp, and you have to drive down to shoo them off. They go under the water, and who knows where they go?

If you are trying to launch a boat, most people are in the boat when you push it into the water, but the poor old driver has to go and park the car and come back. The driver then has to climb into the boat, and if it is a five or six-metre boat, getting from the water into the front of the boat—because people nose into the boat ramp—from the boat ramp is quite a big step. Unless you are super athletic, it is pretty hard because most boats have got the motor guide at the front, the anchor and some rails over the top, so to climb up over all that on a slippery boat ramp can be dangerous.

What some people do is reverse in, because they have steps at the back of the boat but that also becomes dangerous because you have a large motor sitting there with very sharp blades. I know the boat is in neutral, but the blades still spin. It is just how they go.

What we are trying to do is put it right beside the boat ramp because there is a dirt cliff and people come in and they nose into that and then they can get on and off, but it becomes slippery and washed away. As the water goes up and down through the rainy season, it washes away and becomes unstable.

What we are in the process of putting a pontoon right beside the boat ramp which will allow the driver to go and park the car and trailer, come down, people will be able to nose into that pontoon. Climbing on to the front of the boat or the side of the boat will be a lot easier and less dangerous because the pontoon floats in the water and goes up and down as the water goes up and down. It allows easier access to the boats, noting there are crocodiles swimming in the water.

Lots of people go to Corroboree to fish. It is a place where I take my friends and family to check out the birdlife and the lilies; because it is non-tidal and we do not have to worry about wind and it does not get rough, it is a nice place to go to. A lot of people put a couple of lines out, trawling and they will have people taking photos of birdlife, buffaloes and wild pigs. It is a really nice spot and easy to get to. We are making sure that getting in and out of that waterway is a lot safer with the pontoon.

We are also designing all-accessible platforms for Dinah Beach, Shady Camp and Corroboree Billabong. That allows people with a disability to load into the boat from dry land. For example, if you have someone with a disability who may be on crutches or uses a wheelchair, you can put them on the concrete pontoon and drive the boat alongside it. They can then get into the boat, and once they are in the boat—these pontoons are right next to the boat ramp, so you can just drive around and reverse straight into the water. For example, I took my father, who is an old man; he does not have a disability, but climbing in and out of a boat is difficult for someone of old age. He also played footy throughout his life and has a bung knee. He can walk up a relatively easy ramp or up steps and wait on there. I then came alongside and he jumped on, and then I reversed into the water.

We are doing that at Shady Camp as well and at Corroboree. Design is underway for a toilet facility at Point Stuart. Point Stuart boat ramp is past Shady Camp—I do not know if you have been there before, but that is a ramp where people go out to the Wildman out that way and further out. This is designed to make the access to that ramp better so more people can use it and spread out the pressure. If we can reduce the pressure on Darwin Harbour and have more people go fishing where there are better facilities at Shady Camp, Corroboree and Point Stuart, that will ease the pressure for people here.

Some of the more serious people with bigger boats go out overnight and put their boats in at that ramp; they will spend one or two nights on the water and then come back. That boat ramp is a tidal boat ramp, so you need to come in and out during high tide. That will ease the pressure.

When people come off the boat there is no toilet there. The owner of the land, Mr Terry Holtz, has been talking to us about how they come onto his property—he has a small caravan park there—and use his toilet, messing it up. We are in the process of putting a toilet facility there.

There is also \$1.7m allocated for the design, construction and appointment of artificial reefs at the Charles Point protection area. The tender was released in March 2026 and is currently under assessment. The projects completion is expected for July 2027. These are all a part of our program to make recreational fishing easier and more available for people across the Territory.

Under the 2025–26 Recreational Fishing Grants program, \$216,000 was awarded to three community projects in the Darwin rural area and East Arnhem region. Another \$100,000 of grant funding applications are currently under assessment.

We are trying to make it easier—that is what the development plan does—for people to spread the pressure across our fishing areas. We have some of the best fishing; if we can spread out, that will lessen the pressure on the golden snapper. For example, if you put your boat in and went out to the front of Point Stuart or Shady Camp, you would normally get bigger goldens than you would in the harbour, but it is further to go. We have to make it easier for people and families to experience that, whether they want to go out for the day or overnight—if they want to go for just the day, they can.

We have a lot of movement in our tides, so we need to make sure you use the boat ramp to get in and out right. If you have a five or six-metre boat and try to come in when the tide is not right, that can be dangerous.

Mr KERLE: Just because we started talking about lumpy skin disease earlier—the cattle industry is important to the Territory's economy, our farmers outside of the towns and many businesses that service those areas.

Earlier this year lumpy skin disease was detected in Bali. Can you provide an update on how the government is preparing against the possibility of this emergency animal disease entering the NT?

Mr MALEY: It is important that we keep lumpy skin disease out of the Northern Territory. We know that lumpy skin is to the north of us in Indonesia. We have access to a lumpy skin vaccine in Australia, but the problem with a vaccine is, you can vaccinate cows behind the wire, but a lot of the cow and buffalo in the Territory run wild.

It is important that lumpy does not reach here. It would devastate our market, cattle trade and live export trade—more than 400,000 live cattle were exported, which is an 18% increase—so we are working hard to make sure it does not get here. Biosecurity is one of our key factors, and we have to be ready for it if there is an incursion.

We have a trailer, called the BERT trailer, which is set up and designed so that Lorraine's team can go out if there is an incursion. They can take the machines and all the gear they need to ensure they trap the incursion or reduce it to a small area. They are ready to go if that happens.

There was a test program on the WA–Northern Territory border, where they pretended there was an incursion to give the team some practice of what they have to do if that situation arises. Lumpy skin is airborne by mosquitoes. If the mosquitoes come down in the wind from Indonesia—it is a long way and hopefully they do not make it here—we need to be ready.

We do not need to talk much about foot-and-mouth disease, but it is a nasty disease. We are making sure that the Territory and Australia are free of those diseases.

The team, and Lorraine's team, are working very hard. They have been working with the feds, WA and Queensland. We take this seriously because if we get lumpy skin or foot-and-mouth in the Territory, it will devastate our live cattle export and the cattle industry across the Northern Territory.

J DAVIS: Following up the question about protecting our recreational fish and fish stocks, which minister ultimately has responsibility for ensuring the long-term sustainability of Northern Territory fish stocks and aquatic habitats?

Mr MALEY: That is us.

J DAVIS: What statutory powers do you have to prevent activities that might damage fisheries resources?

Mr MALEY: Our department enforces the *Fisheries Act*. I will pass to Matt Osborne to give you an example of that. We have the compliance section. As I said, the previous Labor government got the compliance section up and running, but did not fund it. In this budget we have given them \$4m over two years to become operational.

I have been out there with the boats. You might ask: why is that so important? It is because generally people do the right thing, but some do the wrong thing, and we want to catch those people so that they do not damage the fish stock into the future. I have heard stories of people going out and upsizing, where they catch their limit and they will keep catching them and throwing them back and bring back the biggest three in the end. We want to stop that. The compliance officers' role is to go to the boat ramps and where people fish such as Shady Camp, Point Stuart, Dundee or the harbour. That is where it is important. People like seeing the compliance people because they know they are protecting the fish stock into the future.

J DAVIS: You are talking about compliance of people who are fishing. When a major development project has the potential to impact fish stocks, aquatic ecosystems or fisheries habitat, does the department also have a compliance role?

Mr MALEY: Matt answered that question regularly before, and I will pass to him. He is saying that those developments do their own environmental impact statements and work with the department of Environment to make sure those assessments are done correctly.

Mr OSBORNE: The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is responsible for enforcing the *Fisheries Act* which outlines the minister's powers and the director of Fisheries' powers in protecting and managing the use of aquatic resources. Fundamentally, that is through the establishment of management plans or regulations around the capture, use and sale or recreational use of fish and aquatic resources.

In terms of what the minister and the department can do, we can establish management plans about how aquatic resources are used for those purposes.

J DAVIS: My initial question was: who, in the Territory, is responsible for the long-term sustainability of our fish stocks? You said it is you.

J DAVIS: Environmental impact statements, for example, when Fisheries undertake their own assessment, do they then look at that, verify it or have any oversight of it?

Mr OSBORNE: As those statements are then provided to the EPA as part of their obligations to assess the impacts of developments and other such activities, the EPA can and do provide us an opportunity to review the accuracy because of the technical expertise that resides within in our agency.

J DAVIS: If Fisheries gives advice that conflicts, for example, with the objectives of the development proposal, whose advice prevails? What happens in the approval process?

Mr MALEY: You are asking a hypothetical question. Like I said, this is case by case. We have an opportunity—we respond. If you want to give an example, we do not want to play hypotheticals, if you have a practical example we will answer it, but we are not here to guess and say that this may or may not happen; we would be here for hours. If you have an example fire away.

J DAVIS: I am interested in the legislative framework and the process if there is conflicting advice who has the final say? Is it fisheries?

Mr MALEY: That does not come within our remit, that would be the minister for Planning and Environment.

J DAVIS: It comes within your remit to look after our fish.

Mr MALEY: Under the *Fisheries Act*.

J DAVIS: If in your view something will not look after fish, do you have the final say there or does another minister?

Mr MALEY: You are talking about developments. We have the final say when it comes to the *Fisheries Act*. If you are talking about other legislation like planning or environment that is with the minister for Planning and Environment. We monitor and enforce the *Fisheries Act*; that is our remit, and the department does it

well. I am happy that their compliance officers now have some operational money to do their job to make sure that we get our fish stock ready to go, because tomorrow's fishing starts today.

J DAVIS: I am sure they do. I am still not clear, apologies ...

Mr MALEY: The answer is that you need to ask the minister for Environment.

J DAVIS: To be clear, you are responsible as the minister for fish ...

Mr MALEY: For the *Fisheries Act*.

J DAVIS: ... for the *Fisheries Act*, and you are responsible for the sustainability of fish in ...

Mr MALEY: Under the *Fisheries Act*.

J DAVIS: Yes, so are there limits to what that means in terms of how you are responsible for the long-term sustainability of fish?

Mr MALEY: You are barking up the wrong tree. If you have questions about a development or the environment, you need to talk to the Environment minister.

J DAVIS: My questions are about fish, which is why I am talking to you, minister.

Mr MALEY: We have answered that question.

Mr CHAIR: We cannot go into hypotheticals, but do you have a direct question, Member for Johnston?

J DAVIS: If in the Middle Arm development, the EIS found that it had conflicting outcomes to what the department thought in terms of the ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston ...

Mr MALEY: That is a hypothetical.

Mr CHAIR: ...we will not be able to go down that road.

J DAVIS: I will move on.

Mr CHAIR: That brings us to 10.30 am so we will break for morning tea and reconvene at 10.45 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: We will recommence. We are here with the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Recreational Fishing. We are on questions of the opening statement. Are there any further questions on the opening statement? There are no further questions.

Are there any further questions at all on this portfolio? No. That concludes consideration of all output groups and outputs relating to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all the officers who provided advice to the minister.

Minister, I will give you a brief moment to thank your staff before we do a changeover.

Mr MALEY: I thank the staff. The amount of work that is done preparing this brief is enormous. I also thank staff for what they do throughout the year, day-in, day-out turning up, doing what they do to help the Territory maintain what it is and be the place it is. Sometimes it goes underestimated how much work they all do. Thank you, the staff here especially, but the staff behind at the office doing all that work. Thank you, if they are listening, for the work they do as well because it is all appreciated. It makes a difference.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of all members of the committee, I echo that to the staff here and all the staff of the department who have been working.

The committee suspended.

MINING AND ENERGY

Mr CHAIR: Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Mining and Energy and the Minister for Renewables to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Mining and Energy. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mr MALEY: I have beside me on the left Alister Trier, the Chief Executive; James Pratt, Senior Executive Director, Energy Development, Department of Mining and Energy; Joanna Frankenfeld on my right and Anne Tan also on the right; and Scott Robertson is on the left. He is the Senior Executive Director, Mining Development.

The Department of Mining and Energy plays a pivotal role in the government's key priority of rebuilding the economy and contributes to the whole-of-government objectives aimed at supporting the Territory's long-term economic growth, energy resilience and global competitiveness.

The department is responsible for administering legislation and providing regulatory oversight. It enables responsible mining exploration and production activities; supports industry growth by facilitating investment, maintaining geoscience data and advice; and ensuring compliance and operational standards across the mining, petroleum and energy sectors.

It has a core focus on advancing development of the Territory's mineral, petroleum and energy sectors and actively advocates for and positions the NT as a leading jurisdiction for exploration and investment by supporting industry growth, expanding energy supply and delivering initiatives across mineral development, renewables and energy systems.

The Territory's mining and energy sector is driving economic growth, creating thousands of local jobs and delivering the investment needed to build a stronger and more resilient Northern Territory economy. In our year of growth, certainty and security, the Finocchiaro government has been focused on restoring confidence in the Territory by reducing red tape, backing private investment and ensuring the Territory remains open for business and competitive on the national and global stages.

As global demand grows for gas, critical minerals and reliable energy, the Territory is well positioned to play a leading role in supporting Australia's energy security and economic future with significant opportunities emerging across the resource sector.

In approximately 80 days the Northern Territory electricity grid will be powered by the Beetaloo, a landmark moment for the Territory's energy future. This will mark the first commercial sale of Beetaloo gas and the beginning of a new era of economic growth and investment in energy security for the Territory.

It also represents an important step in positioning the Territory as a future nationally significant energy producer. In just two years this government has unlocked the Beetaloo and laid the foundations for jobs and economic prosperity that will benefit Territorians for decades to come. We came to government saying that we would get the basin into production, and here we are. This did not happen by chance. It has been driven by a government focused on delivering the reform, certainty and investment confidence needed to grow the industry.

Last month we delivered major legislative reforms through the passage of the pipelines and petroleum legislation amendment Bill. These reforms streamline retention licence processes, provide greater operational flexibility and support more efficient project development. Importantly, these changes send a strong signal that the Territory is open for business and is supportive of the expansion of the gas industry in the Territory.

Earlier this year we released 4,000 square kilometres of new acreage in the Beetaloo with expressions of interest open until the end of next month. The interest so far has been strong and demonstrates confidence in the Beetaloo as a globally competitive gas region. That confidence has now been reflected in accelerating industry activity across the Beetaloo.

APA Group's Sturt Plateau pipeline is complete. Construction of the Shenandoah processing and compression facility infrastructure is almost finished.

Late last year both Tamboran Resources and Beetaloo Energy were granted approval by this government to recover and use appraisal gas.

Last month Liberty Energy commenced fracture stimulating three of Tamboran's wells at its Shenandoah South 2 site on exploration permit 98 which are on the same well pad as the other two previously successfully flow-tested wells Tamboran recently delivered. This activity will deliver gas to the wellhead by late August. This is the gas that will begin flowing to the Territory market within weeks, followed closely by Beetaloo Energy in December this year.

Tamboran will also commence drilling two new wells this year on exploration permit 117, just south of the current Shenandoah South 2 pad.

In the last year Beetaloo Energy has completed the largest fracture stimulation in Australia on its Carpentaria 5H well. Flow results are due in the coming month.

Still on Beetaloo Energy, earlier this year they announced a \$10m investment into Territory Sands, led by Territorian Nigel Doyle, for a local frack sand plant and sand mining operation. This means Territory sand will be used to frack Territory wells, reducing the cost of drilling and, importantly, creating business opportunities for our service and supply industry and, of course, more jobs for Territorians.

Santos is set to commence exploration in the Beetaloo with their 12-well pilot program environment management plan recently approved, along with their well operations management plan. Santos will commence its initial three-well program next month with the aim to deliver appraisal gas to market following successful flow testing of those wells.

Key infrastructure planning is progressing, including APA's proposed North to East Australia Pipeline which will connect Beetaloo gas to the east coast and strengthen national security.

International investor confidence continues to grow, with INPEX entering into a farm-in agreement with Daly Waters Energy to acquire interest in the Beetaloo Sub-basin. This demonstrates the company's confidence in the Territory as a reliable investment destination and its strong support for the continued growth of the Territory economy.

With industry continuing to back the Beetaloo, the NT Government is focused on turning that investment into jobs, growth and long-term economic benefits for Territorians.

The government has committed an additional \$2.8m over the next two years to strengthen the Beetaloo Project Management Office, ensuring continued whole-of-government coordination and helping maximise the economic, jobs and regional development benefits from the Beetaloo. The Beetaloo Project Management Office is supporting delivery of crucial enabling projects across government, including infrastructure planning, land availability and service industry facilitation, as well as strategic engagement with the Australian Government and community and industry stakeholders. It is important development of a coordinated long-term approach to the Beetaloo through master planning, investor engagement and policy coordination to accelerate development while maximising benefits for Territorians. Through its coordination role, the Project Management Office is working with our agency to ensure Territory businesses, workers and regional communities are well positioned to capture the opportunities created by the growth of the onshore gas industry.

The Territory is also positioning itself as a future carbon capture and storage hub at Middle Arm with companies like INPEX, Santos and Vopak advancing their development plans. Carbon capture and storage technologies safely inject over six million tonnes of CO₂ annually through 44 global commercial operations, providing a proven method for reducing large-scale industry emissions. By utilising appropriate rock formations deeper than 800 metres and continuous monitoring, these projects achieve permanent secure containment that mimics natural geological storage. Established operations in Norway and Australia have demonstrated the safety of this technology over several decades, adhering to strict international standards to ensure secure CO₂.

Recent amendments to the pipeline legislation will allow for the transport of CO₂ in pipelines which is required for the INPEX and Santos offshore sequestration of CO₂. Both companies are planning CO₂ processing

facilities at their NG sites in Middle Arm and will be seeking approval from the Commonwealth for the storage of CO₂ in Commonwealth waters.

Vopak is progressing plans for a major CO₂ import and handling facility at Middle Arm. Late last year the government provided investment for certainty for Vopak terminals, providing a 'do not deal' commitment for strategic allocation of 10 acres of land at Middle Arm. This proposed \$1.6bn multi-use carbon dioxide import and handling terminal will be able to store between five and 15 million tonnes of CO₂ each year and generate around 1,000 jobs during construction. Importantly, the proposed Vopak development, which is targeted for completion of construction by 2031, will underwrite an emerging new industry for the Northern Territory.

The Territory's mineral sector is experiencing continued growth and strong investor confidence across the Territory, and we have expanded the mining development pipeline to more than \$6.3m. A clear example of this growing confidence in the Territory's resource sector is Arafura Rare Earths reaching final investment decisions for the Nolans project. This is a major milestone for both the Territory and Australia's critical mineral industry, and it is exactly the kind of investment we are looking to attract—projects that create jobs, grow the economy and unlock the Territory's full potential.

The Nolans project will support the diversification of the Territory's economy and attract further investment into critical minerals. Located 135 kilometres north of Alice Springs an integrated open cut mine, the rare earth processing plant will be the first project of this kind built in Australia. This strategically important project will produce high purity rare earth oxide products using permanent magnets with offtake agreements already in place with US, European and South Korean offtake partners.

There is also renewed confidence across the resource sector more broadly with mining commencing at core lithium's Finnis River operation this year. All processing is expected to begin in September with the first concentrate shipment targeted for December making a key step in this stage (inaudible) production. It is the latest in a growing line of mining and resource projects getting up and running across the Territory. Across the Territory other projects continue to make progress. The Jervois copper-silver-gold project by KGL Resources in Central Australia recently raised \$300m to help fund project development as they move towards a final investment decision.

Just over a year ago, large-scale gold mining returned to Tennant Creek for the first time in 20 years, with the opening of Tennant Mining's Nobles Nob gold mine. Tennant Mining is on track to produce 45,000 to 50,000 ounces of gold this financial year. It has plans for expansion of its operations as it moves towards producing 100,000 ounces of gold per annum. As part of this expansion Tennant Mining is progressing the White Devil Gold project, which achieved a significant milestone with the completion of a major resource upgrade, while the mining approvals process has also commenced.

To support this continued growth, we passed the Mineral Titles Legislation Amendment Bill last month, modernising and streamlining the approvals framework to make it easier to invest, explore and develop projects in the Territory. The reforms extend exploration licence renewal periods from two years to six years removing the need for exploration licence holders to progressively reduce the size of their tenure during the initial grant period. The change also supports recreational fossicking by making permits available free of charge, encouraging greater participation and access to the Territory's unique geological opportunities.

While driving new investment and development it is equally important that we continue to address a legacy of historic mining activities. Through the legacy mine program significant progress has been made to remediate former mine sites and reduce environmental risk. In December last year the NT Government awarded a \$9.5m tender to (inaudible) Australia for the first stage of remediation works at the Sandy Flat legacy copper mine located 300 kilometres southeast of Borroloola. This is the first major remediation project funded through the mining remediation refund. This project is not only about fixing the mistakes of the past, but it is also about creating real jobs and economic prospects for the regions.

At Rum Jungle major projects have now been awarded for water remediation services and site remediation works marking a key step forward in the rehabilitation of the Territory's most historically significant sites. Construction of the pit water treatment program is now complete. Dewatering the main pit is around 50% complete and work is well underway on the ground water treatment plant and associated site infrastructure, including the Haul Road network. Together these efforts demonstrate that while we are supporting a strong and growing resource industry we are also investing in responsible remediation of legacy sites.

Our government remains firmly focused on stimulating and supporting the long-term growth into mineral exploration sites across the Territory. A key part of that work is the Northern Territory Geological Survey Resourcing the Territory's program, which helps attract investment and derisk exploration through high

quality geoscience starter industry promotion and targeted exploration grants. In 2026 the Geological Survey is delivering one of the largest geological survey programs ever undertaken in the Territory, including major air borne and gravity surveys across the Top End and Barkly regions. We have expanded our exploration grant program to further stimulate industry and develop new sites across the Territory.

The Northern Territory is driving major reform in the energy sector to deliver a stable and well-managed (inaudible) reliable, whilst achieving the lowest sustainable cost for Territorians.

The Darwin Energy Hub is a key part of the governments long-term planning for the Darwin–Katherine electricity network, ensuring it can meet future demand growth and enable new industry and private sector investment.

Significant progress has been made to deregister projects through detailed planning and approvals work, positioning for the future investment or maintaining the government’s ability to determine the best delivery and investment approach to the Territory’s future energy needs.

Remote power industry communities have been developed to support essential services and economic participation in remote industries. It aims to reduce diesel dependency, improve energy security through future growth and strengthen the long-term viability of essential services delivered to Indigenous communities.

The department is also working closely with the Australian Government and other states and territories through the energy and climate change ministerial councils to provide progress priority, national energy issues, including reform to the Australian Energy Market Operator governance arrangements, policy settings and emerging data centres.

I am happy to take questions, but first I thank all the staff for all the work they have done to prepare this. It is a lot of work, and a lot is done behind the scenes. I thank all of the staff; not only those here today but also those who are in the offices. The amount of work put in to prepare for Estimates—and being open and transparent—is tremendous.

Mr CHAIR: We will now move to questions on the opening statement.

Mr SMELT: Workers at Nathan River Resources raised questions about not being paid as far back as last year. When were you made aware of financial mismanagement concerns at the mine, what actions did you take and why was the situation left to get to this point?

Mr MALEY: The Northern Territory mineral production value and mineral royalty returns are substantively influenced by fluctuations in commodity prices. These commodity prices are also crucial for financial viabilities of the pipeline toward developing mining projects in the Territory. The Territory production value released by the Department of Mining in September 2025 is the total of \$4.36bn in 2024–25; that is up 2%. The production was substantially gold and bauxite prices, offsetting decreased manganese production due to the long-term impacts of Cyclone Megan.

Mr SMELT: Chair, on relevance...

Mr CHAIR: I think the best way we can break this down is if the Member for Nightcliff delivers each of the three questions separately.

Mr SMELT: Minister, when were you made aware of financial mismanagement at the Nathan River Resources mine?

Mr MALEY: I was made aware when statements were made in the media.

Mr SMELT: When was that?

Mr MALEY: I could not give you an accurate date right now, but when it was put out in the media; that is when I was made aware of it.

Mr SMELT: Why were you not made aware of that earlier?

Mr MALEY: You would have to talk to the mining company. It is a private company which operates under its own means, so if you have some questions about how that company operated, I suggest you talk to them.

Mr SMELT: Your department is responsible for regulating the mining industry, including this particular operation. When was your department made aware of it?

Mr MALEY: I will seek some advice and get back to that.

I will pass to Scott Robertson, the Senior Executive Director of Mining Development.

Mr ROBERTSON: The Nathan River Resources and its controlled entities were placed into administration on 26 May. Prior to that point there were ongoing discussions about the disruption which had been caused due to the flooding events and the price of diesel impacting its operational activities. It had to reduce its operational activities to care and maintenance during that period of time while it was ensuring safety controls were in place.

During that time there was notification, as I said, around the 26 May period. At that point in time, we were communicated to about that change of status.

Mr SMELT: There was no notification prior to 26 May that they were these financial mismanagement concerns?

Mr ROBERTSON: The discussions were being held about the widely-affected impact of the flooding events and the cost of diesel that was impacting industry more widely and the direct affects that was having on operations, reducing their operational staffing and capability at that time.

Mr SMELT: Minister, why was the situation left to get to this point without your knowledge and only being aware of it through the media?

Mr MALEY: I will pass that back to Scott—no, Alister can talk to it.

Mr TRIER: With these things a lot these companies go through ups and downs. When they give an indication of going into administration, there are stages to that. Whether that happens or not is a matter for the company. Our job in regards to Nathan River Resources is administration of tenure. We kept a close eye on it. As it entered into administration we provided advice to the minister. As the minister stated, that was after it was made publicly announced.

Mr SMELT: How closely do you follow these ups and downs, the cycles, financial performance, occupational health and safety? How regularly and how involved are you in managing these potential red flags that can result in concerns like this?

Mr MALEY: The department's role, as the CEO mentioned, is it monitors ups and downs, then if any decisions are to be made under the requirements, it comes to the minister for ministerial. I do not follow every company in the Northern Territory or every company listed in Australia's ups and downs. We have an overarching role in the ministerial office and we rely on information passed up by the department.

To answer your question, I do not follow every company's ups and down. We make decisions relating the best interests of the Northern Territory as we move forward.

Mr SMELT: Can you advise how much Nathan River Resources owes the NT Government in unpaid royalties, unpaid payroll tax and any other outstanding payments?

Mr MALEY: Those questions will have to be asked of the Treasurer.

Mr SMELT: As the mining department, you ...

Mr MALEY: Royalties go to the Treasurer, so you would have to ask that question of the Treasurer.

Mr SMELT: The Treasurer does not inform you of those aspects of your department?

Mr CHAIR: I will step in there, minister. We will keep questions to the relevant portfolio and not cross over between ministers.

Mr SMELT: You cannot advise of any other outstanding debts that NRR is carrying?

Mr MALEY: You would have to ask those questions of the Treasurer.

Mr TRIER: There is also some mining remediation levies. They are the responsibility of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

Mr SMELT: Not the mining department?

Mr TRIER: Not the mining department, the relevant department.

Mr SMELT: Can you enlighten us on other aspects? Can you advise how much workers, contractors, small businesses and traditional owners are out of pocket and what the NT Government is doing to support them to recoup those unpaid wages payments and superannuation?

Mr MALEY: Again, those questions are for the Treasurer. The CEO will give you some more information.

Mr TRIER: We are owed some rent and administration fees in the department. I apologise that I made an error there and missed that. There is an amount outstanding. At the point of going into administration; that was approximately \$45,000.

Mr SMELT: Do you have any comment on the out-of-pocket to workers, contractors, small business and traditional owners?

Mr CHAIR: I will step in. We will not ask the minister for opinions or unannounced comments or policy. You can ask what is currently policy—and its application.

Mr SMELT: Are you aware of these out-of-pocket liabilities to these stakeholders?

Mr MALEY: I am aware of what has been in the media cycle. I am disappointed that a private company has gone bankrupt, owing workers money and other outstanding debts to traditional owners or royalty. That is upsetting but we have to look at the big picture. It is a private company and Nathan River Resources has gone into administration.

I understand that there was a creditors meeting on 8 June. At that meeting the administrator would have worked out if there is any money available to pay those outstanding debts. If there is, it might be 50 cents in the dollar, or whatever it might be.

The work that you are talking about is ongoing and we do not know what the final outstanding debts will be because the administrator is working through its job to put the company into administration. I assume they will continue to work with what is left of that company and provide any money to the creditors at some rate, it could be 100% or 50% or one cent in the dollar.

We do not know but the work is ongoing now. Some questions you are asking are relevant because it affects Territorians, but we need to make sure that we let the process go to its full extent and creditors work out what they will do and how much money is paid back. We can then work out if there is any money outstanding.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, the minister has given figures that could be cents to the dollar. There is nothing this parliament would know about what that could be and those figures should not be taken. I ask the media not to repeat any figures from the minister.

Mr SMELT: You reflected on that creditors meeting, what is the role for you and your department following that meeting?

Mr MALEY: We now wait for the creditor to assess the information they obtained at that meeting and they will take their job seriously and do their job in relation to what they can do to sell Nathan River Resources. Can they find a new buyer or break down the company to sell. Those questions are for the administrator.

Mr SMELT: Is the department doing anything at the moment to support the workers, contractors and traditional owners who are in this boat?

Mr MALEY: That is nothing to do with this department. Those questions are for other departments.

Mr SMELT: What is the quantum of the security bond the Northern Territory Government holds for Nathan River Resources, and will it cover those outstanding debts and probably the remediation costs in the future?

Mr TRIER: I will ask the Senior Executive Director to answer the question about the security bond in a sec.

Security bond is about environmental securities and it is specifically to deal with the legacies of a mining operation at the point in time that something like this happens. Things that are outside of that, are those that are before the administrator and they go through the administration processes as just identified. I will hand over to Scott Robinson.

Mr ROBERTSON: I apologise. The security bond sits with the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. We do not have that figure.

Mr SMELT: Would this crucial information also be held by the department?

Mr MALEY: No. It is held by the Minister of Lands, Planning and Environment.

Mr SMELT: As the Mining minister, when you are undertaking your duties and exercising your powers, you do not have oversight of what the bond is held?

Mr MALEY: I do not have oversight of what other departments manage. You will have to ask the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment that question.

Mr TRIER: Sometimes there is a misunderstanding which is that the Department of Mining and Energy has the name 'mines' and we have a very strong—the minister is very passionate about mines. Our administrative role relates to administering tenure. We have a project facilitation role. Environmental matters for mining sit with the department of Environment.

Mr SMELT: Can you tell us how you coordinate—we heard yesterday and again today that you have a silo-approach to your departments. Can you explain how often do you catch up with the Lands, Planning and Environment minister to have these kinds of discussions?

Mr CHAIR: I will come back to multiple previous rulings that we will not summarise the words of any witnesses.

Mr SMELT: Do you want me to restate the question?

Mr CHAIR: Yes.

Mr SMELT: When was the last time you met with the Lands, Planning and Environment minister to discuss issues like the environmental remediation bonds?

Mr MALEY: Cabinet meets regularly. We discuss a whole range of issues at Cabinet. We meet on a regular basis.

Mr SMELT: Do you meet outside of Cabinet to discuss with your colleagues on these overlapping responsibilities?

Mr MALEY: We meet on a range of issues. Cabinet is where decisions are made in relation to ministerials and decisions of government. I will stick to Cabinet meets regularly and we discuss all matters relevant to the operation of government and Cabinet.

Mr SMELT: At government, you have to make decisions on the agenda of the day. Do you have any other structures, working groups and the like where you get together and coordinate on these issues?

Mr MALEY: There is a range of subcabinet meetings. There is also a range of meetings between ministers and departments on various matters as required from time to time.

Mr SMELT: Is this issue of Nathan River Resources being discussed in Cabinet?

Mr MALEY: That is a Cabinet commercial in confidence and I will not discuss what happens in Cabinet.

Mr SMELT: Why was Nathan River Resources allowed to keep operating as a fit and proper person for months after these serious allegations were raised regarding financial mismanagement concerns at the mine?

Mr MALEY: (inaudible)

Mr SMELT: Sorry I missed that. Why was the Nathan River Resources allowed to keep operating as a fit and proper person for months after these serious concerns were raised last year?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: There is always a balance or a judgement here of where a mine continues to operate and when it goes through difficult times. It is difficult to make a call that a mining operation should cease. Even major mines go through issues from time to time. It is a difficult thing. Businesses right through industry have good times and some fail. It is not for government to step in when an industry or a business is having a hard time. Our role is to deal with our regulatory or administrative responsibilities.

Mr SMELT: In terms of monitoring and mapping the ups and downs, what steps did you take in this specific situation with Nathan River Mines?

Mr MALEY: I do not follow each company that operates in the Northern Territory individually. We operate as whole-of-government decisions. That is where we maintain our Cabinet meetings. The decisions we make are whole-of-government.

Mr SMELT: What are the eight remediation projects being progressed by the mining and development division? What is the timeframe for completing these works?

Mr MALEY: Do you want the nine projects listed?

Mr SMELT: I had eight, but if there are nine.

Mr MALEY: We will take that on notice. We have some overarching information regarding the mine remediation fund. If you want the list, we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.3

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

Mr SMELT: What are the eight or nine remediation projects being progressed by the mining development division and what is the time frame for completing these works?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.3.

Mr MALEY: Can we go back to the question about the environmental bond. Can we take that on notice as well so we can get the information to you? We think we can but we want a bit of time.

Question on Notice No 3.4

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

Mr SMELT: What is the quantum of the security bond the NT Government holds for Nathan River Resources and will it cover outstanding debts?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.4.

Mr SMELT: What remediation projects are planned but not yet under way?

Mr MALEY: That is a forward looking question. We are talking about last budget or this budget so that question is outside the scope of the committee.

Mr SMELT: There is nothing on the register now?

Mr CHAIR: I can clarify this point. The Member for Nightcliff can ask about anything current, just not for any new announcements or new or changing policy.

Mr MALEY: We will give you a list of what we have now. I can get Alister Trier, the CEO, to answer that question.

Mr TRIER: The main projects we are working on are Rum Jungle. That has a number of years to run. Sandy Flat is also a significant project with a number of years to run. We have a range of projects, both in the Alice Springs region and the Tennant Creek region. They are to deal with legacy mine sites.

The Alice Springs and Tennant Creek are more focused on mining shafts and those sorts of things which present a danger to the public. Sandy Flats and Rum Jungle are more focused on environmental legacy issues.

Mr SMELT: How much funding is in the mining remediation fund?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Joanna. She is the Chief Financial Officer and is able to give you that information.

Ms FRANKENFELD: As of 31 March 2026, the balance of the fund was \$113.3m.

Mr SMELT: Is that \$113.3m adequate for the remediation projects under way?

Mr CHAIR: I ask that you rephrase that so it is not an opinion.

Mr SMELT: Is the \$113.3m for the mining remediation fund adequate to cover the projects that are currently under way?

Mr MALEY: That is what is in the fund at the moment. Industry pays into that fund. In an ideal world we would like to fix every mining problem in the Northern Territory, but we are constrained with our budget. We have \$113.3m and that is what we will use to remediate these mines as we move forward in the Territory.

I will get the CEO to add a bit more as well.

Mr TRIER: The way that MRF, the mining remediation fund, operates is basically using the interest of the fund as the operational money. As the fund accrues value, so does the interest and it has more funds available. It is an agreed process with industry on how to fund a legacy program going forward. They are supportive of this process.

Mr MALEY: The interest earned from the fund in the financial year to 31 March was \$3m.

Mr SMELT: How much will it cost for the Rum Jungle remediation?

Mr MALEY: That is separate to this fund ...

Mr SMELT: That is not funded out of that?

Mr MALEY: It is not funded out of this one, no.

Mr SMELT: We talked about some of the specific projects. Are you confident in the adequacy of this fund going forward?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr KERLE: Growing up in Batchelor I have an interest in the legacy mine remediation close to Rum Jungle which you mentioned before. There is a number of legacy mines that require remediation works. Can you provide some information as to what work has been done?

Mr MALEY: Is that to Rum Jungle?

Mr KERLE: Just in general, but if you want to be specific about Rum Jungle, feel free.

Mr MALEY: I will talk about Rum Jungle to start with. Rum Jungle, for people who do not understand, is a former uranium mine developed by the Commonwealth Government in the 1980s with the NT in partnership, but it was generally a Commonwealth uranium mine.

The work there was done by the standard of the times; however, it does not meet current environmental rehabilitation expectations. The property is under land claim at the moment. Since 2009 the NT Government has, under the national partnership framework, been investigating the site and consulting with traditional owners to develop a rehabilitation strategy plan and construction design for the site.

I have been to that site and it is essentially the old mine and the ore pits beside it, but the mine is full of water and the top of the water—as they explained it to me—was okay, but as it becomes deeper they are not sure what could be in the water, so they need to treat the water. As they get deeper, to the bottom, the treatment, from my understanding, becomes more detailed. Once the mine is dewatered they will then push the ore back into it with lime—I think they told me—to neutralise anything. Once the mine is refilled with the ore—which is beside it; they will have to push it in from the top—they will then coat it off to seal that mine, adhering to the mine rehabilitation standards. That is in relation to Rum Jungle.

I turn to the small legacy mines. A tender for remediation works for the Alice Springs region—namely, the Harts Range and Arltunga areas—has been finalised and is expected to be advertised in quarter 3 of 2026.

A safety audit of the greater Alice Springs region—namely, the Huckitta and Illogwa areas—is complete and a work package is in preparation.

The safety audit for Pine Creek is complete. A study into threatened species—namely, the ghost bat—is underway to inform future works and planning in that region.

Audits have commenced at the Bonney Well and the Frew River areas. Audits are nearing completion in Katherine, following land access challenges.

Some key achievements for Sandy Flat are:

- award of the active water management tender, which is a \$10m three-year contract, supporting local industry participation, including establishment of a native title holder-led subcontracting business
- award of ecology contracts with direct involvement of landholder stakeholders, including native title holders and pastoralists
- completion of a comprehensive water management plan, providing a scientifically robust integrated program to manage site water risks
- advertising a tender for temporary camp accommodation, which is critical to establishing a safe work camp
- active environmental risk reduction, including return of approximately 20 megalitres of contaminated water into the Sandy Flat pit to limit ongoing run-offs.

Mr CHAIR: Can we have it concise? We will go to a toilet break shortly, minister.

Mr MALEY: I will leave it there.

Mr SMELT: Sustainable energy development was budgeted at \$13.346m in 2025–26 and now is only \$10.621m for 2026–27. Which sustainable energy projects have been delayed, reduced or abandoned with this budget reduction?

Mr MALEY: Regarding the \$2.8m variation, a revised budget figure is a result of reprioritising the 2025–26 budget to the outer years to better align with the work program for the government’s refresh priorities of the Darwin Energy Hub and remote power for Indigenous community programs. We have spread it out because it will not be done in one year, and we will spread it out because the energy hub is an ongoing project.

As the Member for Arafura would know, the remote power project for Indigenous communities is a program for more than 54 communities that are run on diesel power. We are trying to make up a hybrid system to reduce the reliance on diesel for those communities. That will not happen in one year, so it has been spread out over to better align with the program because otherwise it will be a revote, I imagine. These programs will continue. Unlike the previous Labor government that would revoke it and revoke it, we are spreading it out to more align with what will happen with the program.

Mr SMELT: Why have these timelines been revised?

Mr MALEY: These projects will not get done in one year.

Mr SMELT: I have no expectation that it will be done in one year, but why have they been pushed out?

Mr MALEY: The previous Labor government would program these things to happen in one year which will not happen. In reality, these programs take time. Instead of like the previous Labor government—so that they could put a media release out about how good their infrastructure program was—we put it out to reflect what will happen in the real world because these programs will take some time and spread over outer years to complete.

Mr SMELT: Emission reduction through industry development falls ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, if we are changing the line of questions we will take a break. We will take a five-minute break, and we will return at 11.43 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: We are here with the Minister for Mining and Energy and the Minister for Renewals. We are on questions related to the opening statement.

Mr SMELT: Minister, emission reduction through industry development falls from \$750,000 to \$320,000 in this budget. Why is that being cut in half?

Mr MALEY: Can you give us some more information in relation to that? I think everyone is confused where that has come from.

Mr SMELT: I do not have my budget papers on me; ‘emission reduction through industry development’ is the title.

Mr MALEY: I will pass that over to James Pratt, he might be able to give you some answers on that question.

Mr PRATT: I will repeat the label of it, as it is a bit confusing. That is why everyone was scrambling. The ‘emissions reduction through industry development’ was money granted to look at an onshore carbon capture storage framework for the Northern Territory. That involves some funding for policy development and Northern Territory Geological Survey, who were also looking at basin suitability for that activity. The money has been pushed out into different years—a bit like your responsibility from the minister about putting money into additional financial years to ensure programs are delivered. That funding will be completely expended in the coming financial year.

J DAVIS: What are the NT’s emissions in the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: That is for Environment department; it is not to do with our department.

J DAVIS: As Energy minister, do you not know what the Northern Territory’s emissions are?

Mr MALEY: I said that is a question for the minister for Environment.

Mr SMELT: Will the program finish in 2026–27?

Mr PRATT: Yes. The money that has been granted thus far from the Northern Territory Government will be expended in the coming financial year.

Mr SMELT: Can you table a list of sustainable energy projects that are in the budget, with the original allocation, current allocation and date for completion?

Mr MALEY: We will not have the date for completion, so we will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.5

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

Mr SMELT: Will you table a list of sustainable energy projects in the budget, with original allocation, current allocation and date for completion?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.5.

Mr MALEY: We will answer to the best of our ability the dates for completion. We will give as much information as we can. If you need some more we can follow up after that. We will do our best to answer that, yes.

Mr CHAIR: Do you accept that note, Member for Nightcliff?

Mr SMELT: Yes.

Mr SMELT: Can you provide an update, including timelines, for the Darwin Energy Hub?

Mr MALEY: Our government is committed to delivering secure reliable electricity at the lowest cost to Territorians. The Darwin–Katherine electricity grid will require substantial investment in generation, storage and transmission infrastructure over the coming years to support increasing demand and the progressive retirement of ageing thermal generators.

Historical large-scale generation in the NT has largely occurred through a fragmented project-by-project development, creating challenges for systems and things not working together. The Darwin Energy Hub has been developed by the NT Government to facilitate a project to support coordinated generation, storage and transmission infrastructure while improving certainty and supporting future electricity requirements.

What we are trying to do with the Energy Hub is make sure that area is available to secure our electricity. The electricity under the previous Labor government was going up and down and there was an unsecure grid. The Darwin Energy Hub will be developed to help us secure that grid to provide secure and reliable electricity.

The hub development will produce between 180 and 210 megawatts of large-scale solar generation, with approximately 100 megawatts of capacity and the connecting infrastructure to help our government provide lower sustainable costs and reliable systems for the Territory.

Mr SMELT: Could we go to the timelines?

Mr MALEY: The next step is we are applying for a non-claimant for native title. There is no active native title claim over the area—I am not sure if you are aware, the A for the Larrakia; Part B was withdrawn. We are making sure we deal with the native title by making a non-complainant application to give certainty to people who will invest. It will clarify if native title exists and if it does, who are the native title owners. That is going through the process at the moment.

Commercialisation, what will be built there, how it will be built and what it will look like. We are trying to work that out. Once all that information is put together, that decision will go to Cabinet because I imagine there will be different variations of power. As we move forward to work out exactly what 200 megawatts is exactly what the connections look like. I will ask Anne to give more explanation about that.

Ms TAN: In terms of the Darwin Energy Hub, it forms part of the government's broader electricity market performance. As the minister has pointed out, we have undertaken a significant level of de-risking activities associated with the hub. That is to prepare the hub for what potentially the future investment plan for the Darwin-Katherine electricity system could look like.

In terms of what we have undertaken to date:

- sought Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority clearances
- secured the authority certificates
- submitted an environmental referral for the project
- received environmental approval late last year
- completed 30% concept design for the network connection infrastructure, which is a critical piece of being able to connect that site to the Darwin-Katherine electricity system
- secured a level of Commonwealth Government funding under Rewiring the Nation to enable that project to proceed—the network connection infrastructure piece.

As the minister has indicated, we are in the midst of seeking to resolve native title issues that might arise associated with that site. There is then a significant level of work that needs to go into access and planning for how the site could be structured. The existing thinking is that it could accommodate up to 210 megawatts of solar capacity. The decision around how that solar capacity will be delivered has not yet been made. That will be contingent on the electricity system plan which is being developed for the Darwin-Katherine region. That plan will dictate how the DEH is ultimately delivered and therefore what the timeframes associated for delivery will look like.

Mr SMELT: Is that system plan available?

Ms TAN: The plan is currently being worked through. The expectation is that it should be available later this calendar year.

Mr SMELT: In terms of the timelines with the native title processes, when do you expect this could potentially be operating?

Mr MALEY: That is a hypothetical question because there are so many variables. We are working to make sure that the area of land becomes available as soon as possible. We want to ensure that we have the low cost unreliable energy and the energy hub will be part of that mix to ensure energy for the Darwin-Katherine connection.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.3

The nine remediation projects are Rum Jungle, Sandy Flat, Alice Springs Small Mines Safety Program, Huktitta Small Mines Safety Program, Mount Bonnie, Goodall, Katherine Small Mines Safety Program and Pine Creek Small Mines Safety Program. The timeframes range from approximately one year up to the long-term projects, depending on land council approvals, APR and climate restraints.

Answer to Question on Notice 3.4

Mr MALEY: The quantum of the security bond was \$6,287,010. That figure is publicly available if you need to look for it.

Mr SMELT: Can you give us a timeline, if not for operational—we have the system planned by the end of the year. Can you give us any other timeline points for this project?

Mr MALEY: No, I cannot.

Mr SMELT: We are seeing more extreme hot days as a result of climate change, causing more power outages in remote communities. Many elderly and vulnerable Territorians are impacted by this. The remote power system strategy aims to transition 72 remote communities from diesel-dependent power to 70% renewable by 2030. Why is there only \$1.3m in the budget to progress this remote power strategy?

Mr MALEY: This is a strategy where we have climate restraints relating to Wet and Dry Seasons. We are trying to get this program spread out to where it can be delivered, unlike the previous Labor government which would put all the money up-front in the budget so that it could say, 'We are spending X amount of money', knowing full well it could never spend it in that year and it would go to revoke and through.

We understand there is a problem. We are working towards it. The rest of the question may be to the Essential Services minister.

I will give you some further information from the CEO.

Mr TRIER: I will pass to Anne Tan shortly. The money that is set aside for this year is for planning and designing the program. It is an adequate allocation for that. From there it goes into understanding funding sources and where they might be found and applied.

I will check with Anne that I have not missed anything.

Ms TAN: The project, which is now called the remote power for Indigenous communities project, is not funded. It has never been funded. RPSS, which was the inception of the project under the previous government, was not funded either. The funding that we have in the budget is to develop the project. It is operational funding, not capital funding for project delivery. We recognise that because the project is unfunded there will be a need to secure funding sources. Conversations with the Commonwealth Government, particularly CEFC, are proceeding.

Mr SMELT: Can you provide a timeline of when that planning project—the \$1.3m—will be complete?

Mr MALEY: Remember, we are talking about this budget in the future. We have said that it will be done this year, so the answer is this year.

Mr SMELT: What is your government doing to get more solar power installed on public housing and reduce costs to tenants and support the transition to renewables?

Mr MALEY: We have had our battery program, which is now finished—an uptake of that. The Home and Business Battery Scheme commenced on 1 December 2024 and closed in June 2025. We doubled the grant from \$5,000. The previous Labor government dropped it from \$6,000. It was talking about how good its program was, but it cut the funding to that. We increased it to \$12,000, and we doubled the pool from \$3m to \$6m.

Mr SMELT: We are talking about public housing.

Mr MALEY: You asked the first part of the question—I am answering that—about solar panels and rooftops. I will answer that question and then we will move to that solar in a minute.

We doubled the pool from \$3m to 6m to encourage more solar panels on rooftops in the Territory. There were 577 homes and 18 businesses supported in that program. Over 11 megawatts of batteries were installed. The average size increased from 13.4 up to 19.6. The home battery scheme was successful.

The federal government has its own scheme, and \$350,000 has been spent in the Northern Territory off the federal Labor government scheme. You could ask your colleagues how their program is going. We do not have the details of that because it is a Labor program.

In relation to public housing—I will pass to the CEO.

Mr TRIER: The previous question around the remote indigenous power program—there is a lot of focus on public housing as a part of that program. I will go back to Anne Tan for the detail on that.

Ms TAN: We do not have a specific funding program for public housing. The programs that the Northern Territory has put in place are for battery schemes that apply across Housing. In terms of public housing and solar on rooftops for public housing, that is probably a question that is better being referred to the department of Housing in terms of their infrastructure development projects.

Mr SMELT: From a Mining and Energy point of view, there is no focus on renewables for public housing?

Mr MALEY: On public housing, yes. We have talked about the Indigenous power program. That is part of—they are all public houses. We have a program which will increase that.

Mr SMELT: The federal government has funded 16 community batteries on the Darwin–Katherine grid. Where are they being installed, and what is the timeframe for their delivery?

Mr MALEY: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.6

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

Mr SMELT: The federal government has funded 16 community batteries on the Darwin–Katherine grid. Where are they being installed, and what is the timeframe for delivery of this work?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: I accept the question.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.6

Mr MALEY: You might get one in Nightcliff—election commitment.

Mr SMELT: Have you been reading my questions?

Nightcliff has the highest uptake of renewable energy. Will you commit to a community battery for the electorate of Nightcliff?

Mr CHAIR: We cannot ask the minister to commit to government policy.

Mr SMELT: Do you ever plan for a community battery for Nightcliff?

Mr MALEY: We plan to make sure the Territory has a secure, reliable power system, and we will do whatever it takes to make sure that happens. If that ever falls into the plan—which is unlikely at this stage because we do not focus on one area; we focus on governing the whole of the Territory, unlike some people. We are focused on making sure that the Territory is a better place.

J DAVIS: Following up on my question earlier about emissions, I think you said that this is the responsibility of the Environment minister. Does your department have emissions information?

Mr MALEY: No, I think you need to ask that question of the Environment minister.

J DAVIS: I am not asking about the emissions; I am asking whether your department has access to them?

Mr MALEY: No.

J DAVIS: If not, as the minister for sustainable energy development, how are you making energy decisions without taking that into account?

Mr MALEY: We will go back to our government policy of lowest-cost reliable energy and do whatever it takes to make sure that Territorians get that low-cost reliable energy, no matter where they live.

J DAVIS: You do not consider emissions information when you are making those decisions?

Mr MALEY: We consider secure, reliable, cheap energy.

J DAVIS: Do you also consider emissions information?

Mr MALEY: We consider all the factors in relation to making sure we do have our low-cost, reliable energy.

J DAVIS: It is a simple yes or no question. Do you consider emissions information?

Mr CHAIR: We cannot direct the minister on how he responds. The minister gave his answer.

J DAVIS: I will take that as a no.

Can you provide a breakdown of the Northern Territory's energy use, providing a percentage of gas, renewables and oil?

Mr MALEY: For the period 30 December 2024 to 28 December 2025: fossil fuel, 75.5%; biomass, 0.3%; solar, 14.2%; utility solar, 5.1%; and steam, 4.8%.

J DAVIS: Is that the most recent figures you have?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: What was the total gas and royalty revenue collected by the Northern Territory Government in the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: That is a Treasury question in relation to royalty. The Treasurer could answer that question.

J DAVIS: In your annual report we see that there was a \$1.8m concessional payment made to INPEX. Can you explain what the payment was? It is on page 31.

Mr MALEY: I will ask the CEO to answer that question.

Mr PRATT: Historically, the Northern Territory Government had an arrangement with INPEX where it makes a concessional payment for—I will call them boats—the fleet of boats coming in and out of the harbour. When INPEX does a shutdown and repairs and maintenance, the number of boats increases. When they are doing their normal duties and exporting LNG, that number is much lower. This has been in place since the commencement of INPEX in operation, so many years. Government pays a concessional payment to INPEX to assist with the cost of utilising the harbour, hence the name 'concessional payment'.

J DAVIS: In plain terms, that is a subsidy to INPEX.

Mr PRATT: I will call it a concessional payment.

J DAVIS: What is the total value of everything that we are giving the gas industry, whether it is cash, roads, pipelines or land?

Mr PRATT: Member for Johnston, can you repeat your question, please?

J DAVIS: What is the total value of what the Northern Territory taxpayer is giving to the gas industry, whether it is cash, roads, boats, pipelines or land?

Mr PRATT: It is an interesting question, but I cannot speak for the Northern Territory Government as a whole because I can only speak for the portfolios relevant to us here at the table.

The Department of Mining and Energy does not give the gas industry any money. It raises its own funds to deliver pipelines, wells et cetera. The creation of roads sits with another department, so I cannot answer that.

You mentioned the development of pipelines. The Northern Territory Government does not contribute any cash to industry to develop pipelines. Again, they raise their own funds to do that.

J DAVIS: Where would you categorise a payment like the concessional payment for boats?

Mr PRATT: That has been a contract in place since INPEX commenced in 2012. I am not at liberty to say why that was commenced. I was not involved with the process. However, government works with INPEX to

assist with projects. If there has been an agreement put in place around concessional payments for use of harbours, that is a matter for the Northern Territory Government.

I cannot answer your question; I am sorry.

J DAVIS: How many individual people are employed by gas extraction companies in the Northern Territory? To be clear, I am not asking for FTE jobs, job years or mining combined with gas; I want to know specifically how many individual people are employed in the gas industry.

Mr MALEY: That is a hypothetical question. We cannot answer that because you are talking about the 'gas industry', so if you are a welder and you have 50 people welding out there, is that included? Are you talking about the gas companies? Are you talking about the people who supply the toilet paper to the gas industry? That is a question which is, in my view, impossible to answer because it is so broad. You could literally have thousands and thousands of people employed by the gas industry or you could have one person employed by the gas industry.

There is a gas industry in the Northern Territory, and we will try to promote it. There are supply chains that supply work with the gas industry. I have talked with mechanics; welders; plant operators; people who supply plant machinery, toilet paper, cleaning products, demountables to the work camps and fuel; people who grade the road; and people who operate the roadhouses that the gas companies use to put up their workers—literally thousands of people are involved in the gas industry.

J DAVIS: I am interested in everyone who is specifically employed, not one-off contractors. Is that a figure you have? You frequently quote how this industry is bringing so much employment to the Northern Territory.

Mr MALEY: This is a hypothetical question ...

J DAVIS: It is not hypothetical, minister.

Mr MALEY: You have to be able to talk to the gas industry. I do not get invited to their board meetings, so I do not know their staffing numbers.

J DAVIS: I have research figures that say it employs less than 1% of the Northern Territory workforce; do you dispute that?

Mr MALEY: I will not answer that question; it is hypothetical.

Mr CHAIR: We are going into opinions on those facts.

J DAVIS: It is my understanding that your government has recently entered into a number of gas supply agreements with Beetaloo gas frackers. Can you provide information on how much money those contracts were?

Mr MALEY: They are contracts from the previous government and are not in the reporting period, and in Treasury. You need to ask Labor because they did.

J DAVIS: Is there no information available on the amount of money in those contracts from you?

Mr MALEY: You need to talk to Treasury.

J DAVIS: Understood, thank you.

Mr PATEL: Can you provide an example of support the government is providing to sustainable energy development in the Northern Territory?

Mr MALEY: We spoke about the Energy Hub. That will be an area of land which is in Weddell south of Darwin. It will have 200-odd megawatts of solar-type generation, and we are keen to progress that.

Sustainable energy will be part of the energy mix; there is no question about that. There is also a number of solar panels on roofs. I spoke about our battery scheme earlier and how we have put \$12m into the batteries for people to connect off the grid, where they use the solar panels during the day and their batteries at night to allow them to reduce their cost of energy.

The Energy Hub is a great idea, as well as the power plant process we spoke about where we will reduce the reliance on diesel across 54 Aboriginal communities. That is in the planning process. We are keen to progress that.

We have supported the SunCable project in the Barkly, helping them to execute their land use agreement. I have met with them on a number of occasions, and we are working with them to strengthen the project across the Northern Territory. We supported the Wak Wak solar people, TE H2, progressing their environmental referral submission. I have spoken to the Wak Wak people and got a briefing of what their plan is. Essentially, they will put some solar panels near Townend Road in the rural area and will bring that power up to our Territory network. It will be available for connection if they find a buyer or client to sell the power to. Energy North will commence preparation for primary approvals for the project area, including early consideration of key stakeholders.

These represent an important step forward for securing future investment by improving those projects and having them ready with fast-track approvals to help them get those projects up and running.

Mr PATEL: Could you explain how the department ensures proper compliance and monitoring within our mining and energy sector.

Mr MALEY: It is a great, detailed question. I will go to James Pratt as he has a great understanding exactly how that works. Compliance is important for me as the minister. I have spoken to many of those mining companies, and I was surprised at how seriously they take compliance, environmental issues and workplace safety. They place a lot of emphasis on keeping their workers and environment safe because they want their mine and social licence to continue. They work hard in relation to that.

Mr PRATT: I want to be clear up-front that the agency's responsibilities for regulating is not related to environmental matters for both the mining side of things under Scott and the energy side of things. Those functions were transferred to the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment several years ago respectively.

Our responsibility for compliance and monitoring starts with tenure. For mining and energy, we issue tenure to companies to allow them exclusive access as a company to go on and undertake exploration and ultimately production. Our responsibilities for compliance and monitoring in the energy development space also extends to land access agreements, well operation management plans, well integrity reservoir management and resource recovery.

We have a range of officers who are trained and certified in compliance and monitoring, legal officers who provide advice in regard to us upholding our responsibilities and ensuring companies do the right thing.

J DAVIS: Has your department signed any contracts in the reporting period with any Beetaloo fracking companies?

Mr MALEY: No.

J DAVIS: Following on from an earlier question by the Member for Nightcliff, does the department undertake climate risk assessments when evaluating major mining gas or energy projects?

Mr MALEY: Our department operates within the framework of the mining legislation. We manage what we manage in the mining. I will ask James to expand on that.

Mr PRATT: In short, no. The environmental management functions sit with the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. When a mining or gas company puts in an application to develop a mine or gas field or do exploration, the environmental risks that they have identified, and how they mitigate those, are assessed and considered by the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment and the respective minister makes the decision whether to grant those activities approval or not.

J DAVIS: Similar to my question in the previous portfolio, you are the minister for sustainable energy development—is that the title?

Mr MALEY: Renewables.

J DAVIS: Renewables, sorry, energy development. At the end of the day, for these types of questions, do you have the final call or does it sit with another department?

Mr MALEY: Cabinet has the final call.

J DAVIS: We will find out what happens then in 30 years. Is that correct? That is a question ...

Mr MALEY: Oh, sorry.

J DAVIS: What is the time frame for Cabinet discussions to become public?

Mr MALEY: Thirty years.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any further questions relating to the opening statement?

Mr SMELT: Picking up on the home battery scheme again. Why is this scheme being discontinued seeing it was incredibly popular and it provided great cost savings, cost-of-living relief to households and businesses to reduce the power bills and switch on more solar? Why has this been discontinued?

Mr MALEY: For two reasons. One that the federal government brought out its own scheme which was similar to that. You could apply under the federal scheme. I think \$350,000 of federal money has come into the Territory under the same battery, so we did not want to duplicate it.

The second thing is we are in the process of planning our cheap, affordable, reliable energy and to have secure energy. That word 'secure' is important. We do not want to put in more solar panels and more batteries, for example, when it works out they may or may not—I am not a scientist and I do not know; I am not an expert. While we are looking at the bigger picture here to make sure we give Territorians that cheap, reliable and affordable energy.

We are working on that plan at the moment. It includes the Darwin Energy Hub, looking at Wak Wak we just spoke about. It talks about how we can look at new batteries in Alice Springs or Tennant Creek. There are two batteries in Darwin. The second BESS will build into the Darwin–Katherine network. We are looking at the big picture of having some emergency planning. As well, the NTESMO group has come out which will be a standalone department to have a look at the big picture here to make sure that, as we move forward, Territorians have that reliable, secure and affordable energy, not a piecemeal bit here and bit there to try to get a few votes or something—whatever you want to say.

We want to look at the big picture so all Territorians can benefit from that detailed planning into the future.

Mr SMELT: Batteries are a key part of that. What battery commitments do you currently have?

Mr MALEY: I will pass over to Anne Tan about that. We are doing a second big battery and there is also one in Alice Springs that is moving on as well. She will give some more details about that.

Ms TAN: At this stage, as previously discussed, we are preparing a whole-of-system plan. That is an investment plan for the Darwin–Katherine electricity system. However, what has been identified by the minister is urgent need for battery infrastructure to manage grid stability and security.

In that regard, Territory Generation has advanced processes to secure, at this stage, batteries in Alice Springs and Katherine. It will also be looking at a battery in the Darwin system. The first stage of that program is a 12 megawatt battery in Alice Springs. Territory Generation should be able to provide more information to the committee on that when they appear next week.

Mr SMELT: Retail electricity tariffs went from around \$166m in 2025–26 to more than \$224m in 2026–27—a massive \$58m increase. Surely incentivising more Territorians with solar power and batteries will reduce the need for these unsustainable increases in electricity tariffs?

Mr MALEY: Concerning the tariffs, you need to talk to the Treasurer about that. What we have just explained to you is we are looking at the big picture here to make sure that we get a secure, reliable and affordable energy system. We do not want to have a piece-meal attempt because the previous government did that. We are stepping back to make sure that we provide that whole system security, reliability and affordability for Territorian customers.

I will pass to the CEO to add more details.

Mr TRIER: Building on what the minister said, solar is an important part of the electricity mix but solar does fluctuate and you need to be able to manage that fluctuation. It is not as simple as just plugging more solar in and reducing the power. In terms of the strategic planning that the minister was talking to, and earlier about our planning to date, we need to understand what energy types we need—supporting reliability, supporting

mechanisms to sit beside it: that is batteries, synchrons and that sort of thing—where they are placed in a grid to provide the best effect. The third thing is the timing. As some assets change, what assets we replace them with—are they increased solar? Do we still need an underpinning thermal mix and what are the reliable mechanisms to sit beside those to ensure there is a consistent supply of electricity as day goes to night as we get monsoons and those sorts of things?

Mr MALEY: I can explain a bit further. If you have a 100 megawatts of solar, you essentially need 100 megawatts of thermal power sitting somewhere else to support fluctuations where there is cloud cover or a monsoon. The question is when you talk about affordability: 100 megawatts of solar is X amount of money; 100 megawatts of thermal is X amount of dollars, but can you run solar by itself? The answer is no; it needs to be firm.

Can you run diesel by itself or thermal? Yes you can, but it becomes expensive so we have to get the mix right to have the solar. Our power usage in Darwin changes a lot as well. In the Dry Season we do not use very much power. In fact, sometimes we have too much power. In the Wet Season and the Build-Up we use a lot of power. They are the factors that need to be considered. If you just say that we will go thermal; we will go solar or we will go wind, you need to mix it altogether because things have their ups and downs with pros and cons. Having one type of power is, in my view, not going to give us the reliability that we need. We need to have a mix to be able to deal with the seasons and, more importantly, the usage of power that Territorians use as it fluctuates. We do not have the same temperature every day, it changes a lot so we need to manage that.

Our system is getting old, and there is a lack of infrastructure spent for many years, because I think it might have been in the too-hard basket, but we are trying to ensure that, as we move forward, we stick with our policy because that is a reliable, secure power at an affordable cost to Territorians.

J DAVIS: Minister, does the department have modelling that shows that fossil fuels are the cheapest way to provide electricity in the Northern Territory?

Mr MALEY: I just said we need a mix of things here.

J DAVIS: Do you have modelling on the cost of those things.

Mr MALEY: Yes, I will pass to Anne.

Ms TAN: I think we have previously discussed the current process is taking a technology agnostic evidenced-based approach to determining the optimal mix of generation and storage infrastructure required to keep the grid secure, reliable and at its lowest sustainable cost. In terms of the modelling that has been undertaken, obviously the need to is to try and target all three of those government priorities and cost in one element of that but that then has to be balanced against security and reliability.

In terms of developing the whole of system planning, the exercise that is currently being undertaken, cost will be one consideration.

J DAVIS: When that plan is developed, will it be available to the public?

Ms TAN: Yes.

J DAVIS: Is there a timeframe for that?

Mr MALEY: I am not going to stick to time. We are in the process of doing it now. We are not going to be hurried. We are going to do it step by step. When it is ready; it will be ready.

J DAVIS: Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIR: We will now pause for lunch. The time is 12.30 and we will return at 1pm.

The committee suspended.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – MINING AND ENERGY
Output 3.1 – Northern Territory Geological Survey
Output 3.2 – Mining Development
Output 3.3 – Energy Development
Output 3.4 – Sustainable Energy Development
Output 3.5 – Beetaloo Project Management Office

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 4.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 4.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0. This concludes consideration of all outputs relating to Mining and Energy.

On behalf of the committee, I thank departmental officers for attending today.

Mr MALEY: I thank the department staff, not only the ones here but also the ones back at the office who all do the work behind it.

The Territory is the place where you can dare to dream. You can dream what you want to do and what you want to make it. The Territory is the place. The government wants to make those dreams come true.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank all the staff at the department for both coming here today and for the huge body of work that went into today from all department staff.

We will break for lunch and return at 1.05 pm.

The committee suspended.

CORRECTIONS

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the afternoon session of day 3 of Estimates.

Welcome to the Member for Gwoja as the shadow minister. It is your debut, I understand, for Estimates. Be gentle; unfortunately, the Chair has had to step back for some recovery.

Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Corrections to introduce the officials accompanying you, and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Corrections. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mr MALEY: I introduce Matthew Varley, Commissioner and CEO; Alecia Brimson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer; Kate Chambers, Acting Deputy Commissioner; Stephen Thacker, Chief Financial Officer; and Sasha Dennis, Deputy Commissioner. I have been joined by the senior staff here today, and other staff will join as required as we go through the questioning.

Corrections is an essential part of the Territory's law and order response. It also plays an important role in supporting the Territory's economy and helping restore the lifestyle Territorians deserve. When communities feel safe, people go to work, businesses invest, tourism grows and families get on with their lives. The focus is clear: a strong Corrections system that protects the community, holds offenders accountable and reduces reoffending.

When this government came to office the system was under pressure, with increasing prisoner numbers, workforce strain and growing operational demand. The work that followed was deliberate, strengthening the

legislation to hold offenders to account, stabilising the system, investing in the right infrastructure, strengthening the workforce and improving performance.

Today Corrections operates as a connected system—adult operations, Community Corrections and youth justice—that is now more stable, more structured and more focused on outcomes.

This year has been about stabilising and strengthening a system that was under significant pressure. We have moved Corrections from a reactive crisis response to a more structured, modern and outcome-focused system. This is a system that is now more stable, better coordinated and delivering more consistent outcomes across custody and community.

I will give a practical example of what the system is delivering on the ground. Earlier this year when communities across the Territory were responding to severe weather and flooding, the department's community service work program stepped in to support recovery efforts across Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. Prisoner work crews were deployed to assist with the setup and operation of evacuation centres, clearing debris and restoring public spaces, and providing hands-on support to communities as they began to recover. This was practical visible work supporting Territorians when it mattered most, and that is not a one-off.

In the most recent quarter alone more than 24,000 hours of community work were delivered, generating over \$600,000 in value to the Territory economy. That work includes supporting vulnerable households, including pensioners and people with disability; maintaining community spaces; and contributing to essential services right across the Territory. It is about building work ethic and discipline, developing practical skills and ensuring offenders are actively contributing back to the community.

Importantly, it is not just about service delivery; this is about accountability in action and proof that this system is delivering practical value back to the community. This is what system reform looks like in practice—visible outcomes, a practical contribution and safer communities.

Rehabilitation is one of the clearest examples of that shift. We are not just doing more rehabilitation; we are doing it better. We are now seeing stronger outcomes, higher completion rates and more targeted intervention. Programs are now more targeted, more evidence based and more closely linked to reducing reoffending.

The 2026 budget reflects that shift will deliver even more positive outcomes. Total funding of \$524m supports adult operations, Community Corrections, youth justice, prisoner health services and corporate services. Over the past year there was a significant shift from operational demand towards stabilisation.

To date the infrastructure master plan has delivered 1,092 additional beds, with more planned through work camps in Darwin and Katherine.

Targeted operational changes, including custody and transport support from G4S, ensure officers are focused where they are most needed—inside facilities, maintaining safety and supporting rehabilitation. Importantly, this model is enabling a more sustainable workforce approach in supporting operational delivery while longer-term arrangements are considered.

In practical terms, thousands of prisoner movements are managed each year. Court custody and transport demands are being met reliably. Officers remain focused on safety, security and rehabilitation inside facilities. This includes returning additional police officers from Alice Springs Court back to the front line in Alice Springs where they are needed. The operational model is managing thousands of prisoner movements each year and returning correctional officers to the front line where they are most needed. Taken together, these changes are stabilising the system because a stronger front line means a stronger Corrections system.

The role of custodial operations is clear—keep prisons safe, protect staff and maintain order. There has been a deliberate operational shift, stabilising workforce, improving the employment of staff and strengthening the frontline presence.

There were 157 correctional officer commencements in this reporting period. The retention of uniformed cohort has grown beyond 90%. The system is more stable because the front line is more stable. Recruitment, retention and smarter deployment are ensuring officers are focused on core custodial work.

A key question people ask is whether enough is being done on programs. There has been a significant growth in delivery. More importantly, there has been a shift to better outcomes. Prisoners assessed for clinical

treatment programs increased from 30 in the previous year to 233, an increase of 640%. There were 98% of prisoners enrolled in these clinical programs who completed them successfully.

With a clear focus on family violence and remand prisoners, attendance at psycho-vocational programs increased by 47.2%. Rehabilitation is now not just a program; it is a coordinated system response spanning custody programs and reintegration.

The system is now structured around assessment, targeted intervention and rehabilitation pathways. This ensures intervention happens earlier and is matched to individual risk and need. This is supported by the rehabilitation and reintegration framework which embeds evidence-based programs, improves coordination across custody and community, strengthens outcomes tracking and focuses on reducing reoffending.

Programs are no longer standalone; they are part of a connected system response. This includes education and training, behaviour change programs, employment pathways and reintegration support. The focus is clear—practical targeted programs that change behaviour and reduce reoffending.

The answer is not just we are doing more; it is that we are doing it better with clearer outcomes.

There is more to do. We will continue to build on this progress. We are seeing a step change in both scale and effectiveness of rehabilitation across the system. In particular, this year has been focused on strengthening services for women in custody. This includes more targeted women-specific programs and more tailored support pathways that respond to the needs of women in the system. The work is improving engagement, strengthening rehabilitation outcomes and contributing to more stable and safe environments. This includes increased engagement in structured programs and more stable day-to-day custodial environments. It reflects a broader shift in ensuring the system is responsive to different cohorts and delivers more effective, targeted support.

We are building real pathways from custody to skills and from skills to jobs. This has been driven through a focus on correctional industries, skills development and employment pathways.

Participation in education and training has increased significantly, with engagement opportunities growing by 54% compared with the previous year. There were 1,190 prisoner engagements in education and training, up from 761 in the previous year, with 891 completions and an 83% completion rate.

In the last reporting period over 1,700 prisoner engagements in industry employment programs have been delivered, generating approximately \$2.7m in value to the community. This is not simply work activity; these programs are designed to build practical skills, work discipline and job readiness. Importantly, these efforts are now aligned to a more structured, system-wide approach—linking education, training and employment programs. Partnership is essential to this approach.

The Ready to Work program, delivered with Workskil Australia, is a key example. It begins in custody and continues post-release up until 12 months, ensuring support at the point when people are most at risk of reoffending. As of 31 March 2026, 165 referrals have been made, with individuals actively engaged in transitional planning. This is about connecting people to employment before they leave custody, not after. It reflects a broader shift from program delivery to end-to-end pathways from custody to community and into work. This creates continuous pathway from assessment to training, training to employment and then into the community.

Employment is one of the strongest factors in reducing reoffending. It builds ability, supports reintegration and reduces the likelihood of returning to custody. That is good for rehabilitation, for industry and for the community's safety.

Community Corrections is a key part of the departments approach to reducing offending and strengthening community safety. Across the NT, Community Corrections supervises 1,780 offenders. Some of them are transitioning from custody and back into the community. Others are being managed in a community to prevent escalation into the custodial system. The focus is on case management and behavioural change.

Officers work with communities, family, Aboriginal organisations and NGOs to provide coordinated support and supervision. The aim is to support the individuals to make better choices, stay connected to community and avoid behaviours that lead to further reoffending. This is about intervention at the right point in the system, not just enforcement. This is about enforcing accountability in the community, not just managing it. Compliance tools support this work; they are not the centre of it.

Random breath testing, urine testing and electronic monitoring are used where appropriate to enforce accountability and community safety. Electronic monitoring continues to expand, with 827 individuals monitored, which is up from 718 in the previous year, and 578 are supervised through Community Corrections. Importantly, completion of supervised Community Corrections orders was (inaudible) against the target of 70% between July 1 2025 and 30 March 2026, reinforcing accountability in the community. By supporting people to stabilise, reconnect and rebuild, Community Corrections strengthens community safety, reduces the future demand on custodial system and improves long-term outcomes.

In youth justice we are intervening earlier and more effectively. This reflects the system focus on early intervention, structured support and preventing escalation. Youth justice must be firm and effective; it must protect the community, and it must intervene early to prevent escalation into more serious offending. Over the past year there has been a strong focus on target intervention, structured programs and rehabilitation pathways that address the causes of offending behaviour. Diversion pathways have been strengthened, ensuring more young people are redirected from the formal justice system and into supports that address underlying drivers of offending.

Bail support services have expanded, providing structured supervision and stability at a crucial intervention point. Regarding this, 132 young people have been supported, with more than 5,400 bed nights and 67 successful exits. Youth bootcamps continue to be a key behavioural-change intervention. There is \$2.2m invested, 20 camps delivered and 80 young people who participated. The intention across the community of both programs—there is increased focus on education and training, structured daily routines, therapeutic sport and reintegration planning from the earliest point. This reflects the system that is shifting from reactive to structured intervention, to rehabilitation and reintegration that reduces offending.

Preventing youth offenders from becoming adult offenders reduces crime and long-term prison demand, improves life outcomes and strengthens community safety. This is about reducing escalation and stopping youth offending from becoming adult offending.

Corrections is now more stable, structured and outcome focused. That is making a real difference to community safety. The focus remains on stronger safety, stronger accountability and reduced offending.

Stability is being driven by a stringer workforce capability, more effective programs and better targeted interventions across the system. Work is delivered by staff in demanding environments every day. Their professionalism is recognised and their work is making a real difference to community safety. A big shout-out goes to the staff because the work they do—not just the people here but also the people behind the scenes—sometimes goes unnoticed. I put on the record that I thank everyone for the work they do in Corrections, whether frontline or admin.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, minister, and may I say you took 14 minutes, so I did not get to ring the bell, unfortunately.

Mr MALEY: I thought I heard the bell ringing.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: No.

Just as a reminder, the order of questioning is I will refer to the shadow minister first. Then we will go to the crossbenchers, the other committee members and any other members after that.

Are there any questions on the minister's statement? Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: Could you confirm the current number of people inside the Northern Territory correctional system today, a breakdown by prison number and by those in Community Corrections?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the commissioner for that information.

Mr VARLEY: Today we have 2,772 in Corrections custody. Broken down by site it is: Darwin correctional precinct, 1,263; Alice Springs correctional precinct, 784; Berrimah correctional centre, 584; Barkly Work Camp, 70; Batchelor Work Camp, 49; Darwin transitional custody centre, 17; and two in hospital in Darwin.

Mr PAECH: What about Community Corrections?

Mr VARLEY: I do not have today's number in Community Corrections, but the average number of people under supervision is about 1,850.

Mr PAECH: Of your current number, what is the current rate of recidivism across Northern Territory Corrections at the moment?

Mr VARLEY: As we all know, the recidivism rate is measured according to those national definitions under the Report on Government Services. From memory, the result for 2024–25 was 59.6% within two years.

Mr PAECH: What is the recidivism rate for children or youth in youth detention?

Mr VARLEY: I am sorry; I do not have that. I would have to take that question on notice.

Mr PAECH: To be clear, do you not monitor or have data on the youth recidivism rate?

Mr VARLEY: Not to the same level of metrics that we do for adults. The answer to that is the way in which the data is counted. I would also need to check and defer to my deputy commissioner, as there are some differences in the way our population in youth justice is managed and calculated. That also relates to the remand rates of children being higher.

Mr PAECH: Given we are talking about such a small number of people in the Territory, surely you would know when a young person has come back in within two years?

Mr VARLEY: I think we do not keep that data.

Mr PAECH: You do not keep the data.

Mr VARLEY: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: Does the data exist?

Ms DENNIS: In youth justice there is no national minimum standard or approach for recidivism. In the Northern Territory that is not possible at this time because the three systems of Odyssey for AGD, SerPro for Police and CARE for youth justice do not integrate. We are aware of young people when they return under community supervision or if they return to detention, but if they are not underneath the youth justice portfolio and they reoffend we do not know that they have continued to offend unless they come into our supervision, hence why we are unable to triangulate the data. The data exists but it exists in three separate systems. It is a piece of work that is being undertaken, but currently in the Northern Territory, as in many other states, it is not possible for youth justice.

Mr PAECH: Just to be clear, the data exists but is aggregated across three different systems. Someone could get that data to determine the recidivism rate for a young person in youth detention? Okay.

J DAVIS: To follow on from that, did you say that work is being done?

Ms DENNIS: Member for Johnston, that is correct at a national level and then it will come down into each jurisdiction.

J DAVIS: When will that happen?

Ms DENNIS: It has been underway for the past three years. It is quite difficult and complex, and each jurisdiction has a different recording methodology, which is why it is difficult to have one set algorithm to answer the question.

Mr PAECH: Minister, in 2024 you publicly stated that jailing was failing along with the Treasurer and me. Given that the recidivism rate is still so high, do you agree that jailing alone is failing, given those horrific recidivism rates?

Mr MALEY: What we know about putting people into custody is about putting someone into a prison cell like the previous Labor government did with no rehabilitation is failing. Putting someone in there and offering them skills, education, rehabilitation and reintegration is the key to break down and stop that reoffending.

As I said in my opening, there has been a lot of work done on rehabilitation, training, skills and reintegration. In fact, that is one of my main focuses. In the many times I have met with the people today, we always talk about how can we do that better; how can we make these young or adult offenders be less likely come back

to detention? It is a given, and I think everyone can agree that putting them in a cell and not doing anything is the worst possible outcome.

Offering rehabilitation, skills, integration and education is the key. That is why, as I read out those figures in my opening, those numbers are going up. They are going in the right direction because we, on this side of the government, are focused on increasing the education and training programs to break that cycle of reoffending to allow some of these people to go back into the community, no matter where it is, to have better lives and go back to being mums, dads, brothers and sisters to ensure the Territory is a safer place.

Mr PAECH: That is a great story, but you just said that you do not have any data on the youth justice recidivism rates. Can you identify a single new residential, rehabilitation or alternative-to-custody program that your government has delivered that has proven to be reducing recidivism in the Northern Territory?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the commissioner because I mentioned the work skills program and the reintegration program, and they are new programs. There is a range of programs. I am not sure how detailed you want; do you want us to go through each program we do?

Mr PAECH: No. I want you to tell me what programs are working and how you are determining that they are reducing recidivism.

Mr VARLEY: As we all know, the recidivism rate recorded nationally by the Australian Bureau of Statistics has not materially changed much over many years in the Northern Territory. It remains one of the things that is stubbornly high and is well beyond the national average. That is well recorded and is something that we have continued to focus on in Corrections over many years.

In fact, much of our reform for Corrections has been focused on trying to identify and ensure that our resources and our efforts are best directed to addressing the causes of offending and criminogenic factors that bring people to custody. It remains stubbornly high; there is no doubt about that, which is why we have done a substantial amount of work over the last 18 months through our rehabilitation and reintegration portfolio.

I am pleased that Deputy Commissioner Chambers is here; she has led that work over the last 18 months. She has done a lot of research and revision on what our rehabilitation framework should be, and I would happily talk to committee members about some of the work we are doing in terms of uplifting our program delivery and our psychoeducational capacity and our clinical treatment capacity. Also, I think a significant piece of work is being done to upgrade and expand our industry skills and employment work.

Mr PAECH: I am asking a question. I am asking for what new programs have the prison delivered that have proven track records to reduce recidivism?

Mr MALEY: Excuse me, Chair. We are answering the question. We were rudely interrupted. Can you please ensure that does not happen.

Mr ACTING DEPUTY CHAIR: I agree. Please let the commissioner finish the answer.

Mr PAECH: I am asking for him to be direct.

Mr MALEY: Throw him out.

Mr PAECH: No, you need to be quiet.

Mr ACTING DEPUTY CHAIR: Excuse me, Member for Gwoja. Can we respect, get the full answer, then you can have another question.

Mr PAECH: A point of order! Respect goes two ways. The Deputy Chief Minister is screaming to throw me out ...

Mr ACTING DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I know you want to get there and I want you to ask all the questions you want. You will direct questions through me and you will adhere to my rulings.

Mr PAECH: I am asking for your ruling on a point of order.

Mr ACTING DEPUTY CHAIR: I have said let the commissioner continue, uninterrupted.

Mr VARLEY: The best answer to your question, Member for Gwoja, is in two parts. We are delivering enhanced programs that you know well. We are grateful for your long-term support for many of those programs.

We are delivering new programs. Deputy Commissioner Chambers can talk to you about some of that new work we have been doing under the strategy.

The question in the second part, though, is are they proven to reduce recidivism. The answer to that is no. The reason for that is because our recidivism rate obviously remains stubbornly high. I cannot point to evidence that would answer your question. That is being perfectly frank. We all know that challenge.

The reason for that is there are many factors contributing to criminogenic offending. We are focused on ensuring that our programs are evaluated and delivered according to best practice. We have done some significant work on that, particularly in the family violence space.

The second part we are working on is ensuring that our entire rehabilitation framework and strategy, which incorporates not just programs but education, through-care services, post-release services and employment services, all stitched together in an effort to provide us, as Territorians, the most sophisticated model we can potentially deliver to hope and pray that people do not come back to prison.

That is not to say, though, that we are throwing resources into the wind. In fact, many of our programs—I will point to one in a moment—have been designed based on proven methodology that works interstate. We hope to replicate some of their success in reducing recidivism.

The best example I could point to on that is a piece of work I also know, Member for Gwoja, you have supported in the past. The work we are doing is supporting prisoners to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme. That is something we can all agree on is demonstrated, particularly in South Australia, to produce results that when we can engage people who have known and assessed disabilities to access the services they need when they exit custody, they are less likely to come back.

That has been demonstrated in South Australia. We have replicated our Northern Territory model based on that model and we hope to see some similarity in results. However, in that particular program it is too early.

I take your point. We are working to ensure that all of our efforts and resources that Deputy Commissioner Chambers and her team have at their disposal is targeted towards better outcomes for people when they exit custody.

I wish the recidivism rate was lower. We have to keep trying to reduce it. It is a stubborn, difficult and complex problem. It certainly does not mean we are not trying. There have been some marginal differences over time with the recidivism rate. The minister just reminded me that our ROGS data has demonstrated just under a 1% decline from 24 down to 25, where I said it was 59.5%. I misled you earlier when I said 59.6%

Mr KERLE: Chair, can I ask a follow-up question?

Mr PAECH: No, I have not finished my line of questioning.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Follow-up question is allowed, thank you.

Mr PAECH: I will remember that.

Mr KERLE: Given that we are talking about practical programs, would you outline to the committee—I understand there are few facilities around Palmerston and Yarrowonga that fit into this—practical skills programs, cultural and community activities and external partnerships that are currently being delivered in youth detention centres to support rehabilitation and reintegration.

Mr MALEY: I will pass down to Sasha to talk about what we are offering in relation to the young offenders. Under the previous government they were not given the support they needed. The programs that they were engaging in were extremely expensive. For example—the Member for Gwoja knows Back on Track quite well—that cost \$35m for 35 participants. We are not even sure if they passed or failed. That effectively \$1m per child.

We are now making sure that we support those young offenders better, giving them services that are actually needed to help them go out into the community and become better people. That is through these boot camps and programs which Sasha will talk about. We offer services to young offenders in an area where needed, targeted intervention. I mentioned it multiple times in my opening statement. We can agree that one size fits all, as the previous Labor government did, does not work. We are doing that targeted intervention to make these young offenders—youth, 18 and 19 years old—have a better opportunity to have the services they need to make their lives better and make better decisions as we move forward.

Ms DENNIS: The Department of Corrections has increased diversion pathways across the Northern Territory and the number of providers across each margin region. We have expanded bail support services, and our youth boot camps are also creating a clear, early intervention pathway that diverts young people from continuing to offend or increase the seriousness of their offences.

In 2025–26, 80 young people participated across 20 camps for youth boot camps. They are run out of the youth bail facilities and with external providers, but supported and young people are supervised by the bail support staff. That is the difference in terms of how we run these camps.

Seventy two of those 80 young people achieved successful outcomes and completed three to five day camp period. That provides us with a 90% success rate, since these camps commenced from 1 July 2025. Importantly, 66 of those participants were referred while they were on bail. That demonstrates that boot camps are also being used as an alternative to detention, which keeps the number of young people in detention down from what it would be if we did not have the bail support facilities or the youth boot camps.

In terms of the bail support facilities in Darwin, that program was operated from Yirra House. It has capacity for 16 young people depending on the cohort. If there is a female, it has capacity for 14 young people. Those young people all receive structured programs, continuation of their Throughcare Plan if they have been in detention, and also a focus on reintegration to community.

We have had 82 successful young people exit from bail support facilities. Those exits have included attendance at school, completion of bail conditions which may be community work programs, attendance at an alcohol or other drug program or cultural competency support programs.

We also ensure that while there are still incidents and breaches in our bail facilities, which is expected with the high-risk cohort, that we have risk escalation protocols and there are structured supports which have reduced the number of incidents in bail facilities in 2025–26 in comparison to 2024–25.

I would also like to state that the diversion pathways are a success. The new youth diversion program which replaced the previous 'Back on Track' that the minister referred to in community youth diversion, has significantly increased the number of young people on community youth diversion. There are 380 young people since 1 July 2025 who have been referred by police or courts to the youth diversion programs and of those programs we already have 130 young people successfully complete diversion. That is a huge success when we compare it to the previous program that we provided young people.

The strong focus is on early intervention in Tier 1 and Tier 2 and of those 380 young people who have been referred, we currently, as at today, have 144 still completing diversion. It is a huge success in the way that young people are completing supervised orders in community or participating in other programs linked across various agencies, such as the crossover support unit and circuit breaker in DCF.

Mr YOUNG: How many youth programs are currently funded in Wadeye and who are the providers?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Sasha Dennis to answer that question for you.

Mr YOUNG: Then I have just got a follow-up from this.

Mr PAECH: Then we are going back to me.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Sorry, no.

Mr PAECH: I have a lot of questions to ask you, so ...

Mr MALEY: I want the questions.

Mr PAECH: ... I do not want to miss out.

Mr MALEY: You could put them in writing.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: As I said ...

Mr PAECH: You could get your colleagues to ask outside of here.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Excuse me, Member for Gwoja, follow-up questions are allowed. I have just done the Member for Blain, I am doing the Member for Daly and then the Member for Johnston has indicated she would also like to ask a follow-up question. We will do that and then we will come back to you.

Mr PAECH: Yes, we are ready.

Ms DENNIS: In the Top End we provide youth diversion programs through Michael Coombes, who delivers programs in Milikapiti, Pirlangimpi, Wurrumiyanga ...

Mr YOUNG: It is just for Wadeye at the moment.

Ms DENNIS: That also provides support when Thamarrurr requires additional support when young people are transitioning across the West Daly region, so we also fund Thamarrurr to do youth diversion and Sentenced to a Skill.

Mr YOUNG: How many people have been referred to the Sentenced to a Skill program in Wadeye?

Ms DENNIS: In Wadeye there have been zero young people in Sentenced to a Skill as no young people have been sentenced that have come before the court.

Mr YOUNG: My understanding is that there have been no referrals through the court. The minister stated earlier that we are not just doing more rehabilitation; we are doing it better. How can you say that when we have not seen any referrals to a sentencing program in Wadeye alone?

Mr MALEY: I think you have to talk to the Attorney-General because the referral is by the court. If you want to ask the court about how many referrals they do, that is a matter for the court. I am not sure ...

Mr YOUNG: So are you wrong in your statement—your opening statement?

Mr MALEY: Can I finish?

I am not sure if you understand the separation of powers principle, but the courts have the right to make their own decisions and they infer orders and sentences that they see fit. You have to ask that question to the Attorney-General, who will probably say the same thing; that it is a question for the court.

Mr YOUNG: There have been no referrals to a rehabilitation program for young people in Wadeye ...

Mr MALEY: From the court.

Mr CHAIR: We will move on.

J DAVIS: This is probably a question for the deputy commissioner. You just talked about increased numbers of diversion. In the previous portfolio, in the budget, diversion events for youth has almost halved. How do those two figures fit together?

Ms DENNIS: Can you please repeat the question?

J DAVIS: It is in a different portfolio but it is related to diversion events—diversion events for youth; this is under Police. The target was 45%, it was then 27% and the target now is 30%. That is significantly lower. I heard you say that there is increased diversion happening. I had a question around that.

Ms DENNIS: Yes, I can explain that, thank you for clarifying.

From 4 September 2025 with the amendments to the *Youth Justice Act*, we opened further referral pathways for young people to commence diversion. Previously it was through section 38, which was through Police, but we also made amendments to section 64 so the courts can also refer to diversion; then through section 83, which could be compulsory diversion. It also increased because we have other referrals which may be from a local community or a local provider. We also made changes so that it was no longer voluntary, and that all young people and families participate with a local provider pending what their offence is—based on the tier. That is why there has been an increase. It may not be through Police, but through other pathway referrals that we created as part of the amendments to the Act.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up question about recidivism data. I think you referenced return to youth justice supervision. What is the data on that over the last 12 months? I understand that is meant to be reported to ROGS.

Ms DENNIS: That is correct. We report the data for young people who are under community supervision of the Department of Corrections. However, due to the inability in CARE for that to be verified, we are unable to report against the completion of community supervision. We monitor that, based off Excel spreadsheets and our involvement with young people. It is not an accurate number we would provide, but we see around 45% to 50% of all young people completing the community supervision.

We do not report on it in the Report on Government Services due to the inability in our reporting system. That, hopefully, will be addressed by the end of this year.

J DAVIS: Currently is any data provided to the Productivity Commission in relation to young people returning to prison or supervision within 12 months?

Ms DENNIS: No, we are unable to. As I said, our reporting system does not provide us that ability. It is something that is being worked on. Community youth justice supervision has not been reported to ROGS since March 2023 when we left the ION system and started using the CARE system.

Mr PAECH: My question is probably for your deputy commissioner. You spoke about the successful completion rate of your youth diversion programs. How many of those young children or youths who have done that program have since spent a night in detention?

Ms DENNIS: We are unable to provide you with that information. That is not data that we are able to triangulate.

Mr PAECH: The systems—one end would know that they are in and then another system would record that they have been. I want to understand. You talked about your boot camp. How long do your boot camps go for?

Ms DENNIS: They range between three and five days.

Mr PAECH: What type of programs or activities would occur over those three days?

Ms DENNIS: It is dependent on a risk assessment undertaken with the young person and their family as to the appropriate boot camp that they participate in, and the therapeutic supports that are involved with the provider. We do an assessment. Then if a young person requires cultural assistance, healing—a more therapeutic approach—we will work with a provider who is focused on that. We will do those programs,

If they require an intervention such as alcohol and other drugs, we would work with DASA, for example, in Central Australia, who the young person would use this and do programs with.

Then there is also every young person participates in an employment program to identify a career that they may be interested in. That is dependent again on the local provider.

They participate in counselling programs. They also do additional programs to do physical, mental and social wellbeing and strengthening that process. For example, if you are in Tennant Creek and you participated in the youth boot camp, that is with Balanced Choice and the focus is on local employment pathways and through developing social and emotional wellbeing programs in partnership with Anyinginyi and the language centre, then the local family program.

Mr PAECH: What is the flow-on work? We expect adults to do long programs. Three days will not change anyone's behaviours or attitudes. A three-day boot camp will not change anything. What is the flow-on of that?

Mr MALEY: I can answer that. They can do multiple boot camps. They do one for three or five days targeting intervention or training. Then they do another one. They do not do just one and then that is it. They continue to do boot camps and to have different skills. They are targeted, as I spoke about earlier, to make sure that those boot camps they do are targeted to what skills or intervention they need in righting that.

It is not just three days and they are done; it is multiple boot camps and they progress as they go down the line.

Mr PAECH: Do you have a de-identified account of an individual who has done that, or have they just done one boot camp?

Mr MALEY: Yes, we have that information.

Mr PAECH: Could I ask you to take that on notice?

Mr MALEY: What would you like to know?

Mr PAECH: You are saying that young people are doing multiple boot camps. I want to know if that is actually true or if it has just been said by the department that it is happening. Do you record how many boot camps an individual does? Does it go on a case file?

Mr MALEY: Yes, it does. Do we have the information now?

Ms DENNIS: Not on length of multiple unique young people, but we can definitely source that.

Question on Notice No 3.7

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

Mr PAECH: Through a de-identified process of the last reporting period, how many young people have had boot camps for each individual?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes. We should be able to get the information by end of day.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.7.

Mr PAECH: How many children have been referred to youth diversion programs? Can I have that broken down through sections 39, 65 and 83?

Mr MALEY: The information you are after is section 39 is 260. Section 64 is 52. Section 83 is 33. There is also a not applicable of 15. There is a total of 380.

Mr PAECH: To be clear regarding 'not applicable'. Can you provide the definition for why that is not applicable?

Mr MALEY: (inaudible) did not get sentenced to MAP or the charges were dismissed.

Mr PAECH: Okay. Under section 64, how many young children or youths have been found unsuitable under section 64 for diversion?

Mr MALEY: None.

Mr PAECH: Zero. We are just talking about the programs. How many children have been involved with the Elders Visiting Program or the Indigenous mentoring program?

Mr MALEY: There have been eight visits.

Mr PAECH: How many children have been sentenced to a skill or alternative detention order under the *Youth Justice Act* within the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: Are you referring to by the court? If you are in the court, and the court refers you to programs, is that what you are asking?

Mr PAECH: How many youths who have been in detention have then been sentenced to a job or an alternative program?

Mr MALEY: There have been six.

Mr PAECH: Is that to a job, not an alternative program?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Ms Dennis to give more detail.

Ms DENNIS: The Sentenced to a Skill is sentenced to a program to learn a skill with that provider. It is not to a specific job. For example, in Central Australia, we work with CAYLUS who works with the southern Tanami Kurdiji. There have been two young people sentenced to a skill with that provider. They are there in part of that program to learn the skills of a ranger. Then they complete the period of time and then exit. It is not to a job. It is to learn the skills of that job. If they go on to acquire employment, that is an even better outcome.

Mr PAECH: To help me understand this, over the reporting period, how many young people have been enrolled in a program and in education?

Mr MALEY: I will pass that to Sasha for the detail.

Mr PAECH: Sorry. I am facing Sasha because I know you will go to her anyway.

Ms DENNIS: Can I just clarify? Is this in youth detention?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Ms DENNIS: In youth detention 2025–26, there has been an increase in programs. All young people participate in programs. There is no enrolment process. There are programs offered as part of the structured day.

In 2025–26, 4,153 separate episodes were offered to young people in detention by 58 providers. They range from art and music, cultural, social and emotional, criminogenic and so forth. In terms of education, outside of the Department of Education and Training, we provide extra-curricular educational opportunities, often through leave of absence where we take young people to the Palmerston Try-A-Trade, the flexible learning centre at Malak and in Alice Springs, we may do that at Alice Outcomes.

Mr PAECH: You said the word 'offered'. Do you record the non-completion rate of young people in these programs?

Ms DENNIS: That is correct. There is a separation; we have 4,153 activities and also the assessment, treatment and counselling programs. The activities they may choose to participate in—and we take participation rates which over 90% of young people participating in those programs. Of the internal assessment and counselling dedicated programs, I can provide you that information as well. They are programs such as alcohol and other drugs, changing habits and reaching targets, but that is only for young people who are sentenced.

In 2025–26, we provided 1,645 specific treatment rehabilitation focused programs for young people, and we map completion rates. We have an 87% completion of those programs.

Mr PAECH: Would some of the non-completion rates be largely because of staff shortages or a lock down or the young person unwilling or not wanting to participate?

Ms DENNIS: It is the young person unwilling to participate or the young person is released prior to completion of the program.

Mr PAECH: Can I confirm, of your boot camps, how many children per boot camp are there normally?

Ms DENNIS: That may change. For the boot camps that we provide young people who are in youth detention, we take no more than three young people at a time, but it is dependent on the young people in the bail support facility, if there has been a referral from the court. For example, in February from Yirra House there were eight young people who participated in the youth boot camp program in Alice Springs. Four young people participated in the youth boot camp program in April because of the assessments that were undertaken. The numbers change depending on the cohort and the assessment.

J DAVIS: If you are not tracking what happens to kids after diversion and do not have the recidivism rates, how do you know whether any of this is working and, more broadly, what success is looking like in the youth justice portfolio? My final question is: who is responsible for monitoring that?

Ms DENNIS: We are tracking the data. It is not a formal process, so we cannot use that information to contribute to the report of government services. We have a few spreadsheets, so we know if a young person has completed diversion and then if they return into the youth detention centres, because the cohorts that enters into a detention centre is quite small in the Northern Territory. We manually track our young people, but we will not provide that information because we cannot verify it.

J DAVIS: What is the measure of success for the department regarding these programs?

Ms DENNIS: For our measure for success for youth diversion is that a young person successfully completes the diversion based on the tier and then we monitor to hopefully see that they do not reoffend. To be clear on why we cannot share that, we are not aware if the young person comes into police contact and receives a verbal or written diversion. That is a contact, and it is offending, but we do not receive that information.

Our intelligence is based on their contact with us when we become aware of that young person. That is why we do not provide the data externally.

Our success rate is that we have 60% completion of young people in our diversion program. Currently we are tracking at 55% and we also have for our bail support facilities a 70% successful exit rate. At this time, we are at 60% and we are hoping to see that increase.

We have some additional programs to introduce in Alice Springs to support the increase in completion rates but we also have for our youth boot camps monitoring to see if a young person completes the camp, completes our successful exit from bail and then we do not receive back into youth detention.

Mr PAECH: How many young people have been through the youth detention facility within the reporting period? I am asking two questions, one as a young person ...

Mr MALEY: It is 296.

Mr PAECH: Of those 296, do you have data that determines whether that might be the same person coming in multiple times?

Ms DENNIS: That is unique.

Mr PAECH: That is 296 different people, over the reporting period.

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: How many rotational lockdowns have occurred per accommodation block in Holtze Youth Justice Centre each month for the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: The reporting period averaged 34.8 rotational lockdowns due to a range of factors such as unscheduled hospital escorts, unscheduled court appearances, last-minute court-ordered repatriations, staff sickness and constraints.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, staff shortages are a part of the reason for those rotational lockdowns?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Of those lockdowns, what is the average time off block—by off block I mean outside the accommodation block, not just outside the cell?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Sasha.

Ms DENNIS: The average period of rotational lockdown is no longer than 45 minutes per day. Young people exit themselves and the structured day begins from 7 am. They may remain in their block because they have breakfast there and they then shift to education. Education also has a structured day and the young people are not returned physically to their cell until 6.30 pm when we start a lockdown.

We do not monitor the specific time of a young person out of their cell because we use the blocks as part of their residential program and also where we deliver some of those counselling programs. The rotational lockdowns are no longer than 45 minutes, and often that is so our staff can take their breaks when we do not have sufficient staff due to those operational impacts.

Mr PATEL: It is good to know that we have stronger diversion pathways and expanded and well-supported boot camps preventing young people from progressing into the adult Corrections system. Could you explain and provide the positive trends that you are seeing in youth behaviour and engagement?

Mr MALEY: The boot camp and bail support is an important part of youth justice. We want to break that cycle of reoffending. We know that some of these young offenders come from family backgrounds and communities which are lacking in some support. The stronger diversion pathways and expanded bail support create an early intervention pathway which diverts young people away from the deeper system involved.

As I said at the beginning, if we can get these young offenders diverted into wraparound services and programs and help with their lives before they offend and get into the more serious offending, maybe we can change the way they think and behave so that they do not end up in custody. You have all heard stories where young offenders are in youth justice and once they are out they go into adult care; they are just in that cycle. We want to break that.

In boot camps in 2025–26, 80 young people participated across 20 camps with 72 successful outcomes. Those figures by themselves gives about a 90% success rate. This is about trying to get young people into the diversion programs to learn what it is to get up in the morning, do some fitness or have a structured day to be able to come back and go to school—as Sasha spoke about. I have spoken to some of these young offenders, and it is the first time they have been to school on a regular occasion. That is a shame. They go while they are in custody.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. You have said this already; this information has been spoken about.

Mr YOUNG: Unless you want to expand about Wadeye.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: I will let the minister continue. He is answering the question that was asked.

Mr MALEY: I will keep going. In 2025–26, 132 young people accessed bail support, which equates to 5,400 bed nights. Some of these young offenders use this bail support facility because if the court is going to give them bail, the court has a choice to either remand them in custody or give them bail. If that young offender has not got a safe place to go to and has not got those wrap around services it leaves the court with very little or no choice but to remand them in custody.

With these programs, we are trying to make sure these young offenders have somewhere to go so the court can say we will give you conditions. It may be reporting to the police Monday, Wednesday and Friday, or it may be to hang out with certain people or not hang out with certain people, depending on what the court order, but also more importantly where are they going to live and stay to keep away from that trouble. Sometimes people hang out in groups and there may be a ring leader and someone gets caught up on the night in the event and they end up in custody. If we can break that cycle and give them somewhere to stay, which is this bail support, we are able to give the courts an alternative to custody.

We do not want the courts to have no choice, and bang, they are in remand. Remand is the last point for us. We want to break that cycle and this is where the bail support facility has come into play because whilst they are there, they can have some counselling and have those wrap around services to see what else they can do—what else can we unpick—to make sure they do not end up in the next stage which may be in custody

by a court order where there is no choice about bail, they are remanded in custody. It may be that they are sentenced because they have committed a crime and been found guilty.

We are trying to break that cycle and give these young people an opportunity to have those wrap around services early before they end up in custody in either youth justice or into the adult prison. It is about giving those wrap around services to break that cycle and intervene early to give these young people some choices. Some of the young people I have met through this job and in my previous job, have never had that structure, have never had the family support. They go home and there is no support and no clean sheets, and no food in the fridge with no support around home.

Mr PAECH: Come on, we are not here for story time.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Minister, I will ask you to finish up.

Mr MALEY: I know the Member for Goyder would like to hear this because he is supportive of how we support our young people and I am telling him exactly how we do that.

Mr PAECH: I know; you have told us about seven times already.

Mr MALEY: The more you interject, the more I will keep talking, so I am happy to keep going because we are about trying to break that cycle. If we can do this and offer those wrap around services, that is the key to keeping those young people out of the court system and the correctional system as they grow older.

Mr PAECH: I want to know how many young children in custody have neurological and neurodevelopmental impairments or disabilities as of 31 March 2026, and on average per day, across the reporting period.

Mr MALEY: I will pass that down to Sasha to see if we have that information. If not, we will have to take that on notice.

Ms DENNIS: On 31 March there were 16 young people in youth detention who had a diagnosis. There were a large number of young people who were under assessment but did not have a diagnosis, so the answer is 16.

Mr PAECH: That 16, the one who were under diagnosis—if they have left then that has been cancelled and has not been completed?

Ms DENNIS: It may not have been completed. I can provide you the number of assessments that were referred externally. We undertake the assessments when they are in detention with us. If they are released we do a referral to an external provider. I can provide that to you from our programs.

We also follow up with the providers if we do not receive the report back. We monitor why we do not have those reports completed.

We referred 26 young people to an external provider to complete their assessment. Of that 26, seven were not completed due to the matter either being cancelled in court and the report no longer required or three were unable to locate the young person. Then there were other and that may have been failure to participate or attend an appointment.

Mr PAECH: Following on from that, the main question is: how many young people, remanded or sentenced, were having these reports done under section 67?

Ms DENNIS: The only time we did a report under section 67, we received in 2024–25, 12 section 67 reports from the court and in 2025–26, there were 26.

Mr PAECH: What is the average time for a section 67 report to be completed?

Ms DENNIS: It is dependent if it is a new offender and there has not been any previous reports or collation across agencies; it can take up to three to four months. It is also around availability of providers and there is not a large number of providers in the Top End.

In Central Australia there is Congress which is funded to prioritise young people in care who are also in the youth justice system.

In the Top End it is quite difficult to have a provider complete the report. It is also difficult if the young person is released from detention and returns to a community such as Lajamanu, because of travel time and so forth. On average it is three to four months.

Mr PAECH: You have a small facility in Alice Springs where Paperbark was. The majority of people who need this screening are in the Top End and there is currently a bottleneck because there are not the external providers to do the section 67 screening.

Ms DENNIS: I will clarify. If the young person is from Alice Springs they continue their assessment with Congress in Alice Springs.

Mr PAECH: Even if they are moved here?

Ms DENNIS: We return them often to complete that assessment and we work closely with Congress. The staff will come out and undertake that or we will take the young person into the clinic to complete that assessment.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I know you had the imprimatur of the minister to talk directly to the Deputy Chief Minister. Every now and then you should refer back to the minister ...

Mr PAECH: I am still giving him a look.

Mr MALEY: Giving me the look.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: The procedure is you normally come through me to the minister.

Mr PAECH: Through the Chair, minister, we are now talking about how we send children back to have those assessments done. I want to understand what is the cost to transfer a young person from Alice Springs up here? Is it done by charter or commercial flight? What is the cost for the flight, the staff and the incidentals?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Sasha Dennis.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: As I said, if the minister gives his imprimatur, that is fine, but we have to ...

Mr PAECH: Was that good?

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Excellent.

Ms DENNIS: I can provide you with the total amounts of travel expenses. This is inclusive of the cost of the flight for the young person, the youth justice officers escorting and incidentals such as travel allowance and so forth.

The total cost in the reporting period was \$1.24m. On average we transfer 20 young people between the facilities per month.

Mr PAECH: Twenty people, and that could be for a Congress assessment.

Ms DENNIS: That could be; that is correct. We return them for court purposes. We also return them to ensure that assessments are completed.

Mr PAECH: While we are talking about this repatriation and throughcare, how many young people from Central Australia and the Barkly have been held in the Holtze Youth Detention Centre in the last 12 months? How many of this number are on release or on bail and have finalised their matter by way of sentence or not guilty?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Sasha Dennis.

Ms DENNIS: In terms of young people from the Barkly and Central Australia, from the Barkly in the reporting period there were 140 admissions of which there were 39 unique individuals. In Central Australia there were 285 admissions of which 81 were unique individuals.

Mr PAECH: I want to understand, minister, through the Chair, for young people and for adults, what do you do when they are released? Are you still dropping people off at the ...

Mr KERLE: Mr Chair, we seem to be getting into one of the outputs. Are we still on ...

Mr PAECH: No, it is not; they talked about repatriation. Are you trying to shut me down?

Mr ACTING CHAIR: I think the minister has taken the question, so I will let it go.

Mr YOUNG: It is the opening statement, not an output.

Mr PAECH: I am sure you are very capable. You are the deputy leader. I just want to understand when you are releasing a young person whether they have served their time or whether they have been on remand—and I will extend this for an adult as well—let us break into two. We will go to young people first and then mature people.

When a young person serves their time or they have been held and then they have been released because they have been found not guilty or a charge has been withdrawn, what is the process?

Ms DENNIS: When a young person is released from youth detention if they are in Darwin but their residence is outside of the greater Darwin region, we work with their defence lawyer on a repatriation plan for return to home. That will often include, if there is not appropriate transport due to the release date and time, them being accommodated at the Yirra bail support facility. There are no overnight stays in detention and there are no hotel rooms; the young people are supervised and supported. There is contact with family and then we will facilitate their return home.

When they return home, there is contact made with the local provider, if there is a youth diversion provider, because they do follow-up support and throughcare. We also advise the department of Education that the young person is returning, and the Tivendale school will also do that work. We will also work with, if there is an APLO, to advise that the young person may have been released but if they have a good behaviour order or so forth to assist with that community supervision. There is also contact made with the health services if the young person is on an NDIS plan. We also advise the NDIS provider that the young person has been released.

Where the young person is in Darwin we will do the exact same thing. Obviously, we do not need to facilitate the transportation. If the young person is under 14, a youth justice officer or an appropriate member of the youth justice workforce, such as our cultural mentors or case manager, if they are not under our supervision, will travel with the young person to support their return home.

There are also funded providers in Central Australia who do additional work with us to support young people to return home and ensure that they have a dignity pack, they have sleeping items and so forth, or it may be that they fund mum and dad to travel to collect their young person if they live outside of Alice Springs.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Minister, I am conscious that we are still on the opening statement. We do have specific outputs around youth justice. You have been happy to take them on.

Mr PAECH: I want to understand ...

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Could we move on to the outputs maybe?

Mr PAECH: He is doing a good job now.

Mr MALEY: We will carry on; it just takes time to go back and forth.

Mr PAECH: I am happy if you are happy. Are you happy?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: That is good.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: You make the choice.

Mr MALEY: The question was to explain what happens when a young offender is released. We will now have the answer for an adult.

Mr VARLEY: The process for adults continues to be varied as we have thousands of discharges a year. We do some planned repatriations, particularly to remote communities, where we will organise flights, accommodation and transfers. Sometimes it is escorted and sometimes not. At other times we arrange for people to have public transport, bus delivery and we also have some minibuses that we fund and service through a couple of providers. People are able to make their own arrangements if they so choose.

We provide a range of repatriation services. I do not have a lot of data for you right now because, as you can imagine in the adult space, there are quite a lot of people.

Mr PAECH: If an offender is being released—time served or remand, free to go—if they nominate they want to go to a particular location, is that part of the consideration or does it have to be from where they were potentially arrested?

Mr VARLEY: No. It would usually be either a place in which they have been ordered to reside at, if they were subject to continuing orders, or their home location of community.

Mr PAECH: Does the Northern Territory Correctional Services still drop people off at the Palmerston Business Station?

Mr VARLEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: How many have been dropped off over the reporting period?

Mr VARLEY: I do not know the answer to your question but it would be in the order of hundreds.

Mr PAECH: You would have the data, when you are releasing someone, where they are going?

Mr VARLEY: Yes. The question would be, I would be able to tell you who was discharged to which locations on what dates, but as to whether or not we record their intended residence versus where they actually go, I would need to take that on notice. There are thousands of discharges, I am trying not to mislead you, but we tabulate data about where we think people are being released. Of course, if they are leaving of their own free will, that is a matter for them.

Question on Notice No 3.8

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

Mr PAECH: Could you please provide a breakdown of how many people have been dropped off or released to the Palmerston Bus Interchange over the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.8.

Mr VARLEY: That is a very specific question. The difference there is yes we can take that question on notice. If you are asking the locations that other people have been sent to that is quite a different proposition because we would not necessarily record all that data if someone is time-served.

Mr PAECH: When an individual is dropped off, whether Alice Springs, Palmerston or Darwin, to a bus station to get on a bus, are they supervised until they get on that mode of transport?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the commissioner.

Mr VARLEY: Generally the answer is no and that is because they have been released from custody. They would be subject to either their own freedom or own recognisance of taking up a parole or Community Corrections or court order, subject to them meeting those various conditions. There is no requirement for us to supervise a person. That said, we sometimes do. We also sometimes support and escort prisoners who are released to various locations if we think there is merit in us doing that to support them to engage with Community Corrections or comply with their parole order.

Mr PAECH: When you are dropping someone off, how does that intersect with the throughcare that you are supposed to be providing them? Of the population that you are releasing, how many of those has Corrections managed to find secure accommodation for? Or is that not the role of Corrections?

Mr VARLEY: That is a different question. If I can step back a bit with your indulgence, Member for Gwoja, the role of our rehabilitation and reintegration services and our case managers is to connect people exiting prison to the appropriate support services or essentially a life plan so that when they exit, they have a better chance of getting back on their feet and not reoffending. That is why we do what we do.

Added to that, people can be released in a number of different ways, including to parole orders where they are subject to various stringent conditions ordered by the Parole Board. They could be subject to a suspended sentence, a court order or a Community Corrections order, or a range of different conditions whereby the prison would hand over supervision of that person to the requisite Community Corrections office.

Alongside that, there are other support services that we engage with, such as community-based services like NAAJA Adult Throughcare. We also have our open house program with the Salvation Army. That is an example of where people can exit custody and go to a supported living arrangement for a period.

Because of the volume of people we engage with, there are multiple scenarios that could play out. In many cases, particularly where people are subject to a continuing order of supervision—Community Corrections does a great job with that—then, yes, we provide a facilitated handover of those individuals.

Mr KERLE: While we are talking about people being released from custody, I am aware of a few businesses in Palmerston that are eager to get into the Sentenced to a Job program. How are employment pathways, like Ready to Work and expanded industry and skills program operating from custody into community? What evidence shows they are keeping people in work and out of prison?

Mr VARLEY: Our education and employment programs are something that we have been upgrading and building on over time. This is why we launched our partnership with Workskil Australia to connect people exiting custody to real job opportunities and placement support with employers. This is a model we borrowed from some learnings interstate. We announced that earlier this year.

I cannot talk about employment placement out of custody without explaining the overall context of industries and employment and education services in prisons because we want to see people getting job-ready skills, tickets and opportunities inside custody. Through their case management program, we then hope to be able to position them, place them with employers ready to take on a supported employment arrangement with a person exiting custody when they leave. That is why we have engaged with Workskil.

It is all part of a connected system. For example, inside the industry's piece, we have had 1,700 prisoners employed over the reporting period. In the overall community support workspace, you heard earlier about the thousands of hours that we have contributed to the community. Then with the work we are doing with Workskil, we have already had several hundred prisoners referred from inside our case management system to Workskil for potential placement.

The shout-out I would give to businesses in the community is, if you want to be part of that program, please connect with Workskil and the department, and we would be happy to hear from you.

J DAVIS: I have a couple of follow-up questions. One is in relation to release of children. What is the total amount spent transporting young people, including cost of staff, around the Northern Territory? Both on release but also for release. What is the total cost?

Mr MALEY: I will pass that question to Sasha Dennis. She will be able to answer that for you.

Ms DENNIS: The total cost for travel expenses in \$1.24m for the reporting period. Of that, \$20,000 was for repatriation; \$192,000 was for detainee transfers—that is when the young person was returned due to needing to complete an assessment, as discussed with the Member for Gwoja; and the remaining costs were all for staff travel, young person's flights and so forth to return to be released.

J DAVIS: Is the repatriation when someone is released and goes home?

Ms DENNIS: That is correct.

J DAVIS: Does the department pay those costs for all young people?

Ms DENNIS: We do, unless the young person is in the care of the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Children and Families.

J DAVIS: We were just talking about throughcare plans. How many young people in detention have a throughcare plan in place?

Ms DENNIS: There are 50 young people in detention as of today. Did you ask for the number for today?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Ms DENNIS: There are six young people in Alice Springs. Of these six young people, there are three with a current throughcare plan. At Holtze there are 44 young people, and of that, 31 have a current throughcare plan.

J DAVIS: What is the departmental policy in terms of throughcare planning? Is it from the day they are admitted? Does it apply to young people on remand?

Ms DENNIS: Our procedure for a throughcare plan is that it commences as soon as we have contact with the young person. If there is a young person who is admitted, we commence that process. A large majority of the young people who enter youth detention already have a throughcare plan that we will continue—we review and continue. There is a four-week period for that throughcare plan to be finalised. If a young person is released and goes to community youth justice supervision, our community youth justice officers continue that throughcare planning. If they are released and there is no statutory involvement, we do not continue any further work with that young person.

J DAVIS: Does that include young people who are on remand?

Ms DENNIS: That is correct; all young people in bail facilities as well, and if they have been in a bail facility or on remand and they are released, then they have a throughcare plan. That at times will also be provided to providers if there is ongoing support.

J DAVIS: How many young people in detention are on remand as of today?

Ms DENNIS: There are 39 young people.

J DAVIS: Can young people on remand access all the same therapeutic services and programs as young people who have been sentenced?

Ms DENNIS: That is correct; they have access to all programs, but they cannot access CHART. CHART is only for young people who have been sentenced.

J DAVIS: What is CHART?

Ms DENNIS: It is Changing Habits and Reaching Targets (CHART). It is focused on criminogenic behaviours, and young people are only allowed to participate in the program once sentenced.

J DAVIS: Is there currently a psychologist based at Holtze?

Ms DENNIS: We have a senior psychologist. We also have three other psychologists, so there are four.

J DAVIS: Are they working out of Holtze?

Ms DENNIS: That is correct.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: We will now take a short break. We will resume at 2.45 pm.

Mr PAECH: When we come back, I have a question on prisoner employment following on from the Member for Blain.

The committee suspended.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Welcome back. Minister, I spoke to various members—it is up to you. Some members have specific questions on specific outputs. Do you still want to continue on the opening statement and do it that way or do you want to move onto the outputs?

Mr MALEY: I am happy to continue the opening statement if everyone else is. It means we have to shuffle around a bit more, but if you are happy with that, we are happy.

Mr PAECH: We are good at shuffling, mate.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: I have given you the option.

Mr MALEY: Thank you, but we will continue how we are going.

Mr PAECH: I want to follow on from the Member for Blain talking about employment. I want to understand that less than 1% of the Corrections budget is dedicated to prisoner employment. Is that for a particular reason?

Mr MALEY: Are you talking about the adults at this stage?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the commissioner to answer that question.

Mr VARLEY: I am happy to answer the question, but I am not sure about the 1% part. Is there a particular figure you can refer me to?

Mr PAECH: I understand your overall global budget for Corrections. I can only see what I can see is potentially less than 1% allocated towards allowing the transition of that employment opportunity to happen.

Mr VARLEY: I am checking my BP3 papers, but I think you might be referring to the funding we provide to Workskil Australia as part of that grant model. Our employment system is large and incorporates our industries and educational system as well. I am happy to talk you through the scope and scale of that.

We have certainly funded this year. For Workskil Australia I think it is \$800,000 in their first year, growing to about \$1.25m in the next year for employment placement programs.

Mr MALEY: Could you explain that program and what it is because that is the one for reintegration after they exit. Can you explain a bit more about this because I really like this program. I think it will be a winner because it helps these offenders when they get out and gives them an opportunity to have that care and support in that first year they have been released.

Mr PAECH: This is the work ready one?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr VARLEY: Yes, correct. Work ready is the name of our program. Workskil is the name of a national provider which specialises in supported placements into employment. We implemented that program after learning from South Australian Correctional Services. I give a shout-out to Deputy Commissioner Kym McKay. This is his brainchild and he is unable to be here today. He has done the work to design this program, particularly for the Northern Territory context.

A key part of this is a two-year trial of a staged case management program to support offenders who are preparing for release, then after release for a period of up to 18 months. We are rolling that program out for prisoners both in Darwin and Alice Springs from mid-this year. The idea is that program will provide prisoners not only with a job match but a safety net of services that link them to support and assistance to make sure they can make a success of that new job. As I said, it has an 18-month wraparound service plan.

That links, of course, to our ability for people to enter into paid employment. As we know, it is not just about getting a job but remaining supported by your employer to stay in that job, to manage the adaptation of exiting custody and becoming a productive employee.

That adds on to the work we have been doing with our work camps in Barkly and Batchelor, Berrimah and our future Katherine work camp.

Mr PAECH: Your Ready to Work program—I think you issued a media release on 26 March about it. You said it was for 350 people. What does that mean for the rest of the prison population. We are talking about in excess of 2,800 people.

Mr MALEY: This is a trial program. We are assessing to see how it works and how it is suited for the Territory. As the commissioner said, it is based on a South Australian program.

I spoke to the provider—I cannot remember her name; she was an enthusiastic lady—about how well it worked in South Australia, which is similar to Darwin but not exactly the same. We are trying to do is make sure that this program is a pilot program. I cannot remember where the 350 came from but we are not offering it to everyone because it is a pilot program at the moment.

Maybe the commissioner can add more to that. I emphasise that it is a pilot program designed to see if it works and make sure it has been adapted to the Northern Territory. Once that trial period is over there will be a full assessment to see whether it continues or if it needs to be tweaked, changed or managed differently to get those outcomes.

Remember, the outcome is when someone is out of custody. When they are released, you can no longer force them to do anything as they are a free person. What we find is they will miss the opportunity to have some of those wraparound services, someone they can ring up or someone who can go and check on them. This program provides those services just to try to get them back into a job, or on a job or looking for a job and keep them motivated. In my view, and I could be wrong, that first year is very difficult sometimes to reintegrate back into the community and go back into their own community and family and make sure they do not stray down the path where they were previously. This program helps them with that.

It is a pilot program, so that is where that 350 would have come from. It is not available to everyone.

Commissioner, is that accurate?

Mr VARLEY: That is right. Just to add, Member for Gwoja, it is early days. As at 31 March—I suggest the number would be higher now—we have had 165 individuals referred internally to that program. Those people undergo job-readiness assessments and planning for their release. If they are successfully placed, they can access that employment support when they exit. Obviously, as I mentioned in my answer to the Member for Blain, we need employers to sign up for that program as well. If people google the program they will be able to see how employers can sign up and participate.

I want to make the point, though, and to your question, that 165 is a good start, but it is not the totality of our system because our system is based on our internal industries, work parties and our paid and volunteer employment programs that already exist in prisons. In any given year—and in this year if I am right—I think the number was about 1,749 people engaged in a combination of internal industries, paid and volunteer employment. That is separate again to the CSWP work.

Mr PAECH: While we are talking about employment, can you just confirm for me how many frontline correctional workers are currently employed?

Mr VARLEY: I knew you would ask me this question, Member for Gwoja, so as always you know that I like my data. As of today—or what I call today, which is the most recent pay period—we have 847 correctional officers employed in the department.

Mr PAECH: What is your vacancy rate as of 31 March 2026?

Mr VARLEY: To answer that question, I will go back to the Estimates number. At 31 March, we had 825 officers employed against a budgeted establishment of 838. The variance there—if my maths is right—is 13. As I said, today our headcount is 847 because we continued to recruit in that intervening time. The answer is that at the moment I do not have vacancies in terms of my establishment, but what that does not show is what I intend to grow to in the year ahead.

Mr PAECH: What are the current operational staffing minimal standards for Darwin, Alice Springs and Berrimah?

Mr VARLEY: That is a very interesting question because that is subject to our current negotiations with our union representatives. It is work that we have been doing intensively over the last two or three months to work towards finalisation of our enterprise bargaining agreement—or dispute, depending on which way you look at it.

Mr MALEY: I wonder if we should go down this path considering it is in dispute in relation to staffing.

Mr PAECH: That is your call. You are the minister. You can say no to me if you want.

Mr MALEY: Yes, we will answer.

Mr VARLEY: The operating models that currently exist for our prisons prescribe around 629 correctional officer posts within that roster. It does not include factoring in relief and CBU20F which you might recall, we have just shut down that site. We are calculating off 629.

We have then done new work to negotiate a model for a full establishment of Berrimah, which would move us to an establishment of Berrimah at 192 officers plus relief.

As our roster model builds out, our employment model grows and we establish Berrimah and Alice Springs Women's Correctional Centre at full capacity, we will head somewhere to the vicinity to the north of 900 correctional officers.

Mr PAECH: Over the reporting period, have those models been breached?

Mr VARLEY: That is a subjective question. We say we try not to breach them, we do not breach them, but then union did take me to task on a couple of occasions. We have been in dispute on a couple of those occasions

Mr PAECH: How often would there be a vacancy for a shift, currently?

Mr VARLEY: That is a very different question. That is something we have been working hard to address through the development of new roster models. The answer to your question is most days. This has been a perennial problem for corrections. As I can demonstrate through our numbers, if you look at the growth in our workforce over the last couple of years, we have net grown our workforce by some 30%.

The challenge I face is sustaining a full operating model to maximum, optimum capacity every day of the week. That is because of staff leave, absence and rosters. That is a continuing piece of the dispute we are working on with the union, one I am committed to resolving.

Mr PAECH: Over the reporting period how many resignations have there been?

Mr VARLEY: Give me a moment please for the exact separation. I can tell you that my separation rate for custodial operations over the reporting period, until the last pay at 4 June, was 6.7%. I would have to check the exact number for you but it is in the order of 7%.

Mr PAECH: So that is about 100—

Mr KERLE: Mr Chair, can I ask a follow-up question on this line of questioning?

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Member for Blain, follow-up question.

Mr PAECH: Sorry, I just have not had that confirmed yet.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: After this answer, we will go to Member for Blain.

Mr MALEY: We just said just under 7%.

Mr PAECH: Just under 7%, which would almost equate to 130 something.

Mr VARLEY: That is about 56 to 60 separations.

Mr PAECH: In the reporting period?

Mr VARLEY: No, that is from 1 July to 4 June.

Mr PAECH: So you anticipate there would be more if it was the reporting period?

Mr VARLEY: No, it would be less, because the reporting period would be 31 May. I am trying to give the Committee the most current data. The workforce data is something I monitor exceptionally closely.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Member for Blain, follow-up question.

Mr KERLE: So we all appreciate that we need as many correctional officers as we can to match the need coming from the justice system, and retention is also a key factor. Minister, can you update the Committee on the actual correctional officer recruitment and retention gains, and how they are improving safety and rehabilitation in our facilities?

Mr MALEY: Thank you, that is a great question. I will talk a bit about the G4S, what we have done in relation to that and what they do, then I will pass to the Commissioner to talk about that.

G4S is a private company that has come in to help us facilitate numbers. Their role is they do prison transports, some hospital sits—to explain that a hospital sit is when if a prisoner has to go to hospital for medical treatment, two officers have to go with that person and sit with them while they are getting treatment. That can be from one day to one week or one month. G4S are helping with that.

They also sit in the courts, they are doing that here in the local court and Alice Springs local court, which allows the qualified correctional officers to go back into the prison system, what we call ‘behind the wire’, where they offer training services. Staffing numbers sit in there to make sure that behind the wire is secure. G4S manage the incidentals outside the wire in relation to transfers.

What we have done is—that gives us more staff. We will get you some actual numbers in relation to Corrections officers soon, but you need to have in the back of your mind that the G4S organisation offer their service to be able to help us and allow us to put more staff behind the wire. I think the G4S and Corrections recruitment—which I go to the recruitment officers—allows for a bigger prison estate. They might not be Corrections officers per se, but G4S and its Corrections officers do a wonderful job because it is a challenging job dealing with some violent people—some people have been there a while, and some people have not. It is about making sure our prisons stay—I will pass to the commissioner to give some numbers about the staff.

Mr PAECH: I have a follow-up question on G4S.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: The Member for Johnston has a follow-up too.

Mr MALEY: We will get to some staffing, then we will take the Member for Gwoja’s question and then the question from the Member for Johnston.

Mr VARLEY: We have, over the reporting period, recruited 157 new Corrections officers as at 31 March—sorry, it was 103 as at 31 March. It is 157 to most recent year-to-date. That is a mix of what we call our trainee Corrections officers and experienced Corrections officers, which are lateral recruits from other jurisdictions.

J DAVIS: This is on behalf of the Member for Mulka. I have many questions from him—which, apologies Member for Mulka, I do not think we will get to today.

To follow up on G4S, how many G4S people are currently employed in correctional centres, and what are the total costs of that?

The second question I have—I will ask them both at once—is who complaints about G4S go to.

Mr MALEY: To answer the first bit of the question, there are no G4S staff in correctional centres. G4S staff are at the courts doing court sits. G4S staff do transfers, which is from the prison to court and back or from watch houses to the court and back. They also do some hospital sits, which is where a prisoner needs to go to hospital—G4S will take them and sit with them whilst they undergo their medical treatment. That is the first bit of your question. I will go to the commissioner to talk about the exact details of how that works.

J DAVIS: Specifically, the member is interested in the cost and where complaints about G4S staff go.

Mr VARLEY: The G4S program is an important and integral part of our network now. I say G4S because that is the current contracted provider that we have on deck. I should note that there is a procurement out for a long-term contract, and that decision has not yet been made, so I need to be clear in saying that the G4S program is the current provider.

That partnership occurred and commenced from February 2025 and started out with a rotational workforce from interstate. It has gradually grown with more than 100 special correctional officers now employed by G4S locally, and that has allowed us to release Corrections officers and police officers to primary duties in either correctional centres or police work.

J DAVIS: I have two specific questions: what is the total cost; and who do complaints go to?

Mr VARLEY: I can answer both of those.

J DAVIS: I am just mindful of the time.

Mr VARLEY: Thank you for your patience. The total cost to the reporting period is \$13.84m, and that is broken down in a number of different ways. The primary cost of that is the wages and contract management costs, including establishment costs of our own to set up the program. So, \$13.84m, which is about—we estimate a full year effect of about \$15m.

To answer your second question, if there are complaints about the work of G4S, then they can be made to me and we can deal with it contractually. They can also be made to any other oversight integrity body in the Territory because they are an extension of us and our service and they are special correctional officers under the Act; they would fall under the jurisdiction of oversight bodies in the Territory.

Mr PAECH: I would like to know if the department has considered or looked at the expansion of G4S to any other services within the Northern Territory Correctional Services?

Mr VARLEY: The short answer to that is no, we have a tender that is now closed. The best way I can answer your question is that we are positioning that contract for the long-term delivery of prisoner escort and transportation services, including courts across the Northern Territory, potentially including other courts beyond where we are now. We have had those discussions with the Attorney-General's department and the courts. There is a future option for police to draw down on that service should they wish to but, currently, they have not indicated that they would like to.

Mr PAECH: Will there be an investigation? Will it be done by correctional services into G4S's failure to maintain a prisoner in a court room?

Mr VARLEY: The short answer is—and to comment on that question—the escape that occurred last week is under investigation. It is being conducted by G4S and corrections, and I have allocated a chief superintendent to do that inquiry as we speak. The investigation is underway. I will note—without premising the outcome of that inquiry—that my primary concern around that escape is a failure of infrastructure. This is something that I have been looking at for some time because I am responsible for the custody of those prisoners in courts, however, I am not responsible for the infrastructure of courts. We are working with the Attorney-General's department and the courts to review the design of docks in the Local Court. That project is underway, and I expect to see designs for that by the end of June or July. Hopefully we will move to a constructed, better improved and modernised dock system that would mean people cannot jump the barrier.

Mr PAECH: To be clear, the investigation is a joint investigation with G4S or two separate ones?

Mr VARLEY: They are two separate ones, Member for Gwoja. We do investigations and critical incident reviews for all escapes and absconds. For this one, G4S do their own review as they are contractually required to do, and we do our own one independently. The chief superintendent that I have allocated to that task has recently joined us from South Australia, so he is entirely able to do that investigation as he has a series of specialist qualifications in the field.

Mr PAECH: How many adults and youths have escaped from correctional services custody within the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: Four for youths, and for adults we will get that information for you now.

Mr VARLEY: Thank you for your patience, Member for Gwoja. What I have just learned is that I should be deferring to my other Deputy Commissioner, Kate Chambers, who has studied hard for this. I have given all the spotlight to Deputy Commissioner, Dennis. I am going to hand to Deputy Commissioner Chambers because she has been waiting patiently all day.

Ms CHAMBERS: There were 14 absconds and one escape are the figures.

Mr PAECH: Are you able to give a breakdown of what regions?

Ms CHAMBERS: Yes. Those relate to Barkly Work Camp, Batchelor Work Camp, Alice Springs Correctional Centre and road transport.

Mr PAECH: Do you have the numbers?

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Hang on, Member for Gwoja. The Member for Casuarina has been trying to get a follow-up question on G4S.

Mr PATEL: I am interested in the Corrections and G4S partnership. Can you update me on that partnership? Is it strengthening our frontline services?

Mr MALEY: The short answer is yes; it is strengthening the partnership. I will make it short to give you more time; I will not spend more than 20 minutes on this.

Mr PAECH: It is all right; we know you are outsourcing it.

Mr MALEY: For the youth escapes, there were three in Alice and one in Darwin.

G4S is strengthening by allowing the officers to go behind the wire, and G4S can do those shifts. They work hand in hand, together, to strengthen the entire Corrections estate. This is a good idea.

Did you want to talk about the money as well or do you just want to know how they work together?

Mr PATEL: If you can explain how effectively it is working.

Mr PAECH: You could just ask in a caucus meeting.

Mr MALEY: In relation to the Darwin Local Court there has been cell management, 1,237 transfers; there have been from Darwin secure prisoner escorts and transport from Katherine, 7,358; and Alice Springs Local Court and through Alice Springs there has been 359 DCO prisoners and 1,138 police prisoners. That gives you an idea of the numbers of the work they are doing that would not have to be done by Corrections officers.

Whilst those Corrections officers are not doing those transfers, they can be back offering rehabilitation, training and work in the industries. That is how their working together is strengthening.

I will leave it there because I know there are more questions.

J DAVIS: In the reporting period have any women been kept in men's prisons?

Mr MALEY: No. For example, we had a restructure in relation to the women's Sector 11, which is out the front of the Holtze prison. That has been reworked. That was a low-security prison and has been reworked for a women's prison. There are 38 prisoners there today. There is room for women in that.

Unlike the previous government that left them behind the wire—I have been through and walked there. They were being catcalled and harassed. We are moving the women out from behind the wire.

The same thing has been done in Alice Springs as well. We moved the women from behind the wire to a separate facility. It is still a secure facility because these women are still prisoners. They have their own separate area.

When you are talking about men's prisons, I suppose Sector 11 was previously a men's prison, but it was vacated, reworked and renovated. Then the women were moved in.

Does that answer your question?

J DAVIS: Mainly. Where did you put women suffering mental health distress in Alice Springs, given the women's prison there had no mental health or high-dependency unit?

Mr VARLEY: I think it is important to clarify neither Darwin nor Alice Springs women's prisons had a dedicated special needs unit for women. This is something that we want fixed. That is why I want purpose-built women's facilities.

The needs for women's mental health and special needs are managed inside their existing sectors or in community-based treatment centres such as hospital or special clinics. Most often, though, it is dealt with inside custody using our specialist forensic clinical services, either in Corrections staffing or in our partnership with the Department of Health.

J DAVIS: Were any women in Alice Springs kept in the men's prison at any point?

Mr MALEY: If you talk about before we came to office, the women were inside, behind the wire, in a separate area.

J DAVIS: I am talking specifically in relation to women not behind the wire but actually in the men's prison. The answer may be no; I do not know.

Mr VARLEY: The answer to that is, on a rare occasion—and there is a very special reason for that—if they are held at risk in the Alice Springs prison, the at-risk cells are in the men's facility, as they are in Darwin. Depending on the nature of the woman's needs, there is a possibility that a woman could be held in a sector of the prison that is largely occupied by men, but they are always kept separate. I want to be really clear.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.7

Mr MALEY: I have an answer to question on notice 3.7 about, through a de-identified process, how many boot camps have unique offenders.

The total number of unique prisoners is 15; repeats with the same provider is six; and repeats with different providers is nine.

J DAVIS: The Chief Minister stated clearly that offenders would be housed according to their sex assigned at birth. How does the department intend to guarantee the safety of transgender women who are housed in male correctional facilities?

Mr MALEY: I think the Chief Minister hit the nail on the head. They will be housed in prison assigned to their sex.

J DAVIS: In the reporting period has the gender and intersex treatment of prisoners' directive changed?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: On what date was it changed?

Mr MALEY: In October last year.

J DAVIS: Could you provide a copy of that to this committee?

Mr MALEY: No, I could not.

J DAVIS: Because?

Mr MALEY: We do not have one.

J DAVIS: Could you take that on notice?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Question on Notice No 3.9

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

J DAVIS: Please provide a copy of the gender and intersex treatment of prisoners' directive, including the date it was changed.

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

Mr MALEY: Yes. Can we add a bit to it as well?

Mr VARLEY: Member for Johnston, the directive requires a general manager to identify any case where a prisoner is received who may seek to be placed in a facility that is different to their sex assignment at birth if they may have a different gender identify. If that is to occur, first thing is that the prisoner is held on separation for their own protection for a period of seven-odd days whilst that assessment is carried out. We then engage the appropriate services—and I will look at that. The directive ultimately requires me to make a decision about the placement of that person and, to this point, since that directive has been changed, I have had no cases presented to me where I have made any such decision.

DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.9.

J DAVIS: The prison numbers have gone up over the reporting period, and the health budget for the prison has gone down according to the budget papers. Who is paying for healthcare in prison? Presumably the cost has increased if prisoner numbers have increased.

Mr MALEY: I can explain that. Health was managing the budget previously. There has been a change now where Corrections will take over in managing the health budget. That is where the change has come from. Previously Health had a line of \$18m, but it was costing more than that. They could not say exactly how much more it was costing. We have added an extra \$20m to that so we are now in the process of working out what it actually costs to run the health industries inside prison. The change is that Health ran it previously.

They could not give us an exact cost. We have given it \$20m, and Health transferred an additional \$18m across, so that is where those figures come from. I will let the commissioner explain a bit more, but in a nutshell, that is why there is a difference in the health budget because it is transitioned. We are now effectively working out exactly what it costs because Health could not provide that. We are now working out what is best bang for buck in relation to making sure prisoners have a health system that is suitable but also making sure we do not overspend taxpayers' money. We must get that balance right to keep everyone safe, especially the prisoners when they need access to the health system. They need to be able to access those systems. Does that answer your question, or do you want more information?

J DAVIS: That is enough information; thank you.

Mr PAECH: In terms of health, how many children have been placed at risk during the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: I will pass that over to Sasha.

Ms DENNIS: In the reporting period, there were eight young people placed at risk in Darwin, and none in Alice Springs.

Mr PAECH: You are talking about taking that over from NT Health. Will it stay an NT Health service, or will you look at bringing in an external provider?

Mr MALEY: I will let the Commissioner answer that, because we are looking at how health is managed completely.

Mr VARLEY: My intention is that it will stay at NT Health. The minister has asked me to do a review of what the appropriate in custody health model should be, how to properly cost baseline that, and how to design an appropriate governance model. That is why I will expect the \$38m to change over the forward estimates.

Ultimately, we all believe—and I have spoken to the CEO of Health about this—that the best model remains an integrated model with the Department of Health, but I would like to see more robust governance mechanisms around the partnership.

Mr PAECH: What is the maximum time people have been held at the Darwin Transitional Custody Centre, and what is the criteria used to determine that?

Mr VARLEY: The maximum time someone has been held at the Darwin Transitional Custody Centre, which has been operating since late December last year, is no longer than four weeks. We have changed that model to reduce that substantially, to no more than seven to 14 days. The reason we are doing that is because it is not a long-term facility where we want people to stay. It is meant to be and will be a facility that supports the court operations in terms of intakes, rotational appearances, and lodgements back to the main prisons.

Mr MALEY: The police are also using that as a watch house.

Mr PAECH: To that point, in terms of DTCC, how many people have been held there in the past 12 months?

Mr VARLEY: I would have to take that on notice in terms of the reporting period. As an example, I could tell you that early this week there were 0 in there, and today I think there was 17.

Mr PAECH: I would appreciate that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.10

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

Mr PAECH: How many people have been held in the Darwin Transitional Corrections Centre in the past 12 months, and what is the average and mean length of stay?

Mr MALEY: Are you talking Corrections, because we reuse it for a watch house.

Mr PAECH: Just corrections.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.10.

Mr PAECH: I know we are mindful of time, but I know you really want to talk about infrastructure, so I am going to ask you a question about that.

Mr MALEY: You left your last one a bit late.

Mr PAECH: I know. We will see how quick you can get it out. There is \$6m in the budget allocated for Corrections' infrastructure masterplan. Could you talk us through what that is for, and are there any plans to build a new prison in the Territory?

Mr MALEY: I will start by answering the second part. Yes, there are plans to build a new prison. We went to the election promising to build a new men's prison, a new female prison, a worker's camp at Holtze and a worker's camp at Katherine.

Part of the masterplan is also a bail support facility along with a transfer intake facility in Alice Springs, which will allow the previous youth facility to be used as a women's prison. That is a shuffle of people, to get those ladies out from behind the wire into a separate secure facility—as the Member for Johnston said, and still have an area where, I think, up to eight youths will be able to be housed in Alice Springs in a secure facility, along with the bail support.

Also, in Darwin, we are planning—as our masterplan talks about—and the CLP plan is to transition out of Berrimah, and Holtze will be where we house our detention estate. The youth justice is already there. We will

build new prisons there, but we are in the planning process. There was some money, \$15m, to start the planning for looking at what a new prison would look like at Holtze.

Mr PAECH: In your response when you talk about a remand facility in Alice Springs, is it for children or adults?

Mr MALEY: It is for children. It is an intake facility. For example, if a court orders an assessment, instead of flying a young offender to Darwin for one or two nights, they will be able to stay in Alice Springs and go back to the court in one or two days' time.

Mr PAECH: Obviously, through your master plan you will identify that a new prison would cost in excess of \$1bn. Are you talking about building a prison to the capacity of 500, 800 or 1,200?

Mr MALEY: That is the work we are doing at the moment. That is the money that we have allocated to work out what we need, exactly where it will be located—I know there is a lot of land around Holtze—and what infrastructure is already there in relation to power and water. That is where that work is being done. We want to make sure that we get this project right. We do not want another ship lift project.

Mr PAECH: Is that \$13m part of the \$6m or is that different?

Mr VARLEY: I love talking about infrastructure, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: I know you do.

Mr VARLEY: It has been a success story for Corrections, as you rightly note. I am not sure about the \$6m you are referring to. The short answer is it is a lot more than \$6m. We have been investing in lots of different facilities as part of the master plan. There is \$6.8m marked for the Alice Springs women's correctional centre works and upgrades. That might be what you are referring to. Equally, the government has announced the construction of the new work camp to be built at Holtze over the next couple of years on the existing PPC site. We are also establishing the Katherine work camp program. I think announced in the press today was the \$5.7m stage 1 upgrade contract to a local firm, so I am not sure if that is the \$6m.

There are multiple pieces of the puzzle. My ambition with this government support has been to ensure that we have a future state system able to manage the needs of the Territory and exit Berrimah in a few years' time.

Mr PAECH: You are talking about these plans. Once this master plan is done—I acknowledge security concerns—will a general overview be made public about the future projections and growth?

Mr VARLEY: Yes.

Mr PATEL: Can the minister outline the initiatives and improvements made to improve the management, accommodation and rehabilitative outcomes for women in custody?

Mr MALEY: We have moved the women from behind the wire. For example, at Holtze where I visited the women, I walked down past the maximum-security area and I could hear calling, wolf-whistling and yelling out. We are moving the women into Sector 11, which is out the front, which is a dedicated area to host more rehabilitation programs and training programs dedicated for women. They, I understand, have a different need from men, so we are trying to have women in a separate area. Previously, they had to walk up this little corridor, I suppose you could call it, to the transfer centre inside Holtze. Again, they getting yelled at and called names. We are making sure that the women are focused in their own area to have that training which is unique to them.

Mr VARLEY: The minister is referring to not only the better environment but also a safer environment. Our early data shows we think an 80% reduction in behavioural incidents in the new Alice Springs women's centre, compared to the old H Block inside the main jail. We attribute that based on advice from officers on the ground telling us the women are feeling much more settled, safer and more secure in their own facility. That is a good outcome, not just for them but for the safety of our officers.

Mr CHAIR: I put on the record that we stayed on the opening statement for the whole session. That was done with the consensus of the shadow minister, the minister and the cross bench.

This now concludes consideration of the Department of Corrections. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for appearing today, and the officers who provided advice to the minister. Would you like anything further.

Mr MALEY: I would like to say a few words. I would like to thank everyone for being here today. I have been here most of the day. Corrections have done a wonderful job, and I think Sasha Dennis deserves a drink or a coffee tonight. She has answered lots of questions. I think, from this side of the table everyone has tried to answer the questions honestly, openly and provide you with as much information as we can. We are here to try and work together as a team, because I think we are all in the Territory for the same reason of trying to get the Territory to a better place. We might have different ideas of how to get there but I think we are all working for the benefit of the Territory.

As I said at the beginning, I want to thank everyone here today. Especially the staff who are not here today, who are behind the scenes, put all this work together, it is a pile of paperwork, and they have done a great job.

Mr CHAIR: The committee will take a short break and will resume at 4 pm with questions of the Minister for People, Sport and Culture.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER CHARLS' PORTFOLIOS

PEOPLE, SPORT AND CULTURE

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Welcome to another fun-filled session of Estimates 2026.

I welcome you, minister, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Mr CHARLS: I have Ms Samantha Livesley, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of People, Sport and Culture; Ms Deborah Butler, General Manager, People and Culture; Mr Francis Mills, General Manager, Sport, Recreation and Concessions; Ms Cynthia Loganathan, Chief Financial Officer; and Ms Rachelle McMillan, Deputy CEO, Strategy Programs and Enabling Services from the Department of Children and Families.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 20 minutes. If you make it to the 15-minute mark, I will ding the bell—it sounds like that; it is fun to ring the bell. I will then call for questions relating to the opening statement.

The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving to output-specific questions.

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

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of People, Sport and Culture?

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

It is a privilege to appear before the committee as Minister for People, Sport and Culture; Disability; Arts; Youth, Seniors and Equality; Multicultural Affairs; and Veterans. These portfolios are diverse, but they share a common purpose; they are about people and creating opportunities for Territorians to participate, contribute and thrive while strengthening the communities that make the Northern Territory such a unique place to live.

These portfolios also sit at the heart of the government's commitment to restore the Territory lifestyle. When we speak about restoring the Territory lifestyle, we are talking about more than infrastructure, services or

programs; we are talking about the things that make living in the Northern Territory special—strong communities, vibrant sporting clubs, thriving arts and cultural activities, active and connected seniors, opportunities for young people, support for veterans and their families, inclusion for people with disability and communities where people from every background feel welcome and able to participate.

The Territory lifestyle is not something that can be manufactured by government; it is built every day by Territorians. It is built by volunteers who coach junior sport, by veterans who continue to serve their communities, by artists and performers who tell our stories, by multicultural organisations that bring people together and by community groups that create opportunities for people to connect and contribute.

The role of government is to support those efforts, remove barriers to participation and create the conditions that allow communities to thrive. That is the role of the Department of People, Sport and Culture. The department has a unique responsibility across government because its work reaches every stage of life and every corner of the Territory, supporting young people to make positive life choices, helping seniors remain active and connected, supporting people with disability to access services and opportunities, investing in sport and recreation, preserving our cultural heritage and recognising the contribution of veterans and multicultural communities.

Every investment delivered through this department contributes to stronger communities, greater participation and a better quality of life for Territorians. This work is central to the government's priorities of restoring the Territory lifestyle, rebuilding the economy and reducing crime.

Strong communities are safer communities. Communities where people are connected, engaged and participating are communities that are more resilient and better positioned to face future challenges.

In 2026–27 the Department of People, Sport and Culture will continue delivering significant investments across disability services, sport and recreation, arts and culture, veterans affairs, youth services, seniors programs and multicultural affairs.

One of the largest areas of investment remains disability services. The Northern Territory Government continues to contribute approximately \$130m annually towards the National Disability Insurance Scheme while also working alongside jurisdictions across Australia to deliver important reforms arising from the NDIS review and the disability royal commission.

Importantly, the Northern Territory has secured \$34m in joint funding through the Thriving Kids bilateral agreement, supporting earlier intervention and improved outcomes for Territory children with developmental delay and autism and their families.

For veterans and their families we continue to deliver Operation Thrive, the Northern Territory's first Defence veterans strategy. Through this work we are supporting transition, employment, wellbeing and recognition for veterans and their families while progressing the Territory's response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. The Northern Territory has a proud connection with the Australian Defence Force, and we remain committed to ensuring veterans choose the Territory as a place to live, work and contribute.

We also continue to support our multicultural communities whose contribution to the Territory's social, cultural and economic success cannot be overstated. This year we look forward to progressing a new 10-year multicultural strategy and action plan while continuing investments that strengthen community participation and celebrate the rich diversity that helps define the modern Northern Territory.

For seniors, our focus remains on promoting healthy ageing, preventing elder abuse and ensuring older Territorians remain connected, respected and valued members of our community. We will continue our strong partnership with COTA NT and support initiatives that encourage participation, wellbeing and community connection. For young people, we are continuing investments that create opportunities, build resilience and encourage positive engagement in community life.

Programs delivered through the NT Youth Strategy, the NT Youth Round Table and the Regional Youth Services program provide practical support and opportunities for young Territorians to have their voices heard and contribute to their communities. The completion of the Northern Suburbs Youth Hub at Leanyer will provide another important space where young people can connect, participate and access services.

Sport is synonymous with the Territory lifestyle. It has always been one of the great strengths of our community. Sport brings people together, promotes healthy lifestyles, develops leadership and creates

opportunities for Territorians of all ages and abilities. In 2026–27, we will continue investing more than \$45m in sport and active recreation programs, infrastructure and participation initiatives. This includes support for community sport, regional and remote participation programs, athlete development pathways, the Northern Territory Sports Academy and initiatives that help reduce the cost of participation for Territory families.

We are also continuing to invest in Aboriginal participation in sport through pathway partnerships such as our commitment to NT Cricket and programs that create opportunities for young people across regional and remote communities. We will also focus on pathway programs such as hockey and the Malaysia Hockey League initiative of which Hockey NT should be congratulated for.

Arts, culture, libraries and archives are equally important to the Territory lifestyle. They preserve our stories, celebrate our identity and strengthen our sense of place. Through investments of more than \$27m, we continue to support artists, cultural organisations, community institutions and infrastructure projects that contribute to cultural tourism, local employment and artistic expression.

Projects delivered by this government continue to strengthen cultural infrastructure across regional and remote communities, ensuring Territorians and visitors alike can experience the richness of our cultures, histories and creative industries. Libraries and Archives NT continues to play a vital role in preserving Territory history while providing free access to knowledge, learning and research opportunities for communities across the Territory.

Across all these portfolios there is a common theme: connection. It is the foundation of strong communities and of the Territory lifestyle. I acknowledge the dedication of the staff of the Department of People, Sport and Culture, my advisory councils, community organisations, volunteers and stakeholders across the Territory who help deliver these outcomes every day. Together, they are helping to build stronger communities, supporting participation, improving wellbeing and ensuring the Northern Territory remains the best place in Australia to live, work, raise a family and enjoy life.

I look forward to answering the committee's questions.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Mr BROWN: Welcome, everyone. Minister, during the last sittings you agreed that the budget did not include any new measures to address rising costs-of-living expenses for Territorians. With Territorians facing the second-highest rent in the country, Darwin house prices rising faster than any other jurisdiction, high fuel and groceries and CPI at 4.2%, can you explain how you and the rest of the Cabinet explain how you prioritised new prisons over the cost-of-living relief?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, I will let you have the floor; however, I am reflecting on whether or not that was covered in the opening statement and if it is related.

Mr BROWN: It is in terms of lifestyle.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Are you happy to answer the question, minister?

Mr CHARLS: I can move onto Output 1.3, because I have not covered any of those in my opening statement. I am happy to go to there if that is what you want.

Mr BROWN: We do not want to go to outputs; this is the opening statement.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That was not mentioned in the opening statement. We need questions related specifically to the opening statement.

Mr BROWN: It is related to Territory lifestyle, though.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, it is up to you.

Mr CHARLS: When it relates to the outputs, I am happy to answer the question, but if we can, keep focus on the opening statement. If you want to move to the outputs, you have all this time to ask questions regarding that.

Mr BROWN: I will hold that until 1.3. Just to let you know, we have similar questions about living expenses.

Mr CHARLS: I am happy to answer any questions about the opening statement. Once we have done that, I am happy to move to all the outputs and answer all the questions.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Do you have any questions relating to the opening statement?

Mr BROWN: During last Estimates, you said, 'I am the minister for Seniors, so I am representing them in the Cabinet and taking that voice to Cabinet'. Why did you fail to advocate for cost-of-living relief to at least keep pace with inflation, rather than maintaining it at the same level, which effectively means the benefit to Territorians is actually shrinking?

Mr O'GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Acting Chair! Asking the minister, 'Why did you fail?', is argumentative. I think it needs to be rephrased.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I tend to agree. Would you rephrase the question, please?

Mr BROWN: During last Estimates, you said, 'I am the minister for Seniors, so I represent them in Cabinet'. Could you state whether you have advocated for their cost-of-living relief to keep pace with inflation, rather than maintaining it at the same level, which effectively means the benefit to Territorians is shrinking?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, I am the minister for Seniors, and I carry their voices to the Cabinet. Again, I think we should answer this against a specific output. It was not part of my opening statement. If you wish, I am happy to go to that output and answer that question, or we can wait until we reach it.

Mr BROWN: You can answer that now because you are the minister for Seniors.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, you did touch on Seniors in your opening statement, so I am happy for you to answer that question now.

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to Seniors, I have been engaging with my seniors ministerial advisory council and different stakeholders such as COTA, the peak body, and I am carrying their voices to Cabinet to represent them. When it comes to the decision-making of the Cabinet, unfortunately, I cannot say what we have discussed or decided there. I can assure you their voices are taken there.

We are continuing to provide cost-of-living measures. If you listened to the recent budget, it was clear that this government has committed almost \$290m for cost-of-living relief overall. When it comes to seniors, a good portion of that goes to the Power and Water and other subsidies.

Mr BROWN: Could you be specific, out of that cost-of-living relief, what is dedicated to seniors?

Mr CHARLS: The Northern Territory Government ensures seniors, pensioners, carers and vulnerable Territorians are valued, respected and supported through policies, projects and initiatives that focus on financial support, social connectivity and safety.

As of 31 March 2026, 16,558 members are on the NT Concession Scheme. Members are eligible to receive cost-of-living support through concessions on electricity, water, sewerage, motor vehicle registration, Northern Territory drivers' licence fees, council rates, waste removal and spectacles.

There are 18,177 members on the NT Seniors Recognition Scheme. Members receive an annual payment of \$550 recognising their valuable contribution to the community. The prepaid card can be used at almost any business to enable seniors to spend their \$550 to suit their lifestyle.

Mr YOUNG: How many are on the NT recognition scheme for the \$550?

Mr CHARLS: There are 18,177 members on the NT Seniors Recognition Scheme.

Mr BROWN: The 16,058 that you mentioned earlier—cost-of-living relief—how much of those have actually claimed?

Mr CHARLS: There are 16,558 members on the current NT Concession Scheme.

J DAVIS: About the seniors concession scheme—how many members of the concession scheme are in remote communities?

Mr YOUNG: Can we also put in there a breakdown of urban and rural areas? Can we get a breakdown of the three areas, including remote?

Mr CHARLS: I will take that question on notice because it is specific for the numbers.

Question on Notice No 4.1

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record, potentially adding in the additional locations.

J DAVIS: Can you outline the rural, remote and urban numbers in the seniors concession scheme?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.1.

Mr BROWN: The latest NTCOSS cost-of-living report shows that there is not a single affordable rental in the Northern Territory for a person with disability, support pension or age pension. Do you appreciate how critical cost-of-living relief is for some of our most vulnerable Territorians who are doing it incredibly tough? Do you have a plan to do anything about this?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Are you asking for an opinion?

Mr BROWN: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: You cannot ask for opinions. Do you want to restate the question?

Mr BROWN: I will restate the first one.

The latest NTCOSS cost-of-living report shows that there is not a single affordable rental in the Northern Territory for a person with a disability support pension or an age pension. Do you appreciate how critical cost-of-living relief is for some of our most vulnerable Territorians who are doing it incredibly tough?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That is still an opinion. You may want to restate that last part of your question.

Mr BROWN: Do you appreciate just how critical cost-of-living is for some of our most vulnerable Territorians?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Arafura, when you are asking somebody if they appreciate something, that is asking for an inference or opinion on that. You may want to make it a factual question.

J DAVIS: Many seniors in my electorate rely on their senior's recognition card to assist them in paying bills that are due early in the financial year. Many of them raised difficulties they faced last year, when many of the cards could not be activated and needed to be replaced. Can you tell me how many cards had to be reissued?

Mr CHARLS: This is going back to the specifics for 1.3. I am happy to move on to output 1.3, because you are going to the specifics—there was no mentioning about any of those in my opening statement. As I mentioned, I am happy to answer all the questions, but it is always helpful for me and the department ...

J DAVIS: I am happy to do it at the output. I just thought while we were on it, it would be useful but I can wait for that.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Johnston, do you have any other follow-up questions on that output related to the opening statement, or in output 1.3?

J DAVIS: I will not bother wasting time, I will go to the output.

Mr BROWN: Can you explain, as the Minister for Seniors, why you have not chosen to increase the Seniors Recognition Scheme for another year?

Mr CHARLS: Again, it is specific about 1.3. I am very happy to move on 1.3 if that is what you want, because if you do not think anything in 1.1 are not important and happy to move on to 1.3. But, I prefer to answering that when it gets to 1.3.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I am just wondering if you have questions specifically around the concession scheme, we can leave them all to 1.3. Do you have any questions specifically on the details in the opening statement that you want to go through? Otherwise, we can move to output.

Mr BROWN: Well, I have got the scheme, then you have sports voucher. I will go to sports voucher, Minister.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Arafura.

Mr BROWN: When Territorians are facing cost of living crisis', can you explain why the \$100 sports voucher scheme has been frozen for the second year in a row under your government?

Mr CHARLS: That is again, through the output 2.1, but I will just answer this one. When it comes the sports vouchers to 31 March 2026, expenditure amount is \$2.03m, which was 58% of the total allocated budget of \$3.5m. When it comes to the question about why this has not been increased, at this point in time, this is what the government is focusing on. We want to make sure we are keeping on how we can support families. As we all know, the cost of living has increased. We want to make sure we are keeping on what we have and support the families so they can support with one sport voucher every six months, or if there are children who are participating in two seasonal sports. Still it will be a cost-of-living measure for the families.

Mr BROWN: Territory families are feeling the pinch, can you explain why parents who are struggling to make ends meet are now being forced to take on more out-of-pocket costs as the vouchers' purchasing power decreases?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Arafura, I think that question is a bit repetitive. It is similar to the first one. Is there something different that you want to know?

Mr BROWN: In regard to the voucher, it has not been increased even though the cost of living has increased. Is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: I understand that you questioned why it has not been changed, but I think you are only talking about the two years, but they were like that with the previous Labor government. They have not increased, so this is something that government is supporting families with to provide that cost-of-living relief. We as a government are proud to maintain that and providing that relief for the families.

Mr BROWN: Is there no increase for this year, last year or the year before?

Mr CHARLS: From my understanding there has not been an increase for a few years now, including during the previous Labor government.

Mr BROWN: Did you fight for an increase in Cabinet?

Mr CHARLS: Again, I said that earlier. I cannot talk about what was discussed in Cabinet, and if you are that keen you need to wait for 30 years for the release of Cabinet records.

Mr BROWN: That is a no.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Arafura, do not put words into people's mouths. I think the minister has answered the question regarding the ministerial process.

Mr BROWN: The minister is trying to get us to go to 1.3 while we are trying to ask questions on the output. He does not direct us ...

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I do not think he is doing that. He is trying to direct it to an appropriate place in the groupings. We will stay on the opening statement if that is okay.

Mr BROWN: Unfortunately, he is trying to direct us to the outputs.

Mr CHARLS: Can I just make a comment. It is about 1.3, so that means they are not showing any interest on 1.1 or 1.2. It is the majority of my portfolio about the people and disability. If that is what the opposition want to take the time on, I am happy to move onto any output they want to, but I strongly prefer if we can go in order because it will help everyone to follow that, and it helps my department and the members to have a common understanding rather than the written questions they have prepared from all the outputs.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Do you have any questions related to the opening statement, or would you like to move to outputs?

Mr BROWN: I mentioned sports vouchers and swim vouchers. Are you happy to answer on swim vouchers?

Mr CHARLS: Again, Member for Arafura, I am happy to answer all those questions, but can we go through the outputs? That is all I am asking. I know you have prepared a list of things, but if you can align that to the output it would be helpful for everyone to answer, and you will get a structured response as well.

Mr BROWN: We have done this with all the other ministers.

Mr CHARLS: I cannot comment about what other ministers have done before. I am saying my preference, and when it comes to a huge sports portfolio with all touch points with the people, I prefer that to be structured.

Mr BROWN: Wow. You might as well ask yourself the questions.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I am happy for you to keep asking questions specifically related to the opening statement, but I understand what the minister is saying for the department's process. It is easier to go output by output. If your questions related to the opening statement fall under specific outputs, they will not get missed. We have plenty of time to go through every output, if you can manage it in that way. That would be better for the department to respond.

Mr BROWN: If that would make you comfortable, we will go to output 1.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Johnston, do you have any questions remaining regarding the opening statement?

J DAVIS: I am happy to ask under outputs.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: You can tell me to also go back to the output if you want, but you specifically mentioned the youth hub in your opening statement. I can say on behalf of the northern suburbs team, including you and the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina that we all welcome that initiative and congratulate you. I have three questions, and you can maybe roll your answer into one.

We heard from the opposition that there was no consultation into the youth hub. I would like to know if that is true, and you can explain that. Secondly, we also heard from the federal member Luke Gosling that there are currently no youth services in existence in the area. I would be happy if you can clarify that because there is a major one I know of. Thirdly, can you provide a status update on the youth hub tender and proposed timeline?

If you want me to read through that in the output I will; it is up to you.

Mr CHARLS: I will touch on that question. I would prefer the details to be discussed when we reach that output.

In terms of the Youth Hub, that was announced earlier this year. From the information that I have been provided, the tender has now been closed. We look forward to how the DLI will do the tender process and who it will be awarded to. Then the Youth Hub, I would like that to be opened towards the end of 2027 or early 2028.

In terms of the specifics, I prefer that to be responded to when it comes to Output 1.9.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That concludes all questions relating to the opening statement. The committee will now consider the Estimates proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2026–2027 as they relate to the Department of People, Sport and Culture.

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

Madam ACTING CHAIR Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr BROWN: Output 1, People, community engagement and inclusion?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: We will get to Output 1 next.

No other questions relating to budget and fiscal strategy? That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 1 – PEOPLE

Output 1.1 – Community Engagement and Inclusion

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output Group 1, People, Output 1.1, Community engagement and inclusion. Are there any questions?

Mr BROWN: Back to my seniors questions. How many seniors are currently accessing the Senior Recognition Scheme? You said 18,500 ...

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Arafura, I believe that is Output 1.3 for seniors.

Mr CHARLS: It is under concession, that is why.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: We are talking about Output 1.1, Community engagement and inclusion.

Mr CHARLS: For clarification when it comes to seniors and all the strategies, it comes under this output, but when it is specifically about the concession, that is 1.3. If you want to talk about seniors in broader terms, that comes under this output.

J DAVIS: I have questions under this one.

Mr BROWN: Concessions.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That is Output 1.3. Are there any questions on Output 1.1?

J DAVIS: The 2026–27 budget provides \$1m in additional funding to establish the community grants program. Can you clarify whether this is, in fact, additional funding or replacement for the Multicultural Grants Program which last year received \$1m in funding but is not listed in this year's budget?

Mr CHARLS: The \$1m committed for the multicultural community grants program last year was an election commitment that we have delivered. That was a one-year commitment we provided. This additional \$1m that are referring to is a new program.

J DAVIS: Sorry, I missed that. The Multicultural Grants Program no longer exists? It is not in this year's budget.

Mr CHARLS: The Multicultural Grants Program exists, but there was an uplift of \$1m compared to the previous financial year. That was a time-limited one-year commitment that was provided by the CLP government when we came to government. That is an election commitment we have delivered.

Now it is back to how it was before. The Multicultural Grant Programs are definitely there. That will be rolled out next year as well.

J DAVIS: What is the budget for the Multicultural Grants Program?

Mr CHARLS: The 2026–27 budget is \$1.447m.

J DAVIS: On community engagement and inclusion, at last year's Estimates, I asked the CEO whether there was any way of measuring impact in terms of social inclusion. At that point, you committed to looking at a broader wellbeing measurement. Twelve months on, has any framework been developed, and have there been any resources allocated to that work?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass that on to the CEO to answer that question.

Ms LIVESLEY: At this stage, no further work. We have been reviewing and updating the current strategies we have across our community engagement division, which includes multicultural affairs, disability, gender equity and diversity. That has been the current focus of the team. Part of those will be developing an outcomes framework to measure the impact and how we are delivering those.

J DAVIS: In terms of community inclusion and wellbeing, specifically?

Ms LIVESLEY: More broadly for each of those specific areas. Each of those areas within community engagement have their own strategy, we are progressively updating them as they are coming to the end of their period.

J DAVIS: Is there any intention to design any kind of broader evaluation framework around community engagement and wellbeing?

Ms LIVESLEY: Not at this stage, no.

Mr CHARLS: To add to that, in broader terms, we supported almost 81 events and activities last year, so the broader (inaudible), we want to support the multicultural community for them to come together and share their culture, and that is where we are seeing things move forward.

The department has worked with many stakeholders in this current financial year to develop the 10-year multicultural strategy, which should be announced in the next few weeks once the process has been completed. Extensive work was done by the department through the Office of Multicultural Affairs during this financial year to ensure that the multicultural communities are supported, heard and their perspective is taken when it comes to that strategy development as well.

J DAVIS: Is there any evaluation of that grant program to multicultural communities?

Mr CHARLS: There are different grant programs the department is providing. The majority of the grant programs are under the \$10,000 mark. As I mentioned earlier, the total value of the grant funding is \$1.447m. The priority of the department within this financial year was to ensure we would have the multicultural strategy in place for the next 10 years. As part of that, that is something that we can look into. We have two FTE for the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and it has been like that for many years.

When it comes to that broader work, it is really hard for the public servants to deliver with those two FTE, so they have to clearly work on the priorities for the department. One of the priorities for the department was to support multicultural communities by providing those grants, and also to work through the multicultural ministerial advisory council and take the strategy forward.

The department has done a really good job and has done a lot of consultation across the Territory in different regions. That was the key focus of the department, and that is the reason why there was no specific evaluation. Moving into the future, there may be opportunity if the workload permits for the department.

J DAVIS: To clarify, is there currently no evaluation framework but there may be in the future? Have I understood? I understand you are not committing to that.

Mr CHARLS: There are evaluation frameworks like the process of acquittals and things like that. There are ways the department is measuring how the communities are spending their grant—are they doing it properly? Is the acquittal process there? The government has a system called Grants NT, where the organisation must be compliant to receive funding as well. There are processes in place, but when it comes to that broader evaluation, that is something the department does not have the capacity to do with two FTE. Into the future, this is something that if we need to do it, we may need to tap into the university or other external organisations to do that evaluation, which is not currently a priority for the department.

J DAVIS: As you spoke about in your opening statement, part of the intent of your agency is fostering an inclusive and connected community for Territorians. My broad question—which you may have already answered—is: how are you measuring whether the work of your agency is doing that?

Mr CHARLS: One of the measures that I, as the minister, (inaudible) the participation of the multicultural community across different events and activities. For example, on 30 May we had the Big Day Out in Alice

Springs as well as the Harmony Soiree in Darwin; I think I saw you at that event. We can see that the multicultural community events are growing in participation with the community coming together. Last year in comparison to this year, there were a significant number of stalls representing their culture and community. We can see that people in the community are coming together, and we are seeing things going well. That is something that I have observed.

When it comes to the department, there are processes like acquittals and other things in place to ensure that the funding provided by the government is being used correctly according to the projects that they submitted. When it comes to those processes, the department is doing that work and is working alongside other departments to ensure all the funding is going to the organisations that are compliant on GrantsNT.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I have a follow-up question regarding the multicultural events. I attend many multicultural events and last night we attended the La Festa della Repubblica Italiana, along with the Member for Fannie Bay and our other parliamentary colleagues; it was a great event. You also touched on the Harmony Soiree, and that is one example of bringing together all our multicultural communities to celebrate. What funding is provided in that space?

Mr CHARLS: I already mentioned earlier that the total funding for that grant was \$1.447m.

Mr YOUNG: Could you identify every multicultural specific funding line in the 2026–27 budget?

Mr CHARLS: It is under Community Engagement and Inclusion and in 2026–27 it is \$16m. That is the breakdown which comes under Community Engagement and Inclusion.

When it comes to the Multicultural Grants Program, we have different grant programs which the CEO can discuss the specifics of. We have the smaller grants, the Quick Response Grants. We are supporting the peak body grants to the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory as well as the MCSCA in Alice Springs. We provide different grant funding for different organisations to provide that support to the community, to bring them together and to work together irrespective of their backgrounds.

J DAVIS: I would like to go back to the evaluation question because, with due respect, I am not interested in how many stalls are at an event or how many people go to them. This is Estimates and it is about whether your department are achieving key aims which—from the budget papers—is to foster an inclusive and connected community for all Territorians with your nearly \$300m budget. My question is: how are you measuring whether you are achieving that aim?

Mr CHARLS: I have to say; I do care about people celebrating, as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. You may not care, that is totally up to you as an individual.

J DAVIS: Of course I care, minister; that is a total misrepresentation. That is not what I am saying. I am saying that is not a measure of your key aim.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Just answer the question.

Mr CHARLS: Again, I...

Mr YOUNG: He has got to withdraw that. It is a reflection on a member; he needs to withdraw it.

Mr CHARLS: I just requoted what the member said. I have not done anything else.

J DAVIS: You said that I may not care about these events, and I said that is not a measure of the key...

Mr YOUNG: It is a reflection on a member. He has to withdraw.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, I ask you to just answer the question.

J DAVIS: Minister, you clearly know I care; I go to all of them.

Mr CHARLS: If the Member for Johnston did not say that I do not care about (inaudible) has happened, then I am happy to withdraw. I thought that was what I heard.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: If you could, just answer the question.

Mr CHARLS: I touched base—I do care about the (inaudible) process and that (inaudible) forms include assessing outcomes and impacts as well. That is, again, the current measures of evaluation. As I mentioned, as the minister, I do not expect the department—when it comes to the Office of Multicultural Affairs with (inaudible) to do more broader work. I know that thing you mentioned about \$300m budget, but you need to understand that out of that, nearly half is going to the NDIS through the budget process as well. Specifically about this line, so I will only answer to the Member for Daly; it sits around \$16m and specifically about Multicultural portfolio; it is about \$1.447m. It is not \$300m, it is about \$1.447m.

J DAVIS: There is no process for evaluating, broadly, whether or not your portfolio is achieving its key aim? Currently, under your current resources.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I think the minister has answered this question, so we are getting quite repetitive here. He spoke about acquittal processes with the money that was granted, there is acquittal processes there. I feel like we are repeating the same question again and again. If you have another question, please ask it.

J DAVIS: I have other questions under this output. If other people have some I am happy to go to them, and then I can come back.

Mr YOUNG: I will just go back to the first question I asked in regard to the specific funding line in the 2026–27 Budget. Last years BP3 listed multicultural grants, multicultural community facility grants and the Katherine multipurpose multicultural facility. Where are those lines in this year's BP3?

Mr CHARLS: If you look on to Budget Paper No 4, page 30—Katherine multipurpose multicultural facility: \$1.5m.

There are current discussions happening with the Katherine Town Council about how we are progressing on that.

Mr YOUNG: Is it correct that the community engagement and inclusion output has fallen from \$17.47m in the 2025–26 budget to \$16.049m, as you stated earlier, in the 2026–27 budget?

Mr CHARLS: I already mentioned earlier when the Member for Johnston asked about the \$1m time-limited funding that was an election commitment for one year. That was that \$1m cessation of time-limited funding from 2025–26. There is around \$0.17m internal transfer from sports and recreation for active recreation grants, \$0.13m reduction in funding from \$0.25m for the establishment of integrated service system for reducing domestic family and sexual violence, which was funding the Department of Children and Families that came across. That was reduced by \$0.125m. Then \$0.05m, \$50,000, lent to the application of parameters and alignment of management attributes across outputs. Another \$50,000 was carried over from 2024–25 to 2025–26 for the men's shed relocation project, and \$0.2m, which is \$20,000, for centralisation of the department's workers' compensation and corporate and governance output. That was that difference.

Regarding the \$1m, the majority of the difference is because of the time-limited funding, which was an election commitment that the Finocchiaro CLP delivered.

Mr YOUNG: Is it also correct that the budget paper explains these decreases are a replacement of a time-limited uplift for multicultural grants with the broader community grants program?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, that is right.

Mr YOUNG: Can you table a list of every multicultural grant approved in 2024–25, 2025–26 and proposed for 2026–27, including the applicant, amount requested, amount approved and whether the event was fully funded?

Mr CHARLS: Is this about 2024–25, not 2025–26?

Mr YOUNG: It was about listing every multicultural grant for 2024–25, then 2025–26 and proposed for 2026–27, including the applicant, amount requested, amount approved.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, it has to be within the reporting period. It has to be in 2025–26.

Mr CHARLS: If the Member for Daly goes through the department annual report, all the funding allocated is part of that which was released during this period. The annual report for this financial year will be released.

Mr YOUNG: Are you able to table that?

Mr CHARLS: It is already a publicly available document. The annual report is on the website; you can just google to find it.

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide the proposed ones for 2026–27?

Mr CHARLS: From my understanding the organisation has to apply for the grant. I do not have the skill to anticipate what the organisation will apply for in the next financial year. I do not know who will apply. When they apply the department will assess.

Mr YOUNG: Can you at least provide the 2025–26. I think the one you are showing me, I may be wrong, but it might have been the 2024–25 document.

Mr CHARLS: You are asking for information about the requested and amount approved. From my understanding I do not even see that information as a minister because that is purely an operational thing, and the grants are processed within the department.

Mr YOUNG: The department would have that information.

Mr CHARLS: The CE's annual report will be published by October. All that information will be there. If you are specifically asking about from 1 July to 31 March, if you want, I am happy read out that list.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, that is fine.

Mr CHARLS: I believe you are specifically taking this question somewhere, so I will read all those organisations and how much amount they received. The recipients of Multicultural Community Facilities Grant 2025–26 are:

- NT Timor Chinese Association Inc received \$28,950 to replace a damaged 30-metre fence.
- NT Thai Association received \$65,000 for building certification inspection cost, removal services and contribution towards gardens services.
- Cyprus Community of the Northern Territory received \$305,000 for kitchen, bar and toilet renovations or \$398,950 in total for the community facilities.
- Sharing arrangements—the Hindu Society of the NT received \$6,000 for sharing facilities with the Telugu Association of the Northern Territory.
- Hindu Society of the NT received \$9,500 for a sharing facility with Tamil Society of the NT.
- Hindu Society of the NT received \$6,200 for a sharing facility with Indian Cultural Society of the NT.

Recipients of the Multicultural Grants Program 2025–26 are:

- Latvian Association of Darwin Incorporated for the project a Century of Latvia's history displayed on 10 informational banners—\$2,000
- Pakistan Association of the Northern Territory Incorporated Pakistan's national day celebration—\$13,000
- Central Australia Sikh Cultural Centre Incorporated 556th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji—\$3,000
- Africa Australia Friendship Association African annual dinner dance—\$6,000
- Tamil Society of the Northern Territory Incorporated Indian Food Festival—\$5,000
- Tamil Society of the Northern Territory Incorporated Indian Food Festival—\$5,000
- Fiji Multicultural Community Alice Springs Incorporated Fiji Day 2025—\$3,900

- Telugu Association of the Northern Territory Incorporated Vanabhojanalu traditional community picnic 2025—\$4,000
- Alliance Francaise de Darwin Bastille Day 2025—\$4,500
- Central Australia Sikh Cultural Centre Bandi Chhor Divas 2025—\$3,000
- Indian Association of the Northern Territory Diwali 2025—\$6,000
- Telangana Association of Darwin, celebrating Telangana traditions, Bathukamma—\$4,000
- Telangana Association of Darwin Ganesh Festival—\$4,000
- Australia China Friendship Society NT Grants Incorporated multicultural dance and food festival—\$25,000
- inaudible Incorporated inaudible Festival—\$3,000
- German Association in Darwin Incorporated Octoberfest—\$1,000
- Tennant Creek Fijian Community Fijian Independence Day Celebration Week—\$15,000
- The NT Irish Association Incorporated NT Irish Festival 2025—\$20,000
- Northern Territory Cricket Limited 2025 multicultural cup—\$8,000
- The Korean Association in Australia Northern Territory Incorporated Darwin and Korean Language and Cultural School—\$5,000
- Filipino Senior Citizen Association Incorporated Senior Territorians Wellbeing—\$18,000
- The Italian Club Darwin, Italian Cultural night—\$25,000
- Australia Japanese Association of the Northern Territory Japanese Cultural Day—\$5,000
- Cyprus Community of the NT Incorporated Food and Wine Festival 2025—\$40,000
- Colombian-Australian Association of the Northern Territory Colombian Festival 2025—\$20,000
- inaudible Community inaudible group Ltd Cultural Community Cookup and Connection—\$6,000
- Northern Territory Homegrown Club inaudible Festival Celebration 2025—\$2,500
- Celebrate Around Two Australian Vietnam's Family Association Incorporated Vietnamese New Year 2026—\$10,000
- The Korean Association in Australia Northern Territory Incorporated Korea Festival 2026—\$10,000
- inaudible NT Incorporated Interfaith inaudible shoulder to shoulder 2026 Standing with Australian Muslims upholding Australian values—\$3,000
- inaudible Association of Darwin inaudible cultural picnic—\$5,000
- Taiwanese Community of the Northern Territory inaudible festival—\$5,000
- Indian Cultural Society of Northern Territory Celebrate Holi 2026, \$5,000
- St Savvas of Kalymnos Greek Orthodox Parish (NT) Ltd, a celebration of culture and community, \$20,000
- Northern Territory Hong Kong Club Year of the Horse, Chinese New Year celebrations 2026, \$3,500
- NT Timor Chinese Association Inc, Chinese New Year 2026, \$4,000

- The Korean Association in Australia Northern Territory Inc, Darwin Korean Language and Cultural School, \$5,000
- Cyprus Community of Northern Territory Inc, the New Year (inaudible), \$20,000
- Telangana Association of Darwin Sri Sita Rama event, \$5,000
- Australia China Friendship Society (NT Branch) Inc, Chinese Festival 2026, \$20,000
- Islamic Society of Darwin Inc, Multi-faith Grand Iftar and Interfaith Eid celebration 2026, \$3,000
- Indian Cultural Society Northern Territory Inc, and Evening in India, \$10,000
- (inaudible) Association NT Inc, (inaudible) 2026, a community celebration of Sikh culture, \$4,000
- Latin American Association Darwin Inc, (inaudible) festival 2026, \$35,000
- (inaudible) response grant, Islamic Society of Darwin Inc, Interfaith Day and Mosque Open Day 2025, \$2,000
- Nepalese Association of the Northern Territory Inc, a multicultural Holi Festival 2022, \$2,000
- Indian Cultural Society Northern Territory Inc, Diwali 2025, \$2,000
- NT Timor Chinese Association Inc, Timor-Leste (inaudible) NT community, \$1,000
- Central Australia Sikh Cultural Centre Inc, (inaudible) Festival 2025, \$2,000
- Lion Heart Association Inc, Mid-Autumn Festival 2025, \$2,000
- (inaudible) Northern Territory Australia, Religious Festival 2025, \$2,000
- Colombian Australian Association of Northern Territory, Colombian Celebration of the Day of the Little Candles in Darwin, \$1,800
- Buddhist Society of the NT Inc, Taste and Talent Festival, \$1,000
- Lion Heart Association Inc, Chinese New Year, the Year of Horse 2026 Celebration, \$2,000
- Cyprus Community of NT Inc, Cyprus Remembering Eternal Heroes and Legacy of the 1974 Invasion, \$400
- (inaudible) Association of the Northern Territory Incorporated, (inaudible) 2026, \$2,000
- (inaudible) Refugees Australia Inc, Many Tongues, One Territory, their multicultural youth (inaudible), \$2,000
- Puja and Cultural Association of NT Inc, (inaudible) celebration 2025, \$2,000
- Tamil Society of the Northern Territory Inc, Diwali celebrations 2025, \$2,000
- Vietnamese Community in Australia NT Chapter Inc, Tet 2025 Mid-Autumn festival events, \$2,000
- Council of Ageing Northern Territory Inc, Seniors Multicultural Social Support Program, \$25,000
- Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia Inc, Case Management Support to Migrants in Central Australia, \$160,000
- Australian Red Cross Society, Connected Women and Their Families, \$100,000

- Melaleuca Refugee Centre, Torture and Trauma Survivors Service of the Northern Territory Inc, My NT Kaleidoscope, \$120,000
- Catholic Church of the Diocese of Darwin, Italian and East Timorese Community Service, \$50,000
- Colombian Australian Association Northern Territory, Building and Thriving, Inspiring Community, \$15,000
- Ignite Potential Inc, Employment Training and Emotional Wellbeing Support for Migrants, \$150,000.

For the peak body and services funding: Multicultural Council of Northern Territory for staffing, operational costs and projects, \$361,748; and Multicultural Communities of Central Australia Inc for staffing, operational costs and projects, \$191,209.

When it comes to the Harmony School, they are getting small grants up to \$800 for different schools across the Northern Territory as well.

On top of this, through other departments like Tourism and Events and also through the Community Benefit Fund, there are various grant programs that we do in order to support the multicultural community because we value their contribution to the Territory and we want to ensure we are supporting all the community and help them to celebrate their culture and be part of the journey that we are on as Territorians. We are proud to provide these opportunities for them and that they are working together in that partnership with the government and the community.

I thank the opposition for the opportunity to recognise all the communities as doing wonderful community engagement in Northern Territory.

Mr YOUNG: I appreciate that extensive list, with the costings to each grant as well. I was trying to keep up. I was just wondering how many exactly there were—just a number figure.

Mr CHARLS: There were 81 events and initiatives. Because the Celebrate grants have a round 1 and a round 2, there may be the same organisations celebrating different culture throughout the year, so they may have multiple grants.

Also, one thing I need to specifically say is that if any association is noncompliant, has not done their acquittal process, or if they have not demonstrated from the previous round that they have spent the money on the project, those organisations will not get that support. There are many organisations who apply for the grant who will be ineligible, because on GrantsNT, that is one of the first checks and balances that all the departments are currently doing. I am sure that was available during the previous government as well. We make sure they are compliant in order to receive the government funding.

Mr YOUNG: I think I heard you say—this is just to clarify—that you could apply for one grant, but it might be over multiple events if they have multiple events within that calendar year. Would they have to apply separately for different events?

Mr CHARLS: There are two rounds that normally happen. The first round is from 1 July to 31 December, so that means they need to apply around March the previous year. Round 2 is from 1 January to 30 June, so they need to apply around October. It is on the website when the grants are opening.

For example, within that six months when they are applying, they can incorporate multiple events they want to do. It is very competitive. There are multicultural associations that are very active, and because one community is celebrating, it gives that opportunity for the other community to come and celebrate as well. That means more organisations are applying for the same round of grants. That sometimes may impact on their success or how much they receive.

I believe it was the Colombian association—when they sang their national anthem at the Waterfront, I could see the tears from the community members. It was a proud moment for them to celebrate their culture and their country here in the Northern Territory. That is how we as the government and the department are supporting the communities who are compliant. We will continue to provide that support in the future.

Mr YOUNG: I agree that it is important. Just to round off, within that funding period there is two each year. Within that funding period, for example, that grant could facilitate three events. It is not a trick question; I think that should be the case, but I just want to clear that up.

Mr CHARLS: I will pass to the CEO to answer because it is technical how they run their grant program.

Ms LIVESLEY: Within the program, organisations can apply for grants to celebrate. That could be a one-off event, or they could put forward that they might do a couple of different activities, or they might be delivering a support program. The majority will be for a one-off celebration event, celebrating a particular important cultural day for the community.

Mr YOUNG: Let us say that one of the multicultural groups apply for a grant for three events, and there is an underspend for what they have said for one of those events. Can they bring that amount forward to the second event that occurs in the same year, as long as it is acquitted for and is only spent on the three events? Let us say there are three events. In the first event, there may be an underspend on what applied for within that grant. Can they bring that forward to the second and third event?

Ms LIVESLEY: That is standard practice around a grant variation. What we would do is an organisation would write to the funding department to request a variation to utilise the funding awarded for a different activity or to carry over.

Mr YOUNG: How many multicultural organisations applied for funding in the last round and were rejected?

Mr CHARLS: We do not have that specific information in front of us, but I am happy to take that on notice and the department can provide that information.

Question on Notice No 4.2

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

Mr YOUNG: How many multicultural organisations applied for funding in the last round and were rejected?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.2.

J DAVIS: I think I just heard you reference funding for domestic family and sexual violence. I noticed in the budget papers that funding for prevention activities addressing gender-based violence dropped from \$250,000 last year to \$125,000. What happened to that funding and why has it reduced?

Mr CHARLS: That was specific funding that was provided to the Department of People, Sport and Culture from the Department of Children and Families. Last year it was \$250,000 which that department provided to DPPC. This year the budget line reduced that to \$125,000.

J DAVIS: What was done with that money last year?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass this to the CEO to respond because it is a specific program.

Ms LIVESLEY: The majority of that funding was allocated towards our men's grants program that we delivered. It is a Territory-wide program.

J DAVIS: What is the men's grants program?

Ms LIVESLEY: It is a small grants program for organisations to work with men as an early intervention and prevention supporting program. It is to bring them together to talk about—as early intervention and prevention around any violence and family and domestic violence. A lot of it is focused on community organisations, especially in our remote communities.

J DAVIS: My standard question: has there been any evaluation of that?

Ms LIVESLEY: It has only been two years running, so no evaluation at this stage.

J DAVIS: With now half the funding, what is the intention with that into the next year?

Ms LIVESLEY: It will continue along, just with reduced funding. That additional \$250,000 is just a one-off for the first year for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Framework. It was only ever for one year, for the first year \$250,000, then it is ongoing \$125,000.

J DAVIS: Is that the total funding allocated to domestic, family and sexual violence prevention activities within your department, or are there other budget lines funding prevention work?

Ms LIVESLEY: In terms of dedicated funding from the Department for Children and Families that is the one line, but through our Office of Gender Equity and Diversity we also have our general grants round and other programs that will award grants that have a focus on prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence.

J DAVIS: How much money does your department get from the department of Territory Families around domestic, family and sexual violence?

Ms LIVESLEY: The \$125,000.

J DAVIS: Is there no other money?

Ms LIVESLEY: No.

J DAVIS: My understanding is that under action plan 1 there was ongoing funding to the department which continued; is that correct?

Ms LIVESLEY: There was funding that is actually sitting with our department that is not directly from DCF around elder abuse, that we deliver through the Office of Senior Territorians.

J DAVIS: In terms of any funding for domestic, family and sexual violence prevention, currently it is \$125,000 for gender-based violence prevention, which goes through to men's grant programs, and there is an amount of money, you may have just said, for elder abuse. Can you quantify that?

Ms LIVESLEY: That, I think, was a very long-term transfer from the budget from that area when we were all part of the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities. It currently sits at around \$300,000.

J DAVIS: There is no other funding, to your knowledge, dedicated to domestic, family and sexual violence prevention?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to domestic violence, it is not about specific funding programs. For example, one of the things that we hear from different groups is around the social isolation and other aspects that is like one of the things that impacts on increasing domestic violence. For example, one of the groups I met when I was in Alice Springs was the Bikes Mwerre group. It is about bringing children to get the experience to work on a bike, doing the right thing. It is about providing an opportunity for any person to be out from the household and engage in something to build friendships and networks.

When it comes to the Multicultural Grants Program and things like that, these are the things that really help individuals build that network outside. We will have one for when there is an issue to reach out. If you look at the budget line that may be the only thing that specifically mentions that. The intent of the department and government is we are supporting the community. Through that broader support we are helping people, which comes under the broader term under my department to be in a position that they can better raise these issues and awareness.

For example, we are providing, I believe, \$100,000 for the Red Cross women empowerment and all that information. It is providing an opportunity for them to come together and share their experience. Many individuals who are in the Territory may not be aware of how to escalate things. It is about providing opportunities and networks.

All these different grant programs are providing that in some kind, but specifically, under the budget lines, I agree with the CEO that is what is specifically there for.

J DAVIS: For the record, anything that supports people being connected and having options, I support. I am particularly interested in how that might relate to preventing domestic, family and sexual violence and—at

the risk of sounding like a broken record—I would love to know how that work is actually being measured in terms of preventing that, if that is what the money is intended for.

Mr YOUNG: I have one more question going back to the grants. Can you provide a breakdown of successful grant applicants—the list that you read out—into each region? Can you do it specifically to a community—for example, if any in Wadeye may have had a multicultural event there?

Mr CHARLS: What was the example used?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: His example was by community as well, if you can break it down further; by region and then community.

Mr YOUNG: I am not sure if you can do it by community, but I was just ...

Mr CHARLS: We can do it by region, but not specific communities across the Territory.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any way to find out whether there were events held in different communities, just by—I am not sure if there is any reporting around that.

Mr CHARLS: Can you please define ‘community’?

Mr YOUNG: For example, obviously there are plenty of multicultural events in Darwin, Alice Springs and I think you mentioned Tennant Creek. I am trying to get a better understanding of more broadly, out of those regions. For example, a community like Daly River, Wadeye or—to the specific community.

Mr MACKAY: Community as a location, not necessarily as a multicultural group, I think is the ...

Mr YOUNG: Yes, you are right. It is to the community itself, where the event would have been held—the location.

Mr CHARLS: Specifically, when it comes to the grants program, it is about the individual organisations putting the project to the government. There is no project that is run by the government for the community. It is all application based. If any communities want to celebrate something in any region of the Northern Territory, it is not going to prevent that. It is up to the individual community groups whether they want to do it or not.

Mr YOUNG: Would it have a location to it—where the event is being held? I am assuming when a multicultural group applies for a grant, they would say we are applying for this funding and it will be—I am not asking specifically for Darwin, I am talking more broadly in the regions, but I am using this as an example—at the Waterfront. We know there are a lot of events down there, so you probably would have that data to break it down. However, I am not asking about Darwin; I am asking more for Central Australia and the Top End outside of Darwin. For example, would you have the breakdown of North East Arnhem Land?

Mr CHARLS: We can break it down through (inaudible) but, like I mentioned, it is totally up to the community where they want to run the program. Normally, from my understanding, the application consists of a project description where they want to run it and how much it is going to cost. Those details are involved in that grant application process.

I will leave it for the CEO to respond to that because you are asking information that I am not across.

Ms LIVESLEY: We would have to go through each grant to extract that level of information, but what we could do—we would do it at a high level—would be by region. We would not necessarily be able to narrow it down to the exact physical address or location.

Mr YOUNG: I would not want it to an address; I want to know if there was an event in Wadeye, Peppimenarti or Nhulunbuy. If it is through region, my next question is—I do not want to overwork the department—would I specifically be able to go in there and look at that within the regions, if you broke it down to regions?

Mr CHARLS: I have not received any invitations to attend a multicultural community event in Wadeye or the locations you mentioned.

Mr YOUNG: It was just an example.

Mr CHARLS: Mainly, these programs are applied for by multicultural groups of people with an organisation, because you have to be a registered incorporated association to apply for the grants. The grants are not available for individuals, from my understanding; it is only for registered organisations. The organisations mainly work in a place that the multicultural community groups are residing as well. That is why most of the time you will see that the majority of that happens in the Top End because almost 160,000 of the total population of 265,000 resides in the greater Darwin region. There are multicultural organisations in Alice Springs. I am not aware of any associations in Katherine or Tennant Creek.

Mr YOUNG: It is just between Darwin and Alice Springs. They are registered organisations. Could an Alice Springs organisation provide an event in Tennant Creek?

Mr CHARLS: To add to the context, for example, this government announced a multicultural facility in Katherine, but there are no registered organisations there. That is why I mentioned earlier that we are working with the town council. The Katherine population relies on volunteer workers—like sports clubs—and there is a lot of work and risk when they are take on a director role of these organisations. It totally depends on the volunteers and the community on how they want to do things. My government does not dictate any of these community groups; it is a voluntary application that happens through the portal, and the department makes a decision on that.

Mr YOUNG: To confirm, you cannot get that data on each region? I am happy if it is a yes or no; I do not need an explanation.

Mr CHARLS: One correction from the department is (inaudible) has run an event in Katherine, even though they are based here. They ran events in Katherine this year and last year.

Mr YOUNG: I am happy to do it by region. I can take it on notice.

Mr CHARLS: For the previous question, we will add that to breakdown to the regions.

Question on Notice No 4.3

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

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide a list of the multicultural grants that were approved in the 2025–26 period for each region?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.3.

Mr YOUNG: To help me understand who can apply for the multicultural grant, can I have a definition of 'multicultural'? Does that include Aboriginal organisations as well?

Ms LIVESLEY: For us, it would be any registered association or organisation, as long as they are adhering to the multicultural grants programs guidelines for what they are applying for and their activities. It does not prevent a range of different organisations from applying; what they are applying for would be where they need to meet the criteria of each grant program.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know of any Aboriginal registered organisations that would be eligible and have applied for those grants?

Ms LIVESLEY: Not off the top of my head, no.

Mr YOUNG: Would I be able to get that on notice?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Do you want to just repeat your question for the record so we can get a clear understanding of whether that is available?

Mr YOUNG: Were there any Aboriginal organisations that were eligible to apply for the multicultural grant?

Mr CHARLS: In my view, I do not think the Aboriginal organisations will meet the criteria for that. That is my personal view because I am a migrant myself. As I mentioned, there is \$1.447m available to support the migrant population.

I am not sure if I am quoting this wrong. I think it is one in five people who are born overseas or have one parent born overseas. I see this funding allocation specifically for celebrating their culture which they are doing in a place that is completely different to how their children had the opportunity. It is an opportunity for them to showcase their culture to the next generation and then continue that. I feel that this is not something that would be eligible for the Aboriginal organisations.

J DAVIS: To be clear, you said in your view that multicultural means migrant, which is someone who has arrived to Australia. Is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: It is a culturally and linguistically diverse people, separate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It is for whoever meets the criteria for culturally and linguistically diverse will meet that criteria, but is separate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Mr YOUNG: It is excluded from that?

Mr CHARLS: That is my understanding, yes.

J DAVIS: Is that your understanding, or is that how the department defines it?

Mr CHARLS: That is my understanding. I can go to the departmental guidelines and come back before we finish off this output.

J DAVIS: Do you need that on notice?

Mr CHARLS: No. Before this output finishes, I will come back.

Mr MACKAY: I have questions on this output that are related to veterans, but I do not know if we are done with multicultural.

Mr YOUNG: I still have questions about multicultural festivals.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Can you give an update on the multicultural hubs that were scheduled to go into Katherine and Alice Springs?

Mr CHARLS: There were two commitments that the current government took to the last election. One project was the Alice Springs Multicultural Community Centre which sits with us as a DLI project. I was in Alice Springs a few months ago and—from my understanding—it is in the tender process, or the tender may have closed; they were at the 30% design concept at that time. The community is really excited for that opportunity because there is no specific multicultural hall available for those community groups to hire, or it is too expensive. That is why MCSCA is one of our stakeholders and peak body representation for the Central Australia region. The department and DLI has been working with MCSCA and also other multicultural groups and are taking that feedback. The commitment for the current allocation of funding is around \$9.8m to complete that multicultural hall in Alice Springs, which will be the first one for the Central Australian region.

In Katherine, our commitment is \$1.5m. Currently, the department is working with the DLI and the Katherine Town Council on how they can deliver this. The department has gone through different options. I think it has identified a location that needs some of the work completed by DLI as an assessment. Once we have that information the department will communicate with the Katherine Town Council about the proposal and we will know at that point time. Hopefully, I am expecting that to happen in the next three to six months.

Mr YOUNG: many multicultural festivals are planned months in advance and funding agreements are often negotiated before major international shocks. What work has your department done to assess cost pressures on festivals whose agreements were settled before the Iran war and broader Middle East escalation?

Mr CHARLS: From my understanding, the government does not have a position in terms of increasing the funding of any of the grant agreements based on the recent geopolitical situation. That was not in place before and I think it is not in place currently. It is about the different organisations coming together and then celebrating their culture. If you are specifically asking about any particular organisation or events I can talk

about the involvement in that, but if it is in broader terms I am not aware of any direction from the government to increase or uplift the grants because of the recent geopolitical situation.

Mr YOUNG: Have any multicultural organisations asked your office or department for supplementary funding because the security, insurance, travel, freight, artist costs and event costs have increased?

Mr CHARLS: During this specific time between 1 July and 31 March, I have not been asked by any organisation. This is an ongoing conversation that happens with me as the minister because I attend many events across the Northern Territory for my portfolios. Always there is a conversation about the increasing cost, but that does not mean the government is in a position where we can uplift the grant funding. It is about how the community is working together with private entities and private sponsorship. I always say to different community groups, especially the big events happening at the Waterfront and different parts of the Northern Territory, about when the community is working together they make sure they can use every single dollar that they are getting from the government or the private entities as sponsorship, and they are delivering that.

As I mentioned, there is no plan in place for the government to increase the grant or increase a percentage of all the grants just because there is geopolitical tension across the region.

Mr YOUNG: You would admit that geopolitical tension is creating further costs for multicultural groups to run events?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Are you asking for an opinion? Do you want to restate that question?

Mr YOUNG: Because of the geopolitical conflict that is occurring, do you see an increase in costs for multicultural groups to run their events?

Mr CHARLS: First of all, except the Colombian festival, none of the events are not funded by the Department of People, Sport and Culture; that is my understanding. The ones done through Major Events previously—the current Tourism and Events. Based on the information I have been provided the agency is being flexible when considering variation requests because the successful applicant can always request for a variation. That does not mean that will be approved on request, but that is some of the process. I am sure if you want to specifically ask about any of the major festivals, if it comes under my department I will try to answer that, but in broader terms most of the events and festivals sit under the current Tourism and Events Northern Territory.

Mr YOUNG: I think I may have heard you say that there have been no requests for additional support received through you or more broadly the department.

Mr CHARLS: From 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026 I have not received any requests that I can think of or that have come across to me.

Mr YOUNG: Can we check that through the department too?

Mr CHARLS: The department have confirmed they have not received any during that specific period of time from 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any contingency fund in the 2026–27 budget to help multicultural festivals deal with the extraordinary cost spikes?

Mr CHARLS: As I mentioned earlier, from my understanding there is only one or two festivals supported through my agency. Most of the other festivals are supported by Tourism and Major Events, and I would recommend you direct this question to Minister Boothby when she is here.

Again, if there was an emergency situation—in the past during the previous Labor government, if you have a good example of how Labor government supported through the crisis, and it is something that we can adopt, then I would be very happy to receive that feedback and we can look into that. If you have any examples where funding has been uplifted in the previous grant programs because of a crisis or emergency, I would appreciate that advice and we will look into it.

Mr YOUNG: If community organisations have signed a funding agreement before these cost increases and can no longer deliver the same event safely or properly, what practical support can they access?

Mr CHARLS: They can request remediation, or they can look at scaling down the event. It depends on how much they can afford with the amount of money they have.

Mr YOUNG: is there no flexibility in that funding or support mechanisms that you currently have in place to support multicultural events if there is a cost increase for those events?

Mr CHARLS: From my understanding there was no change made to this guideline. This is the same guideline and practice that was under the previous government that we currently adhere to. There has been no change by the CLP government, and we support all the different cultural groups who want to celebrate their culture. We adhere to the guidelines that are in place currently. As I mentioned earlier, there are opportunities for variation requests and if there are available funds within the department, it is totally up to the decision of the department or whoever makes that decision on the grants to consider that.

Mr YOUNG: Are there any formal channels they can apply for further increases to their grants?

Mr CHARLS: I do not think you have applied for one of these grants, but I have applied for these grants before. There is an Office of Multicultural Affairs and once you receive the grant agreement you then communicate with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. There is an email trail so that you can always go back to the person who is in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. There is a form that can be completed for the variation request and that variation request can be put in to the Office of Multicultural Affairs. There is a panel that assess the grants within the department and it is up to the panel to decide whether they need to consider that variation or not.

Mr MACKAY: Veterans in the Defence community are quite important. What events, programs or activities have been funded by your department for our former service members and veterans in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: We really value the veteran community here in the Northern Territory. There are close to 20,000 members of veterans and their families who are residing in the Northern Territory, which is probably the second-highest per capita across Australia if you compared it to any city or regional town. We are proud of our veteran community and their families.

There are different programs and grants through which we have supported the veteran community during the period from 1 July to 31 March. To specify some examples: Veteran Gaming Australia for the social connections, we provided a grant of \$5,800; Reeling Veterans' Shady Wellness Program, \$15,000; Veteran's Motorcycle Club NT Chapter Accountants VMC NT NAGM Run 2026, \$15,000; Darwin Sailing Club First Mates free sailing for veterans and their friends, \$11,942; Nautilus Mobile Force, NORFORCE, Norforce Health, Wellbeing and Remote Community Engagement initiative, Norforce Aussie Rules team, \$15,000; TD and S Weston's Veteran's Coffee catch up, \$14,700; the Top Ender Tri-Services Magazine Incorporated, the Top Ender wellbeing and welcome guides, \$15,000. That is in the Darwin and Palmerston region.

In the Alice Springs region: Alice Springs Beekeepers Association Incorporated for veteran's pollination festival, \$8,400; in Adelaide River, Mt Bundy Station Private Limited, Mt Bundy commemorative memorial and public display honouring Northern Territory's World War II service legacy, \$15,000.

In the Katherine Region: Bronagh Crawley Equine Assisted Learning, harnessing the power of horses, \$12,536; and for the same provider, harness the power of horses, \$11,000; 5/7 Royal Australian Regiment 2025 Veterans' Games Australia event team, \$20,000—that is something that is supported by the Department of People, Sport and Culture to take part in a Gold Coast for their games last year; Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation Limited, Kookaburra Kids Operation Thrive Project, \$20,000; Veteran's Support Force, Veteran's Games Darwin regional heat 2025, \$20,000; and Soldier On to support the continuation of support services provided by soldiers within the Northern Territory for \$19,000.

There are other projects that were funded or are going to be funded before the end of the financial year as well.

Mr MACKAY: Is the department aware of how many ex-servicemen organisations operate within the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the rough numbers of ex-serving members, we have around 5,000 members who are ex-serving. We do not have the specific numbers for the organisations, but we have a person who is working in the veteran's space who are engaging with ESOs, and providing that information about these grant initiatives and programs. This is only the second year of this grant, meaning this is relatively new; it

would normally take its time to get more applicants, but we are looking at how we support veterans in the community.

One of the other things that I do through the Ministerial Veteran's Advisory Council is asking veterans what the key areas are they believe I need to be advocating for, as the Minister. There are opportunities within the Northern Territory how we can support the veteran community but when it comes to most of the funding it comes under the (inaudible). There are a lot of changes that normally happens in the (inaudible) the veterans in the Territory. That is advocacy I normally take to the federal level to ask them to consider how to do things differently, especially when it comes to our regional and remote areas in order to access specialist services and other services where veterans may have to travel interstate. We will be able to deliver things better if the Federal Government wants to provide that additional support for veterans living in regional and remote areas. That is something I am strongly advocating to the Federal Government.

Mr MACKAY: Does the department have rough numbers or an idea of how many veterans there are in the Northern Territory, outside of the greater Darwin region? It could be the whole Territory minus the greater Darwin area.

Mr CHARLS: We do not have that specific number. It would be a difficult challenge for the department to get those numbers. The only thing that I can think of is that your department may need to contact through the DV and find out through them—but still, it may be an exercise that may take a lot of time for the department.

Mr MACKAY: What programs or initiatives are your department running to encourage ex-service people to move to the Northern Territory? Is there any specific programs or initiatives to encourage former defence employees to bring their families up and stay in Darwin or the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to specifically supporting the veterans and their families; Operation Thrive is something designed specifically for that. Under Operation Thrive there is grant funding of around \$850,000 per year. That is something carrying over to the next financial year, so we have the same allocation of \$850,000 in the next financial year. The different organisations can apply for the grants and, when it comes to different events, that is something that helped the veterans and their families to connect better.

When it comes to initiatives like what I and the department are currently working on, is with the Office of Commissioner for Public Employment to see whether there is any opportunity or way that we can give some priorities for the applications for the veterans who want to transition for a job in the Northern Territory. We have not landed on that; it is something that we are currently working on.

We know that in the government, there are provisions like special measures especially to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation increases in the workforce. When it comes to the veteran population our—me as the Minister for Veterans—I would really like to see something similar to that. People such as those really trained individuals may transition under the Australian Defence Force, and we would really like to see them integrated into the public sector. I would like to—like many other overseas countries like the United States; there is a huge market for the individuals transitioning out of Defence. That is not really available in Australia. That is something that we want to see and there are opportunities and provisions under the LCPE—we would like to see how we can prioritise that. That is what the serving members coming off from Defence—Defence, Airforce or Navy.

When it comes to the families, I would really like to see about provisions for the family members who are here with a serving member to get some priorities when it comes to a location of the job or job application process. One of the common things that we normally hear is that—because of more locations compared to, because it is on the Eastern Coast—sometimes it is pulling back on the families too. They would like different opportunities and, from my understanding they can give two or three in order saying where they want to go. Sometimes it is a struggle for the Defence to have Darwin as their preferred choice. I strongly believe as the Minister for Veterans that providing this opportunity for the family is something that will increase the uptake of people wanting to come and explore the Northern Territory. As we know, for many people, once they are here they do not want to leave the Territory because they get really chilled with the Territory and the lifestyle.

One of the other initiatives that I have in discussion with the department is about when it comes to the family and the children, into the schools as well. As you know, as the local member, each school goes in their jurisdiction and the catchment area. One thing that the veteran community has communicated is around if there is opportunity for the veteran community and children of serving members to get some exemptions meaning they can be in a school where other serving members children are as well. Those are some of the things we are looking at.

That is all going through the process. I would really like to see that to be fruitful, because we really value members who are serving the country. I always say that their sacrifice is our freedom, so we need to look after them.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I think you have touched on it—I was going to ask you a question about what efforts you will do to create employment pathways for former service personnel within the Northern Territory public service, but I think you touched on that then.

You also made reference to Operation Thrive; can you give me more of an insight on what Operation Thrive does and how much we contribute to it?

Mr CHARLS: Operation Thrive is an initiative that comes under the Defence Veterans Strategy for the Northern Territory government. What we are looking at is around how we can create opportunities for veterans to access something not available, or eligible through the DVA.

When it comes to the Department of Veterans affairs and their programs, there are more restrictions in place. That means it is all individual-based applications, but when it comes to Operation Thrive we are trying to create an environment where veterans, serving and ex-serving members, can come together and, if the organisations want to, apply for a grant. There are opportunities for them to come together.

From my background as a psychiatric nurse previously in the hospital, I came across many individuals who are suffering from PTSD and other issues. Providing this opportunity is allowing them to build trust in the system, have more friendships and connectiveness. That means we will most likely be able to keep those veterans in the Northern Territory; that is what we want.

Some of those programs are providing opportunity for serving members to interact with ex-serving members so that can really understand what the opportunities and benefits are in the Northern Territory. Those are the areas we are tackling.

When it comes to the funding allocation, as mentioned earlier, the budget last year, this year and next, we have an allocation of \$850,000 for Operation Thrive and its various projects. That will be the veterans community grants and Operation Thrive project grants initiatives. I can say during this period 19 applications have received approved funding, 11 approached funding during the same period. There were one in Adelaide River, one in Alice Springs, two in Katherine and 7 in the Darwin and Palmerston region.

The veteran community grant opened from 1 September to late May, most recently. I believe the department is still going through that process for the final allocation of that grant.

Mr YOUNG: Can the local government councils apply for those grants? I know we have a big service in Adelaide River that the Coomalie Regional Council run.

Mr CHARLS: I do not think it prevents any local governments from applying for these grants. I can give an example Darwin Anzac Day, it was not the local government who applied, but from my understanding the RSL applied for that grant. Then additional funding for the Anzac Day parade as well. There is nothing preventing local government applying for the grants.

Mr YOUNG: Could I ask for a list of local government councils that have been successful in applying for that grant under the last financial year?

Mr CHARLS: I have read out the name earlier, so there were not any successful, but I am happy to take on notice any of the local government who have applied for this grant.

Question on Notice No 4.4

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

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide a list of local government organisations that have applied for this grant?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Daly of the minister has been allocated number 4.4.

Mr BROWN: I was reading through the budget papers and trying to find the line in the budget for veterans, but I could not find it. I am happy with the grants that are being sent out. There are two parts to my question. What was the overall grants program for all the vets in the region? Can the government allocate that and get a funding towards them in the near future?

Mr CHARLS: May you please say the last part of that question?

Mr BROWN: Regarding the overall grants that were allocated to veterans, will the government dedicate future funding for them in the years to come?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the Operation Thrive, the funding is \$850,000 for the current financial year. It will be there in the next financial year also.

Mr YOUNG: What funding is specifically supporting the health and wellbeing of veterans as part of Operation Thrive?

Mr CHARLS: All those are connected to the health and wellbeing. When it comes to something more specific, like Soldier On, they received \$90,000 for the continuation of support services provided by Soldier On within the Northern Territory. Most of them are for the health and wellbeing of the veterans.

Mr YOUNG: How many did you say applied for, or were successful, in the Operation Thrive grants?

Mr CHARLS: Fifteen applicants were successful between 1 July and 31 March. The grants were open until the end of May, which means the department is still processing some of those grants outside of that timeframe.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any reason for a delay in the processing of those grants?

Mr CHARLS: No, the grants are open throughout the year. That will be available in the annual report from the department. The department will publish all the successful grant recipients irrespective of where they are.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any will to update Operation Thrive in the coming years?

Mr CHARLS: I see all of the grant fundings being upgraded or increased, but one of the challenges we are facing is the debt that was left by the previous government; we have to balance the budget. We are making sure to support the community by providing grant opportunities, and I am keen for this to increase over the years as the debt level reduces.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any work ongoing with the recommendations since the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide was handed down? If so, are you able to expand on that work?

Mr CHARLS: In September 2024 the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide released its final report which included 122 recommendations to improve health and wellbeing outcomes of current and ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force.

The government released its public response to the royal commission in October 2025. The response addresses the 10 recommendations which have direct implications for the Northern Territory. The Department of People, Sport and Culture is the lead agency to oversee the implementation of the response. The department is collaborating with other Northern Territory Government agencies, the Commonwealth, states, territories and the Northern Territory veteran community to implement the recommendations of the royal commission to ensure the best outcomes for the veteran community in the Northern Territory.

Operation Thrive was developed in anticipation of the outcomes of the royal commission, ensuring that the Northern Territory is well placed to address the key findings and continue to support the veteran community.

Do you want me to go through each of the 10 recommendations?

Mr YOUNG: Yes, if you could.

Mr CHARLS: Recommendation 4: Mitigate the adverse impacts of the posting cycle. We agreed to that response, and the lead agency is the Department of People, Sport and Culture.

Children of Defence personnel can enrol at a Northern Territory Government school without having a fixed address. That is something we are working towards.

Operation Thrive is supporting the continuation of five higher education scholarships for veterans' partners and dependants of current and ex-serving ADF members to study at Charles Darwin University.

Operation Thrive is supporting the continuation of the veteran community grants to provide funding to organisations and businesses throughout the Northern Territory to deliver events and activities which assist in improving the physical and emotional wellbeing of the veteran community.

Within the same recommendation Operation Thrive is supporting the continuation of the Cowork Coplay program facilitated by Human Quotient Group. The Cowork Coplay program offers a unique opportunity for participants to focus on what matters to them, from career goals to personal development and wellbeing. Over eight weeks participants attend weekly three-hour face-to-face sessions that blend facilitated workshops, learning, co-working time and opportunities to connect with others who share similar experiences.

I had the opportunity to attend one of these in Palmerston recently. On the day there were about eight participants, I believe. The plan for that day was to look at how they can do their résumé, especially when they are applying for jobs in the Northern Territory. Those are the levels of work. They go through different skills that they want to go through. It is open for family of the veterans to apply as well.

Operation Thrive will support Military and Emergency Services Health Australia to provide workshops focused on decision-making, identity, transfer of skills and employment readiness, with delivery from June 2026. This organisation will also provide a (inaudible) emotional and relationship skills program to build emotional (inaudible) and relationship capabilities.

Recommendation 23: Record convictions of sexual offences in Australian Defence Force records and civilian criminal records. The response was no action to occur because the Northern Territory reports all convictions of sexual offences to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

Recommendation 72: Expand and strengthen healthcare services for veterans. As a government we agree to that in principle. The lead agency is the Department of Health. Operation Thrive will support the continuation of veteran-centric healthcare training to GPs, practice nurses and practice managers in Darwin, expanding to Alice Springs.

I was able to attend one of their training sessions a couple of months ago where about 20 GPs were getting this training which helped them to navigate through the DVA process and other things, especially when they are applying. Based on the feedback from community members the DVA is a complicated system, and they have to go through all the processes. That is why this training is important for GPs to make sure they can access that DVA support as well.

The Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs should complete a plan by December 2026 for submission to the veterans ministerial council for endorsement to support recommendation 88. I am a part of that.

Regarding the national funding agreement on veterans' wellbeing, further support from the Northern Territory Government is dependent on the outcome of this plan and associated funding agreement.

I will read out the other recommendations.

Recommendation 77: Develop a suite of postvention resources in collaboration with stakeholders. We agree with that response.

Recommendation 85: Develop employment pathways for ex-serving members in public sector agencies. We agree to that response. I already mentioned that the Department of People, Sport and Culture and OCEP is working towards this and seeing how we can support that pathway.

Recommendation 88: Develop a national funding agreement on veterans' wellbeing. We agree to that. The lead agency is the Department of People, Sport and Culture. The Northern Territory is awaiting further information on the national funding agreement for this.

Recommendation 103: Improve the support, communication and services provided to Defence families. We agree to that recommendation as well. The lead agencies are OCPE and the Department of People, Sport and Culture. Operation Thrive continues to support the veteran community in the Northern Territory through initiatives, programs and events designed to enhance their physical and mental wellbeing. The Department of People, Sport and Culture continue to work closely with key stakeholders to ensure that essential communication and information is shared and services are advertised.

Earlier this year we had this event at the start of the year at the Darwin Convention Centre, Welcome to the Top End, which was an opportunity for the family members to come and talk to different organisations and associations available in the Northern Territory top end region. That was well attended, and the Convention Centre was packed when I was there and I can recall the Chair, the Member for Fannie Bay was there along with Minister Cahill as well. There are other things that the Department of People, Sport and Culture support.

We agree in principle to recommendation 105 to improve coordination with coroners and National Coronial Information System, and lead agency is the Attorney-General's Department.

Recommendation 107: Establish the national Veterans date is set. We note recommendations (a) and (b) and we agree in principle (c) and (d). The lead agencies for that are Department of Health and Department of Corporate and Digital Development.

Recommendation 108 Ensure that all eleven jurisdictions and entities regularly provide data to the National Veterans Data Asset—this is subject to further consideration because this is something that the Member for Goyder asked earlier when it comes to that data set, so we do not have a current system in place. The Department of People, Sport and Culture, Department of Health and DCDD are the lead agencies. Through the CSTC the Northern Territory Government will continue to participate in discussions regarding this recommendation because we as a government believe there should be an investment from the Commonwealth to get their recommendation, but we are happy to support as a jurisdiction.

Mr YOUNG: Are there any timeframes for the implementation of those recommendations?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to certain recommendations, as I mentioned earlier, there are some timeframes that we are waiting for from the federal government because some of those are tied up there, but when it comes specifically to other areas, there is no definite timeframe. That is something that the departments who are working on these recommendations are working actively on because we want to see that completed. The discussions, for example, when it comes to the CPI earlier informed that the work is currently underway, and recently OCPE attended the Veterans Affairs Ministerial Advisory Council and provided an update on how things were at that point in time. Through the veterans ministerial council and through the department, this is something that is actively being worked on to action and complete.

There is no specific timeframe because some of those works are more resource constrained, and it depends on the priorities that they are currently working on.

Mr YOUNG: Exactly how many recommendations that you have spoken about need Commonwealth support?

Mr CHARLS: There are 122 recommendations in total, and we are working on 10. Out of that 10, five of them still need support from the Commonwealth. Out of the 122, the federal government are involved in 117, and five for the departments just in the Northern Territory.

Mr YOUNG: Are there support systems for veterans who may have served from a different country, who are now citizens of this country? We know that sometimes serving, no matter which country you serve, can lead to PTSD, depression, mental health—if someone has served for another country but is now an Australian citizen or permanent resident, are there support systems in place under your portfolio?

Mr CHARLS: I believe they can join the veterans organisations and be part of those. I do not believe there are any restrictions. Specifically, I can say I have been to the Vietnam veterans and seen people who served for Australia in Vietnam, and people who served in Vietnam who had to evacuate the country. They are both working together. There are opportunities available for them to be a part of.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: We will break in 15 minutes. Minister, have you been able to source a response on the question we were going to come back to around about the grants for Multicultural Affairs and find out whether or not the scope of those grants were just for migrant families?

Mr CHARLS: The multicultural grants program grant guidelines was approved—that is a current one. The definition for the multicultural community refers to people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and heritage within the Northern Territory community. That is the definition as per the guidelines.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Has that changed—is that a new scope of work under the current government or is that something that was previous?

Ms LIVESLEY: No, that is the current definition. We have not changed that.

J DAVIS: I have questions in relation to elder abuse, which you spoke about both in your opening statement and now. In March 2025, Darwin Community Legal Service released a policy directive and action plan on older persons abuse in the Northern Territory endorsed by more than 20 key stakeholders as a roadmap for implementing a national plan to end the abuse and mistreatment of older people. That was over a year ago. What specific actions has the government taken since then to respond to that roadmap, given that we know one in seven senior Territorians experience elder abuse?

Mr CHARLS: In February 2026 the Northern Territory Government released two new grants that work to address the older persons abuse in the Northern Territory. This includes the Older Persons' Abuse Grant, with a grant funding pool of \$50,000, excluding GST, in 2025–26. Individual grants of up to \$15,000 are available to businesses and community organisations to assist the community in responding to and addressing older persons abuse. Priority for these grants will be given to activities and events that target older persons abuse priorities, or are based in regional and remote communities. Applications for this program closed on 12 May, and I look forward to advising the successful applicants.

The second grant is a \$20,000 grant to be provided to one business or organisation each year to host World Elder Abuse Awareness Day events and activities. This grant is aimed at bringing greater awareness to the Territory community regarding older persons abuse and what they can do to help.

The Darwin Community Legal Service receive the funding of \$260,000 in 2025–26 to deliver an outreach model aimed at supporting all of Territorians experiencing abuse. DCLS provides the legal referral advocacy and education service under their model which informs all Territorians of the dangers of older persons abuse, what it can look like and where to seek help. I can inform, as part of my senior's ministerial advisory council, this topic was discussed. I was at the Darwin legal services—I cannot recall the exact date but it was within the last week.

I spoke to the seniors and networking group. They have representations from Relationships Australia and other organisations. This is an area I am actively and currently working on. This is a challenging space because most of the abuse happens from the near ones who may be family or a known person.

I asked them to provide some of the individual case studies that helped me advocate for this matter. As you know, reading the stories and narratives helps to build on the discussion. There were some concerns raised about the Advance Personal Plan by the Darwin Community Legal Services. I am waiting for that information; it is not in front of me. I believe they might have already sent it, or it is in train. I asked for that within a one-week timeframe—whether they can send it.

The Attorney-General's department is responsible for that. I can advocate and communicate to the Attorney-General to show the concerns I have received from the community. This will help them make the necessary decision-making changes.

J DAVIS: Can I clarify, what is the total number of grants—you said there are two new grants, a \$50,000 one a \$15,000 one, plus a one off \$20,000 one. What is the total grant amount?

Mr CHARLS: The total amount for the grant allocated this and next financial year is \$300,000.

J DAVIS: You also said—so I have it right—\$260,000 to Darwin Community Legal Services, which includes an elder abuse legal service. Is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: I just need to correct you on that figure: it is \$230,000 to DCLS for the elder person abuse outreach model.

J DAVIS: Does that include legal advice? Do you know what that covers?

Mr CHARLS: It provides the legal referral advocacy and education service under their model.

J DAVIS: The reason I am asking is that it has been raised with me there is a gap in terms of specialist legal advice for older people. In terms of a legal referral advice, people identified that as a gap because there is not anyone to refer people to. But this service will be a referral service, not an advice service. Is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: Based on my understanding, the DCLS provides legal referral advocacy and education service under their model. I am not sure whether the person who communicated to you has gone to DCLS or not. That is the information I have.

J DAVIS: I can talk more about it, but I will leave it aside for now.

You talked about the fact that much of this abuse happens from people who are close to them. I think you referenced earlier when we were talking about domestic, family and sexual violence, that you have domestic, family and sexual violence money within your portfolio specifically for elder abuse. Is that right?

Mr CHARLS: From my understanding, when that was responded to earlier, specifically about the domestic, and family violence, I believe the CEO mentioned about the elder abuse which is kind of this pool of money as well. It is the same.

J DAVIS: The grant money, is that domestic, family and sexual violence money?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass it on to the CEO.

Ms LIVESLEY: The \$300,000 was transferred from the Department of Children and Families.

J DAVIS: Are those grants required to show how they work for domestic family and sexual violence prevention?

Ms LIVESLEY: The grants have focused on where we saw the gaps. The team in the Office of Senior Territorians did a piece of work on where we saw the real gaps in where some of those services are, and that is why there is a focus for us on that program for regional and remote. Noting that you have Council on the Ageing Northern Territory, National Seniors Australia and Darwin Community Legal Service who are based in Darwin and other urban areas. Without getting into the particulars, the focus is on how they can work with the community to raise awareness about elder abuse and what those prevention actions can look like.

J DAVIS: Elder abuse sits across multiple pieces of legislation such as the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* and *Criminal Code Act 1983*; it would come into your portfolio also. Who is responsible for coordinating the government's response across those agencies? Does that sit with you as the Minister for Youths, Seniors and Equality?

Mr CHARLS: Based on the national plan we have, it sits with the Attorney-General's department.

J DAVIS: I would like to clarify that in terms of the Advance Personal Plan, are you waiting for DCLS for information?

Mr CHARLS: In the context of some of these case studies, it is something that DCLS has discussed with me recently. I asked the DCLS to provide that case to me and I am waiting for that information and once I have it, I can communicate that to the Attorney-General.

J DAVIS: I think—this was in the briefing with DCLS, and I know you had been provided it also—that one of the national issues around the Advance Personal Plans is that there is no mandatory register. When people move across jurisdictions, things can happen that go very wrong and the question for any minister is what work are you doing to work towards a mandatory national register for Advance Personal Plans? I understand that you are waiting on more information on this, so you may not be able to answer it today, but that it my understanding of what part of the issue is.

Mr CHARLS: I think there is a national plan for elder abuse. You can ask the Attorney-General when she is here about the details of that. That would be your opportunity, and the Department of the Attorney-General can respond.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Johnston, I must interrupt. We will break for 30 minutes and return at 7 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: We are with the Department of People, Sport and Culture. We can continue questioning on Output 1.1.

J DAVIS: I would like to quickly come back to the two new grants. What are the criteria for those grants?

Mr CHARLS: Because there is a difference between the guideline and criteria, the department will get it and I will respond to that question shortly.

I have the answer to an earlier question, may I read that out now?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Yes.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.1

Mr CHARLS: As of 31 May 2026—the department could not run the numbers going back to 31 March—urban, Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs, 14,662; rural, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy, 736; and remote, which is all the locations, 1,193. All up there were 16,591.

J DAVIS: May I ask a follow up question to what you have just said. At last year's Estimates, the number of people on the concession scheme in remote communities was 1,950; that is a significant drop.

Mr CHARLS: We must do the comparison, but I do not have those numbers in front of me. Including rural and remote together, it is almost the same amount. I do not know what the definition was for the breakdown provided last year.

J DAVIS: It may be both. My follow up question is what efforts have been taken to improve uptake in remote communities? We can talk to that when we come to Concession Output if you would like.

Answer to Question on Notice No. 4.2

Mr CHARLS: Thirty applicants applied for the funding in round 2 of the Multicultural Grants Program Celebrate; 24 applicants were funded and six were not recommended for funding. That was the response from the department.

Mr YOUNG: Would you have a list of those organisations that were not successful in that grant?

Ms LIVESLEY: We do not publish information on unsuccessful grant recipients. Even though we might it, it is not public information that we provide. We only publish the information about organisations that we fund and the funding that they are awarded.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any reason why that is the case?

Ms LIVESLEY: It is just the practice that we do, we need to report against the funding that we are responsible for administering. We do not report against applications that are unsuccessful.

Mr YOUNG: Out of those that were not successful, were there any disputes from any of those applicants?

Ms LIVESLEY: I would not be able to say, right now. It would be something we would have to look into. We always have a process if people want to raise any issues with us. As I said, there is an independent panel that assesses and awards those grants. We can see if there were any complaints, but I am not aware of any.

Mr YOUNG: What is that process, exactly?

Ms LIVESLEY: Applicants can contact the office of multicultural affairs if it is a multicultural grant and talk to the officer responsible to raise a concern. It is a standard complaint process for agencies.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.3

Mr CHARLS: I have the multicultural grants approved in the 2025–26 period broken down by region, including grants approved after 31 March 2026.

Under the Multicultural Grants Program Celebrate Round One, there were four in Central Australia, with three in Alice Springs and one in Tennant Creek, and 24 in the greater Darwin region. For the Multicultural Grants Program Celebrate Round Two, there were two in Central Australia and two in the greater Darwin region.

Under the Multicultural Grants Program Support, there was one in Central Australia and six in the Top End based in Darwin, with three of the programs extending outreach to Katherine. Under Peak Bodies, Central Australia and Top End had one each.

Under the Multicultural Community Facilities Grant, greater Darwin had four, and under the Multicultural Community Facilities Grant sharing arrangements, greater Darwin had nine.

Under Harmony Week Grants, Central Australia received one, East Arnhem received four, Big Rivers received one, and the Top End received 12, including one in Bachelor. Under Harmony Festivals Grants, Central Australia received one for the Big Day Out in Harmony; Greater Darwin received 11 in relation to the Harmony Soiree, one for the production, eight for the community stalls, and two for the school lanterns display.

Under the Multicultural Grants Program Quick Response, Central Australia received four, greater Darwin received 24, and NT wide there was one.

Mr YOUNG: You mentioned Batchelor. What organisation was successful?

Mr CHARLS: Batchelor Area School Council Incorporated for a school event, of \$400 for the Harmony Week.

Mr YOUNG: Under which grant program?

Mr CHARLS: Harmony Week Grants.

Mr YOUNG: You stated there were four grants for Central Australia in the first batch of grants you mentioned, and three for Alice Springs. It might just be my misunderstanding. Are Central Australia and Alice separated?

Mr CHARLS: Based on the information provided to me by the department, Central Australia received four in total, with three in Alice Springs and one in Tennant Creek.

Mr YOUNG: My understanding is Alice Springs is within Central Australia.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: To try and move this along, I think they have four grants in total: three in Alice Springs, one in Barkly, and they may have classified that whole area as Central Australia.

Mr CHARLS: Central Australia: four. Then in brackets, three in Alice Springs and one in Tennant Creek.

Mr YOUNG: Oh. In brackets. Okay. That is where the confusion lay.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.4

Mr CHARLS: I will pass it on to the CEO to respond.

Ms LIVESLEY: No local government organisations have applied for the Operation Thrive grant in the reporting period.

J DAVIS: Is there data kept by your department on the rates of elder abuse?

Mr CHARLS: No, there is no data kept by the department on elder abuse.

J DAVIS: Do you know if anyone keeps that data?

Mr CHARLS: When I spoke with Darwin Community Legal Services last week they mentioned they are keeping a database. I requested whether they would be able to share that with me. Hopefully I may have some information on that.

J DAVIS: In relation to data, one of the things I have been told is that victims of elder abuse are often kept in hospital for extended periods because there is nowhere safe to discharge them. We know this is an ongoing problem in the Northern Territory in terms of older people. Is that something that has been brought to your attention in terms of elder abuse, specifically, not just seniors?

Mr CHARLS: I have not been notified of any hospital admission member? so sometimes, most likely, administering inaudible the Minister for Health might be notified as a provision but not as a senior. The data may not be broken down as elder abuse in the system.

J DAVIS: In terms of how those communications work, if there is an issue that is impacting specifically on seniors, for example senior who are experiencing elder abuse who end up in hospital because there is nowhere safe for them to go—it is in hospital so it is under the Minister for Health, would he talk to you if it was a seniors issue? IS that something you work across departments on?

Mr CHARLS: That is not a conversation I normally have with the Minister for Health. We talk about the number of clients waiting in hospital for inaudible which is impacting the senior's portfolio. That is something I have been advocating on behalf of my Senior's Ministerial Advisory Council. I facilitated a meeting from a working group last year to meet with the Minister as well. There is significant progress that was made in terms of that aged care announcement from the federal government, and the commitment from the Northern Territory government about the provision of land availability next to the Palmerston Hospital.

Speaking from my experience of working in the hospital as a registered nurse and being inaudible acute services, overseeing the psychiatric inpatient and inaudible units. I am not aware of any reporting profiles based on aged category going to a ministerial office. Those are the operational decisions made by the Department of Health individuals. If you have specific questions about that you can raise that with the Minister for Health, to see whether he is across that.

In broad terms, we talk about the things that impact senior, and my Ministerial Advisory Council are actively working on. They are being represented to many ministerial offices in terms of different challenges. That is a space I am actively working with other ministers.

J DAVIS: Would an issue like this, if this was an issue identified to you or through the Seniors Advisory Council, then you could advocate to the Minister for Health. I am interested in how it works. I think you, as the Minister for Seniors, your job is to look after seniors and to advocate for their interests. How does that happen around an issue like this?

Mr CHARLS: I said earlier that I have been working closely with the Darwin Community Legal Service. I had many meetings over the reporting period with the Darwin Community Legal Service. As a minister and a local member, I facilitate the Darwin Community Legal Service to come to my electorate office and talk at the seniors morning tea. I care about seniors and have been actively working in that space.

When it comes to individual issues, as you are aware, we have close to 30,000 seniors in the Northern Territory currently. You are talking about an individual case. When it comes to that individual case, if there is information that comes across to me, as the minister, definitely there will be action following that.

This specific information is not something that I am aware of. I realise that you have this information. Have you tried to raise the issue with me, or is it new information that came to you today?

J DAVIS: To be clear, this is not about an individual case; it is about a systemic issue which people have talked about with me. I am raising it with you now. Obviously people have been engaged with DCLS, so it will come through DCLS and Relationships Australia with the services that are there to support them. People have felt—I have made a speech about it, sorry.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Yes, this is a process of asking questions about the finances. If you have other issues, maybe you can do it through letters to the minister.

J DAVIS: Yes, absolutely. I will move on from this now and hand over to someone else.

Mr BROWN: I have a question on elder abuse as well. I think you briefly touched on this earlier. The Northern Territory does not have a dedicated specialised legal service for older people experiencing abuse. What considerations have been given to funding specialised legal assistance as part of government's response to older persons abuse?

Mr CHARLS: I earlier touched on this by saying that the Darwin Community Legal Service provides legal help, advocacy and an education service under its model. The department funds the ...

Mr BROWN: Sorry, who was that?

Mr CHARLS: The Darwin Community Legal Service. The department is providing \$230,000 for the services that it is providing.

Mr BROWN: What does that cover—which areas, which communities, which regions?

Mr CHARLS: I have been advised by the department that funding for the legal services sits with the AGD.

Mr BROWN: The Northern Territory remains one of the only jurisdictions without an adult safeguarding unit. What evidence does the government have that current arrangements are adequately protecting vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect and exploitation?

Mr CHARLS: I briefly touched on the different grants programs that are available through my department. For more detail this is something you can raise with the Attorney-General because that sits with Attorney-General's Department.

Mr BROWN: What oversight mechanisms exist to ensure advance personal plans are being interpreted and applied currently in the healthcare settings? How many complaints or concerns relating to their abuse have been identified over the past two years?

Mr CHARLS: That question was specifically about how the advance personal plan is interpreted in the health setting. I recommend the advance personal plan sits with the Attorney-General. How it is interpreted in the Health department is something to be directed to Minister Edgington because I cannot speak for the Health department.

Mr BROWN: Is that Boothby and Edgo?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, the minister would be Minister Edgington.

J DAVIS: Why did you scrap the Alice Springs trip for the Youth Round Table? It existed previously, but is no longer.

Mr CHARLS: When I came to this portfolio there was an opportunity for 18 youths to participate and I expanded that to 22 which put financial constraints on the department. The department made that decision to cut the trip to Alice Springs which meant we can provide more people the opportunity to be part of the Youth Round Table. It was a 15% to 20% addition to the group. It was because we had to increase the numbers of participants which gave more opportunity for young Territorians.

J DAVIS: What is the total budget amount for the Youth Round Table?

Mr CHARLS: The budget funding allocated for the Youth Round Table is \$136,000.

J DAVIS: What does that cover? What is the breakdown of expenditure?

Ms LIVESLEY: That budget supports the operations of the Youth Round Table. They have four meetings a year. They do an intensive residential in each of those meetings so that supports the travel and professional development opportunities for all members.

Mrs CARLSON: One of my passions coming into this term is the youth hub which has been announced in my electorate of Wanguri. Thank you very much, minister. We heard from the opposition that there was no consultation into the youth hub. Is this true? Can you explain or expand on the consultation process for the youth hub?

Mr CHARLS: The first consultation done was with the youths at one of the Youth Round Table meetings last year. The Youth Round Table members received the first opportunity to respond to that, and they were really excited about that opportunity to provide their feedback. They provided that feedback and they were all in favour of supporting the youth hub to be moved across to the Leanyer water park because that is an active space where people and families come together. They can see how the benefits of that will be amplified by having another service there.

On top of that, the department received in total 77 submissions, including 16 online and paper-based surveys. The Department of People, Sport and Culture had stalls in Casuarina Square on multiple occasions to take the data from community feedback as well.

I do not agree with the allegation that there was no consultation. There was extensive consultation.

The local members from that area, including you, me as the Member for Sanderson, Brian O’Gallagher as the Member for Karama and Khoda Patel as the Member for Casuarina, all did extra consultation. Personally, I have doorknocked nearly 100 in that area in Wulagi just across the road. Everyone had the same opinion that this was going to help young people, and they wanted to support it.

One of the things I discussed, because of my Youth portfolio and also as the Member for Sanderson, is that the youth program has been delivering from Sanderson High School for the last four years since 2022. I can say to this committee that so far, for nearly 21 months, I have not received any complaints from anyone about that program and young people coming to it and having the opportunity to have this option after school, during the weekends and school holidays.

One thing I will add that on many occasions, when the Sanderson Middle School or the current High School is not available, Anglicare is the provider and has already been running the programs from the Leanyer Recreation Water Park which is for them. When they provided the feedback they said that this has all been happening there. There were no community complaints happen during that time as well. Everyone see this as a good location rather than the old location which was the Casuarina Fire Station.

Mrs CARLSON: That probably leads on to my second question, which you have clarified—the existing services in the area. That is good to hear that there are still services there for the young people.

Can the minister please provide a status update on that Youth Hub? Obviously our youth are looking forward to having that permanent space. Provide the tender and proposed time lines so we can go back ...

Mr CHARLS: The design and construction for the northern suburbs Youth Hub at Leanyer Recreation Park closed on 5 May 2026. That is the process that is done by the DLI. The current advice is that it will be completed in quarter three of 2027. As the minister, what I would like to see is a build like this needs to be commenced by late 2028 at least. I will be working with my department to have that regular follow-up with the DLI to keep that on track because this is an important thing that we, as the government, have taken to the northern suburbs. We are offering a permanent location from the current temporary Shack program from the Sanderson High School.

I would like this to be completed by late 2027, early 2028. That is when the young people will be able to go and spend time after school and weekend and school holidays.

One other important thing I need to mention is I visited the current Shack program which is run by the Sanderson High School on multiple occasions. It is good to see the amount of support provided by the individuals working for Anglicare and the trust being build between the young people and the staff members of Anglicare.

It is similar in Palmerston as well as the wider Northern Territory. We can see the benefits of this opportunity because many of these young children do not have the opportunity to get assistance with homework and

engage in other extracurricular activities at home. This is an opportunity that, as a government, we are offering for that young generation which we strongly believe in. We want them to lead the Northern Territory tomorrow and make sure that the support is available. They have this role modelling and different activities like roller skating. They are enjoying everything.

From the last information I received from the department the participant rates is about 33, 36 and 40. That is something I am hoping to increase once we are in the Leanyer Recreation Park with the new facility as well.

Mr YOUNG: Following on from this question, did the consultation happen after or before you decided to move it?

Mr CHARLS: When we announced the proposed location, we said this is where we would like to see it. One of the criticisms that we had about the previous government or the process at that time was that there was no opportunity for the people to provide feedback about the location. There was no opportunity to provide feedback about the concept of the design of the facility. We, as a government and I as the minister, wanted to ensure that the opportunity is available for the people living in the northern suburbs, especially young people and say, 'This is what government wants to do. Can we have your response to that?' That is what we have done.

As I mentioned, we consulted at different levels. The consultation happened by the department, directly with me as minister and directly to the members of the Youth Round Table. The department collated that information. The four local members in that region actively communicated through the members of their communities and received their opinions as well. Consultation happened after we announced the proposed location. Based on that feedback and from all those avenues, we decided it was to be in the recreation park in Leanyer.

Mr YOUNG: Was it 77 people who participated in that consultation who put in submissions?

Mr CHARLS: Seventy-seven submissions were received, individually and from groups and organisations.

Mr YOUNG: How many of those submissions were businesses and organisations from the northern suburbs?

Mr CHARLS: I can take that on notice. I know what angle you are trying to take this to, but I can clearly say that most of the participation was from the northern suburbs.

Question on Notice No 4.5

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

Mr YOUNG: Of the 77 submissions, how many were from the northern suburbs?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.5.

Mr YOUNG: During that consultation period did it ask where they were from—whether they were based in New South Wales, a specific town or Palmerston—or not? Would you have those numbers?

Mr CHARLS: I do not have that information in front of me, but the department will get that information. I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No. 4.6

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, please repeat the question for the record.

Mr YOUNG: Could I have a breakdown of the 77 submissions, where those recipients were from, whether it was interstate or outside the northern suburbs region?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Before we proceed, is this not the same question as the one before?

Mr YOUNG: It is asking about outside the northern suburbs. The difference here is that it will show that there may be some within the Northern Territory outside of the northern suburbs, and there may be some from interstate potentially. For example, if someone from Sydney submitted, then that should show that.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes. I would also like to add a comment. All the houses that I doorknocked are in the northern suburbs, not New South Wales. That is all I can say from personal experience. The Youth Round Table members I consulted directly, which were approximately 22 of them. I am not sure if some were unavailable on that particular day or not. They are Territorians who would like to see that opportunity available to them.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.6.

Mr YOUNG: Will the results of the consultation be made public?

Mr CHARLS: The department will be able to provide high-level data without specifically pointing out an individual's information. If it is a person providing that information, we cannot share information of an individual who provided it, but we could share where they are from and other things without disclosing their personal information.

Mr YOUNG: Why can you not provide the results from the individuals who made submissions? I understand you may not be able to attach their personal information, but you would be able to retract that information from those documents to have a better understanding of what the consultation looked like, considering that you are saying it has strong support. I am trying to understand from the evidence provided that you are saying through this consultation to see all those 77 submissions.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, I must interrupt and call a five-minute break. We will see you all back here at 7.40 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: We might re-ask that question so we can refresh the member.

Mr YOUNG: Are you able to provide the submissions from the consultation for the Northern Suburbs Youth Hub publicly for each submission?

Mr CHARLS: I do not think there is any such practice of sharing all the information, but the department will provide high level information about this.

Mr YOUNG: Do I need to put that on notice?

Mr CHARLS: I will not accept that on notice, because asking for individual 77 submissions—I do not think that is information that can be shared.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: High level submission, is that something we can take on notice?

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide the high-level report from the consultation, from what was submitted?

Mr CHARLS: As said before, I am happy for the department to provide that high level of information.

Mr YOUNG: Can I ask why those individual submissions cannot be provided, given unusually when there is consultation periods, when we have committee meetings, we ensure they are made public to give confidence to the public and constituents. Considering you came into the election as an open and transparent government, what confidence will the public have to ensure that reflects the consultation period for the northern suburbs? Noting, when we proposed our youth hub, we made those public.

Mr CHARLS: I did close to 100 door knocking, and I cannot share that information. Because you would like to received that information, I cannot share that information. I will say a conversation happened between

myself and the individual at the doors. That is my personal experience and the Youth Round Table, most likely it should be kept during the process.

Because it is a departmental process, I will pass it on to the CEO to talk about the submissions they received and at the level of information they can provide.

Ms LIVESLEY: We would not provide individual survey responses to anyone. People provide their information on the survey and what we would do is a high-level summary report for aggregated data. We would never ever provide people's individual responses.

Mr YOUNG: But you are able to retract from those individual submissions, like their names, address, suburbs. So that information, that privacy is kept confidential.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I think the minister and CEO have answered your questions around that.

Mr YOUNG: It is a fair question.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: They have already answered it. They said they will provide a high-level submission.

Mr YOUNG: Not this question, they have not answered whether they can retract that sensitive information whether they recycle people's names and addresses, for example.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: They have already advised they will provide a high-level submission. That is the answer to your question

Mr YOUNG: Well, you are giving the answer to the question.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, I will leave it with you if you want to answer another question. It is the same context.

Mr CHARLS: I already agreed for the department to provide that information. I am happy to take that question on notice, at the high level. However, it is the same question asked in a different way, and I think asking for the same answer, which I already agreed to.

Question on Notice No 4.7

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

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide an overview from the consultation regarding the northern suburbs youth hub?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.7.

Mr YOUNG: How are you progressing the transport options for the new site?

Mr CHARLS: Can I ask the Member for Daly about his understanding of how it is currently working? I feel like the Member for Daly does not understand how it is currently working, about moving it from a temporary location to a permanent address.

Mr YOUNG: Given there will be more people using the youth hub where the new site has been proposed, there will be more people moving around that area. The northern suburbs is quite a large area, so I am trying to understand whether you are progressing different transport options, routes and working with DCF to ensure young people have access to use the youth service and get home safely. Have you started that work?

Mr CHARLS: I asked that question because currently the transport is being provided by IBC Social Enterprise Pty Ltd ABC youth transport service. While we do not fund them, Larrakia Nation also supports the transport. This is going to be on one side of Vanderlin Drive, which is one of the busiest bus routes, compared with Matthews Road. Matthews Road has limited accessibility. It is in my electorate, so I know about this. For

people in the northern suburbs, the new location will be much more accessible than the current temporary location. That is the reason I asked if the Member for Daly knew the context.

Even in Palmerston, they provide transport options, which is part of the current contract. The new contract will be negotiated with whoever is the successful organisation running the contract. That is always part of the contract that will be in place in the future.

This will have better bus connectivity, and there are two bus stops in front of the Leanyer recreation park.

As people living in the northern suburbs know, it is one of the busy areas and people from across the greater Darwin region come with their family to enjoy their time there. It is not only people who have cars or a personal vehicle accessing the facility; it is everyone. I have seen a lot of people catching the bus from that location because there is a skatepark and basketball court there. It is a fully active site that people are using. This will be an addition to the existing facility that young people can go into as well.

Mr YOUNG: It would be true to say that, obviously, you will have more traffic coming through when you build a youth centre in that area. There are families, and it is not just young people who use the Leanyer Recreation Park. There would be more people when you put a youth hub there. That is why I was trying to get the context of whether there would be more public transport or which other providers would interlink within the northern suburbs to ensure that young people have the ability to safely access the youth hub and safely get home and have those options in place. It is an important question that people in the northern suburbs have asked.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, the question you asked, as far as I heard, was asking for an opinion. Did you actually have a question? If you do, could you restate it?

Mr YOUNG: I was giving context as the minister mentioned getting an understanding of what I said. He had to get information from the department so that he could understand how it works. Considering he is the member for that area, I would assume he would have had it off the top of his head.

Mr CHARLS: I am happy to provide response. Malak is directly opposite the Leanyer Recreation Park, and there is a traffic island and signals for young people to use. When anyone drives through Vanderlin Drive, it is a place that normally is (inaudible) because of the traffic island. Young people walk across the road to the Leanyer Recreation Park using the signals.

There are a lot of lower socioeconomic families leaving the northern suburbs, and everyone does not have the luxury of a car to drive or the luxury of parents to drop them off. Some children find their way themselves, including students from Sanderson High School, previously middle school, making their way from Malak and Karama suburbs. I have seen a few families dropping off kids, but children go to school and this facility by themselves. There is no luxury in the northern suburbs to have a private vehicle.

The young people are aware of the risk and are using public transport and vehicles. I have full confidence in the young generation. I acknowledge your concerns are genuine. I drive through Vanderlin Drive and see what is happening on a day-to-day basis, as are other people residing in the northern suburbs.

Mr YOUNG: You keep talking about the existing transport to temporary location; are you talking about the SHAK, or have they decided on a provider?

Mr CHARLS: I spoke about the current provider, and it is my expectation that negotiation and discussion have to be a part of the new contract. If we can provide that access and service for young people, why cannot we provide that in future and that should be a part of the negotiation. From my understanding the department has not started that process. Once it is closer, it will be part of the contract. I cannot talk about that now, but it is currently an option, and I would like that to be a set provision in the contract to know who the provider will be.

Mr YOUNG: What age group will access this youth hub?

Mr CHARLS: Currently it is from 10 to 17 years, and if there is a sibling from the age of eight years. The contract for the new youth hub has not been negotiated, but I would like to see the current replication to be available. Currently, we have one Youth SHAK program from the northern suburbs, and there is another good model in Palmerston, run by Y Northern Territory. There are ways we can replicate what we currently have and if there are opportunities to improve, the Department of People, Sport and Culture will definitely look into it. They are always looking for opportunities to improve, especially for Territorians, and people in different stages of their lives. This department is about working with the people.

Mr YOUNG: You stated that a 10-year-old child can have the responsibility to bring an eight-year-old child to the youth hub; is that what you said? I might have missed ...

Mr CHARLS: This is something that the staff member there informed me about when I went there. Most of these programs are designed by Anglicare such as the SHAK program and the one in Palmerston. That is what they informed me, and now I am sharing that information with you.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, that is fine. I am trying to clarify that, because I am thinking that 10-year-old kids accessing youth hubs—say, it might be one 10-year-old child from a family going to the youth centre and being able to use that centre until 10 pm, late at night. They then have to get home, and their parents may not have a car. That is why I am asking what considerations you have in regard to public transport or other service providers to ensure kids as young as 10 can get home once they have finished that service. As you mentioned, a lot of families of a low-socioeconomic background may not be able to afford to take their kids to the youth hub. That is why it is important to question what planning you are doing to ensure the safety of young kids getting home after using that service.

Mr CHARLS: I believe I have already answered that question and provided the name of the organisation currently providing the transport option for children.

Another thing is that it is hard to comprehend this information because, when you are reading all of the files and things, it is only about 15 to 20 minutes. Please organise a time with Anglicare to sit and talk with them. I am sure that they will explain—much better than I am—the way they support people because they do that on a day-to-day basis. I had the opportunity and privilege to see the wonderful work they are doing in multiple locations. If the opposition are really concerned about those people, I strongly recommend you visit the Palmerston and northern suburbs SHAK program. You will then get a clear understanding of how the programs run and it will help you.

Mr YOUNG: I am trying to understand, because it all comes around funding agreements with the SHAKs that are used and what service they can provide.

Mr CHARLS: Currently, there is an agreement with the SHAK and they are providing the service. When that contract is terminated—from my understanding based on the way that the budget is working, there will be that funding available and there will be a tender process to find out the new provider. I have full confidence in the department to make sure these provisions will be available. I think they work really well with the young people. I have seen their work over the last 21 months, and I have full confidence in the department to execute that contract for the benefit of young people.

Mr YOUNG: Have any other organisations been given the opportunity to submit an interest in terms of the new youth hub?

Mr CHARLS: That tender process is not open yet. From my understanding, when it is a tender process there will be provisions for anyone to apply for it.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know when that tender process will open?

Mr CHARLS: Early next year, 2027.

Mr YOUNG: In quarter 1 or quarter 2?

Mr CHARLS: You can save this question for next year.

Mr MACKAY: In the budget papers there is mention of a number of—I think it is 200 or 300—events that have been supported by the department for Youth. As someone who had never been described as an athlete growing up, how many of these would be described best as not relating to sport or physical activity? Is there—in the events that the department supports—activities for those who are not necessarily athletic?

Mr CHARLS: The youth grants cover a range of activities and there is an opportunity for everyone. This Saturday I will be at Palmerston to announce the Palmerston Youth Festival at which there will be a variety of opportunities available for young people. It may be sports and arts—I am not sure whether fishing is a part of that, because I know that is what you are interested in. I have with me nearly nine pages of information, which I am happy to table, which shows youth grants information from 1 July 2025 to 1 March 2026.

Mr MACKAY: Do we have a breakdown of how many youth events were hosted in the rural area? That is not rural and remote in the context of the Territory, but in the areas of Humpty Doo, Berry Springs, Lambells Lagoon, Acacia and Adelaide River?

Mr YOUNG: Could we also add Wagait Beach, Dundee Beach and Batchelor?

Mr MACKAY: Let me rephrase the question. Do you have a breakdown of where those youth activity events have taken place in the Territory? Do you record the suburbs or regions?

Mr CHARLS: We record the regions, but it is about to including where organisations are delivering. On the list that I just tabled, you will find information which is in your area of interest, as with the Member for Daly.

If you know any organisations in the area of your interest who would like to participate and provide opportunities for young people, they can apply if they meet the criteria for this grant. I strongly encourage you both, as local members, to communicate with the providers in your region to apply. This is for everyone in the Territory and there are no criteria for occasional funding for any specific regions. It depends on how they meet the criteria and how well this will go with young people in that region. From the tabled information, it has been well received throughout the Territory.

Mr MACKAY: When we talk about the youth grants, does 'youth' in the department context stop at 18, 25 or 30 years? What is the definition for those youth grants?

Mr CHARLS: It is 12 to 25.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know what services will be connected back into the new youth hub?

Mr CHARLS: This will be part of the tender process. As the minister, I would like all the services currently available in the youth SHAK program plus, if there are opportunities, options for more. That is what I would like.

Mr YOUNG: I assume there have been design works for the youth hub?

Mr CHARLS: It is a design and construct project and will be a part of the design tender process.

Mr YOUNG: Is there nothing final on how the new northern suburbs youth hub will look at the moment to get an understanding of how many service providers could fit within it?

Mr CHARLS: This is the design construct process. That will be part of that design—sorry. Based on the feedback that we received the young people have already articulated what they would like to see. That is part of the design tender. The individuals who are designing have an understanding of that with the information that was provided to them. That will be part of that design and tender process.

Mr YOUNG: You are saying that was a co-design with young people from the northern suburbs or the Youth Round Table. Who would that work be done with?

Mr CHARLS: My advice is this will be based on the design that was initially done in Casuarina. That is based on the changes in the land and dynamics, so that would be something they have adapted to the new site. The feedback from the young people was already saved. That will be taken into that design and tender process.

Mr YOUNG: There will be some adjustments made to the new youth centre. With those new adjustments will young people be then consulted again if there were any changes to the design of the youth centre?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass it to the CEO to respond because she was part of this during the previous one and the current one.

Ms LIVESLEY: No, we would not be doing any further community consultation on any changes to the design.

Mr YOUNG: Last one. How much did the recent consultation cost, considering this was the second consultation in relation to this project?

Mr CHARLS: There was no cost associated because it was done by the department staff including the online Have Your Say.

Mr YOUNG: There would be costs, given people's time within the department, wouldn't there?

Mr CHARLS: I understand your concern, but again, that is a priority the department wants to deliver. That means it is business as usual work for them. We cannot take every project from the department and break down the cost because, for the staff, it is part of the day-to-day work they have been doing.

Mr YOUNG: How many people within the public service worked on that consultation—full-time staff, part-time staff to potentially casual staff? How many hours were put into the consultation period?

Mr CHARLS: Two to three staff from the Office of Youth Affairs worked on this project, along with many other projects that they are currently working on, including the Youth Round Table and other day-to-day work that they do in their role. As I mentioned before, the Department of People, Sport and Culture staff always look at what they want to deliver, especially when it comes to the Youth portfolio.

I have seen them over the weekend after I worked with the young people. This Sunday I will meet the Youth Round Table group again. I am sure the staff members will be supporting the young people from all over the Territory on this weekend as well. We do not have any breakdowns of how many hours they have been doing this particular work, but that was business as usual for the department and for the Office of Youth Affairs.

Mr YOUNG: Does the Youth unit within the department have two or three people, or was it two to three?

Mr CHARLS: There are more than that many staff members, but for this particular project there were two or three working on and off doing different consultations. For example, I believe the CE was there in Casuarina Square for feedback. There were many staff members—not just in the Office of Youth Affairs but the department as a whole—who worked collectively for different projects. I have seen this work really well, and it is something that they wanted to deliver for the young people.

There were questions about if we have kept a timesheet. We have not. I have not expected the public servants working in that space to keep a timesheet specifically for that because that is business as usual. They have done the job, and we now have the results in front of us.

Mr YOUNG: I am trying to understand because you said that there were two to three staff within the Youth unit, but now you have said that there were many people working on it outside. The numbers are still inaccurate and you are contradicting what you had been saying.

Mr CHARLS: I said two to three people at that time. That does not mean the same two or three people working. Multiple—two or three—people from the department working on the same thing as they can ...

Mr YOUNG: Okay; that is a lot clearer. The question I asked was specific in the staff who worked on it, which you came back with the number of two to three; but then you said that many people worked over—after that. That clarifies it.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Do you have a question, Member for Daly?

Mr YOUNG: He was asking me a question in terms of the clarification around it, so I was answering the question.

That clarifies it, but there are no hours to understand the cost of the second consultation and the time that was put within this consultation period; is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: It is business as usual for the department. For example, if I were to ask the Chair how much the cost is for this process, I do not think the Chair would have a breakdown. If you want that, we need to have someone else work on that breakdown and then come back to us. I do not think there is any benefit for anyone to go back to check the hours and then come up with the costing for that. I am comfortable as the minister that they have done the job. We have the evidence in front of us. The project is currently underway. Its tender has closed, so they have done their job and we can see the results.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I have a follow-up question in relation to that.

Mr YOUNG: He had a follow-up in terms of the costing because he did not quite close off. You gave me the option to ask the follow-up.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, I am asking a follow-up question. We will come back to you afterwards.

In relation to the Member for Daly's line of questioning on staff from the department working on projects, that is pretty normal practice across the department. It is not anything special specifically for this youth hub. That happens on a day-to-day basis in every department across government and private business; people work on special projects and money is absorbed by the department because of that. Is that right? Is that an accurate statement to make?

Mr CHARLS: They are on a full-time or part-time contract, and a part of their working hours these are the priorities that they are working towards. These are one of the projects that they are currently working on as business as usual.

Mr YOUNG: I did take note that you were willing to take that on notice in terms of the cost and hours that were put into the consultation period.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Just to be clear, he did not claim that he was willing to take anything on notice.

Mr YOUNG: He softly mentioned it.

Mr CHARLS: I am happy to repeat again. The department has provided the evidence to this committee about the work it has done. The tender process has closed. I do not want the department to do another resource allocation to do this exercise just to provide this information to the Member for Daly. The department has done the job and completed the project and whatever was required of them. The CEO is happy with that response. That has gone through its tender process. That is closed. We already said that we are happy to take the submissions on board. That means the department would already be working on a question that has been answered for the Member for Daly. I cannot see why the department needs to do this again because they have already done their job.

Mr YOUNG: I am not questioning whether they have done their job. I am just trying to understand the cost to do the consultation for the new youth hub. That was my question. Clearly, you are not willing to provide that answer for the cost of consultation ...

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, please do not put words in the minister's mouth. If you have a question, ask it please.

Mr YOUNG: It is not words in his mouth, it is factual. He is not providing the answer.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, I will put you on a warning if I need to, so please ask questions.

Mr YOUNG: Could I get an understanding of how the department did the consultation. Did it help the young people write their submissions or was it just a run-down of how the consultation period was run?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass it to the CEO who was part of the consultation process. She can provide that information.

Ms LIVESLEY: I can assure you we did not help anyone write their submissions. We did that through the Have Your Say survey, as well as the pop-up stands we had at Casuarina, where people could come and fill in surveys and talk to staff. Also there was feedback through a consultation session with our Youth Round Table, where they gave a lot of valuable information of what they would like to see, as young people, in a youth hub. There was also other feedback that we did through general consultations with a number of youth organisations and providers.

Mr YOUNG: The survey would be part of that report you will be providing of what was in the survey—the line of questioning?

Ms LIVESLEY: Is that the high level report?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

Ms LIVESLEY: Yes.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Are there further questions relating to Output 1.1?

Mrs CARLSON: I need to go back to seniors again; a general question probably. Can you please tell me about your Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians and expand on the work they are providing and the makeup of that membership? Can you enlighten me please?

Mr CHARLS: The Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians was established in 2014 as an independent voice for Territory seniors on the broad and dynamic interests of seniors in the Territory, ensuring the needs and aspirations of seniors are reflected in key government policy development.

The council met three times in 2025–26 financial year from 30 October 2025 to 31 May 2026. As for the Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians terms of reference, membership includes up to 10 community members, with two peak body representatives from the Council of Ageing COTA NT and two from National Seniors Australia, as well as one from the Association of Independent Retirees and elected representatives from local government, the Palmerston and Litchfield Seniors Association and the peak Aboriginal organisation. Additionally, there are two observers from the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. As of 31 March 2026, they have 15 members in the committee.

Is there anything else you would like to know?

Mrs CARLSON: No, you expanded it with a good cross-section there, thank you. My next question probably crosses over into disability, but many seniors use disability parking. What was the government's response to the City of Darwin's recent changes to disability parking?

Mr CHARLS: This is something that was raised in the senior's ministerial advisory council as well. Many seniors have access to disability parking. I wrote to the Lord Mayor about this issue and I got a letter back recently to inform me that it was an error that happened at an operational level without the elected members being across that information. I got the assurance from the Lord Mayor that is currently being addressed and the people with disability parking permits can park their car in the city now. That has been resolved.

The Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians have many areas they are working on. I mentioned earlier when you were not here that one was the aged carer working group. I facilitated for a small group, three members, to meet with Minister Edgington last year. There are other areas which they raised. This is one specific issue which I actioned, took to the Lord Mayor and it is being addressed based on the information provided to me. The seniors have been impacted for a short period of time, but I have been reassured that has been corrected by the City of Darwin through a motion put forward by an elected member.

Mr YOUNG: The written questions that are put to you and your department come back with the cost to the department that it took to put together those questions. Why cannot you provide the same response for what it cost the staff to do the consultation period? Is it not a bit contradictory—wouldn't you think?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, are you asking for his opinion?

Mr YOUNG: No, the question is within there.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: You ended it with 'wouldn't you think'.

Mr YOUNG: Before that.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Make sure the questions are not asking for opinion, please.

Mr CHARLS: I was a public servant and, as the minister, I currently work with public servants. I respect the service they provide. I do not believe their duty is to provide information to an elected member of parliament who wants to just get a headline about how much cost has impacted. That is not their job; it is to look after young people in that specific area. I am confident that they have done their job regarding this project, the same as the CE clearly informed.

Chair, I am not sure why the Member for Daly keeps asking the question.

Mr YOUNG: We are in Estimates. It is about understanding the costings. That is the whole point of Estimates. Are you saying we are not here to ask how much it costs to run a consultation period? That is what Estimates is about.

Mr CHARLS: I already provided information about how much it has cost. You can see from the information available in front of you how much it costs to run the department. The operational and personnel costs are incorporate in there. There is no additional cost for the department to specifically do it. This was business as usual. There are many other projects that the department is doing as business as usual. The department do not have the resources to break down each of their projects and how much cost was incurred ...

Mr YOUNG: Of course you do. You can do it with the written questions, so I am sure you can do it with the consultation period.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Do you have a question, Member for Daly? This is not a to and fro; you do not get to just argue. It is not a debate; this is a question and answer session.

I have a follow-up question for the minister.

Mr YOUNG: It is showing that he does not want to provide the costings of the consultation period.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I have a follow-up question for the minister on your line of questioning.

Would it be fair to say that if the department is answering written questions on notice, there is a short timeframe that happens over; it is mainly a day or two or a week at most. You can easily understand how much time it has taken to answer some questions on notice as opposed to a project that goes over months or years and has staff allocated. Is that a fair assumption to make in relation to a department and the difference between responding to the Member for Daly's accusation about how it is easy to provide ...

Mr BROWN: Are you asking for his opinion?

Mr YOUNG: That is an opinion and an assumption, Chair.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Excuse me, I am asking a question. Is that something that is accurate to say in relation to the department?

Mr YOUNG: Isn't that opinion? You just said, 'Is it accurate?' Isn't that an opinion check? I will ask the Deputy Chair ...

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, I have asked a question. Can you please respect the fact that other people in this environment can ask questions too and let the minister answer.

Mr YOUNG: I respect it, but I will ask the Deputy Chair ...

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Please refrain from talking; it is not a debate.

Mr YOUNG: You have asked for an opinion.

Mr CHARLS: We are moving on to the last 61 minutes, and we have all done really well so far. It was a respectful conversation with the department. I can see that the tone has been changing.

All I can say about that is when a customer asks the department to do something, we need to account how much effort that is for the department. Chair, you referred correctly, because you worked as a public servant as well. For example, if the department wants to go back and do it, they may need to go through the calendar and everything over the last nine or 12 months.

As I said, we moved onto the next stage, and I do not know why the Member for Daly is still stuck there. I made an offer saying that moving into the future there are opportunities for us to work together, and we can look forward about what the new Leanyer Recreation Park youth centre will look like.

Mr YOUNG: It is Estimates; it is understanding costings.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, please stop interrupting.

Mr CHARLS: We are looking forward of what it will look like. I said that many times that they have done their job. It has moved on, and the tender has closed, and the Member for Daly is still talking about the past. It is for the (inaudible) for the department to do that. That is the reason the department cannot provide that, and

I do not want to put that burden onto the department. I have answered the question, and there are no issues in terms of that.

Mr BROWN: Senior Territorians have made it loud and clear in their advocacy for voluntary assisted dying laws to be passed in the Territory. Can you confirm what funding is in the budget to ensure correct information is being provided to senior Territorians surrounding the VAD debate?

Mr CHARLS: From my understanding this legislation will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly hopefully in the next few months. We do not normally allocate funding for all the legislation that we debate. I strongly believe that is our job as members of parliament to debate. I am trying to answer in the context as the Member for Sanderson because it is specifically about legislation. I have been doing a lot of consultation in my electorate, and I am sure you are doing the same. COTA has been actively engaged in the senior Territorians space over the last few months or few years, and there have been many forums where members of our Assembly has been part of that. That is work that is happening in terms of the legislation. When it comes to the department, from my understanding, there is not any funding located specifically for this.

Mr BROWN: Is the funding in the pipeline? Or we will we still debate it?

Mr CHARLS: The legislation will be debated in parliament hopefully this year—later this year. When the Attorney-General's Department table that there will be an opportunity for you to ask those questions about how it will be delivered or when it will be commencing if the legislation is passed.

Mr BROWN: Prominent senior Territorians are calling for MLAs to support the legislation; can you confirm if you will support it?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Arafura, you are asking the member for an opinion on a position which will be debated in parliament. That is not part of the Estimates process.

Mr BROWN: He is the minister for Seniors. We need to know is position.

Mr YOUNG: He is the minister for Seniors; he should be advocating for or against.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: He has already admitted that he is still undertaking consultation with his community, it is not appropriate for this forum.

Mr CHARLS: For the record, can I respond to that?

Mr BROWN: Yes, of course; there you go.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Absolutely, if you want to.

Mr CHARLS: I am one of 25 elected members to the Northern Territory parliament, and I do not have any special privileges as the minister for Seniors in that parliament Chamber. When we are on the floor, from our understanding, all our votes count, and I will be one of the 25 votes. When we debate, I will be debating as the Member for Sanderson, and that will be where I will disclose, based on the consultation of my electorate. People who live in my electorate clearly know that because I host a seniors morning tea every month in my electorate and do a lot of roadside work and doorknocking, and it was on my newsletter. As the Member for Sanderson, I am doing all that work. As I mentioned, there is no special privilege for me in the Chamber as the minister for Seniors when it comes to that Bill.

J DAVIS: Are the criteria for the grants for the elder abuse program available?

Mr CHARLS: I will table this document.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Is everyone happy for that document to be tabled? Anybody against?

Mr CHARLS: There are two documents. One is Older Persons' Abuse Grant Program, Grant Guidelines 2025–26. The other one is Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Grant Guidelines 2026.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Disability

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.2, Disability. Are there any questions?

Mr YOUNG: Angus Taylor's Coalition plan says that welfare payments and the NDIS should be reserved for Australia citizens. Do you support that policy?

Mr MACKAY: Madam Acting Chair, Standing Order 109, asking the member for an opinion.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I agree. Member for Daly, can we stick to questions for the minister.

Mr YOUNG: Can I ask for clarity and consistency throughout the estimates period? Yesterday, a member of the government asked the Treasurer for an opinion regarding capital gain. The Chair let that through. I want to make sure there is no double standard here and to ensure that there is consistency throughout the process because that was allowed yesterday. When opposition members ask the questions, we get shut down.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, I was not the Chair yesterday. I have no understanding of what happened. As far as I am concerned ...

Mr YOUNG: There needs to be consistency throughout it all.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Can you let me finish, please? You have just asked the minister for an opinion. It clearly states in the Standing Orders that this is not allowable as a question. What happened yesterday is not my issue or concern. Please ask a question that is not asking for an opinion.

Mr YOUNG: Is it not your issue? You do not want consistency throughout the estimates period.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: I am putting you on an official warning. Member for Daly, I consider your conduct to be disorderly and I warn you that if you persist, I will order you to withdraw from the hearings under paragraph 12 of the Assembly's resolution establishing this committee. Please ask appropriate questions.

Mr YOUNG: Minister, the ABC reported the proposal would block non-citizens, including permanent residents, from 17 welfare programs. Critics say it would unfairly say it would target permanent migrants from China and India. Is that the position of your government as a policy?

Mr CHARLS: I am happy to share my position as the Minister for Disabilities for the Northern Territory Government that I have returned to the Honourable Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Ageing and Minister for Disability, and Senator the Honourable Jenny McAllister, Minister for the NDIS. I have cc'd all the elected members to the federal parliament—both houses, both senators and members of the federal government—into this letter as well because they need to be informed about the position the Northern Territory Government is taking.

This is a significant change that will happen with the recent proposal from the current federal Labor government. The proposal and the modelling suggest that by 2030–31, there will be almost 160,000 people coming off from the NDIS program. Now, it is sitting at approximately 760,000. With the natural growth plus this 160,000 coming off, they want to bring that number to 600,000. This is a change that is being brought forward by the federal Labor government. It is fully in control of this.

Another thing the Member for Daly is asking for an opinion that he wants to quote on the news. When there is legislation submitted to the federal parliament on the table by the current Labor government from the federal government, the impact on Territorians is pretty high, especially when it comes to regional and remote Territorians. I am really concerned as the Minister for Disability for the Northern Territory Government. This will not be a helpful thing for the Northern Territory because we are already struggling. As the members both representing here today from the Territory Labor opposition in this committee—both of them represent regional or remote parts of the Territory, so I assume they have an awareness of these changes and how it impacts the people they are representing. When it comes to the remote Northern Territory there are issues in terms of the provider availability and the services that can be made available to Territorians living there.

One of the changes that the Northern Territory Government agreed to through the first ministers forum is around—they are looking to provide that additional support through the Thriving Kids for zero to eight years old. That was supported by the Chief Minister as the member of that particular group chaired by the Prime Minister. Since implementation, we have seen a complete change in other parts of Disability. This clearly shows that there may be more impact to the Health and other sectors as well. That is where we are clearly raising our concerns, and I am happy to table this letter that I have sent across to both ministers and cc'd all the prevalent members because I strongly think that all the members from the Northern Territory will be

strongly advocating against some of these changes, or that there should be some provisions specifically for the Northern Territory given consideration that we are not similar to the eastern states or eastern cities; Darwin is not similar to Sydney or Melbourne. We have our own challenges, and I think those challenges are difficult and different to them. We cannot have a one capsule solution for this one.

I strongly suggest and encourage of other members in this parliament—if there are opportunities, you need to raise this issue with the federal ministers because this is something that is going to impact the people with a disability who really deserve to be looked after. At the same time, I completely support all of the current actions by the taskforce against SHARP practice and other illegal practices happening in that provision; we completely support provider registration for Supported Independent Living. I completely support that as the Member for Disability. Those changes are really good. The broader impact is something that I am concerned about and I strongly advocate that there needs to be some special provisions for the Northern Territory.

One thing that I am really vocal about and will continue to do in that Disability Reform Ministerial Council, is talk about the percentage of population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons. The National average is around 8%, whereas we have about 53% out of the 6,700 people on the NDIS. We know that these changes are not going to be good. I am hopeful that the federal government is not going to make those changes as they will clearly impact all of the people will disabilities in the Northern Territory. I table this letter.

J DAVIS: Do you have a figure on how many Territorians currently supported by the NDIS will be negatively affected by these cuts?

Mr CHARLS: One of the things that I asked about at the last Disability Reform Ministerial Council in Canberra two or three weeks ago was specifically about the modelling and how it is going to impact the Northern Territory. They have not done any modelling for the state and territory levels. I can say that all the state and territory disability ministers—I know that there is some selective reading happening here in terms of the news. There was a big news story yesterday or this morning about all of the state and territory disability ministers, who provided a joint submission—I signed on that joint submission as well—about the impact the changes are going to have on each state and territory.

Another thing I am worried about for the Northern Territory's 6,700 participants—when it comes to the major states and territories, they are really concerned because this modelling has never been done at the state and territory level. We do not know how much it is going to impact them, but at the end of the day my main concern is that Territorians are going to suffer. I would like more information to be made available, which I sought at that meeting and was informed that someone from the department will be in touch to provide that information. I have not got that yet, but I will get the department to follow up on that. In the meantime, I already submitted that letter which I have tabled. I joined with other Territory and state ministers on a joint submission that was finally submitted either late yesterday or this morning.

J DAVIS: In relation to Thriving Kids that you just mentioned. What specific funding has been allocated to expand the allied health and early childhood workforce such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists to meet the expected spike in demand?

Mr CHARLS: We have not reached that level of how the funding splits. When the agreement was signed by the first ministers, it was a 50–50 co-contribution from the Northern Territory and the federal government, with \$20m from the Northern Territory for four or five years and \$20m from the federal government. The federal government kept \$6m out of that \$20m contribution for their national initiatives like television advertisements and other online communications.

Effectively, the Northern Territory will be getting only \$14m over five years, which is \$2.8m a year. The total in the first financial year it will be about \$6.8m specifically for Thriving Kids. The department is currently working with the Department of Health, Department of Children and Families and the Department of Education to come on to that model.

I strongly would like to see in that is enhancement in that more positions of allied health professionals when it comes to the child development team. I worked with NT Health before and I know how much challenge is there at the moment as well.

As a government we would like to see (inaudible) look on our current wait time to see a specialist and how it will be changed over from 12 months to 24 months once we implement it as well. I can say this is something I am following up and will work closely with the Chief Minister, minister Edgington and ministers Cahill and Hersey. The Treasurer is also involved in the conversation because this is something that, once we are

implementing some of this, we want to see the real benefit for the Territorians between the age of zero to eight.

We always hear of challenges to see a specialist, especially as you mentioned, speech pathologist and others. One of the things that we sometimes hear it is good to see that person earlier. That was the intention of the government and that is what we are looking for as well.

J DAVIS: Can I clarify? Did you say \$20m matched funding, or just \$20m from the Commonwealth?

Mr CHARLS: Matched funding of \$20m over five years—\$20m from the Territory and \$20m from federal ...

J DAVIS: They are only giving you \$16m?

Mr CHARLS: They kept \$6m and they gave \$14m, so it is \$34m in total ...

J DAVIS: For five years?

Mr CHARLS: For five years. That is about \$6.8m per year.

J DAVIS: I also have a question on behalf of the Member for Mulka. What has the minister done to strengthen the NT disability services sector to support people in remote communities in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: It is always about advocacy. I clearly outlined earlier how much it will bring back. That is currently happening with the proposed changes. That is the space that I have been advocating with the federal government from my first disability reform ministerial council meeting.

Specifically in the Northern Territory in Maningrida the NDIA has commissioned an alternate commissioning site that is strictly for a defined one provider to deliver all the light health services.

J DAVIS: Who did you say it was?

Mr CHARLS: At Maningrida to provide all the light health services. The NDIA (inaudible) this is not done by the Northern Territory Government. We supported this process. They identified Carpentaria as one of chosen providers. They are providing that as a site. I think it is the first site in Australia. They started this financial year, so hopefully in the next 12 to 24 months once they have reached that milestone NDIA will do their review. If that is a successful model there will be advocacy to see whether we can have a similar model, rather than many providers flying into one community and trying to use all the package funding available for the travel. The Northern Territory Government would like the plan to be utilised and spent for individuals to receive therapy sessions rather than being spent on the individual provider using it for the travel and other costs.

J DAVIS: Is there anything else you can add to that? It was a broad question in terms of strengthening the sector. That is an example. I think the Commonwealth is driving that in Maningrida, so in terms of the NT Government.

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the NT Government—as the Minister for Disability, when it comes to the specific rules, I have the ability to influence the decision. When it comes to policy decision-making, all the state and territory ministers have the ability, whereas the new proposed changes are taking away the ability of the states and territories. That is why all the states and territories are fighting together to say that we cannot give all that power to one federal minister to make all the decisions.

As part of the budget you can see that we are co-contributors to the NDIS. We are funding around \$130m this financial year. Next financial year it will be \$131m. That is around one-third of the total funding expenditure in the Northern Territory.

When it comes to the regional and remote areas, I have been strongly advocating for measures and activities against the sharp practices. We can clearly see that the safeguard commission and the staff members are working in the regional and remote areas of the Northern Territory. Some those things were in the media recently about the fraud that they identified. We can see some of the results, but I have always been advocating for more of that action happening, especially when it comes to regional and remote areas.

There are certain providers who are not doing the right thing. We would like the providers who are working with people with disability to do the right things and to support them because the whole concept of the NDIS

is to have choice for individuals to receive the care, service and everything that they want with their disability. That is something I am strongly advocating.

As I mentioned, when it comes to the numbers, almost 53% of our population are identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We want to have a clear safety mechanism in place that will be available to protect vulnerable Territorians identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

On top of all of this, one that thing that I have been strongly advocating as the minister—based on what I have been informed of by the NDIA and the discussions I had with the NDIS. If a person can make a decision, if they are a disabled person or a carer working with a disabled person, by signing a form all of the plan will be transferred across to another provider. I have been asking whether the NDIA or the NDIS could implement if someone signed a paper, why can they not go back to that person and say, ‘Y signed this. Do you know the impact of this?’ Signing one paper should not transfer all the money to another provider. That is where some of these problems lie, so I have been advocating for that to be changed. People know that these things are happening. I am advocating for change, and I am hopeful that will happen in the near future.

Mr MACKAY: With the reported alleged \$5m NDIS fraud earlier this year—I think in about February it was reported in the media—when did the department become aware of the investigation? When was the department notified that this alleged fraud had taken place?

Mr CHARLS: It was on the day they executed the warrant.

Mr MACKAY: Has the department undertaken any investigations, off their own back, into the alleged fraud?

Mr CHARLS: It is the responsibility of the NDIS Fraud Fusion Task Force to do that and my department works mainly at the policy level and with the stakeholders.

J DAVIS: I acknowledge this is probably, primarily a question for the minister for transport, but someone has asked me to raise it with you because it involves the safety of people with disability. I have been contacted about a wheelchair accessible taxi incident—I think you may be aware of this—where a passenger was not properly secured and experienced a serious failure during transport. Are you aware of this incident?

Mr CHARLS: I am aware of a similar incident, I do not know whether it is the same.

J DAVIS: I assume it is, or hope it is. What role does your department has in escalating or responding to these kind of systemic safety issues affecting people with disability in transport services?

Mr CHARLS: I will start answering the question and then will pass on to the CEO to finish the response. In my Disability Advisory Council, this is one of the topics that is currently being discussed since the first meeting. There are many individuals who need a taxi and that is not always available for Territorians with a disability. I have been working with the minister for transport and there has been some progress and some members were part of that working group.

I have been informed that some work that has been completed and some information which could be out soon. As at yesterday, I registered that information when I received it and there will be more information to come. I requested that specific information be shared with me before it goes public. I will probably pass it on to the CEO to discuss some of the work that has been happening in that space for some time.

Ms LIVESLEY: When issues arise in relation to multipurpose taxis and other public transport requirements, that is a matter for the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure. We regularly liaise with the area within DLI and they have spoken and consulted with our Disability Advisory Council and, as the Minister for Disability noted, have been a member of their Transport Consultative Committee, which is a project group. We would raise that a department level if there was a serious concern that we become aware of. A lot of times, the department already knows because people are across that feedback complain process.

J DAVIS: As the Minister for Disability, do you have involvement with young people with education and young people with disability or does that sit solely with the Education minister?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, I have involvement in that space but mainly in advocacy; the responsibility sits with the Minister for Education and Training. It depends on the question as to whether I can answer.

J DAVIS: Broadly, in advocacy, would that be run individual issues or systemic advocacy or both; or it depends?

Mr CHARLS: Whatever information comes across to me, I always try to advocate for them to the responsible ministers. When the information that was for the Department of Education, I always communicate with the minister responsible.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Schemes

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Schemes.

Are there any questions? Member for Arafura.

Mr BROWN: As of 31 May 2025, there were 1,950 members of the concession scheme in remote communities. What is the uptake number for 2026? What efforts have been taken to improve the uptake?

Mr CHARLS: In the rural and remote areas until 31 May 2026 there were 1,929 members in the scheme.

Mr BROWN: Was that 1,929?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, that is right, for this financial year from 1 July 2025 to 31 May 2026.

Mr BROWN: That is a reduction from 2025

Mr CHARLS: Yes, quoting the number you said—1,950—there is a reduction of 21.

Mr BROWN: Are you aware that only 15% of customers using Jacana prepayment meters are receiving NT concessions under the scheme?

Mr CHARLS: The advice is no, we are not aware of that.

Mr BROWN: During the cost-of-living crisis which impacts those on the lowest incomes the most, what is being done to increase awareness of the scheme for those who are using prepayment meters?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass to the CEO to respond.

Ms LIVESLEY: We are aware, and it is our focus that the concessions recognition scheme unit is undertaking throughout this year to try to increase our membership of eligible Territorians in remote communities. We do not have a physical presence in remote communities, except for Tiwi Islands and Maningrida.

We are building on partnerships with other Northern Territory Government agencies, other providers and Commonwealth agencies to help us work through supporting people who will be or could be eligible. Some of that might also be supporting them with their 100 points of ID to become eligible as well. We know that it is a piece of work. It is a focus that we are trying to stand up in partnership with other agencies.

J DAVIS: Also on behalf of the Member for Mulka, how many people in the Mulka electorate are on the NT Concession Scheme?

Mr CHARLS: There are currently 118 NTCS—Northern Territory Concession Scheme—members living in the electorate of Mulka. On 31 March 2025 there were 96 members, so there is an increase of about 22 members compared with last year.

Mr MACKAY: How many are in the electorate of Goyder?

Mr CHARLS: We specifically have that information available to us because the Member for Mulka asked this question last year. We anticipated that he would ask the question this year as well.

Mr MACKAY: I am happy if you provide it on notice.

Mr YOUNG: Can we get all the electorates tabled and then it is just straight there, done? You do not have to go through them all.

Mr CHARLS: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.8

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

Mr MACKAY: Can we receive a breakdown by electorate for the current and last year's number of people on the concessions scheme?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, with the comment that I have been informed it is a big piece of work, so it may not be something the department will be able to respond to within the normal timeframe.

Mr YOUNG: That is fine.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.8.

J DAVIS: I started to ask these questions in the opening statement regarding the Seniors Recognition Scheme. I noted that many of my constituents have talked about the difficulties they face last year when many of cards could not be activated and needed to be replaced. Do you have a figure on how many cards needed to be reissued?

Mr CHARLS: Senior Territorians had a challenging time last year at the start of the financial year because of a third-party provider issued card had some challenges. The department has actively worked with the provider and also with the DCDD at the time. They had to reissue the card. There were approximately 6,000 replaced last year due to that fault. We are anticipating there will not be an issue this year. This is not something that the department is foreseeing to come because the money has been allocated with the third-party provider to issue the cards. This was an issue with its system, not with the Northern Territory Government.

J DAVIS: When were the final cards posted to recipients?

Mr CHARLS: My advice it was around late August. It took a couple of months for it to be resolved from 1 July to 22 August.

J DAVIS: What did the cost end up being to the department for the card replacement? Did it bear the cost for that?

Mr CHARLS: My advice is no. There was a contract provided to a third-party provider. It was a fault at their end. They fixed that issue.

J DAVIS: My last question was what has been done to ensure the same situation does not occur this year, which you have answered. Thank you.

Mr BROWN: On the increase in awareness, do you have a year's mapping of getting out and educating people in the regions?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass on to the CEO to respond.

Mr BROWN: Let me make it more pointed. How many trips and outreach engagements has your team undertaken to provide the information regarding the concessions, with a breakdown in the major centres and remote areas?

Mr CHARLS: I will pass on to the CEO to respond.

Ms LIVESLEY: I do not have that data, but I can assure you the team attend all the regional seniors expos. We also work closely with Council of the Ageing—which we fund—which also ensures that information is

provided. Our process is to work with our NT Government partners that are located in remote communities where those key interface sites are. For us, a key one is the Health department where it is in NT Health-run clinics and people are made aware of the concession scheme and who may be eligible, and if they are not a member, how we can support them to become one. It is a piece of work that we have started and is one that we really want to ramp up and do more in.

Mr BROWN: Would that be the same for the Aboriginal-run clinics like Red Lily and Mala'la that are in my region.

Ms LIVESLEY: Yes, because we find that health clinics in a remote community are probably a place where most people will go at some point. It is a good place for information.

Mr YOUNG: I want to understand more regarding the NT concession scheme to ensure that people who are eligible in remote and Aboriginal communities have the opportunity to apply for it when you are doing that other work with agencies interlinked with them. Some of the work done with the Department of Housing in terms of tenancy agreements that are put in place, they may have that list available. I understand there are automatic deductions from Centrelink payments. That may be able to link it up quickly to ensure that people have access to the scheme. Is that work being done too? If so, when is it like to finish to ensure that people have access?

Mr CHARLS: Because it is a specific question about the department. I will pass it to the CEO.

Ms LIVESLEY: We have not gone into that close a piece of work with the department of Housing, but it is something that we have written to it about regarding what we can do with a partnership approach to increase our membership and what it can do with its staff on the ground to support that.

Mr YOUNG: I understand with the scheme people have to apply year by year. Is that the case or am I thinking of the Seniors Recognition Scheme?

Ms LIVESLEY: No, they have to renew their membership for both schemes annually. Between January to June every year is our period when we send out notifications to all members to renew their membership.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any reason for that?

Ms LIVESLEY: That was due to a fraud control mechanism put in ...

Mr YOUNG: Fraud control?

Ms LIVESLEY: ... in about 2018, I think, from memory.

Mr YOUNG: When that notice is sent out to remind people to reapply, is it reapplying from the beginning, or is it basically saying, 'I am still eligible'?

Ms LIVESLEY: Yes, they just have to go and verify on the website. They do not have the reapply and re-provide all their information. It is a weblink and you can go on it simply.

Mr YOUNG: For people in remote communities who would not have access to internet or computers?

Ms LIVESLEY: I can check the team, but I think they are supported. People can ring up our concessions unit and they can help over the phone to do it as well.

Mrs CARLSON: I have a follow-up question. With the renewal, is that because one of the eligibility criteria is you have to be a Northern Territory resident for more than 50% of the year—which is why you would need to then re-confirm your residential status.

Ms LIVESLEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: I think you said earlier that part of what you are looking at is trying to assist people with things like the 100 points for ID and barriers to people to access the card. Is that right?

Mr CHARLS: I will get the CEO to respond to that.

Ms LIVESLEY: Yes, in initial discussions we had with Housing colleagues about what they have identified and also Health colleagues that some people do not have the right kind of identification to get the 100 points of ID, even to be eligible for Centrelink payments and what we can do about that with a broader government approach. It is more than just the concession scheme that would be impacted.

What we can also do for those people who are eligible and do have ID about how we are picking them up and making sure that they can access both schemes where they are eligible.

J DAVIS: I am sure my colleague will be happy to hear about cutting red tape. Is there anything else you have identified particularly in relation to this scheme that could assist with people being able to access it who are not currently?

Mr CHARLS: My advice is no.

Mr MACKAY: We have discussed this before. As you are aware there are residents in my electorate and across the rural area who do not have the luxury of being able to use the concessions on water and sewerage, given that they have their own sewerage and bore water or rainwater tanks and are not connected to town water? Is the government looking at any options for how the concession schemes might be able to be rejigged so that the rural seniors who pay for their water through their power bill are not being left out?

Mr CHARLS: Through the ministerial advisory council there is a working group currently working on this. The department is supportive that there is some communication with Treasury on how we can look at that and whether we can change that.

This is something that I never knew. You wrote to me earlier and discussed it on multiple occasions. Some of the remote and regional members on the council have mentioned it also. That work is underway with Treasury to see whether we can move that towards power bills, for example. The costing model needs to be done, and that is underway.

Mr MACKAY: Can you advise the committee on funding in the concession scheme—because on paper it looks like there has been a slight reduction. How are we assisting with the cost of living for our seniors and those on the concession scheme?

Mr CHARLS: In this current financial year the revised budget was \$30.320m. In the next budget it is \$30.196m. The \$0.12m decrease for the Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Scheme budget primarily relates to the \$0.19m related to the realignment of budget across outputs to ensure consistency in employee funding rates and the centralised office of CEO costs previously allocated to other outputs. This is a reporting adjustment only and not an impact on the department's total budget.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – SPORT

Output 2.1 – Sport and Recreation

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output Group 2.0, Sport, Output 2.1, Sport and Recreation.

Are there any questions? Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: Is there any funding in the budget for the upgrade of Gardens Oval that the Member for Fannie Bay promised during the last election?

Mr CHARLS: There is no money in this budget, but that is with the department of Housing's budget.

Mr YOUNG: Is it the department of Housing for upgrades to Fannie Bay oval?

Mr CHARLS: Sorry; it is local government. It is one department, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development.

Mr YOUNG: Has there been funding in there? Do you know or are you not sure?

Mr CHARLS: There will be. There is funding allocated.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Member for Daly, you can direct that question to the minister for Housing and Local Government on Monday.

Mr CHARLS: There is funding from this government; \$2m is committed towards Gardens Oval. That announcement will be coming out tomorrow.

Mr YOUNG: Tomorrow—breaking news from the Sports minister himself.

Which remote communities are expected to receive support through Territory-funded sport and recreation programs during 2026–27?

Mr CHARLS: Under the activities in remote communities program the following councils will receive funding: Barkly providers through expression of interest, \$457—because the Barkly Regional Council did not want to provide that funding so it will go through an expression of interest process through the Barkly council—Belyuen council, \$81,000 next financial year; Central Desert Regional Council, \$451,000; Coomalie regional council, \$127,000; East Arnhem Regional Council, \$624,000; MacDonnell council (inaudible), \$512,000; Roper Gulf Regional Council, \$592,000; Groote Archipelago Regional Council, \$173,000; Tiwi Islands Regional Council, \$150,000; Victoria Daly Regional Council, \$354,000; Wagait Shire Council, \$56,000; West Arnhem Regional Council, \$384,000; West Daly Regional Council, \$234,000; and to be reallocated across other outputs, \$97,000.

Mr MACKAY: I am happy for you to take this one on notice. How many Sport Vouchers have been redeemed for clubs located within the Freds Pass Reserve sporting complex in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: We do not have the information available directly, but we have the regional breakdown. In Litchfield \$112,000 has been redeemed as of 31 March 2026. I do not know the number of ...

Mr MACKAY: I am satisfied with that number because that will encompass Freds Pass.

Mr CHARLS: That is Litchfield, but I do not know whether it is Freds Pass because the people living in the Litchfield Council are can redeem for other activities as well.

Mr MACKAY: With the Learn to Swim vouchers do you know what the uptake is as a percentage of the people who are eligible for that scheme?

Mr CHARLS: There have been 4,099 vouchers redeemed as of 31 March 2026, which is a 5% increase compared with 3,898 during the same period of the previous financial year.

Mr MACKAY: What is the current status of the Woodroffe Oval redevelopment? Can you provide an update?

Mr CHARLS: With the Woodroffe development there is the Palmerston Cricket Club through NT Cricket, the peak body, and the Darwin Buffaloes through AFL NT. Many joint meetings have happened in this financial year. The department is close to negotiating a deal between NT Cricket and AFL NT to have those two clubs agree on a long-term lease arrangement that will help the project to move ahead. One of the complexities of this project is that the land is leased in perpetuity by the Palmerston Cricket Club. It is a Crown lease. The Department of People, Sport and Culture is looking after other areas as well. For that development to happen there should be a long-term lease arrangement between both clubs. That was one of the reasons there was a delay on this one.

We have almost reached a point that the initial \$900,000 will be moved across in this financial year and put on hold until that lease agreement has been submitted. Once that has been agreed on, the project will move on and we will be able to see AFL and cricket utilise that upgraded facility 12 months of the year.

Mr MACKAY: What about the Gillen Oval redevelopment in Alice Springs?

Mr CHARLS: The Gillen Oval multi-sport precinct is a key election commitment to deliver a new multi-use community sporting facility in Alice Springs supporting the increased participation across a multiple sport. The project is being led by the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure with their design and construct procurement approach adopted to accelerate delivery timelines.

The design has progressed, and the construction anticipated to commence later this year. Practical completion is currently targeted for early 2027, delivering new sporting infrastructure, including irrigated playing fields, change rooms, spectator amenities and supporting infrastructure. This will be a significant

addition for Alice Springs overall and there will be a lot more Territorians using that oval, as it is a significant investment from the Territory CLP government for the Alice Springs region.

Mr MACKAY: Does your department have any specific grants or funding available for new clubs which are going through the process of forming with a constitution and trying to incorporate. The most recent example is the Livingstone Jets, a new rugby club. Is there funding or grants support to help to establish new clubs in the Territory that your department offers?

Mr CHARLS: There are no current funding provisions available to support new clubs. I understand that once they are a registered club, there would be many opportunities for them to apply for DIPL grants through the CBFM and other departments. There will be opportunities, which are currently available for other clubs, which they will be able to utilise.

Mr BROWN: Are you confident the Melbourne Football Club will continue playing AFL games in Alice Springs beyond the end of their current agreement?

Mr CHARLS: There are contract negotiations for all major events sits with the Tourism and Events NT. The Minister for Tourism and Hospitality is responsible and you can communicate with her. I am not across any information about that.

Mr BROWN: No negotiations as et?

Mr CHARLS: It sits with the Tourism and Events and Minister Boothby.

Mr BROWN: How many remote community sport and recreation positions are currently funded by the government?

Mr CHARLS: I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.9

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

Mr BROWN: How many remote community sport and recreation positions are currently funded by the government?

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, for the Department of People, Sport and Culture; I will not be able to take your question for all the government.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.9.

J DAVIS: Thank you to the Member for Goyder for reminding me that I had this question. What support is the department offering to the PINT Club which recently went into voluntary administration? Will you support a new not-for-profit to take over or support someone in the process of taking it over? It is a big concern to many people in my electorate.

Ms LIVESLEY: It is a complex matter because they had a Crown lease in perpetuity. It is not actually the Department of People, Sport and Culture; it is a mix between the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment Crown lands estate along with the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations under the *Associations Act*.

J DAVIS: Who would I ask about that?

Ms LIVESLEY: You would ask Minister Burgoyne for Crown lands and Minister Cahill for the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: That concludes Estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence at 9 am on Monday 15 June with questions for the Minister for ...

Mr CHARLS: Chair, can I make some comments? We have not gone through other outputs, specifically when it comes to Sports. I want to say that we have the World Cup for soccer coming through and the Department of People, Sport and Culture, Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations are working with Football NT to provide opportunities for Territorians to see the Socceroos game.

When it comes to Arts, I acknowledge all the fantastic work that has been done in the arts industry. We do not have the time to reach that portfolio. Recently there was a lot of impact from the floods in the Daly Region. A \$30,000 grant was recently given to Merrepen Arts to celebrate its 40th anniversary. We communicated with them. I want to add that on to the outputs as well.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I was going to give you the chance to finish up but you took the wind out of my sails. Would you like to take the opportunity to thank your staff?

Mr CHARLS: Yes. I thank all the staff members from working at the executive level to working on the ground on different portfolios and areas of my ministerial portfolio. I have seen all the wonderful work they have been doing. Unlike officers under some areas like multicultural affairs with two staff members, the youth team which is always working, in and out, in the evening, and I have also seen them on the weekends and evenings.

When it comes to the Disability team, that specific area has been putting in a lot of hours recently because of all the changes and information that we have to rely on, on behalf of the Northern Territory and the disabled community to the federal government. They have worked a lot of extra hours.

I thank everyone in the Department of People, Sport and Culture because we are a small department but when it comes to the reach, we reach across the Territory. We can clearly see the wonderful work that the department is doing across the Territory. When it comes to our government's lifestyle strategy, I am proud to say that my department is working really well to support that strategy. Once again, I thank all the members of the department.

Madam ACTING CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, we thank you as well for your work.

That concludes Estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence at 9 am on Monday 15 June with questions for the Minister for Health. Thank you everyone.

The committee suspended.
