

The committee convened at 8.30 am.

Mr CHAIR: Good morning. I welcome everybody to this public hearing of the Estimates Committee.

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

I also acknowledge the traditional people I grew up with, the Pitjantjara and Arrernte mob in Alice Springs.

This is the 21st year of the Estimates Committee process. The procedures of the committee have been well established over time; they are outlined in the information manual which is available on the Assembly's website. I will highlight a few of these key procedural points.

Phones must be turned off. The estimates hearing agenda gives the order that outputs will be considered. I remind members to seek clarification from the minister at the beginning of the hearing if they are unsure which output a matters falls under.

It is important that each question on notice is given a number and repeated so it is very clear. I have to go through that, so I will pull people up from time to time and say, 'Just one sec; we have to do the number'. I apologise for interrupting whenever that happens. I may also interrupt when answers are given, to clarify the question number it refers to. Questions on notice must be answered by 18 July 2022. Under the Assembly's resolution the committee is not able to accept any answers after that date.

As required by the Assembly and detailed in the estimates information manual, the committee has developed a COVID safety plan and will continue with the measures implemented over the last two years. That means fewer people in this room and we have others next door. Only the staff of the agency before the committee will be on level three, and staff from the next agency will be on level four in the Nitmiluk Lounge. I ask that agency staff leave level three promptly when their hearing is completed so we can admit the next agency while maintaining appropriate physical distancing. There will be a short break between each agency for this transition.

MINISTER FYLES' PORTFOLIOS

CHIEF MINISTER

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S OFFICE

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed with consideration of outcomes of proposed expenditure in the order set out in the estimates hearing agenda, commencing with the Chief Minister. Welcome, Chief Minister and the Auditor-General's office.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, thank you for that welcome. I also acknowledge the Larrakia people on the land on which we gather today and all other Indigenous Territorians. I do not intend to make an opening statement for the independent statutory offices. I have with me Julie Crisp, the Auditor-General, if the committee wishes to ask her any questions.

Mr CHAIR: I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first. The Chief Minister indicated that she will not be making an opening statement.

The committee will consider the whole-of-budget fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to the output-specific questions, then non-output specific budget-related questions. Other members may join in after the shadow on a line of questioning pursued by the shadow, rather than waiting until the end of the shadow's questioning on an output.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2022–23 that relate to the Auditor-General's office. Are there any agency-related questions whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to let the Auditor-General make a statement, if she has one.

Ms CRISP: This year the office is scheduled to deliver 120 audit tasks against a budget of 115. We tabled three reports to the Legislative Assembly compared to 125 tasks and four reports in the prior year.

The audit program enabled a detailed and robust review of financial and compliance matters affecting the public account and ensured sufficient audit work was undertaken in order for me to form an opinion on the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report. The audit program continued to focus on performance management system audits and data analytic exercises designed to contribute to improved public sector management, governance and performance reporting.

As at 31 March 2022, total income recognised for the financial year was \$3.856m, being \$17,000 below the original budget of \$3.875m. Output appropriation for the year to date was \$2.295m. The remaining revenue comprises recovered audit costs from statutory audits of \$1.447m and goods and services received free of charge from other NT Government agencies of \$114,000.

The variance between actual revenue and budget is attributed to recovered audit costs being lower than budget by \$9,000 and services received free of charge being lower than budget by \$8,000.

The office is dependent on adequate appropriation funding to deliver audit services and continue to provide an appropriate level of assurance over the public account. Compared to the same time last year, appropriation funding reduced by approximately \$10,000 for the nine-month period.

As at 31 March total expenses incurred for the financial year were \$3.832m, being \$210,000 below the original budget. The variances are largely attributable to the timing of the delivery of the audit program with a number of audits still in progress during April and May that would usually be largely completed by the end of March.

Actual audit costs are affected by the number of audits, the nature and the scope of the audit, the time an audit takes to complete, the composition and experience of the audit team assigned to the audit, annual contractual price escalations and the increasing market rates of audit services. The increase in cost was also driven in part by new and revised auditing and accounting standards.

Delays in completion of audit work reflect resourcing constraints in agencies and audit firms, largely due to COVID but also in skills shortages. The office recognised a small operating surplus at 31 March and is also expected realise a small operating surplus for the year end.

The office has an approved staffing level of five. There are presently four positions filled and a recruitment process is under way to temporarily backfill a position that has fallen open, with one employee taking a promotional opportunity with another NT Government agency.

The permanent transfer of one employee has enabled the office to minimise the impact of unbudgeted employee bonus costs. We note that budget Cabinet has approved additional appropriation funding for bonus payments. As at 31 March, employee costs were \$7,000 above budget but we should be within budget by 30 June.

There are 111 audit tasks scheduled for the 2023 financial year. The reduction from this year reflects machinery of government changes, a reduced number of outsourced audit hours to counter rising rates and reduced internal capacity due to resourcing constraints.

The new panel audit contract, effective 2 January last year, has seen increased costs associated with delivery of the audit program due to high professional service rates. The rates are linked to inflation, and the uplift applied to the contracted rates in January 2022 was above 5%. As advised in last year's estimates, increased costs are also expected to arise from the introduction of new and amended Australian auditing standards.

The risk to the delivery of audit services, appropriate segregation of duties and succession planning highlighted in past strategic reviews, including the most recent review tabled in November 2021, has significantly impacted the office this year.

I thank the principal auditors Sue Cooper and Stacey Kelly, and Manager Finance and Corporate Services, Lisa Blakeley. They worked incredibly hard to ensure we continue to deliver the program efficiently and effectively and to meet all the regulatory and financial responsibilities that apply to public sector agencies.

I acknowledge the work of Karen Matthewson. Karen accepted a promotional opportunity with another agency during the year. She had been with the office for nine years and was instrumental in digitising the

records of the office and supporting our commitment to reducing our physical impact on the environment. In addition to managing our records, she undertook a range of corporate and finance-related tasks.

I thank the authorised auditors agency personnel and Members of the Legislative Assembly who contributed to the strategic review of the office, which was finalised in November 2021. Their insights and suggestions are valued and we are attempting to implement the recommendations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There was the strategic review into the office; you came out of that with a glowing commendations from the review. Congratulations to you and your small but mighty team. There was mention in the review of resource capacity limitations. Could you explain how your resources limit your capacity?

Ms CRISP: There are five positions: my own, two principal auditors and two corporate and finance staff. One of the challenges, as far as running the office is concerned, is segregation of duties. It does not matter whether it is a financial or transactional processing matter or whether it is an audit. Everything requires a level of review in addition to a preparation. That brings limitations with it.

With the one position going, we are up against it. We have used principal auditors to assist in ensuring that we have appropriate review processes over our finances and our deliverables within but this week, as an example, we have two of the four of us off with COVID. There are two of us in the office, which tends to create a backlog of work; we are all trying to get through that. Perhaps one of the other things we have also seen with COVID is the skill shortage within the firm. We have had to push back a number of audits, start them later and take longer to finish them because of the resourcing constraints.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned that one position is going. Is that because someone is leaving your office and you need to replace them or you are losing a position in your office?

Ms CRISP: No, we have not lost the position; it is position is still there. We saw opportunities for that person to take a promotional role within government. A good boss helps their people find the best opportunities. That is what that is about.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You will be able to replace them, in theory.

Ms CRISP: Here's hoping. We are looking to consider the existing structure of the office and whether the best structure previously is still the best structure. We probably need to look at the change in the number of positions in-house.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Obviously you are auditing right across government. How many referrals to ICAC have you made?

Ms CRISP: A referral to ICAC obviously is mandated where there is reasonable suspicion of improper conduct. We always review our files with the intent to focus on the audit and material misstatements. Where we have reasonable suspicion that something requires referring, we refer it. Over the last 12 months there has possibly been three instances of referrals. We are also able to be contacted by the ICAC if they have concerns about something as well.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In your March 2022 report you investigated—or undertook the audit—for the Langouant review, 'A plan for budget repair'. You noted that existing systems and processes do not permit assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the response in achieving the outcomes of the financial report. Could you explain whether you had any feed back to your office from government on how government could improve in response to your report?

Ms CRISP: Regarding the plan for budget repair, it is important to point out that we do not undertake a performance audit, it is a performance management system audit. We are not assessing where an organisation is compared to another point or a starting point, we look at what systems are in place for an agency to evaluate where they are at. The statement on the plan for budget repair was about whether there are systems in place to demonstrate dollar savings that should be attributed to the actions taken in response to the plan.

At the end of every audit I issue a management letter, which lists comprehensively where I think areas could be improved and where the performance management systems could be strengthened. I receive a response back from the agency on every one of the recommendations. That is a different report to the one that is published, but the agency also has the opportunity to respond to that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does the implementation of 'A plan for budget repair' have the right systems to assess whether or not it can calculate the dollar savings that it intends to?

Ms CRISP: At the time of the audit there was no comprehensive system to assess what dollar value of savings the actions had contributed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You tested a small sample of the Home Improvement Scheme—I think it was about 45 applications—and found a sizeable number of exceptions during your audit testing, some applications having multiple exceptions. Could you explain what you mean by exceptions, so that people watching can also understand? I would like to understand how any breaches were scrutinised and whether you identified fraud or serious elements as part of your audit.

Ms CRISP: The Home Improvement Scheme—you would be aware that it was a large initiative and had in excess of 20,000 applications for vouchers. It is not possible for us to look through all 20,000, as there is not enough staff. We did select a sample. In some respects it was a targeted sample. We were looking for elements to prove or disprove.

The Home Improvement Scheme required an applicant to attest that they were seeking a certain amount of funds and that the work was to be undertaken on a private residence. People were only entitled to apply once for the scheme and for one property and were not meant to receive financial benefit from a related party. If you applied for the scheme it would not be a related party doing the work.

We were concerned about a number of related parties. The Northern Territory is not a large jurisdiction, and a lot of people are related to businesses. We were concerned about that and a number of applications where one individual had made more than one application.

We were concerned that there was a range of first instances where we would have thought, based on the rules associated with that scheme, that the application would have been rejected. It was not; it was reconsidered. That was within the realms of the department but we were concerned about the reason the initial decision to reject had been overturned. We do not have the resources to trawl back through it, and the office does not have a fraud investigation mandate, so the appropriate thing was to refer that in the report to parliament. I said that I had undertaken any referrals mandated so from that, on reply—if I am concerned about or had a reasonable suspicion about conduct or inappropriate behaviour to refer that to ICAC.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many were referred to ICAC? You mentioned you only did about three in the last 12 months?

Ms CRISP: I referred the entire program.

Ms FINOCCHIARO: Were any applicants or contractors ordered to refund the grants?

Ms CRISP: The project was in progress when we undertook the audit. Quite a number of payments were still to be distributed so it was a moot point. We have not gone back to demonstrate the extent to which people have been asked to refund money.

Ms FINOCCHIARO: The agency has to respond when you say that it can improve next time or have certain measures in place. Do you make sure that happens or is a fresh audit for whenever the next grant round might be?

Ms CRISP: There is always an opportunity for me to go back and do a further audit but I need to consider how much benefit that will be to the audit program, noting we have referred the findings from that, whether it is actually necessary for us to go back in or not.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Because it is with ICAC?

Ms CRISP: Yes. There are a lot of topics we can look at without going back to the ones we have already done.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: One referral that was made to you last year was regarding Attorney-General at the time, Selena Uiibo, who reported in parliament in March 2022. She tabled a report that you found contravened Section 6(2)(a) of the *Public Information Act*. The word 'Labor' was mentioned seven times in that document; it purported to be a document from the NT Discrimination Commission but it was from the minister's office and included the minister's personal government email address. Clearly, upon closer inspection it was

prepared by the fifth floor, not the Anti-Discrimination Commission. As part of your review, did you contact the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner?

Ms CRISP: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As a part of your findings you make recommendations. Is there any way for you to check that those recommendations are implemented?

Ms CRISP: In relation to the *Public Information Act*, what I can do is limited under that piece of legislation. I can request information to be withdrawn; that is it. It is my view that once information is out in the public domain, it is in the public domain. In this instance it was a tabled paper; once it has been tabled it is there, it cannot be un-tabled or retracted. I can make recommendations and I do. In that instance, it was about ensuring people had the appropriate training. As a general rule, I do not revisit to make sure that training has occurred.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Minister Uibo's office does not have to report back to you and say, 'We have completed the training'?

Ms CRISP: The Attorney-General responded that they had taken on board the commentary. They received a draft copy of what I am proposing to table in my report, responded to me and took it on board. They are not required to follow up to say 'this person has attended training' or otherwise.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Your office provides critical information and insight into government. You have been the Auditor-General for how long?

Ms CRISP: Eight years.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am staggered that, in an ever-increasing PS, you still have a staff of four. When you started, what was your staffing level within your office?

Ms CRISP: Four.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Eight years later it is still four. I rest my case.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – AUDITS AND REVIEWS
Output 1.1 – Audits and Reviews

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 2.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 2.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank you for attending today.

The committee suspended.

NORTHER TERRITORY ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Mr CHAIR: We will now consider the Northern Territory Electoral Commission. Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement.

Ms FYLES: I have Iain Loganathan, Electoral Commissioner for the Northern Territory Electoral Commission and Kirsten Kelly, Deputy Electoral Commissioner. Iain will provide an opening statement.

To clarify, the NT Electoral Commission has responsibility for Chapter 8 of the *Local Government Act 2008*. If the committee wishes, questions can be asked in this output. We will come back if needed, but generally that is what happens.

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: The major event for the NTEC for this financial year was the August 2021 local government election, which was run at a cost of \$1.86m. Councils paid \$1.75m of this cost and the agency covered \$113,000 of COVID-related expenses.

The turnout at this election was 61.4% compared to 58.5% for the 2017 election. For the first time regional councils had the option to offer early voting services from the council offices. Six regional councils offered this service and collected 2,863 votes.

A new savings provision, which allows electors who are not on the roll to enrol and vote on the day, enabled 2,150 Territorians to cast a declaration vote with 1,741 of these admitted to the count.

Since the 2021 local government election the agency has conducted two supplementary local government elections and three local government by-elections, costing \$9,477.

The agency conducted nine online enterprise agreements for OCPE, generating \$26,155 this financial year. These elections are conducted on a marginal cost-recovery basis. The agency also conducts paper-based fee-for-service elections. We conducted four of those, generating \$12,608. These elections are conducted on a full cost-recovery basis.

I will speak about an issue that I believe should be of concern for all of us. The recent federal election again highlighted the continuing trend of declining voter participation in remote communities. Despite initiatives that allow electors to enrol on the day and vote at LG and LA elections, and extended early voting service provided by councils at the 2021 local government election, remote voter turnout continues to decline.

This is more than a COVID-related issue. Societal disengagement with the political process has been an ongoing trend for some time. There are 22,000 Territorians not on the electoral roll. According to the AEC it is estimated that 16,000 of them are Aboriginal. Perhaps it is time to stop asking why more and more Aboriginal Territorians are choosing not to vote. Maybe the question should be, 'Why should Aboriginal Territorians vote?'

The next Legislative Assembly redistribution starts in February 2023. The likely outcome is that remote Territorians will continue to be underrepresented in our parliament. There is also likely to be a referendum on the constitutional recognition of First Nations people in this term of federal parliament. Unless there is a dramatic change with remote voter engagement many remote Aboriginal Territorians are unlikely to vote.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Commissioner, I thank your staff for everything they have done and thank you for your preparation for today.

I am glad that you touched on voter participation, because it is a critically important issue. I know that your office has been battling and trying to find innovative ways to create that engagement, or at least, an awareness that an election is being held and providing the opportunity to vote—all of those types of things.

With the Daly by-election, there was extended voting in Wadeye, which had not been done before. I want to understand the KPIs for that and whether or not it delivered the outcome the Electoral Commission was hoping for. Because of the five full days that were opened in Wadeye, how did the compare to when it was only one or two days?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: I do not have the exact numbers of people who voted, but the Daly by-election is a good example, because we just had the local government election a couple of weeks earlier. We noted that there was a significant increase in the number of votes taken with the extended voting services for the by-election.

At the Daly by-election there was a decline in voter turnout in the rural areas, but in the remote communities there was an increased turnout in comparison to the local government election.

I am happy to take your question on notice and provide a more detailed response in relation to the exact numbers. We have also drafted the report for the Daly by-election, which will be tabled in parliament shortly.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I would like to put that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.1

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Could you please detail the contrast between the number of people who voted in Wadey over the five full days, compared to the previous Territory election, when voting was only one or two days?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated number 1.1.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the involvement of the Territory Electoral Commission in the federal election? Is there a role?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: The role is minimal. We share resources and information. A number of my staff, including Kirsten Kelly, worked for them during the election. It is more about sharing information, particularly regarding casual staff who worked for us. We shared other details, such as remote community turnout, who went, how long we were there, the schedules and the contacts. It is more about intelligence. They run their election and we run ours.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you have any involvement with—for example, a complaint was made regarding the Labor candidate, now the Member for Lingiari, using a Northern Territory Government vehicle for campaigning. Is that something that your office had to deal with?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: No, we had nothing to do with that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Equally, allegations that the Member for Gwoja was exchanging Foodbank vouchers for How to Vote cards—that is not something ...

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: No.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, that is a pretty serious allegation the Leader of the Opposition is making. I do not think that it is appropriate to make that without substantiation. I ask you to remind members to be careful with their comments. We are protected by parliamentary privilege, but that is a significant allegation.

Mr CHAIR: If there is sensitive information or information that anyone would not like to go on the public record, or it is commercial-in-confidence in nature, we can go *in camera*, as this is broadcast live.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned that you will be tabling your report to parliament, will that be in August?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: I am not sure of the exact date, but I suspect that it would be in August. We are also finalising the election report, which will make recommendations in regard to local government elections. That will be either tabled in August or the sittings after that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Has any work been done towards—I think Alderman Justine Glover has resigned or flagged her intention to resign. Will there be a by-election at the council level for that?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: That is correct. The City of Darwin meets tonight and will consider dates and details about that by-election.

Ms PURICK: Marrakai is in an unincorporated area, as is Dundee and the surrounding areas of Litchfield. There is a process under way to decide whether they should be incorporated to the Local Government department. If somewhere like Marrakai/Corroboree was incorporated to Litchfield council, would that result in a reconfiguration of the boundaries of Litchfield? If so, would there have to be another election of members just for Litchfield council? There would be about another 800 people from Marrakai. If they were pushed into Litchfield—and Douglas Daly—does that mean the boundaries of Litchfield would have to be reconfigured and there be an election for the new Litchfield council area?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: There are two processes occurring at this point in time. A representation review is being conducted for ward boundaries for existing councils, including Litchfield. It does not include any of the unincorporated areas. At the same time the government has an inquiry in relation to the Top End

councils and has been seeking submissions, so they are separate. I am involved in the representation review. I am not involved in the Top End councils' one.

I do not know, but in my dealings with local government I have been told that, depending on the outcome of that inquiry—for example a Top End council includes Litchfield and Marrakai—it would seek our advice in relation to reasonable ward boundaries within that area. My understanding is that those ward boundaries would not come into play until the next local government election. These are only preliminary discussions. I think that the processes have been worked out initially; how it is to be implemented is subject to further discussion.

Ms PURICK: Because it may not happen?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: Yes.

Ms LAMBLEY: The low voter turn-out in the federal election, particularly in the seat of Lingiari—remote voters—was comparable to the very low voter turnout by remote voters in the 2020 NT general election. I am seeing this as an ongoing problem; it is a systemic problem that is not getting better. The media I heard the other day about voter turnout in Lingiari made it sound like it was unique, but it has been a problem for many years.

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: I agree with everything you just said.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is nothing new.

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: Electoral commissions do not have the answer to that. We have been trying new things but if you look at the electoral roll in remote communities there are minimal people on the roll who were born from 2001 or 2002. Less and less young people are on the roll and being engaged. There is a societal change in how people view politics or democracy, and it is worse in remote communities. I do not know how to change that. That is why I included it in my opening statement because something has to be done. What is currently being done is not working. This has been happening for a long time, and it is getting worse. It will continue getting worse if the status quo continues

Mrs LAMBLEY: Have the resources within the Northern Territory Electoral Commission been eroded over the last four or five years?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: That base line for the Electoral Commission has remained constant.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There has been no increase?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: There has not been any increase. The electoral roll is maintained by the Australian Electoral Commission, which we pay to maintain the roll for the NT. We use that roll for its elections. Predominantly, enrolment is a function of the AEC. Nothing I said today should be interpreted as any criticism of the AEC; it has had its own challenges. Running an election in the middle of COVID was problematic and certainly had an impact on service delivery. It is an issue that needs to be addressed. With a referendum proposed regarding the recognition of Aboriginal people you would think that if it is ever going to be tackled now is the time.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I note you have a staffing complement of 11 FTEs. How long has it been at that level for?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: It has been at that level since I joined the commission.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How long ago was that?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: That was eight years ago. While that is our FTE in election years and in the lead up to election years, we put on additional contract staff. These are experienced electoral staff who would work for us for 12 or 18 months in the lead up and post-election. It is an organisation that certainly waivers in terms of staffing numbers. It is either feast or famine, according to the electoral cycle.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You and I have had conversations for several years about the closure of the Northern Territory Electoral Commission office in Alice Springs. In hindsight, do you think that was a bad move because of the very low voter turnout in Central Australia, particularly in the federal election in the seat of Lingiari?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: With the benefit of hindsight I do not think it was a bad move because Alice Springs as a town has the highest turnout of anywhere. It is outside of Alice Springs where you have the issue.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are the regional centre for Central Australia where people come to do their business. Closing the Northern Territory Electoral Commission office, now three years ago—would that be correct? I think it was a backward step and the figures speak for themselves. Anyway, that is a decision outside your purview.

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: I take responsibility for that decision; it was not a decision of government, it a decision relating to how the NTEC best manages its resources. We have minimal enrolments in that office, and part of the reason is that the electorate offices in Alice Springs provide that service. Of the enrolments we were getting, very few were from the post office and very few from our office. The electorate offices were garnishing the majority of enrolments from Alice Springs town and the communities close by.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It did not help at all to encourage people to vote. You do not think having an office, a presence, in Alice Springs encouraged people to think about voting—publicity, marketing, sowing the seed of democracy perhaps?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: The model that we have now is that we would set up a temporary office three or four months before a major election to push the enrolment and participation message.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are you thinking of closing the Darwin office because it has little impact—using the same rationale?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: No, I am not.

Mr YOUNG: You talked about comms and letting people know when elections are on. In my experience through a lot of communities I go to—we rock up and people do not know that voting is on. I was wondering what the Electoral Commission is doing with communications so people know when there is an election, especially with remote polling booths?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: This is a changing space in regard to how we communicate in the community. Traditional media like newspapers are less effective. My view—and what the Electoral Commission has tried to do—is to communicate directly to people through their phones with an email or an SMS. Where those details have been provided on the electoral roll we let people know that voting will be at their community at this day and time. We also do a lot more with Indigenous media, particularly Indigenous radio, where we have advertising in Indigenous languages.

Our other big push is with social media. Nearly 100% of Territorians are on Facebook. A lot of our advertising that has been traditionally used for older media changed to towards modern social media platforms to get the message out.

The information we are receiving is that people are generally getting the message, but they are choosing not to vote for other reasons. We will be doing some work in this regard. We are working with CDU and ANU on a research study. It will include the Division of Daly, given the fact that we had a local government election closely followed by a by-election. We will be going into those communities, looking at electors who did not vote in either election and asking them why. Is it an issue of communication or an issue they were not aware of? Is it that they are disinterested or are there other issues of which we are not aware?

There is no point in us continuing what we are doing if we continue to get low voter turnout ...

Mr YOUNG: You talked about Facebook and emails. A lot of the homelands within the Daly electorate and other Aboriginal homelands across the Territory do not have a telecommunications service. I talked earlier about people and voters not knowing there was an election on that day. How will you engage with homelands that do not have telecommunication services, so they know when voting is on?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: We deal with all the resource centres. We have all the details. We send all homelands posters stating when voting will be in that community or homeland. It is difficult to communicate messages in remote communities. The more remote you are the harder it is to get that message out.

We give information to schools, health centres the police stations. Any kind of infrastructure out there is on our mailing list, and they will get details. We email them posters and ask that they print them and put them on the noticeboard. That is the traditional way of doing it.

We are trying to get more mobile numbers and email addresses so we can get that information directly to a person's phone. The reality is that we are more likely to have a mobile number and an email address of someone who lives in an urban part of the Territory than someone who lives in a remote part of the Territory. That is the challenge.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When are you expecting that research study to be completed?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: The research study has not commenced yet. We told the AEC we would wait for its election. We are hoping that there can be a joint study between the two commissions, as we try to unravel and come up with different approaches to what we could do in the future.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It will be interesting, because you are right about the confusion. We had people at Berry Springs Primary School coming to vote for council and not realising that was the weekend before. Do you have a breakdown on the Electoral Commission's spend on promotions, advertising and posters—all that stuff you just mentioned—in the rural areas versus the remote areas, noting that the vote was up in the remote areas and down in the rural areas?

Commissioner LOGANATHAN: The details will be in our election report we will table later this year. I am not sure exactly whether there will be a rural or a remote and urban breakdown. If I could take that question on notice, I will provide the requested information.

Question on Notice No 1.2

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please break down the spend by the Electoral Commission for the Daly by-election in rural areas versus remote areas.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes, of course.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated number 1.2.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – ELECTORAL SERVICES Output 3.1 – Electoral Services

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, Electoral Services. While the Chief Minister is responsible for the NT Electoral Commission responsibilities under the *Electoral Act 2004*, the Minister for Local Government is responsible for the NT Electoral Commission responsibilities under Chapter 8 of the *Local Government Act 2008*. However, the committee has agreed that any questions for the commissioner regarding local government will be asked during his appearance with the Chief Minister and the actual commissioner will not be reappearing before the committee with the Minister for Local Government.

No questions.

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

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank Mr Loganathan and Ms Kelly for your attendance today.

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER AGAINST CORRUPTION

Mr CHAIR: We will now move to consider the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption. As I hope everyone has noticed, the witnesses are appearing via video conference. Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials who are accompanying you and to make an opening statement.

Ms FYLES: I will hand straight to the officials and Mr Michael Riches at the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption.

Commissioner RICHES: I regret that I cannot be there in person, but I am home with COVID-19. Also, joining me remotely today is Ms Kathryn Clet, Director of Corporate Services.

Mr CHAIR: Good morning, Ms Clet and Mr Riches. Thank you for joining us, considering you are unwell.

Commissioner RICHES: It is what it is. I only propose to address a few matters in my opening. Next month will mark one year since I commenced as the commissioner. It has been an interesting year. I do not intend to dwell upon the past other than to observe that I have, in many respects, taken a fundamentally different approach to my role and to the work of my office to that of my predecessor.

For that reason, I have spent a great deal of time focusing internally to build the systems, processes and standards that I consider necessary for my office. I do not intend that to be a criticism of the past but merely a reflection of a different approach.

When I commenced, my office was carrying a substantial number of investigations, preliminary inquiries and more than 150 reports that had yet to be assessed. I am pleased to say that by engaging staff from other teams within my office to provide much-needed resources to an assessment group, that backlog has been cleared.

I immediately took the view that the office did not have the resources to properly and effectively and efficiently carry so many matters. So much was clear from the fact that some investigations have had no action taken on them for more than a year. I also took the view that it was not proper to outsource investigations to external investigators.

In many cases I determined to refer or close the investigation because I did not consider it to be a matter that ought to be investigated by my office. It was not, in my view, within my jurisdiction or because action had not been taken on the matter for a long period of time that there was little utility in continuing. There were a number of investigations I did adopt, and a few of those matters continue today.

My office is now carrying 14 investigations, all of which I consider are worthy of investigation by my office, and a further three preliminary inquiries. While our investigations are still taking longer to finalise than I would prefer, I have greater confidence that they are supported by proper process. I expect greater efficiencies will follow.

I have completed a review of the practices, policies and procedures of a public body and a final report will be provided today. I understand that the public body will accept all 25 of my recommendations. My office is already well under way with another such review. We have also completed a project to review, catalogue and digitise more than 550 files of the former Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner.

Since I commenced, five sets of Supreme Court proceedings have been issued relating to matters that occurred before my time but for which I, as the ICAC, am listed as a defendant. Responding to those matters has had a resource impact. Because those matters are ongoing, I will not comment on them other than to note that proceedings will consider aspects of the ICAC Act, including section 155, which is the power to make a public statement. Judicial guidance on that provision, amongst others, will impact on the approach I take.

As the budget papers indicate, next financial year my office will face about a 20% reduction in funding compared to this financial year. I understand that those allocations were determined in 2020. While I made a recent submission in respect of my budget allocation, that submission was not accepted. I am disappointed that is the case. The significant reduction from this year's budget will impact on the discharge of my statutory functions.

Nevertheless, I am enthusiastic about the next 12 months and beyond. While there is still work to do, I think we are now on the right path to ensure a continuing, positive and effective contribution to integrity in the Northern Territory public administration.

I express my gratitude to my current staff, who are committed to the effectiveness and integrity of my office. Finally, can I table a document, which I heard is being printed out for all members? The document has been prepared to offer statistics about the operations of the office and, in particular, the receipt of reports to my office. I will not take up time talking about that document now but I am happy to answer questions.

Mr CHAIR: Copies of that document will be circulated.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sorry to hear that you are unwell, and I thank you for appearing today. It is an important process, but we do not want you putting us before your health, but it is appreciated; I also thank Katherine and your team.

Commissioner RICHES: I am a determined individual.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know that. It is an important attribute for the ICAC Commissioner to have. I have just received your statistics, thank you.

My first question is to the Chief Minister about the 20% reduction in funding and how the government has justified this to the ICAC office?

Ms FYLES: The Labor government put in place the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption in 2017. This was an important piece of legislation to ensure integrity through our government funds and that Territorians could have trust in the decisions made for the long-term benefit of the Territory, not the short-term benefit for a few.

Greg Shanahan has been doing a review of the legislation. I take on board the feedback from the ICAC. In conjunction with that review, we will be looking at making sure we have the legislation and appropriation to enact it, going forward for the ICAC.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is happening with the review, minister? Where is that up to?

Ms FYLES: There was initial review work done, which raised questions. That discussion paper was released at the end of January. There were a number of submissions received—and late submissions were accepted—about this from government departments, members of the Legislative Assembly, individuals and statutory authorities. There was a diverse range of perspectives of that review. Consultation was conducted on a confidential basis so that people could have confidence in providing their information and thoughts.

The next steps going forward will be over the next few months working on some legislation based on the feedback received during that submission process. Whether that is an exposure draft bill is something that is being pondered. We have plans to ensure that the thoughts and feedback from the review Greg Shanahan is conducting will create legislative changes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Going back to the 20% reduction in funding. You referenced the Shanahan review which does not deal with funding. The Cabinet, of which you are part, made that cut to the ICAC. Why did the government cut 20% of the ICAC budget?

Ms FYLES: We said when we funded the ICAC that from its outset it would receive a core base of funding, then if significant matters needed to be funded a Treasurer's Advance could be sought. It is a pivotal time for the ICAC. We note the work that has been undertaken by Mr Riches. We have had an ICAC in place for some years, but equally we are reviewing the legislation. We have seen significant work undertaken on the Office of the ICAC, making sure its processes are efficient. We will make sure it has the budget to match.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is not just a reduction pending workload, it is an actual cut on last year. Your government has deliberately gone into budget Cabinet and said, 'We will take \$1.272m out of that bucket of funding'. What justification is there for your government to reduce the ICAC budget by 20%?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question, Mr Chair.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you expecting the ICAC to come forward for a Treasurer's Advance, because the ICAC Commissioner has said he provided a budget submission to your government asking for that budget

allocation and it was rejected, which clearly impacts the role he and his team can play. Are you now putting the ICAC in a position where he has to apply for a Treasurer's Advance?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question explaining the process. We put in place the legislation and gave it a budget. We understand the nature of the work the ICAC undertakes; it is fluid. Going forward we are happy to ensure it has the legislation and the provision of funds to operate.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If the commissioner was to come forward with a Treasurer's Advance for \$1.272m, the Treasurer would approve that?

Ms FYLES: There needs to be fiscal responsibility. You would be the first one at me if there was not. We were very clear about this. If you read the debates and the media commentary when we established the ICAC, there was a budget. Equally, the nature of the work that these type of investigates bodies undertake, from time to time has the need for more expenditure. We support having an ICAC in the Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can understand why this really does not pass the pub test. You have an investigate body that investigates any number of agencies and people. I am not limiting it exclusively to government, but clearly government is a substantial feature of referrals made to the ICAC and what makes up its workload. Whether that is found to be true is another story, government would be a big part of the ICAC office's investigation workload.

The government of the day, which is undoubtedly under investigation, is cutting 20% of the budget knowing that impacts on the ability of the ICAC to be able to undertake investigations.

Ms FYLES: What does not pass the pub test is passing an inquiry into parliamentary expenditure then reversing that decision. We stood by—have enacted ICAC legislation and will ensure it has the funds to operate. I just explained the process that it has a set budget. The fluid nature of this work means that from time to time it could go over that, processes are in place.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you agree with the ICAC Commissioner that the cut to the budget impacts the role of the ICAC?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have not asked that question before, so I am not sure how you did. Do you agree with the ICAC Commissioner that the 20% impacts the role?

Ms FYLES: I can go back over it but I know we have a lot of outputs ahead of us. Regarding the process it is clear how the ICAC is structured. I have answered these questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are not prepared to justify the cut, or admit that a cut to a budget impacts the role. We just heard from the Auditor-General and the Electoral Commission about how resourcing plays a big role on the number investigations and work that can be done. The ICAC has a 20% cut; anyone can open the budget book and see that it is a cut. We know that will impact its volume of output yet you are too stubborn or proud to admit that is the case. Should you not be justifying the 20% cut?

Ms FYLES: I do not think we need personal slinging matches. We put in place in ICAC. It has a budget, and there are mechanisms to go over that if it has more investigations. We acknowledge the significant work of the incoming ICAC Commissioner—I note it has been a year. We are doing a review of legislation and will ensure there are appropriate resources to enact it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Commissioner, with the cut to your budget how does it change the threshold for cases going to the investigation stage?

Commissioner RICHES: It does not change the threshold, in that the threshold is dictated by the legislation. The practical reality is that I have to be realistic about what I am capable of investigating. It would be foolish of me to take on more investigations than my team and I could realistically address. Taking on too many investigations leads to unnecessary delay and, in some cases, poor outcomes.

I understand the concept being raised—that I can come forward and seek special funding from time to time. I am grateful for it.

An issue that ICAC commissioners around the country experience is difficulty in finding and retaining highly competent investigators of the kind who work well in anti-corruption agencies. Corruption investigators are not interested in waiting around to be called. People who investigate these kinds of matters are specialised in their training and education. I have been working on upskilling the investigators on my team for this kind of work. It is important to have a contingent of skilled and experienced corruption investigators on the team to assist in investigations when they are conducted.

Ms PURICK: The previous commissioner was referred to the Privileges Committee for misleading and being threatening to a journalist. It is still before Privileges—I know that you probably will not be the new Privileges Committee Chair. Where is that process at? It has been some six to 10 months since that person was referred to Privileges Committee.

Ms FYLES: I need to be careful. I am happy to go in closed session but what I can say is I am still the Chair of the Privileges Committee. I do intend to change that. That matter is still before the Privileges Committee. I am happy to go *in camera* or to leave my response there.

Mr CHAIR: I propose that we do not go into the Privileges Committee here at the ICAC because they are separate, and it is a parliamentary committee.

Ms PURICK: But it is still before the committee?

Mr CHAIR: It is still before the committee. I know that the DLA staff are working on that, trying to arrange and re-order the committees in due course.

Ms PURICK: In regard to the opening statement, commissioner, you said that you have been cataloguing and digitising the public interest disclosures, cases or matters. Does that mean you have put them to bed and that none of the cases with the Public Information Commissioner have been dealt with? Or have they just been pushed into the catalogue system or are there still some ongoing because people would have reported serious issues, presumably within the public sector?

Commissioner RICHES: The process I referred to was not related to whether or not any matters were the subject of investigation when they transferred to the former commissioner. It is a project that involved us cataloguing and digitising many boxes of hard-copy material. All the material is now retained on an electronic system for eternity.

I raised it because it was a not insignificant project done by a small, efficient team.

Ms PURICK: How many full-time staff do you have within your agency? How many of the staff are investigators?

Ms CLET: As at 31 May 2022 the ICAC had 24.49 full-time equivalent—that is a round 25 as a head count—four investigations at 12.49; nine of those staff are in investigations and five are in assessments, which also deals with tri-agency reports, referrals and the like. About fourteen staff relate to operations.

Commissioner RICHES: We have one legal practitioner as well, who is very much involved in the operation.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned before that you are taking a different approach to taking on investigations and said words to the effect of ‘You cannot take on too many that you cannot address’. You will not take them on unless you can properly, effectively and efficiently deal with them. That is fair enough.

The 20% cut would have a big impact because you are working within the budget. You do not have some imaginary budget you wish you could have. For example, as things are coming in you process them. Correct me if I am wrong; this is my interpretation. You are processing things as per your capability to deal with them, so you are triaging the most serious things and get on with those. By deduction then, if you had the 20% back you would be able to take on many more things.

Commissioner RICHES: First I want to emphasise that my functions extend beyond just investigations. Obviously that is what I am best known for. I have said before and will say again that my functional responsibilities of education and prevention are just as important as my obligation to conduct investigations into improper conduct.

Looking at the organisation and my functions as a whole it stands to reason that the more resources I have at my disposal the more effectively I am able—perhaps effectively is not the right word but the more I am

able to take on. There is a limit to that, and the limit is me. The reality is that I become the bottleneck because it is a commissioner in this jurisdiction it is not a commission, but whilst my predecessor had engaged two individuals nominally as deputy commissioners, I have taken the view that a deputy commissioner should only be a person that is appointed in accordance with legislation. At present the legislation does not provide for that.

I readily accept that even now I am somewhat of a bottleneck to my office. There is only so much I can achieve in 24 hours. Having sufficient resources will allow me to investigate the matters I consider worthy of my office and to do so as efficiently and effectively as I can. At the same time I conduct the education and prevention programs, including what I am really keen to do, which is a regional and remote education prevention program. Being able to do so is contingent on resources.

I also have to bear in mind the budgetary impact of the costs associated with the Supreme Court proceedings.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Effectively it will be a 20% reduction ICAC office output?

Commissioner RICHES: I will not be drawn on the impact of work. I am a practical person. I will work with whatever resources I have, will do the very best I can, and I will push my team to get the best out of them that I can. That is all I will say.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are five Supreme Court proceedings at the moment. None of us have a crystal ball; there could be more today. That is possibly a liability that your office will have to wear, with an already-cut budget. Has any modelling been done by your office in quarantining or setting aside a portion of your budget in case any liabilities arise from the proceedings?

Commissioner RICHES: We have incurred costs of \$149,000 to now. I do not intend to comment on the proceedings other than to say that one of the proceedings have been heard and others are awaiting judgement. The other matters—one is what I will call a preliminary hearing. We are in the relatively early stages of those other matters. None of them have proceeded to hearings. There will be a funding issue for those matters.

If you are asking me for projections, the difficulty is how long those hearings will take. If the defendants are successful or unsuccessful that will impact on costs. It is difficult to project. Early on I asked Ms Clet to quarantine a certain amount of money, which I think is almost spot-on so far, for the costs we have incurred thus far. We are taking it into account. We will ensure we accommodate it within our budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Up to this point, the ICAC has paid out \$149,000 as a result of court proceedings. There are five more Supreme Court proceedings on foot, and you are awaiting judgement for one of those.

Commissioner RICHES: There are five sets of Supreme Court proceedings; one has already occurred; a second has had a preliminary hearing; and the other matters they are yet to be heard.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How does your office absorb its own legal costs? Can you use your legal staff member so that it does not cost you more, or have you had to use your budget to pay for additional legal team?

Commissioner RICHES: The costs are arising because of the engagement of external persons. Regrettably, the Solicitor for the NT and the Solicitor-General were conflicted, so I was unable to use their services. I am making use of the services of the Crown advocate in the Solicitor-General's chambers, which has been of some assistance, but I also engaged private solicitors within the Northern Territory and independent counsel from interstate. There are inevitable costs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where those costs put out to tender?

Commissioner RICHES: No.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Given the size of the legal matters that have been put through the Supreme Court, did you consider doing that?

Commissioner RICHES: No. One does not always have time to run extensive processes when one needs to ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was simply a matter of time?

Commissioner RICHES: With respect, I am entitled, as the commissioner, to determine who I am satisfied to represent the office.

Ms PURICK: For clarification, when you talked about the deputy commissioner, who is also the general manager, did you say that role ...

Commissioner RICHES: No. The deputy commissioner is not the general manager. The former commissioner appointed two individuals, Mr Rex Wilde QC and Mr Nicholas Papas QC as deputy commissioners. The general manager, whose title is now deputy chief executive, is Mr Matt Grant. They are different individuals.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It sounds like a sizeable impact. There has been a 20% budget cut; money going out to defend the office of the ICAC; and there may be liabilities arising from making payments depending on the outcome of judgements. Is it your intention to seek a Treasurer's Advance so that any money spent on legal processes and defences in court will not take away from your ability to do education, prevention and investigations?

Commissioner RICHES: The idea of a Treasurer's Advance is not a matter I have considered in the past, but I am grateful it has been raised. I have not yet had the opportunity to meet with the new Chief Minister; I have spoken to her once during a meeting of the ICAC committee. I look forward meeting with the Chief Minister in the near future to discuss these matters and the progress in changes to the ICAC Act.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Chief Minister, we have heard from the ICAC Commissioner. It is not just the 20% reduction your government has taken from the ICAC's budget, it is also the significant costs they are incurring in defending the office. Already \$150,000 has gone in payments as a result of negative judgements against the ICAC. What will your government do to ensure that the ICAC can continue with that workload in the face of budget cuts and money being spent on services which are not key services of the ICAC?

Ms FYLES: When we established the ICAC—something the previous government refused to do and, when they passed an inquiry into political donations, they reversed it. We have been very open with the fact that there is a budget. We are here analysing the budget papers because we have a responsibility. We would love to spend a lot of resources across the Northern Territory Government, but we have that responsibility. With the review to that legislation, we will ensure the ICAC has the financial resources to do the job.

The new ICAC—it has been a year, so we should probably stop saying that—has done an enormous job. We look forward to working with it. It had a previous increase to budget to deliver the role of the ICAC. The door is always open between the ICAC and me, as Chief Minister and Treasurer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It must concern you that a significant portion of their budget will be allocated to activities that are not ICAC activities, such as education, prevention and investigations.

Ms FYLES: You are making an assumption there and verballing ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. The ICAC Commissioner just explained that it has five Supreme Court proceedings. At a minimum it is having to defend the office with legal costs for external counsel. Either way, money will go out the door. I am not predicting an outcome of the proceedings; it could go either way. At a minimum there will be significant legal costs for whatever period of time these court proceedings go on for.

That will come out of the budget that should be spent on education, prevention and investigation. Is it not a concern to you that the ICAC has to use resources it should be spending on its core function rather than on legal fees?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, there is jumping to assumption and some verballing happening here. I have made it perfectly clear; we have the legislation ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you explain how I am verballing? The ICAC has literally said that it is defending five sets of Supreme Court proceedings.

Ms FYLES: Yes, and you are saying that ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That costs money.

Ms FYLES: Yes. I have also said that we are reviewing the legislation and there will be an opportunity, I assume, with the change in legislation of resources. There is also the ability to come back for a Treasurer's Advance, or on something specific. Every agency is given a budget; they need to aim to stick to that budget. We understand that there are issues. When those issues are identified, with valid reason, we will look at financial resources being provided. A good example is COVID. It has impacted some agencies and not others. They have been provided with additional COVID payments.

You are making an assumption that the government will not provide the resources to the ICAC to continue its job under the legislation, when I have said repeatedly this morning that the ICAC will have the financial resources to do its job in the future.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not making an assumption; I am asking the questions. You said that the Shanahan review will look at the cost. Of course, this is a closed-door review; no-one has been able to see it. Many people, including many members of parliament sitting here today, felt that should have been a process through the parliament, fully open to the public. It should have been a parliamentary committee or an ICAC committee which undertook that review, not a behind-closed-doors review.

That breeds more questions than it can ever give answers, and people get the impression that it is government controlling a review. With an ICAC you need to make sure people feel that there is ownership. It always has to be beyond reproach and as open and transparent as possible. The fact that the Shanahan review was behind closed doors has led to some concern about it.

Because no-one has seen it, can you tell us if a budget review was part of the Shanahan review?

Ms FYLES: We have delved into a policy question. As I said previously, the consultation was conducted on a confidential basis, with that clearly outlined, so we could get that breadth of information.

My answer remains the same. We will ensure there is strong ICAC legislation and that there are financial resources for the commissioner.

This is about our values as a Labor government. Decisions should be made and taxpayer dollars should be spent in the long-term interest of the Northern Territory, not the short-term interest of a select few. We famously had quotes from the CLP Treasurer that money opens doors. That is not how we operate.

We introduced this legislation into the Northern Territory; it has been in place since 2017. It has been a huge job establishing an ICAC. It is the right time to look at that legislation. I do not know how many different ways I can say it. We will ensure that the ICAC has the financial resources. Of course, we have to stick to budgets, but there is opportunity—and if there are extraordinary circumstances—for things to be considered, just as there is for any other NTG agency.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will the Shanahan review be made public?

Ms FYLES: I have answered that question. It is also delving into a policy—that review was based on submissions being confidential, so that people could be comfortable coming forward with that information.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It will not be made public?

Ms FYLES: The discussion paper was released. The appropriate information was released. We made that review on the basis that it would be confidential, so that people would come forward with comfort in providing frank information.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You will provide legislative amendments later in the year, I presume. How will the Members for Araluen, Goyder, any other members of the Northern Territory Parliament and I know whether or not the laws you bring are part of the recommendations if we never get to see the recommendations?

Ms FYLES: You know the legislative process. There has been discussion about whether it is an exposure draft bill, but exposure draft bills can drag out the process. We will consider the best way to bring that forward—whether it is an introduction of a bill to the House and it sits on the Notice Paper for briefing, discussion and key points, or it is an exposure draft bill.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much has this review cost to date?

Ms FYLES: Greg Shanahan has been leading the review. I am happy to ask. He has a couple of roles there and works part time. I am happy to get that information for you.

Mr CHAIR: Do you want to do that one on notice?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes.

Ms FYLES: There is an opportunity in the outputs under Chief Minister and Cabinet, or I can take it on notice now.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will put that on notice now.

Question on Notice No 1.3

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was the total expenditure this financial year on the ICAC review that you announced in April 2021? What is the itemised break-up of that expenditure?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 1.3.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Commissioner, what was your involvement or level of participation in the Shanahan review?

Commissioner RICHES: From recollection, the review had already commenced prior to my commencement as the commissioner. I recall being contacted early on and indicating that it was premature for me to comment, because I was still trying to understand the legislation. Ultimately, I made a submission. I met with Mr Shanahan and his assistant, Miss Haack, and followed up that meeting with a written submission.

I provided a copy of that written submission to you, Mrs Finocchiaro; the then-Chief Minister; and to the ICAC Committee for the sake of transparency. Others would know the matters I raised. I will add that now, with the benefit now of almost a year working with this legislation, there are a few more things that would benefit from consideration. I intend to do deal with that by way of a general report to parliament.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If there are more things, the legislation has not been finalised so it is not too late to incorporate them. If you were to report that to parliament, that is a great way for everyone to know what you are recommending.

Commissioner RICHES: I think that is the appropriate way for me to approach things—by way of a general report to parliament or through the committee that has been established for my office.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When you report to parliament will you be doing that via the Speaker or the ICAC minister? We had concerns in the past with government. No-one wants to see a closeness between government and the ICAC Commissioner, probably least of all you.

Reporting to parliament has to be done in a way that does not seem to give advantage to government or anyone else. How do you see yourself in a practical self-reporting to parliament? Will it be via the ICAC minister or the Speaker?

Commissioner RICHES: The short answer to that question is that I will report precisely in accordance with the act. Whatever the act requires is what I will do. If it is a general report that I think ought to be made to parliament, I would provide it to the Speaker because that is in accordance with the ICAC Act. You can rest assured that I will act consistently with ICAC Act requirements.

Ms PURICK: The document you tabled has 'allegations by public body'. Under that, the top 12 bodies—how many of those reports have resulted in investigation? Of those complaints, how many have been referred to

a government agency for action? How many have you got back? Do you undertake an audit process to ensure that when it goes to a government agency for action that it is dealt with appropriately, given the person within that agency is making a complaint about something in that agency?

Commissioner RICHES: I am happy to take that on notice even though it is all material I intend to cover in my annual report.

Question on Notice No 1.4

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

Ms PURICK: Of the allegations by people within a public body, how many has the commission taken on to investigate formally and how many have been referred back to the government agency—as per your new processes—for appropriate action? How many have come back to you to say the case has been closed or further action has been recommended?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Goyder has been allocated the number 1.4.

Commissioner RICHES: This is not a new process I have adopted; it is a process that has always been in the ICAC Act. My predecessor referred matters to other agencies as well. There is the power under the act for me to refer a matter to a public body and require that body to report back to me as to the action taken.

That is a resource-intensive exercise because it requires me to receive that, then me or a member of my staff must assess the manner in which the matter has been dealt with. The number of matters I refer out with the requirement to report back will in turn be dictated by the resources I have available to assess them.

Ms PURICK: That is probably what I am trying to find out—how many have come back to you with recommendations or a course of action?

Commissioner RICHES: With outcomes, yes. I understand.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Prior to your time there was the ICAC report 'By the Length of the Straight'. In that report it listed information excluded from the investigation. On page 23 of the summary it said that information that was excluded—not considered in doing that investigation—was confidential information about the decisions and proceedings of a committee of Cabinet, and confidential information and communications among members of Cabinet.

Are these areas that you will maintain as off-limits for gathering information as you are conducting investigations?

Commissioner RICHES: It is not a matter that I have decided is off-limits. It is a matter that is off-limits by statutory design. Section 79(2) of the ICAC Act says:

However, a person is not authorised or required by this Act ...

Then there is a provision relating to the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*.

Section 79(2)(b) says:

to disclose confidential information about the decisions, proceedings or deliberations of:

- (i) the Executive Council or a committee of the Executive Council; or*
- (ii) the Cabinet or a committee of the Cabinet; ...*

(c) says:

to disclose confidential information about communications among members of the Executive Council or Cabinet or among Australian governments; or

And (d) is:

to produce a document or to disclose information about a document that is exempt under Section 45(1)(a) of the Information Act 2002.

I do not have the *Information Act* in front of me but I can assure you that section 45(1)(a) is a very long list of documents, the effect of which is to exclude me from being able to require a person to produce documents of that kind.

It is a matter that I will address in a general report that has been an investigation I had to discontinue because I have not been able to access Cabinet documents. It is a matter that, in my view, is quite serious. It related to an allegation of misleading Cabinet. However, because I have not been able to access the Cabinet documents, I cannot progress with the investigation because those documents are key to the investigation.

I do not criticise the government in any way. The government is entitled to claim public interest immunity in respect of Cabinet documents, and I am obliged to comply with the act. It has had an adverse impact on that investigation. It is not a decision of mine. The parliament made that decision.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In other jurisdictions, would ICAC have access to Cabinet documents?

Commissioner RICHES: In that respect, the act is not dissimilar to other jurisdictions. Obviously, in other jurisdictions, the language will differ and there might be differences as to the breadth of what is captured by the restriction. The Northern Territory is very broad, particularly when one looks at section 45(1)(a) of the *Information Act*, but it is not dissimilar to other legislation around the country. There is always something that has restrictions over Cabinet-in-confidence. I do not have any difficulty with not being privy to the deliberations of Cabinet. There are good policy reasons for being able to have frank and robust discussions in Cabinet. In this case, it was not the Cabinet discussions I was interested in. It was an allegation of misleading by someone outside of Cabinet. It was someone different. Nevertheless, it was captured by section 79 not the ICAC Act.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I appreciate your explanation because it seemed controversial at the time, particularly—most people accept Cabinet confidentiality; there is a need for that. The confidential information and communications between members of Cabinet, when they are not in Cabinet but in their usual discourse of being colleagues, captured people's attention.

You mentioned before you would report to parliament. Can we expect a bit more fleshing-out of that from your perspective in the coming months?

Commissioner RICHES: I am probably not able to say much more than what I have, to be honest. It would be patently unfair to expand upon the nature of the investigation because the reality is that allegation is untested. I do not think it would be fair to identify individuals involved. Whether or not the allegations are true, I do not know. I do not think it would be fair in those circumstances.

It is an issue I will face. It is not dissimilar to issues that arise in respect of parliamentary privilege. There are matters that have been around for quite some time. There are always different views taken as to the breadth of those protections.

As an investigator, it is natural for me to want everything; that is part of being an investigator. I will always be guided by ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Chief Minister, were you the Racing minister when you sat in Cabinet and gave away the \$12m for the Turf Club?

Ms FYLES: I note the cuteness in which this question is asked, Mr Chair.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Good question, though, is it not?

Ms FYLES: I was very proud to be the minister for Racing, something that injects a lot into the Northern Territory economy. Regarding the question, I do not think it is before this budget output.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You will make the Turf Club repay the \$12m you gave away as part of Cabinet. You were the Racing minister. As Chief Minister, will you make the Darwin Turf Club repay the \$12m?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, the Leader of the Opposition is factually incorrect a lot lately. There were some comments on radio that were factually incorrect. She asked a question in the House about this topic. It is not before the output that we are on.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Could you explain how I am factually incorrect?

Ms FYLES: I am sure there will be opportunity, but I encourage you to fact-check your comments. The question in the House was whether I have attended the races. I do not believe this is on the budget output that is before us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not factually incorrect in my question, that your government is making the Turf Club repay the \$12m grant. I am asking you now, as the new Chief Minister, will your government continue to make the Darwin Turf Club repay the \$12m?

Mr CHAIR: We are still on the opening statement from the Office of the Independent Commissioner for Corruption—just double-checking.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will I get an answer to that question?

Ms FYLES: I do not believe it is the output that is before us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In which output could I ask you that question?

Ms FYLES: I suggest it would be a question you ask of the Minister for Racing, Gaming and Licensing, as you well know.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Perhaps I could ask it in Chief Minister's, minister?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a question about the process of publicly releasing ICAC investigation reports. It was previously revealed that a 474-page report into allegations the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics—I think it was the Katherine office. It was not released due to claims that it 'eroded trust within the agency'.

As ICAC, do you accept that proposition? Clearly, what was finalised must have been a significant body of work and expense to the taxpayer. Why does not the ICAC obtain this report from DIPL and place it on its website, as it has done with other reports that cost taxpayers money? Your website says that under freedom of information you are committed to publishing as much information as possible on your website and in your annual report. How can this failure to publicly release a taxpayer-funded investigation be allowed to happen by ICAC? I am wondering if you have any comments on that?

Commissioner RICHES: Are you talking about a report that my office prepared?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, the investigation you made into DIPL in Katherine. The report was not released publicly because the minister said that releasing the report would erode trust within the agency. The fact that it was a publicly funded investigation report and that the philosophy of your organisation says that you try as far as you can to release information to the public. I am wondering if it is possible to release that report independently to the public.

COMMISSIONER RICHES: I am sorry, it might be COVID but I do not know what report you are talking about. Are you suggesting that I have prepared a report into ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have done an investigation into the Katherine office of DIPL.

Commissioner RICHES: No. I have not done an investigation into the Katherine office of DIPL. What I am currently conducting and which I have not yet completed is a review of the practices, policies and procedures of DIPL out of the Katherine office. I have not even started writing that report because I have not completed the review. I am sorry, I do not know what you are talking about.

Ms FYLES: Member for Araluen, you have some documents before you, perhaps you could share them with the committee so that we can be further enlightened as to your line of questioning.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am reading what I have been given.

Ms FYLES: You are reading from some documents, perhaps you could share that with the committee so that the commissioner can answer your question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am sharing it, minister. It says, 'It was previously revealed that a 474-page report into allegations against DIPL was not released due to claims that it had eroded trust within the agency.'

Ms FYLES: What is the source of the document that you are reading from?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is a private source. I asked my whole community to provide questions for this process and they have done so. I will not be revealing my sources.

Commissioner RICHES: I can assure you there is no 474-page report that I have prepared that has not been released.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Whilst I appreciate you will not go into the specifics of any investigation, I will ask if you are prepared to comment on whether or not the previous Chief Minister, any current government ministers or the Commissioner of Police are currently under investigation?

Mr CHAIR: This is estimates. I remind you about the manner and form of questions which we all know. I think we would be going into an area of asking for a legal opinion and not based on an output.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not asking for a legal opinion, and the commissioner can say that he is not answering if he wants to.

Mr CHAIR: I just remind everyone of the manner and form of questions we can go through.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not asking specifically about an investigation—if I think specifically about everything following the Rolfe trial there was a big push. We wanted to see an independent inquiry under the *Inquiries Act* to look at the four days between the fatal shooting and the charging of Constable Rolfe. There was no movement on that from a government perspective, but the ICAC Commissioner came in and said that an investigation would take place.

Obviously it is very difficult, but the status of that and whether or not it is in fact an investigation—the community is very interested in this issue. You are not a public commentator, commissioner, and I am not asking you to be one. The expectation from large sections of the community is for the ICAC to investigate the four days between the shooting and Constable Rolfe being charged.

Commissioner RICHES: Yes, I appreciate there is a lot of interest in my activities. One of the most challenging parts of the job is trying to find a balance between what I disclose publicly and what I think ought not be disclosed. I acknowledge that minds will differ about where that balance has been struck and whether or not I do it well. I have already stated publicly that I am investigating a number of issues surrounding the arrest and charge of Mr Rolfe. I am happy to confirm that, given I have already said publicly that it is an investigation I am conducting. I am not prepared to comment further beyond the statements I have already made in respect of my other investigations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Under section 39 of the ICAC Act, the ICAC is able to hold public hearings. Has that ever been done before?

Commissioner RICHES: No, it has not been done in the Northern Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there a framework or policy on that? How will you form the decision on whether a matter should be held in public? Is there a public interest test you would apply? I am interested in how you would make that decision.

Commissioner RICHES: The power is there to conduct a public inquiry in the course of an investigation into improper conduct. It is not a power that has been exercised by me or my predecessor. There is a framework already in the act. The starting point is that the commission of the act requires me to act in the public interest in respect of the discharge of any of my functions.

I am also obliged to take in all matters outlined in Schedule 1 of the act. Part of Schedule 1 deals expressly with matters other than in private. There are a number of factors I am obliged to take into consideration when determining whether to conduct a public hearing as opposed to a private hearing.

One challenge, which is experienced here and in other jurisdictions, is understanding that there will be a great deal of public interest in the conduct of public hearings. Against that, it is ensuring that I get the best evidence and the truth. Sometimes, in holding private hearings, a person may feel they are in a position to be more frank and open with their answers and that can be more beneficial.

I have to bear in mind, particularly if I am investigating serious allegations, of any potential to have prejudicial impact on future prosecutions. I have to be careful with considerations that go towards having public hearings. Having said that, I am not someone who would never conduct public hearings. I am open to public hearings if I consider that the circumstances are appropriate and that the public interest is in favour of conducting public hearings.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That decision will be made on a case-by-case basis, including the Rolfe investigation?

Commissioner RICHES: Yes. A public hearing does not have to be the entirety of an investigation. Certain hearings might arise, and I will consider that as each investigation proceeds.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned that you had taken a fundamentally different approach. You were working on building your internal focus, standards in your office and capability of your team, which is fantastic. Unfortunately, it was reported last week that someone had been charged with unauthorised disclosure of information and it is before the court. I do not expect you to comment on that.

This is an important and key area which has to be maintained and worked on within your office. Presumably, this is not something you are concerned about at a significant level; it is not endemic within the office and is an isolated incident which you were able to identify?

Commissioner RICHES: You will appreciate that I will be careful in what I say.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, of course.

Commissioner RICHES: Put it this way, integrity to me is everything. Any person who does not act with integrity or to the standard that I expect, will be dealt with in the appropriate way.

I am very pleased with the staff I have at the moment. By and large, they have embraced my approach to things and are adapting to the standards I expect. I am quite devastated by the events.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In 2021 the previous commissioner said at estimates that 'all declared conflicts of interest must be recorded and forwarded to my executive assistant'. Is this still the policy and was anyone checking on the executive assistant in these instances for their conflicts, and if so, who?

Commissioner RICHES: What incident are you referring to?

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will read it out to you again. I have sourced questions from all over my community, commissioner.

In 2021 the previous commissioner said at estimates that 'all declared conflicts of interest must be recorded and forwarded to my executive assistant'. This is in relation to the question just asked by the Leader of the Opposition. Is this still the policy and was anyone checking on the executive assistant in these instances for their conflicts, and if so, who?

I am asking you about checks and balances. I am wondering about the skills, qualifications and experience of someone who would sit in an executive assistant role within ICAC.

Commissioner RICHES: Obviously, the identity and the role played by the subject of those proceedings, and disciplinary action, has not been identified by me. Answering that question would be unfair to the individual for two reasons: one, because I have not identified who that person is; and two, because one ought to wait to hear the alleged facts before raising a question like that. I feel very uncomfortable addressing that question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will ask a broader question then. How would the role of the executive assistant be typically used at the office of the ICAC?

Commissioner RICHES: Not dissimilar to the way an executive assistant is used in any other office. The executive assistant would assist me in managing my diary and schedule, have access to my emails to priorities my activities and ensure that I am staying on top of the work that comes to me from a range of different parts of the organisation and externally.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What level would the executive assistant position be within the public service?

Commissioner RICHES: The executive assistant is the same person who was there when I started. Ms Clet, can you assist with the level?

Ms CLET: Yes, the executive assistant is an Administrative Officer 5.

Ms PURICK: In regard to that matter—I am pretty sure from memory that I heard some public statements—I understand that there was commentary about a leak from ICAC regarding the Darwin Turf Club case and it was sent to police for investigation—but I am not 100% sure on that.

Has that alleged leak in regard to the Turf Club matter been investigated and has it been referred to police?

Commissioner RICHES: It has been referred to the police. It was referred to the police not long after I started. As to the status, that is something you will have to check with the police.

I take seriously any alleged disclosure of information from my office. If people cannot have confidence that they can come to my office and that their information will be treated appropriately, that would fundamentally undermine the confidence that people have in my office. To me that is unacceptable.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you describe the pre-employment checks undertaken at ICAC?

Commissioner RICHES: At present—this is something that I have recently made some changes to—the pre-employment screening checks involve checking qualifications to ensure that the person who says they have certain qualification has that qualification; psychometric testing; and historically a police clearance certificate was required.

I take the view that it is not enough. I have gone down the path of requiring people to undertake the Commonwealth security vetting processes but was advised by the Chief Minister's office that it is not appropriate, so I ceased doing that. I have an agreement with NT Police that they will conduct further background checks with intelligence holdings and advise me whether there are any red flags associated with employing a person in the office. That process was adopted in South Australia—I was in the ICAC in South Australia for eight years. It was a very effective process that assisted us to have better confidence in the integrity of the individuals on staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The issue of secret recordings made by ICAC without a warrant has come up within our ICAC. What are the total number of taxpayer-funded secret recordings made by ICAC without a warrant, to your knowledge?

Commissioner RICHES: We must be careful about language. It is not an offence for a person to record a conversation to which they are a party, even if the other parties to the conversation are not aware of it. That is not a criminal offence.

The concern I raised about the recordings undertaken by persons within my office before I commenced was not whether or not they were unlawful, but if they were appropriate in the circumstances. I took the view, which is different to what occurred before me, that it is not appropriate for an agency of this kind to record conversations when these witnesses have come forward to provide assistance to the office.

To my knowledge there have been six occasions when a recording has been made. I do not say that all six were inappropriate. Some had merit, for want of a better term. They did not involve witnesses to investigations. I cannot say whether there were others. I can only mention the ones I am aware of because there was a recording. I do not want to comment further because I know that matter is with the inspector.

My staff are under no illusions about that process.

Mr TURNER: Commissioner, after hearing the number of members in investigations—for the clarification of the Public Accounts Committee. I think it was said that nine members are in investigation roles, is that correct?

Commissioner RICHES: I think that was Miss Clet's.

Miss CLET: There are nine members in the investigations team as of 31 May 2022.

Mr TURNER: Does that translate to nine investigators or is that including people in investigation or administrative support roles?

Commissioner RICHES: There is only one investigation support role. The rest are investigative.

Mr TURNER: Thank you for being here today; you are obviously not well. Your comments about the challenges of attracting and retaining investigators in the Northern Territory—could you explain to the Public Accounts Committee about current pay levels, whether that is an issue when you are trying to attract experienced investigators, competing with the Northern Territory Police's pay and entitlements and how that translates into you being able to provide the best service you can for Territorians?

Commissioner RICHES: I will ask Miss Clet to give you the raw numbers. I can tell you that it is a challenge. Not only in terms of pay but with entitlements. We cannot offer the same entitlements that a Northern Territory police officer has the benefit of.

I do not think that it is just entitlements. The reality is that, in many cases, a highly competent, experienced investigators, who may be on a career trajectory within a law enforcement agency, are unlikely to want to move out of that agency because it may impact on their ongoing career.

There are not many investigators inclined toward the type of investigations we do. That is not just an issue in the Northern Territory, it is across the country. For just one of my investigations we have in excess of 26,000 documents. It takes a particular kind of investigator to be enthusiastic and excited about working through 26,000 documents to find the relevant evidence.

We are already looking at a smaller pool of investigators who enjoy this type of work. Then it is a matter of attracting them to the office in light of what we can afford to pay them. It is challenging to attract people from interstate because invariably what is being offered interstate is significantly more than what is being offered here.

Mr YOUNG: Chief Minister, BP3 says that the 2021–22 budget was restarted to reflect the transfer of information management and work for services support functions to DCDD and that the decrease was mainly due to the variations in additional funding provided in the 2020 budget. Would that explain the 20% the Leader of the Opposition was talking about?

Ms FYLES: Across government there was the transfer of some shared corporate services—an efficiency for a small jurisdiction. From a number of agencies, resources that used to be with an agency go across to the centralised service. Yes, that would be part of it.

We believe in an ICAC and being open for the community. We also need to manage our budgetary responsibilities so that agencies are provided with a budget. Particularly in this case, if anomalies require the commissioner to go above his budget.

You have seen shared corporate services, for example. From time to time agencies get an increase. They have an increase for a period of time—that is for a specific reason. When that curtails, there are adjustments in the budget papers. BP3 explains all of that to people.

Mr TURNER: I am just trying to give the Public Accounts Committee an idea of—for the record, if it is not obvious, I am a staunch supporter of the Independent Commission Against Corruption and that it was brought in because it was desperately needed. It is important that the Public Accounts Committee understands ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are talking about the budget Estimates Committee in here now?

Mr TURNER: Yes. It is important that the committee understands the amount of work that goes into the investigations. That is why I was asking the commissioner about the number of investigators it attracts and

retains. I think the question has already been asked regarding the provision of services. I note that previously the commissioner said that he would not be outsourcing services.

If you have required a search capacity in the ICAC, have you been able to source other integrity-based agencies to provide assessments or source investigators from other agencies to ensure that matters are still getting addressed?

Commissioner RICHES: Yes. I was in Canberra last week, meeting with my counterpart commissioners from around the country. That is where I picked up this bug. There was widespread discussion about how we can share our resources as required. I have in-principle agreement from two interstate agencies to provide assistance to us with forensic electronic crime support services. There is the ability to call upon other agencies but, in many cases, the situation is the same. We are all fighting for a relatively small pool of resources. Whilst I might be able to call on other agencies, whether they are in a position to be able to assist is another story.

Mr TURNER: In your report to the parliament tabled earlier this year you noted, regarding recruitment, promotion and some other areas, that you would be preparing a separate report for the parliament in 2022 further addressing these issues. Is that still your intent?

Commissioner RICHES: Yes, it is coming. In the meantime, the Commissioner for Public Employment has published a document about recruitment. I have read that; it is a very good document. It addresses many of the integrity risks I plan on raising. I would encourage anyone in public administration to read the Commissioner for Public Employment's document on recruitment.

Mr Deputy Chair, may I return to a question that was raised earlier about the 470-page document? I have just received information. I think the member was talking about a document that was prepared by the department, not by me. It is not clear to me why I would be responsible for publishing.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you, Commissioner. I just had clarification on that, too.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER AGAINST CORRUPTION **Output 5.1 – Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Operations**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 5.0, Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption, Output 5.1, Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Operations. Are there any questions?

Ms PURICK: Commissioner, you have 24 or 25 staff, what is the percentage of turnover? Is it a high turnover? Do you have a percentage of staff leaving over the last 12 months?

Commissioner RICHES: That is something Kathryn and I were working on yesterday. The turnover has been more than 50% since I commenced, so we have had high turnover. Ms Clet can probably give you the exact figures.

Ms CLET: From 1 July 2021 to 31 May 2022 we had seven separations from the NTPS, which are all resignations from the Northern Territory enrolment; 11 transfers out were agency, five of which were on a fixed-term secondment with the ICAC and their contract had finished, one was promoted to a permanent position within the NTPS; and five are on temporary secondment to another agency. That is 18 people transferring out of the office of the ICAC.

We expect four people to return after secondments, but that will not be until towards the end of the year or the next financial year.

Mr TURNER: With the budget you have allocated in relation to operations, do you find it is sufficient for access to vehicles and equipment for your investigative teams to carry out inquiries they need to do?

Commissioner RICHES: There is no difficulty with access to equipment, vehicles or the like. We have an abundance of equipment. It is more the human resources that are the main requirements for the kind of work we do.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 6.1 – Corporate and Governance

Output 6.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: There are no other non-output specific budget-related questions. On behalf of the committee I thank the Independent Commission against Corruption and Ms Clet for attending today.

That concludes the ICAC.

The committee suspended.

OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement about the Ombudsman's Office.

Mr FYLES: We have with us the Ombudsman, Peter Shoyer, who is also the Information Commissioner. I hand to him to provide an opening statement.

Mr SHOYER: The Ombudsman's Office operates jointly with the Office of the Information Commissioner. In 2021–22 the office took on two additional roles: providing administrative and investigative support to the new Judicial Commission; and acting as interim national preventative mechanism under the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment—OPCAT for short.

Approaches to the Ombudsman's Office are likely to be around 2,500 for the fourth year running, which is a substantial ongoing increase on the historical average of closer to 2,000.

Complaint and application numbers for the Information Commissioner will fall from a high last year to a figure somewhere in the range of recent previous years.

Complaint and application numbers for the Information Commissioner will fall from a high last year to a figure somewhere in the range of recent previous years. The Information Commissioner's office also continues to take freedom of information and privacy-related inquiries and provides policy advice.

The COVID pandemic has had an ongoing impact on all our offices and on the timeliness of the public sector agency responses to inquiries and complaints.

Last year I reported an increase in the number of open matters at the end of the year, from an Ombudsman's perspective. We are chipping away at the backlog and are hopeful that the number of open matters at the end of this financial year will fall to some extent.

The majority of these open matters are NT police conduct matters, where we oversight investigations conducted by the police professional standards command. The ongoing backlog is a matter of concern for our office. Complainants and subject officers deserve timely finalisation of complaints. Progress is being made, but we continue to work with police to address that backlog as quickly as possible.

The Judicial Commission, for which we provide support, is now operational and supported by our office. As an interim national preventative mechanism for OPCAT, the office has worked with the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice and a range of stakeholders to advance preparations for OPCAT, including contributing to drafting of necessary legislative amendments. The NTG has provided funding of \$160,000 per annum for this year and next financial year to advance the OPCAT.

In addition the office has undertaken other statutory functions during the year, including audits and inspections of NT police compliance with surveillance devices, telecommunications interception and covert operations laws, a review of domestic violence information sharing legislation and preparation for review of a police utilisation of firearm prohibition orders.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any questions on the statement?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is good to see you, Mr Shoyer. I thank you and your team for doing a lot of preparation, undoubtedly, for today.

In the letter to the Attorney-General's department that you published in your 2020–21 annual report, you stated that the report will prove invaluable in informing public debate and promoting fundamental change. Have you been provided with a reason the report and its recommendations—the Paget report—have not been published to date?

Mr SHOYER: Not beyond the correspondence I have had. I simply made that comment. The discussions I have had with the Acting Corrections Commissioner and the newly-appointed Corrections Commissioner have indicated that there was progress being made towards that, but I have not seen any detail—certainly no published detail—on that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you aware how many recommendations there were in the Paget report?

Mr SHOYER: There were a number of them. I do not have a figure with me, but I think it would have been about 20 or more.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why is your government not releasing the Paget report?

Ms FYLES: We have committed to releasing the executive summary. I have asked the Attorney-General to ensure that it is published. The report is about a secure complex operational area.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When can we expect that to be published?

Ms FYLES: I would have to seek some advice from the Attorney-General. I am happy to come back with a time frame or ask him to provide that when he is at estimates next week.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there a reason it has taken so long to release just the executive summary?

Ms FYLES: I was the previous Attorney-General. On coming into the role as Chief Minister, I committed to releasing that executive summary. I note the comments I just made about that being a highly complex operational secure area. We do not want to—in the interest of providing information—inadvertently affect the safety of our hard-working corrections officers and the inmates. We are making sure the information being released is appropriate from a security perspective.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does the executive summary detail how much the government spent in repairing the damage?

Ms FYLES: I could answer that from memory, but that is a question for the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice; there will be plenty of opportunity next week during estimates. We had an insurance-type policy, but I would be speaking from memory and will not go there.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you aware how many recommendations were in the report?

Ms FYLES: I would get these detailed questions and I am aware of this information but I suggest it should be asked of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, rather than my recollections.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will he provide that information?

Ms FYLES: It would be my expectation that he would provide answers to your questions today.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Ombudsman, in last year's annual report you noted that there was a significant backlog in Victims of Crime applications and that there was a promised review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act*, which had not been finalised. Has that review been finalised?

Mr SHOYER: Not to my knowledge. We followed up the backlog. I have not done so recently; I was intending to do so but due to various absences relating to COVID I have not had a chance to have a meeting on that. I could not say what the actual backlog is, but there was some additional funding to address the backlog.

Ms FYLES: It is incredibly difficult for Victims of Crime; resolving cases is a complex area. We are providing resources to the team to expedite them as much as possible, but it is often caught up in processes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who is conducting the review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act*?

Mr SHOYER: I do not know the details. As I indicated, there is correspondence in the last annual report, which is the extent of my knowledge on that broader review.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I would like to put that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.5

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In respect to the promised review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act*, who is conducting the review, when will it be finished and will it then be made public?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes. I will also ask the Attorney-General's office to have that information ahead of their session.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 1.5.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Shoyer, you mentioned not knowing the backlog numbers. Could I ask you that question on notice?

Mr SHOYER: I suggest that it may be better to ask the Attorney-General because he will have up-to-date figures.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In March 2021 you said that it was 1,674 victims of crime matters were still outstanding.

Mr SHOYER: At that stage, I had a recent update, but I do not have one now.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You also noted that you would be considering an own-motion investigation into the administration of the Victims of Crime scheme. Are you still planning to undertake that investigation?

Mr SHOYER: It is still a possibility, depending on recent progress. It is not on our immediate schedule but we are monitoring to look at whether it is necessary. That will depend on the status of the backlog and the matters taken on board at a policy and legislative level.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many matters have come through your office for this reporting period?

Mr SHOYER: We are expecting to have 2,500 approaches to the Ombudsman's office for the reporting period, which is in line with the last three years but an increase on previous years.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does your budget support your ability to deal adequately with that high volume of approaches?

Mr SHOYER: It is challenging, particularly when combined with the challenges of facing COVID and staff absences. We are finding it tough, and it is something we will have to look at—whether we seek additional funding in the coming years. For now we are managing to get through but there is no doubt it has been a challenging two years to address those issues.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you know the numbers of complaints you have received from victims of crime?

Mr SHOYER: From victims of crime, no, I do not have that at the moment. I do not think it has been huge this year, but in past years, at its highest, was a little over 30. There would have been less in this financial year to date.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If you do not mind I will ask that question on notice and include a breakdown of the number of complaints in relation to Jacana and Power and Water.

Mr SHOYER: Absolutely. I can give you figures on Jacana and Power and Water.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will just ask the other one on notice.

Mr SHOYER: It is just the Crime Victims Services Unit is within the Attorney-General's department.

Question on Notice No 1.6

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many complaints in this reporting period are from victims of crime in relation to Victims of Crime applications?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 1.6.

Mr SHOYER: In relation to utility services, as at the end of May there have been 37 Power and Water and 75 Jacana. That compares with the previous year when there were 50 Power and Water and 108 Jacana. Over the past two years there has been a significant drop for Jacana and Power and Water complaints.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you attribute that to Jacana, and Power and Water, working with people better or being more—their service deliveries increased.

Mr SHOYER: They are addressing issues at the front line before they come to us I think there have been improvements over the last couple of years. There were significant issues with solar rebates last year, but they are improving by dealing with things up front rather than people necessarily coming to our office.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Well done Power and Water, and Jacana, if you are listening, that is a very good result and you should be proud of that and continue the good work.

You mentioned about the increase in complaints about the changes to the Feed in Tariff. Are you yet to receive any complaints in relation to government—their cut to the Feed in Tariff for those who are grandfathered?

Mr SHOYER: We have received a small number of inquiries to date. That will hit in July, and we may receive more complaints. When we found out about it we approached Jacana directly regarding its communication strategies and the way it would handle calculation of the four years. The responses to date have been positive. It is a very challenging situation for people who have just entered into arrangements but our main concern is to make sure that they are up front with people, explain the situation and be fair in calculating the lead in time.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Ombudsman office deals with complaints against police; last year there was a large back log; I think it was 183 matters to the end of 2021. What is the current backlog for police matters?

Mr SHOYER: There is still a significant backlog, but as of the end of May the number of outstanding police matters was 137, which is a reduction, but there a significant number have had delays. We are trying to focus on with police to get the numbers down. It is important from a point of view of complainants; it is also important from the point of view of police.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have been waiting for the reform of the police disciplinary system for a long time. All of the resources for dealing with police complaints come from your office. Are they not shared with police?

Mr SHOYER: No. The basic inquiries are dealt with by our office but if it gets to the stage of more serious complaints— category one and category two complaints—they are investigated by the police standards command within NT Police, under our supervision. We will receive complaints, assess them and categorise them as to how serious they are, then pass them on with any suggestions as to areas of investigation. The PSC will investigate and we will be provided with a draft or a report. We will have input into any other areas that need to be looked at, but the report will be provided by NT PSC. A lot of the necessary time and resources are within NT Police.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you able to provide a breakdown of the 137 outstanding? Which ones are with professional standards and which ones are with your office?

Mr SHOYER: They will all be with the professional standards command but come back to our office for checking. There is a small number. We churn through them quickly when we get a draft report, so there would just be a handful that ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Your office does not do the investigation into the complaint; once you receive it from the person you ensure that professional standards command has it on its list?

Mr SHOYER: Yes. We make sure they are doing the investigations we think are necessary and dealing with all the issues. We do have the power to conduct our own investigations but the reality is that the huge bulk of those—at the moment all of them—are police professional standards command.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I need to ask PSC about its resources. Have you been provided less funding specifically to deal with FOIs?

Mr SHOYER: There is a small reduction in the resources. That is to do with a staff member who was on long-term leave leading up to retirement and there was a reduction in funding because they had not indicated whether they had received the mandatory vaccination, which created a reduction in the allocation. That does not mean we will be spending less on FOIs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many FOI applications were there for this reporting period?

Mr SHOYER: For this reporting period we get information from individual agencies at the end of the year, so we do not have the figures at the moment. In the previous year, I think it 1535 across government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When is that to the end of? The calendar year?

Mr SHOYER: No, to 30 June 2021. At the end of each financial year we get each agency across government to provide details of the number of applications received. :

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In 2020–21, 61% of all valid applications were refused either in part or in full. Do you have that information for this year?

Mr SHOYER: No. We will be getting that at the end of the year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is the trend that those are increasing? I noticed over the last couple of years there has been a significant increase in FOI requests.

Mr SHOYER: Referring to the information from the Australian Law Report at page nine, there were various reasons for which an application for access to information may be refused. One of them is to do with being subject to exemption. There was an increase from 37 to 59 applications last financial year, which were refused in full on the basis of exemption. This might appear to be a significant increase, but remember 1,500 applications were received. Whether that trend will continue this financial year, I am not sure. I am not particularly concerned by it at the moment. It may be that they were justified exemption claims. It is something we will keep track of.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes questions on the opening statement.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE Output 7.1 – Ombudsman Operations

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – INFORMATION COMMISSIONER Output 8.1 – Information Commissioner Operations

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 9.0 – JUDICIAL COMMISSION
Output 9.1 – Judicial Commission Operations

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 10.0 – OPCAT
Output 10.1 – OPCAT Operations

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 11.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 11.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 11.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, Mr Shoyer, for attending today. Thank you to all your staff.

While the Administrative Arrangement Order puts responsibility for the Department of the Legislative Assembly with the Chief Minister, by convention the Speaker will answer questions regarding that department.

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to outputs related to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I will take the opportunity to make an opening statement. I have with me Kathleen Robinson, Acting Chief Executive Officer; Tim McManus, General Manager Strategic Services; Bridgette Bellenger, General Manager Territory Regional Growth; Andrew Cowan, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Territory Investment Commissioner; and Jason Schoolmeester, Major Projects Commissioner.

As the questions move through the outputs, I will ask the staff to swap around to provide as much information to this committee as possible.

As a central agency, the CMC provides the highest-quality policy advice and support to me, as the Chief Minister, and within my portfolios as Minister for Major Projects and Minister for Defence. They also provide support to my Cabinet colleagues. The CMC provides a critical role in leading and coordinating whole-of-government programs and initiatives. All of us in this room can appreciate that.

The CMC has a number of ministers that it specifically provides portfolio responsibility to:

- the Deputy Chief Minister Nicole Manison, as the Minister for Advanced Manufacturing
- Selena Uiibo, as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Treaty and Local Decision Making, who has ministerial responsibility for the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Aboriginal Interpreter Service—a vital service across the Territory
- Paul Kirby, as the Minister for Veterans Affairs
- Chancy Paech, as the Minister for Local Government.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment also falls within the remit of CMC for budget purposes. However, I ask the committee if all questions relating to this portfolio could be directed, as is standard protocol, to the Minister for Public Employment, Hon Paul Kirby. He will be accompanied by the Commissioner for Public Employment, Ms Vicki Telfer, during the hearings.

The CMC has a broad and diverse remit of responsibilities, and a number of key achievements were made in the past year. On the economic front CMC's Investment Territory team has now fully integrated into the agency with funding provided to support this function moving forward. The Territory Investment Commissioner, Major Projects Commissioner and the broader Investment Territory team are directing efforts to grow a sustainable and diverse \$40bn Territory economy by 2030, particularly in new areas including Defence; aerospace; critical minerals; mining process; advanced manufacturing; data; maritime; renewable generation; technology; hydrogen; and carbon capture, utilisation and storage.

Over the last 12 months, the Territory's investment portfolio has grown to almost \$15bn worth of committed projects and about \$40bn planned and proposed projects, with the investment portfolio being diversified across a number of industries, sectors and size across the Territory which is particularly important.

Investment Territory is working with proponents with a combined value of more than \$21bn in planned and proposed projects targeting investment within the next five years, including three new major projects approved this year. Investment Territory's recent success includes facilitating 18 projects to move from potential to final investment decision, ensuring \$842m of capital investment and \$170m of operational investment, which will achieve 1,600 jobs during construction, 850 direct jobs and 700 indirect jobs during operations; and activity across sectors including circular economy, digital technology, Defence, aerospace, energy, minerals and agribusiness.

Investment Territory's priority portfolio also includes 28 projects worth more than \$21bn anticipated to reach final investment decision in the next three to five years, with projects in every region of the Northern Territory. Thirteen projects with major projects status make up more than \$17bn and are estimated to support over 6,000 jobs in construction alone. Over the next year Investment Territory will be targeting and securing emerging opportunities, including \$7.5bn of capital investment currently under due diligence, potentially supporting an additional 2,800 jobs. Along with growing the venture capital, ecosystem and deploying investment solutions to crowding finance.

Great progress has been made on a number of the Northern Territory's major and significant projects. As this committee would well know, we passed legislation in the May sittings about the Australia-Asia PowerLink Project that will enable the Territory to fulfil its commitments under its project development agreement with Sun Cable.

In mid-May Arafura Resources announced that it had signed a non-binding MOU with South Korean-based Hyundai for offtake of rare earths from its Nolans rare earths project.

The Finnis Lithium Project construction commenced in October 2021 with Finnis on track to become Australia's only lithium mine to start production before the end of 2022.

Core is also developing plans for a lithium hydroxide plant and was awarded a \$6m grant under the Commonwealth Government's Modern Manufacturing Initiative for a pilot processing facility to produce battery-grade lithium hydroxide. The pilot for this project has the potential to position the Territory strategically as an important jurisdiction for the production, processing and manufacturing of critical minerals to the rapidly expanding electric vehicles and renewable energies market.

The three subsea cables and the three-plus terrestrial cable connections and data centres have already been announced.

NTG has equity investment with ELA, fast-tracking the development of the Arnhem Space Centre. We saw the excitement of that with the Prime Minister here in Darwin last week.

The Local Jobs Fund has made incredible achievements with a total of \$34m committed from the fund since December 2021, with \$14m investment into the amphibious aircraft industries and the Asia-Pacific Aircraft Storage—a 40% increase in the last six months. The Local Jobs Fund is also in the final stages of negotiating the first NAIF on-lending partnership, with \$56m in funding secured through this partnership.

Accelerated transformation of Middle Arm into a global, competitive, sustainable precinct by:

- driving coordination of the fundamental inputs, enablers and markets
- leading collaboration with the Australian Government to source critical, enabling infrastructure commitments

- engaging with industry principles to secure private investment
- supporting multi-agency precinct master planning progression.

Leading the Territory momentum to become a global leader in emission-reduction technology through:

- carbon capture, utilisation and storage
- driving activation of nearby offshore storage solutions
- leading a partnered approach with CSIRO, industry and engineering companies to develop our business case for a large-scale, multi-user hub—key to unlocking the Territory’s transition to a lower emissions future and paving the way for sustainable industry growth
- establishing the Beetaloo sub-basin steering committee to drive strategic planning for rapid industry development, including coordination of enabling essential services, infrastructure and community services through economic, environmental and socially responsible decision-making.

The agency plays a huge role to lead, coordinate and collaborate across government to deliver key priorities, including:

- strategic policy and legislative changes
- responding to the national reform agenda
- implementing priority initiatives that affect the public sector.

In the last financial year, the Office of Chief Minister and Cabinet:

- supported 23 meetings of the national cabinet
- successfully supported and ran the emergency operations centre public information group, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- commenced the implementation of the customer experience reform for Northern Territory Government agencies to ensure our clients and customers are at the centre of everything we do
- continued to provide strategic advice on current and emerging policy issues, including the development of cross-agency policy initiatives targeting improved social, economic and environmental outcomes, supported by sound and independent evidence bases
- progressed the implementation of the social outcomes framework for the Northern Territory to include the develop of a toolkit that supports outcomes-approach across government policy and service delivery, including government organisation partners, complementary to the program’s efforts
- continued to provide a whole-of-government coordination and support to the various activities—stakeholders relating to the implementation of the remaining recommendations from the independent scientific inquiry into hydraulic fracturing in the Northern Territory
- in the Top End and our regional and remote communities, progressing key priorities under the Darwin City Deal, including redeveloping the Civic and State Square
- Activate Darwin has delivered a number of successful space activation events through the CBD, including the International Laksa Festival and the street art competition
- established regional economic growth committees and developed the associated regional economic growth plans. These committees are driving the implementation of key recommendations arising from the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission agenda to secure investment and sustain population numbers, driving jobs and industry growth in the all-important regional locations

- providing and continuing to support a coordinated multi-agency response to COVID-19 particularly in regional and remote communities, including progressing bio-security negotiations with the Commonwealth Government in consultation with land councils, providing interpreter support, distributing key public health messages and supporting the regional COVID-19 response in frontline roles.

This is just a small number of the achievements and initiatives being led, driven and progressed by Chief Minister and Cabinet.

I take this opportunity to publically acknowledge and thank the former Chief Minister and the previous CEO of Chief Minister and Cabinet, Ms Jodie Ryan, who was the CEO for five years. I acknowledge the contributions made to the Territory whilst in that role—working incredibly hard and working with the employees of CMC.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are a new Chief Minister. It is fair to say that you are yet to show your point of difference with your predecessor when it comes to openness, transparency and scrutiny. The opposition provided its written questions—which are always done in advance of estimates—in March, and have just received answers to those global written questions partway through today. This means that there is very limited opportunity to be able to review those and utilise them for questioning today. Why did your government not ensure that the opposition and independents have access to the answers well in advance of estimates?

Ms FYLES: The responses to those questions have been provided. My understanding to members—I would have to check with staff about the specific time frame, I had just asked the question here but ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They were just provided a couple of hours ago.

Ms FYLES: My understanding is that they were being worked on across government and should have been provided yesterday.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They were not provided yesterday. Where was the hold-up? I do not believe for a second that the public service did not have them done weeks ago. Did ministerial officers or your office review the answers to the questions provided by the public service before they were released to us?

Ms FYLES: We get a number of written questions through the normal legislative process and estimates. We try to provide information particularly for Chief Minister and Cabinet, coordinating them across a number of agencies to provide them to the Leader of the Opposition in this case.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That does not answer my question. When did government, fifth floor ministerial officers—your office—receive the answers to those written questions from the public service and why were they only then provided to us partway through today?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I have answered the question. My understanding is they were provided yesterday. It is an enormous amount of work. We certainly treat them with respect as we do with the written question process. Those responses have been provided.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Could I get the question on notice, because that is not an answer?

Ms FYLES: No. I just answered the question but you do not like the answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. I will ask it again. When did your office or any ministerial officers receive the answers to the written questions?

Ms FYLES: An enormous amount of work that goes into these answers. The information has been provided to the members. I am of the understanding that it went yesterday, I apologise if it did not go until this morning but we have provided the answers to the questions. I do not believe there is an outstanding question here.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You have not answered my question so I am entitled, as a member of the committee, to ask it on notice. You can reject it if you want to but I would like to ask my question on notice.

Ms FYLES: Just because you do not like the answer does not mean that you get to ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There was no answer for me not to like.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition you are talking about when were the answers received by ministerial officers. If you ask that question you can only ask the Chief Minister about that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. I am happy to ask it on notice.

Mr CHAIR: Ask the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: She is not answering it. I would like to ask it on notice. She can reject it.

Ms FYLES: As Leader of the Opposition knows, having been in parliament for nearly a decade, the coordination is through the minister's office. Ministers review these questions. They have been done in a timely manner. The questions have been answered. I do not believe there is an outstanding question. Just because she does not like the answer, it is not my fault.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy for you to reject my question on notice, but you have not answered my question so I will ask it on notice and you can ...

Ms FYLES: I just answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When did your office receive the answers to written questions from the public service?

Ms FYLES: I have just explained. Questions come in across government. Ministers finalise those questions. They have done so and those answers have been provided to the opposition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: My question was not answered. Thank you.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, do you want to put it on notice?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I would love to.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When were answers to the global written questions, submitted by the opposition on 29 March 2022, received by each ministerial office and the Chief Minister from the public service? Why did it take between that date and partway through today for the government to publicly release the answers?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question, Mr Chair. Anyone reviewing *Hansard* can see it, so I do not accept the question.

Mr CHAIR: That is different to the question you were asking before, because ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. When did they receive it ...

Mr CHAIR: And get it back?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. If they received it a week ago, two weeks ago, why did it take until partway through today for us to receive it?

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister acknowledged that she has answered the question and is not accepting it on notice.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is entirely a matter for her and her reputation going forward, Mr Chair.

Undoubtedly, the public service spent an extraordinary amount of time working on preparation for their ministers and more senior bureaucrats for estimates. I thank them very much. I know that those written questions take significant amount of work.

My questions are not in relation to the efforts of the public servants, but rather what hand the fifth floor has in changing, rewording or delaying publishing of those questions. It is extraordinary that this government can continue to come to estimates with such contempt and provide answers to written questions, knowing full well they receive them from our diligent public service well in advance of today's proceedings. It should be noted that it is antidemocratic behaviour ...

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, that is an imputation and is not in the manner and form of questions. Please stick to Standing Order 109, which is manner and form of questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you, Mr Chair.

Chief Minister, why did you not take on the Police portfolio?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure that this question is to do with the opening statement.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are the Chief Minister.

Ms FYLES: I am not sure it is about the budget, which is what the opening statement is about.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You cannot explain to Territorians why you did not keep the Police portfolio? We are in Chief Minister's Department; you are the Chief Minister.

Mr CHAIR: I am not sure it is directly relevant to the budget or the opening statement. As I have done previously, I am happy for you to ask the question and the Chief Minister or the minister can make that deliberation because they know their portfolio better than I do.

Ms FYLES: I do not believe it is a question about the Territory budget. I am happy talking about the achievements within Chief Minister and Cabinet and the work we are doing to diversify the economy to ensure that every Territorian has a job, while making sure we have the resources to support the social challenges we have in the Northern Territory.

I do not think it is a question. If asking about portfolio allocation is the best the Leader of the Opposition can come up with it shows a lack of substantive understanding of the Northern Territory Government budget which provides support across the Northern Territory, ensuring that people, no matter where they are—in Central Australia, the Top End or in a remote community—have access to the services that they deserve.

We have been doing a lot of work. The officials I have here would love to talk about the investment portfolio and the jobs we are attracting. We know the Leader of the Opposition does not like good news—she is a negative Nancy. Of course, when we see great things ...

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, let us not get there today before lunch. Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Minister has indicated that it is not an area that ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: She is not willing to answer that question. Your response speaks volumes, Chief Minister. What you have illustrated is that you fail to understand how important it is for the Chief Minister to hold the Police portfolio to give the strength and encouragement to that agency, which is out there keeping our community safe, and ensure that law and order and community safety is front of mind of your government. The fact that you could shrug that off speaks more volumes about you than it does about me asking that as my first question.

Mr CHAIR: There is a question, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, she was able to provide some commentary so perhaps I can provide further commentary. Our support to the Northern Territory Police is through a record budget. Since Labor came to government in 2016—the Leader of the Opposition does not like to remember that she was a part of the Giles/Mills chaotic government years—the Police budget has increased by 36%.

You can sit there and roll your eyes all you want but we are giving police the tools to do their job, whether it is for new infrastructure in remote communities or CCTV cameras. It is certainly a big job. It is ill-informed of the Leader of the Opposition to make that type of commentary when she could ask questions relating to the opening speech. The specific investment coming into the Territory will allow us to continue to grow the budgets of the agencies that provide social services.

Mr CHAIR: I remind all members and guests of the manner and form of questions, which is under Standing Order 109, and of which we are all aware. Let us try to confine our questions to that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Chief Minister, you did not make a mention of crime or community safety in your opening statement. I know that you will say that is not in the opening statement. That is the point of what I

am saying. Within the Chief Minister's department, there is responsibility for community safety and law and order, so why did you omit any reference to crime or community safety from your opening statement?

Ms FYLES: There are a number of outputs that those questions could be placed under. I just provided a high-level overview, particularly focusing on the economic opportunities in the Territory. It was a good opportunity for the Leader of the Opposition to listen because she does not like to hear good news. She pretends it is all doom and gloom.

There is significant economic investment coming into the Territory, which will allow us the agencies—there are a number of days of estimates where individual agencies can provide information to the community regarding their budget outputs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You will not explain why you did not mention crime or community safety. That reinforces the fact that, on top of you not taking the Police portfolio, it is not the number one issue for you or your government.

Ms FYLES: We are hearing rants and the Opposition Leader is trying to find relevance, but we have a number of budget outputs. We have hard-working public servants here today and there are many behind the scenes. It is imperative for the Leader of the Opposition to speak to and ask questions relating to the budget that is the responsibility of Chief Minister and Cabinet. The minister for Police and other ministers are looking forward to showcasing their portfolios in the budget outputs as well.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Chief Minister, one day when you are the Leader of the Opposition, you can ask me whatever questions you like. Until then I get to ask you whatever I like.

Mr CHAIR: Honourable members, one moment please.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, the comments just made are offensive. It is disrespectful to the position of Chief Minister, and it highlights that the Leader of the Opposition simply does not get it. When you are the Chief Minister, your job is to drive and develop the economy across the Northern Territory and ensure that Territorians have the budget to provide social services for the social challenges I acknowledge every day.

The pure arrogance to say, 'When I am the Leader of the Opposition and she is the Chief Minister' highlights that the CLP still thinks the Chief Ministership is a plaything of CLP government. It is the most important responsibility, an absolute privilege, and I take it seriously every day. I find comments like that offensive.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition, Chief Minister and anyone else watching. Let us try to continue along the vein that we started off with this morning, which was very good, because we are here to examine the budget. That is what the budget estimates process is. Let us continue down that path rather than delving into the personal and making imputations and inferences which, again, is not in the manner and form of questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Since you have become Chief Minister, what change in policy relating to law and order have you made?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I am not sure if the Leader of the Opposition is familiar with the budget outputs that are before us, but I am not sure where that would sit.

Mr CHAIR: We are still on the opening statement.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Would you prefer I ask you questions on crime in 14.1, Chief Minister? There is a range of crime, security and community safety issues that come under 'Chief Minister'. I will be asking those questions. We are in the opening statement, and it is a perfectly suitable place to ask them. If you need more time to think about your answers I can ask them in 14.1 but otherwise I have a raft of questions on what the Chief Minister is doing about crime security.

Ms FYLES: It is probably better in the output.

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: In terms of economic development you talked about things happening in Darwin. What projects has your government completed and delivered to Alice Springs since you came to government in August 2016.

Ms FYLES: Under the Investment Territory output we are happy to answer under that question. I know your passion for Central Australia, and it is deserved.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am happy to go into output groups, if that is the way you ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask one more on the opening statement. In your opening statement you said that there is \$21bn in planned and proposed projects. Does that include the luxury hotel and Project Sea Dragon?

Ms FYLES: It includes Project Sea Dragon. I will seek some advice, and I am happy to come back during the questioning about the luxury hotel project.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am wondering if you did not answer my question before because you do not know the answer, and it will give you half an hour to get the answer through. I think this is a peculiar point we are at where you are not answering questions but you will in 10 or 30 minutes' time. I just had to put that out there.

Mr CHAIR: I take that as a comment then.

Mr YAN: Previous governments have been able to receive global questions by the end of March and be able to provide answers to the opposition and Independent members so that we can prepare for estimates. Why has this government not been able to do it for estimates in 2022?

Ms FYLES: The opposition like to try to rewrite history but I answered that question a few moments ago.

Mr YAN: You are answering questions to the Leader of the Opposition—I asked why could this government not do it 2022. I was not after the excuses of why they did not do it.

Ms FYLES: The questions have been written questions—a process of the parliament, and they have been accepted. Responses have been provided and will continue to be provided.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will you take that last question on notice? I have no confidence that we will circle back to it.

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister said she would come back.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, but I would rather ask it on notice. That way if I forget I do not have to rely on them to remember.

Ms FYLES: It is often the process when you are here for quite a few hours that we circle back to things. There is a large amount of information—if that is the way the Leader of the Opposition wishes to operate I am happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.7

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I might expand on it seeing as we are doing it on notice.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I ask you to remind committee members that if they ask a question on notice not to change the question or expand it, which is becoming a theme from the Leader of the Opposition this morning.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you want me to ask it to you now and you tell me that you cannot answer it and then I do it on notice anyway, because we can play the semantics or I can just ask the question on notice.

You referenced in your opening statement \$21bn in planned and proposed projects. Do these projects include failed projects that no longer hold major project status or projects that are no longer going ahead, such as the luxury hotel and Project Sea Dragon. If so, why would government include the value of those projects in its total plan and proposed project figure?

Ms FYLES: It is a question with a bit of commentary so maybe I can accept the question with a bit of commentary back. Twenty-eight projects worth more than \$21bn are anticipated to reach final investment decision in the next three to five years. The Leader of the Opposition has her answer there.

Thirteen projects with major project status will make up around \$17bn and are estimated to support around 6,100 jobs in construction alone. This government is getting on with the job, being positive and creating jobs for Territorians. We acknowledge the negativity from the Leader of the Opposition. There were two points—the hotel and Project Sea Dragon. I am happy to update the committee and take that on notice.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 1.7.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can the Chief Minister list the 28 projects and their associated dollar-figures that make up the \$21bn?

Ms FYLES: We will change some officials because we have different people here supporting us.

Mr CHAIR: We have Mr Schoolmeester and Mr Cowan joining us. Welcome. Mr Cowan and Mr Schoolmeester, the Leader of the Opposition has asked the Chief Minister a question relating to the 28 projects that were raised in the opening statement.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I want the list of the 28 projects and their associated dollar-figure next to that project.

Ms FYLES: Investment Territory is facilitating a number of major projects. We can speak about major projects because they have been publicly announced, but some are commercial-in-confidence. Mr Schoolmeester will talk to that.

A number were announced in the last few months, including Desert Bloom Hydrogen, Mount Bunday and HyperOne. Two have reached final investment decision—Northcrest and Alice Springs Hospital accommodation. The Nolans rare earth project at Mt Todd has received material regulatory approvals. There is the ILUAs—Indigenous Land Use Agreements. Project Sea Dragon, which was a question that was noted before, is reviewing construction of stage 1a.

The remaining projects are undertaking feasibility studies, seeking regulatory approvals and securing finance.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Just to confirm, I do not want any detail on the projects. I am just after the 28 projects and their associated dollar-figures.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: In addition to the major projects that the Chief Minister already mentioned, the other projects we are working with that comprise the 28 projects, include the Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency project; the Ammaroo Ammonium Phosphate fertilizer project; the Asia Connect Cable (ACC-1)—formerly the Inligo Darwin–Southeast Asia–Japan–US Cable—the Australia-Asia PowerLink; Fountain Head Gold; geothermal hydrogen production at Middle Arm; Hayes Creek gold silver and zinc mine; HyperOne—which the Chief Minister has mentioned—Jervois; Karinga Lakes Potash Project; the Merlin Diamond project; the Molyhil Tungsten copper project; Mount Peake vanadium-titanium-iron project; Mount Bunday; Mount Todd; Nolans rare earth project; the rubber project; Singleton Horticulture Project; Tennant Creek gold project; Tiwi hydrogen project; United Cable systems; and Winchelsea mining.

There are other projects that have less public reporting, including The Amphibian aircraft manufacturing project, Desert Bloom Hydrogen, the Darwin 1 NEXTDC data centre, the Hawiki Nui international cable, Project Sea Dragon and Watarrka National Park multi-day walk.

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

Mr CHAIR: We will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2022–23 as they relate to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Debt is \$8.7bn. Our interest repayments alone are more than \$1.4m every day, which is crippling our ability to deliver services, crippling our children with unsustainable levels of debt and means that your government cannot be making the types of investments it might otherwise make if there was money in the bank. What new initiatives will you as Chief Minister introduce to reduce our debt?

Ms FYLES: For me it is a key priority to diversify our economy and make sure that that reaches across the Northern Territory. For far too often in the Northern Territory we have had a boom-or-bust cycle; you could

almost pinpoint the major projects. We are sitting in one today: the Parliament House State Square Precinct, built in the 1980s/1990s as a project to stimulate.

We have come a long way from the position when we inherited government in the post-INPEX construction phase, which the CLP failed to plan for. Our government is making sure we diversify projects and not put all our eggs in one basket and that we have own-source revenue to tackle the social challenges we face in the Northern Territory.

It is a cycle. As a long-term Territorian you would know that we get to a point where accommodation and housing is hard to come by; that goes back down when a project finishes. We want to make sure that we diversify the economy, which is why you just heard a range of projects that we will continue to drive across the Northern Territory so that we can reach our full potential.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No new initiatives?

Ms FYLES: I just outlined a number of initiatives we are driving. We cannot just rely on the private sector to invest. We need to support the private sector and make sure there is the due process that Territorians expect us to put in place.

We are forecasting a government net operating surplus in 2024, which would be the first in nearly a decade. We are focused on providing resources where they are needed in the Northern Territory and government agencies to provide support, while at the same time driving economic development into the Territory and diversifying that across industry and the Northern Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What new initiatives are you doing to tackle crime?

Ms FYLES: I have acknowledged community safety and property crime as an issue. Alcohol fuels far too much of the crime and antisocial behaviour in the Northern Territory. As a government we have done the most comprehensive reforms in this space, acknowledging that many Territorians enjoy drinking responsibly. It is part of relaxing and going out for a beautiful meal in one of the many hospitality venues. A cohort in our community uses alcohol to fuel violence; that is unacceptable. We have put in place a range of measures, including co-location for detoxification, rehabilitation and sobering up and ensured that police have the resources they need. It is far more than just investing at the crisis end with police and emergency departments. It is making sure non-government organisations have the resources to provide support.

It is also the generational change that we need in the Territory. This is an area we have invested in; we are starting to see some of the success. The birth weight rates of our babies are starting to lift. We invest in Families as First Teachers in preschool. Education is the key to unlocking many of the social challenges we have in the Territory. There has been an enormous amount of work done; there is an enormous amount more to do.

Results do not happen overnight; in some cases it takes years. Some of the early support is starting to make an impact. We are ensuring that support is provided in the current setting.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For six years you have been part of a government that refused to bring itself to say 'crime crisis'. You have continually failed to accept that there is one, yet at the same time your department is funding private security businesses to patrol Fannie Bay, the Darwin CBD and Palmerston to combat escalating crime. How much money is your department spending to fund private security to supplement policing in the Northern Territory?

Ms FYLES: In tackling these challenges which have, for far too long, been put in the too-hard basket by successive governments—some is long-term work that takes investment. It is one of the first things that are scrapped when people look for budget savings. It takes a lot to continue to provide funding and defend it.

We have a strong relationship with local government and non-government organisations. That comes to the point I just made about investing and providing support before it ends up being at the pointy end where police need to be involved because an alleged crime has taken place.

I am happy to take on notice the dollar figure for working with councils and private security operations; I do not have it at hand. We are focused on activating spaces. In my opening statement I mentioned the activation of the CBD and working with local government in Alice Springs and Darwin to provide support to stop the risky behaviour which often ends up with interaction with the criminal system.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I had more questions on that, but obviously the answer needs to be taken on notice. I was going to ask how much, which agencies, what areas, etcetera, so I will do that in the question on notice.

Ms FYLES: Sorry, Mr Chair and Leader of the Opposition, I have a couple of figures that have been provided to me. I am happy to take the question on notice and make sure that I have not missed anything. I have the figures for the Larrakia day patrols, the Palmerston day patrols, the safer city places and city safe security patrols where the government works with non-government organisations and the private sector to provide support. There may be more that is not here, so I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.8

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much in total is the government spending on private security agencies to patrol areas of the Northern Territory? Which agencies are responsible for overseeing, administering and paying for those security agencies? What areas are being patrolled by private security? Does that extend to Alice Springs? Are they benefiting from having government pay for private security in the Alice Springs CBD?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes, I am happy to come back with some information about the supports that are complementary to the work that police and other government agencies do.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated number 1.8.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The cost of living for Territorians is through the roof. NTCOSS released its May report, which says:

... cost of living pressures have ... intensified for Territorians, and at an unsustainable and disproportionate rate in certain areas.

It shows that transport costs are up 16% compared to the national average of 12.5% and fuel costs in Darwin are up 41.4% compared to the national average of 32.3%. What is your government doing to drive down the cost of living for Territorians? Will you support the CLP's legislation to ensure that fuel retailers have to publish their profits?

Ms FYLES: One thing I will not be doing is supporting the CLP's policy of privatising our Power and Water, our asset and network ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A point of order, Mr Chair! That is not what I said. It is not a CLP policy and quite frankly that is out of order and outrageous for the Chief Minister to make some random allegation of that nature.

Ms FYLES: It is not random. They were set up with structural separation when the CLP was in government between 2012 and 2016. If they had the chance they would sell those networks ...

Mr CHAIR: Let us stick to the question about driving down the cost of living and the fuel price disclosure legislation.

Ms FYLES: It does have relevance, because one of the biggest things the Northern Territory Government does in providing support to Territorians on the cost of living is the community service obligation to Power and Water and Jacana Energy. That provides community and social benefits which would not otherwise be achieved if it was left to commercial and market forces. It is about ensuring Territorians have access to affordable power, water and sewerage services. When the CLP came to government it increased power prices by 30%.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much did you reduce power by?

Ms FYLES: You realised that you made a fatal error in your ways.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I did not. I am still interested in how much you have cut power and water.

Ms FYLES: I am sure we were elected at the same time in 2012, and we had the Mills government—with respect to the Member for Araluen, because I know she regrets her time and if she would like to say otherwise, speak up—with that terrible cost of living increase. It was heartbreaking putting up power, water and sewerage. Our government has a community service obligation to make sure Territorians can access their power at the CPI increase year—unlike what is happening with the cost of electricity on the east coast.

We also provide a range of supports, such as the Home and Business Battery Scheme of \$2.4m, electric vehicle stamp duty concessions and the measures we provide to different sectors of the community. The Northern Territory Government provides a subsidy for young children direct to the childcare centres. This is not often noticed, but it helps reduce the cost of childcare. Territorians with school-age children have the back to school payments and Sports Vouchers. The NT Seniors Recognition Scheme, worth \$30m-plus, provides a range of concessions on essential services. That is valuing people in our community.

They are some of the things provided by our government to support Territorians with the cost of living. We are conscious of home ownership and providing land release. Sometimes it is easy to point out the cost of living support which is provided, other times it is the work more generally of government that provides it. We are conscious of the fact that Territorians' cost of living has increased; we will pull whatever levers we can.

There was a question about legislation. Mr Chair, you are getting your law degree and the Leader of the Opposition has a law degree, but I do not trust any legislation that she writes. I rely on the Parliamentary Counsel for that. Any legislation she is referring to, we are happy to look at. Recently, we had some legislation from the CLP that was completely flawed. It had Maley's and Finocchiaro's lawyer hands all over it, but it was not proper legislation.

I have answered that question in great detail, but I am sure there will be something the Leader of the Opposition would like to pick on.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, you might like to remind the Chief Minister that she cannot mislead estimates, as she cannot mislead parliament. The legislation she just referred to was drafted entirely by the Parliamentary Counsel. She can withdraw it; that would be the most appropriate thing to do. She is going down a road of misleading the Estimates Committee.

Mr CHAIR: Let us refrain from too much commentary and stick to the manner and form of questions as we consider the budget in detail.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does she want to retract what she said?

Ms FYLES: I retract the fact that the legislation you previously developed was written by lawyers Maley and Finocchiaro. It was not proper legislation. We are happy to look at any legislation going forward.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Retract that, because the Parliamentary Counsel drafted the legislation. Unless you are having a go at Parliamentary Counsel, which is most undignified.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I get the privilege and honour to be the Chair of this committee.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think that it is important, Mr Chair, because the Parliamentary Counsel does an exceptional job. It is important that the community has confidence in the legislation brought to parliament and for Territorians to know that all legislation brought to parliament by the opposition is drafted by the Parliamentary Counsel, as is the fuel retailers disclosure legislation.

Will the government support a recommendation of the ACCC, which was designed to ensure that retailers were not charging excessive amounts of profit, so that Territorians pay appropriate amounts at the bowser? Will the government support legislation, properly drafted by the Parliamentary Counsel, that requires retailers to disclose their profit margin?

Mr CHAIR: Just before you answer, let me finish what I was saying about the privilege and honour of chairing this committee. It is not the position of someone attending to ask questions to then ask the Chief Minister to withdraw something. You were continually doing that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Unless it is part of standing orders. Because to mislead you have to move that by ...

Mr CHAIR: As Chair of this committee, which is a privilege for me to do, I am telling you that it is not your position to ask the Chief Minister to withdraw. We are here to consider the budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do the normal rules of parliament apply in estimates?

Mr CHAIR: The manner and form of questions is where we need to stick. We have moved off over the last hour or so. It is eight minutes until the lunch break. This morning's session was good. When we come back after lunch it would be nice if we could stick to considering the budget in detail rather than moving into what may be policy areas and expressions of opinion without imputations or inferences.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On all sides.

Mr CHAIR: They are the rules for everyone here.

Ms FYLES: The cost of fuel is a national and international issue. There are factors driving that, including the tragic war in the Ukraine. We have swayed off the budget, but that is fine, it is the Leader of the Opposition's prerogative. I am not aware that legislation has been introduced to the House. If the opposition is preparing legislation, as with every piece of legislation we will look at it on its merits, how it has been prepared and if it will be good law for the Northern Territory.

As much as fuel is presently an issue—it was a significant issue during the federal election campaign—there are factors outside the Northern Territory's control. But the impact within the Territory is significant, with distances and transportation of goods and services.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will you reverse the four-year pay freeze for public servants?

Ms FYLES: We value our public servants. When the CLP came to government, it sacked many public servants and disrespected the role they played. We believe this budget delivers the services that Territorians need and is responsible to the economic and fiscal situation we are in.

We have undertaken a range of work to structurally reset the Northern Territory Government budget. We will continue to undertake that work.

Promisingly, one thing that I am very hopeful for with the incoming Commonwealth Labor government is them recognising the cost of service delivery. The cost of service delivery in the Northern Territory is more than it is on the east coast. It costs less to deliver services in Newcastle than in the Territory.

When you overlay the Northern Territory's location as well as remote service delivery, it is complex. I am promised by the Commonwealth Government that in key areas it will deliver needs-based funding. I am looking forward to heading to Canberra later this week.

The Prime Minister has shown the importance of the Northern Territory. Territorians discovered a confidence and positivity during COVID from our ability to provide for the rest of Australia with 20,000 people coming back to Australia through the Centre for National Resilience. Last week, instead of flying over Darwin, the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese came to the Territory. It would be interesting to note how many times the previous Prime Minister came to the Territory but I will not get stuck in the past. He did not fly over the top; he stopped in Darwin. That shows the strength of the relationship going forward and the ability of the Commonwealth Government to understand the cost of delivery of services.

We do not just sit back and rely on the rest of Australia to prop up the Territory. We are focused; you have seen that through the projects I was talking about and the economic investment into creating own-source revenue in the Territory. It is always a balance between making sure we have appropriate development and we protect the pristine natural environment in the Territory.

I am very much looking forward to working with the Commonwealth Government on the true cost of service delivery in the Territory and, equally, the opportunity to grow and diversify the Northern Territory economy.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a no. Are you aware that temporary casual employees were the recipient of the \$4,000 bonus even when it was their last week in a three-month contract?

Ms FYLES: That question would be best placed to the Commissioner for Public Employment and the Minister for Public Employment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will they answer those questions?

Ms FYLES: If it is in their portfolio and their budget output, I would expect them to do so, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Boundless Possible has been an extraordinary waste of money, time and energy. Its fate seems to have been delivered some time ago under the cover of darkness. When did Boundless Possible end? When are we expecting this new rebrand of 'We are the Territory'?

Ms FYLES: Boundless Possible was a campaign that has worked interstate. I talked about this publicly a couple of weeks ago. It is a campaign that has driven people here to the Territory but in terms of ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many?

Ms FYLES: Can I answer the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, but how many?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, you have the call.

Ms FYLES: Regarding that marketing campaign, it was successful in changing the reputation of the Northern Territory from a hot, dusty, backwards place to the modern metropolis that it is. But within the Territory, I absolutely acknowledge that it was not something that brought our community together.

We have been doing focus group work and research relating to the taglines. The one that sticks to mind is probably from a decade or so ago. There was 'a healthy Territory' and 'a green Territory'. Queensland has it with 'a Queenslander'. It is important for a sense of pride in the Territory to have something within the Territory and that research has been undertaken.

In terms of the Territory and Boundless Possible, it is something that resonated interstate and provided brand marketing across different campaigns.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it gone? Is it dead?

Ms FYLES: I answered that in my first word or two.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much did Boundless Possible cost in total?

Ms FYLES: I would have to look at the breakdown because it has been in place for a couple of years now. In 2021–22 to 31 March—it was the brand promoting the positive opportunities of living and working in the Territory. It is about attracting people to the Territory and changing that reputation of the Territory. I look for the Member for Araluen because she came to the Territory many decades ago for a job and an opportunity and has found a wonderful home here—it was \$700,000 for the targeting advertising under that campaign.

Mr CHAIR: We will break for lunch now. You can conclude that answer when we return.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back.

Chief Minister, you were answering a question about Boundless Possible. You can finish if you can recall, otherwise we can move on.

Ms FYLES: I can recall, but in the interest of time I know there are many of outputs in Chief Minister and Cabinet, Health and other portfolios so I am happy to move forward.

Mr CHAIR: We are still on questions relating to the whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategies.

Mrs LAMBLEY: On what criteria do you measure that Boundless Possible was successful? 'Interstate', you said.

Ms FYLES: Yes. I would be happy to provide a briefing on that. I was briefed on this as incoming Chief Minister. The advice was that it resonated interstate. There were videos and a bunch of stuff behind it. It has resonated in words but within the Territory ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Because our population growth has not increased hardly at all, has it?

Ms FYLES: No, but we also had COVID as a factor. In terms of changing a perception of the Territory, it has provided.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It has not increased for the last five years according to the stats I have in front of me. I am wondering what criteria they are measuring, to say that it has resonated.

Ms FYLES: I am passing on the information I was briefed on. The person best placed to answer your questions is not here but I am happy to organise something offline, because I appreciate the genuineness of your question.

OUTPUT GROUP 14.0 – ADVICE AND COORDINATION **Output 14.1 – Strategic Policy Coordination and Engagement**

Mr GUYULA: Chief Minister, thank you for letting me know and coming to my beautiful electorate of Mulka. Like I said, you are welcome to visit my office and the staff.

Mr Chair, I have question that was going to be asked at Output 12, which cannot be answered by the Speaker. It is a question for you about your determination of resources for Independent members. Can I have permission to ask this question to the Chief Minister?

Mr CHAIR: Yes.

Mr GUYULA: In last year's estimates I asked the former Chief Minister about the need to bring back researchers for Independent members as we had in the 13th Assembly. The Chief Minister took the question on notice last year and answered that the issue would be discussed with the new Clerk when they commenced. He also stated in a letter, 'I understand the importance of these resources for Independent members of the Legislative Assembly and its significance to promote and inform parliament and, thereby, a strong democracy'.

In my view it is not unimportant. It has been almost two years since my initial request. Could this issue be discussed with the current Acting Clerk and resolved quicker so that we are all participating in a strong democracy?

Ms FYLES: As the committee would be aware, a statement was issued by the Speaker a week or so ago and there is a new Clerk starting at the end of the month. Equally, we have a new Speaker in the Chair. I am a newish Chief Minister, having been in the job a month. I value the work and perspective that Independents bring and would be happy to look at that.

That probably feels to you like the same run-around and answer you got last year, but I cannot answer that any differently on the spot. Perhaps before the Speaker comes next week, we can look into that and provide you and the other Independents with an answer. I just do not have an understanding—apart from reading the RTD—of what the present entitlements are.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Nothing.

Mr GUYULA: At the moment. Okay, thank you.

Ms FYLES: We now have an opportune time with a new Clerk and new Speaker to address that.

Mr GUYULA: Yes, we would like to have an opportunity of using research workers so that we get on and try to work like everyone else in the Chamber. I would like more input for my electorate and other communities.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Hear, hear! Well said.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 14.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 15.0 – TERRITORY REGIONAL GROWTH **Output 15.1 – Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs.**

Mr CHAIR: We will now move on to Output Group 15.0, Territory Regional Growth, Output 15.1, Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal affairs. Are there any questions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The 2022–23 Budget shows a total of \$100.9m in this output, which is \$51.73m less than the 2021–22 revised budget. That effectively equates to 50% of the current budget. What is the reason behind this significant funding drop? Can you detail a breakdown of where the funding is cut from—for the Chief Minister's department, Aboriginal strategic land policy, Aboriginal Affairs, Treaty and Local Decision Making and Local Government?

Ms FYLES: Under this area there is a number of aspects. There is the Darwin City Deal national partnership funding for the education and community precincts. There is the Blue Mud Bay implementation plan, the Jabiru social infrastructure, the Jabiru and Kakadu futures, the Barkly Regional Deal partnership, the NT Government funding profile and a small amount of Commonwealth funding for interpreter services.

The advice I have received is about Commonwealth funding coming in and out and projects not continuing, or which have ceased. That is my understanding for that decrease in budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you outline the dollar figure decrease against each of those areas?

Ms FYLES: The budget decrease of \$51.73m—that is the figure you were referring to?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms FYLES: The Darwin City Deal national partnership funding for the education and community precinct is not continuing. That was in 2021–22 and does not continue in 2022–23. It is \$27.3m. These projects could have been implemented or the funding has been rolled out. It is not saying that the projects are not continuing.

The Blue Mud Bay implementation action plan was \$8m; the Jabiru social infrastructure fund, \$5m; Jabiru and Kakadu Futures, \$2.9m; the Barkly Regional Deal is \$5.8m; and the interpreter service is \$1.2m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When you say the \$27.3m is no longer required, what does that mean? Is that for the new CDU building in the city?

Ms FYLES: Correct. I can ask Bridgette Bellenger—this is her portfolio area—to talk to this if you would like?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, whatever works for you. What does that mean—\$27.3m is gone from that project? Is that NT Government money or are the feds no longer tipping that amount in?

Ms BELLENGER: It is the expenditure for that financial year for the project from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth are funding that project—\$96m. That is this financial year's contribution to that project. Further amounts will come in and out. This budget is flexible in terms of all of the project money flowing in and out to various projects, but the core funding is fairly stable.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We budgeted a decrease of \$27.3m, from the federal government, for the CDU project?

Ms BELLENGER: That is correct. You will see that in every financial year, as the CDU project hits milestones, more funding will flow through to the budget, then out to the project.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That does not equate to a federal government cut in the funding, it is just not expected to be coming in?

Ms BELLENGER: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you go through—the Chief Minister said it very fast, I could only scribble down four. The next one was Blue Mud Bay. What does that mean?

Ms BELLENGER: That is the funding for the implementation action plan that was in this year's budget, but will not show in next year's budget. It was a one-off payment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: From the federal government?

Ms BELLENGER: No, that is our payment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That has been removed from this budget?

Ms BELLENGER: It was a one-off payment that was part of the agreement with the NLC on the Blue Mud Bay Implementation Action Plan.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You paid that last budget, so it is not ...

Ms BELLENGER: We are paying it—yes, that is correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You paid \$8m last budget to the NLC for the Implementation Action Plan.

Ms BELLENGER: It will be paid in this financial year and will not show in the next—that is correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the next one? Two Jabiru ones, I think.

Ms BELLENGER: One was the Jabiru social infrastructure fund. That money has flowed throughout this financial year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was that amount?

Ms BELLENGER: That is \$5m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is Territory money?

Ms BELLENGER: Yes. That is a mix—Rio Tinto money, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the next one?

Ms BELLENGER: Jabiru and Kakadu futures. That was money expended in the last financial year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much was that?

Ms BELLENGER: It was \$2.9m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What about the Barkly?

Ms BELLENGER: The Barkly Regional Deal national partnership—\$5.8m has been expended this year in the Barkly.

The last one was the funding for the legal interpreters services. That was highlighted in this year's budget, but will be a different amount coming through to the next budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why is that?

Ms BELLENGER: It is just our funding negotiations. We are working with them on funding an interpreter service. It is still in negotiation.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the dollar figure next to that?

Ms BELLENGER: It is \$1.2m.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I think this is where I ask my question about Alice Springs. What projects have been delivered to Alice Springs since you came to government in August 2016?

Ms FYLES: The document 'enhancement Territory', has the progress and outlook from May, and there is a page specifically for Central Australia and the investment being generated. There is also a snapshot overview. I will make sure that you get that. In the interest of time I will not read it out.

Since the Major Projects Commissioner and Investment Commissioner commenced in April 2021, Investment Territory has facilitated five projects in Central Australia. Those five projects are:

- Alice Springs Hospital accommodation

- Glen Helen Resort acquisition and upgrade
- Kings Canyon purchase and redevelopment
- Kings Creek Station acquisition and expansion of accommodation
- Lasseters Casino and Resort redevelopment.

In addition, there are seven projects identified in the priority pipeline of work, which are looking toward final investment decision in the next couple through to five years. This is in addition to the work on the national Aboriginal art gallery and the Watarrka National Park multi-walk facilities. There are opportunities in Central Australia with international space, as a location for launching the balloons.

There are also a number of mining projects. There has been active exploration for a number of years, but there are several projects heading toward final investment decision.

I would be happy to provide this document to you, Member for Araluen.

That does not include NTG-funded infrastructure projects.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am interested, given what has gone on in Wadeye over the last few months, basically since Anzac Day, I think when the recent riot occurred. What is Chief Minister and Cabinet doing to assist Wadeye?

Ms FYLES: What happened in Wadeye is tragic. I have been out there a few times recently. We have a coordination unit which sits within DCMC. Bridgette has been leading that work, as well as a staff member on the ground in Wadeye. We have sent in additional resources and they fluctuate around the response at the time. I am sure police can talk through the operational resources. I have witnessed that first hand when I went there.

We have also been working with local service providers—some are government; some are non-government—making sure that the community has the support. It is trying to find a balance in providing their support now and allowing the space for calm so that we can step forward and try to rebuild the community. It has certainly been tough in Wadeye.

I was out there a couple of weeks ago and took the opportunity to go to an outstation, to one of the homelands. I acknowledge the council out there, which has been working with government to ensure resources such as ablutions, laundry facilities and a store truck which takes the store to the homelands so people can purchase the goods they need. It is incredibly complex and many layers to the response. Rather than me just going on, I am happy to take more specific questions.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Have you allocated extra funds for Wadeye, given the crisis?

Ms FYLES: Yes. Agencies have provided additional resources into the community. Police is one that comes to mind. Housing is working through the damage to the properties. If there is any ability to recoup costs and for charges to be laid, that will happen.

Other expenditure has been for infrastructure services. We provided what we needed to provide at the time. Chief Minister and Cabinet has had the coordination role across government.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a question about your commitment to freedom of the press. What is your position? The former Chief Minister excluded the *NT Independent* online newspaper. I want to know whether it is your intention to continue that exclusion of that media outlet.

Ms FYLES: Yes. Seeking my opinion is probably not ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is not an opinion, it is a policy.

Ms FYLES: There is no policy about the *NT Independent*. We do not recognise the *NT Independent* in the sense that it is owned by an individual and that individual, Mr Owen Pike—I have been the subject of derogatory comments on social media, certainly in terms of freedom of accredited media and, equally, media that will provide an unbiased view. I am always willing to consider that, but there is no policy position as such.

Mrs LAMBLEY: But you will continue to exclude them?

Ms FYLES: There has been no direction issued by me.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you intend to give one at some point?

Ms FYLES: No. It is something that an individual has formed. I have been subject to derogatory commentary from that individual. I have broad shoulders; I can carry it, but I do not think there is a place for that in our community. If you are in a leadership role in the media, there needs to be balance and make sure comments do not inflame. That would be my commentary to this hearing today.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am not debating this with you, but as politicians who have been around for a long time, we are all subjected to that at times by different media. The principle of freedom of the press is at stake, which we are all signatories to; it is part of our code of conduct. To exclude one media outlet over another is a big call. It is infringing on that requirement of the code of conduct.

Ms FYLES: I do not recognise the website as an independent or reputable media outlet. We could debate that, but it is my view and I am happy to be convinced otherwise.

Mrs LAMBLEY: On what grounds?

Ms FYLES: Anyone can get a bit of cash, form a website and claim they are a media organisation. You do not know ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Have you not just described *News Corp*?

Ms FYLES: That could be a point but to me they are not a reputable media outlet. I am happy to consider that in the future, but that is my present view.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am disappointed to hear that. I thought you would have had a change of direction.

Ms FYLES: I am not saying there will not be in the future. You have asked and we have probably digressed from the role of the committee and analysing the budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you realise the media see the *NT Independent* as a legitimate media. They have won some media awards.

Ms FYLES: I have said that I would provide that comment and we have digressed from the budget.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 15.0

OUTPUT GROUP 16.0 – INVESTMENT TERRITORY **Output 16.1 – Major, Significant and Government-facilitated Projects**

Mr CHAIR: We will now move on to consider Output Group 16.0, Investment Territory, Output 16.1, Major, Significant and Government-facilitated Projects.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: To give comfort to the public servants listening, we have hundreds of questions in all these outputs and will be doing them as written questions. Obviously our time is extremely constrained. For the same portfolios last year, we took 36 hours to scrutinise and this year we only have 23. I know you have done a power of work and we will be providing the remainder of our questions as written questions.

Why is Project Sea Dragon still on the major projects list, considering the Seafarms Group CEO, Mick McMahon, stated that the project was unviable?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: Project Sea Dragon's Mick McMahon has resigned and new CEO Rod Dyer has been installed. I understand that the major shareholders are seeking to pursue the project moving forward. Obviously there are lots of questions to answer as the previous CEO provided detailed analysis as to why he thought it could not go forward. The current leadership is confident it can move forward. We will work with them to see if they can answer those questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As far as the government knows, the proponents have had a change of position; it has gone from unviable to ...

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: That is all we have been told. They are working through the process and we are happy to help them when they are ready.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is little information included on the government's major projects website. Why are the indicative timelines or expected final investment decision dates on the website?

Ms FYLES: Some of this is commercial-in-confidence but Jason can elaborate further.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: Many major projects are complex and often involve senior capital investment. We work through detailed processes with approvals, project management and capital raising. We do not like to put information on our website; that is their prerogative. They also have ASX requirements for their own listings. Rather than be at odds with what they may be telling the marketplace, we often do not put out our information; we follow their information about what is in the ASX.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Government could be more transparent about its involvement with the project. Your government claimed \$21bn in likely investment, yet the viability of some of those is uncertain at best. Would it not be more transparent for the government to detail the major projects and where government is at with them? For a lot of projects, the government would be waiting on the proponents to make the next move or have to complete, for example, their environmental assessments. The status of the project could then be the government waiting for the proponent to complete its ASX. Is that not a better way to be more transparent over the status of projects?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure about your line of questioning. We have Investment Territory, which has a progress and outlook report. It is a publicly available document that outlines—I was referring to it with the Member for Araluen. It outlines the way we identify the projects, work with private developers and their partners, work with the Commonwealth and provide spotlights on different regions in the Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does it detail where each project is up to in the approval stage?

Ms FYLES: Sometimes approvals are commercial-in-confidence information, because shareholders are making decisions from it. Other times it is more open and that information is celebrated in the community.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sounds very thorough and well-considered, thank you.

The ship lift was on the major projects list; now it is not. Why is that?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: It is a major project in an NT Government infrastructure sense, not in terms of a private sector-led project. That is why it is not on the major projects status list anymore.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It does not have major project status, but it is a big project of the department of Infrastructure?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why was it removed as a major project?

Ms FYLES: It comes down to the point of the technical term 'major project'. It is a massive project for the Territory—but in terms of the work we do in attracting private-sector investment and giving it major project status.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is the final design and construction contractor still expected to be appointed in the second quarter of 2022, which is the end of this month?

Ms FYLES: Yes. It may have slightly slipped, but it is getting close.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is the new projected time line?

Ms FYLES: It is a current live procurement process. We do not anticipate it will slip too far—perhaps just some weeks.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Page 17 of Budget Paper No 2 shows a \$75m payment for the ship lift in 2021–22 and \$103m in 2022–23. That is in excess of the \$100m total that government said it would contribute. Is there a revised figure for government's contribution?

Ms FYLES: I will take that one on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.9

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Page 17 of Budget Paper No 2 shows a \$75m payment for the ship lift in 2021–22 and \$103m in 2022–23. Government previously said that its contribution for the project was \$100m. What is the new total revised expenditure by government to deliver the ship lift?

Ms FYLES: Part of the reasoning is regarding commercial-in-confidence and NAIF funding; it is complex.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 1.9.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The budget for Investment Territory was \$15m last year. It has increased sizeably to \$43m in the revised figure, but then there is a \$21m cut for 2022–23. Can you explain why these changes are being made in Investment Territory? The footnotes do not really flesh out why there are such major changes.

Ms FYLES: Some of it is to do with back cast around internal restructure of the Jabiru Kakadu futures, Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs output and functional transfers into Investment Territory for Defence Industry, Resourcing the Territory and Investment Attraction. In 2021–22 the budget decreased mainly due to carryover funds for the Local Jobs Fund. It would probably be best coming from Andy Cowan to provide a bit more.

Mr COWAN: That is correct. Most of that is reflecting restructures and new functions coming into Investment Territory. In 2021 there was an increase of \$27.825m, mainly due to carryover from the Local Jobs Fund from 2020–21 into 2021–22. In 2022–23 there is a budget decrease by \$21.145m, which is mainly reflecting a profile change of the Local Jobs Fund. It is also being offset by additional funding coming into Investment Territory in that year for accelerating investment and winning investment for the Territory

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What does Investment Territory spend its budget on? What is it investing in with that money, or is that just staffing costs?

Mr COWAN: It is a mixture of staffing. A key recommendation of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission was ensuring that both commissioners were resourced to seek advice from technical experts. Project portfolios—for example there are a range of consultancies we have used to ensure we are well placed to make informed decisions for government for the next steps for a project and what we would support in regard to projects going forward. Predominantly a mixture of personnel and operation funding, but there is some funding for consultancies.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much goes to consultancies and how much to staffing and administration? What is the split?

Ms FYLES: We do not have the breakdown, but we can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.10

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please provide the budgetary breakdown for Investment Territory on how much of its budget is spent on wages, administrative support, operations and consultancies.

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question.

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 1.10.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Just to confirm, Investment Territory does not invest in anything?

Mr COWAN: That is not entirely correct. We have the Local Jobs Fund, which gives us a vehicle to help attract and secure private-sector companies coming to the Territory. It is a fund that enables us to invest in concessional finance and equity, and it has been very successful in regard to supporting us attract private sector companies to the Territory. Part of that fund is ensuring we look for match funding from the private sector. It is a great tool for us competing against larger jurisdictions to help them choose the Territory to set up their business here.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How much is in the Local Jobs Fund?

Ms FYLES: As at the end of May there is \$34m in projects; \$26m in proposals under due diligence; and \$115m remaining for future investment.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that on top of the budget for Investment Territory? Investment Territory manages the jobs fund?

Ms FYLES: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The annual report cards for Territory Investment and Major Projects Commissioners were proposed for release in the second quarter this year, which is now. We are yet to see those report cards, which clearly impact on our ability to scrutinise the government during estimates. Can you advise when the report will be released?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure what you have missed, but it has been provided. I have just been referring to it this morning—from a few weeks back. I am happy to make sure that you ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It has been published?

Ms FYLES: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Thank you. The government has committed \$10m as a co-investment with the Albatross project. What will the \$10m be used for and what are the terms of that co-investment—for example, does government sit on the board or have voting rights? What is the trade-off?

Ms FYLES: This was the first official Local Jobs Fund applicant post the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission report. It is a hugely exciting project for the Territory. The investment will be made on a matched basis with private equity. We have already have the matched investment coming in. Having these aircraft manufactured in the Territory is exciting.

Mr COWAN: The exciting thing about this project is it is not just one project; this is investing in advanced manufacturing in the Territory. This platform, the G-111 float plane, has a whole supply chain. We have Pratt & Whitney, which is probably the best global engine manufacturer. Dassault Solutions is a key French company involved in the aviation sector, which will provide a virtual twin of the plane which is used in a number of Defence assets. They will also provide a virtual twin of the supply chain.

We have a number of local Territory manufacturing companies, training organisation and industries. We have partnered with the Airport Development Group to set up an aerospace manufacturing precinct. Excitingly, some of the people within that precinct were here last week. Heat Treatment Australia is involved in the joint fighter supply chain, producing the landing gear. This is bringing exciting capability to the Territory.

You will see more from Investment Territory when we are looking at investments. We will look at how we can capture a broader element to the supply chain. During COVID there have been challenges with areas in our supply chain. If we attract many investments—as we are doing in partnership with the Airport Development Group into the aviation manufacturing precinct—that will be an exciting story.

There was one other question, Leader of the Opposition regarding the board of AAI. We have an independent investment committee that provides advice through the Local Jobs Fund. One of the members who is very

familiar with this project and who has done significant due diligence will be sitting in as an observer—not a voting member of the board—to ensure we have confidence in the strategic direction of the company and that the investment is being used for what is proposed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that observer a Northern Territory Government employee?

Mr COWAN: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are we paying this person to be an observer, as a consultant?

Mr COWAN: Our investment advisory group is external members with the right expertise to manage a fund. They are contracted onto that investment advisory group. Yes, the individual would be provided support for his hours sitting on those board meetings.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Does that come out of the Investment Territory budget or is that additional?

Mr COWAN: I will need to clarify that. It will be either within our Local Jobs Fund funding or within our existing appropriation for Investment Territory.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The \$10m for the project came from the Jobs Fund?

Ms FYLES: Correct.

Mr COWAN: It was a mixture of concessional finance and equity.

Mr GUYULA: During the 2021–22 financial year, how much funding through the NT grants programs, or otherwise, has been provided by the NT Government for major projects that involve fracking?

Ms FYLES: I do not think there has been any. There is none in this Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I will get you to ask other ministers that question as well. If I am incorrect, I will correct the record but the advice I have is that there is none within the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Mulka, will you be attending every hearing in the couple of weeks? We could put it on notice to the Chief Minister so that it does not fall off.

Mr GUYULA: Yes. I will be around for a couple of weeks.

Budget Paper 3 states that there are 16 major projects currently being progressed. What are each of these projects? How much funding have they received from the Northern Territory Government in grants, or otherwise, in previous financial years, and how much will they receive in the 2022–23 budget?

Ms FYLES: Member for Mulka, I think you have picked up on the KPIs, which are the targets and not the actual projects. Jason Schoolmeester can provide more detail.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: There are 13 major projects currently awarded major projects status. The KPI in the budget papers was 16. We will not quite make that this financial year but we a number of projects are looking to apply for major project status which will likely go before government to ask if they can be a major project. It is only 13 today but we anticipate it being 16 or more in the future.

Ms FYLES: Member for Mulka, just some advice from my team here. They say that the Commonwealth has provided grants or funding but that it is zero from the Northern Territory Government.

OUTPUT GROUP 17.0 – DARWIN WATERFRONT CORPORATION

Output 17.1 – Darwin Waterfront Corporation

Ms FYLES: I have Sam Burke from the Darwin Waterfront Corporation here. While you are asking your questions, I will thank the officials who have been with me and bring him in. I have Alistair and Sam.

Mr YAN: The Darwin Waterfront Corporation budget remains unchanged from last year. With the \$21m that is available, will there be any key changes to waterfront operations in the year ahead?

Ms FYLES: My understanding is that the increase is about CPI, wages and efficiency dividends. I am not sure, probably we have a re-imagined Waterfront. I mean, the Waterfront is fabulous but there is a re-

imagined plan, which would create significant economic benefit to the Northern Territory. I am not sure if you would like the officials to talk in more detail about that?

Mr YAN: I have a question about the master plan for the Waterfront because that was unveiled earlier in the year—a surf park, lagoon and a playground. What is the status of negotiations between the NT and federal government for those changes?

Ms FYLES: With the new incoming Commonwealth Government it is a key priority for us to share the vision we have of the Territory. I think we can all agree that the Waterfront precinct and Convention Centre have added greatly to Darwin and provide a significant economic boost as well as an opportunity for locals. We will make sure the incoming Commonwealth Government is fully aware of that and will be seeking its support for that project.

Mr YAN: Will the Northern Territory Government be seeking the entire \$200m from the federal government or will you be looking for private investment as well?

Ms FYLES: We want to use this to drive private investment. It is key for us as a government to drive NTG investment to attract Commonwealth and private investment so that our dollar goes further.

Mr YAN: Do you have any specific goals on what level of private investment you would be looking at for the new Waterfront precinct?

Ms FYLES: We know that it will bring significant goals. I am happy to hand over to Sam and Alistair to answer that if they have information to share.

Mr BURKE: The ask of the Commonwealth is \$200m. We quantity surveyed \$57m in private investment for the surf park facility and have a hotel at the Convention Centre as part of our master plan, which is to be fully privately funded. Our view further, once the central precinct is developed—which is \$257m worth of investment—is about \$1bn of private investment across the remaining 20 hectares or so of development land. Our view is to invest with the Commonwealth in the central precinct to drive private sector interest and investment and a return to the Territory through the northern and southern precincts.

Mr MALEY: How much NT money will be put into that \$200m-odd? What is the NT contribution?

Ms FYLES: At this stage it is commonwealth funding. Of course, we think it is an important project and we have seen what the existing waterfront precinct has achieved for Darwin in the Top End and the Northern Territory more broadly so we are very willing to work with the waterfront corporation around driving this investment. At this stage there has been no allocation.

Mr MALEY: There is no allocation from the NT government?

Ms FYLES: Not at this moment, correct.

Mr YAN: There is \$57m for the surf park, a motel was to go adjacent to the Convention Centre. Are there any costs or ideas on that?

Mr BURKE: We have done feasibility studies on the convention centre. The funding for the convention centre makes up a large portion of our budget allocation each year. To support the centre we need 250 or so keys and we have broad estimates in the \$80m-plus range for the capital cost for the hotel. That is a matter for the market. The plan is to work with Investment Territory. It will go to market and be tested, but we have baseline numbers that we know are required to complement the activities of the centre.

Mr YAN: You stated that the Convention Centre takes up a large part of your \$21m budget. How much of that does the centre take up?

Mr BURKE: Our budget is approximately \$28m for expenditure for the period we are looking at. Roughly, \$15m goes to the Convention Centre. It fluctuates quite a bit. I will not go into great detail, unless you want to, but there is a financing payment, operating subsidy, an availability payment—which is built into the financing payment—and something we call an incentive payment, which is paid to the operator of the centre when they meet criteria in terms of attracting national and international delegates to the centre.

Mr YAN: What sort of revenue are we getting back on the Convention Centre for that \$15m spend?

Mr BURKE: The centre has a complex economic benefit piece around it. The centre is subsidised by the Territory, so it does not return a profit to the Territory, but there are numbers done every year by Tourism regarding delegate spend and return to the Territory. For every dollar that the Territory government invests in the centre, a lot of work has been done regarding economic return and delegate spend.

Everything that the corporation and operator tries to do is increase the number of delegates and delegate nights—that is behind our master plan as well—to return the indirect return to the Territory. The centre does not make a profit.

Mr MALEY: Do you know what the indirect return is?

Mr BURKE: We could take that on notice and get you some numbers.

Ms FYLES: Tourism would also be able to provide you—the tourism and major event space significantly drives—in terms of that facility and what it brings to the Territory ...

Question on Notice No 1.11

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

Mr MALEY: What is the return on government investment in relation to the Convention Centre?

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

Ms FYLES: I am happy to answer it to the best of our ability.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated number 1.11.

Mr YAN: Crime issues are affecting all of the Territory's shopping centres. The Waterfront is probably no different. How many break-ins have been reported at the Waterfront in the last 12 months?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure that is a question specific to the output before us.

Mr YAN: If we are looking at the Waterfront as a business unit of government, any crime activities that take place there will affect its operational capabilities and capacities. I am interested to know how many break-ins were reported and what effect that has on occupancy and turnover.

Ms FYLES: We know that the CLP talks down the Territory. It is not at the output before us. Mr Chair, I do not accept the premise of the question.

Mr MALEY: How much money do you spend each year repairing damage done by crime at the Waterfront?

Ms FYLES: This is negativity and talking down the Territory. The Waterfront provides a very safe environment—as we all know, having visited there. This is not a consideration to the output before us.

Mr MALEY: My question is directly to the output, because it is about revenue and spending. How much money is spent each year on repairs due to crime at the Waterfront?

Ms FYLES: It is the exact nature of the question—crime and talking the place down ...

Mr MALEY: I thank you for your opinion, but that is the question. It is about financial return and expenditure at the Waterfront, so it is a legitimate question. I am happy to take it on notice if you do not have the information.

Ms FYLES: No, I just think that the Waterfront is a fantastic asset. Across the Territory we have assets such as the Waterfront. We have issues from time to time, but we are talking about the high-level investment this government makes to attract people. I do not think the question being posed about investment we are seeking from the Commonwealth is a specific budget output.

Mr MALEY: The budget output is the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. It is a very broad output. I am asking directly about the revenue spent from the Waterfront. How could it not be a budget question?

Ms FYLES: I believe the Waterfront is a very safe and welcoming environment. I am happy for the officials to support that statement. I point out to the committee that we have an opportunity to talk up the opportunities in the Territory, or we can get into the gutter and talk down the Territory, as we see from the Members for Namatjira and Nelson.

Mr YAN: I am not talking down the Territory, I am not ...

Ms FYLES: You are!

Mr YAN: Would you let me ask the question, please?

Ms FYLES: Actually, the officials would have provided you with a response, but if you want to jump back in and keep talking the Territory down, you are welcome.

Mr MALEY: Let us hear the response.

Mr YAN: I am not talking the Territory down. I agree that the Waterfront is a great place to be. I enjoy it as well, but the Member for Nelson and I would like to know the expenditure on repairs for criminal activities that take place at the Waterfront. It is a direct budget line for the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. I would like to know the answer to that question. I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr BURKE: Member for Namatjira, we will need to take on notice the sum spent to repair public infrastructure for criminal damage. The number will be very low. We also have commercial owners and tenants in the precinct who tend to receive the bulk of the very small amount of criminal damage there.

It is worth noting that we operate a 24/7 operation at the Waterfront, with full-time rangers and security staff at all times, along with a network of over 300 CCTV cameras. We think of it as a very safe place to visit.

Question on Notice No 1.12

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

Mr YAN: In relation to repairs at the Darwin Waterfront, can you provide the cost of repairs due to criminal damage?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 1.12.

Mr YAN: The reinstatement of the Beach Club at the Waterfront, allowing takeaway drinks and food, is another welcome activity and decision. Will this continue to operate this Dry Season? Have there been any issues?

Ms FYLES: The Waterfront Corporation can provide some comment. I remind you that questions on licensing would be to the Minister for Racing, Gaming and Licensing, although I have Alcohol Policy. I am happy to provide my valuable opinion if you care to hear it.

Mr BURKE: The Beach Club is back this year. It is not back yet. Importantly, we worked very closely with government to ensure that the concept of people being able to responsibly have takeaway alcohol with food in the public domain at the Waterfront was maintained post the emergency declaration powers that the Commissioner for Licensing and the Licensing Commission have.

We now have, for all venues at the Waterfront, a 'catering authority', which allows you to purchase a set number of drinks per full meal and consume it within our municipality. We then declare the area in which you can consume the beverages. It was started as part of the COVID response. Now it has been warmly welcomed and been the driver of our master plan in that the Waterfront is a public domain, but we want it to feel like a resort when you enter it and be very relaxed—but well-managed.

Ms FYLES: Under the risk-based licensing model we implemented, it acknowledges that with alcohol comes a risk to the community, but if you have good overall management by licensees, you can have a mechanism for the different authorities that can be on someone's liquor licence. They are based on risk and pay that fee. We are providing for responsible access to alcohol through the new *Liquor Act* and the risk-based licensing model we implemented.

Mr YAN: I welcome that; it is a great idea. Anything to attract people to the assets we have in the Territory is a positive. With the changes—and any changes to liquor policy can create problems—were there any problems with the Beach Club previously?

Mr CHAIR: Is the Beach Club something specific or is it just about having a drink on the grass?

Mr YAN: I do not know; I am from Alice Springs. We have plenty of sand but no beach.

Ms FYLES: We have risk-based licensing, and there are different categories. This is a variation; it is not a straight restaurant licence. It has been set up that they must have food and it is managed with the number of drinks. The restaurant owners—the Waterfront Corporation has additional security, which provides support and can identify issues that might be problematic.

This could be implemented in another area, for example if a traders' group came forward they would provide additional supports to facilitate it for the vibrancy of their area.

Mr YAN: Have there been any changes at the board level, with Jodie Ryan's retirement from DCM? Has she also retired from the board?

Ms FYLES: It is delegated to the role of Chief Executive Officer, Chief Minister and Cabinet. Kathleen would take that role whilst in that position.

Mr CHAIR: Can I clarify what the Beach Club is? I have been to the Waterfront, had a meal and you can have a drink. Is that the it?

Ms FYLES: No.

Mr BURKE: I should have clarified that. We have two parts. At all times you can buy alcohol with food. Then we established a venue in the public domain, which has the luxury of cushioned lounges and umbrellas. There are more to come this year, that will be the Beach Club proper.

Mr CHAIR: Are children allowed in the Beach Club?

Mr BURKE: Absolutely.

OUTPUT GROUP 18.0 – GOVERNMENT SUPPORT
Output 18.1 – Support to Ministers and Leader of the Opposition

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many FTEs are employed in the ministerial offices of level five?

Ms FYLES: I am seeking advice from officials. Staffing varies from minister to minister.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you provide a breakdown?

Ms FYLES: How about I take this on notice and get back to you?

Question on Notice No 1.13

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many staff are employed in the nine ministerial offices on level five? Please provide a breakdown of each office.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 1.13.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I understand that some ministerial officers have a media adviser or a press secretary—I am not sure what you call them—and a full-time staffer who manages social media. Is that correct?

Ms FYLES: It varies from office to office. We work as a team across the floor, so resources are shared. Not every minister has a media adviser. We work together to ensure ministers have the support they need.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you give a number of how many media advisors and social media staff you have?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to provide the figures per office and across the floor but I respect the privacy of the staff who work there, Member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not think that is overly private.

Ms FYLES: No, but I am happy to provide a level of information. I will take that on notice with the previous question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I think Territorians are fascinated by level five—even when I was a minister. People want to know who is working up there, not individually but generally, and where their money is going in terms of resourcing ministers.

Ms FYLES: I will provide that information in general terms. I respect the staff and their privacy.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Will you also provide a breakdown of their position titles?

Ms FYLES: I said that I will take it on notice and provide you with information. I am sure that if you are not happy with that, you will let it be known. I will provide what I think is appropriate along with protecting the privacy of the staff who work there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not require names, just position titles. Can I ask for a list of position titles and the levels of those positions?

Ms FYLES: I have taken the question on notice and I am happy to provide that information in general terms. I have made it quite clear that the privacy of the staff who work there—in the past, unfortunately, they have been dragged into things but I am happy to provide a level of information. I am sure that if you are not happy with that, you can write back to me and we can go from there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can I add that to the question on notice then, including position titles and position levels?

Mr CHAIR: Under 1.13, the level five ...

Ms FYLES: No, I will not take titles and levels. I do not think that is appropriate. You can identify information for people. I am happy to provide an overarching view of the information but I will certainly protect the privacy of the staff.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you explain to me how that invades someone's privacy, if you have 50 people working up there, how they can be identified by a position? Can you provide levels then?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to provide across the board, like a global figure. I am happy to do that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I acknowledge that you could.

Ms FYLES: I am happy to provide a level of information. I think that is important but there are not reams of people up there. In committing to provide the information, I do not want to breach their privacy.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I note that the budget allocation is approximately \$17m to support ministers and Leader of the Opposition. Can you provide a breakdown of how much is allocated to support ministers and how much is allocated to support the Leader of the Opposition?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take that on notice. I have a little bit of knowledge but I do not want to go there in case it is wrong. I am happy to provide the breakdown of ministers versus the Opposition Leader.

Question on Notice No 1.14

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: Please provide a breakdown of the budget allocation to support ministers and the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 1.14.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is about saving money, because in your opening statement you said that you intend to get to a surplus in 2024. You plan to overspend by \$1.1bn in the coming financial year yet two years after that you plan to get to a surplus. Obviously, you plan to generate a lot of more income than you are now. You also presumably intend to make some savings.

This question relates to savings. Two of your ministers have relatively small caseloads and have what anyone who has been around politics and parliament would call minor portfolios—Minister Moss and Minister Ah Kit. They do not have any significant budgetary responsibilities. Was there any thought put into going back to eight ministers, which is what your government had in 2016, 2017 and 2018?

Ms FYLES: I am pretty sure that minister for Environment is not a minor portfolio. You may have a different belief and value to me but I absolutely value the Northern Territory environment and, equally ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am not saying that I do not value those portfolios.

Ms FYLES: You just said that they are minor. I completely disagree with that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the budgetary responsibility for the minister for Environment?

Ms FYLES: The minister for Environment has a huge responsibility in the Northern Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Monetary is about budgets.

Ms FYLES: Absolutely. The monetary value of the environment is huge because we need to have opportunity for jobs and job creation in the Territory. At the same time we have to value our environment. This comes to a threshold point of difference. It is with most respect that I answer the question. I value the environment and jobs. We need economic development in the Northern Territory; to value our environment as we step forward; and make sure it is taken into consideration equally.

We have some huge projects. The Acacia project will streamline the delivery of health services, save lives and ensure we save vital health dollars. They are huge responsibilities.

I do not consider any of the ministers having minor portfolios, particularly the two you highlighted. We have to agree that we have a fundamental point of difference. I value the environment and I value the opportunity to deliver services in a more streamlined manner using advances in technology.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You had an opportunity to reduce your Cabinet from nine to eight, which it was for the first two or three years of you being in government; therefore, saving in the area of a million dollars of taxpayers' money a year. Whether you like it or not, it is no reflection on what those portfolios are but they are minor compared to Infrastructure, Education, Health, Police and a range of others. These minister's do not have any of the major portfolios. That is different to your definition, but it is how it was defined when I was Treasurer and a minister years ago. These two ministers do not have a huge responsibility in terms of budgetary responsibilities. You have answered my question. You did not see fit to do that, which is fair enough.

Ms FYLES: I value the environment, water, climate change ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: So do I.

Ms FYLES: No, you do not. You are calling them minor portfolios.

Mrs LAMBLEY: They are, technically, minor portfolios.

Ms FYLES: I will not speak ill of your leadership when you were Treasurer because you were a part of a very divided team at that point. I have gotten to know you personally. For me, those portfolios are incredibly important.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You did not want to save money. That is fine, minister.

Ms FYLES: No, I am answering the question. You had your opportunity, please let me. I value the environment. Without the environment we do not have jobs. Without water we do not have a Territory. Climate change is here, it is real. These are serious issues; we take them seriously in our Cabinet. Equally, with the digital and corporate services—a huge responsibility—the procurement across Northern Territory Government, driving Buy Local and digital transformation. You look at the systems—you would know these well—in Territory Families, Police, Health, which are all frontline agencies. If they have good systems in place using digital technology, they can deliver more for the taxpayer dollar. We have a distinct point difference, and I am happy for that to be on the public record.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Chief Minister, you are planning to reach a surplus in a couple of years' time. Where will you make the cuts going forward, for example in this area of your responsibility: Chief Minister and Cabinet?

Ms FYLES: The budget that has been delivered—the Treasurer is looking forward to her opportunity—has a projected government operating surplus. We are not afraid to make the difficult decisions or place the investment where we believe we need to. We will not sack tens and hundreds of public servants, which is what happened under the CLP. We will not put people's power up by 25%. We will make sure that as a government we continue to manage the budget going forward.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You did not answer my question. Where are you making the cuts?

Ms FYLES: We have outlined a clear plan that gets us ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Outline it now.

Ms FYLES: It is the budget; it is everything we are talking about.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is why we are here, budget estimates, to talk about the budget.

Ms FYLES: Yes, and our budget shows that we will get to that projected government operating surplus.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You will go from a deficit of \$1.1bn in the coming year to zero in 2024. That will be nothing short of miraculous.

Ms FYLES: We have a plan; it is called Budget 2022–23.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yet you will not outline any cuts to the Office of the Chief Minister ...

Ms FYLES: We will not have a 'slash and burn' mentality, which is what happened under the CLP. We are maintaining budget discipline and ensuring the money we have is invested wisely. I stand by the budget that has been delivered.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Your record in government is horrific. You have taken us from a net debt of less than \$2bn five-and-a-half years ago, to about \$8.7bn today, yet you are trying to convince us that you will get to a zero budget deficit in two years, with no cuts. It does not stack up.

Mr YAN: How much does the media unit for the Chief Minister and Cabinet cost per annum, including protocol? What is the budget?

Ms FYLES: I will take that on notice. There are two elements: protocol and the internal communications unit.

Mr YAN: I will ask two questions.

Question on Notice No 1.15

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

Mr YAN: How much does the media unit cost the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet per annum? How much does the protocol unit cost the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet per annum?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 1.15.

Mr MALEY: In the first week of September 2021, \$23,000 was spent on ministerial travel to the Daly electorate. Could you give a breakdown of where the \$23,000 was spent?

Ms FYLES: I am unsure if it is this output, but I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.16

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

Mr MALEY: In the first week of September 2021, \$23,000 was spent on ministerial travel to the Daly electorate. Could you give a breakdown of that expenditure from 15 August to 15 September 2021?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 1.16.

**Output 18.2 – Support to the Administrator
Output 18.3 – Government Services**

No questions.

**OUTPUT GROUP 20.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 20.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 20.2 – Shared Services Received
Output 20.3 – Shared Services Provided**

No questions.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of all the outputs related to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. On behalf of the committee, I thank all departmental officers for attending today and everyone else who did the work behind the scenes.

MAJOR PROJECTS

LAND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr CHAIR: I invite you, as the Minister for Major Projects, to introduce the officials accompanying you, and if you would like to make an opening statement regarding the Land Development Corporation.

Ms FYLES: I have with me, Tony Stubbin, Chief Executive Land Development Corporation and Karly B, Financial Controller. In the interests of time, we will not make an opening statement but are happy to take any questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 21.0 – LAND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr MALEY: The budget papers show a \$10m increase in residential development income. Can you provide a breakdown of what that increase is?

Mr STUBBIN: Member for Nelson, you are talking 2022–23?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr STUBBIN: We expect to have revenue from Zuccoli Village and Kilgariff stage 2A received in 2022–23.

Mr MALEY: Do you see your organisation competing for industrial land with private developers?

Mr STUBBIN: Inevitably if you are performing in the same market place, competition must occur between private and government providers.

Mr MALEY: Do you think that is unfair when private development has to buy the land and the government gets given the land for free? We are here to promote private investment, why would we have to be competing against private enterprise?

Mr STUBBIN: There is a longstanding practice to avoid the consequences of any government business impinging on the private sector unduly. This occurs across all jurisdictions in Australia, including the Northern Territory. There is a concept of competitive neutrality, whereby a government business, when it is established, is required to face the same costs and imposts as a private company.

That is administered by the Department of Treasury and Finance. We are scrutinised by them on an annual basis to ensure that we do not gain from our advantage.

In land ownership, government has the power under the *Land Development Corporation Act* to vest land in the Land Development Corporation as freehold land. Equally, it has the right to tax us on revenue profits we make on that and to charge a dividend, as an owner would, on any profits we make. We pay taxes and dividends on all profits made.

Mr MALEY: Yes, but you do not pay interest on the loan to buy the land, as a private investor would.

Mr STUBBIN: We inherit a capital charge against the LDC. We have loans and we pay interest on those loans.

Mr MALEY: I have seen government tenders where it says you should use government LDC land versus private land. Why are we not promoting private enterprise when there are two choices of land? You say it is all fair. Why would we not give it to private enterprise over your organisation?

Ms FYLES: We support private investment if there is the ability for the private sector to come in and fill that gap. As Tony outlined, in situations where it may need to be government land through LDC, there are mechanisms to ensure it is competitive and not that they have been given something when the private sector does not get the same benefits.

Mr MALEY: There is a lot of land at the back of Palmerston. I cannot remember the name of the road it is on. Is it Wishart estate? There is land being released near the old trade development zone, when the other land is ready with roads. It has not been sold because of the market, yet LDC is releasing more land when this private land has not been utilised yet. Why?

Ms FYLES: I suggest, in this in-depth questioning, that the minister for DIPL would be able to provide a little insight about those different spots you just mentioned. I am happy to take it on notice, but equally ...

Mr MALEY: If there are two equal portions of land ...

Ms FYLES: No, I see the point you are getting at.

Mr MALEY: ... why would you compete with private enterprise? Why would you not let them do what they have to do. You have made a new subdivision and put out fresh land when there is other land still available. There is a lot of land behind the old prison throughout the old trade development zone that is privately owned and developed but they cannot sell because of whatever reason. LDC do new subdivisions and that land is utilised over private enterprise. That is what I am getting at.

Ms FYLES: Yes, I get the point you are trying to make. Equally, sometimes it is about the location and what it can offer. It is not always straightforward. It may appear—it is a little like what I said earlier. You drive past something in the Territory and assume it is bushland and will remain that way forever. It is not necessarily true; it could be owned by someone who has longer-term plans for it.

Equally, when it comes to land—whether it is government releasing that land for a certain need—if the private sector has land that is suitable—it would come down to that criteria. I am sure the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics would be happy to take these points and provide you with more information.

This work began previously on area plans identifying the future needs of the community versus the land available ...

Mr MALEY: Are you aware of any complaints from private enterprise against your organisation about the release of land?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure if you want to elaborate specifics, but ...

Mr MALEY: No, I do not know any. I am looking at the bigger picture and wondering if there is private enterprise in Alice Springs, the back of Palmerston or Tennant Creek?

Ms FYLES: That question is best directed at Treasury, because it would face that competitive neutrality.

Mr MALEY: Would it not be the organisation?

Ms FYLES: The complaint would be against them, so they ...

Mr MALEY: Are there any complaints against them ongoing?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question for the Treasurer, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.17

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

Mr MALEY: Are there any complaints from privately owned developers or property owners against the Land Development Corporation regarding the release of Land Development Corporation land where private land could be utilised in the same area or industry?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes. I suggest asking the Treasurer, but I am happy to take it.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 1.17.

Ms PURICK: A point of clarification on the Land Development Corporation chief executive—is this agency responsible for negotiating purchase of the Kowandi land or is it Land Development Corporation or DIPL?

Ms FYLES: It is DIPL; ask tomorrow.

Mr YAN: I have questions related to Kilgariff in Alice Springs. When was it initially expected that Kilgariff stage 2A would be completed?

Mr STUBBIN: We expected it to be completed January/February this year.

Mr YAN: Is there any explanation or reasons for those delays? It is June, nearly July.

Mr STUBBIN: It is in your electorate. You would notice if you are driving past at night that the street lights are on. The bitumen is down. We are near practical completion. There are a few checks required to remedy sewer and stormwater issues. Otherwise things are looking ready.

Kilgariff has been held up for a couple of reasons, not dissimilar to developments in Darwin. It is the challenges of getting appropriate staff and materials. There have been some headaches but we expect titles to be available in the next two months. A lot of people have already signed contracts and builders are keen to get onto this. We are keen for that to happen.

Mr YAN: Do you have any plans to fast-track future blocks at Kilgariff? Do you have time lines on those developments?

Ms FYLES: That would be a policy decision of the government. We are very conscious, particularly in Central Australia—I suggest you ask that question to the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Mr YAN: Has the dispute between the council and the Land Development Corporation been resolved regarding flood, water mitigation and drainage?

Ms FYLES: It is still being worked through, but that is with DIPL.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of the Land Corporation Development.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back. We will now consider the outputs relating to the Department of Health. Chief Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Health to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Health.

Ms FYLES: The officials at the table today are Dr Frank Daly, Chief Executive Officer; David Braines-Mead; and Adjunct Professor Joanne Norton. We have other officials joining us as required, including the Acting Chief Health Officer and the Head of the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre.

I will introduce the other relevant output executives as they are required during the afternoon. I am very conscious of time, so I will cut down my speech but there are key points I would like to make.

I acknowledge the extraordinary job that, specifically NT Health—this is not to take away from other agencies, individuals or organisations within the Northern Territory—has done an extraordinary job responding to and managing the most challenging time we have faced in the Territory, during the two-and-a-half years of the pandemic.

COVID-19 cases peaked—we know they have peaked when we get past that point—on 12 February when we had 7,733 active cases in the Northern Territory, 170 patients in hospital, 21 requiring oxygen and two in ICU. Tragically, to date, the Northern Territory has recorded 52 COVID-related deaths. I give my condolences to those people's families and friends.

Health is an extremely complex environment. Working through COVID has been complex, but the leadership and staff have worked tirelessly to manage the resources and provide support to Territorians. We have shown strength and resilience that allowed us to be agile and responsive. We have changed to the nature of the pandemic.

I acknowledge the former federal Health Minister Greg Hunt, who we worked very closely with, and the Commonwealth Government for the support provided; the Aboriginal Medical Services led by John Paterson; the land councils; local governments; Northern Territory Primary Health Network; and primary care providers across the Northern Territory. In making these comments, it is not to miss out anyone but we are talking about Health and the budget. I know that there will be a number of questions.

As we draw to the point where the emergency—I signed that public health emergency declaration a total of 11 times. I do not think any of us expected it to last that long. We are all fatigued by COVID, but that does not mean it will go away.

This week there will be significant changes to CHO directions. We will see the end of the public health emergency and with that, the exclusion zones, lock-in areas, safety measures for businesses, quarantine workers and facilities, major events, cruise ship limits and the vaccine mandate will end. However, while the emergency ends, the pandemic continues. Hopefully, we will transition to an endemic. There are still many cases and, tragically, deaths around the country and the world each day.

The transitional powers the Chief Health Officer has at this stage—these directions are in place, but could change as the health advice changes. It will be a requirement for an infected person to register their rapid antigen test and isolate—presently, it is for seven days—wear a mask in certain settings, such as aged-care and healthcare facilities—and the ability of the assistance of police to enforce a CHO direction. This committee knows this legislation well, because we debated that passage of legislation. It will be enacted as of midnight tomorrow night.

The quarantine program is a real testament to Territorians. Twenty thousand people came through Howard Springs as a pathway home to Australia. In total, forty thousand came people through Howard Springs, and close to 4,000 people were accommodated at the Alice Springs quarantine facility. We often talk about the quarantine facility and naturally, we pivot to the Howard Springs Centre for National Resilience, but Central Australia undertook an enormous effort, working closely with the Tennant Creek Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital. It was a huge body of work.

The Alice Springs facility closed in May. The Centre for National Resilience will cease in a few weeks' time, but it will be mothballed so that if it is needed it can be stood up.

I acknowledge the staff involved in those facilities. With the emergency ending, the emergency operations centre will be stood down. I was there last week and spent time with the staff. There were so many people there at one point.

The other point I will talk about is the vaccination program. There will be criticism from others here today. It was a multi-faceted effort. We worked with Aboriginal medical organisations and the primary healthcare sector—we had vaccinations across the Northern Territory. It is easy to criticise, from when it commenced in March 2021 through to 1 June, significant numbers of people were vaccinated. There were over 588,000 doses across the Territory.

We know the pressure that the COVID pandemic put on the public health system. I acknowledge the efforts of clinicians and those who work in the hospitals that support them, including the administration staff, PCAs, cleaners—all of those people have been vital.

We are refocused on clinical streams where patients may have had a deferred case over the last two years. Through the chief executive, Dr Frank Daly, and our regional and hospital leads, comprehensive planning and preparation has been enacted, is under way and will continue to address deferred surgeries.

We will redirect our personnel back to the area of health delivery. You will see this as an increased focus from us.

One of the most significant and positive outcomes of COVID is the increased use of telehealth in urban and remote settings and the ability to have virtual care. Thousands of episodes have been delivered. That is a significant increase compared to before COVID.

The Health budget is the largest single component in the Northern Territory Government—\$2bn. You will see this budget returning to the core Health budget. There was an inflation, largely due to the agreement with the Commonwealth Government to run the Howard Springs facility—the Centre for National Resilience. That came through the Health budget. I want to front-foot that. I know the committee members know their way around budget papers, and they will have identified that.

We continue to grow in our health system, in investment and health infrastructure—\$147m will be spent in 2022–23. This is not just in the hospitals, but also in the primary healthcare setting. It is also a key priority in mental health.

We partner with our non-government organisations and work on early intervention; health is a huge contributor to the life outcomes. We have the Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home Visiting program, commonly referred to as MECSH, run by Anyinginyi in the Barkly; the Katherine West Health Board; Sunrise in Big Rivers; and Miwatj in East Arnhem.

We have the Universal Child and Family Health Services, Healthy Under 5 Kids, partnering with families. That is available in all our urban and remote primary healthcare settings. We are working with the Department of Education on community hearing worker positions, working with Menzies. There are so many wonderful partnerships we have in Health.

I also have responsibility for alcohol policy, more broadly across government agencies. Within Health we provided a budget for residential rehabilitation services, counselling and community-based services, education and information; and given small grants to community organisations, focusing around alcohol and other drugs particularly for youths.

The workforce continues to remain a challenge for all in this sector across Australia and the world. We have a number of programs. We are supporting people to have a career in the Territory. That is particularly done through the rural generalist program that I had the privilege of launching in October last year. That is a coordinated training program where we are developing services in remote communities so that Territorians can get healthcare closer to home. It also provides support to those participating in the training program.

Pathways to community control—I am proud of the aboriginal medical organisations and of us supporting them to deliver culturally appropriate services as close to home as possible. A number of clinics and services have transitioned to aboriginal medical organisations. That will continue. It is a key part of local decision-making.

I acknowledge something that is a personal thing for me and many others. Health is acknowledging the Territory's response to climate change, which threatens the health and wellbeing of Territorians through multiple factors and puts us at an increased risk to infectious disease, cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, asthma, allergies and mental illness.

The Department of Health has established a climate health advisory committee which is a multidisciplinary group to build strategies to mitigate the health impact of climate change and have strategies to reduce the impact on the environment from the health sector. Around the world the healthcare sector has a huge impact on climate and environmental issues. The Department of Health, through the Central Australian health area service in the Top End, along with Darwin Hospital—have joined the Global Green Healthy Hospitals program. We are focusing on sharing best practices and knowledge to deliver sustainable healthcare, which is what the community wants and what clinicians and those who work in the health sector would like to see.

There have been changes to legislation, which this committee would be familiar. I acknowledge the Surrogacy Bill 2022, which passed a few weeks ago. That is a significant body of work that provides a framework to enable Territorians access to surrogacy as a legitimate way of building a family. Many people in the department drove that. I acknowledge their work.

We will support and keep Territorians as well as we can through our health system, by being responsive to the community's needs, particularly as we transition from a pandemic to an endemic. We are investing in models of care, being innovative and delivering services as close to home as possible. It is certainly the key for me, as Minister for Health.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to address them. I am happy to take any questions.

Mr YAN: Thank you for your opening address. I also thank all the people you have here from the public service today.

In a previous press release, and today, you stated that we have a \$2bn investment in our health infrastructure and services across the Territory for Budget 2022–23. Does the \$2bn include the infrastructure program? The agency budget papers only list \$1.877bn, not \$2bn.

Ms FYLES: Yes, it does include infrastructure. I can give you a breakdown if you wish.

Mr YAN: Yes please.

Ms FYLES: Operational budget is \$1.88bn, which includes \$45.3m from the Commonwealth and \$119.2m in infrastructure.

Mr YAN: The media release for this year's budget states that \$60m of this year's budget is to address additional COVID-19 pressures allocated to 2021–22. Can you explain how that is reflected in the budget papers? Is that \$60m under 2022–23 budget or is it under the 2021–22 revised?

Ms FYLES: It is going into 2021–22 acknowledging the impact that COVID had on the delivery of health services.

Mr YAN: If the revised budget for 2021–22 is \$142m more than the original budget, that is more than \$60m. Where did the rest of the overspend come from?

Ms FYLES: The variation for the increase of \$142.3m—\$60m is additional Territory funding for COVID-19, \$23.7m is additional NT funding for fixed costs associated with the Centre for National Resilience, \$29.6m is additional funding from the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response and \$23.6m is from the Commonwealth and external agreements. That would be for specialist training programs, Primary Healthcare Network NT agreements and approximately \$4m from own-source revenue for services provided by the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre.

Mr YAN: Was it \$29m from NT for CNR?

Ms FYLES: There was \$23.7 from the NT for Centre for National Resilience and \$29.6m was for the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response. That was where they brought in arrangements—many of them were established in 2020 but we needed to enact them earlier this year. That would have been the beds we were able to utilise at the private hospital for example.

Mr YAN: That \$23.7m from NTG for CNR, what does it include?

Ms FYLES: The \$23m was for the Centre for National Resilience for domestic travellers who needed to undertake quarantine. When we were caring for people at that facility, people were charged a fee for staying at that facility. That went to Central Holdings but there may be reasons why it did not. To reassure Territorians, 100% of the repatriation costs were covered by the Commonwealth Government.

Mr YAN: That was for people travelling back from overseas.

Ms FYLES: Correct. The 20,000 people.

Mr YAN: The feds picked up all that.

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr YAN: A lot of that \$23.7m is for domestic travellers.

Ms FYLES: It was probably more related to fixed costs, for example to get the facility ready for us to utilise. There were a number of contracts in place.

Mr YAN: From those domestic travellers who used CNR, how much were we supposed to get and how much is outstanding in revenue?

Ms FYLES: I am seeking some advice on answering that question because we knew it would come. During the Katherine outbreak among the Binjari mob and Robinson River, the people housed at Howard Springs were provided with that care, because it was appropriate. It is about that cost.

Mr YAN: Yes, I understand.

Mr BRAINES-MEAD: Since we started charging for domestic quarantine at the CNR and the Todd facility at Alice Springs—that commenced on 4 April 2020 up until 31 March 2022—we issued invoices to the amount of \$34.6m. About \$3m has been provided in 50% reduction for financial hardship when individuals or families meet the earning criteria, in line with Centrelink payments, not exceeding certain amounts.

Of that net \$34.5m we have invoiced to date, there have been payments of \$26.9m received and paid in full. As at 31 March \$6.7m is outstanding.

Mr MALEY: Did anyone stay at the centre without being charged? Was there anyone who had free accommodation? Not free—you know what I mean.

Ms FYLES: In the Centre for National Resilience, as I just mentioned, if that was the best place for us to care for some people, then that was provided to them. As you just heard, some people were able to get a reduction because of hardship. The other outstanding amounts are like any debt to the Territory; they need to be paid.

Yes, there would be people who stayed there at no cost, but it would have been due to circumstance. One example I can think of is to do with arrival times. If things were out of people's control, they did not need to pay, but if they made that decision they knew the rules and were charged for the visit.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a breakdown of how many people stayed there at no cost?

Ms FYLES: Regarding numbers I am happy to seek advice, but that is where you get that figure ...

Mr MALEY: Can we take that on notice?

Ms FYLES: Yes. Before I take it on notice, the figure of \$23m for fixed cost is for where people were brought to the Centre for National Resilience from remote Aboriginal communities, there was no cost to them. Equally, the same with the Todd facility in Alice Springs.

As the virus and the pandemic evolved, initially everyone needed to be cared for in a central location, but once we had the virus in community and could care for people in that community-based setting, our posture changed.

Some people were in hospital for a short period, then went there because that was the most appropriate care. I am happy to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.18

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

Mr MALEY: How many people stayed at the Centre for National Resilience free of charge?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 1.18.

Mr YAN: Whilst we are talking about CNR and support to the facility, what was the total cost to lease or rent all those rooms at the motel in Berrimah in support of CNR?

Ms FYLES: I am seeking some advice on that.

Mr YAN: I am happy to take it on notice, minister.

Ms FYLES: Before I take it on notice, I have a figure which may be appropriate.

The majority of staff who stayed at the Quest Palmerston were SERCO employees working with the Centre for National Resilience with varying contracts. The accommodation component was \$3.5m.

Mr YAN: That was the accommodation component? Were there any components to their stay at Quest Palmerston?

Ms FYLES: I should say that is their accommodation. The majority of the staff who stayed at Quest were the SERCO staff. That figure may encompass someone else who was not able to stay at Quest; they might have stayed elsewhere. That was the component paid to SERCO staff for accommodation. The majority of the people at Quest were SERCO.

To be clear, the Territory was covered for 100% of costs for the Centre of National Resilience staff who worked domestic and international—we ran it as one facility. Originally AUSMAT was there, then they withdrew and CNR was run by NTG. That figure is not necessarily the total figure that Territory taxpayers paid; there would be a component covered by the Commonwealth.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, are you comfortable that I have already put a number in for that question.

Mr YAN: I will change the question.

Question on Notice No 1.19

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

Mr YAN: Can you supply the costs borne by Territory taxpayers for people staying at the Quest Palmerston?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes, from memory there was no cost to the Territory taxpayer; it was under the repat program, but I am happy to take the question on notice.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 1.19.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where does the outstanding debt from people who were in quarantine sit in the budget papers?

Ms FYLES: It is a recoverable amount to the Territory, so it sits with Central Holdings. It is about \$6.7m. It is similar to a fine or any other service for fee that ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Out of interest, have you worked out the average debt per person outstanding?

Ms FYLES: No. We could do some maths, but we do not have it.

Mr YAN: The important question for Territory taxpayers is what is being done to recover the \$6.7m that is outstanding.

Ms FYLES: Absolutely. It is important. From the Territory's perspective, we need to understand that these resources stopped the virus from getting into our community for a considerable period of time. The virus would have had significant toll on human life and our health system.

As much as it is frustrating to have this \$6.7m owed to the Territory, the resource we had and the way we implemented it saved us. It is a debt owing to the Territory, so the normal channels of seeking those funds would include legal action.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You had to employ people to recoup that debt, have you not?

Ms FYLES: DCDD did the invoicing and manage collection of moneys. It would have a structure of seeking that if it is owed to the Territory—like any other amount for a service that was not paid; you would be chased down.

Mr YAN: In Budget Paper No 3, page 117, there is a revenue of \$4.7m listed as Veterans' Affairs. What is that?

Ms FYLES: In the Territory, people access a service through one of our hospitals or healthcare clinics, then we charge it back to Veterans' Affairs. The individual would not have to pay at the time, but there would be a claim made to Veterans' Affairs.

Mr MALEY: Can you outline the cost of people travelling from communities to the Howard Springs centre and back again?

Ms FYLES: I will take that on notice. We transported a number of people between the middle of January and end of March. Sometimes it was a partnership with a non-government organisation—it might have been a police resource used. I will take that on notice.

Mr MALEY: Can we add the number of people transported and the cost?

Question on Notice No 1.20

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

Mr MALEY: Can you provide the number of people who were transported to the Howard Springs centre and back again, in relation to COVID and the cost of that travel?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 1.20.

Mr MALEY: Some people from Howard Springs were released out the back of the facility and some were taken home. How was it decided who was taken to another place or a community, or released out the back door between the centre and the school?

Ms FYLES: We had a huge welfare response—Territory Families was heavily involved in that. It was really up to the individual and the family if they wished to stay in Darwin or Alice Springs, or we would provide transport to their primary place of residence. It was no different than the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme if people are transported. We endeavour to get them home but they are free to undertake whatever travel they wish.

Mr MALEY: What is the plan moving forward for the Howard Springs National Resilience Centre?

Ms FYLES: I know this is for your electorate. It has been an amazing asset for the Northern Territory and Australia. We have come to an arrangement which may not be finalised, but the Commonwealth will provide financial support for 12 months for the tail-end of the pandemic. We hope we do not have to utilise it, but we do not know. As I said in my opening statement, it will be ready to be stood up if needed for a health-type response, then broadly across government we can work through what the facility would be utilised for.

Mr MALEY: Regarding the negotiations that will come from the federal government, will there not be any Northern Territory taxpayer money?

Ms FYLES: We will transfer the asset from health across to DIPL on 30 June. The Commonwealth Government has provided some financial support, but initially there will be Territory dollars needed to keep the facility. As you can imagine, general mothball maintenance, gardens, pest control, electricity and plumbing—it is intended that for at least a year the facility would be able to be stood up at short notice. We need to remember if we started to see COVID or another type of illness start to build, we would have that time. That is the intention.

Mr MALEY: Can you give an estimate of what the cost will be to maintain that facility for the next 12 months?

Ms FYLES: It would depend on the posture at which it would be stood up. I am happy to take that on notice. It would be in conjunction with DIPL that would answer that.

Question on Notice No 1.21

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

Mr MALEY: Can you provide the estimated cost to the taxpayer to the Howard Springs centre for the next 12 months?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 1.21.

Mr YAN: During your opening statement, you mentioned some changes to the CHO directions and what they would look like for the Territory. Last week you announced that the state of emergency will not be extended, and you announced that the CHO directions mandating COVID vaccinations for Territory workers would be lifted. When did you first receive the health advice that the mandate could be lifted?

Ms FYLES: I received final advice from the Acting Chief Health Officer. We are happy to bring him in on Thursday morning. I went straight from that SEMSC Cabinet meeting to speak to the media. When we decided to sign the public health emergency in March, it was based on health advice. During the changing situation with COVID, the vaccine was, and still is important, but the advice that morning was that we did not need to have it mandated.

There were a number of meetings leading up to that. To give the community an understanding, we were in contact every day. It would be rare for me not to have a text message or a conversation with the CHO, Deputy CHO or the chief executive.

Mr YAN: What evidence were those changes based on, what evidence was provided to make those decisions and can that evidence be tabled? Are we able to see it?

Ms FYLES: Yes, will ask the Acting Chief Health Officer to come into the room.

Dr PAIN: Please repeat the question.

Mr YAN: In relation to the ending of the state of emergency and the change to the vaccination mandate, what evidence was your decision based on? That is the first part of the question.

Ms FYLES: It was about the proportionate response at the time. Dr Pain can talk, but it was the epidemiology of the virus. The virus has changed, the rate of vaccination in the community and the ability for us as a health system to respond.

Dr PAIN: As you can imagine, looking at the (inaudible—microphone off) watching the pandemic (inaudible—microphone off) and also the national, international and local epidemiology. It was quite clear, over the last several weeks, the numbers of cases have declined and continue to decline. We were conscious that there might be other variants which might cause climbs, but those variants, BA4 and BA5 ...

Mr CHAIR: Dr Pain, the orange light needs to be on.

Dr PAIN: We were conscious of the possibility of other variants causing rises, but we have been watching those trends closely over the last few weeks and there is no evidence of BA4 and BA5 becoming a problem. I was comfortable and confident to give advice that we could end the emergency and that a number of measures that were part of the emergency could cease. One of those was the vaccine mandate.

Mr YAN: Based on the evidence we heard today, can that be tabled in writing for Territorians to read, understand and take in?

Ms FYLES: The transcript of this hearing?

Mr YAN: With respect, minister, not everyone will read a transcript of what takes place in estimates on a Tuesday afternoon.

Ms FYLES: Reporting was something the Leader of the Opposition was narky with me about this morning. I pulled her up on the fact that she was incorrect with her facts. The Chief Health Officer has to present me with a report. This public health emergency ends at 11.59 pm tomorrow. I must have that report within three months, then I have six sittings days to table it.

The availability of the information has been clearly communicated through this hearing and messaging to the media. That is the formal reporting requirement. Additionally, the directions that remain in place—when that legislation ceases; we do not know when that will be, another report has to be provided. There tends to be peaks and troughs with infectious diseases, especially in winter, particularly in the northern hemisphere.

Mr MALEY: The legislation introduced says that it will only be a summary of the report. What will be tabled? Will that be the actual evidence or a summary of the evidence?

Ms FYLES: It will be in great detail. Previously the public health emergency was a five-day period and was based on natural disasters. For example at 11.59 pm advice was received from the Bureau of Meteorology that the cyclone would be a Category 3—it had that level.

It is a little disrespectful using the term ‘summary’. With the pandemic going for two years and five months, it will contain a great level of detail. It will reference the fact that 256 SEMSC meetings were held—the key decision-making processes. Preparing a report for five days versus two-and-a-half years—that is why the change was made in the legislation.

Mr YAN: I understand, but you use the word summary not us. Will you provide us the evidence you used to create that summary report? Can we get a copy of that evidence?

Ms FYLES: No. It will be in that report. The CHO has participated in...

Mr YAN: Not the summary of evidence, I am looking for the evidence.

Ms FYLES: It will be the full response that the Northern Territory. This is a point of difference, with respect. You would have opened the borders in June 2020. You would have done things differently; that is your prerogative.

We are proud of the track record we have in managing COVID-19 in the Northern Territory. When we were first faced with this virus and were told to prepare for thousands of deaths—in remote communities particularly—we responded accordingly.

I believe that it is a point of difference; I say that with respect. We will provide a report on the public health emergency and the decisions we made—tragically we have lost 52 lives to date. The virus is still here and people are still getting sick, but we point to our track record.

Mr YAN: The evidence will not be provided, just a summary of the report?

Ms FYLES: You are mincing words.

Mr YAN: I am just asking the question.

Ms FYLES: We are providing a report that will be tabled in the parliament.

Mr YAN: And that report will be a summary of the evidence?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I have explained the difference and why the legislation was changed. I do not think this is about the budget output. We are talking about a public health emergency that went for more than two years as opposed to when the legislation was first drafted and implemented. It was based on natural disaster responses for around five days.

Mr YAN: When you talk about health advice, what is the health advice and where did that come from?

Ms FYLES: Doctor Pain can talk about the great number of meetings that he, the deputy CHOs and Doctor Heggie—everyone had to participate in endlessly over the past two years on weekends, public holidays, late at night, during the day and sometimes multiple times a day.

Dr PAIN: We have had daily situation reports throughout the pandemic and received up-to-date information about the number of cases and the impact on the health system et cetera. We consult widely amongst public health colleagues in the Northern Territory and with the Department of Health at the Commonwealth level—the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, which is where the Chief Health Officers have met

hundreds of times since our last meeting here. That advice is continually provided and reviewed. I have been able to distil that and provide advice to the government on a regular basis.

Mr YAN: Who provides the advice to you?

Dr PAIN: I have a Chief Health Officer advisory group, which includes public health people from within the public health system and outside it. We bring together a lot of experts in the Territory. We also have an expert reference group that has more infection prevention control expertise; I chair that. I chair the CHO advisory group, and we have a number of other advisory groups. I draw advice whenever I need it.

Mr YAN: Just within the Northern Territory or within Australia?

Dr PAIN: What I was describing is from within the Northern Territory but, as I said, there is also the AHPPC at the national level.

Mr YAN: Can you give me some more information on the national level?

Dr PAIN: The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee—a long-established committee—has taken a principal role in advising Australian governments on the response to the pandemic.

All the Chief Health Officers are members. As the Deputy Chief Health Officer I attended almost all of those meetings with the Chief Health Officer. I am well briefed on its advice. That is the principal committee which has given advice throughout the pandemic. It gave advice about the closing of the borders fairly soon after the events in Wuhan became clear and, since then, has given advice to government, which each of the Chief Health Officers take to their jurisdictions and respond to.

Mr MALEY: Is that health advice the same across all of Australia to all Chief Health Officers and they take it back? What happens then? You said it gets a ‘Territory flavour’?

Ms FYLES: Yes, that was the AHPPC at the Commonwealth level, then the advisory groups that Dr Pain spoke to are the processes within the Northern Territory that provide all of that input.

Mr MALEY: Can you explain a bit more about how that works?

Dr PAIN: Each jurisdiction has its own decision-making with respect to the public emergency—as you know we have our own act. We have discretion; that has always been the case. We take the advice from the national level, develop a consensus and make statements to the national consensus-nature. Then we make decisions at the local level, which we have done. The ability to do that has been incredibly important throughout the pandemic. We have made our own decisions and judgements as to movement controls and so on which, as the Chief Minister said, stood us in good stead.

Ms FYLES: In the Northern Territory we had the responsibility of some of the most vulnerable people in Australia. To highlight that figure to you, those who are on the national immunization program that are considered vulnerable for the flu, are 120,000. That highlights how vulnerable our population is and what we needed to keep in mind when making those decisions.

Mr MALEY: Can you explain how National Cabinet—which was meeting on a daily or weekly basis—and the information from those meetings would influence your committee? Did that affect or have an influence on any decision you may be making?

Ms FYLES: I chaired the Health COAG—which was the Health ministers—for a significant period of time. We met on a daily basis, three to four times per week, and it has since gone to a more regular occurrence. We were provided with the information nationally—epidemiology and from Dr Brendan Murphy and Professor Paul Kelly.

We made sure the Chief Minister at the time was prepared with a briefing from the health perspective prior to every National Cabinet. That would often come to me from the CHOs, then to the previous Chief Minister.

Mr MALEY: How did the information that came from the National Cabinet through to the Chief Minister influence your decision?

Dr PAIN: It is important to distinguish between the Chief Health Officers, their advice and the decisions that are made at National Cabinet. Clearly, we were influenced by that advice because once the national position

was determined, we would do our best to adopt it to try to have a consistent approach. Consistency was the objective, but we had to make our own decisions. We maintained our independence and decision-making.

Ms FYLES: That was overlaid with the fact we have such a vulnerable population and a smaller health system. It is a credit to our community that we kept the virus out until we had a certain rate of vaccination—I am not taking away from how hard the health staff worked—so the health system could cope.

When I talk about the peak on 12 February of 170 cases in hospital that was dealing with a different variant. If we had an outbreak of Delta in the Northern Territory—and the CHO can speak to this—it would have been a vastly different situation. Instead, we were dealing with the omicron variant and had a base rate of vaccination. Of course we wanted everyone vaccinated, but the rate played a part.

Dr PAIN: We were blessed, really, in Australia with the omicron variant. It was much more infectious than the other variants and, at the same time, was much less virulent so caused much less harm. That, on top of the fact that in the Territory we were able to achieve very high vaccination rates, meant that over the Christmas period, when it was appropriate to start to relax our controls, the impact on the hospital system and deaths was nowhere near as significant as we expected. As the Chief Minister said, it put pressure on the health system. We managed it as well as we could. In the end, it was a much lower impact than was predicted and could have happened.

Ms FYLES: One of the other factors for us regarding population and why it was more vulnerable, was not just the underlying illness and comorbidities we have, but because we have a very young population. With the vaccine, a certain sector of our community was still not eligible for the vaccine, so we had to take that into our overall thinking. There was a lot of rigour and process put around the advice we received.

I have a response to a previous question, but I am happy to keep going down this line.

Mr YAN: I want to step back to your opening statement about changes to the CHO directions, which mean quite a bit to Territorians, particularly after ending the emergency. You stated that prior to COVID there was a policy position on certain people needing to be vaccinated. Will we be reverting back to that position?

Ms FYLES: Yes, you are talking about the requirement for people in certain occupations to have the vaccine?

Mr YAN: Are you able to outline what that specific policy is, who those people will be and what are the time lines? Will they be six-monthly, annual—where is the mechanism for enforcing that?

Ms FYLES: The vaccine mandate will cease because that is the health advice, but there may be a requirement in certain roles for people to be vaccinated. Prior to COVID there was a requirement for some in the health sector—the aged-care sector, for example—to be vaccinated against the flu each year.

It is a policy decision of the employer. It might be whoever the aged-care provider is. It might be ARRCs, Southern Cross, NT Health—if you are working within a remote clinic such as Miwatj in a remote setting. It is a policy setting, not a CHO direction.

Mr YAN: Would all health workers in the Northern Territory be required to maintain a vaccination status?

Ms FYLES: I will ask the CHO to provide details.

Mr YAN: Previously, it was health, aged care, police ...

Ms FYLES: This is not just specific to COVID-19. There will be no CHO direction about COVID-19, but it could be that you need to have your flu injection, COVID-19 and measles.

Dr PAIN: Before we introduced the mandates, there was a policy position for COVID-19, but also for influenza—we are all familiar with that. In the health system, as a condition of employment, if you are working closely with patients and there is risk to them you have to be vaccinated.

We are reverting back to that, from a Health point of view, as a policy position. Other agencies will have to determine what their policy position is. Within Health, the policy position is that there are two categories of workforce. Category A are people who work very closely with and are closely exposed to patients. Category B are people who have contact with patients, but do not have the same degree of close contact. Both categories will have to be vaccinated against COVID-19. That is not everyone; it is for those two key categories of people.

Mr YAN: Where is the mechanism for that enforcement?

Ms FYLES: It is a policy—a condition of employment. It is not unlike other occupations' health and safety requirements. If you operate forklifts, you need a forklift licence. If you are serving alcohol, you need an RSA.

It would be that you are working in a higher-risk environment, but not exclusively to aged-care and health; in this role you need it. It is not necessarily defined by the position, because if you were working in a cancer care centre, for example, it could be that everyone there needs to be vaccinated, whereas if it is in the main tower of a hospital or clinic, it may just be as Dr Pain said—the staff who come into close contact.

Mr YAN: When can we expect to see directions from the CHO—I know there will not be a CHO direction that you have to be vaccinated ...

Ms FYLES: You will not see a health direction from the CHO. That is the whole point.

Mr YAN: The industry and employers will now make the determination as to who is required to be vaccinated, and the employer may be the Northern Territory Government?

Ms FYLES: Correct, or it may be AMSANT—an Aboriginal medical organisation—or one of the aged-care providers.

Mr YAN: For Territory workers, and moving forward from when this comes into effect, is there a time line on organisations like NT Health to provide a date and time they will implement this or could it be at any time?

Ms FYLES: There is no direction.

Mr YAN: As an employer, NT Health could make a determination that you have to be COVID vaccinated ...

Ms FYLES: We revert back to—it is already there. There is the policy and OH&S framework and there was the CHO direction, which has been removed. It is still there.

Mr YAN: COVID-19 vaccination would drop in along with the flu vaccination or something else?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr YAN: That will mean some changes to employment conditions because it might not sit there now.

Ms FYLES: It does sit there now.

Mr YAN: Does COVID-19 sit in the employment directions for vaccinations even though the employment directions may not have been in place when COVID arrived?

Dr PAIN: We put it in place in anticipating the need for it, but we decided the mandate was necessary before a number of other conditions.

Mr YAN: I needed to clarify that point because they are the questions people will be asking: 'Am I required to?' 'Can they force me to?' That is what happened during the mandate.

Ms FYLES: It is up to the OH&S under people's employment.

Mr MALEY: Can you explain why you thought it necessary to retrospectively invalidate the mandate clause?

Ms FYLES: Yes. We backed our health officials and will continue to do so. It was to ensure they had the legal protection regarding the directions being made.

Mr MALEY: Was it not secure?

Ms FYLES: We wanted to make the health advice abundantly clear all the way through. The decision was made on that.

Mr MALEY: What advice did you receive in relation to introducing the law? Why did you do it?

Ms FYLES: As I just pointed out, we back the decisions our CHOs made. When I say 'CHOs', there have been deputy CHOs and acting CHOs. It has been a significant period of time. We wanted to make it abundantly clear that they had a support.

Mr MALEY: Was it anything to deal with any legal cases in the Supreme Court?

Ms FYLES: It is to make sure the work they do was backed by law.

Mr MALEY: Was it anything to do with the Supreme Court challenges?

Ms FYLES: It was about making sure the directions they had made in the best interests of the health and care of Territorians was backed.

Mr MALEY: Were you concerned that CHO directions were an abuse of power? Is that why you made it law?

Ms FYLES: No.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many Northern Territory public servants were sacked because they did not comply with the vaccine mandate?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question for OCPE, under the Minister for Public Employment and the Commissioner.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What about just within Health?

Ms FYLES: There were about 50 people.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.18

Ms FYLES: There were 6,489 people not charged a fee at the Centre for National Resilience.

Mr YAN: I will follow up on the question from the Member for Araluen. There were 56 health staff terminated as a result of the vaccination mandate out of a total of 65. That is noted at 31 March.

Ms FYLES: That is what I said: around 50.

Mr YAN: Yes, 56 were terminated due to the vaccination mandate. Last year, the figure was only 17 terminations. That is a 282% increase in terminations. Will there be efforts made to re-recruit the 56 health staff who were terminated, now that the mandate is lifting?

Ms FYLES: In terms of the health staff, specifically, it could be that it is a policy requirement for them to be vaccinated. That would be a matter for the individual employer.

Mr YAN: The department is not going to reach out to the people who may be able to be re-employed by the agency?

Ms FYLES: We know how important the vaccine is. If someone feels they are now eligible to come forward, we regularly recruit to positions. From a policy perspective a large number of health employees need to be vaccinated not just for COVID-19, but other illnesses.

Mr YAN: I will come back to staffing later. Currently there are 35 CHO directions. They are set to be automatically revoked, unless the CHO re-introduces the direction. Which ones will be kept?

Ms FYLES: I have spoken about this important message for Territorians. The public health emergency will end at 11.59 pm tomorrow; every direction will go. The transitional legislation is for up to two years.

It may be that we have a number of directions. They could ease and as we see the cycle of viruses, for example the northern winter with new variants emerging. We would need to bring in different CHO directions. The same SEMSC process would be in place and we would receive health advice.

Four directions will remain; one of them is having to register your rapid antigen test. There are a number of infectious diseases you must register, but most of the tests are done through a laboratory so your result is automatically provided to the Centre for Disease Control. The RAT is a home test, and the requirement to report that remains.

The second one is the period of isolation. At present, someone has to isolate for seven days if they test positive to COVID-19. That could change; there could be no isolation or a shortened period of isolation. Perhaps the CHO could provide further information about that. It is presently a direction.

The other one is the masks in high risk settings, such as aged-care, prisons and hospitals. You have to wear a mask in those settings.

The fourth one is about the ability for police to enforce those directions. Police have quite broad powers, as we know, but they specifically like to have it in legislation that they can enact.

Mr MALEY: If you test positive for COVID, you have to remain isolated for seven days?

Ms FYLES: Presently, but that direction may be removed or shortened.

Dr PAIN: That is a good example of where the AHPPC has a very strong influence on this. At the moment, the AHPPC feels that the seven-day period is still necessary, but that is obviously under review and, in due course, it will end. We have not yet determined when that will be.

Ms FYLES: For example, the United States went to five days earlier this year.

Dr PAIN: Each of the jurisdictions will make that decision, but none of us would be prepared to stand out from the rest of Australia on that because it would create too much inconsistency and difficulty.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a time frame, when you expect, as a doctor...

Ms FYLES: I have asked him that.

Mr PAIN: I will follow the advice from the AHPPC when they say it is a reasonable thing to do. It is clearly on the horizon, but if you want me to guess when that might be or when I think it would be reasonable, I would say probably in the next couple of months.

Mr YAN: During your opening statement you spoke of the ACCHOs and their support and the importance of remote healthcare. How many remote clinics in the Territory have been closed or had reduced services, permanently or temporarily, in the financial year to date, and what were the reasons for these?

Ms FYLES: While information is coming to me—obviously COVID-19 provided an impact. We all struggle at certain times of the year to get the staffing resources. We rely on people who make the choice to come and work for a period of time, then have a break. It is a changed structure in remote clinics that we see more and more.

I have just been given some figures. One of the periods is Christmas. We see that as a challenge and more, with workforce being unable to travel due to border restrictions. Eleven clinics had reduced services, and presently we have five clinics getting services. They have a main clinic nearby, and they go to deliver services to that community a couple of days a week.

It is important for people to understand that these are primary healthcare clinics. They are there to provide a primary healthcare service. We acknowledge that in these remote communities they become a pseudo point of contact. We need to acknowledge that and work through a longer-term plan across government, because it may not be that a medical response is needed immediately, but that the community needs a response from a government or a non-government agency in that role, for example council or an NGO organisation.

It is clearly identifying the role of clinics. They are there to provide primary healthcare services, and they do an exceptional job. I have been at a clinic leading up to a weekend—they are not open on weekends. They are busy making sure people have their medication. This steps to the broader issue we face in the Northern Territory. We expect people to take medication but if they do not have a running fridge in their home or access to one, it is difficult. We provide vital services, but equally how do we overcome the challenges to provide certainty for those communities? Some of them operate from a hub model to provide that outreach service.

Mr YAN: Do you know the vacancy rate of staff in remote clinics is? Are you able to give us a breakdown by region and location? I am happy to take that on notice.

Ms FYLES: Yes, we take that on notice. Like I did with the previous one, if I am able to get the information I will come back to you.

Mr YAN: I will wait until you get the information.

Ms FYLES: Do you have the written question on this one as well? It is my understanding it has been provided.

Mr YAN: We only got those this morning. We are good, but we are not that good.

Ms FYLES: The figures jump around a little bit. I might take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.22

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

Mr YAN: What is the vacancy rate of staff in remote health clinics? Can I have that as a breakdown by region and/or location?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 1.22.

Mr YAN: The reason I asked that question is we have answers to written questions, which said that 1,400 health staff resigned on 31 March 2022. Last year the figure was 950. That is a 47% increase in resignations. Of these resignations, I am told that 742 were for areas other than the Top End. We have lost 450 more staff than last year. Can you explain why we have this mass level of resignations?

Ms FYLES: Health is a big agency, with over 7,000 people Territory-wide. We have a number of people who come to the Territory for a period of time, particularly during clinical training. The question you asked earlier was about remote health staff. It is important that we do not misrepresent the figures by painting that type of picture.

It is not uncommon for people to come here to fulfil a contract or do a period of training for a while. I know someone who left at the end of last year. They cannot wait to get back here, but because of their clinical training they have to go to another institution. We are trying to overcome that.

We are working with colleges to ensure some of the more advanced training can be undertaken in the Territory so there can be a process where specialists from interstate have a roster of visiting the Territory to upskill our people. We do that from Alice Springs and Darwin together and from Darwin to Nhulunbuy.

Mr YAN: Those numbers would be fairly constant year on year, if we have turnover from what you say. We have had an increase of 450 in one year.

Ms FYLES: I do not have that information; I am happy to take your word for it. It is a big agency and we see a turnover of staff. I am happy to seek advice about why potentially it would be 400 more.

Mr YAN: Of concern is that out of a total of 1,400, based on the figures I have been provided, 742 were outside the Top End. That is our regions: Katherine; Tennant Creek; Alice Springs; and out bush. That is a concern to me, having a remote electorate and servicing the people in our communities.

Ms FYLES: The only thing I can point to in the last period of time is that there was an impact with the borders and people who may be able to live in the Territory but have frequent visits back home. That may have been a factor driving that increase over the period of time.

The other point worth making regarding separations from the agency and why the figure would be higher was that we only ever employed some people on a shorter-term contract for COVID services. That could be why ...

Mr YAN: But a contract ...

Ms FYLES: I do not have the information before me.

Mr YAN: How do they get a contract—I understand how short-term contracts work; if you are on a short-term contract, you finish. But if you look at where we were sitting at the height of COVID, these figures are to March and our COVID issues did not start to drop away until late February, early March. I would like to think that we would not be letting people go when we our healthcare system is critically understaffed.

Ms FYLES: Our healthcare system has a high turnover. There were factors around people being employed, particularly with quarantining, that figure—the quarantine facilities, people doing home quarantine, and international travel had resumed. That could account for that drop-off.

Mr YAN: I am interested to see the figures, because this is a concern for me. Are you able to provide a breakdown of the level of these staff who have resigned, then how many of them are frontline workers?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take that on notice and to provide the information we can. There is a genuine reason—Health has a high turnover, and retention in the Northern Territory is something I have asked the chief health executive to work toward. It is important. A number of factors that drive that.

Equally, we had unprecedented times, particularly around the period you are quoting.

Question on Notice No 1.23

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

Mr YAN: As of 31 March 2022, 1,400 health staff had resigned. Over half of these—742—were from areas other than the Top End. Can you provide a breakdown of the levels of the staff who resigned? How many were frontline workers?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 1.23.

Mr GUYULA: Earlier in your opening statement you spoke about alcohol and other drugs. As remote communities are given the opportunity to negotiate alcohol management plans, how will the government help to provide alcohol and drug treatment in remote communities?

I would like to see community members, who are currently living around town camps, come home but it is important that we have local support for people who struggle with addiction. Is there anything in this budget or any way the government can support more programs on country?

Ms FYLES: To give you some reassurance, in the changes that are coming, the 112 communities that were GRAs—general restricted areas—or dry communities prior to the intervention go back to being GRAs. They will still be dry communities.

In other communities there is a large number, but a wide variety of places have been identified. In alcohol management plans, we believe each community should decide how alcohol is available in their community. We will be providing support. It is an addiction and needs a health-based approach.

We provide over \$24m to non-government organisations—Aboriginal medical organisations—to provide support services. This is for volatile substance abuse, rehabilitation, sobering-up shelters, counselling, information, residential treatment services, the alcohol and other drugs aftercare services, as well as the youth alcohol and other drug substance abuse programs. There are also small grants.

I acknowledge that in the Northern Territory we have a big problem with alcohol. We have put in place a range of measures. For those programs to be led by community on country is particularly important in this space to ensure people are afforded every opportunity of rehabilitation.

Mr GUYULA: In the question before this, I was talking about COVID. Could you advise if, during the pandemic, resources have been directed away from other areas of health and are leaving some people worse off than before the pandemic? For example, the current flu outbreak seems to have been hard for many clinics to cope with.

On a different issue, I have heard of high numbers of diabetes-related amputation following the COVID period. Have some health areas been neglected during the COVID period and now need greater investigation to look after people who have serious health concerns?

Ms FYLES: You are correct; I talked in my opening statement about the elective surgeries that have been deferred because of COVID. It is a huge concern to me as Health minister and something for which we are prioritising our resources. We have anecdotal evidence but it has not been presented in a clinical form to me.

We are seeing the impact of missed treatments—we call it a missed episode of treatment. It is a priority to ensure that we catch up on people who did not receive their treatment or a diagnosis.

In terms of the resources, we have tried to keep primary healthcare clinics open and running and providing those services. However, because people could not travel to appointments, there were missed episodes. It is a priority for us that people get the care they need so they do not have further impacts.

You mentioned the flu—Dr Pain can speak to this. We talked to the media about this yesterday. The flu vaccination is on track for the time of year, but the flu has arrived a bit earlier than we anticipated. That is why we are particularly focused on doing a blitz on flu vaccinations.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise the number of cases of rheumatic fever in the Northern Territory for each year over the past five years? Could you advise the number of people in the NT who currently live with rheumatic heart disease?

Ms FYLES: I will take that question on notice. I have a couple of figures here but the figures I have before me, when added, do not make sense.

Question on Notice No 1.24

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

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise the number of cases of rheumatic fever in the Northern Territory for each year over the past five years? Could you advise the number of people in the NT who currently live with rheumatic heart disease?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Minister for Mulka has been allocated the number 1.24.

Mr GUYULA: In the last estimates I asked about the ways that government performance is being measured in relation to the management of rheumatic heart disease. There appears to be no way to measure government performance in meeting the prevention and eradication of environmental health issues. Are you able to advise if you have defined clear measures and agency performance in this area?

Ms FYLES: The government structure of the national Rheumatic Fever Strategy has changed. The Australian Government and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation are co-designing a nationally coordinated approach to the implantation of Rheumatic Fever Strategy.

We are participating and contributing to that through the recently created Jurisdictional Advisory Committee—the JAC. This will help inform decisions on priority activities and funding for RHD. A significant amount of work has been put into place that is un-costed. Importantly, we have the Northern Territory Rheumatic Heart

Disease program, which goes through until 2022. We will be looking at that over the next financial year. It is an important question that you asked about how we can fully count the numbers and hold ourselves to account on implementing changes.

We have a natural increase in the numbers but the work that we are doing, particularly the impact of the work outside of the health space—housing is a key factor. We are working on that through the NT strategy.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Late last year you closed the Integrated Withdrawal and Assessment Service in Alice Springs. You talked about residential alcohol rehab in your opening statement. Why did you close it and what savings were made due to the closure of this facility? This was a 10-bed alcohol rehabilitation facility and one of the rare services we had of this kind. It provided specialised and exclusive rehabilitation ...

Ms FYLES: The advice I have is that the infrastructure was not suitable. Let me grab another official for you.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That facility was used by alcohol mandatory treatment from 2013 through to when it became the Integrated Withdrawal and Assessment Service under your government. It has been used for alcohol rehabilitation for the best part of 10 years now. It was a very good service, providing alcohol rehabilitation to people who would not normally ever access it—people like you and I in Alice Springs.

While I have the microphone, I thank Dr Pain and Dr Heggie for all of the hard work they have done for Territorians over the last few years.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, Member for Araluen. That will mean a lot to them. I will ensure it is passed on to Dr Heggie. I can see that it is genuine.

Joining me is Cecelia Gore, Executive Director of Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs. She leads this area in Health. Mental health has been a key priority for me. I recently gave Lauren Moss the portfolio of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, making it a standalone portfolio

Ms GORE: IWAS was run through the Central Australia Health Service. The main reason for its closure was that it was not considered suitable from a COVID infection perspective. Staff from the service were deployed to other areas of the health service for the period. Where people needed withdrawal, they could still access it through the Alice Springs Hospital. There has not been a high demand, partly because people were staying on community.

The service will reopen on 1 July. It was never intended to close forever. There has also been work to look at that model of care as more of a short stay and respite facility, to encourage people into the broader treatment system.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is good news; thank you.

Mr YAN: How many remote health clinics have private security now—in the last financial year? I would like to specify which ones in a breakdown by region.

Ms FYLES: It is something we need to use from time to time. Staff safety is an absolute priority, and we have done work, particularly with remote area nurses. We undertook a review in terms of implement recommendations and will continue to do so to ensure they have a safe workplace.

We work closely with the department of Infrastructure to ensure that whatever upgrades to facilities can be made—I think it is just Wadeye at the moment. That has been in response to recent broader community unrest. The focus is to keep clinics open when a community is faced with times of adversity. We have a process because there are incidents from time to time when our staff are unsafe in the community. They have incidents and we have a process in place where the NT Health chief executive talks to the Police Commissioner to ensure the safety of staff and the safety of that community.

We take this issue seriously. My understanding is that Wadeye is outside the reporting period because it was during April, May and June. We had to utilise some private security in Yuendumu as well, to ensure ...

Mr YAN: You might have some outside of Yuendumu and others in Central Australia, as well.

Ms FYLES: I am going on the advice the officials provided me. They checked, but I am happy to take it on notice if you would like me to.

Mr YAN: What is the expenditure? Maybe I could ask those on notice.

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take them both on notice. I am not trying to hide something; that is the advice.

Mr YAN: I raised it because I am aware there are other clinics.

Ms FYLES: An initial reaction in the past has been to remove nurses and clinic staff. Our focus now is working with police and non-government organisations. If that means sending in private security to help keep staff safe, we do that so the broader community does not miss out because of the misbehaviour of a few.

Question on Notice No 1.25

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

Mr YAN: How many remote health clinics have private security? Can you specify which ones and break it down by region? What was the expenditure on private security for remote health clinics over the last financial year, again broken down by region?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated number 1.25.

Mr YAN: Do you know how many break-ins occurred at clinics in the reporting period, and are you able to break that down by region?

Ms FYLES: I will take that on notice.

Mr YAN: I have a few more questions along those lines, would you like to take them all on notice?

Ms FYLES: Yes, and if at the end I can provide any commentary, I will.

Question on Notice No 1.26

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

Mr YAN: How many break-ins have occurred at remote clinics in the reporting period, and can you break that down by region? How many instances of damage were there to remote clinics in the reporting period, what were the costs of those repairs, and can you break that down by region? How many assaults were there on remote clinic staff in the reporting period, and can you break that down by region? How many assaults were there on remote clinic patients or family members in the reporting period, and can you break that down by region?

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

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The questions asked by the Member for Namatjira have been allocated number 1.26.

Ms FYLES: You could also ask Police and DIPL, because those questions would be answered by them.

While we are talking about it, Minister Moss is responsible for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, so mental health questions will be asked of her later in the week. I do not want anyone to miss any questions. As I hold the Health portfolio, I am happy to answer questions today. I just wanted to make that clear because it is a change from the last few years.

Mr YAN: Last week I was advised that remote clinics will go to a centralised call system, along the lines of calls to 000 going to a central point where calls are dealt with and managed. I am informed that remote clinics

are going down this path, where previously you called the remote clinic and someone would be there to answer it, maybe after hours. Now it will go to a call centre, and the call will be triaged. Are you able to confirm if you are moving to a centralised call centre system and, if so, for which clinics?

Ms FYLES: I will get Dr Frank Daly to speak to this. You know that I have a declared conflict of interest with CareFlight and the Treasurer. As I said to the Estimates Committee before, Minister Lawler is up tomorrow. This does not really touch upon that, but it is being explored for good reasons.

Dr Daly will talk to it. I just raised the declaration of a conflict of interest because it is breaching that.

Dr DALY: The triaging of calls or appropriate reaching of calls has been an issue, in particular when there are calls after hours or in emergencies. In the past some people called a station number in an emergency rather than 000 and on occasions they have been appropriately answered and the call dealt with. On other occasions, because of the staffing of local police stations—maybe the Police Commissioner should be answering this—there has been trouble with the phone not being answered because they are out of the location.

There has been a recommendation in the case of emergencies, that the caller dials 000 so that the appropriate level of urgency can be gauged and be directed accordingly to police, ambulance or the local health system. In terms of the health triage of calls in remote communities, in particular in Central Australia, that is now being done by the MRAC system, which you are probably familiar with. It is an impressive system; I urge you to visit it.

In Alice Springs Hospital there is co-located a critical care physician and nurse who provide medical input into the assessment of calls from remote areas. Co-located with that are representatives from RFDS and ambulance. They are able to make sure the appropriate advice is given. If the patient needs to be retrieved from a remote Aboriginal community, they can provide advice in the interim. Between the critical care physicians and RFDS, they can make sure they are appropriately using their dynamic assets in managing logistics appropriately, taking into account load factors, pilot hours, maintenance of the aircraft and making sure that aircraft goes in the right direction at the right time.

I do not know whether your question was referring to that system but that has been an evolution of the previous district medical officer model, where there was always a DMO on call to assist with primary healthcare and emergencies in remote communities.

Mr YAN: It was my understanding that where there is a clinic in a community, there was an after-hours number for the clinic that people could call should they need to. Those calls will now not go to their local clinic, but will go to MRAC or somewhere else.

Dr DALY: This is a proposal. I am not sure if it is just in Central Australia. It has been contemplated in Central Australia but is already being used by a number of the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to relieve the workload in community locations. One of the issues people have when they go out to work for four, six or 12 weeks at a time in a remote location is that they are in the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If they have to take calls in the middle of the night—and sometimes calls are not of an urgent nature—it disturbs their sleep, which is detrimental in terms of their ability to get appropriate rest and recharge for the following day.

We are now contemplating a system, which has already been enacted in a number of the ACCHOs, where they will go to a more centralised location to work out whether the person in the community needs to be woken and whether it is appropriate. A large portion of the calls are not an emergency, and it is perfectly appropriate to give interim advice and allow the staff member in the community to rest.

We are hoping that this will in some part assist with recruitment and retention in communities because of the unremitting nature of the work they do and the enormous commitment they make in communities.

Ms FYLES: That is the point I made earlier about our primary healthcare clinics. They are primary healthcare—the first ones to put up their hands in emergency situations. You know this well, Member for Namatjira, once people get hold of the number—we see it with police and emergency health services—they become that point of call, particularly after hours.

We need to balance our staff getting adequate respite and, equally, that they are available when there is a trauma urgency after hours.

Mr YAN: Have you allocated a budget line for this call-centre model?

Dr DALY: No, not at this stage.

Mr YAN: When do you envisage it becoming operational?

Dr DALY: It is still in the conception and design stage on our side. This has already been done in one or two of the ACCHOs. It is something my original executive directors are exploring as an option.

Mr YAN: I go straight back to the number one consideration for our communities, which is consultation. What plans do you have in place for the consultative model to get that message out to communities?

Dr DALY: Consultation on communities is paramount. If we were to make a change like this, we would do extensive consultation in the communities, not just with the staff but with our community members, TOs and the like to make sure it is acceptable and appropriate.

Mr YAN: If we go to a centralised call-centre model, will it be one call going somewhere or will there be something based in the regions, like Top End, and Central Australia et cetera, so that at least the people will have some knowledge about the area they are dealing with.

Dr DALY: Yes, that is very important. The conceptual design being described to me is that it would be regionally based. A number of remote communities—not central for the entire Territory or an entire region. I agree with your premise that it needs to be local knowledge and understanding the context and setting of a community.

Ms FYLES: As we transition services to Aboriginal medical control we need to make sure—it is the primary healthcare, but how we cater for the emergency response. The points you made a valid; and we need to bring community with us. It is an opportunity to ensure the safe working environment for our staff and the delivery of high-quality healthcare.

There have been changes with technology. It is an opportune time for us to explore this.

Mr YAN: What are the current overtime costs carried out by clinical staff at the NT's five main hospitals?

Ms FYLES: Do you want the overall?

Mr YAN: Yes.

Ms FYLES: These are the figures from 1 July through to 31 March. There has been a significant impact on our workforce from COVID, as you would be aware. We have had a number of clinicians and their family members with COVID. Recently there have been changes to isolation but even when people had processes, as an essential worker, to undertake other measures and still continue to work, it had a significant impact.

Of our six main hospitals, Alice Springs had \$5.5m in overtime; Gove had \$620,000; Katherine had \$660,000—I have rounded these slightly—Palmerston had \$1.2m in overtime; RDH had \$12m; and Tennant Creek had \$520,000. I should have said that it is not just for staff needing to take leave. Also with additional patients—particularly when I talked about how many people we had in hospital with COVID on 12 February—there was an amazing workload for our clinicians and those who support them in caring for people.

There was that factor, amongst others, with overtime. That is where we have additional funding into this year's budget for a COVID response. Part of that is overtime.

Mr YAN: What are your projections for end of financial year? Every department works out stuff for estimates and then does a 12-month projection.

Ms FYLES: No, we do not have projections through to 30 June before us. We could say that we have seen a significant burden from the impact of COVID. The flu is having an impact on the hospital setting. We had significant numbers of people in hospital with flu last week.

Mr YAN: I can extrapolate that. We are effectively nearly \$20m for nine months. We are talking \$6.8m per quarter, so we would expect that to be about \$25m extrapolated out to end of financial year—off the top of my head.

Ms FYLES: It may be a little higher because of that peak. It could be higher because the flu impact in hospital is quite significant at the moment.

Mr YAN: In recent media you stated that you will not be providing the flu vaccination free for all Territorians, despite the reports of the severe flu season and severe illness from the current flu. Do you have figures on how many Territorians have had influenza this year, how many have been hospitalised, and how many have ended up in ICU?

Ms FYLES: We have had 3,210 cases this year. We suggest that is an under-estimate of cases. There were 567 people hospitalised, 83% of those are Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander Territorians.

Mr YAN: How many in ICU?

Ms FYLES: I know we had a figure last week of five in intensive care. I do not have a figure today, but that shows you how serious it can be.

Mr YAN: Yes, those figures are up there with some of the COVID figures—maybe not at the height but during some of our peaks.

How many Territorians have been evacuated from communities due to influenza? Are you able to break that down by community and what the cost might be? Are we running a similar system as we were during COVID or not?

Ms FYLES: I do not think we are in the data collection, but we have some figures because they have been shared.

Dr PAIN: I have some figures for last week. We get them weekly from CareFlight now. We had 11 people evacuated from community last week. We will be getting that data again this week. They have been widely spread, for example there were two from Maningrida. I cannot remember all the others. That is a high number of influenza retrievals for this time of the year.

Mr YAN: The government and opposition have done media on this over the last couple of days. Other states have promised free flu vaccines for everyone based on the severity of the flu season. Do you have any idea what the cost would be to provide the flu vaccination to every Territorian for free? Have you done the calculations on these figures?

Ms FYLES: It is not a decision based on cost. We need to make sure we get the vaccine to the most vulnerable—120,000 Territorians are eligible under the national immunisation program, which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, women who are pregnant and children six months through to five years of age.

We want to get the vaccine to the most vulnerable to reduce the burden of illness. We need to be careful not to pivot our resources and provide it free to the people who would probably get vaccinated or are not necessarily the most vulnerable. Dr Pain and I have had this discussion over a few weeks. Queensland was the first jurisdiction to make the decision. We have a great resource in the primary health setting of GPs and pharmacists, who provide the flu vaccination. They base each year on how much flu vaccine they need and charge for that service. It is a small fee; I think it is \$15 to \$20.

I know that you do not trust me; I am a politician, like you. I will pass to Dr Pain, who is a health expert.

Dr PAIN: We gave advice about this a couple weeks ago. We sought advice from our colleagues, as we usually do. There is some divergence in view, but our core public health advice on this—as well as how to run our vaccination programs—is that we need to focus on the most vulnerable. Fifty per cent of our population are already eligible under the national immunisation program; we need to get those people vaccinated, hence the action we took over the weekend.

We want to get children under five years of age vaccinated; the rates are very low. The problem is that people do not realise it as they have gotten used to COVID, which is not a problem in those children but influenza is. They can get seriously unwell. People over 65 are generally more susceptible, as well as Aboriginal people over 50.

That is where our focus is. When we see our rates coming up, and we are confident that we managed to get to those people, we can consider expanding. At this point to would not be the best use of our resources. The

main issue is not so much the problem with access to vaccines; we have those available. We had logistics issues with one community recently. It is an issue of vaccinators and the ability to get people to them.

Mr MALEY: You have enough vaccine; you just cannot get it out there?

Dr PAIN: We can get about there. There is no problem getting it out. It is the people who give the vaccinations. That is our limiting step.

Mr MALEY: But if you have enough vaccination in storage, why could you not just open clinics in Darwin and say, 'Come and get it if you want it?'

Ms FYLES: Because we need clinically trained people to deliver the vaccine.

Mr MALEY: I am assuming that doctors and local clinics could do it. But if you have enough vaccine available can I just go and get one? I would not want to take it off vulnerable people, I accept that, but if you have enough why not just say, 'We have heaps ...'

Ms FYLES: We have a strong system of rolling it out. Our GPs and pharmacists are key to that. They have a plan and enact it every year. We do not provide it free to everyone, because we have the vaccine and not the vaccinators. We pivoted with Marrara as there was a stagnation in the COVID-19 vaccination. We have that resource there until the end of (inaudible). We are keeping that for flu but we cannot create vaccinators; you have to be qualified to do that.

Mr MALEY: Correct me if I am wrong, but if you go to the chemist you have to buy the vaccines from somewhere else, which is why they charge \$15 for it. If you gave it to them for free would they still charge \$15 or could that just be the pharmacist giving them a needle?

Dr PAIN: The issue is that those providers, who we need to encourage and who will continue to provide vaccines to those who are not eligible under the national vaccination program, have purchased their vaccines and they are delivering them. If we were to make those free, it is very disruptive to them.

Mr MALEY: If you made it free for them, they could still charge their time to give you the jab. Instead of \$15 it might be \$5 because they do not have to buy the vaccine from wherever they buy it from.

Dr PAIN: Yes, I do not particularly want to get into that issue. The advice is very clear. The restriction on access is about vaccinators and that is the advice.

Mr MALEY: A way around it is if you have enough vaccine and supply it to the chemist, they can reduce their cost because they do not have to buy the vaccine. Is that feasible?

Ms FYLES: I do not think it is as simple as that. In Queensland when they announced their program, there was negative pushback from some of the planned programs. We need to be careful about what are we trying to achieve. We do not just want to go and vaccinate the people who would probably already get it and be happy to pay \$15 or \$20 for it.

Mr MALEY: As long as you are happy to pay for it or get it for free.

Ms FYLES: People want everything for free, we know that. We do not want to divert our resources from the people who will probably get vaccinated or, more importantly, who are not in that 50% of Territorians who are particularly vulnerable. We need to make sure we target that 50% of people...

Mr MALEY: Could you not do both? All you have to do is provide the vaccine to the chemist.

Ms FYLES: We are loving your ideas. We have not ruled it out going forward, but you are hearing from Dr Pain that presently we really need to promote to those people who are eligible for free.

Mr MALEY: I fully accept that because they are vulnerable, but you could have two prongs going at once in giving it to anyone who wants it. I would be saying no, if you did not have enough. But you have enough vaccine. The problem is getting it out to the people to give you the jab. The chemist and the doctors have to go and buy it. Could you not have both things going at once? Get the vulnerable people done and do anyone who wants it—if not for free, at a reduced cost. Then the chemist does not have to buy the physical vaccine from wherever they buy it from. At the moment, they can get it from the government for a reduced price. It should make it more incentive to get it if it costs \$5 versus \$15.

Dr PAIN: As the Chief Minister said, we are open to whatever will work for us, so we will take this on.

Ms FYLES: The Primary Health Network helps with GPs and pharmacists, and there has been extensive consultation with them. I point to the commentary in other jurisdictions which jumped at it but it might not necessarily achieve what you are trying to do.

Mr YAN: I welcome the news that Marrara facility can do flu vaccines in the Top End. It is a good, commonsense approach. What is taking place outside of the Top End in the likes of Katherine, Tennant Creek and Central Australia which is probably getting hit harder than the other areas because of the cold weather at the moment?

Ms FYLES: The vaccine is available through all the primary healthcare clinics. It is available through the community care centres and the Aboriginal medical organisations. There was already a strong program. We just had the opportunity at Marrara; we had the vaccinators and the lease on the facility. It was a decision made to pivot that resource rather than having people sitting around idle, but there are certainly resources in the regions across the Territory.

Mr YAN: Does the vaccination hub in Alice Springs still exist? Could that be pivoted to provide assistance with flu vaccinations?

Ms FYLES: At 44 Bath Street on the corner? That is already closed.

Mr YAN: There was a vaccination centre on the hospital campus.

Ms FYLES: There is still a strong vaccination program in Central Australia. It was just that resources and opportunities were in the Top End.

Mr YAN: I am very conscious of time, Chief Minister. We are running out quickly.

Ms FYLES: We have another 20 minutes.

Mr YAN: I need another six or eight hours.

Ms FYLES: I appreciate you have asked a lot of in-depth questions and it has been very amicable, as it has been with you, Member for Mulka.

Mr YAN: I have regional questions about Tennant Creek. We know that renal dialysis facilities are urgently needed in Elliott, Canteen Creek and Ti Tree, while additional chairs and beds are needed in Tennant Creek, Borroloola, Robinson River, Ali Curung and Alpururulam. Is there any funding in the budget for dialysis facilities in the Barkly region? If so, which communities has funding allocated?

Ms FYLES: Sadly, renal dialysis is a growing need in the Northern Territory. We have allocated significant resources. We also worked with the Commonwealth Government. One of the most exciting announcements, apart from prevention, was the change in the Medicare rebate a couple of years ago that recognised a very remote dialysis treatment Medicare item. It is almost \$700, which comes close to the cost of providing those services.

They are not straightforward to simply roll out. There is intricate infrastructure and water that needs to be provided to people. You would be well aware of the significant investment at Alice Springs Hospital of \$25m for new ambulatory care, which will include 64 renal chairs. We acknowledge the Commonwealth Government for that funding.

In Tennant Creek we have 17 chairs presently that can cater for 66 patients. We are keen to work with the non-government organisations. Purple House provides services that springs to mind. We are open to providing more renal chairs in community. I have been working on delivering renal chairs to Wadeye. I have had numerous visits meeting with traditional owners and people from that region who receive dialysis treatment. All of those communities are important; it is just complex infrastructure to roll out.

The change in the Medicare item was welcome. We have a renal strategy in place. This change came in after that and superseded it. We have self-led care, where a family member might care for someone and help provide the dialysis. I acknowledge that it is difficult; this nurse-led care option is a step forward.

Mr YAN: Is there no funding to increase the number of renal beds in the Barkly region?

Ms FYLES: We are making that investment into Alice Springs. I have to seek advice about further infrastructure. The thinking has changed in the last couple of years, away from a centralised model and self-care model to nurse-led model. It is difficult infrastructure.

Wadeye is a big community. Getting that off the ground has been a lot of work for me and the chief executive, Dr Frank Daly, and DIPL.

Mr YAN: I understand about Wadeye, with its location. I speak for the people of the Barkly. Their closest renal facilities are Alice Springs or Katherine—and that is if you are in Tennant Creek. You have a 500-kilometre drive to Alice Springs or a 600 kilometre drive to Katherine to access some of those specialist services. Being able to provide those services closer to home would improve and assist people.

Ms FYLES: Yes. The services in Tennant Creek provide 60-odd episodes of treatment a week. I would like to see it happen in more communities, but it is difficult work and not just based on infrastructure; water is a factor. In our policy, we want nurse-led care in remote locations.

Mr YAN: With the changes to this Medicare policy ...

Ms FYLES: It was a Medicare item.

Mr YAN: Medicare, yes. I understand what that means because there are a number of people, particularly in remote areas, who struggle because they are classed in the wrong location. Anyway, that is another two-hour discussion.

Ms FYLES: Remote and very remote, yes.

Mr YAN: Will you consider funding in the future? With changes to the Medicare item, will you be considering implementing funding to provide these services, or at least provide funding to the likes of Purple House, to deliver these services?

Ms FYLES: The delivery of these services has seen remote community clinic upgrades. We need to incorporate renal chairs into the upgrades and new clinic builds. We have an ongoing source of revenue to fund those services, but it is difficult infrastructure to deliver. There is the opportunity for partnerships with the non-government organisations such as Purple House, but there are also opportunities which you see in Alice Springs with Fresenius to deliver those services—a PPP type arrangement. That source of revenue to pay for the treatment ensures people can get treatment close to home and do not have to be displaced.

Mr YAN: I have been working with Purple House, which has been pushing to get renal services into Atitjere and not been supported by government to do it. They are looking to external investors and philanthropists to provide funding. Would you advise why government has not stepped up to provide that assistance to Purple House, rather than them having to go out and find money external to government to be able to provide those services to people in remote areas?

Ms FYLES: Even though the Health budget is \$2bn, there is never enough to go around, so we try to balance it out. The current renal strategy comes to a conclusion at the end of this year. It is not just working with non-government organisations; it is the ability for public-private partnerships to come on board and provide the equity.

This is a difficult but, unfortunately, growing need in the Northern Territory. It is a key priority to provide those services as close to home as possible. I can assure you, from my perspective as Minister for Health, it is something I am driving. The chief executive will nod his head at that, but you cannot just snap your fingers and have that water source and infrastructure put in place.

I think there is a role for non-government organisations and the Commonwealth Government in this space. I look forward to having these conversations with the new assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians, Malarndirri McCarthy, when I head to Canberra, to help us get these services in communities. I think it provides an opportunity for people to stay in the community—the leadership provided is invaluable.

Mr YAN: While I am speaking about the Barkly and Tennant Creek, we have the Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy to improve access to quality and culturally responsive health services. The Tennant Creek Hospital has lost the Patient Assistance Travel administration position, a purchasing officer

and a business manager. Out in the regions, Epenarra has lost two positions and the clinic is now only working a few days a week, when Canteen Creek staff are able to go across and man it.

Will Health return to these positions? If not, why are we not returning these positions to the Barkly?

Ms FYLES: It is important to have services in the regions. In terms of the Patient Assistance Travel person, it was an operational decision. Often those people need to provide support around the clock, so it is a service not necessarily delivered Monday to Friday. It was an operational decision made by the department so that they could process PATS forms in a timely manner. They made that decision and may wish to speak to that.

The second part of your question was?

Mr YAN: Tennant Creek also lost a purchasing officer and a business manager.

Ms FYLES: I do not have information on that to hand, but I am happy to hand to the chief executive to provide comments.

Dr DALY: I will invite the regional executive director of the Barkly to join us; we are doing quite a bit of work making sure we have the right resources to manage services in the Barkly.

Ms FYLES: While they are coming into the room, I will make further comment about improving the level of service delivery. I know it is tough for a region, but decisions are made because we have a team of people and we are trying to make the best operational decisions. It is not because we do not like a certain area.

Lisa has just joined us. We are discussing the patient travel and a couple of other positions.

Mr YAN: Purchasing officer and business manager positions.

Dr DALY: I will make some introductory comments while she gets comfortable. I cannot speak specifically about those two positions, but Lisa has been leading a piece of work. She has been in place since late last year as our new regional executive director and has been doing considerable work with her counterparts in Central Australia to have the appropriate resources there, as well as David's office, to manage not only the hospital but the primary remote services and alcohol and drug services.

Ms BARNES: The two positions you talked about, in particular the purchasing officer, are still within the service in our stores department, working closely with the central stores out of Alice Springs, but being that connection, and is still retained within Tennant Creek Hospital.

The business manager role has been absent from the Tennant Creek Hospital for a number of years now but a number of those functions are still being picked up through our operations manager and finance team.

Mr MALEY: Is the Patient Assistance Travel Service admin officer who used to run that—being managed out at Alice Springs now?

Ms BARNES: That is correct.

Mr MALEY: Will the business manager position be advertised soon?

Ms BARNES: The position was reallocated into the finance team. It sits within that and provides support to Tennant Creek Hospital.

Mr MALEY: Have the positions been cut?

Ms BARNES: Not cut, reallocated into that team.

Mr MALEY: The other ones were Epenarra Health Centre, where we have lost positions. That clinic is now being serviced out of Canteen Creek. Will Epenarra reopen, or will it continue to be serviced out of Canteen Creek?

Ms FYLES: Before you came in, Lisa, we were saying that the challenge of staffing remote communities, and the shift in the service—these are remote primary healthcare clinics but there is also an expectation on whether it is something for the whole of government to discuss how we support communities with a 24/7 response—whatever they may need to be.

Mr MALEY: Epenarra is not isolated, either. I have a clinic in my electorate—Engawala—which was a seven-days-a-week clinic with evening staff.

Ms FYLES: I do not think they were ever a seven-days-a-week clinic. They were Monday to Friday clinics from 8 am to 4 pm. We have amazing staff who take their responsibilities above and beyond, and they deliver services seven days a week, 24/7. That is not sustainable and not what it was set up to do. That is the point. It is uncomfortable to talk about, but we can come up with a model where we deliver emergency services into remote communities in a sustainable manner for everybody.

Mr YAN: I am very wary of time. We have seven minutes left. Palmerston hospital ...

Ms FYLES: The one you mob could not build!

Mr YAN: Oh no, it has started.

Ms FYLES: You dug a hole and filled it in! We will let you say ...

Mr YAN: It is there.

I take my hat off the staff at Palmerston. They are great people, who do a great job. How many ED beds do we have open?

Ms FYLES: It is an operational decision faced day to day, depending on the hours of the day. Regarding the overtime that has been required across the Northern Territory hospitals due to the impact of COVID—in caring for patients and the extra resources—our own staff were going off sick. We have a number of beds there. Speaking from memory, I think it is 18.

Palmerston and Royal Darwin Hospital operate in conjunction to provide care. We always look at how we can deliver those services operationally.

Mr YAN: Having 18 beds in ED—how many are open today?

Ms FYLES: I would not know because it is not my job to know exactly how many beds ...

Mr YAN: I am sure there is someone there ...

Ms FYLES: It would vary with the time of the day. There is no point staffing beds when we do not have patients. We need to make sure we match the patients, staff and operational times.

Mr YAN: I know that ED beds were restricted in Palmerston last year and the year before. It went from running a full complement of ED beds down to, I believe, five or six and maybe even four.

Ms FYLES: How about I get the ED doctor to talk about the ED beds? Would that work? Dr Frank Daly is now the chief executive.

Dr DALY: You are speaking of an issue that we had with nursing and medical staff manning the Royal Darwin Hospital and the Palmerston Regional Hospital emergency departments, last year in August. We undertook a review with staff and had an external group help us analyse the service delivery model, staffing ratios and rostering, to give us advice.

We also reallocated staff from other areas to assist in the short term. The answer was that we did not need to close the emergency department. We could continue operating an appropriate service, but we could swing the beds and increase and decrease our as demand required over a 24-hour and seven day a week cycle. Obviously, the demand for beds is different at 2 am than it is at 2 pm.

That staffing and operational model has served the department well. We moved out of that heightened issue last September. They are now using that model permanently. I could not tell you the number of beds that are being staffed this minute, but that is an operational decision, which is determined between the head of the medical department and the nursing director in the department from hour to hour and day to day, to make sure that they have the appropriate capacity for their demand as they project it.

Mr MALEY: Did the staff being sent to the Howard Springs centre—the 400 staff—have an effect?

Ms FYLES: No, it was a myth. There were challenges with health staff around Australia and the world. That is something we are trying to overcome by growing our own workforce, but people with those skills were not migrating to Australia; they were sticking closer to home on the east coast. That was a factor.

The Howard Springs facility provided the quarantining. There were some medical staff, but the people who run the emergency department were not required at Howard Springs.

Mr YAN: Dr Daly, thank you for your advice on the changes that have happened at Palmerston ED. What would be the average on a day-to-day basis—I know there are 18 beds, and I understand that you do not have the staff to run 18 beds. You might not need to run 18 beds in ED. Do you have any idea of what the average of beds per day is for ED?

Dr DALY: I have been advised with that we have a number of beds open today and they are flexing up the emergency observation ward beds this afternoon as they need to. I could not give you what the average number is, but we have replete data regarding the number of presentations coming to the hospital. They have not changed substantially from one year to the next. That demand is being met.

Mr MALEY: Are there 18 beds there now?

Ms FYLES: That was a figure I recall from when the facility first opened.

Mr MALEY: That is the full complement of beds; are they still there or have you taken some?

Dr DALY: The beds are still physically there.

Ms FYLES: That is the figure I can remember from the opening. There was some conjecture that I may have gotten that figure wrong. I am happy to provide that offline. For the month of March, for example, Palmerston ED had 2,706 patients, which averaged to 87 patients per day.

Mr CHAIR: Last questions.

Mr YAN: What is the cost of transporting patients from Palmerston to Royal Darwin Hospital?

Ms FYLES: I will declare a conflict on that, because CareFlight have that contract.

Dr DALY: The cost to transfer patients from the Palmerston Regional Hospital to the Royal Darwin Hospital, in the reporting period, was \$1.85m.

Ms FYLES: That is for the nine months.

Mr YAN: Thank you, Dr Daly. I have a lot more questions, but I have been shut down.

Mr CHAIR: The time has expired.

Ms FYLES: There is one minute to go on this.

Mr CHAIR: It just ticked over to 5 pm.

Ms FYLES: (inaudible) for comparison 2021 was zero, 2020 was one, 2019 was four and 2018 was three, and we already had six in ICU ...

Mr YAN: With influenza?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you Chief Minister and all the agency staff who appeared and some who did not. Everyone has clearly prepared and done a power of work.

The committee concluded.
