

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

MINISTER UIBO'S PORTFOLIOS

ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE

Mr CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. It being 8.30 am, we will recommence estimates hearings with the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. I welcome you, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, first I acknowledge we are meeting on Larrakia country and pay my respects—on behalf of my team, my agency and myself—to the Larrakia elders past, present and future.

I introduce the senior officials who are at the table and accompanying me today for this estimates hearing: the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, Ms Gemma Lake; the Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Mr Craig Smyth; and the Chief Operating Officer, Ms Alecia Brimson.

Mr CHAIR: I will now invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy before moving on output-specific questions and finally non-output specific budget-related questions.

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

I remind honourable members, as I did yesterday for the Minister for Territory Families, Minister Worden, that we have an option to go *in camera*. Being Attorney-General, dealing with sensitive matters, you have the option to go *in camera*, which is a private hearing, if you or your officials see fit.

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, I also advise the committee that division heads responsible for each of the output groups will join me at the table as required. I will introduce them once they join me.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a brief opening statement. The department is a large and very diverse one. Its mission is to protect people's rights and interest through the delivery of an integrated, fair and accessible justice system. The department supports me, as the first law officer of government, and delivers legal services and representation to government. The department administers 158 pieces of legislation which support the government's legislative program through review and reform work. The department provides support to victims of crime and administers a strong and responsive justice system in the Territory.

In addition, the department promotes community safety through correctional interventions and regulates workplace health and safety. It also play a key role in protecting the rights and interest of Territorians through a number of independent officers.

The department encompasses seven output groups. The first is Legal Services, which provides government with the quality legal advice, representation and policy development, supports victims of violent crime and conduct important research into the criminal justice system.

The Correctional Services output group provides a safe, secure and humane custodial service that targets reoffending through focused rehabilitation programs, education and training. Correctional Services is also responsible for monitoring and supervising community-based offenders to ensure compliance with orders of the court and the Parole Board of the Northern Territory, for whom they also provide secretariat support.

The Court and Tribunal Services output group provides administrative services to enable delivery of justice to the Territory community by courts, tribunals and fines recovery. It is important to note that whilst the CEO is the accountable officer under the *Financial Management Act* and the *Public Employment and Management Act* for the administration of the department, many of its arms are independent in the delivery of their functions by virtue of statutory appointments and functions.

The Director of Public Prosecutions is one such statutory office. The DPP continues to provide an independent public prosecutions service to the Territory and support to witnesses and victims throughout the criminal justice process.

The Independent Officers output group, which includes a range of independent statutory bodies, continues the important role of protecting community rights.

The NT WorkSafe output is an independent regulator and ensures that businesses and workers meet their responsibilities under the law in regard to workplace health and safety. NT WorkSafe also provides assistance to businesses and workers to meet their responsibilities through workplace visits, advice, audits and inspections.

The Corporate and Governance output group continues to deliver high-quality service supports to the department, with continued focus on increasing efficiencies and streamlining internal service delivery. The reform that is associated with the Northern Territory Government centralisation of corporate services had significant change to this output.

I am happy to invite questions from the committee as appropriate.

Mr CHAIR: Are there questions on the opening statement?

Mr EDGINGTON: Thank you for the opening statement, minister, and thank you to all the staff here today to support you at this estimates hearing. It is a big portfolio and I am looking forward to getting through as many questions as possible today.

Victims of crime is a big issue. One of my first questions is that we often hear that Victims of Crime has run out of money. It is a serious issue which is raised all the time in the community. Did Victims of Crime run out of money last financial year and what is the budget this year?

Ms UIBO: The work which is done on supporting victims of crime and their families, in often a very dramatic time, is extremely important. Acknowledging the work of that division and how sensitive some of the matters are and their care and commitment to ensure that victims get the best service possible is definitely a first priority for our division. The division deals with some difficult and challenging circumstances across the NT.

Some of the areas we are working on to further support victims of crime and reduce crime in the NT is ultimately to keep communities safe. To make sure Territorians are safe, whether in their own home, in the community or in businesses—the work is still ongoing. This division is extremely important in delivering that service and the skill level is commendable for our staff. I thank the staff in the unit for their work to support Territorians through those traumatic times.

The CVSU has received an additional \$1.5m ongoing in this year's NT budget, which highlights our government's commitment to put victims of crime first. It meant an additional \$1.25m for victims' financial assistance payments and \$0.25m for an additional full-time equivalent employee to improve processing times. This will allow the CVSU to recruit an additional two officers to assist with the processing of payments and address the current applications list. In the 2021–22 budget there is an amount of \$7.754m for this unit and the CVSU is currently operating within its revised budget for this coming financial year.

Mr MALEY: Can you tell the community how long it takes on average to get compensated if you are a victim of crime?

Ms UIBO: The average time for making a decision under the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act* is just under three years.

Mr MALEY: To confirm, if you are a victim of crime it takes three years to get compensation, on average?

Ms UIBO: On average, in terms of the numbers, data and processes which are attached to the criteria to meet particular areas to be fully assessed, sometimes there can be delays. Medical and specialist information is collated through the unit which provides support for the application for that victim.

Mr MALEY: Three years is an extraordinary long period of time to get compensation. Could you explain some of these delays?

Ms UIBO: That was part of the previous answer. It is an average time; it is not the waiting list time.

Mr MALEY: Some are longer?

Ms UIBO: Some may be longer; some may be shorter. We have calculated an average time. There are areas outside the unit's control when they are waiting for medical reports, police reports, insurance reports et cetera, to support the victim's application. They have to collate all of that information for their application.

Mr MALEY: Is there any support available for those victims while they are waiting on the average of three years for their compensation?

Ms UIBO: If we move to that output later on, we will get the department division head to come and answer some of the particulars of those details.

Mr MALEY: I am just trying to get it now. You raised it in your answer. Can you explain that to us now?

Ms UIBO: You are now talking about operational matters, so I would bring in the division head to talk about the operational details. I mentioned it in the opening statement and gave you the overarching outlook of the department and the services. I am happy to talk in more detail once the division head is here when we get to that output.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us an average of what the payout compensation is per victim of crime?

Ms UIBO: The figures may vary greatly due the individual circumstances and what the application may be surrounding in terms of the incident that has occurred. We could talk in more detail in that output if ...

Mr MALEY: Which output is that exactly?

Ms UIBO: It will be in Output 1.3.

Mr MALEY: You said earlier that you would put on two extra officers to assist in the payment and the processing of these claims. Why has it taken your government five years to do that?

Ms UIBO: We recognise that this important unit has experienced some delays in processing that. We recognise that having more staff to support those victims and often very skilled and trained staff—allowing that through this upcoming budget to be able to support the work of the unit is important.

They have been operating within their budget, which we commend and respect, but we have provided more of that funding to deliver a better service.

Mr MALEY: You did not answer my question. Why has it taken you five years if the average wait time is three years for a victim to get compensated? Why has it taken five years to realise that and put on two extra officers?

Ms UIBO: Again, it is based on individual circumstances and cases, and each case is different. Unfortunately, there is no formula that you can tick and flick. We are dealing with people in traumatic circumstances. There can be delays through the other criteria to support applications. Sometimes victims are not necessarily ready to talk about the incident, so you need to allow for time and support. I am happy to move on to some of the operational aspects during Output 1.3.

Over the last three years, CVSU has been working to improve its processes and look at the restructure of the unit in order to increase the efficiencies and maximise some of the positive outcomes in supporting victims of crime in the Territory. They have been working hard to keep within the existing budget.

Mr MALEY: When do you expect these two new employees to come online?

Ms UIBO: I will pass to the Acting Chief Executive, Gemma Lake.

Ms LAKE: Thank you for the question, Member for Nelson. Just this week I approved the recruitment for the two officers. That will be advertised very shortly and we hope to have them on board really soon.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us an idea of 'really soon'?

Ms LAKE: It is difficult.

Mr MALEY: You can be very broad.

Ms LAKE: Yes. It is difficult to predict how long the process will take depending on how many applications are received. I hope that we will have that done in the next six weeks.

Mr MALEY: Where will they be based?

Ms LAKE: They will be based at the Crime Victims Services Unit in Darwin.

Mr MALEY: Will they have to work across the Northern Territory?

Ms LAKE: Yes. The unit works across the Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: The budget for Crime Victims Services Unit for 2021–22 is roughly \$7.7m, which is less than the revised spend of \$8.39m for current year. You mentioned that there has been a \$1.5m increase; however, looking at the budget figures it is hard to see where that fits in. Can you tell us where the extra \$1.5m is in the budget?

Ms UIBO: I will pass Alecia Brimson, our operating manager.

Ms BRIMSON: The \$1.5m actually occurred in the budget for 2021–22. What you are seeing is a variation that accounts for own-source revenue, that is, an application made regularly for areas to access revenue that they generate. The unit had access to nearly \$0.5m of victims' levies to use as expenditure. Expenditure capacity falls off until such time as approvals are generated to be able to access again. That may occur. It is up to the unit to work out whether or not they can generate the revenue in which to use as expenditure and get approval to do so. The other part will be parameters for wages and CPI.

Mr MALEY: If they use internal source revenue to pay this \$1.5m, what will be cut that would have been paid with the \$1.5m? I note that your own budget papers say there is a reduction of \$1.5m. If you will get the \$1.5m that you spoke about, something has to be cut. What will be cut which would have been spent—the \$1.5m—if this was not happening?

Ms UIBO: We recognise this is a very important area. I know that you will want to be politicising some of these areas, but it is not a matter of ...

Mr MALEY: No, I just want the facts, because people work in this industry. I am asking a very simple question.

Ms UIBO: No, you asked me a question and I will answer ...

Mr MONAGHAN: A point of order, Mr Chair! The Member for Nelson knows what I will say. Under Standing Order 109, the minister has the right to answer a question without interruption.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Member for Fong Lim. It is early in the day, but let us go through Standing Order 109. Questions are not to be argumentative or contain imputations, insult or hypothetical matter, and questions should not ask ministers for an expression of an opinion. Notwithstanding the fact the minister is the Attorney-General, Standing Order 109 says do not ask ministers for a legal opinion.

Mr MALEY: Does that apply to the answers that it should be the same as the questions, because that answer was implying that we will ...

Ms UIBO: You have to let me answer first, Member for Nelson.

Mr MALEY: I am talking, please, minister.

Ms UIBO: You did that to me. You interrupted me. You asked a question and then you interrupted me.

Mr MONAGHAN: You have not dealt with my point of order.

Mr CHAIR: Not yet.

Mr MONAGHAN: We had interruptions and now we have another interruption.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, Standing Order 109 is about the manner and form of questions. We have had six days now, and one to go tomorrow with the GOCs and the Speaker. It is a question and answer process. The minister has the call to answer the question on the \$1.5m.

Ms UIBO: Thank you. Going back to answering the question. There is a \$636,000 difference, \$500,000 of that is own-source revenue. I will pass to Ms Alecia Brimson to talk about some of the detail of the variance.

Ms BRIMSON: Parameters for wages and CPI occur each year in agencies. On top of that there was one-off Commonwealth funding for CVSU for the National Redress Scheme. The redress activity is rolled up into the CVSU budget.

Mr MALEY: I will restate my question because you did not answer it. What will be cut from this \$1.5m that their own-source revenue would have been spent on because you are now spending it on this section?

Ms UIBO: We explained the variances in the dollars, but nothing has been cut from one area to another.

Mr MALEY: I will rephrase the question. Your own budget papers cut the budget down by \$1.5m. You said earlier that you are raising the budget by \$1.5m and Ms Brimson said that money comes from own-source revenue. I accept that it is from wages et cetera.

If there is more money in the budget, this \$1.5m that you said would increase would have been spent internally on other things. You have to cut something to be able to spend the \$1.5m that you said is there, but it is not in the budget figures. What will not happen where that money would normally have been spent?

Every year I am guessing you get roughly \$500,000 own-source revenue from victims of crime because every year there are victims of crime. I understand the process that the offender goes to court or gets money and they have to pay it back, and that is where the own-source revenue comes from.

That money which would have been spent on other projects—what will be cut to allow you to increase the budget by \$1.5m when your own budget papers say you are decreasing the budget by \$1.5m?

Ms UIBO: There is a small variance which I spoke to, and that was \$636,000. Nothing has been cut.

Mr MALEY: What will have to be cut? That is my question.

Ms UIBO: Nothing is being cut.

Mr MALEY: What is in the future? What will you not spend the money on, because now you are spending money on this section? You said that you are raising it by \$1.5m, but your budget papers say you are cutting it by \$1.47m, so something has to be cut.

Ms UIBO: The unit is operating within its budget and confines. They do an amazing job. Nothing has been cut. I have answered the question.

Mr MALEY: I accept the unit does an amazing job, but your own budget papers are cut by \$1.47m. You say there is an increase of \$1.5m. Where is that money coming from? It is not \$630,000, it is \$1.5m.

Ms UIBO: Reiterating that against the revised budget I have given you the figure of \$636,000 difference. There is not a cut of \$1.5m as you are alluding to.

Mr MALEY: I will take you through your own budget papers. Your budget papers say that \$7.54m is your budget for Victims of Crime for this financial year. Last year, the revised was \$8.3m, so \$8.3m minus \$7.7m is \$1.4m. That is a cut, is it not? That is a reduction in budget.

Ms UIBO: The figures we have against the revised and current still gives us the figure I have provided of \$636,000. I believe we have answered that question.

Mr MALEY: Can I refer you to page 165 of Budget Paper No 3 of the booklet? We will read out these figures together. We are talking about the Crime Victims Services Unit on the third or fourth line down. The budget for the 2020–21 was \$6.2m. In the next column, the revised for 2020–21 is \$8.3m. The budget for 2021–22 is \$7.7m. It seems to me there is a cut of \$1.47m.

Ms UIBO: The same amount against the revised is \$636,000. When you look at the revised column and the budget itself that is the difference—if you want to get a calculator out and do it.

Mr EDGINGTON: The former CE of the Attorney-General's department, Mr Shanahan, retired last year. The deputy CE, Gemma Lake, has been doing a wonderful job as the acting CE. What is the current status of the recruitment of a new CE?

Ms UIBO: Mr Greg Shanahan, our outgoing CE of the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, had an esteemed career of over 14 years. He is a Territory boy, born and bred, and he is still here in his pending retirement.

Mr Shanahan has not officially retired; he is taking his leave, pending retirement. As you acknowledged, the work of Gemma Lake as acting chief executive officer has been outstanding and she continues to do a great job. We are very fortunate to have a very strong leader in that role.

The first round of recruitment for the position, unfortunately, did not see a suitable applicant at the time. We are now in the second phase of recruitment and a very close to finalising the position. I look forward to making that announcement once things are finalised in the recruitment process.

Mr EDGINGTON: A couple of weeks ago we learned about the retirement of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Jack Karczewski QC, and deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Matthew Nathan SC. What will the process be for appointment of new persons to those roles and how long do you expect it to take?

Ms UIBO: They are esteemed department staff who have done an amazing job in the public prosecutions area. I mention the consistent and stable leadership we had with Mr Karczewski and Mr Nathan in those positions. We have been very lucky in the Northern Territory to have people of such high calibre working in those roles. Both are leaving for personal reasons. It is unfortunate timing, being close to the end of the financial year, but we wish them all the best in their retirement.

The deputy Director of Public Prosecutions is heading back to New Zealand to be with his family, so we wish him all the best. We thank Mr Nathan for his work and his commitment to the Northern Territory for the many years he has been in his role.

The positions are being recruited to. A deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Ms Victoria Engel, has been appointed in that role. We are finalising an interim DPP, which Ms Lake is leading through her role as acting chief executive officer. We are looking forward to the full recruitment process so we can recruit to that position in the longer term.

Mr MALEY: In relation to that, do you take this opportunity to do a job description review of any of those positions?

Ms LAKE: The DPP's role and functions are set out in the relevant legislation. We have not identified a need to review that at legislation this point, or the deputy director's position. Both seem to have been operating as intended and as required.

Mr EDGINGTON: You mentioned Ms Engel being appointed. Is that acting, or has she been appointed to the role?

Ms UIBO: My understanding is she has been appointed to that deputy position.

Mr EDGINGTON: Was that an open recruitment process to that position?

Ms LAKE: Under the DPP act, the DPP has the ability to appoint deputy directors at his or her discretion. Mr Karczewski has appointed Victoria Engel to the deputy director position pursuant to that act.

Mr EDGINGTON: How long ago did that take place?

Ms LAKE: I believe it was 7 June.

Mr EDGINGTON: Have there been any other resignations or retirements from the DPP over the last 12 months, or this calendar year?

Ms UIBO: We can answer that when we have the deputy director present for that output, which I believe is Output 4.0. If you ask the question then, you will be able to get the answer on the spot.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the status of the Corrections Commissioner and has he returned from leave?

Ms UIBO: As you would be aware, the deputy commissioner, Mr David Thompson, who is acting as the commissioner and doing a great job with Corrections. He is supporting staff and ensuring that correctional services continue to be strongly delivered across the Territory in all of our facilities and our two work camps. I will pass to Ms Lake for the operational side of employment.

Ms LAKE: Commissioner McMahon is still absent; he has not yet returned to work.

Mr EDGINGTON: How long has he been off? What is the total leave of absence so far?

Ms LAKE: I do not have the exact dates with me. I believe that it is since February.

Mr EDGINGTON: Would it be fair to say that there are a lot of people acting up to backfill positions as a result of that absence?

Ms UIBO: In the Attorney-General and Justice department we are very proud that some people have stepped up into roles, filling different areas. That is a great testament to the staff and employees in the department. I acknowledge the work, dedication and experience of these people, who are stepping into some of the roles—without any hesitation—to provide stability in the workplace and continue the quality service for the department and make sure things operate effectively and efficiently. We are lucky that we have very dedicated staff in the department to do that work.

Mr MALEY: Do you think that having so many acting people in the top half of your department shows poor leadership and foresight from you?

Ms UIBO: That is asking for an opinion, so I will not answer that.

Mr MALEY: Can I rephrase the question? Do you think that having so many people who are acting would fail the pub test and that people in the Northern Territory would be disappointed, yes or no?

Ms UIBO: I do not go to the pub, so I would not know. Again, that is asking for an opinion, so I will not answer.

Mr MALEY: Are you refusing to answer the question about your leadership?

Ms UIBO: You are asking me for an opinion. I am here to discuss the budget and talk about outputs and the great work of my department. I am happy to take questions about the budget rather than about me.

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to acting, the general manager's position in Alice Springs—I raised this in parliament some time ago. Our estimate is that it has taken roughly 25 weeks to fill that position? What is the status of that position as we speak?

Ms UIBO: Thank you for your interest. As the shadow Attorney-General and as a member from a regional centre, I know that it is an interest for you. I will pass to Gemma because it is an operational matter regarding recruitment to position and she has updated information.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Barkly, is the GM role at Corrections?

Mr EDGINGTON: It is the general manager of the Alice Springs Correctional Centre.

Ms LAKE: The recruitment process for the Alice Springs general manager was completed. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful in securing a candidate. Following completion and closeout of that process, the department identified a need for immediate and strong leadership of the Alice Springs Correctional Centre and sought the necessary approvals to make a direct appointment to that position. The announcement regarding that direct appointment was made within the department at least on 21 June. I am pleased to advise that Mr Bill Carroll has been appointed to that role.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is that role still the same as was advertised? That is the general manager position of the Alice Springs Correctional Centre?

Ms LAKE: That is correct.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why did it take 25 weeks to get through the recruitment process? What is the reason? That is nearly six months.

Ms LAKE: I acknowledge that the process took some time. It experienced a number of delays throughout the process; some to do with the specific process itself, which I cannot comment on for confidentiality reasons, some to do with operations of the department. There were a number of delays experienced, unfortunately, and it took some time to complete. I acknowledge that.

Mr EDGINGTON: What were the delays? It seems to me that six months for a recruitment process is excessive and the impact on the prison, having people acting in different positions for six months. There must be some reasons for those delays.

Ms LAKE: As I said, there were a number of different reasons for those delays. Some are very specific to that particular process.

Mr EDGINGTON: What were they?

Ms LAKE: I cannot comment on the specifics of a recruitment process ...

Mr EDGINGTON: Why not?

Ms LAKE: ... in order to protect the applicants involved. There were a number of delays; some were operational, some to do with staff availability, some to do with specifics of the process and ensuring processes were followed. I acknowledge it took longer than it should. It is unfortunate, but it has been closed out now and we have filled the position.

Mr MALEY: Can you at least tell us what the operational delays were, without going into specifics of people to protect a person? I accept that. What were the operational delays?

Ms LAKE: Availability of staff, Member for Nelson, was one. We obviously had Estimates Committee last year in December. We had budget processes going on. Demands on time were the operational factors.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many staff do you need to run a recruitment process?

Ms LAKE: You need a panel, obviously. You need to conduct interviews and make recommendations to the delegates and inform them. There are a number of different staff involved in the process.

Mr EDGINGTON: With the absence of the commissioner, were you involved in the recruitment process?

Ms LAKE: Yes, I was the approving delegate.

Mr EDGINGTON: You were not on the panel?

Ms LAKE: No.

Mr EDGINGTON: Okay. Minister, since you have taken over as the Attorney-General, you have emphasised the importance of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement which was released in draft form in September 2019. What is the status of the agreement as we sit here today and when will it be finalised?

Ms UIBO: Member for Barkly, I know this is an interest for you, and you have been keenly following the progress of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. We are very fortunate in the Northern Territory to be going through this process. It is the first of its kind in the Northern Territory and is being led by the Aboriginal Justice Unit. I acknowledge and thank them for their work.

There have been nearly 160 consultations across the Northern Territory in regard to remote, regional and urban settings to feed into the consultation of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. We are finalising and refining the agreement and are looking to launch it in the second half of this year.

The work that is being done currently is to ensure that we have a very strong implementation plan for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. We know the principles and values. The draft agreement is available publicly on the Attorney-General department's website. Many people have looked at that. I think it was 51

submissions for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement when the consultations were occurring, which is quite outstanding.

The majority of the work is centred on safety on community, making sure we are strengthening the justice services in the Northern Territory and ensuring that we can address some of those very high statistics of Aboriginal incarceration rates for Aboriginal Territorians in the NT. Implementing the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is extremely important to a Territory Labor government. I acknowledge we have bipartisan support from the CLP opposition. We thank them and welcome that.

In terms of practical and tangible measures regarding the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, to ensure that offending behaviour is specifically addressed, crime is reduced in the Territory and we have fewer Aboriginal Territorians incarcerated in our justice system.

The finalisation of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is close and we look forward to announcing the launch. Some areas we have been able to concentrate and roll out earlier—one is improving and encouraging the numbers of Aboriginal Justices of the Peace. There are currently 16 in the Northern Territory and we want to increase that number. These are things we can do before the final agreement is published. There are other areas as well as the alternatives to custody.

There is an Alice Springs life skills camp, which you would be aware of. It is focused on Aboriginal women to look at the pathways out of the justice system. We currently have residents in the facility who are doing extremely well and going through the processes to get wraparound supports, which are much needed in reducing contact with the justice system.

The alternative to custody site, which will be developed on Groote Eylandt in partnership with the Local Decision Making agreement, is focused on young Anindilyakwa men between 17 and 25 years of age. It is a rehabilitation centre.

They are important wraparound services focused on justice, health, families, culture and language. Those areas of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement have already taken shape and some are in practice, which is fantastic. The official launch will be in the second half of this year.

Mr MALEY: I have a follow-up question. In relation to the 160 consultations, could you expand on that? When and where were they?

Ms UIBO: We have that as an output and the Aboriginal Justice unit will be here. We can ask for specific details, if you are happy to wait for that output.

Mr EDGINGTON: In recent Supreme Court sentencing remarks, Justice Blokland urged corrections policy and legislative minds to turn their attention to the issues facing victims who find themselves punished or banished from their communities after reporting sexual or other violent offending. What work are you undertaking in this area to deal with those issues?

Ms UIBO: I reiterate that all Territorians deserve to be safe in their home, community and business. I take those comments from Justice Blokland seriously. In regard to some of the areas, we need to look outside the justice system at what the impacts are, particularly to victims and their families. The families are there to provide care and support to a family member who has been through a traumatic time.

We are partnered with the department of Territory Families, led by Minister Worden, particularly on the family, domestic and sexual violence framework. Minister Worden has been lobbying and advocating strongly with her federal counterpart, Senator Anne Ruston, in getting further support for the Northern Territory. It also crosses over into the adult justice space—Minister Worden has carriage of youth justice.

There are multiple agency working groups working on targeting family, domestic and sexual violence in the Northern Territory and its impact on Territorians and the families of victims, to ensure we have a strong framework and the implementation and action of that framework hits the ground and support is provided to victims and their families as needed.

Mr MALEY: Have you had a briefing in relation to that judgement?

Ms UIBO: I do not often take the briefings regarding Justices' sentencing or comments.

Mr MALEY: This is more specific. This is a very important issue. Have you had a briefing about how those comments that were made affects this problem in those communities?

Ms UIBO: The work is already happening in my agency, in partnership with the minister for Territory Families and her agency—I also mention the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

We have a working group between our agencies and offices—and between ourselves as ministers. We are working towards the domestic, family and sexual violence reduction framework. It is important work. We do not wait for cases to be identified. We recognise this is a serious problem in the Northern Territory. It is seriously affecting Territorians—victims and their families. It is unacceptable to have that in our communities—in town, in the rural area or in a remote community or homeland.

We recognise this as a big issue, hence the support we are getting from the Commonwealth Government. We welcome that. We identify that this is an area that we need to address in Territory. We already have some very strong frameworks in place and we are making sure that we implement those frameworks.

Mr MALEY: Have you discussed these particular comments with any of your colleagues?

Ms UIBO: Yes. The working group consists of me and the ministers for Territory Families and Police.

Mr MALEY: That working group has discussed these comments?

Ms UIBO: It is part of our community safety work that we are doing. This plays a big role in that.

Mr MALEY: But have you discussed these comments with that groups?

Ms UIBO: Not those comments from an individual. No, we discuss the issues and recognise that this is a big area that we need to change in the Territory, hence the work of government in making sure that we have a multiagency approach.

Mr MALEY: Do you plan to discuss these comments in the future?

Ms UIBO: The comments are noted and they are already taken into account with the work we are doing.

Mr MALEY: You have not discussed them specifically yet?

Ms UIBO: Not the specific comments, no, but the principals and the general values, yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: In your opening statement, you mentioned 158 pieces of legislation under your portfolio. You mentioned that some of those are under review. Is the ICAC legislation under review at the moment?

Ms UIBO: I am not responsible for the *ICAC Act*. That comes under the Chief Minister.

Mr EDGINGTON: Just getting back to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, how many full-time employees are working on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement?

Ms UIBO: We have a lot of employees working on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Are you asking specifically for the Aboriginal Justice Unit?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, make it the Aboriginal Justice Unit. I gather they are the only ones working on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Ms UIBO: No, they are a cross-agency. We also have multiple agencies working. If you want specific figures of all the employees across every agency in government who are working on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, I will have to take that on notice. I can answer for the Aboriginal Justice Unit, which sits within this department.

Mr EDGINGTON: You can give me the number of full-time employees working in the Aboriginal Justice Unit.

Ms UIBO: I am sorry I do not have that figure in front of me but we have the Aboriginal Justice Unit here to answer questions in that output if you are happy to get the answer through that output.

Mr EDGINGTON: Perhaps I will just go back to that original question if you are willing to take it on notice regarding how many employees have been working on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement over the last six months across government.

Ms UIBO: It would be difficult because often people are working in particular sections, but we can try to pull that data for you and take it on notice. As I mentioned, we have multiple agencies, including some of my other areas: Office of Aboriginal Affairs; OCPE; AGD; the Chief Minister and Cabinet; Police, Fire and Emergency Services; and Territory Families. I think most of the agencies are working on it, so we can take it on notice.

Mr EDGINGTON: Just before we get to that, I am interested to know if there has been any consulting expenses and how much trouble has been undertaken as part of that question, if you are willing to take all of that on notice.

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Question on Notice No 8.1

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How much money was spent working on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement over the last six months, including full-time equivalent employees, consultant expenses and travel costs?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question.

Ms UIBO: Yes. We will endeavour to get the answer.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: In the budget papers, \$1.451m is listed for alternatives to prison. We touched on Groote Eylandt before. Is that entire amount for the Groote Eylandt project or are other projects included in that funding?

Ms UIBO: There are two: the Alice Springs life skills camp, which is the one I mentioned that targets Aboriginal women who have contact with the justice system; and the other is the Groote Eylandt rehabilitation centre.

Mr EDGINGTON: Do you have a breakdown of how much of that funding is for Groote Eylandt and how much is for Alice Springs?

Ms UIBO: We only have the global there, so we will have to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.2

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

Mr EDGINGTON: The budget papers include \$1.451m for alternatives to prison. What is the breakdown of that funding? How much of the funding is for the Groote Eylandt project and how much of it has been allocated to the program in Alice Springs?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question.

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr MALEY: We are talking about alternatives to prison. I am not sure if we need to talk about it now or in an output, but I want to ask some questions about community custody orders. That is an alternative to prison. I have been involved in the court system for a fair while and I know others who have been involved longer than

I have. I have never seen that used. I am wonder if any money has been put to community custody orders. When I say that I have not seen it used, I have seen and asked for but the response when it goes to Corrections is, 'We do not have the resources for that'.

I am not sure whether to ask that now or in another output.

Ms UIBO: I think that is a very good question. I recommend that it goes through to Community Corrections, Output 2.2, when our commissioner is with us.

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to budget allocations, it is concerning that the budgets allocated to the independent offices are reduced for all but one of the offices. How is this consistent with promoting accountable government?

Ms UIBO: Can you repeat the end of the question?

Mr EDGINGTON: It is concerning that the budgets allocated to the independent offices are reduced for all but one, which is Consumer Affairs. How is this consistent with promoting accountable government? Why have their budgets been cut?

Ms UIBO: I will pass to Alecia Brimson. She has some of the variances and explanations in regard to the changes. One thing we have been looking at in particular—it comes a little later in Output 5.0—is the way we can efficiently manage the budget and services without impacting the quality of services in the Northern Territory. There is a review into offices, the positions that are held and the services that are delivered, and how that could better provide Territorians with services. We will have some further details when we get to Output Group 5.0.

Ms BRIMSON: Essentially the two major contributors to the reduction in budget relate to the cessation of the Commonwealth program for Register-General. That program had a set life and it fell away. The Anti-Discrimination Commission has regular access to its own-source revenue. It runs a lot of training courses and charges for that. It gets approval to access that. That approval has fallen away. It will be seeking that approval again. Assuming that approval is provided, it will have access again to that revenue.

The rest relates to parameters for wages and CPI.

Mr EDGINGTON: If it relates to wages and the CPI, why are there cuts? Have wages and CPI gone down?

Ms BRIMSON: Essentially, they are government parameters applied to all agencies for efficiencies and savings.

Mr EDGINGTON: To clarify, the cuts that we are talking about refer to the efficiency dividend. Is that what you are saying?

Ms BRIMSON: Yes, that is right.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the efficiency dividend for each of the independent offices?

Ms BRIMSON: Essentially, the only parts of that department that have some reductions in our efficiency dividends are areas that are Commonwealth funded. There is, obviously, no efficiency dividend applied to Commonwealth funding. Corrections get a reduction of two-thirds in its efficiency dividend. In the remainder for 2021–22, there is 0% for CPI and wages for 2021–22.

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

Mr CHAIR: There being no further questions, the committee will consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2021–2022) Bill as they relate to the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr MALEY: In relation to the budget, under Legal Policy, it seems to me that there has been a cut of \$1.8m. The revised was \$41m, now it is \$40-and-a-bit. Can you explain where that cut has come from and how it works?

Ms UIBO: There are always changes in budgets. Obviously, we are in the estimates process now. Ms Alecia Brimson will talk about the variances and the changes in that area.

Ms BRIMSON: The variations in relation to that budget relate to parameters for wages and CPI. There is some one-off funding for COVID for legal service providers. That falls away. The department received some one-off funding for expenditure pressures for expensive cases. That was a one-off for this financial year. There was some transfer of funding between years and transfers to some other agencies for 12 months for 2021–22.

Mr MALEY: You are saying wages and CPI all add up to \$1.8m. Is that correct? In all those things you mentioned, there is a \$1.8m cut to that Legal Policy Unit. Is that correct?

Ms BRIMSON: It is the culmination of all of those movements that equate to the \$1m. It is not individually wages parameters.

Mr MALEY: All those things you mentioned add up to a \$1.8m cut? Can you give me an example of the one-off funding that has been cut or taken away from the federal government?

Ms UIBO: With those reductions of the one-off Commonwealth funding—you would not call it a cut, you would call it a reduction in the one-off funding. Ms Brimson will provide one of those examples.

Ms BRIMSON: For example, \$2.146m was Commonwealth funding which fell away in 2021–22. It was a one-off for this financial year—for COVID.

Mr MALEY: There was \$2m in funding that was taken away. What about an example of the transfer of the funding you mentioned?

Ms BRIMSON: In 2021–22, \$1.732m was transferred, so the culmination of the million dollars are essentially unders and overs in the budget. It is not all a reduction.

Mr MALEY: Roughly, though, there was just over \$3m of money that you mentioned, yet there is a \$1.8m reduction. I am confused as to how we are talking about just over \$3m in those two examples, but there is only the \$1.8m. How does that all interplay?

Ms UIBO: In terms of legal policy, which you are asking about, there are some fulsome lists exactly of the impact on the budget. Some of it are variances and reductions. An example is the reduced Commonwealth funding which is one-off. Some of it is transferred as well, for example across agencies. We had a machinery of government change also and they all add up in the end. That is the final figure, the one that you asked about.

Mr MALEY: Not to go through the whole list now, but will you take it on notice to provide us with a copy of that list?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I can.

Question on Notice No 8.3

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

Mr MALEY: Can you please provide us with a list of the breakdown of the funding reductions you mentioned in the previous question?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes. I will add that it will be reductions, transfers and increases. It will be the whole gamut.

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

Mr MALEY: I am just going through the budget output and the next one is Community Corrections. There seems to be a reduction, or cut, of \$1.5m. Can you explain where that came from and how it came about?

Ms UIBO: Can I just clarify? Are we in the output of the fiscal and overall—or are we in output 1.1.

Mr CHAIR: No, we are still on budget and fiscal strategy. We have not moved on to the outputs as yet.

Ms UIBO: Can you please repeat again? I apologise.

Mr MALEY: In relation to the budget line on Community Corrections. There seems to be a cut of \$1.5m. I take you to the figures: the revised was \$26.5m and the budget is now \$25m so there is a cut of \$1.5m. Can you explain where that reduction will come into play and how that will interact in relation to Community Corrections?

Ms BRIMSON: Community Corrections had \$3.45m for electronic monitoring for 2020–21. That fell away to \$2.9m ongoing and will contribute to part of those reductions. The remainder is parameters for wages, CPI and depreciation.

Mr MALEY: Again, that \$1.2m or \$1.5m—I am not sure what the exact figures are—reduction is CPI and wages, and what else was it?

Ms BRIMSON: The culmination of all of them is effectively reductions. The reduction from \$3.45m for electronic monitoring for 2021 fell away to \$2.9m ongoing. Wages, parameters, efficiencies and depreciation makes up the variation.

Mr MALEY: With the new bail laws which talk about increasing electronic monitoring, I cannot see how there would be a reduction when the legislation seems to be that there will be more electronic monitoring this year. Can you explain that?

Ms UIBO: We changed providers in December last year, so we are on a new systems in terms of the contract. The ongoing is to provide stability to the capacity of the new contractor who is delivering the service. It is across three agencies that use the electronic monitoring devices, AGD, Police and Territory Families—a service across government. The ongoing is through some of the changes. I am not sure what the other agencies have in terms of the contract or what their figure is, but as Ms Brimson has pointed out, \$2.9m is ongoing, which is furthering the capacity of the old system.

Mr MALEY: You took a previous question about a breakdown of that reduction in legal policy. Will you take this on notice given that it is the same breakdown for this section what that will all add up to?

Ms UIBO: Yes. Ms Brimson has mentioned most of what the figures were, but we are happy to reiterate that.

Mr MALEY: Yes, but I did not get a chance to write them down.

Question on Notice No 8.4

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

Mr MALEY: Can you please provide a breakdown in relation to the Community Corrections budgets line which shows as \$1.2m reduction and where that will be spread out in the Corrections unit?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr MALEY: We were talking about lower courts in tribunals which seems to be a reduction of \$1.2m—it is the same line of questioning. Can you explain where the reduction comes in and how it will interplay with the lower courts and tribunals?

Ms UIBO: We have some detail for this, so I will pass to Ms Brimson to explain some of the variances.

Ms BRIMSON: The variations for that output relate to judicial back pay, that is one-off for the financial year which occurs this year and it does not flow into next year. Some one-off funding for expensive cases was for

this financial year and falls away next financial year—wages and CPI parameters, depreciation; there was also a family law pilot that ceased in 2021.

Ms UIBO: Commonwealth funded.

Ms BRIMSON: Yes, that was Commonwealth funded.

Mr MALEY: Is that the one with Territory Families and the consent orders? Is that the pilot program that fell away? Does anyone know about that?

Ms UIBO: We can answer that in the Lower Courts and Tribunals output because we will have the head of division then to speak to it.

Mr MALEY: What output is that?

Ms UIBO: Output 3.2.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – LEGAL SERVICES **Output 1.1 – Solicitor for the Northern Territory**

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0 Legal Services, Output, 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory. Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: Under the output group Legal Services there is no output for the Solicitor-General. Where is the budget for this office contained?

Ms UIBO: It is contained in the Solicitor for the Northern Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is there a specific allocation of funding to the Solicitor-General?

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

Question on Notice No 8.5

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

Mr EDGINGTON: There is no output group for the Solicitor-General. What is the specific funding allocation for the Solicitor-General?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly is allocated the number 8.5.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is the office of the Solicitor-General fully staffed at the moment?

Mr SMYTH: The Office of the Solicitor-General is fully staffed at the moment. It has traditionally been staffed by the Solicitor-General, Crown Counsel and an administrative assistant.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are all those positions fully occupied at the moment?

Mr SMYTH: That is correct, they are. The position of Crown Counsel has recently been filled.

Mr MALEY: Are there any acting positions or are they all on a permanent basis?

Mr SMYTH: They are all permanently filled or on executive contract officer basis.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much has been spent briefing to external counsel in that office?

Ms UIBO: I will pass to Gemma Lake.

Ms LAKE: The Solicitor-General's chambers does not brief out the work. If the Solicitor-General is unable to do the work, it is briefed out by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory. The way that works is that where it is briefed out it is the client agency that pays for the particular counsel services required.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a breakdown of, when it is briefed out, how many are briefed out to the local counsel versus how many are briefed out to interstate counsel.

Ms LAKE: Can I clarify if your question relates to counsel brief as opposed to law firms engaged?

Mr MALEY: Sorry, can you repeat that?

Ms LAKE: We have law firms engaged under the Northern Territory Legal Services List, which is separate to engaging counsel or barristers. I am just clarifying if the question is related particularly to counsel?

Mr MALEY: I will ask that question later, but for this question it is in relation to counsel.

Ms LAKE: I do not have that answer here, in regard to counsel.

Mr MALEY: Can we put that on notice?

Question on Notice No 8.6

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

Mr MALEY: Minister, when you brief counsel, is it interstate counsel versus local counsel? What is the difference between briefing out someone local or someone interstate?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson is allocated the number 8.6.

Mr EDGINGTON: Over the last couple of Estimates Committees, the legal proceedings brought against the Northern Territory Government, a department or an employee thereof, in the Supreme Court and Federal Court for the financial year to 31 March, are numbered 24 in 2020 and 25 in 2019. What are the figures for the current financial year to date?

Ms UIBO: Could I clarify, are you talking about court cases?

Mr EDGINGTON: Legal proceedings brought against the Northern Territory Government, a department or an employee.

Ms UIBO: Because SFNT operates on behalf of different agencies, each agency would have carriage of those numbers. We can take that on notice, acknowledging we will have to collate that from other agencies.

Question on Notice No 8.7

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Over the last couple of Estimates Committees, the legal proceedings brought against the Northern Territory Government, a department or an employee thereof, in the Supreme Court and Federal Court for the financial year to 31 March, numbered 24 in 2020 and 25 in 2019. What are the figures for the current financial year to date?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Are there any actions currently pending against the Northern Territory Government relating to the *Mineral Royalty Act*?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.8

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many actions are currently pending against the Northern Territory Government relating to the *Mineral Royalty Act 1982*?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Have any royalty actions been settled or finally adjudicated in the past year. If so, what was the nature of those actions?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.9

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Have any royalty-related actions been settled or finally adjudicated in the past year. If so, what was the nature of those actions?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: If there were any cases settled or finally adjudicated, what was the estimate of the cost to the government upon resolution of those matters?

Ms UIBO: To clarify, there is the cost of running the case which, obviously, the agency can supply. But if there was a settlement it would be confidential, so we would not be able to supply that information. Would you like the agency cost of a case, or are you comfortable with that answer of we would not be able to provide confidentiality amounts?

Mr MALEY: I accept that some of them are confidential, but some will not be. Will you be able to give us the ones that are not confidential? I am guessing we are only talking about a very small number.

Ms UIBO: My understanding is that the settlement amount would come from the client agency and not necessarily from AGD. We could provide the running costs for staffing et cetera, but we would not be able to provide agency other than our own. The client agency would be paying whatever confidentiality settlement has been agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: Will you take that on notice?

Ms UIBO: To clarify, I would only be able to provide the agency running costs. The settlement costs would be confidential. If you are wanting specific agency figures you would have to write to those agencies about those cases.

Question on Notice No 8.10

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

Mr EDGINGTON: If there have been any royalty-related actions settled or finally adjudicated, what is the estimate of the cost to the government upon the resolution of those matters?

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

Ms UIBO: To clarify, Member for Barkly, are you talking about mineral royalties?

Mr EDGINGTON: Mineral royalties—any royalty-related action.

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many proceedings have been brought against the Northern Territory Government by former detainees and children in care since the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory?

Ms UIBO: Just to clarify, that would be a client agency question. That would sit with Territory Families, which is responsible for the *Youth Justice Act*.

Mr MALEY: Would you be able to give us how much it has cost to run those proceedings then, as it is your department?

Ms UIBO: My understanding is the client agency pays the fees, so it would be Territory Families which would pay for the costings of that case.

Mr MALEY: Would your department run the court case?

Ms UIBO: It runs the service but the cost would be covered by the agency responsible for ...

Mr MALEY: Then would you issue an invoice the agency?

Ms UIBO: We have a youth claims team. We could provide the cost of that team, but not necessarily the other agency's costs.

Mr MALEY: If you run the service, do you invoice the other agency for the cost of running that court case?

Ms UIBO: We have a service-level agreement with Territory Families for the running costs. We could provide the cost of the team that is doing the service, but not necessarily any of their other costings for that agency.

Mr MALEY: Will you take that on notice?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Question on Notice No 8.11

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

Mr MALEY: Can you please provide us with the cost to government of how much your agency spent in relation to actions brought against the government by former detainees or children in care since the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory?

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

Ms UIBO: To clarify, would that be for the period of 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021?

Mr EDGINGTON: Is that the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: Yes, it was for the last financial year.

Ms UIBO: Yes, thank you, we accept that.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How much money to date has been paid out on behalf of the government under the National Redress Scheme?

Ms UIBO: We have that as an output in Output 1.3.3 and we will have the head of division sitting at the table for the output.

Mr EDGINGTON: In 2019 the Australian Human Rights Commission raised a complaint against the Territory. The Aboriginal residents of Wadeye have commenced proceedings in the Federal Court of Australia claiming discriminatory conduct by the Northern Territory under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* of the Commonwealth. What is the progress in this matter and is it still on foot?

Ms UIBO: It is still before the courts.

Mr MALEY: How many matters have been outsourced, either in part or whole, to private law firms or barristers? What is the cost to the Territory of outsourcing those matters?

The second part of that question is, can we have a breakdown between interstate law firms and barristers versus local law firms and barristers.

Ms UIBO: In relation to the first part of the question, there are 42 law firms providing legal services, including 14 interstate firms. That is as of 31 March 2021.

There have been 267 matters outsourced for the period 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021. There have been 253 matters outsourced to local firms, that is, 95%, and 14 matters have been outsourced to interstate firms which is 5%.

In relation to the cost, that would be for the client agencies which have those costings.

Mr MALEY: In relation to those costings, do you arrange for that work to be outsourced and then invoice the client agency, or does the law firm pass the deal directly to the client agency?

Ms LAKE: The way that process works is the legal request for advice or representation comes in to the Solicitor of the Northern Territory. We assist in engaging the firm, getting the quote et cetera. Once the firm is engaged, the firm then deals directly with the client agency and invoices the client agency directly.

Mr MALEY: You are saying that any cost agreement that the firm enters into is with the agency, not you? You do not enter into the cost agreement with that firm or barrister.

Ms LAKE: There is no cost agreement, as such. The NT Legal Services List requires that each of the firms on the list provide their rates, so the rates that are charged to the client agency have to be as provided under that list. Does that answer your question?

Mr MALEY: Yes. Can you give us a breakdown of your agency on how much you have spent? I am not talking about the agency—the other one—but in your agency in relation to this.

Ms UIBO: We have some costings from 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021. It is \$983,882.99.

Mr MALEY: Can you read that figure again because I only got half of it?

Ms UIBO: It is \$983,882.99.

Mr MALEY: That is your own cost to outsource to private law firms and barristers?

Ms UIBO: Yes, that is correct for the Attorney-General and Justice department.

Mr MALEY: Okay, thank you. Can you give us a breakdown in relation to costings of how much of that \$900,000-odd has been spent in local and how much has been spent interstate for barristers, private law firms or counsel?

Mr CHAIR: That is \$934,688.84.

Mr MALEY: I will put it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.12

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

Mr MALEY: Minister, out of the \$900,000-odd you just gave us, can you provide us a breakdown of how much was spent on local law firms, barristers or counsel compared to how much was spent on interstate law firms, barristers or counsel?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question.

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr CHAIR: As it is 10 am, we will take a quick comfort break. We will be back in a few short minutes.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back to estimates. Were there any further questions on Output 1.1?

That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Legal Policy

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Legal Policy. Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: The *Youth Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2021* was introduced recently by Minister Manison. What input did you, as the Attorney-General, or the department have in drafting the legislation?

Ms UIBO: This was a multiagency effort and Territory Families, Police and AGD worked constructively together. There were the drafting instructions, the work on the amendments and work on the broader suite of policy and programming. This was jointly progressed through each of those three agencies.

Mr MALEY: Since we debated that bill on the floor—and there were a lot of questions about whether that bill actually reversed the presumption against bail—has your department done any work or sought any advice in relation to whether that amendment did reverse the presumption against bail?

Ms UIBO: Since the three or four weeks since the amendments were passed, we do not have any further instructions in the sense of what was currently passed. The multiagency working group is still meeting. We heard from the Territory Families minister yesterday about ensuring we had strong data collection over the next few months and looking for periods of when we review legislation. This naturally occurs for all legislation.

In terms of my specific agency over the last three weeks, no, we have not looked at any of the datasets because it is still being collected.

Mr MALEY: Even though there are lots of questions about whether that amendment changed presumption, no-one has looked into that since that happened?

Ms UIBO: In regard to what affected my agency, there were some changes to the *Bail Act*, as you are aware. We had input about those provisions and amendments, but in having a look at what is working and what is not, it is too early to tell yet. But the multiagency approach will be to ensure that we have regular review points of that legislation and amendment as we do with other amendments and legislation that goes through the House.

Mr MALEY: I want to confirm, you said that you have not done any work in relation to whether that changed presumption yet—I think those were your words. Is that correct?

Ms UIBO: We had input into any of the changes that affect the legislation under the agency ...

Mr MALEY: That was before it. I am talking about when it was enforced to now.

Ms UIBO: Not since it was passed three weeks ago.

Mr EDGINGTON: What follow-up, as far as the policy-monitoring role goes, will be played by your department to ensure that the bill that passed last month is having the effect of lowering youth crime rates?

Ms UIBO: Territory Families is taking the lead in the data and tracking. AGD will be ensuring that through those multiagency working groups on this specific area we have input from our legal policy perspective and through our crime stats unit.

Mr EDGINGTON: In estimates last year, in a written response to a question on notice, we were told that the review of the penalties for the property offences in the *Criminal Code Act* would be conducted in two tranches, with the review of the first tranche of key property offences anticipated to be completed by May 2021. Has this been completed?

Ms UIBO: Yes, the department is conducting a review of the penalties for property offences in relation to Part VII of the *Criminal Code Act*, Property offences and related matters. It is anticipated that the review for all such offences will be completed by mid-2021. Obviously, we are in mid-2021, so we are looking at introduction a little later in the next sittings—not in tomorrow's sittings but in August sittings.

Mr MALEY: Has that review been completed?

Ms UIBO: The review is being finalised, but the majority of the work has been completed.

Mr MALEY: The review has been finalised, or is about to be finalised and the majority of work has been completed?

Ms UIBO: The majority of the work has been completed. It is being finalised currently, so it will be ready for introduction in the second half of the year. It is a little later than we anticipated, but there is a lot of work. We acknowledge all of our legal policy team for their input and making sure we do things properly.

Mr EDGINGTON: The way the review was described was, 'a review of the key property offences'. What are key property offences?

Ms UIBO: As the work is still being finalised, I am happy to take that one on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.13

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

Mr EDGINGTON: The review of the penalties for property offences in the *Criminal Code Act* was to be conducted in two tranches with the first review of the first tranche of key property offences. What is meant by the term 'key property offences'?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr MALEY: To clarify, it would be two parts, but they have been wrapped up into one which is to be completed by later this year?

Ms UIBO: Yes, you are correct, we are looking at the two parts. Through that finalisation process it was possible to put it all through as one piece. There are a few different layers to the legislation which we are currently finalising. In terms of the timing, if it needs to be in the two tranches, which we originally anticipated, we will keep to that. If it can all be done in one piece, we will try for that. It will be dependent on finalising some key parts of the legislation.

Mr MALEY: You said it is being finalised now but you are now saying you are not sure whether it is one or two parts. I am confused; has it been finalised and is coming up in June or has it not been finalised and we do not even know if there are two parts?

Ms UIBO: It is one review. In terms of staging the legislation, we anticipated two tranches—as I mentioned and the Member for Barkly acknowledged. There were discussions about the finalisation and looking at the two parts—or if it could be done in one, which would require some time line changes. It was anticipated to be two parts, but there are other factors which could change the timing of the expectation—but still for 2021.

Mr EDGINGTON: I want to talk about some of the various pieces of legislation under review. We spoke about the ICAC legislation. I believe you said it was under review and managed through the Department of the Chief Minister or the Chief Minister's office. My recollection is that the Attorney-General was heavily involved in the initial drafting and implementation of that legislation. Why is the Attorney-General's office not part of that review?

Ms UIBO: As you acknowledged, we are not the lead agency. The Chief Minister is responsible portfolio holder of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption and the associated act, and it is led through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The Attorney-General and Justice department has been consulted through the review process.

Ms LAKE: We have provided input to the officer who is conducting that review. We have met with them and will continue to do so as required. We are certainly part of that process.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many staff from the Attorney-General's office are involved in providing input into that review?

Ms LAKE: At this stage we have had about three to four officers providing input, including me, Mr Smyth and members of the Legal Policy Unit. It will depend on the issues raised and the particular input sought as to whether additional legal advice or other input needs to be provided as part of that process.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are there any staff, current or on leave, who have been seconded to participate in the review of the ICAC legislation?

Ms LAKE: We have not seconded any staff to the department of the Chief Minister for that purpose.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are there no staff from the Attorney-General's office involved in the review of that legislation?

Ms LAKE: I understand one member of our legal policy area won a temporary position in the department of the Chief Minister, and I understand she is assisting Mr Shanahan, who is part of conducting the review. Other than that, we have not seconded or transferred any staff over.

Mr EDGINGTON: You said Mr Shanahan is involved in that review? Your chief executive.

Ms LAKE: Our former chief executive. He has been engaged by the department of the Chief Minister.

Mr EDGINGTON: You say ‘former chief executive’—I thought it was on leave from the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice?

Ms LAKE: I will clarify. Mr Shanahan was on a long period of leave until 31 March, and he has now officially resigned from his role as chief executive. I am not sure of the terms, but he has been engaged by the department of the Chief Minister to assist them with the review of that legislation.

Mr MALEY: How long was the on leave for? You said a long period of time, so can you expand on that?

Ms LAKE: Mr Shanahan’s last day with the department was 27 November last year, and he took a combination of leave up until 31 March this year. That was his official last day.

Mr EDGINGTON: When did Mr Shanahan commence his position reviewing the ICAC legislation?

Ms UIBO: As he is no longer an employee with AGD, it would be a question for the Chief Minister’s agency.

Mr EDGINGTON: Perhaps if I rephrase it—while Mr Shanahan was employed by the Attorney-General’s department, was he also engaged to assist with the review of the ICAC legislation?

Ms UIBO: No.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the status of the review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act*?

Ms UIBO: In regard to the statutory review, section 70 of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* requires that there be a review of the first three years of operation of the act. A consultation results report on victims of crime reforms, including a review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* was provided to the former minister in August 2019 and recommendations for the reform are under consideration by government.

The report of the recommendations has not been released, but further work has been requested on options (a) reducing the backlog of applications; and (b) reforming the financial assistance scheme.

Mr MALEY: Can you confirm, the government received a report in August 2019 and now it is June 2021 and no work has been undertaken in relation to that report?

Ms UIBO: I am not sure if you heard, but there has been a lot of work in regard to the recommendations. Further work has been identified to focus on reducing the backlog of applicants and reforming the financial assistance scheme related to the act.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the recommendation in regard to reducing the backlog of applicants?

Ms UIBO: That area is still being worked on, as mentioned in the two answers previously provided. We recognise this area is a high priority for our government, hence some earlier questions and answers in regard to assisting with more staff in that unit.

Mr MALEY: Have any parts of that review been completed and are not still being worked on three years later?

Ms UIBO: The work that is currently engaged with those recommendations is looking at the whole system of services that is provided, making sure they are efficient, quality services supporting the important work that the unit does. Above all, it is to make sure we support victims of crime.

It is a large body of work. The recommendations are live and active and are being implemented through the department.

Mr MALEY: Are any of the recommendations completed yet, three years later?

Ms UIBO: I will have to take the question on notice in regard to the number of recommendations implemented or completed.

Question on Notice No 8.14

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

Mr MALEY: Minister, can you provide information on any recommendations that have been completed from the review that was handed to the government in August 2019?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question.

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: The *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* is also under review, with a projected end date of 2021. Given that violent crime statistics show that domestic violence and alcohol-related assaults seem to be out of control, what is happening with this review?

Ms UIBO: We acknowledge that this is a very important area to address in the Northern Territory. A consultation paper outlining legislative and non-legislative proposals is being prepared by the department. The most effective way to reduce domestic and family violence in terms of working across government—again, multi-agency partnerships, including the very important non-government agencies and organisations that work in this sector to provide support to Territorians and an overall response to this critical issue.

The review being conducted will also consider some of the following areas:

1. the need for legislative reforms in relation to coercive control, which is a national conversation
2. whether it should be an aggravating circumstance to commit certain domestic violence-related offences in the presence of children.

This review is under way and a report is expected to be released for consultation in late 2021. A working group is being established to enable stakeholders, communities, legal professionals, non-government organisations, Aboriginal organisations et cetera to have input and provide feedback to the review.

Fostering the cross-agency government collaboration is very important when looking at justice for victims and preventing domestic, family and sexual violence in the Territory. Improving outcomes for families across the Northern Territory in the area of domestic and family violence is also a commitment of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which I am sure you are very aware of.

A technical review of Part 2.11A—the rehabilitation programs component of this act—will also be undertaken, as it has been operating for one year. That will be August/September 2021.

Mr EDGINGTON: You spoke about a consultation paper. How do you intend to engage with the people living in remote areas of the Northern Territory?

Ms UIBO: The multi-agency approach is critical to ensuring we hear the voices and get feedback from all Territorians, particularly those with English as a first, second or third language. Through my other agency, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, I am very proud to have the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to ensure that cross-agency government work—particularly in a space as critical as preventing domestic, family and sexual violence—is provided the opportunity across the NT to engage all Territorians.

That work is critical in regard to multi-agency partnerships. Through the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, we have a great model of engagement ensuring that remote regional and rural Territorians are included in the consultations that are critical to government policy and non-government services.

Mr COSTA: What will the Aboriginal Justice Agreement mean for the Northern Territory?

Ms UIBO: I have mentioned the Aboriginal Justice Agreement a few times and we had questions on it. We have the output, but I am happy to lead on from the question from the Member for Barkly.

You asked, what will the Aboriginal Justice Agreement mean in the Northern Territory? The reduction of domestic, family and sexual violence is part of what has been identified in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement in relation to government services and the delivery of justice for Territorians—putting victims first and ensuring there is community safety regardless of where you live in the Northern Territory.

This is a high-level strategic agreement that we are looking at. Implementing the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is a critical body of work which is currently under way, and we are looking to release the final agreement in the second half of this year. It is very much anticipated by community members, legal professionals, other government agencies and non-government organisations—reducing recidivism and offending in Aboriginal Territorians, and the high level of statistics in regard to incarceration in our correctional facilities. We want to ensure that we have high-quality service delivery for Aboriginal Territorians and wraparound services. As you know, Member for Arafura, this is critical. It is a huge body of work.

We will have the Aboriginal Justice Unit with us shortly for that output. We will be happy to talk about operational details then. We are already working on the alternative to custody model and the law and justice groups. Member for Arafura, you have been an advocate of this, and other members here will be very interested to hear about some of the progress for the law and justice groups in supporting better access and high-quality access to justice in the Northern Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are there any other reviews or legal policies currently under way in your department?

Ms UIBO: Some of the reviews that are in train include the *Advanced Personal Planning Act 2013* and medical decisions for a person lacking capacity; the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*; the *Business Tenancies (Fair Dealings) Act 2003*; the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007*; and the *Health and Community Services Complaints Act 1998*.

We also have the property offences and Criminal Code reviews, and the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999*, *Summary Offences Act 1923*, and *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* reviews, which we have discussed.

Mr CHAIR: Can I have some clarification on the property section of the Criminal Code? I have a keen interest in the Criminal Code. I understand there is attempting to be an amalgamation between Part II and Part IIAA. Is that review still happening or do I have my wires crossed? Is that part of that area?

Ms UIBO: I love your interest. I know you have that legal eye and are keeping an eye on legislative reform. I will pass to Ms Jenni Daniel-Yee.

Ms DANIEL-YEE: I would not call it an amalgamation of Part IIA and Part IIAA but we are looking at transferring the criminal responsibility to Part IIAA as a responsibility to reflect property offences. It is an ongoing project of ours to do the whole Criminal Code, eventually.

Mr CHAIR: It is not just property.

Ms DANIEL-YEE: At this point we are just looking at property, but it is a long-term project to change the whole Criminal Code.

Mr CHAIR: Maybe I should not have said amalgamation. Yes, it is a long-term project to try and bring those two fault elements into alignment regarding Part II and Part IIAA.

Ms DANIEL-YEE: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MALEY: I know you have listed a whole lot of reviews there. Will they all be finished this financial year?

Ms UIBO: A couple have been completed. I will go through some time lines if that is helpful.

The *Advance Personal Planning Act 2013* is looking to be completed by 2022. The review of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* has been completed and it is currently under consideration by our government. The *Business Tenancies (Fair Dealings) Act 2003* is in train and it is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2021. That is dependent on resourcing.

The *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* is currently under review, as you are aware, and is anticipated for the end of this year, 2021. The *Health and Community Services Complaints Act 1998* is currently under way and is looking at being progressed, depending on resources. The reviews are done thoroughly and take up a lot of resources. We do not have an anticipated time of completion but the work is happening.

The property offences and Criminal Code review will be mid-year this year and we are looking for introductions in the second-half of the year. And the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999* is looking to be

completed by the end of this year, 2021. The *Summary Offences Act 1923* is currently on hold, depending on resources. There are a lot of reviews in place and a lot of work is being done.

Lastly, the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act* is being completed so the recommendations are under consideration by government and that is a whole suite of work that is happening and still under way.

Mr MALEY: Minister, you mentioned a whole lot of reviews there and you put a caveat on most of them saying, 'depending on resources'. Are you saying your department is under-resourced?

Ms UIBO: No, there were only two that are depending on resources. It is quite a skilled area to do the review of legislation. We have time lines; we have anticipated time lines. They can be moved forward or moved back depending on the work that is happening.

When something comes up, if it is urgent or if something gets changed through the Commonwealth that also affects the workload and the resourcing of where we would concentrate those skilled staff to be able to see what affects the Northern Territory. We sometimes have uniform legislation that comes in from the Commonwealth and that may affect our legislation or some of the current review processes or anticipated review processes.

Mr EDGINGTON: The closing date for submissions on the NT Law Reform Committee Mandatory Sentencing and Community-Based Sentencing Options Consultation Paper was 25 November 2020. The committee was to produce a report to government by March 2021. Have you received the report yet?

Ms UIBO: I acknowledge the NT Law Reform Committee and their work. It is made up of volunteers. It submitted a report to government, which I received on 31 March 2021. The Territory Labor government is currently considering the recommendations of that report and is reviewing areas as part of other reform.

As mentioned already, the Aboriginal Justice Agreement has recommended a review of the *Sentencing Act* and, in reviewing sentencing in the Northern Territory, the safety of our communities comes first. We are looking at what we can do to lower recidivism and reoffending rates in the Northern Territory. We are also looking at effective versus ineffective sentencing practices so that we can get strong justice outcomes for our community.

Mr EDGINGTON: Will that report be published?

Ms UIBO: It is currently Cabinet-in-confidence. Once the recommendations are considered by our government, we will respond to those recommendations.

Mr EDGINGTON: What time frame are you anticipating for that?

Ms UIBO: Because it is a Cabinet document, I cannot provide a time frame for that.

Mr EDGINGTON: The NTPA has made submissions with respect to the consultation paper. The minister for Police said the government is looking at reviewing penalties for assaults on police. Is this review separate to the NT Law Reform Committee process or was the minister simply referring to the broader review that is being done?

Ms UIBO: I am getting some clarification in regard to cross-agency collaboration—being the lead in some areas and the service provider in others. I will pass to Ms Gemma Lake for the response.

Ms LAKE: It is a matter we have looked at over time. We are not looking at it actively, but we would engage with Police, Fire and Emergency Services to work on any review of those provisions, if needed.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has the Northern Territory Police Association made a submission to your department seeking a review of the penalties for assault on police?

Ms LAKE: I do not recall a submission to our department specifically from the NT Police Association—in my time, I should say.

Mr EDGINGTON: I have a few questions on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Public comments and submissions were closed ...

Ms UIBO: Sorry, just to clarify, are we still going through the output numbers?

Mr CHAIR: Yes, we are at Output 1.2. Currently we are in Legal Policy in Output Group 1.0, Legal Services.

Mr EDGINGTON: Sorry, is it a different output?

Ms UIBO: Member for Barkly, I was just clarifying. I have a lot more detail on my contents page. We have split it because we have a lot of information. I am very happy to take Aboriginal Justice Agreement questions, but while you are asking, I will introduce Ms Leanne Liddle who is the Director of the Aboriginal Justice Unit.

Mr EDGINGTON: Thank you and welcome to Leanne. The draft Aboriginal Justice Agreement was released in September 2019. Public comments and submissions on the agreement closed in July last year. How many submissions were received?

Ms UIBO: Fifty-one written submissions were received.

Mr EDGINGTON: Have they been made public?

Ms UIBO: Not all the submissions have been publicly released.

Mr EDGINGTON: Have any of those submissions been publicly released?

Ms UIBO: No.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why not?

Ms UIBO: The Aboriginal Justice Agreement is being finalised as a Cabinet document. Once we have the final agreement, then we will publicly release the written submissions, after we have confirmed the submission writers are comfortable with public release. They might have requested confidentiality for their submission.

Mr MALEY: When do you think that will occur?

Ms UIBO: It is currently a Cabinet-in-confidence, so I cannot provide a time line.

Mr EDGINGTON: There has been \$1.1m allocated to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. According to the annual report, it was due to be finalised by the end of last year. You might have touched on it, but when can we expect this agreement to be finalised?

Ms UIBO: I note your interest in and support of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. I thank you for the bipartisan support for such an historic agreement occurring in the Northern Territory. There has been a huge body of work put through with the director in the Aboriginal Justice Unit. We are finalising the agreement. It is sitting with Cabinet for the finer details.

I acknowledge we have very strong representation across community with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement reference committee, which has been heavily involved in providing feedback and expertise across the community sector and legal profession to finalise the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

A lot of work is going in to this and we anticipate that in the second half of 2021 we will officially launch the agreement and have it operating in the Northern Territory. We are addressing some of the keys areas available publicly in the draft, such as reducing reoffending and imprisonment rates of Aboriginal Territorians; engaging and supporting Aboriginal leadership across the Northern Territory; and improving justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians.

As I mentioned earlier this morning, we also have a few areas which have already been rolled out, like the alternatives to custody and boosting the number of Aboriginal Justices of the Peace. That work has already started, so it is not like we are sitting around, waiting for the official launch. Work has already occurred based on the draft agreement and the recommendations that can be found on the website.

Mr EDGINGTON: Submissions closed on 31 July 2020; are you saying this Aboriginal Justice Agreement has been before Cabinet for nearly 12 months?

Ms UIBO: No, in August 2020 we had a Northern Territory election, so once the final draft agreement was completed through the Aboriginal Justice Unit. We went into caretaker mode, and you do not make decisions

while in caretaker mode—Labor does not, anyway. Then we went through the portfolio swearing-in for ministers in September 2020.

The Aboriginal Justice Unit did not stop working during that period of time. It consulted on the draft agreement—which is the one we can see publicly—and took on the feedback. I acknowledge the Aboriginal Justice Agreement reference committee, which provided feedback on the draft agreement and is fine-tuning the agreement, the strategies in place and the recommendations now that are sitting with Cabinet. It is concentrated on the implementation plan and ensuring that when the agreement goes live the implementation plan is attached to that.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are you saying that there is still some work going on outside of Cabinet regarding the Aboriginal Justice Agreement?

Ms UIBO: No. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement with the refined recommendations is sitting with Cabinet.

Mr EDGINGTON: It sounds to me like it has been sitting there since just after the 2020 election.

Ms UIBO: What is currently being worked on across agencies is the collaboration of the implementation plan, which will be attached to the final agreement when it is launched very soon.

There is some work going on outside Cabinet. You just said agencies are working on—what are they working on?

Ms UIBO: That is the implementation plan. In regard to the refined agreement, that is sitting with Cabinet.

Mr EDGINGTON: If they are working on an implementation plan and you have not finalised the recommendations—I do not get it. Is this the cart before the horse?

Ms UIBO: The recommendations have been finalised. The development of the implementation of those recommendations is the cross-agency, multi-agency collaboration that is happening. When the agreement is launched publicly, the implementation plan will work hand in hand on how that agreement lands and how it is implemented across the Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: It sounds to me like you have settled on some recommendations; is that fair to say?

Ms UIBO: The recommendations from the Aboriginal Justice Agreement work. The public draft agreement, which is available, has been refined—that is, the refined agreement is sitting with Cabinet. Looking at how we implement the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is the current work of government in regard to our cross-agency collaboration.

Mr EDGINGTON: How can people be discussing the implementation if the recommendations have not been finalised?

Ms UIBO: It is not just any people; it is our public service—how we make sure the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is doing what is recommended.

Mr EDGINGTON: What are they actually working on? If your recommendations have not been finalised, how can they develop an implementation plan to implement the Aboriginal Justice Agreement if you have not finalised the recommendations?

Ms UIBO: The recommendations have been finalised in the sense of the principles. The strategies are being refined from the draft agreement to the final agreement, which is the final document. How we implement those final recommendations is the work that is happening across the different agencies.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why does it need to be sitting in Cabinet if all this work is going on outside of Cabinet? What are you hiding? Why do you not just release it?

Ms UIBO: Member for Barkly, it is not hiding anything. There are some very clear processes of government to ensure we do the work with due diligence. There is also a very high level of responsibility to ensure that the work being done across the Northern Territory community, particularly by the Aboriginal Justice Unit, is upheld—the integrity is upheld, people are not given false hopes, and there is practical implementation of those principles and values. It is a living, breathing document being implemented across the Territory and will not sit on the shelf.

There is a lot of high expectations with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. If it is rushed, there is a good chance it will fail. We want to make sure the processes are followed properly and that we have all the work that has been lined up over many months—acknowledging Ms Liddle as the director and her team for their work. The expectations of community and the reference committee are that the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is not just a document, but that it has actions attached and those actions provide a positive outcome for Aboriginal Territorians in the justice system.

Mr MALEY: If Cabinet changed the recommendations, will that affect the implementation of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement?

Ms UIBO: The recommendations have been provided. What we are looking at in terms of the principles, the strategies and the implementation plan, that is what Cabinet is considering. The final agreement—as per community expectations and all the consultations that fed into many months of work—will be released as a final document. It is important for us, as government, to have that implementation plan.

We know what needs to be done; it is very clear. Most Territorians know what we need to change in regard to the system, but how will we do it? That is the challenge of government, and that is the work happening on the implementation plan. It is not just the why, because we know the why, but the how.

Mr MALEY: I do not think you answered my question. If Cabinet considers the recommendations, does not accept them, and changes the strategy or the principles—because that is what Cabinets do—will that not affect implementation of that plan? Cabinet needs to approve it and then you work out how to implement it; does that make sense? As my colleague said, cart before the horse.

Ms UIBO: It is clear through the work that has been done that the principles and values are there. Our Territory Labor government is strong in what has been already highlighted through that draft agreement. It is through the fine tuning of an agreement in partnership with the implementation plans that Territorians know how we will enact the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, what, how and when it will be done.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much has been expended on developing this Aboriginal Justice Agreement so far?

Ms UIBO: This financial year to 31 March 2021, it is \$542,886.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is the agreement considered to be within budget overall, given that it appears to be behind schedule?

Ms UIBO: The estimated budget for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement currently for this upcoming financial year is \$1.1m.

Mr EDGINGTON: How do you anticipate that budget will be spent over the next 12 months?

Ms UIBO: That figure is for the operation of the Aboriginal Justice Unit regarding staffing and employee numbers.

Mr EDGINGTON: From your responses, are there other agencies involved in the implementation or development of the implementation plan?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is that coming out of the \$1.1m budget or their own agency budgets?

Ms UIBO: That is through their own agency budgets. We are relying on the skills and expertise across government to collaborate for the purpose of providing the strength of the implementation plan for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many staff are in the Aboriginal Justice unit?

Ms UIBO: There are four staff in the AJU.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is a new initiative referred to as a one-off funding to support courts in the NT Legal Aid Commission for the amount of \$3m. What is this for and why is it a one-off?

Ms LAKE: The department received a one-off \$3m for expensive cases. Part of that money was for DPP, partly for the courts and legal aid.

Mr MALEY: Where did you received that money from?

Ms LAKE: It was part of the budget process.

Mr MALEY: You got an extra one-off payment this year of \$3m. Where do you expect to spend that money?

Ms LAKE: I do not have the specific details of how we would expect to spend it, but it would be on resourcing those cases.

Mr MALEY: I assume you do not put a request in for \$3m to Cabinet without a reason. Could you take that question on notice?

Ms UIBO: Yes, Member for Nelson.

Question on Notice No 8.15

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

Mr MALEY: Can you please provide information of where you expect to spend the \$3m which you received as one-off funding support this year?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the total amount allocated to legal assistance in the budget?

Ms UIBO: In 2021–22 the department, through its grants administration team, will administer legal assistance funding, totalling \$25.754m, from the Commonwealth Government under the NTLAC and \$7.525m from the Territory government, excluding the ad hoc funding requests.

Mr EDGINGTON: What proportion of the legal assistance budget is allocated to specialist women's legal services?

Ms UIBO: Recognising that legal assistance for women's services is essential in the Northern Territory, three specific women's legal aid services are provided across the Northern Territory. I will start with the Top End Women's Legal Service. The Commonwealth funding is \$312,000 for NTLAC baseline generalist and baseline family law and family violence funding.

The Central Australian Women's Legal Service is \$427,000 to domestic violence legal service in the southern region. The Commonwealth funding for CAWLS is \$1.487m and NTLAC baseline generalist and baseline family law, family violence, domestic violence unit and health partnership funding.

Through Katherine Women's Information and Legal Services, or KWILS, the Commonwealth funding is \$256,000. NTLAC baseline generalist and baseline family law, family violence, including family advocacy and support services funding from Legal Aid Commission of approximately \$170,000.

Mr EDGINGTON: In addition to that, which organisations receive funding from the NT Government to deliver legal assistance?

Ms UIBO: The Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission is one; the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, or NAAJA, is another; the Darwin Community Legal Service is another one; and the three women's legal services—Top End, Central Australia and Katherine—are the services across the NT.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the value of funding that NAAJA receives from the NT Government on an annual basis?

Ms UIBO: Through the Commonwealth funding, which is provided through NTLAC, the funding for NAAJA is \$15.281m.

Mr EDGINGTON: Do you know how much NT legal assistance funding is spent on legal assistance for perpetrators of family violence, including defending criminal charges?

Ms UIBO: That question would relate to the data collected for those services—their clients if it is a defence or prosecution.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is that part of the reporting arrangements back to the funding provider? And would you have those statistics?

Ms UIBO: We would have to take that on notice in regard to what reporting requirements are requested and required of the different services.

Question on Notice No 8.16

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How much NT legal assistance funding is spent on legal assistance for perpetrators of family violence, including defending criminal charges?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question.

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Does the Northern Territory Government provide any non-financial assistance, such as office premises or subsidised premises to any organisations in the legal assistance sector? If so, which organisations receive the support and what is the financial value of the support each organisation?

Ms UIBO: The agency provides some support to the Top End Women's Legal Service, but regarding the breakdown of what would be in-kind, we would have to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.17

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

Mr EDGINGTON: Does the Northern Territory Government provide any non-financial assistance, such as office premises or subsidised premises to any organisations in the legal assistance sector? If so, which organisations receive the support and what is the financial value of the support for organisation?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question.

Ms UIBO: Yes. I will add onto that—there is another one, the Domestic Violence Legal Service through NT Legal Aid Commission. We will add that to the question.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: The importance of multidisciplinary education has been identified as integral to the success of specialist family violence courts in other jurisdictions. Are you aware of what budget has been provided, or any measures implemented for training to support the specialist family and domestic violence court in Alice Springs? Who is developing the training?

Ms UIBO: That would be better placed in Output Group 3.0, Court and Tribunal Support Services, when the head of division is with us.

Mr EDGINGTON: What funding does the NT Government provide to specialist women's legal services for risk management?

Ms UIBO: The figures were provided earlier for those three women's legal services in the Northern Territory—that would be the funding. If there was risk management attached to that, it would be for each of those services through that funding.

Mr MALEY: The statistics for alcohol and domestic violence have been going up throughout the Territory. What work is your policy unit doing to reduce those statistics?

Ms UIBO: The Alcohol Policy Unit sits under the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade with carriage by Minister Fyles.

In terms of the department's contribution throughout those areas, there is the work on the justice agreement—which has been identified and we have spoken about already. That is one area. Also, with the review of the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007*. Those are the contributions from the department in those two specific areas.

Mr MALEY: Do you think those agreements will reduce the upward-trending statistics which have come out in the last few months?

Ms UIBO: The work is being done because we identified that strong need in the Northern Territory. I would not be able to answer a hypothetical about the future, but we recognise this as an area of need and priority in the Northern Territory and will continue that work, not just with our agency but in partnership with other agencies.

Mr EDGINGTON: The introduction of the NTG Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework and the Common Risk Assessment Tool imposes obligations on specialist domestic and family violence agencies, including specialist women's legal services. We understand this involves a significant amount of extra time and effort for these agencies. What funding has been made available to specialist domestic and family violence agencies to support the administration of the risk assessment management framework and the Common Risk Assessment Tool?

Ms UIBO: You mentioned the services that concentrate on preventing and reducing family and domestic violence. Those envelopes stand as is. Some of the work under way is the work in partnership with the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, there was a rise in family and domestic violence with COVID. It was nationally highlighted and brought to the table to address as a key priority across all jurisdictions. The Northern Territory was part of those conversations.

The federal funding which is boosted to the Northern Territory—some of it was once-off through COVID-19 funding. Some of that Commonwealth funding was provided to Northern Territory legal aid services specifically through the support of legal assistance services across Australia.

In terms of our COVID-19 legal assistance funding and project agreement, the NT received \$1.158m in the 2019–20 year and \$1.986m in 2020–21.

Though the project agreement, NTLAC, DCLS, KWILS, Top End Women's Legal Service and CAWLS all received an ICT payment administered by the department. NAAJA and the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service received an ICT payment directly from the Commonwealth Government to support the services they were providing across the Territory regarding domestic and family violence.

Mr MALEY: What tools do you have to measure the success of those two things—the domestic violence risk assessment and the framework? Do you have any KPIs in relation to measuring whether the funding you just spoke about is actually reducing—if it is successful or not? What are the KPIs and how do you measure these programs?

Ms UIBO: We provide the envelope through our partnership with the Commonwealth. The lead agency is Territory Families, which would provide those details and the statistics of what the outcome measures are and what the requirements are for reporting any KPIs that may be attached. That is better placed with Territory Families.

Mr EDGINGTON: If the risk assessment and management framework operates as it is intended, there will be greater detection of risk of serious injury or homicide detected in our community. The risk assessment

and management framework requires specialist domestic and family violence services such as women's legal services to respond and manage the risk. Has any additional funding been provided to each specialist women's legal service to manage the expected increase in identified risk?

Ms UIBO: The current funding we have outlined for those services is what they get. In regard to some of the details you have asked for, that would be each of those legal aid services. Obviously, they operate differently and with different population base, depending on where they are located and the services they deliver. We would not be able to provide that as an agency. Those legal aid services would have that information.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is no additional funding. Is that correct?

Ms UIBO: The funding is provided, but there is the relationship with the Commonwealth through the NTLAC through the bilateral schedule as well. It has been outlined in the previous answer.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.17

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, we just received an answer to a question on notice. Support for premises to two legal service providers. They are Top End Women's Legal Service of \$74,400 per annum for rental support paid by DCDD, and the Domestic Violence Legal Services has in-kind accommodation in the Local Court in office and operating space.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Crime Victims Services Unit

Mr CHAIR: We will now consider Output 1.3, Crime Victims Services Unit. Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: Where there has been compensation awarded to a victim of crime, the Territory may commence a proceeding in the court for recovery of the amount of compensation paid. In the last financial year, what dollar figure has been recovered from offenders?

Ms UIBO: As we are changing senior officials, I introduce at the table Ms Rosslyn Chenoweth who is the Director of the Crime Victims Services Unit for the department. As Ros is walking in, please repeat the question.

Mr EDGINGTON: Where there has been compensation awarded to a victim of crime the Territory may commence a proceeding in the court for recovery of the amount of compensation paid. In the last financial year what dollar figure has been recovered from offenders?

Ms UIBO: Can I seek some clarification? Are you seeking the figure for the previous financial year or the current financial year, through the estimates reporting period to 31 March 2021?

Mr EDGINGTON: Last financial year 2021, and if you have an update till March this year we will take that as well.

Ms CHENOWETH: With regard to the recovery of payments under the scheme—I do not have the amounts from last financial year in front of me, but in relation to the reporting period I have the monthly amounts that come in. They come in chunks because we outsource a lot of the work to debt collectors. It is about \$16,000 in July; about \$11,000 in August; \$17,000 in October; \$31,000 in December; \$31,000 in January; and then there was a period where there was not a lot of activity in recovery. It was over \$300,000 in February/March. We can add that up to ...

Mr MALEY: What was the total recovery for this year?

Ms CHENOWETH: Whatever they all add up to. I can add them up and give you the exact figures.

Mr MALEY: What are we talking roughly there?

Mr CHAIR: I have \$16,000, \$11,000, \$17,000, \$31,000 and \$31,000, which is \$106,000.

Ms CHENOWETH: It was about \$100,000. Yes. In that nine-month period.

Mr CHAIR: Up until March this year?

Mr MALEY: Ms Brimson was saying earlier that the own-source revenue was about \$500,000 for the recovery of the fines for victims of crime. When we were talking about the figure of \$500,000 to \$600,000—we had that conversation.

Ms UIBO: The understanding is that we have two parts. Answering the first question from the Member for Barkly was about the recovery from offenders, which is the figures we read out of the payments. There is also the victims levy on infringement notices; that is a larger amount, which is for \$3m, and that is through the courts process.

Mr MALEY: Ms Brimson was saying that there was \$500,000 of revenue from victims of crime earlier, unless I am mistaken. Going back to what I was talking about in regard to the whole budget—in your highlights you say on page 166, on the second line, there is an additional one-off for the Crime Victims Services Unit of \$1.5m. This is what I was getting at earlier, when I was talking about the \$1.5m and we had a disagreement about the \$630,000.

In your budget papers the \$630,000 has gone down a little—when Ms Brimson was saying that of that, \$500,000 is made up of money recovered from offenders.

From what I just heard then, those figures do not match up, and they certainly do not match up to the \$1.5m in your own budget paper at page 166. I am very confused, as I am sure Territorians are, that we have heard different figures coming out of your department in relation to—first, there was the \$100,000 we heard about in recovered funds, from the Member for Barkly's question. Earlier it was \$500,000. Your budget highlight says \$1.5m as an additional payment.

Your figures go down by about \$600,000. Minister, I am confused; can you explain that?

Ms UIBO: We are just getting some clarity; we will probably take that on notice. Some of the understanding is that more was recovered and was expected, which is obviously with the variants and changes. We will take it on notice so we can be completely clear and give you the proper explanation.

Question on Notice No 8.18

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

Mr MALEY: Can you explain why your budget highlights state that there is \$1.5m additional funding for the Crime Victims Services Unit, yet the columns in the actual budget say that the revised budget for 2021 was \$8.3m, and in the budget for this year it is \$7.7m. That is the first part of the question.

Earlier today, we heard some information from your department that there was \$500,000 as a recovery for victims of crime, but we just heard that there was \$100,000. I am confused where that actually lies and what the actual figure is.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson is allocated the number 8.18.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many active applications does the Crime Victims Services Unit hold at the moment?

Ms UIBO: There are 1,674 active applications.

Mr MALEY: Rosslyn was talking about the \$100,000, and then she mentioned that debt collectors are used to recover that. Can you please tell us the cost that debt collection services impose on your agency to recover the \$100,000? I say that as an estimate because we did not do them up correctly, but around that figure.

Ms UIBO: I will pass to Ms Chenoweth to give you some of those figures.

Ms CHENOWETH: It is a small amount. Over that nine-month period it would have been less than \$10,000.

Mr MALEY: The debt collecting fee was less than \$10,000, so the figure was raised at \$106,000. You have effectively made about \$90,000 in relation to the recovery for victims of crime from the offenders.

Ms CHENOWETH: Yes, in relation to the recovery of payments made under the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act*.

Mr EDGINGTON: (Inaudible – microphone off.)

Ms UIBO: Six hundred and forty-one outstanding applications were lodged before 2018.

Mr EDGINGTON: If a person is registered on the Victims Register they are entitled to be told the following information about their offender: if they are transferred to another prison interstate or overseas; if they have applied for parole and whether it was granted; when they are due for release; if they have escaped; and any recapture or if they are died in custody. Have there been any circumstances in the past year where this information has not been provided to the victim?

Ms UIBO: Not that the department is aware of, but to clarify we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.19

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

Mr EDGINGTON: If a person is registered on the Victims Register they are entitled to be told the following information about their offender: if they are transferred to another prison interstate or overseas; if they have applied for parole and whether it was granted; when they are due for release; if they have escaped; and any recapture or if they are died in custody. Have there been any circumstances in the past year where this information has not been provided to the victim?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr MALEY: We heard that we recovered about \$106,000 from the offenders. How much has been paid to victims under the Victims of Crime applications?

Ms UIBO: Could I clarify which time period you are requesting?

Mr MALEY: In the last financial year. The \$106,000 I assumed was over nine months—basically all of last financial year. How much was paid out to victims of crime last financial year?

Ms UIBO: The total for the reporting period, 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021, was \$2.897m.

Mr MALEY: We recovered \$106,000 from offenders. Why is there such a big difference between the amount paid out and amount recovered?

Ms UIBO: That was explained earlier. We have the offender order, the court levies received and the infringement notices.

Mr MALEY: Effectively, if you are a victim of crime, the offender has to pay compensation. Is that correct? The victims are being paid \$2.8m and we recovered from the offenders \$106,000. I am not talking about the \$140-odd for the victims of crime—but why such a difference? Surely we are meant to recover all the money from offenders?

Ms UIBO: I will pass to Ms Chenoweth to explain the differences in collections, levies and infringement payments.

Ms CHENOWETH: The victims assistance fund, which funds the financial assistance scheme, comprises money that is recovered directly from offenders and from the victims levy imposed when a person is found guilty, and infringement notices—there is a victims levy attached to a lot of infringement notices. That is how the fund is funded.

The actual debt recovery process, which is undertaken by my office, goes directly to offenders. To recover from them is complex and it is difficult to recover from offenders, as many are impecunious. There are also questions of fear by victims—the retribution issue if that money is recovered from them. We take the fears of victims into account in determining how far we go with the debt recovery process. There are a lot of issues that impact on our decision and ability to recovery from an offender.

Mr MALEY: I accept that completely and I understand that there would have to be many considerations. If we take these considerations out and put them to the side for the time being. We paid \$2.8m to victims. We should be entitled to \$2.8m back from offenders, but we are not. We get \$106,000 back, which is based on various decisions made by your department.

Ms CHENOWETH: Not necessarily decisions, but ability as well. We take direct debt recovery action against a lot more than that, but it is whether we can recover. Sometimes we cannot find offenders; it is very difficult to serve them. Some have passed away; some are still in gaol; and some are impecunious. There are a lot of reasons we cannot. It does not mean we do not have the statements of claim out there and are making applications for those.

Mr MALEY: But the figures are that you paid out \$2.8m and received \$106,000.

Ms CHENOWETH: That is correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a question about the Community Justice Centre. When do I ask that?

Ms UIBO: Under courts.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration on Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Criminal Justice Research and Statistics

Mr CHAIR: We will now consider Output 1.4, Criminal Justice Research and Statistics. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: I have an answer for question on notice 8.5.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.5

Ms UIBO: The answer to 8.5 is the budget for the Solicitor-General for 2021–22 is \$997,647.

Mr EDGINGTON: Crime statistics are very often spoken about. Would it be possible to make a spreadsheet available to the public with the yearly crime statistics for a 10-year period, to make it possible for the general public to look at trends over time in the various categories of crime in the Territory?

Ms UIBO: I welcome to the table Ms Carolyn Whyte, Director of the Criminal Justice Research and Statistics Unit of the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. We do reporting—monthly statistics are provided. I will get Carolyn to give more detail about the question in regard to the longer-term reporting, what is accessible and available to the public and what also becomes part of research and statistics.

Ms WHYTE: We have a long-term dataset available on the government's open data portal. That has monthly crime statistics data back to January 2008. It is not available as a spreadsheet; it is a CSV file, which is for compliance with open data machine-readable datasets. It is openable and usable as a spreadsheet. That would be available.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is that available in a format that can be readily opened, were a member of the public can look at a 10-year trend of crime statistics? Where it is recorded, is that something a member of the public would have to do interrogate further to find the statistics?

Ms WHYTE: A member of the public would need to know what they are doing to create the trends in that data. It is put out as a dataset to support research and a lot of questions. Where people would have the ability, the website does not have user tools overlaid on it. The user would provide that in either Excel or something else.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why can we not just have a 10-year spreadsheet that is easily accessible and does not require any further interrogation? Why can we not see the monthly statistics presented over a 10-year period?

Ms WHYTE: The data is available. In terms of putting out an interface for people to use, there is quite a lot of data there. Coming up with a series of all the possible charts of things that people might want to look at from that data every month is over and above what we would do. The data is there for people who want to interrogate it.

Mr EDGINGTON: The data is there to interrogate further but why can we not have statistics over a 10-year period? The statistics that come out monthly have assaults, alcohol-related assaults, domestic violence, sexual assault, commercial break-ins, home break-ins, property offences and unlawful use of a motor vehicle. Why can we not see that over a 10-year period?

Ms WHYTE: In the monthly tables that we publish now, there are statistics for a six-year period. Would you like four more added to that?

Mr EDGINGTON: I would like to see those statistics presented in a format where the average person in the Northern Territory can click on a button, like they do now to see the monthly statistics. Why can they not see that trend over a 10-year period?

Ms UIBO: We will take that as a suggestion and feed it back to the department. As Ms Whyte mentioned, there is six years' worth of data. I take your point about the 10 years. It might be something we can look at through the unit.

Mr EDGINGTON: Will you pursue that on behalf of the Northern Territory public to present those statistics over a 10-year period?

Ms UIBO: It is something we can look at, understanding that there are parameters around the work that the crime statistics unit produces. They also look at reports. It is a very skilled and talented set of expertise that is required in that unit, led by Ms Whyte and her team. I am not wanting to overload the work they already do but we can have a look at the sustainability of having a 10-year dataset as opposed to the six-year dataset that is currently available.

Mr MONAGHAN: It is not my area, so I am very keen to understand how that team contributes to the work of government. Can you explain that?

Ms UIBO: The work that the unit does is of a lot of interest. As Ms Whyte explained, there are specific areas which get published. It is also used for data and research in terms of support to other agencies. Then they have some areas where there is specific remit in regard to reports that are active and data being collected.

Ms Whyte provided a great response in terms of how data was aggregated, collected and received through the estimates of December last year. The work they do that is ongoing, particularly for other agencies. I will get Ms Whyte to talk about the team, what they specialise in, some of the research they do and their general business.

Ms WHYTE: The Criminal Justice Research and Statistics Unit is a shared service between this department, the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, the Northern Territory Police and agencies that have responsibility for alcohol. We provide support to these agencies with analysis and reporting from across the criminal justice system.

Some of our data is provided by Police, some by the courts and some comes from Corrections and youth justice. We use that to support the work that is happening in the development and evaluation of policy and programs. We work closely with relevant counterparts in our partner agencies, making sure we are all on the same page, using the same data and have the same information when it comes to the criminal justice system.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the current recidivism rate for prisoners in the Northern Territory? For example, how many will go on to commit a subsequent offence within 12 months of being released?

Ms UIBO: This crosses over to the next output in regard to Correctional Services. We are trying to seek some clarification for that question. Could you repeat that question so we make sure we get the correct answer?

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the current recidivism rate for prisoners in the Northern Territory? For example, how many will go on to commit a subsequent offence within 12 months of being released?

Ms UIBO: We will take it on notice and, hopefully, provide the answer in the next output.

Question on Notice No 8.20

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

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the current recidivism rate for prisoners in the Northern Territory? For example, how many will go on to commit a subsequent offence within 12 months of being released?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many youth offenders were arrested in the last financial year?

Ms UIBO: Sorry, we just got the answer for the previous question, 8.20, if we can provide that?

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.20

Ms UIBO: The NT recidivism rate in 2019–20 in regard to sentenced prisoners released in 2017–18 who returned to prison with a new sanction within two years was 60.8%. This is an increase from 2018–19 for which the figure was 59.4% of such prisoners returned within two years.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am waiting for the answer to how many youth offenders were arrested in the last financial year.

Ms UIBO: We will take that one on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.21

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many youth offenders were arrested in the last financial year?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.21.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many youths were arrested for new offending while on bail for the last financial year?

Ms UIBO: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.22

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many youths were arrested for new offending while on bail for the last financial year?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.22.

Mr EDGINGTON: For the financial year to date, can you please break down the sentenced youths into sentence-type categories, for example boot camp, victim conferencing, incarceration or any alternative sentencing options?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.23

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

Mr EDGINGTON: For the financial year to date, can you please break down the sentenced youths into sentence-type categories, for example boot camp, victim conferencing, incarceration or any alternative sentencing options?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.23.

Mr MALEY: Can you provide us with information relating to how many youths on bail have been found as 'exceptional circumstances' and not continued—this is in relation to the last four weeks in the new legislation.

Ms UIBO: Specific details regarding exceptional circumstances are still being recorded, related to the amendments that went through three to four weeks ago. It is still being plugged into the system in terms of the reporting data and how to collect that information.

Mr MALEY: Are you saying the system has not been modified to accept whether exceptional circumstances apply?

Ms UIBO: The current work is happening through the unit to record and track that data.

Mr MALEY: As at today, we cannot record that data?

Ms UIBO: Yes, that is correct.

Mr EDGINGTON: In the past 12 months, how many charges of assault with intent to steal have been laid against youth offenders?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.24

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

Mr EDGINGTON: In the past 12 months, how many charges of assault with intent to steal have been laid against youth offenders?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.24.

Mr MALEY: When do you think your system will be able to measure whether exceptional circumstances is used in relation to these youths and the new bail laws which were brought in recently?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, would you please restate the question so you are not asking the minister for an opinion?

Mr MALEY: Could you tell the committee when your system will be able to measure whether exceptional circumstances is correctly applied for and given by the courts?

Ms UIBO: I cannot provide a specific date as the work is under way. When it is finished, we will let you know.

Mr MALEY: Can you provide an estimate?

Ms UIBO: Not at this stage.

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to charges of assault with intent to steal, how many of these charges have convictions been recorded against, how many has the offender been sentenced to detention and what is the average sentence?

Ms UIBO: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.25

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

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to charges of assault with intent to steal laid against youth offenders over the last 12 months, how many of these charges have convictions been recorded against, how many has the offender been sentenced to detention and what is the average sentence?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.25.

Mr MALEY: In relation to the serious breaches of bail, under the new bail amendment, can you provide some information as to how many youths have been charged and found guilty of a serious breach of bail?

Ms UIBO: From 15 May 2021 to 10 June 2021, 17 youths allegedly committed a serious breach of bail, prescribed offence or electronic monitory curfew breaches on 27 occasions—emphasising that this is allegedly committed and there may not be sentencing attached to this.

Mr EDGINGTON: In the past 12 months how many charges of robbery have been laid against youth offenders? How many of these charges have been withdrawn or dismissed? What are the reasons of these charges being withdrawn? How many of these charges have resulted in the offender being sentenced to detention, and what is the average sentence?

Ms UIBO: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.26

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

Mr EDGINGTON: In the past 12 months how many charges of robbery have been laid against youth offenders? How many of these charges have been withdrawn or dismissed? What are the reasons for these charges being withdrawn? How many of these charges has resulted in the offender being sentenced to detention, and what was the average sentence?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.26.

Mr MALEY: My question is in relation to the alleged serious breach of bail. With the figures you gave previously, how many of those youth offenders were remanded in custody?

Ms UIBO: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.27

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

Mr MALEY: How many of the youths who allegedly incurred a serious breach of bail were remanded in custody?

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

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.27.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.4 and Output Group 1.0.

The committee suspended.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back. I ask the minister to introduce the members of her team.

Ms UIBO: I welcome to the table Mr David Thompson, Acting Commissioner, Northern Territory Correctional Services.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Output 2.1 – Custodial Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Correctional Services, Output 2.1, Custodial Services.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 2.0, Correctional Services, Output 2.1, Custodial Services. Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: When is the commissioner expected to return from leave?

Ms LAKE: The matter concerning Mr McNairn's absence from the office is an employment one and it involves personal and private information, so it would not be appropriate for me to discuss.

Mr EDGINGTON: When does the acting commissioner's period of acting as the commissioner end?

Ms LAKE: We have been renewing the acting commissioner on a month-by-month basis. It will be reviewed again at the end of this month.

Mr EDGINGTON: That would be the end of June?

Ms LAKE: That is correct.

Mr EDGINGTON: Would it be fair to say there is no certainty about the commissioner returning to duty at the moment?

Ms LAKE: The matters concerning Mr McNairn are employment matters and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on them.

Mr EDGINGTON: Last year we were told the cleaning, repairs and additional work and expenses incurred as a result of the May 2020 riot at the Darwin Correctional Centre amounted to \$2.122m as of 31 December 2020. Subsequent media reports put the damage from \$20m to \$40m. What are the current costs associated with the riot? Has there been any additional work required since then and at what cost?

Ms UIBO: Regarding the serious disturbance in May 2020, the value of the damage is still considered in the order of approximately \$30m. This is a combination of restitution of building and some personnel costs for the escort. The department has been reimbursed \$2.779m of the \$3.327m in expenditure associated with the disturbance. The invoicing of the remaining \$547,000 is in train and that is through the insurer.

The works to remove all the damaged infrastructure is complete and works will shortly commence in regard to the restitution.

In relation to the charges of prisoners involved—and I am sure you understand there are matters before the courts—I will not be able to comment on that side of the incident.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You just said \$30m. Did you mean \$30m or \$3m?

Mr MALEY: I have the same question—\$30m or \$3m?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It did not stack up with what you said—\$30m or \$3m?

Ms UIBO: For the reimbursement, sorry, there is the consideration of the whole damages, which was estimated between \$20m and \$40m. It is still estimated in that ballpark, which is about \$30m. In what has been claimed to the department so far and what has been reimbursed by the insurer is the \$2.779m out of the \$3.327m.

Mr MALEY: There is \$30m worth of damage and you have recovered \$2m?

Ms UIBO: I will pass to Ms Alecia Brimson for the dollar figures. In regard to the insurance claim and the processes, in part she will be able to speak to some of the details of that.

Ms BRIMSON: The public-private partnership is insured. Essentially, the damage is insured. Whilst the insurer goes through the process of estimating the damage and what it has cost, the agency has incurred some costs. That is the figure just quoted by the minister. That has largely been now recovered through those insurance payments. The remainder of the damage and the cost of that should be met by the insurer.

Obviously, as we work our way through the damage and they work out exactly what has occurred, there will be some variations to those amounts.

Mr MALEY: Have you actually spent \$30m repairing the building and now are awaiting insurance? How much money is out of the government pocket, I am getting at?

Ms BRIMSON: The Territory government has paid out \$3.32m—that is what it has cost us in our expenditure. We have recovered \$2.7m. We are expecting in the order of \$0.5m to be paid to us before the end of this financial year.

Mr MALEY: I am still confused ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Yes, me too.

Mr MALEY: Where do you get the \$2m from?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Who is paying for the rest?

Ms UIBO: I will pass to Acting Commissioner Thompson.

Mr THOMPSON: The cost of the damage is estimated at \$30m. That is being managed by the project company. They have quantity surveyors and loss adjustors to deal with. That is where the \$30m comes from.

Mr MALEY: Who is the project company?

Mr THOMPSON: Sorry, the public-private partnership, the PPP, owns the site.

Mr MALEY: They are the ones who have spent the \$30m?

Mr THOMPSON: They have the duty to deal with the insurance claim. Does that make sense to you?

Mr MALEY: I am still confused. Has the \$30m been spent repairing the damage?

Mr THOMPSON: No, the damage is not repaired yet.

Mr MALEY: Is the building sitting there vacant?

Mr THOMPSON: The \$30m is the estimate of cost.

Mr MALEY: The riot was on 7 May 2020 and it has been sitting vacant and is damaged right now?

Mr THOMPSON: The preliminary work has been undertaken to get the site fit for the contractors to come in and do the refurbishment. There has been a delay because they had to reschedule some of the works that were unforeseen at the time. They have now become available to the quantity surveyors and engineers. In other words, that was work we could not see at that point in time which we now have to include in the scope of works.

Mr MALEY: There is another \$27m to be spent repairing the prison?

Mr THOMPSON: It is the estimate of \$30m at the moment.

Mr MALEY: You spent \$3m, so there is \$27m more to spend on the estimate?

Mr THOMPSON: Yes.

Ms UIBO: The dollar figure I mentioned earlier is through the insurance—what has been claimed back.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why has it taken so long? This happened in May 2020. The acting commissioner just said the site is being prepared. What has been done on the site so far?

Ms UIBO: I will get the acting commissioner to talk to some of the detail. Some of the works slowed down last year, unfortunately, because of the global pandemic. There were some changes to the access to the Darwin correctional facility. Taking that into account, unfortunately, delayed some of the project. I will get the acting commissioner to talk to some of the detail regarding the site and what has been done so far.

Mr THOMPSON: The work that has been undertaken is preliminary work to make the site safe, clean up the debris and allow the main contractor to come on-site.

The PPP, which is organising the contractor, had to reschedule the scope of works. That has been delayed with agreeing on a contract with the contractor. I hope we will have a start on-site by the main contractor very shortly but, at this moment in time, the main contractor has not commenced work on the site as yet.

Mr EDGINGTON: It sounds to me like the site has been cleaned up. Is that it?

Mr THOMPSON: That is correct. We are waiting for the main contract to be agreed on and the main contractor to start the main refurbishment works.

Mr EDGINGTON: When you say the main contractor, has there been a full scope of works prepared as to what needs to be done to restore that part of the prison to what it was before the fire?

Mr THOMPSON: That is correct. It has been done by the PPP—the organisation that is organising all of that work—in agreement with the contractor to commence the works as soon as possible.

Mr MALEY: What is the cost to the government for housing these prisoners—or whatever services that were in that part of the prison that is now unusable? What is that cost to the government?

Mr THOMPSON: The work that was done initially to put emergency accommodation on-site is part of the insurance claim, too.

Mr MALEY: How much is that costing so far?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.28

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

Mr MALEY: How much is it costing the Territory taxpayer to rehouse prisoners whilst this part of the prison is vacant and not being cleaned up?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.28.

Mr EDGINGTON: Just to make it clear, which part of the prison is damaged? Is it where prisoners are housed, training areas or kitchens? Can you give me an overview of what has been damaged in the prison?

Ms UIBO: A large portion of the damage is through the education and training building and the areas that provide activities to prisoners—employment pathways after a custodial sentence.

Mr THOMPSON: The main damage that has been done is to a multifunctional activity centre that also housed our sentence management and our security department, as well as the education and program delivery units. It has damaged quite an extensive amount of our activity facilities within the prison. They also damaged, beyond quick repair, the sector five management unit.

Mr MALEY: What is the cost of relocating the sector five management unit?

Mr THOMPSON: That is part of the installation of the temporary units that we spoke about earlier. You asked for an ongoing cost for that, and those are obviously rental units. That is the item you took on notice.

Mr MALEY: Will that be included in the question on notice?

Mr THOMPSON: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: You mentioned the education and training area; what impact has that had on the delivery of those services to prisoners?

Ms UIBO: There are still education and training activities provided. There is the industrial area where some of that are still taking place. I will get the commissioner to talk more about the facilities, what is available, what is being utilised in some of the changes that have been adjusted in order to keep those activities and programs running.

Mr THOMPSON: This has caused us considerable convenience in terms of delivering our facilities across the Darwin Correctional Centre. However, the staff have adapted very well. We have made some good improvising arrangements; we have brought on these broader covenants and are continuing to deliver education, offending behaviour programs and vocational arrangements. Having said that, it is obviously not ideal.

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to key performance indicators, offender program hours delivered, the estimate for 2021 of 16,000 hours is well short of the KPI of 20,475. The reason given for this is venues being temporarily unavailable following an incident at the Darwin Correctional Centre. None of these venues are available, but it sounds like you are still able to deliver some of those services.

Ms UIBO: That is correct. Our Corrections staff have been working very hard to find alternative spaces and utilise other areas. The acting commissioner mentioned some of the temporary arrangements in place to support those programs and activities. We have those KPIs as the benchmarks and targets. Unfortunately, some of those hindrances and changes have slowed the progress towards those targets. I will get the commissioner to speak a bit more.

Mr THOMPSON: We have probably hit the perfect storm, to be frank. Last year, leading up to this concerted discipline incident in as much as we had also been dealing with the COVID-19 issue just before that, which caused considerable restriction on our ability to deliver normal services. The setting-up arrangements created further delay. It has been quite a difficult year in terms of meeting our delivery.

When we get back to normal, as it were, we will deliver services as we should be, but there is a restricted regime in effect at this moment. Having said that, I pay compliments to the staff out there. They are doing the very best they can in the most difficult of circumstances.

Mr MALEY: When will repairs to the prison be completed?

Ms UIBO: As the acting commissioner outlined, a lot of the preparation to the damaged site has just about been completed. We are hoping through that contract-to-contract arrangement that we will see restitutions to the facility starting as soon as possible. To provide a time line right now would be irresponsible, but there is some positive movement in terms of having some of that preparation work done. I anticipate that work will happen very soon.

Mr MALEY: Effectively, because of the situation, you can answer the question because you do not know?

Ms UIBO: You have asked me for a time line and I cannot give that because I would be giving you false dates if I do not have the information.

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you reassure us that the scope of works has been completed and agreed to with the insurer, and the work is about to go ahead?

Mr THOMPSON: That work is being scheduled and put together by the quantity surveyors working for the private owners. The work is complete—in part answer to the programming of that works. It is still under negotiations. We had a meeting yesterday where we talked about asking for that work to be accelerated with the main contract once we start on-site. Hence, our eagerness to get back to having our facilities back in play.

Mr MALEY: Is there an estimate of when the work will commence? How long will it take once it commences?

Mr THOMPSON: They are unable to give a program completion date as yet. That is because there are deliberations between the loss adjustor quantity surveying side and the partnerships quantity surveying side. I expect that we will have that very shortly, but at the moment we do not have a program of works.

Mr EDGINGTON: What are the issues still under discussion between the loss adjustor and the PPP? What are the issues that have not been finalised that will allow this work to commence?

Ms UIBO: As it is contract to contract, it is commercial-in-confidence in terms of the arrangements, which the commissioner has confirmed.

Mr EDGINGTON: It sounds to me like there are issues that still have not been resolved and we still do not have a commencement date for the works. What are the issues that have not been resolved?

Mr THOMPSON: They are contractual issues that we are not directly party to. I cannot give you that answer because we are not the people leading this. We are certainly putting pressure on to get a conclusion, but it is a commercial-in-confidence matter between the contractor and the private provider.

Mr MALEY: Who is wearing the cost for this contractual dispute? Is it government having to pay extra money for hiring emergency accommodation? Who is wearing the cost while the contractors are having a dispute? Is the taxpayer paying for that?

Ms UIBO: It is not necessarily a dispute. It is works that have been claimed through the insurance provider and the scope of works, the preparation to the damaged site and the business contract to complete the works. It is all part of the insurance claim, which is the overall figure I gave you earlier.

Mr MALEY: Who is paying the month-to-month cost now—I am guessing renting the emergency accommodation?

Ms UIBO: My understanding is that it is all directly through the insurance claim as a whole.

Mr MALEY: Can you tell us what the month-by-month cost is?

Ms UIBO: We will take question that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.29

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

Mr MALEY: Can you please tell us what the month-to-month cost is of keeping the prison running considering the damage done by the riot in 2020?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.29.

Mr EDGINGTON: You have estimated damage at about \$30m. How many people have faced prosecution in relation to these riots?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice because the charges and prosecutions would have to be separated out. As I mentioned earlier, some of those are still before the court, so we will not have the figures.

Question on Notice No 8.30

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many people have faced prosecution in relation to the riot in May 2020?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.30.

Mr MALEY: For the people involved in this, how many of the charges have been finalised?

Ms UIBO: Is that similar to the Member for Barkly's question? Are you talking about prosecutions and charges?

Mr MALEY: His was about the ongoing ones. How many other prosecutions have been finalised in relation to the prisoners involved in this riot?

Ms UIBO: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.31

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

Mr MALEY: How many prisoners' court cases have been finalised as a result of charges occurring in relation to the damage to the prison in 2020?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.31.

Mr MALEY: Was restitution sought from these offenders?

Ms UIBO: Because those charges and cases are still ongoing, I cannot provide that answer.

Mr MALEY: Is the prosecution asking for restitution from these ongoing cases? Was restitution paid for the cases that have already been finalised? There are two parts to that question.

Ms UIBO: We cannot comment on any of those current court cases. We have taken the previous question on notice about what has already been finalised. To the first part of the current question, we cannot comment on anything that is currently before the court.

Mr MALEY: My first question did not talk about restitution. I want to make sure we know if restitution has been paid by those offenders. Can we put that on notice as a separate question?

Question on Notice No 8.32

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

Mr MALEY: Was restitution sought from the offenders who have been charged and the cases finalised in relation to this? If so, what amount of the restitution was paid or ordered to be paid by the offenders to the NT Government?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.32.

Mr EDGINGTON: At last estimates we were told that the Ombudsman had written to the acting chief executive the day before seeking a copy of the Paget review into the riots. Has the Ombudsman been provided with a copy of that report?

Ms UIBO: Yes, under the *Ombudsman Act*, the Ombudsman formally requested a copy of the Paget report in January 2021 and has received it.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many assaults on correctional officers or other Corrections staff have there been for the current financial year across all prisons? Can you provide a breakdown between prisons? Of the numbers of assaults which one resulted in an injury to the officer—those that involved spitting or other bodily fluids and those that involved weapons?

Ms UIBO: Because of the different elements to that question, we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.33

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many assaults on correctional officers or other Corrections staff have there been for the current financial year across all prisons? Can you provide a breakdown between prisons? Of the numbers of assaults which one resulted in an injury to the officer—those that involved spitting or other bodily fluids and those that involved weapons?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.33.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many of those assaults were reported to police and how many resulted in charges being laid against the prisoners involved?

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice as well.

Question on Notice No 8.34

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many of those assaults were reported to police and how many resulted in charges being laid against the prisoners involved?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes. I also emphasise that all assaults are reported to the police. We will get the number for you.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.34.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many days of absence have there been due to correctional officers or other correctional staff being assaulted or injured?

Ms UIBO: There is a lot of detail there so we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.35

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many days of absence have there been due to correctional officers or other correctional staff being assaulted or injured?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.35.

Mr EDGINGTON: The review into Corrections ordered by government and conducted by KPMG in 2019–20, at a cost of \$750,000, outlined a number of critical areas that require improvement including a significant increase in custodial staff and more importantly, programs delivery staff. What increase in budget has been allocated to introduce these improvement measures?

Ms UIBO: Regarding the Corrections budget, an ongoing \$10m was provided in terms of the reform and that work is ongoing.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the status of that KPMG report? Where is it? What is being done to implement it? Have the recommendations been approved?

Ms UIBO: The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice is undertaking an efficiency and effectiveness review of NT Correctional Services.

The review has been informed by the KPMG report which you already spoke about. It said, 'The ultimate but challenging aim for NT Correctional Services is to build and maintain a sustainable balance between personnel, operating and capability budgets; to achieve government's expectations and the outcomes ensuring offenders are treated safely and humanely; and not to compromise the safety and wellbeing of our Corrections employees and staff members.

'The focus of the review is the performance of all aspects of NT Correctional Services in terms of functional alignment—looking at the vision and the mission; strategy; efficiency, including financial performance of the division; effectiveness, including business processes, capability and systems; and leveraging relationships and partnerships.'

The actual focus of the review is NT Correctional Services organisational structure and governance; custodial operational and staffing model; capacity planning and infrastructure; education and industries; health services; offender programs; escorts; operational expenditure; strategic approach; and performance indicators.

The review is jointly sponsored by the chief executive officer from AGD working closely with the commissioner for NT Corrections.

Looking at the review, the report and the body of work as outlined, there is a lot of work going in to this to ensure we have a smoothly operating correctional service, but also ensuring safety of staff, correctional officers and the treatment of prisoners. A large part of the review is ensuring that Corrections programs are tangible and have effect on recidivism, rehabilitation and community safety. We will provide an update on redesigned programs in due course. It is a large body of work and it is very important.

Mr MALEY: You said there is a \$10m increase in the budget. I am looking at the budget papers for Correctional Services; the revised budget for 2020–21 was \$230m. The budget forecast for 2021–22 is \$221m, which seems to be a reduction. I cannot see where the \$10m increase is for the budget you just referred to, when your budget papers do not show that.

Ms UIBO: Corrections received \$15m in the 2020–21 budget and \$10m ongoing from 2021–22 budget.

Mr MALEY: Is the budget for Correctional Services \$230m overall and this year it is \$221m?

Ms BRIMSON: As with a lot of our outputs, there are a series of budget adjustments or variations that occur; some are 'ons' and some are 'offs'. In terms of the Corrections variations, there was a \$15m budget increase from 2021, that fell to \$10m ongoing.

As mentioned earlier, part of the expenditure capacity was the additional expenditure associated with the disturbance, nearly \$3m. There was a reduction in access to revenue from the industries program. There was also a variation for a lease cost for the Darwin Correctional Precinct—the PPP—which varies each year; that was an increase.

The others relate to some depreciation, budget transfer and the application of wages, parameters and efficiency dividends.

Mr MALEY: The \$10m increase will be for CPI wages, not important programs or delivery of staff? I do not accept that there is a \$10m budget, as it has gone down from \$230 to \$221m, but the money is not going to the staff; it is going to other things. Is that correct?

Ms BRIMSON: Effectively, the additional budget was a base budget adjustment for the output. That will cover all sorts of expenditure pressures on the Correctional Services output.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the spend on overtime for the year to date and how does that compare to the last financial year?

Ms UIBO: For the reporting period for the year to date, 158,549 hours of overtime have been claimed at a cost of \$10,499,800.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is year to date; how does that compare to last financial year?

Ms UIBO: Sorry, that was for the reporting period, 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021. Could you repeat the follow-up question?

Mr EDGINGTON: How does that compare to the previous financial year?

Ms UIBO: For the previous full financial year, the cost of overtime claimed was \$13,097,487.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is getting close to that at the moment.

Mr MALEY: Going back to the \$10m, it was not put back into the budget to deal with the recommendations in the report. Was it because Corrections was underutilised originally?

Ms UIBO: Corrections is a service agency in terms of the amount of pressure that is on the service delivery. It is not something we control in terms of who comes in and out the door of Corrections. The costings have been identified and were put through the budget process to make sure the operating costs aligned with the budget needs for the Correctional Services division, which is why that dollar figure has been provided—\$10m ongoing.

Mr MALEY: That \$10m does not relate to the recommendations in the KPMG report that cost \$750,000—it just goes back into Corrections for them to spend wherever they see fit.

Ms UIBO: The \$10m was considered as an adjustment to the baseline funding, but through the KPMG report all those elements I mentioned other longer-term reforms we are looking at in Corrections to ensure effectiveness and efficiency, delivery of service while maintaining the quality of service and the safety of staff and prisoners. That was initially identified as a baseline need for the division and there is ongoing work through the recommendations of the report.

Mr MALEY: That \$10m was not increased to introduce the improvement measures as recommended in the KPMG report specifically?

Ms UIBO: No. That is correct.

Mr MALEY: The question was, was there any money in the budget to deal with the recommendations of the KPMG report specifically?

Ms UIBO: The KPMG report informs more of the overall reform that is required, which would then allow Corrections—through AGD—to further pursue any budget bids in following financial years.

Mr MALEY: Was the report not dealing with requiring a significant increase in staff and more programs for the delivery of staff? Was that part of the recommendations? There has been a \$750,000 report, but no money has been budgeted to introduce any of the recommendations of that report.

Ms UIBO: To reiterate some of the previous points I made, we identified the need in baseline funding to increase, for the reasons we have already discussed. The ongoing work through the recommendations in the report will inform what is needed in regard to costings and the implementation of those costings. There will be further work for future budget Cabinets and budgets to reflect the needs of the Correctional Services division, and the quality of services provided, as well as the reform to enhance some of those services.

Mr YAN: As part of these recent reviews and reports into Corrections—and there have been a number over the past 10 years, specifically KPMG and Riley—those reviews have recommended an increase in minimum safe staffing levels, to both correctional centres. The KPMG report is about three years old now; what measures have you implemented to increase staffing and improve staff safety as part of those reviews?

Mr THOMPSON: That is a good question; you reap what you sow. You will recall doing the CF staffing document just before your departure in your previous employment as general manager. That has been funded as we moved over the 600 mark specifically at Alice Springs.

There are a number of reports that you mentioned. Some of them are quite useful and some of them are out of date. We live in fast-evolving world. Some of the principles of a healthy prison are still there, which we need to get to. We need to do a restructure and a reform project, not necessarily in line with that one KPMG report. That is the work we will embark upon.

At every prison I have worked out in the last 25 years, people said we need more staff. That is not always the case. We need to adjust the way we operate. By that I mean we need to expend on training of our staff to learn more about dynamic security, how we have personal arrangements within the prison environment that will in turn make the place that bit safer.

The answer is not always more staff. Prison safety is a key element, as is respect, purposeful activity, rehabilitation and resettlement; they are essential. It is important that we do the restructure, reform and realignment. Attempts have been made in the past to do this, but when you look at those reports—the Hamburger report and the two KPMG reports. There is actually a report dated 1984. Those reports have been undertaken on how correctional services should operate. We live in fast-evolving world.

We embark upon that work, but how much it will cost, I could not tell you. It is very important that we get set on that work. The terms of reference for that have been set.

Ms UIBO: To add to the comments from Commissioner Thompson, the number of our custodial staff has been growing, but more work needs to be done to get that balance the staffing cycles right, as you would understand and appreciate from your previous role.

Mr EDGINGTON: It sounds like there is a review of the KPMG report, so I am not sure where things are at. You have mentioned a review; who is part of the review team that will move ahead with all these recommendations from the KPMG report? Who is on it? When will it start? Why is it taking so long to get this moving?

Ms UIBO: Ms Gemma Lake, as acting chief executive officer of the department, is working with the acting commissioner to implement that review and reform. A staff member has been seconded from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, who is doing a very detailed and concise snapshot of the current services and areas where we can improve efficiency and effectiveness in regard to service delivery for NT Correctional Services.

A big part of that is the effectiveness of offender programs. Reducing offending and recidivism is a big part of that as well. We are looking to ensure that the review which commenced on 4 May this year is provided back to me and the government in early 2022. We are making sure the body of work is done properly.

As the commissioner mentioned, there are some high needs for the division. We want to make sure the resourcing and staffing is appropriate as needed, and the quality and service delivery is maintained and improved where needed.

Mr EDGINGTON: It sounds like a very high-level review team. How many prison officers know what is happening in the prison system and are forming part of that review team?

Ms UIBO: We are still finalising the terms of reference for that high-level strategic review and the scope of work, and we are looking for input from members on the ground to do that work day-in and day-out. They will be a part of that process once the terms of reference are completed.

Mr MALEY: The KPMG report was done in 2019–20, you are reviewing and still formulating it. It is now 2021, and you have not done the review of the review. Is that correct?

Ms UIBO: It is not a review of the report, it is a review of the whole system of NT Correctional Services based on those recommendations from the report and then implementing them.

Mr MALEY: It has taken you over a year-and-a-half to get there. We have not even formulated the review panel yet?

Ms UIBO: Some work has been identified and some areas are moving ahead. In ensuring effectiveness and efficiency, that will be led through the high-level strategic group.

Mr MALEY: Surely this delay is putting prison officers' safety at risk?

Ms UIBO: We do not believe so. The work of our correctional officers is critical, ensuring that safety, at all times—not waiting for any review or reports—is part of the daily routine and a priority for Correctional Services to keep those officers safe.

Mr MALEY: Surely this review would also be putting prisoners' mental health at risk. Rehabilitation cannot go ahead and those types of programs cannot be delivered, because the review of the review has not taken place?

Ms UIBO: All the current programs and services, and access to those services, are provided; they have not stopped. Regarding prison welfare and wellbeing, the enhancement of those programs, if there are any areas to further develop and improve those services and access to services, is part of the bigger body of work.

Mr MALEY: That is all a part of the KPMG report which happened in 2019–20 and we still do not see that happening yet?

Ms UIBO: It is a large body of work. It is an area that recognises the need for improvement to support our correctional officers and the service they provide—ensuring the safety of the officers and prisoners, and, ultimately, having a strong and quality delivery of justice in the Northern Territory.

Mr MALEY: I would have thought the priority of the safety of the prisoners and the prison officers would be critical in relation to this.

Ms UIBO: Absolutely, I have said that about five times.

Mr MALEY: But it has taken you a year-and-a-half to formulate the review of the review. Do you not think these people deserve a higher priority than you are giving them?

Ms UIBO: Again, it is a priority for our staff and the welfare of the prisoners. The reform that is required needs to be a lasting one. It is needed in this area. If you rush things and do not get them right, you are not necessarily enhancing the quality of service or ensuring there is that stability and safety for staff and prisoners.

The work that is being done provides the opportunity to have better services, more services and appropriate services that address areas of community concern. There are a lot of complex factors such as reoffending rates, recidivism, mental health and wellbeing, and exit plans from custodial sentencing. We need to make sure they are all staged and moving forward.

Not one area is being held or stopped in any way, shape or form. This is about enhancing that service and continuing to support the effectiveness and efficiency of our correctional service.

Mr MALEY: Mr Thompson said that he lives in a fast and evolving world in relation to Corrections—this report will take a year-and-a-half for the review of the review. Is there a danger that the recommendations will be so outdated that another review will be needed? From a report in 2019–20, we know that \$750,000 has been spent. Do you think there is a serious chance that your recommendations will be so outdated and you will have to start again? You are putting prison officers and prisoners at risk.

Ms UIBO: Again, I am not commenting on hypotheticals for the future. It is important work that is continuing.

Mr EDGINGTON: Just going back to the review team—the team that is putting together of terms of reference. I find it astounding that it does not involve prison officers who work in the prisons or anyone from the Prison Officers Association. Why have they been excluded from the team that is developing the terms of reference?

Ms UIBO: Just to reassure you and those listening, we will include correctional officers. The Prison Officers Association is an important stakeholder. They do very important work, advocating and lobbying for their members and for all Correctional Services staff.

Once the terms of reference are completed, we will be looking to identify all of the key stakeholders, whether they are in the correctional centre or providing services and programs to Corrections. Ms Lake can provide further detail in regard to the inclusion of those key stakeholders, particularly the voices of staff.

Ms LAKE: The terms of reference identify all of the relevant stakeholders. The officer who is conducting the work at present, seconded from Chief Minister, has already spoken to people in the Alice Springs prison, Darwin prison, Community Corrections offices, Katherine and in Alice Springs, and I believe in Tennant Creek.

There is already an amount of consultation that has occurred and, as part of the process, we will continue to engage with all the relevant stakeholders.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why are they not part of the team at the moment? It sounds like you are telling me that they will be consulted with. Why are they not part of the team to developing the terms of reference? I am talking about the Prison Officers Association, the prison officers that work on the ground every day of the week and understand what is going on in the prisons. Why are they not part of the team that is putting together of terms of reference?

Ms UIBO: I believe Ms Lake answered that in terms of having the consultation for feedback to inform the terms of reference and then to finalise the terms of reference.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are they not part of the team putting together the terms of reference?

Ms UIBO: They are informing the terms of reference.

Mr EDGINGTON: It does not sound like it to me. How many correctional officer vacancies are there at the moment?

Ms UIBO: We will take that question on notice.

Mr EDGINGTON: You do not know how many vacancies there are.

Ms UIBO: We will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.36

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many correctional officer vacancies are there at the moment?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.36.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the budget for court transport and hospital escorts in the 2021–22 budget?

Ms UIBO: We do not have the figures broken down into that specific. Please repeat it and we will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.37

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

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the budget for court transport and hospital escorts in the 2021–22 budget?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 8.37.

Mr MALEY: Can you tell us what was spent on prisoner transport last financial year?

Ms UIBO: Can you just clarify whether you are talking about prisoner escorts or prisoner transport—for the figure you are asking?

Mr MALEY: Prisoner transport. Is there a difference between prisoner transport and prisoner escorts? Could I please get a breakdown on both of those?

Ms UIBO: I will get the acting commissioner to explain the difference between the two and then we can take the question on notice.

Mr MALEY: Just take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.38

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

Mr MALEY: Can you please provide a breakdown in relation to the costs for the last financial year in relation to prisoner transport and prisoner escorts?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I accept the question.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 8.38.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Opposition members, we have not asked any questions over the last five hours. We are wondering if we could get a few in. They are not in this section of output groups.

Mr MONAGHAN: I have a question about much of the stuff we are talking about rehabilitation and the Correctional Services. To me, it is a very high priority in what we do. How are the programs and the prisoners giving back at the moment to our community and what sort of programs are we looking at that our community would see happening? In my electorate, from time to time, some of those prisoners cut grass for older people and those sorts of things. Are those things still happening with COVID?

Ms UIBO: It is a big part of the work the acting commissioner has carriage of. He is very passionate about restorative justice and giving back to the community. We want to see consequences for offenders. How do we also impart the social expectations of giving back to community and social justice?

We had some programs—and I will let the commissioner talk in a more detail—in regard to some of the community services that are provided by prisoners in order to support restorative justice. Communities around the Territory can see some of the consequences for offenders providing services to give back to community—and that we are instilling that sense of social duty and restorative justice.

To name a couple, the female prisoners do a knitting program and provide little teddy bears to the children's hospital. Those opportunities have been supported by the Country Women's Association in collecting donations for the knitting wool. It has been run by one of our officers in the women's sector.

I will let Commissioner Thompson speak about some of the points you made about what other services are still able to be provided by prisoners for community justice.

Mr THOMPSON: Thank you very much for that question; it is very appropriate. It is very important that we work hard to get this right. In all the years I have been working in Corrections, I have never come across a cohort like we have to manage here. They are different and we have to think differently.

I still think the seven pathways towards successful resettlement apply—accommodation; attitudes; behaviour programs; children; family; drugs and alcohol are key; education, training and employment; finance benefits and debt; and health.

Those pathways still apply. We have to think a bit radically about offending behaviour programs and not be afraid to be different in the Northern Territory. We have to work very hard with the education provisions—we have been up and had a look—but it is very important that we do something about the gaps where someone cannot read and write. There can be no greater handicap. I hope this review gives us an opportunity to focus on the nuts and bolts that we are talking about here.

The Member for Namatjira is passionate about the delivery of work in prisons. It is very important that we get this work activity up and running because it brings so many spinoffs for a successful reintegration. I hope I have given you an oversight of what I would be looking for, but we have some good practice going on. We have something of a cutting edge in terms of what we have in Nhulunbuy and Batchelor work camp.

We have an excellent facility in Barkly and, as the minister said, I am very passionate because it is very important that restorative justice and community service work parties are a part of that. It is very important that we encourage people to give something back to the community. We encourage and we support that.

Mr MONAGHAN: Would the Aboriginal dance group be part of that program?

Mr THOMPSON: It will be, yes.

Mr MONAGHAN: It has been going for a number of years now. Was that traditionally part of the program?

Mr THOMPSON: That will be part of the overall aspects of what we would be looking to deliver. We have to go back to understanding what works. There is some stuff we do because we have done it for so long. We probably need to take a look at that and not be afraid to say, 'Actually, this is not working for the cohort that we are looking after'—and much of the cohort is Aboriginal Territorians.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Come on, guys. We have 20 minutes to go.

Mr COSTA: Sorry. Does the elders program play an important part with them going back to community?

Mr THOMPSON: Very much so. I was very fortunate to receive the elders program when they had their conference earlier in the year. They play a key role. They have played a key role in helping us get the message out to prisoners that parole is important. People take heed of parole. They can get themselves released from custody as soon as possible. We have quite a number of prisoners who would not be applying for parole. I am thankful to the elders for taking part in an excellent video presentation we made because we now have a greater uptake in prisoners applying for parole.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Community Corrections

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.2, Community Corrections. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Parole Board

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.3, Parole Board. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 2.3 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – COURT AND TRIBUNAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Higher Courts

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Court and Tribunal Support Services, Output 3.1, Higher Courts. Are there any questions?

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Community Justice Centre has been functioning for almost two decades. I am told it does not have a specific allocation within the budget and that it comes in under the courts. What is the budget allocation for the CJC? What was it in 2019–20? What is it for this year financial year? What is the plan for the CJC? I am concerned that you are stripping it down.

There is talk that you will cut this service. It is a very important service; it is about alternative dispute resolution, restorative justice and saves the Northern Territory a lot of money by helping people to resolve conflicts rather than take them to court.

I want to know what you are doing in this space.

Ms UIBO: I introduce Mr Chris Cox, Executive Director Courts and Tribunals, who is joining me at the table.

I will pass to Ms Brimson to answer the Member for Araluen's question.

Ms BRIMSON: The budget for the Community Justice Centre for 2021 was \$565,000. We are currently in the process of establishing all the budgets for cost centres that sit under outputs. The finalisation of the budget for the CJC for 2021–22 has not been finalised yet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was it in 2019–20?

Ms BRIMSON: I do not have the 2019–20 figure.

Ms UIBO: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.39

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: What was the budget for the Community Justice Centre in 2019–20?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly is allocated the number 8.39.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is there any intention to strip this service?

Ms UIBO: It is part of the overall look at the works of the department in each of the divisions of the department, as Ms Brimson pointed out in regard to working out the budgeting. We recognise the important service the Community Justice Centre provides across all our communities, and we have received recent correspondence from a lot of stakeholders and interested community members, which is great. That is all part of the process of looking at the remit. It remains under consideration by the departments—ensuring the service is doing is intended, can it be improved, is it not doing what it was initially intended to do.

For those listening, the Community Justice Centre provides an opportunity for alternative dispute resolution, particularly through mediation. We have trained mediators throughout the Northern Territory who undertake that work, as well as small set of staff who work in that division.

It is of community interest, but it is under the current remit of having a look at the services that are delivered across the Northern Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Can you guarantee you will not strip funds out of the CJC, take positions away or reduce its functioning?

Ms UIBO: It is still under consideration, so I will undertake to ensure you are provided with that information if any decisions are made.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You cannot guarantee that you will not reduce that service?

Ms UIBO: We will provide that information once a decision is made.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I will take that as a no.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.39

Ms UIBO: I have an answer to the Member for Araluen's previous question. The budget for the CJC in financial year 2019–20 was \$575,000.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Lower Courts and Tribunals

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Lower Courts and Tribunals. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Fines Recovery Unit

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.3, Fines Recovery Unit. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 3.3 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS
Output 4.1 – Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0, Director of Public Prosecutions, Output 4.1, Director of Public Prosecutions. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.1 and Output Group 4.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – INDEPENDENT OFFICES
Output 5.1 – Consumer Affairs

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 5.0, Independent Offices, Output 5.1, Consumer Affairs. I note that the committee does not have any questions relating to Consumer Affairs, the Registrar-General, the Public Trustee, the Office of the Public Guardian, and Health and Community Services Complaints Commission. Those independent officers are, therefore, not appearing today.

Output 5.2 – Anti-Discrimination Commission

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 5.2, Anti-Discrimination Commission. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 5.2.

Output 5.5 – Children's Commissioner

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 5.5, Children's Commissioner. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 5.5 and Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – NT WORKSAFE
Output 6.1 – NT WorkSafe

Mr CHAIR: We will now consider Output Group 6.0, NT WorkSafe, Output 6.1, NT WorkSafe. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output Group 6.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 7.1 – Corporate and Governance

Mr CHAIR: We will now move to consider Output Group 7.0, Corporate and Shared Services, Output 7.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 7.1.

Output 7.2 – Shared Services Received

Mr CHAIR: We will now move to consider Output 7.2, Shared Services Received. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 7.2 and the Output Group 7.0.

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

That concludes consideration of all output groups relating to the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. On behalf of the committee, Attorney-General, I thank you and your officers, Ms Lake and her team for the advice and hard work you have put in to prepare for estimates this year.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Mr Chair. I thank the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, all of the staff, everyone who was on call and everyone who was listening in. I appreciate the work they do across government from our agency. Thank you so much to those who appeared with me today at the committee.

Mr CHAIR: We will now move to consider outputs relating to the minister's portfolio of Treaty and Local Decision Making and Aboriginal Affairs.

We will have a short break for a changeover.

The committee suspended.

TREATY AND LOCAL DECISION MAKING
ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back everyone. We will now consider Treaty and Local Decision Making, and Aboriginal Affairs. Minister Uibo, I note that the funding for Treaty and Local Decision Making and Aboriginal Affairs sits with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

I welcome you to invite and introduce the officials who are accompanying you today and to make a brief opening statement regarding your portfolios.

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, I introduce Ms Bridgette Bellenger, General Manager Territory Regional Growth; Ms Mischa Cartwright, Executive Director Aboriginal Affairs Strategic Partnerships; and Mr Anthony Shelley, Executive Director, Strategic Aboriginal Policy. All are part of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

In the essence of time, I will reserve my right to do an opening statement.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – TERRITORY REGIONAL GROWTH
Output 8.1 – Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group 8.0, Territory Regional Growth, Output 8.1, Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs. Are there any questions?

Mr EDGINGTON: In regard to the treaty, when did you first find out about the issues or the complaint that had been made about the Treaty Commissioner?

Ms UIBO: I was made aware a complaint was provided to my office on 30 March.

Mr EDGINGTON: What action did you take?

Ms UIBO: On receiving the complaint, I immediately directed it to the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, Ms Jodie Ryan, to receive and request a formal response from the Treaty Commissioner. The issue was also referred to the ICAC, who passed it on to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet as an employment matter.

Mr MALEY: When you say immediately, was that the same day or the next day or week?

Ms UIBO: I received the complaint on the afternoon of 30 March and it was passed to the department the next day on 31 March.

Mr MALEY: After you passed on the complaint, what was your next step?

Ms UIBO: In relation to the arrangements of employment through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, who were responsible for the employment of the Treaty Commissioner—the work of the department to receive a response from the Treaty Commission. We were waiting on advice through Chief Minister and Cabinet in regard to those processes.

Mr EDGINGTON: What considerations were given to suspending the commissioner with or without pay at that point?

Ms UIBO: In terms of having due process and diligence in terms of the responsibility of the portfolio, again this was an employment related matter so it was referred to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

There are clear guidelines in the *Treaty Commissioner Act 2020* regarding employment, suspension and resignation. This is under section 14 and 15 of the act. It is very clear what can and cannot occur in regard to suspension which is received by the administrator—and the rules and regulations of being either physically or mentally unfit for a role.

Mr MALEY: You showed no leadership. You did not ask him ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: A point of order! Standing Order 109: imputation or insults. The start of that question did not align with that.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, can you rephrase the question?

Mr MALEY: What exactly is your role as Minister for Treaty and Local Decision Making?

Ms UIBO: The role of the Minister for Treaty and Local Decision Making is to drive the Northern Territory Labor government's policies in those areas.

We established the Independent Treaty Commission, hence the act brought in to effect last year in 2020.

The Local Decision Making policy, a commitment from our Territory Labor government, was driven by the Chief Minister in 2016 when Territory Labor became government. Now I have the responsibility and carriage—the work of the Local Decision Making minister is to ensure all government agencies are implementing that policy across government. We have a cross-agency collaboration.

Ultimately, it is to empower Aboriginal Territorians to have a say, a voice and locally decide what happens to their community, for their people and the betterment of all Aboriginal Territorians.

Mr MALEY: Why did you not undertake your own investigations in relation to the complaint you received?

Ms UIBO: It was a matter for employment. I do not employ anyone in that sense. I have my employees in my ministerial office. The Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet is responsible for employing the Treaty Commissioner.

Mr EDGINGTON: What date was the investigation completed?

Ms UIBO: As this occurred through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, I will ask Ms Bridgette Bellenger to answer that detail.

Ms BELLENGER: The Minister for Treaty and Local Decision Making received a complaint on 30 March 2021, and on 31 March referred it to the CEO of Chief Minister and Cabinet to investigate. The reason it was sent to the chief executive officer, as outlined by the minister, was that the Treaty Commissioner is employed under the PSEMA as an exec contract officer.

The CEO consulted with HR and the investigation was undertaken in accordance with the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*. Chief Minister and Cabinet wrote to the Treaty Commissioner outlining the complaint received and afforded him 14 days to respond. The Treaty Commissioner requested a two-week extension during that period, as he was travelling remotely and unable to access the support required to respond. This request was granted.

Once the response was received, further work was undertaken and the investigation was concluded. Both the complainant and the Treaty Commissioner were advised of the outcome. As this was a formal HR process under the PSEMA, the outcome of that is confidential.

The Treaty Commissioner then took personal leave from 24 May 2021 until his date of resignation on 11 June 2021. He received some entitlements as an executive contract officer. The details of these are confidential.

Mr GUYULA: The interpreter service is very important. Many services that use the interpreter service are aware that there is often a shortage of interpreters. Patients and doctors are often waiting for interpreters or just have to continue without language support. Is there any significant investment in this budget to ensure that we are training and recruiting more interpreters?

Ms UIBO: I agree with what you have said about the Aboriginal Interpreter Service providing a critical service across the Northern Territory. I acknowledge the staff who implement that work—Aboriginal interpreters who travel across the Northern Territory, who are based in regions, towns and remote communities, and who travel to the homelands to provide that service.

As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I am honoured to have carriage of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. At the last election, we made those changes from the Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, and putting the Aboriginal Interpreter Service with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, which is a great move. I am very proud to hold the responsibility for that amazing service.

Better equipping our interpreters and ensuring that all of our government agencies are utilising the critical skill that our interpreters provide—whether it is government consultation, government services, Health or other service delivery agencies—is vital to making sure Aboriginal Territorians have the information and decision-making platforms that they need in their first language.

The work that the Office of Aboriginal Affairs is undertaking through DCMC is a review of how we have the Aboriginal Interpreter Service delivering critical services across the NT, particularly how to enhance, recruit and retain the hard-working interpreters and provide career pathways so we do not have those shortages.

We have new interpreters, young and old, and people who speak multiple languages who can provide those services to Aboriginal Territorians across all communities. It is big body of work and I recognise that the status of interpreters needs to be elevated. I am proud to say that my department is working on that now.

Mr CHAIR: Honourable members, as it has gone past 1.30 pm that concludes our time for consideration of outputs from the Attorney-General. On behalf of the committee, minister, I thank you for appearing today, and all the staff we have seen—and the ones we have not, such as Parks and Wildlife. I guess that is the way it goes in estimates.

Ms UIBO: Thank you very much, Mr Chair. Thank you to the committee members for the questions. Thank you to the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet for appearing for a very short time. There is some great work happening in that space. We will continue for the next few years of this term of the Territory Labor government.

I also acknowledge and thank the department staff for the division of Parks and Rangers, which I am responsible for. They have been on call and waiting since the morning. I thank them so much for their preparation. The work we do in the Parks and Rangers space is critical and appreciated by all members of the committee, and all members of parliament. Thank you to Parks and Rangers and the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security for all the work they have put in for estimates this year, even though they were, unfortunately, unable to appear today.

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now be in recess until 2 pm. After the lunch interval we will have questions for the Minister for Local Government. Thank you, everybody.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER PAECH'S PORTFOLIOS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. I welcome you, Minister for Local Government, to today's hearings. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

I note that the responsibility for Local Government sits with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; however, questions for the Minister for Local Government will now be answered.

I will now invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy before moving on to output-specific questions and finally non-output specific budget-related questions.

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

Minister, I invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Mr PAECH: I introduce Ms Bridgette Bellenger, General Manager Territory Regional Growth; Ms Maree De Lacey, Executive Director Local Government and Regional Development; Ms Meeta Ramkumar, Senior Director Sustainability and Compliance; and Mr Ethan Redshaw, Manager Legislation and Policy.

I acknowledge the traditional owners, the Larrakia people, whose country we are meeting on today, and I pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging.

Mr Chair, it is a great privilege to be here today as the Local Government minister. I will provide a brief opening statement. I will then go through various outputs to talk about the many positive deliverables that the Department of Local Government has been working on with various stakeholders, such as the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory and all the Territory's outstanding councils. In every corner of the Territory, they do a fantastic job delivering municipal and essential services. A significant body of work is being delivered by the government under this portfolio and I am pleased to outline some priorities.

The local government elections are now just two months away. Local government plays a vital role in delivering services that impact the daily lives of people across the Territory. It is important that Territorians who live in each of the local government areas have a say in who represents them for the next four years in this distinct and essential sphere of government.

The government has made important changes that will strengthen voter franchise and will apply to the 2021 local government elections. The *Local Government Act 2019* and Electoral Regulations both commence in July 2021. As part of this, on-the-day voting will be a feature of the forthcoming election. This means that people who are not enrolled to vote, but are eligible to do so, can enrol and vote on the same day as the election. My first bill as the Minister for Local government enables this important reform of the electoral system.

In addition, regulations under the *Local Government Act 2019* enable the time frame for the receipt of postal votes to be extended from one week after the election to two weeks. This will provide greater opportunity for people living in remote locations to have their vote counted.

After the 2017 local government elections, the Northern Territory Electoral Commission made a number of recommendations for improvement. The new *Local Government Act* and Electoral Regulations addressed those recommendations. On top of the legislative reform and consistent with those recommendations, a pre-election remote enrolment and electoral awareness program is ramping up through a partnership between the Chief Minister and Cabinet, the Northern Territory Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory.

As of last week, Chief Minister and Cabinet's regional teams have led engagement with over 1,400 people in remote communities, with 48 people completing forms and getting on the electoral roll and over 60 people updating their electoral details. In addition, 27 people expressed interest in nominating as a candidate and they are being given information on how to go about it. This is early days in this campaign and we anticipate seeing a lot more activity across the Northern Territory over the next month.

Chief Minister and Cabinet has worked closely with the local government sector throughout the development of the new local government legislation. The support has included consultation, workshops, information sessions and responses to requests for guidance.

Forty-nine sample policies and guidance documents were drafted and provided to councils to help the transition to complying with the requirements of the new act. Work will continue as the sector adapts to the new provisions that strengthen governance, transparency and local decision-making.

I have just returned from Tennant Creek, where I relaunched the Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy with my colleague, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, as part of our continued focus on local decision-making and good engagement between government and remote communities. The Remote Engagement Essentials training workshops supports the strategy and have been running since 2016, building the skills of public servants and other effective engagements with remote communities. Five hundred and fifty-four participants have completed the training since its launch in 2016. The local government sector provided a vital boost to the economy to recover from the impacts to business of COVID.

The successful myDarwin app discount voucher scheme, developed by the City of Darwin, was strongly endorsed by local retail and hospitality traders. The Northern Territory Government provided \$1m to local governments which allowed myDarwin to be extended, and other apps such as the myAlice. Five additional regional councils created their own programs, which combined to collectively support over 700 local businesses Territory-wide. The outcome from this funding was an outstanding and essential boost to our economy, with over \$12.3m being spent by 73,000 registered users across the Territory.

In 2021 the Northern Territory Government also administered \$52m in funding for local government grant programs that supported council operations, local authority projects, Aboriginal employment and other priorities. Of this funding, \$31m was allocated to the Northern Territory operational subsidy, which is the main support offered to the nine regional councils and three shire councils to assist with the provision of local government services in regional and remote locations.

There was also funding totalling \$8.5m provided to the Indigenous jobs development fund, which supports over 500 Aboriginal jobs in regional and remote areas. This program provides financial assistance to the regional councils to cover over 50% of the cost of employing an Aboriginal staff member.

Another important program funded in 2020–21 was the local authority project fund. Totalling \$5.7m, the fund supports local authorities and their respective communities by funding community priorities, as advised by the local authority members. In addition to the recurrent local government grants program, during the year Chief Minister and Cabinet also administered the \$4m local government priority infrastructure fund program and the \$1.8m Waste and Resource Management program.

The Waste and Resource Management program was established in May 2021 and provides assistance to regional and shire councils to address waste and resource management issues across their communities. This program was developed in response to council feedback that waste management, including responsibility to legacy issues, is a priority for them. This program is flexible and enables councils to prioritise funding across their needs in areas such as data, waste management strategies, infrastructure, and plant and machinery.

Looking to the future, the Northern Territory Government is collaborating with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory and the Northern Territory's local government councils to develop a 10-year strategy for a strong, responsive, well-governed local government sector. This includes increasing

collaboration between the three spheres of government for the benefit of our communities. It is intended that the local government strategy 2030 will be settled in 2021–22.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide an opening statement. I am happy to take questions from the committee.

Mr SLOAN: Thank you for that opening address. I also pay tribute to the public servants here today for all the work that has been done leading up to this day.

As Minister for Central Australian Economic Reconstruction, can you please advise why your portfolio has no budget output listed in these estimates?

Mr PAECH: The Central Australian Economic Reconstruction Committee is a coordination committee that works across all government agencies and departments. The work of that committee is to provide comprehensive advice, look at investment opportunities and work within the existing agencies across government to look at ways in which we can deliver economic projects.

The budget for that—regarding infrastructure—is coming from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. Part of the revitalised Alice Springs plan fund is being handled by that department. The secretariat for the Central Australian Economic Reconstruction Committee is supported by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr SLOAN: Can you advise what the budget is for this financial year?

Mr PAECH: The budget for the Central Australian Economic Reconstruction Committee? As I have outlined, the role of that committee and the ministry is a coordination across existing government agencies. The secretariat is delivered by Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr SLOAN: Do you have any idea how many full-time employees are in the department looking after this portfolio?

Mr PAECH: The advice I have is there are three staff who manage the secretariat. It is very common for the Central Australian Economic Reconstruction Committee to undertake work, provide advice and look at strategic opportunities for investment in Central Australia.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are those three staff exclusively working on just the Central Australian Economic Reconstruction Committee?

Mr PAECH: Yes, that is correct. This is a signature initiative by the Northern Territory Government to ensure that Central Australia is not left behind in the economic rebound. The committee members are all voluntary; they are not remunerated. They provide strategic advice and bring forward possible avenues to attract investment.

They attend various projects around Alice Springs and Central Australia, if that is required, to look at the economic benefit projects are delivering. They are working on a range of projects currently. A number of those would be commercial-in-confidence.

Mr YAN: Following on from the Member for Araluen's question, we have those three FTEs—which I am quite pleased about—looking after interests in Central Australia. Where are they located? Are they located in Central Australia or Darwin?

Mr PAECH: Those positions are located in Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Does the brief for the Central Australian Economic Reconstruction Committee include the Barkly?

Mr PAECH: When the committee is talking about economic opportunities, we take a holistic approach. We look at remote communities—Alice Springs—and how we can continue to build on various programs and projects that operate in the Barkly region, because this is crucial. This is not just about one town; this is about the economic opportunity for the region. We have great representation on that committee. We are making sure that Aboriginal land and people are features of this. It has the potential to not be missed. It is a priority.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have representatives from the Barkly on the committee?

Mr PAECH: We consult with people. I took on the portfolio when the membership of that committee was already established. I have made provisions to increase a gender balance on that committee and have made sure there are Aboriginal people on my committee.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No-one on the committee is a resident of the Barkly; is that correct?

Mr PAECH: Not at this stage, no. We consult with the Chamber of Commerce and people from around the Barkly. One of the challenges we are working through is the requirement for someone to regularly commute. The committee meets once a month in Alice Springs. We would need to work through those logistics, but it is not ruled out.

Mrs LAMBLEY: All members come from Alice Springs; is that safe to say?

Mr PAECH: That is correct. The members come from Alice Springs and represent various industry areas or sectors of the community.

Mr YAN: Are you able to provide a list of who makes up that committee, please?

Mr PAECH: I am happy to provide a list. That is public knowledge.

Mr SLOAN: How long have these three people being employed in this role?

Mr PAECH: The three people have been involved as long as my tenure as the Minister for Central Australian Economic Reconstruction has been in place.

Mr SLOAN: Until this point, what have been their key achievements?

Mr PAECH: Are you referring to the staff or the portfolio?

Mr SLOAN: The work of the portfolio.

Mr PAECH: The Central Australian Economic Reconstruction portfolio has been involved in a number of projects across government, particularly in Central Australia. It has been involved in and provided advice on the hospital accommodation; provided comments and feedback on the multistorey car park and the revitalisation of the Alice Springs CBD. The committee has been involved in the economic benefits that all major projects occurring in regional and remote parts of the Northern Territory will return. Also the preparation work that needs to be done in Central Australia, across Alice Springs and the Barkly region for those major projects to come online, including the services required in regional towns to support that growth.

Mr SLOAN: Are there any plans to increase this group from three to more?

Mr PAECH: As work continues, if there is a growing demand for secretariat support on the committee we will revisit that, but at this stage I have carried over the Central Australian Economic Reconstruction portfolio. Every minister of the Northern Territory Government has the economic opportunities at the forefront for Central Australia. That is a commitment of each minister whose portfolio remits go to the Central Australia region.

Mr YAN: For my own interest, are you able to provide the levels that the three FTEs in Alice Springs are? Are they AO3s, AO4s or ECOs?

Mr PAECH: I am happy to take that on notice. I do not make it my business to understand what classification people are.

Question on Notice No 9.1

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

Mr YAN: Regarding the three FTEs who support the secretariat for the Central Australian Economic Reconstruction committee, can you provide a breakdown of the levels of those employees?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question.

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.1.

Mr YAN: Listening to your opening statement I was very pleased to hear about the funding going to homelands. I am also interested in the \$5.7m that you mentioned for the local authority project fund. You will probably have to take this on notice—I am interested because it is looking after local authorities in remote areas. Are you able to provide a breakdown of what this has been spent on and in what communities?

Mr PAECH: When we are talking about the local authority funding—that goes to regional councils. They work with their local authorities. Each local authority in each community has a formula from the councils, by which they calculate the budget for each community. The local authority decides which project they do.

I do not have that information. That information does not come back to the department on particular projects. What comes back to the department is information on making sure the funds are acquitted. If funds are not acquitted, the local authority has the opportunity to apply to have those funds carried over.

I am happy to do that, but we do not collect the information on what the particular projects are. I am happy to hand over to Meeta, if you require further information.

Mr YAN: I am interested in what the projects happening in those communities might be. Some great projects are happening.

Mr PAECH: Projects that are part of the local authority fund vary. It is dependent on honouring the local decision-making. Having been out on the road quite a bit over the last few months, often some communities use it to develop a playground, shade over play equipment and support for sports carnivals. It is up to the determination of that local authority, as long as it is mandated to support the community's benefit and aspiration. Each local authority is different. Some have used it to do a tree planting fund for a streetscape. It varies.

Mr YAN: If you have the data on how it was acquitted could you supply that, to see what projects are happening in the regions and what it is being used for?

Mr PAECH: We are happy to take that on notice, but I will ask Meeta to provide additional comment which may answer some of your questions.

Ms RAMKUMAR: The allocation of the \$5.47m—I think the minister said \$5.7m but it is \$5.47m—is allocated to every local authority across the Northern Territory based on a formula. The councils have two years to spend the money. They can pool the money for two years. We have information on some of the larger projects that local authorities have delivered. As the minister said, it varies from meeting room facilities to run the local authority meetings up to the larger projects.

We can provide that information and allocations for each local authority per annum.

Mr YAN: It will be interesting because I know some communities pool their money and save it for larger projects.

Ms RAMKUMAR: Yes, we can provide you with some of the larger projects for each of the councils.

Question on Notice No 9.2

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

Mr YAN: Could you provide a breakdown of where the \$5.47m for the local authority project funding has been allocated and provide any advice on completed projects for the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.2.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You mentioned the Alice Springs CBD revitalisation project. Are you happy to answer a few questions on that now?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: An amount of \$20m was allocated to this a few years ago. Have you fully allocated the entire \$20m? Is it fully spent?

Mr PAECH: The \$20m has been committed. The announcement I made yesterday, was on the successful awarding of the tender documents. There is a portion of those funds that has not been spent yet. You will be pleased to hear that it has been committed—\$4m for the water play area in Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are you able to give me a full breakdown of exactly where all that money has gone, the \$20m? Every cent of it.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to provide that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That would be great, so that Alice Springs people will know where it has been spent.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to take that on notice. I do not have that level of detail here. The commitment has been made by the government and we are honouring that commitment.

Question on Notice No 9.3

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

Mrs LAMBLEY: Could you provide a full breakdown of the allocation of the \$20m for the Alice Springs CBD revitalisation project?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The questions asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 9.3.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I know this will be predictable, but I would like an update on the national Aboriginal art gallery, please.

Mr PAECH: The national Aboriginal art gallery remains a commitment of the government. We are currently waiting on a decision of the NTCAT, which we anticipate will be made in the coming months. We have Tracy Puklowski, the director, who has been brought on board to continue the coordination and development of the national Aboriginal art gallery.

I was in Canberra last week where I met with various ministers of the Commonwealth Government to talk about this exciting project and to continue conversations regarding Commonwealth investment into the project. I am very happy with the outcomes of those very productive meetings. It is clear that everyone understands that the national Aboriginal art gallery is a game-changer for Central Australia, particularly in a few areas. One is the celebration of Aboriginal art and culture.

In the area of tourism, there are three destinations nationwide where we attract major tourism investment. They are the Sydney Opera House, the Great Barrier Reef and Uluru. This investment will ensure that people visiting Uluru will then come to Alice Springs to see the national Aboriginal art gallery.

Tourism NT is very excited about the prospect of the national Aboriginal art gallery proceeding. There is also the educational tourism opportunity to make sure we have a premier destination to explore the importance of Aboriginal art in the birthplace of Aboriginal art. It is a way for Aboriginal people to experience the truth-telling component through art. It is the narrative of being able to tell someone about a journey. We also see this as a great way of starting that true reconciliation process as a nation.

Back to your question, we are fast-tracking this project. The design tender closed on 9 June. We will work through that to make sure that we have a successful applicant who will then pursue the design briefing and tender so that the community has a visual idea of how the gallery will look.

If it proceeds at the preferred location of the Northern Territory Government, being the Anzac precinct, how it will incorporate working in and around the greenspace will be considered because we acknowledge that a large cultural and artistic institution needs to have an abundance of greenspace—that being the oval. A large majority of that would stay and be opened out for concerts—an outdoor auditorium, a great space for the Masters Games to host openings, with permanent infrastructure ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Anzac Day ceremonies.

Mr PAECH: Absolutely. We would still honour the people of Alice Springs' wishes that the precinct is referred to as the national aboriginal art gallery which is on the Anzac precinct. There would be a commemorative garden between Anzac Hill and the gallery as a way of commemorating the sacredness of the hill and Central Australians who fought in the wars.

We want to make sure it is an inclusive facility and precinct where we can have dawn services. I have not spoken about the design tender document yet, but I imagine there would be a restaurant or a rooftop facility where we could take in that surrounding landscape.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is great. That is the most information I have heard on the national Aboriginal art gallery for some time, so I thank you for that.

The allocation in the budget is down to approximately \$46.5m. How much are you planning to spend on this? Obviously, \$46m will not cut it; it will not even go half the way. What are you expecting to spend?

Mr PAECH: The design tender that went out was incorporating a build of between \$150m and \$180m. That seems like a significant amount of money, but for an institution of national significance we think it is appropriate. We continue to work with corporate Australia on potential partnerships to invest in, philanthropic ventures, and what conversations to have with the Commonwealth Government about a contribution to make sure this can be built.

All conversations to date have been very positive. We continue to work through that. I have said to all parties involved that the return on investment for this project is so significant. This gallery will help us secure future regional airlines flying into Alice Springs. More flights, more people and more life means a sustainable future for Central Australia.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is good. It sounds like you are pushing ahead. By using the Anzac Oval as the site of the national Aboriginal art gallery, we have a problem with rugby league and rugby union. Could you provide an update as to what is happening with that space? The relocation of those fields, please.

Mr PAECH: We remain committed to our initial commitment with the rugby codes. Any new site that rugby is offered or provided would essentially go from one oval to two, to cater for the growing demand in that sector of our community. A few sites have been identified, but we continue to work with the rugby codes. Like anything, I am mindful that we need to have planning and scoping undertaken at those sites to make sure they are financially viable before we make any announcements.

Our commitment is that we support those rugby codes to have two ovals in Central Australia because we know it is a very well-attended sport. We believe it has outgrown its current location. Moving to a new facility where two ovals could be provided would allow for future growth—two games could be played in an afternoon so it would not go into the later hours of the evening, or need to start earlier in the day.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The timing of how this all happens will be critical. We need those ovals built before you start using the current ovals for the gallery. Have you got that planned out?

Mr PAECH: I always have a plan.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is great to hear. I want to know about it.

Mr PAECH: We do not want to pre-empt anything because we need to wait for the NTCAT decision. There are always plans in place. The documents went out for the design tender, and the national Aboriginal art gallery articulate the gallery can, will and should be built in stages.

Stage one would be the existing high school site, so we can prepare if the NTCAT's decision has that outcome. If not, we can look at an alternative location. We do not want to pre-empt that, but we are looking at potential sites. As soon as the decision is made by the NTCAT, we will work closely with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to fast-track that and get it up and running so we have a great facility.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Stage one may not interfere with the oval?

Mr PAECH: That is correct, yes.

Mr CHAIR: How many rugby fields are currently at the Anzac Oval site?

Mr PAECH: One.

Mr CHAIR: By my recollection it is one, I used to hit sixers into the Todd, playing cricket there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: As did I.

Mr PAECH: Yes, there is currently one oval. We made a commitment of two. Picking up on your point, Member for Araluen—and for public certainty—the gallery can and will be built in stages because we do not want to disempower anyone or stop any games of rugby being played.

Mrs LAMBLEY: People are nervous about the future of rugby league and rugby union because you have not put anything in the budget to address this problem to relocate rugby league and rugby union. When will we see something in the budget for this?

Mr PAECH: I am confident that once an outcome has been made by the NTCAT around how we proceed, we will then be able to commence planning and scoping works. We can look at an indicative figure—what it would cost to develop two ovals for the Alice Springs community.

Member for Araluen, I am happy to look at a briefing with you, the Member for Braitling and the Member for Namatjira about how we proceed, particularly after the NTCAT decision is made, because that will deliver answers for many people in the community in regard to how the project proceeds.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What date are we expecting the outcome from the NTCAT?

Mr PAECH: Either in August or September.

Mr YAN: You mentioned a \$150m to \$180m budget build. This goes back to the relocation of rugby league and union. You mentioned that you do not have a budget line at this stage for the relocation, but do you have a budget line for the acquisition of Anzac Oval if it is compulsorily acquired? There has already been some research done on what that piece of land is worth.

Mr PAECH: Yes, that is correct. There was the process before my tenure as the minister for my portfolios, whereby the government met with the Alice Springs Town Council—who is the land holder—and made offers for the acquisition for that land. Those offers were made and they worked through it with the council. The council did not proceed with that. The cost of that will be a decision of the NTCAT, because it will be based on the valuation, I assume from the Valuer-General.

Mr YAN: You also spoke about communications with the two rugby league codes. Where is that at now, because they are a bit in the dark?

Mr PAECH: Our position with the rugby codes still stands as it did when we had the initial meetings with them, which the former minister had. That position is that we will still commit to two rugby ovals in Central Australia. But we were careful; we did not want to exhaust and fatigue them, given we were going down a process with the NTCAT. Our position remains unchanged until such time as there is a change in decision, we remain committed to two rugby ovals for the codes in Central Australia that will be up to the appropriate standard for them to have games and for games to be played in Central Australia.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You talk about being exhausted and fatigued; the people of Alice Springs are pretty exhausted and fatigued about this whole thing. Do you have any time lines for when you might be beginning construction of the national Aboriginal art gallery?

Mr PAECH: I anticipate construction will start 2022–23, if the preferred site does proceed and the design tenders are done. The design tenders will take some time to ensure they done in a culturally appropriate way whereby they have taken in all the first people’s principles around the considerations. I am hoping to open the doors of the gallery no later than the end of 2024 or beginning of 2025.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This project started under the former CLP government in 2016. Labor came on board and embraced it in 2016. Now you are saying 2024; that is eight years. You are saying construction will start in 2022 at the earliest. That is six years of nothing. If that is it, that is it, but you can understand why people are frustrated. I know it has not always been under your watch, but this has been excruciatingly and unnecessarily long for a range of reasons. Is there any chance of it happening more quickly or is 2022 the earliest?

Mr PAECH: I am not in a position to provide those definite dates on the construction times because that will depend on the design tender brief, getting feedback on it and ensuring it is appropriate. In that document, the design tender, having those considerations and consultation with First Nations people was crucial.

I acknowledge that there has been a period of time throughout this project—but to date, this country does not have a national institution honouring Aboriginal art. Sometimes things take time, but it will happen; I am confident that I will be able to deliver the national Aboriginal art gallery for the Territory. If we could build it tomorrow we would, but we would have to go through the appropriate channels to do so. It is very important.

I acknowledge that there is an opportunity here to look at things in the future in regard to how we do this. There is also a crucial role that the Economic Reconstruction Committee talks to people about the fact that when this iconic place is built, we anticipate an additional 53,000 visitors to Alice Springs every year. That number was produced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then we have updated the business case because tourism operators and tourism groups are saying that they believe that number will significantly increase. We acknowledge that in Alice Springs—I am sure every Central Australian Member of the Legislative Assembly will agree—there will be a need to now start working on hotels in addition to the gallery. Additional bed spaces in the Red Centre are needed.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is the government doing anything about that?

Mr PAECH: The Central Australian Economic Reconstruction Committee is working on that project. We are looking at what we need to do and how to attract investment. We need additional rooms in the Red Centre.

Mr MONAGHAN: You spoke about stages before—I think I only picked up the second one. Can you outline the four stages of the gallery project? One was acquisition, but you said there were a number of stages—the \$180m mark, or whatever it was.

Mr PAECH: In regard to the design, that document will be in three stages. Stage one is the Anzac Hill High School precinct, and stages two and three other developments around it. There is the existing car park for the high school and the Anzac Oval Precinct, which is the third stage.

We want to optimise as much greenspace as we can so it is a place for the community. In the central business district it will be a wonderful space for tourism operators to look at holding events and so forth. It is a three-stage process.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that this is a major economic project, and part of that is the work of Tracy Pukłowski, our director, along with the additional positions being advertised and recruited to. We have an infrastructure director starting—because this is a major project. We also have people doing workforce training and development.

Economically, this is about local jobs for the construction and ongoing operation of a national institution. We also believe that this national Aboriginal art gallery will provide the opportunity for us to work with the Commonwealth and other state and territory jurisdictions on the creation of training. Young people who are finishing university, or are in university, studying fine arts and Indigenous art or tourism, can be based in Alice Springs through some form of training academy where they can have best-practice experience in a national institution.

It is hard to talk about in a short time, but the economic opportunities are not just in the construction or tourism, but in the education and local employment opportunities.

Mr CHAIR: A normal economic multiplier would be four or five, which would mean you are spending your \$150,000 and you will get half a billion back, but this seems to be the downstream impact on Alice Springs—which is close to my heart. It will be generational. Is that what you are saying?

Mr PAECH: Yes, that is what I am saying, but there are a number of projects that we will see economic prosperity for Alice Springs. But first, they are dependent on the national Aboriginal art gallery development starting. That is providing confidence to operations and investors on the future of our town.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What happens if the NTCAT says no? You are pushing ahead assuming yes—I can hear it from what you have said. What happens if it is a big no?

Mr PAECH: Regardless of the NTCAT decision, Alice Springs will be home to the national Aboriginal art gallery.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is plan B?

Mr PAECH: There is always a plan B, but let us go with the decision of the NTCAT first. We will be guided by that decision.

Mr YAN: I am taking a step back to the rugby league codes and your communication strategy with them. Do you remember when the last communication was with the rugby league codes?

Mr PAECH: I am aware and I have been provided information that employees of the Northern Territory Government have spoken to members of the rugby codes about that decision, but as we progress and work through the NTCAT decision we will continue conversations with the rugby codes.

Mr YAN: It would be prudent for NT Government staff or staff from your office to talk to the codes because I met with them a number of weeks ago and the last communication they had was in February last year. You can imagine what is going on in their minds hearing all of this stuff—'The gallery is coming! The gallery is coming!' They just want to know what is going on. I suggest, with utmost respect, that somebody talks to the two committees and gives them an update on what is going on so they can get back to their members and let them know what is happening. They are working on information that is 15 or 16 months old.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Could you also provide me with an update on the national Aboriginal cultural centre, originally allocated \$20m by your government. Originally it was put together in a \$70m package by the CLP for the art gallery and the cultural centre, but you separated it out. Where are we at with that? What are the time frames you have for establishing that?

Mr PAECH: You will note that the commitment is still in the budget. I met with the group only a few weeks ago to receive a progress update on where they are at and what work is happening. We will continue to work with them and work through their proposal. That money was allocated in the budget, for capital. We will continue to work with them throughout their consultation processes and see what commitment comes from the Commonwealth. I acknowledge that a \$20m commitment is a generous one but will not necessarily build a cultural centre.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is a commitment your government made five years ago, and that is all you can tell me about it. Is that correct?

Mr PAECH: Could you further elaborate? Let me be clear, Member for Araluen; it was a contribution made by the Northern Territory Government that when that group had leveraged funds to look at the building work, the funding would be available to do that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Are you saying it is not a Northern Territory Government project anymore? Is that correct?

Mr PAECH: To be clear, when it was initially worked through, the Northern Territory Government took on the national Aboriginal art gallery component and we made a commitment to the national Indigenous cultural centre, but it was of the view that the centre would be national and their governance structure would be different, so that commitment was made for capital. I am committed to continuing the dialogue with them on the project progressing.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is national Aboriginal cultural centre still a government project?

Mr PAECH: It was always to be led by a group of individuals—the development. The Northern Territory Government made a commitment to the value of \$20m to support the capital works, but the ongoing running of that was never anticipated to be a Northern Territory Government responsibility. It was to be founded on first peoples' principles. I assume that it would be run in a corporate structure similar to how Federation Square is.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay. People do not understand that; I do not fully understand it. They started off together and it was to be the national Aboriginal art gallery and cultural centre. Then it was separated off. There has basically been no progress when it comes to the cultural centre.

Mr PAECH: No, I do not believe that is the case. I believe that committee has done a volume of work in preparing documents and doing consultation. I met with them recently about that project and reaffirmed to them that I was more than happy to continue working with them on this project and various ideas or support that could be offered to make sure the project is delivered. The Northern Territory Government's priority project is the national Aboriginal art gallery.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The cultural centre would always be far more difficult to deliver than the art gallery. Everyone understood that. With \$20m of public money given to the cultural centre, Territorians—Alice Springs and Central Australian people—need to know a bit more about what is going on in that space. I need to know. Where are they up to? What are the time frames? When will we see this delivered? It is a big government commitment.

Mr PAECH: We are getting into a grey area. That money is still in the budget, as you will see. I encourage local members in Alice Springs to meet with the committee, which is doing an outstanding job in pulling that together.

Mr SLOAN: A quick follow-up on that. Has there been any expenditure against that \$20m?

Mr PAECH: Yes, there has. You will note in the budget that of that \$20m commitment there has been a drawdown. That was drawn down by the working group so they could be provided some secretariat and do a round of national consultation about bringing together the key stakeholders.

Again, I encourage the Alice Springs-based members to reach out to that group and hear about the important work it is doing.

Mr SLOAN: How much has it been drawn down by?

Mr PAECH: That is actually in Output Group 4.0. I can provide those figures when I have representatives with me from the department who are specialists in the art and culture space.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, we are still on Local Government. Arts, Culture and Heritage is a bit further away—that way, the minister can get appropriate advice.

Mr SLOAN: Just to get it clear in my head, you said a figure of \$150 to \$180m to build the Alice Springs gallery. That includes the purchase of land, the building of the gallery and the construction of two new ovals. Is that correct?

Mr PAECH: When the scoping went out for the design to the prospective architects, this project was that the building could cost between \$150m and \$180m.

Mr SLOAN: Is the purchase of the land and the construction of the two new ovals additional, on top of that?

Mr PAECH: That is correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Another question about the national Aboriginal cultural centre. Can you guarantee it will be delivered during this term of parliament?

Mr PAECH: That would be a question for the committee. The Northern Territory Government made a commitment towards that project, but we are not in the position to make the determinations of what it will look like, how it will be governed and who will operate it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is your role in the cultural centre?

Mr PAECH: My role, as the Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, is to work closely with them and seek updates about how that project is going. We will be a stakeholder, given that we are looking at an appropriation to help achieve that, or help leverage the additional investment.

I have undertaken with that group to meet with them regularly on the progress. When a time comes to draw upon the Northern Territory Government's commitment, there will be a range of contractual arrangements and reporting mechanisms so we can provide accountability to Territorians on where the investment has gone towards that project.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It would be of great interest to Territorians to hear regular updates on the cultural centre as well as the art gallery. They are major projects, for Central Australia in particular.

Mr PAECH: Absolutely. As part of pulling together the workforce for the national Aboriginal art gallery, Tracy Puklowski is the director. We have additional positions: one person will manage the infrastructure and the build; there is workforce training and development; and someone will take on the role of communications for us to have regular communicate for Central Australia, the wider Territory and the nation on how this project is proceeding and how we can work with corporate Australia on partnership investments.

I am excited about the person we will recruit for the communications position. They will ensure we have a good communicate about the positive work happening in this space; the number of cultural or artistic institutions that have been born out of City Deals; and the work with each state jurisdiction.

In no way, shape or form are we competing. This is the national Aboriginal art gallery. It should be an umbrella under which all other artistic and cultural institutions in other jurisdictions will sit under and have a relationship with.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We would be competing for Commonwealth funds with the other projects, would we not?

Mr PAECH: I cannot go into much detail, but I have met with Commonwealth ministers who see the merit in this project and believe it is a fantastic way to invest in art, culture and heritage. Alice Springs is the rightful place for the national Aboriginal art gallery. It is the birthplace of the Aboriginal art movement, the Papunya Boards, the Yuendumu bonnets, Albert Namatjira's watercolours and the Utopia region.

This is a great opportunity to work with our state counterparts. They have different forms of Aboriginal art, stories and narratives, but they can link in and be a powerful piece if everything is done collaboratively.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is well-known in Alice Springs that there has been some movement on the first floor of the Alice Plaza. About 50 Territory Families staff have moved, or are moving, to a different location. The first floor of the Alice Plaza will be ministerial offices, is that correct? Will your new ministerial office be there?

Mr PAECH: I will reserve that question for another output, but I will talk about the amalgamation of those two agencies. As a minister based in Alice Springs, I want to spend as much time as I can at home in the Red Centre, in my electorate. Yes, I have an office on the first floor in Alice Plaza.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Has that space been refurbished for you? Will it become a ministerial office just for you?

Mr PAECH: There were no additional costs required to fit that out. It was already networked to the Northern Territory Government servers and had the appropriate infrastructure. That will be my primary location but, like anything, there is space there if one of my parliamentary ministerial colleagues is in the Red Centre. They will have a facility to meet with stakeholders and host a range of other meetings.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Will it be your ministerial office in the space that has been vacated on the first level of Alice Plaza?

Mr PAECH: Yes, I have an office there and there will be a representative from the Chief Minister working with stakeholders in the community to address any concerns they may have.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It will be called Minister Paech's ministerial office or something. Okay. When will you be moving in, minister? This is what people want to know. Alice Springs people are hanging on the edge of their chairs. They want to know the goss. When are you moving in? It has been gossip up until now because it has not been clarified or substantiated.

Mr PAECH: Okay. Gossip is the devil's telephone so you should hang up now.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The bush telegraph, should I say?

Mr PAECH: I will say that I have been working out of that location. Yes, I will continue to do so and meet with stakeholders.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have moved in?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay, thank you.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, I take the opportunity to remind everyone that these are going into output areas and we are still on the opening statement.

Mr SLOAN: Do you have an electorate office and a ministerial office in Alice Springs town centre?

Mr PAECH: Yes, it is correct.

Mr SLOAN: With pictures of you?

Mr PAECH: One picture of me. I remind everyone that electorate offices are not to be used for ministerial business. I live in Alice Springs, therefore, I require an office space so that I do not mix ministerial roles and responsibilities with those of mine as an elected member.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where is that said? That has been common practice in Alice Springs over the years. It has been that ministers have used their electorate offices just to save money and for convenience.

Mr PAECH: I have a bush electorate and at various times have multiple people in my office, using it for a community service meeting. They are using my meeting rooms because they come in from the bush and need to meet with stakeholders and organisations and they need support. I made the decision that I did not want to disallow them to use a facility that is there to service my constituents, so I have a separate office where I can fulfil my ministerial responsibilities.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not think it is a policy, though, or a rule. The former Chief Minister, Adam Giles, worked from his electorate office as the Chief Minister. He did not have a separate suite. Maybe you are being a bit decadent, minister.

Mr PAECH: No, Member for Araluen. I ask that you do some research and ask the Legislative Assembly tomorrow when the Speaker ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: I did it when I was a minister. I did not have a separate suite.

Mr PAECH: That was your decision. I am aware that when former members, including the former Chief Minister, had their offices, they had a physical wall put up to divide the two.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I did not.

Mr PAECH: Well, maybe someone needs to look at that. I am not in the business of doing that. I am committed to my ministerial portfolio responsibilities, but that will not come at the cost of my electorate.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not think the 50 people who work for Territory Families were particularly happy to move out of their offices and be crammed into alternative offices in Alice Springs.

Mr PAECH: Member for Araluen, I do not operate on gossip, so can we get to the outputs?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is not gossip; it is fact. I have spoken with many of them.

Mr PAECH: You are incorrect, because it is not Territory Families that was moving.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was Housing.

Mr CHAIR: We are still on the opening statement for Local Government. Minister, what about the Burial and Cremation Bill and support for Aboriginal people burying loved ones? That is of interest to me.

Mr PAECH: In relation to the Burial and Cremation Bill—there was a bill before the House last term. That bill was rescinded from the parliament, as further consultation had been requested by various members of the community and stakeholders. That bill is now being worked on. We have a time line. We continue to hold a range of consultations with stakeholders. We are working with the Northern Territory's four land councils which have jurisdiction over Aboriginal land in the Territory, and local government—our regional and shire councils—on the importance of the burial and cremation legislation.

This is an important piece of legislative reform and it is required in the Territory. It is important to note that the current *Cemeteries Act 1952* predates self-government in the Territory and it has not kept up with changing views and expectations in the community regarding practices relating to the burial and cremation of our loved ones.

Under the act, cemeteries located on Aboriginal land are currently not recognised. There is no legal requirement for the burial records to be kept, which results in loss of heritage and information about the deceased loved ones. There is no ability for traditional owners to make decisions or effectively plan for the use and management of cemeteries and burial grounds on Aboriginal land. Having a system for recording burial and cremations will ensure that graves are recognised and respected in the future.

Part of the legislative reform is to ensure that we recognise traditional owners' ability to make decisions regarding where loved ones are buried on Aboriginal land. It is not for the Northern Territory Government to make a decision on. We are not Big Brother. In this legislation, we are recognising those customs, cultures and practices.

There is a notification trigger in the legislation that will note when we have been notified where they are buried so that in future—with our remote housing program, and the investment we are seeking from the Commonwealth and external stakeholders in relation to homelands—when those records are being kept we are not disrupting a place where a deceased person has been buried. This is very important work and we need to make sure we do it.

Part of that is making sure we do the consultation. We have had extensive engagement across the Northern Territory in the development of this bill, including 130 face-to-face meetings with stakeholders and 180 radio and media information recordings in 18 Aboriginal languages across the Territory. We continue to make sure that work is being undertaken and continue to work through those sensitivities.

We intend for the bill to:

- ensure that human remains are treated with dignity and respect
- recognise and enable the continuation of cultural practices regarding the burial and disposal of human remains
- enable cemeteries or burial grounds on homelands—I pushed for this change, that they are to be referred to as ceremonial and burial grounds, taking into account the cultural considerations
- enable different management structures, including through local government councils, traditional owner groups and the recognised prescribed body corporate holders
- simplify the requirements for recordkeeping and notifications.

Each part of the Territory is very different and we are working through that in a sensitive and compassionate manner. We anticipate that we will introduce the bill towards the end of this year subject to further consultation. We will make sure that a priority is to use First Nations people from the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to make sure people are being informed about this in their local language, in mother tongue, so that everyone is aware of the changes.

It is important to acknowledge that a large portion of the land is Aboriginal land. We have to continue our positive and robust working relationship with the land councils and the Aboriginal people, who are the landholders, to make sure we assist them in having the mechanisms to successfully bury a loved one in a culturally appropriate manner.

In addition, we will work as an agency to make sure that the local councils and traditional owner groups have the appropriate information technology to record the locations for recordkeeping purposes. Furthermore, this will recognise cemeteries in a number of remote Aboriginal communities where they are currently not recognised. This is an important piece of reform that is required in the Territory, but we will step through at a very slow pace to make sure it is done appropriately.

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

Mr CHAIR: There being no further questions on the opening statement, the committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2021–2022) Bill as they relate to Local Government. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – TERRITORY REGIONAL GROWTH **Output 1.1 – Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs**

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output Group 1.0, Territory Regional Growth, Output 1.1, Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Affairs. Are there any questions?

Mr SLOAN: Can you step me through the budget figures here? The 2020–21 budget was \$166m, which was later revised to \$150m. That has been explained in note two regarding the Jabiru and Kakadu futures initiative; that is fine.

The 2021–22 budget drops again to \$119m, and the decrease reflects the funding profile of the Barkly Regional Deal and the Darwin City Deal. Can you explain exactly what that is?

Mr PAECH: I will ask Bridgette Bellenger to provide context to those decisions, because they relate to some regional development projects, primarily being Jabiru and the Barkly Regional Deal.

Ms BELLENGER: The machinery of government changes brought a number of new groups into the department of the Chief Minister. Local Government, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal Interpreter Services and the regional network are all joining together to strengthen the services and priorities in the regions.

In regard to the budget decreases, the funding profile is large sums of project money coming through that will not be reflected in the next year's budget, and a couple of major projects moving out to the Investment Territory team. There is no reduction in the operational funding for staffing for any of the different areas. It is purely project funding.

Mr SLOAN: Even after we take out the Darwin City Deal and the Barkly Regional Deal, which is about \$30.6m, we are still left with a shortfall of \$6m.

Ms BELLENGER: The \$5m for the transfer for Jabiru to major projects?

Mr SLOAN: That was from \$166m down to \$150m—that was incorporated in that?

Ms BELLENGER: That is correct. That is the difference between the \$166 and the \$119m for the next financial year.

Mr SLOAN: There is still a shortfall of \$6m. The Darwin City Deal dropped by \$17.7m and the Barkly Regional Deal dropped by \$6.8m, which is \$30.6m—that was \$24m and the shortfall was \$30m, so there is still a \$6m difference.

Ms BELLENGER: There as the funding that moved out of the regional development network out to the Jabiru major project—the Investment Territory funding. There was also some one-off funding for antisocial behaviour and so on that is not reflected in the next financial year.

Mr SLOAN: Will this have any effect on local government on the ground? Will it affect the vital role they play in service delivery?

Ms BELLENGER: No, all those costings were in other areas. One of the reasons for bringing all that funding together was to prioritise regional priorities and strengthen local government where we could

Mr SLOAN: What consultations have you had with individual councils on these changes?

Mr PAECH: A number of these in the Barkly—the Barkly Regional Deal is in partnership with them. In regard to Jabiru, this project has not traditionally sat with local government. In regard to coordination around the Barkly Regional Deal, those questions should be directed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in regard to the deliverables of the Barkly Regional Deal.

Mr SLOAN: Last year in estimates we discussed a \$100,000 grant provided to LGANT to host two institute of directors courses. You provided me a written answer later on to say that the events were cancelled. Was that money paid to LGANT? If so, has it been refunded?

Mr PAECH: As that question is relating to the financials, I will ask Meeta to provide comment.

Ms RAMKUMAR: During the year there was no new funding provided to LGANT. LGANT applied to carry over the funding, which we approved for \$240,000. In this financial year we approved LGANT to repurpose that for three separate projects. There was \$129,000 to co-fund a senior project officer employed by LGANT over two years. Then there was \$110,000 approved to be used in two phases. Phase one was to support the local government elections and the second phase was to support elected members post-election. That is all the funding that is currently with LGANT.

Mr SLOAN: For 2020–21 financial year can you tell me what the actual and budgeted employee expenses were, year to date?

Ms RAMKUMAR: Year-to-date employee expenses were \$4.9m and the budget was \$5.2m.

Mr SLOAN: The budget is \$5.2m up to 30 June?

Ms RAMKUMAR: Yes.

Mr SLOAN: Following on from last year's estimates, I asked a question regarding the dead man blocks in Southport, in particular what would happen with the surplus funds. You provided a reply advising that these funds would be held by the Public Trustee for seven years. If my math is correct, these funds should become available in 2022. Can you advise how much is being held by the Public Trustee, if any claims have been made, what date exactly in 2022 will the funds become available and to whom they will be paid?

Mr PAECH: As your question relates to the Public Trustee—we have no jurisdiction over the decisions made by the Public Trustee or the releasing of funds. I am aware that is a process that would need to be referred to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. Given that it is the Public Trustee, we would not be able to provide comment on that.

Mr SLOAN: Again with Southport, as I am sure the minister is aware, the residents are unable to apply for bores on their properties. Do the residents have the support of the minister to investigate the potential of running town water to this growing township?

Mr PAECH: That is a question for the Minister for Water Security, Minister Lawler, about the ongoing plans across government for water security moving forward.

Mr SLOAN: Would you support it?

Mr PAECH: I would need to be across the information and what is being requested.

Mr SLOAN: How many projects were funded under the latest local government priority infrastructure funding round?

Mr PAECH: Are you requesting the funds or the individual projects?

Mr SLOAN: Just how many projects.

Mr PAECH: How many projects within each council?

Mr SLOAN: Just overall is fine.

Mr PAECH: I can go through the priority infrastructure fund allocations:

- Barkly Regional Council was \$350,000
- Belyuen Community Government Council was \$95,056
- Blatherskite Park Trustees, which fall within the local government area, was \$322,684
- Central Desert Regional Council was \$504,727
- City of Darwin was \$322,670
- Palmerston City Council was \$400,000
- Coomalie Community Government Council was \$63,234
- Katherine Town Council was \$296,607
- Litchfield was \$193,396
- MacDonnell Regional Council was \$203,880
- Robbie Robbins Reserve was \$200,000
- Victoria Daly Regional Council was \$350,000
- Wagait Shire Council was \$100,000
- West Arnhem Regional Council was \$300,000
- West Daly Regional Council was \$287,746

That totals \$4m and 19 projects altogether.

Mr SLOAN: Is there provision in this year's budget for a continuation of this program?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr SLOAN: Will it be \$4m again this year?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr SLOAN: What is your understanding of the threats posed by ehrlichiosis in local council areas, especially remote?

Mr PAECH: Can you spell that?

Mr SLOAN: I can, yes. E-H-R-L-I-C-H-I-O-S-I-S.

Mr PAECH: I am pleased to advise I know what this is, it is just that name was a bit—this is the tick-borne disease. As an agency, we are working with AMRRIC and across all government agencies to look at this in a holistic way. That work will help us to look at what is needed to combat the virus. Then we can look at future budget appropriations on how we tackle this, given the impact and consequences it can have if left untreated.

Mr SLOAN: Do you have any idea how many regional councils have been affected by it to date?

Mr PAECH: We are working with all the regional councils. Included in that is work we will do with LGANT because local government is the first tier of government on the ground. They know what is happening and see the first sign of it.

We had reports from some regional councils about what to look for, so there is a greater awareness in those regional areas. We will work with AMRRIC, the regional and shire councils and across all agencies to come up with a plan so we can look at an appropriation in the next budget.

Mr SLOAN: Are you aware if there have been any deaths to this point?

Mr PAECH: The advice I received is yes, there have been.

Mr SLOAN: Have you been consulting with your federal counterparts on this issue?

Mr PAECH: Yes, we have. The agency has been working through this given the possible impact it could have. We are working with Commonwealth agencies on further work.

Mr SLOAN: Can it be treated? Is it like Frontline—with traditional ticks, you can inject a dog?

Mr PAECH: It is complex and there are various ways which are being looked at to address or treat it. In most instances, the opportunities that present themselves, particularly in regional areas, would be to destroy the animal.

Mr SLOAN: Are there any plans to resume the SCALE program in the 2021–22 budget?

Mr PAECH: The SCALE project was developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At this early stage, no. We are seeing the positive results from that funding. We will review that, but at this stage, in regard to consideration, no.

Mr SLOAN: In the Electoral Commission's 2017 report, recommendation 8 recommends investigating options and feasibility of introducing a form of electronic postal voting systems prior to the 2020 Territory and 2021 local government elections. Is there any funding for such an initiative in the 2021–22 budget?

Mr PAECH: That is a great question and best directed to the Chief Minister in relation to the Northern Territory Electoral Commission, as those outputs sit with him. As an agency, we continue to look at ways in which we increase voter participation. The other consideration is to make sure there is reliable telecommunications in those areas.

We will continue to work with the Electoral Commission—they are working with us in a productive way, increasing voter turnout and participation, but at this stage electronic voting has not been considered and will not be until we are in a position to afford that opportunity to every Territorian—acknowledging there is complexity with the telecommunication networks. We will keep that on our agenda and work with telecommunication ministers and the Electoral Commission.

Mr SLOAN: Regional councils have identified that voter participation in regional councils would be higher if mobile polling stations were able to stay for longer at communities. As it stands, and depending on the size of the community, mobile stations can be present anywhere from one hour up to a couple of days in individual communities. Is there extra money in this budget to assist communities to pay the Electoral Commission to allow mobile polling stations to stay for longer at communities to increase voting numbers? If not, is this something you would consider for future local government elections?

Mr PAECH: This is a question for the Electoral Commission, but the Electoral Commission would come to agreement based on negotiation and advice from the regional councils on what an appropriate time is, given the events, the size of the community, previous enrolment numbers and so on. We look at how we can work with regional councils on increasing electoral participation through enrolments and working with regional councils to make sure there are provisions in place. When it comes to the question about time, booths and locations, it is a matter for the Electoral Commission.

Mr SLOAN: The Local Government Amendment Bill was passed in May. Is the government currently considering reviewing options for additional local government reforms?

Mr PAECH: As the minister, it is my role to work with LGANT, and all the regional councils, and talk to them about issues or challenges they face. We are constantly looking at ways in which we can better equip, resource and reform local government. Every day that I am the minister, it is my role to look at what we can do to get behind and support local government in the Territory.

Mr SLOAN: On a proposed change to council boundaries, Palmerston would incorporate currently unincorporated areas of Berrimah, which are Elrundie, Tivendale and Wishart. Are there any other changes to council boundaries currently under consideration by the government?

Mr PAECH: The question you have asked is in relation to council boundaries. At this stage, the only boundary that we are working on is the proposal for the Palmerston boundary expansion. That includes relevant parts of the Berrimah area, Elrundie, the Northcrest residential development, Tivendale and Wishart. Aside from most of Elrundie, the land is in the *Northern Territory Rates Act 1971* prescribed area, so owners of land in that prescribed area currently pay rates to the Northern Territory Government. Most of Elrundie is unincorporated and outside that prescribed area, meaning rates are not currently payable for this land.

Mr SLOAN: When we were here in December, we talked about Coomalie and Belyuen councils and exploring options to amalgamate those two councils. Has that progressed any further since December?

Mr PAECH: We continue to work with Coomalie and Belyuen on what a proposal could look like. At this stage, there is no solid proposal that has been put forward for consideration, or that will go out for public consultation. We are working with them both productively.

We need to make sure that when we are making these decisions or looking at these proposals as they go out for public comment on the Have Your Say website, they need to be financially viable. We need to look at all those avenues to ensure that financial viability is the priority so that when those councils are created or amalgamations or proposals take place, people are not in the position of not being financially viable.

We are continuing to work through it with the group in that area, because that will also look at the area as a whole—or as a region.

I also think it is important to put on the record that at this stage the Wagait Shire Council does not want to be included, so it would just be Coomalie and Belyuen that we continue to work with. That is not to say that if that local government area wanted to have those discussions in the future we would not entertain it, but at this stage we will continue to work with Coomalie and Belyuen.

Mr CHAIR: That, therefore, concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0. Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

The committee will now look at the minister's portfolios of Remote Housing and Town Camps, Indigenous Essential Services, and Arts, Culture and Heritage.

Thank you, Ms De Lacey and your team. There were 74 questions by my count.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, thank you and the Estimates Committee. I also thank the representatives from the agency who are here with me today, who continue to do an outstanding job in working in the Local Government space to see progress and productive work happening.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We will have a short break to change over agencies.

The committee suspended.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, I can respond to an answer to a question on notice from the Member for Araluen regarding the national Indigenous cultural centre.

Answer to Question on Notice No 9.3

Mr PAECH: In relation to the Member for Araluen's question about the national Indigenous cultural centre, the Northern Territory Government made an election commitment in 2016 of \$20m capital contribution towards the delivery of a national Indigenous cultural centre in Alice Springs ...

Mr CHAIR: Sorry, minister, one moment. That is question on notice number 9.3, which is the breakdown of the \$20m for the cultural centre?

Mr PAECH: Yes. I am confirming that \$625,000 has been spent to date and the revote of the program for 2021–22 is \$19.385m.

**REMOTE HOUSING AND TOWN CAMPS
INDIGENOUS ESSENTIAL SERVICES
ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE**

DEPARTMENT OF TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Mr CHAIR: Honourable members and guests, we will now move the Estimates Committee to Remote Housing and Town Camps; Indigenous Essential Services; and Arts, Culture and Heritage with minister Paech.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding your portfolios.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, I acknowledge Mr Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities; Mr Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Housing; and Mr Dwayne McInnes, General Manager, Housing Program. Danyelle Jarvis and Kim Charles are also joining us today. They are not before the Estimates Committee, will join us if required.

Mr CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, I acknowledge the Larrakia people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today. I pay my respects to our elders past, present and future.

It gives me great pleasure to speak of my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for Remote Housing and Town Camps; Indigenous Essential Services; and Arts, Culture and Heritage. In appearing before the Estimates Committee today, I specifically acknowledge the partnership I share with the Minister for Territory Families and Urban Housing, Minister Worden, with whom I share carriage of the Housing portfolio, and the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, Minister Lawler, with whom I share responsibility for delivering the Northern Territory housing infrastructure program.

Housing gives Territorians a domestic environment to meet their primary physiological and safety needs. It is the cornerstone for providing our health and wellbeing, no matter where we live, how much we earn, or the size of our home. The provision of housing is essential to a building block of connected communities, thriving places and empowered Territorians.

The relationship between housing and overcrowding; poor social outcomes, such as child abuse and neglect; poor educational attendance; domestic and family violence; youth crime; and unemployment is well understood. Remote housing is a critical element to delivering on the Northern Territory's generational change reform agenda helping to improve social outcomes across health, education and youth justice.

Therefore, government is charged with the responsibility to provide safe, secure and affordable housing for all Territorians who need assistance to live and sleep safely. We also create pathways, services and supports for Territorians to achieve and maintain housing safety and security through their own means to achieve independence.

In recognition that homes are not always places of belonging or safety, government provides services, shelters and support to families and individuals who have become homeless. Houses are a personal space for individuals, families, children and seniors in urban and remote areas. But houses also create communities.

This government has invested \$1.1bn in remote housing. Our remote housing package specifically delivers and represents our drive to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians and deliver 'Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes.' program across 10 years. It plays a significant role in improving access to housing and reducing overcrowding for Aboriginal Territorians living remotely.

Our government's investment has been matched by the Australian Government funding of \$550m for five years through the National Partnership for Remote Housing NT. The combined NT and Australian Government investment of \$2.1bn over 10 years is intended to improve the living conditions for remote Territorians. It is also an investment in our population. In order to create new communities and expand and secure existing communities, we are committed to creating new remote housing lots and ensuring that remote residents have access to quality water and electricity.

For this reason we have also committed \$432.8m over eight years, from 2016, for preparing, land servicing and infrastructure for remote housing works. In the year to date 116 remote lots have been developed. We

also have \$79.9m to progress headworks and build subdivisions to allow new housing to be built and deliver the critical infrastructure, such as the sewerage and electricity required to these serviced lots.

We have committed \$81.1m for essential services, providing electricity, water and waste services in 72 communities and 79 homelands across the Territory. In addition, \$38.8m is allocated to continue providing municipal and essential services, housing maintenance to homelands and outstations across the Northern Territory. This is more than an investment in infrastructure, it is an investment in our people, communities and our businesses.

Forty-seven per cent of contracts have been awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises directly linked to local employment, upskilling and an increased employability for Aboriginal Territorians.

I am also privileged to be the Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, with leadership responsibility for a strong and vibrant arts and cultural sector and for the protection, conservation and cultural sector of the community—preservation of access to the Territory's heritage collection. This government's investment of \$41.8m in Arts, Culture and Heritage will foster a creative and cultural economy in the Northern Territory. We understand the importance of investing in world-class facilities to showcase our rich history, which is crucial to attracting people to the Northern Territory and foster our creative industries.

The Northern Territory's creative industry sector invests more than \$735m directly into our economy each year an employer is almost 2,400 people. It is also incredibly valued to the tourism sectors. Our \$50m investment in the national Aboriginal art gallery in Alice Springs is testament to our commitment to our culture, heritage and the industry. The strategic business case for the gallery estimates that it will bring an extra 53,000 visitors to Alice Springs each year, generating between \$42.8m to \$64.2m and between 164 and 245 jobs.

Preservation of our history is worth a meaningful investment in infrastructure to house our precious collections and position the Territory as a world-class cultural and tourist destination. Together with the national Aboriginal art gallery, government has also invested \$47m for the construction of the Civic and State Square art gallery as part of the City Deal between the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and the City of Darwin.

To ensure that we have quality infrastructure across the Northern Territory we are also investing in museum and gallery upgrades in our regional areas. In particular, we have invested \$27.9m to the Arts Trail program; \$2m in a new arts centre for Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts Aboriginal Corporation and additional investments to support art centre upgrades and gallery extensions to the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre in Yirrkala; Maningrida Arts and Cultural Precinct museum facilities; Injalak Arts and cultural association in Gunbalanya; Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Cultural Centre in the Barkly Region; and Mimi Arts and Crafts and the Gondinymayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Cultural Centre also in Katherine.

I also recognise that not all our precious heritage and artefacts are housed in purpose-built infrastructure. Many heritage listed places are located in our regions and communities, by providing reminders of our history in-situ. By way of example, I am pleased to recently declare that the place known as the grave of Kato Osamu located on the South Goulburn Island to be a heritage place. Following engagement, of course, with the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and the traditional owners of those sacred lands.

The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities is a department of heart, empathy and professionalism. Everything we do is to support the development and growth of Territorians to live their best life. I am proud to be before the Estimates Committee to continue to talk about the outstanding work that the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities delivers every day and continues to plan to deliver into the future.

Mr CHAIR: Are there questions on the minister's statement?

Mr YAN: Thank you, minister, for your opening statement. I thank all of the public servants for taking the time to be here today and for all the work they put in behind the scenes to prepare for estimates.

I have few questions on your opening statement, minister. I took interesting note that 47% of contracts have gone to Aboriginal organisations, which is excellent news. How many jobs—or how are you assisting in generating jobs on country rather than in the major centres, where contractors go out to those communities, or go out to those homelands to do the work?

Mr PAECH: In line with our national partnership agreement and our mandate to support and grow Aboriginal business enterprises—part of that, first and foremost, is increasing the percentage of Aboriginal employment with those contracts. Part of that is a commitment to local employment. This is not about just having Aboriginal people as a number, or often as is referred to as ‘black cladding’, this is about meaningful employment for those in communities. As part of those contracts, it must be demonstrated that the local employment is actually that. It is those who call that community home in the first instance and then we take into consideration the Aboriginal employment overall. But that is the first step.

Furthermore, as an agency we developing ways in which we can regionalise our own department’s footprint in those communities. That will also look at job-creating opportunities, particularly in my area of having remote housing officers or positions in those remote communities. I know as a bush member, as I am sure that you, the Members for Daly and Arafura would attest, that people will report repairs and maintenance issues to someone on the ground in their community if they have a relationship with that person. Also, that person can look at repairs and maintenance as things wearing before they get to the critical point or crisis point of being broken. We are looking at that regionalisation footprint.

We are also looking at running trials across the NT. Three locations have been sought. We are looking to have an expression of interest out in the coming weeks. That contract is around what is traditionally referred to as a hub, or a primary community, to deliver repairs and maintenance by local recruits or workforce to the surrounding, smaller communities and homelands. We are mindful that we need to look at this.

Part of those contracts is that I do not want Aboriginal people to be used just as a number. For those contracts we need to work with the providers so that people are given opportunities to fulfil training, apprenticeships and internships. All those things are crucial so that people can get meaningful employment outside the building program.

Mr YAN: You stated that we need Aboriginal people in communities, working for those contractors. I agree with that wholeheartedly. How are you measuring and assessing that to make sure that people, effectively your contractors, are not rorting the system?

Mr PAECH: To date, we have always relied on the good graces and honesty of those providers. Coming to the portfolio I made it clear that we need to up compliance checks to make sure people were engaged in meaningful employment and they were not just being used for people to get contracts.

We have now moved to a position where a successful tender was awarded to an Aboriginal corporation in the Arnhem region. Because they have a long-term pipeline of work, they are now able to and have committed to bringing on an apprentice and trainees. They are numbers we can monitor and evaluate as well.

Mr MONAGHAN: I am sure the chief executive will know how passionate I am about remote housing. We crossed paths many years ago in that area under various other programs that have rolled out. How critical that employment and housing issue is—and the numbers in housing—to overall advantage within communities. All the data points towards the improvements in people’s wellbeing and getting out of poverty by building more houses. In the aspect of that employment, critical measures under the ‘Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes.’ plan—are there critical aspects under that that the department is monitoring?

Mr PAECH: That is something our compliance team looks at. Moving forward, looking at those contracts is something we will work on. As we begin to see Aboriginal business enterprises taking on large-scale projects, they will be able to demonstrate through their tendering and procurement processes what their plans are to increase Indigenous employment through training and development and workforce development.

We are one of the biggest players in the regions when it comes to increasing or growing Indigenous employment opportunities. We are aware that under our homelands grants, around 250 Aboriginal people have been employed in that process. As we begin to work through the establishment of an independent commission for homelands, a major contributor of that is Indigenous economic development opportunities through employment, working with and growing the Aboriginal business enterprises in those footprint areas.

If you would like further information in regard to those employment numbers, I am happy to ask Dwayne McInnes to provide additional commentary.

Mr YAN: I am keen to hear that; thank you.

Mr McINNES: One of the measures in place to ensure or encourage compliance with the targets we have set for Aboriginal employment is to incorporate into our contracts and assessment process a minimum

requirement for Aboriginal employment. This year, 42% in every contract has to be considered. As part of that assessment process we are providing more weight to the local Aboriginal employment component.

It is not always possible to achieve 42% in every community for local employment, because not all communities are workforce ready. We lend weight to the 42% target and further weight to the number of local employees in the assessment process.

This year we had an average of 38.2% Aboriginal employment. For the life of the program we are travelling at 42.8% for full-time equivalents. On a headcount basis, that is the proportion of Aboriginal employed, it is 47.1%. We are getting up there with Aboriginal employment numbers, exceeding our targets and are working with a larger focus on the local component.

One of the areas we have always had difficulties in achieving employment targets is in the land servicing component because there are specific skills required. It is pleasing to note that we are having better success in achieving that. We have awarded some contracts to Aboriginal business enterprises for civil works and their numbers are pleasing.

In looking at the Ngukurr subdivision the FTE—the total employment achieved—was 42% and the local employment component was 28%. We are working on it and focusing on weighting the local employment component during the tender process.

Mr YAN: Thank you, Mr McInnes; that is quite informative.

Minister, in recent comments you spoke of the compliance team checking on these contracts. How many people do you have working in the compliance team?

Mr PAECH: I will ask Mr McInnes to provide commentary on the compliance team. I note it is a compliance team for all of the agencies.

Mr YAN: I would like to know how many compliance checks have been done. I am interested in that number.

Mr PAECH: I will ask Mr Davies to provide commentary. If you require further information, we are happy to take it on notice.

Mr DAVIES: In terms of compliance, we have a huge workforce dedicated to allocating and procuring contracts and giving grants out as part of agency processes. Of our overall budget across the whole agencies, 60% goes to NGOs and ABEs to provide services—as part of the construction program as well—remotely.

Those contracts are monitored closely and there are a range of officers in our finance section who keep a close eye on what is going on. In terms of broader compliance, we have an arrangement and an agreement with the Australian Government for the national housing program and the remote housing program that we have to report outcomes on. We have a vigilant eye on what goes on.

I visited Barunga recently and made a deliberate effort to see some houses that were being built and do a head count of local people on site and working. It is eyes on and making sure they are reporting appropriately. We watch the cash flow as well. If they have made commitments we are keeping an eye on employment numbers. It does not only apply to Remote Housing, it is across all of our agreements. We make it clear when we are writing contracts that Aboriginal employment targets are part of what we include when they tender. This is part of the assessment process.

The agency is geared to monitor and keep an eye on this. Growing Aboriginal remotely is what we want to see—growing the capacity and supporting the capacity of ABEs to provide a local workforce is part of the work we are doing.

Mr YAN: Asking how many are in the compliance team is probably not such a great question, but I am interested to have some figures on onsite compliance checks—like you just spoke about, Mr Davies—you went to a site, walked around and had a look. I am interested to see how often we are able to do that as a government to ensure that those targets are being met and the wool is not being pulled over our eyes. Maybe I could frame a question for you, that you might be able to take on notice?

Mr PAECH: Certainly. During the construction we always have remote housing officers there doing various other tenancy agreements or inspections on existing properties who keep an eye on the work. Our housing staff do the work on the reference groups—they are also keeping an eye on that.

It is safe to say that when it comes to remote housing often a number of times during the build we keep a close eye on it because of our staff there. We are very happy for you to put a question on notice, but in terms of the exact number it would be a big one because each time they visit the community they will always stop in and check the project.

Mr YAN: Of the housing contracts in remote areas how many physical compliance checks have been done against contractors who have been awarded the work for those areas?

Mr CHAIR: Are you happy with that question, minister?

Mr PAECH: I am and we are happy to provide it. We have staff in the remote program, who work with Housing and DIPL regularly checking on the work. That also helps inform is if people are not compliant and taking the mickey; they will be pulled up next time they go for a tender, because they have not been able to outline the exact number who were employed.

Mr YAN: We know all too often, and you said it earlier, some unscrupulous contractors will fudge their figures or employ Aboriginal people—allegedly—then when you go on-site those people are not there. It happens all too often and it is at a detriment to the communities, because the development for those communities and the individuals in question, the community members—all of a sudden it is not there.

Mr PAECH: Yes, we make it very clear through the procurement process when things are awarded that you may be subject to a formal visit or that housing officers may report back to the agency and we will go in and rightfully ask to prove that those employees who are Indigenous were onsite and doing the work.

Question on Notice No 9.4

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

Mr YAN: Of the remote contracts for housing construction that had been let, how many physical compliance checks have taken place for the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: We do accept the question and I remind people that every time a housing officer is out the compliance checks are built into our community visitations.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.4.

Mr YAN: In relation to the transition with housing and DIPL, how is the transition of housing infrastructure functions to DIPL progressing?

Mr PAECH: Regarding the housing operations with the department of Territory Housing, our role is to ensure that Territorians have access to homes and services. We do the tenancy management for government employee, urban and remote housing. We look at the homelessness services, remote housing governance—that is working with the Housing reference groups. Those Housing reference groups also help us inform updating our wait lists and the tenancy management side of things. We also do the homelands services, town camps and public housing safety officers.

The housing program that is in the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics does the housing construction procurement program, planning and the delivery for the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities under the partnership agreement. They also do the urban and remote housing repairs and maintenance programs for Territory Families, Housing and Communities under a partnership agreement. They are working with us but, ultimately have the responsibility to deliver the remote and urban housing infrastructure investment, land tenure, remote lands planning and the program delivery.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities leads the local decision-making component with the communities, which is working with people on the variations of the designs. Whether a house is modular or brick is ultimately a decision of the tenant, but we will facilitate those conversations.

Mr YAN: Thanks for clarifying. How is the transition going?

Mr PAECH: The transition is going well. We believe that this transition has enabled two things to work very successfully. It has enabled the construction, design, builds and subdivision consultation works to go full-steam ahead. It has also allowed the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities' housing division to focus on tenancy management and enabled it to work with people on sustaining tenancies, clearing up and working through the wait list, looking at the priority housing systems so we are able to look at reunification of Aboriginal children back into the hands and care of Aboriginal people. We are working closely with the Department of Education to make sure a good attendance at school helps get a priority in housing. That has enabled us to look at the care that we can afford and award the tenants.

We also have a close eye on and work very closely with DIPL on the consultations on subdivisions and building programs. Being the client, we make sure from a department perspective that we are satisfied with the design, construction and process of those houses.

Mr YAN: What has been the cost involved with the transition so far?

Mr PAECH: There are two parts to that. The first part is there was a transition in the budget of about \$40m that has left the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities. That now sits within the agency of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. For the other costs for staff movement, I would have to ask the Chief Executive Mr Davies, to provide any commentary on that. It basically has just been a shifting exercise, which would allow that to work tidier for the appropriations.

Mr DAVIES: Territory Families, Housing and Communities is a funder and a purchaser. At the end of the day, DIPL is the provider of the infrastructure. That is the best way to picture it in a programmatic sense.

Previously we had an agency which was trying to do everything. In fact, we had a construction agency within an agency that was also trying to provide services. It was very cumbersome and not connected to the main construction agency, which is DIPL.

It is appropriately placed now. We call it the housing program office. Dwayne McInnes is in charge of that. That is doing the construction, land tenure, making sure we are building the right lots and the land planning. That side of it is very much in DIPL. I am joined at the hip with the Chief Executive of DIPL, Andrew Kirkman. We meet very regularly, as do Brent Warren and Dwayne, regarding the program. We make sure the building blocks are there and the programmatic response regarding tenancy management, making sure tenancy agreements are signed and that tenancies are properly supported. That is all dealt with in the main agency, the policy agency, which is the housing area under Territory Families, Housing and Communities.

Mr YAN: With the breakup of the transition, which is the construction arm of housing across DIPL, has there been any duplication of positions that has resulted in employees being redeployed?

Mr PAECH: No. In regard to those costs, to date a large number of those staff are already based in or working with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. There have only been minor costs to relocate staff from the RCG Centre to Energy House. The only other costs would be the operational budget transfer, which was employee costs of \$9.464m and the administrative cost transfers of \$5.368m. That is a total in transfer for the remote program delivery office of \$14.832m.

Mr YAN: When we spoke earlier in the opening statement about the movement of Housing staff out of the Plaza in Alice Springs across to the Territory Families office—what will that cost as far as office fit-outs and all the bits and pieces that go with moving somebody?

Mr PAECH: Those moves have not taken place, but it is anticipated that where the Territory Housing office is, we would look at merging it with Minerals House, which is referred to as the old Centrelink building. That will ensure that when people come to town from a remote community and need to access a Territory Housing officer, they are not required to go up three flights of stairs to an office they do not know exists.

This is about our agency having a one-stop shop in Central Australia where people can be greeted by a Territory Families, Housing and Communities reception staff member who can triage and see if they are there for child protection, seniors' concessions or a housing issue and get the relevant staff member. That office has the infrastructure in place. With anything, there will be minor costs to move staff, but we are very mindful that we need to work with the staff and offer them an opportunity to talk about the transition and the move so we are not uplifting them without a consultation process or talking to them about the merge.

This is also about saving Territory taxpayers money. Where we have Territory Housing staff members going out to remote communities, they should be in a position to share transportation with the relevant people from the agency, so we do not end up with six white Toyotas in a community for a one-day visit. They can share that coordination and travel together.

Mr YAN: If this is such a great idea, why did we not do it three, four or five years ago? Why is it all of a sudden just being done now to provide additional space for a ministerial office in Alice Springs?

Mr PAECH: Territory Families, Housing and Communities merged as an agency in the machinery of government changes this term. As part of that, this is not about politics; it is about families and bringing together the two agencies which have the biggest footprint in a remote setting along with Health and Education, in ensuring that we get the crucial benefit for remote Territorians. The office space you are referring to was not the Housing space.

Mr YAN: This is nothing about politics. I am just stating that if it was a great idea—and I agree, I think it is reasonably smart to put the Housing offices in with Territory Families and create a one-stop shop. I cannot remember how many meetings I have been to about one-stop shops for remote communities and people. Nothing ever seems to have happened. It is interesting that it is happening right now, when we could have been doing this previously.

Mr PAECH: I will highlight that this has been part of a machinery of government changes. The former Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Services was disbanded by the machinery of government change and a super department was created, made up of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, which brought the two agencies of child protection and youth justice together with housing services to ensure we get the most beneficial impact for the remote Territorians who deserve it. That is so we can look at how we achieve the relocation and reunification of Aboriginal children to their home communities to be with their families.

That can often be achieved by Territory Families staff working with Housing staff to identify needs. That can be evidenced through—rather than removing a child, we may be able to look at homes that are available, the Room to Breathe program to look at additional bedrooms and spaces. That has been a successful merge. We are seeing positive results for the Territory Housing staff working with the Territory Families staff members.

Mr YAN: Do you foresee any more physical relocations of staff in the future?

Mr PAECH: At this stage, the housing staff in Alice Springs will undergo that process to relocate to a central location. That is what we will continue to look at in each place. I will hand over to Mr Davies or Brent Warren, because ultimately that is an operational issue. It is not an issue that I as a minister have carriage of.

Mr DAVIES: We will have agency areas brought together. In Tennant Creek we will have a one-stop shop office of Territory Families, Housing and Communities. Work is going on there. Relocations are being looked at in other areas as well. In Casuarina and Darwin we want ground floor shopfront access for families and children. Mwerre House and Minerals House in Alice Springs—just as an example—has a good lawn areas out the front, so there is a spot where families and children can sit while they are accessing services. We are trying to make our services and accesses as family friendly as possible.

We have looked at a site in Borroloola where we will create a Families presence. Currently there is no Housing officer; it is run from Katherine. We need a Housing officer there. We have a small team of Territory Families child protection workers there; we want to join them up.

Where we can, in a regional location, we will move staff into remote locations, on a voluntary basis, to try to create a footprint where Territory Families, Housing and Communities has a presence where there is a big school, a big health clinic and a police station. We want to be there as well, working with families and with those services in local Aboriginal organisations on the ground to make sure families are properly supported.

Mr PAECH: Where positions become vacant within the agency in Remote Housing, as part of our regionalisation if a community is identified as a big community that warrants a Housing person based there, it is our intention to look to secure a local recruit to work in the community and deliver those services or be that conduit back to the head office in each region.

Mr YAN: What is the current FTE component for the Housing division?

Mr PAECH: Three hundred.

Mr WARREN: There are just under 300 FTEs in the Housing part of the organisation.

Mr YAN: What is your FTE component with all your positions filled? How many vacancies do you have?

Mr WARREN: The figure of just under 300 is the FTE count at the moment. If you would like a vacancy count, we would have to take that away and come back.

Mr YAN: I asked what your FTE component be with all positions filled.

Mr WARREN: It is approximately 300.

Mr YAN: Is that your current FTE component?

Mr WARREN: Yes.

Mr YAN: I will rephrase my question. How many vacancies do you have?

Mr WARREN: I would need to take that question on notice. We can break the data down but do not have it.

Mr YAN: That would answer my next question, which is how many positions does your department have?

Mr PAECH: Member for Namatjira, we will take that on notice but everyone wants to work in Housing, so we have good rates. We are prepared to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 9.5

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

Mr YAN: How many vacancies are there in the Remote Housing agency?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.5.

Mr PAECH: I have some additional details in relation to the Alice Springs office movements. I am happy to provide them now if you would like.

Mr YAN: I am happy to get a briefing from you at a later stage. I am being asked a million questions and I am happy to have a briefing to provide answers to those questions.

Mr PAECH: Sure, that is not problem.

Mr YAN: What is your current level of Aboriginal employment, as a percentage, within Housing?

Mr PAECH: It would be in terms of the agency. We would have to do further break down if you want it for just Remote Housing. In terms of the total agency, our full-time employment headcount is 290 and total paid headcount is 1,399. Our Aboriginal workforce is 17.2% in the entire agency.

Mr YAN: Thank you, they are good numbers.

Mr PAECH: They are good numbers, but we acknowledge that we can grow them more.

Mr YAN: Has the partnering agreement between TFHC and DIPL been completed yet?

Mr PAECH: Yes, it has.

Mr YAN: Will you be developing new KPIs for the arrangement?

Mr PAECH: My understanding is that we have an MOU in place for KPIs. We keep a close eye on that to make sure we are delivering in relation to those.

Mr YAN: The KPIs have not changed; you have an MOU between the two?

Mr PAECH: Yes, that is correct.

Mr YAN: Minister, could you provide a break-down of the \$217.1m for the HomeBuild NT Room to Breathe in government employee housing?

Mr PAECH: Are you referring to the number in the budget paper?

Mr YAN: Yes.

Mr PAECH: The Remote Housing Investment Package?

Mr YAN: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Is that Budget Paper No 4?

Mr YAN: I do not have BP4 in front of me at the moment.

Mr PAECH: That is the 2021–22 approved and published program of \$217.145m.

Mr YAN: That is it.

Mr MCINNES: The \$217m is made up of the capital program supported under the Remote Housing Investment Package, being the HomeBuild NT, the Room to Breathe program and the government employee housing programs. They were referred to in Budget Paper No 4 and bring together the revote figures and the new program for 2021–22. What is not being fully spent in the current financial year rolled over into next. Adding that new program brings you the \$217.1m.

Mr YAN: Is there a breakdown of what that \$217m is for? Are there components for HomeBuild NT, Room to Breathe, and for GEH?

Mr MCINNES: There is and Budget Paper No 4, the details are on page 29. In terms of the revote numbers the HomeBuild NT is at the top of that page. Government employee housing is \$21m; Homebuild NT is \$66.4m; \$30.56m for the Room to Breathe program; and the \$8.7m in minor new works. In the new program we have \$20m for government employee housing, \$50m for HomeBuild and a further \$20m for the Room to Breathe program.

Mr PAECH: We anticipate that as time goes on the HomeBuild program has always been designed to scale up. We understand that number will grow as well.

Mr YAN: As part of the spends in communities and the bush, what evaluation measures have you put in place to ensure the remote housing stimulus packages have helped stimulate the local economies?

Mr PAECH: Whoever the successful tenderer is, we prefer that if the community is not water-stressed they are onsite and work with the local corporation on accommodation. There are also local shops and so forth. It is about that Indigenous employment rate—again local people being involved at every possible opportunity on that project.

Mr YAN: What evaluation measures you have put in place to ensure the various packages help stimulate the local economy. How are you measuring those stimulus packages?

Mr PAECH: When these projects are being undertaken, we work with and talk to the local people on the ground and the organisations about any possible economic benefit they have received. The program is ultimately not a stimulus program; it is a program addressing chronic overcrowding in remote Aboriginal communities. The KPIs with the National Partnership Agreement have been designed is for addressing the level of overcrowding.

We work to understand how much the economic opportunities have increased in the local communities at the local shop or with local people involved. The overall program is not a stimulus package; it is for the chronic overcrowding.

Mr YAN: You would be measuring the success of the program based on overcrowding?

Mr PAECH: That is correct. We measure the success of the program. We work to make sure the incoming tenant or the tenant undergoing a refurbishment has been satisfied with the service they received from the department. The other way is about the additional bedrooms provided for those faces. That includes the refurbs, Room to Breathe and understanding that the remote housing tenancies are living in appropriate-sized properties. How we determine and address the overcrowding is the main objective of that program.

Mr YAN: How do you measure overcrowding?

Mr PAECH: We have a formula that the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities uses. I am happy to ask Mr McInnes to provide further analysis on how that formula works. It is important to acknowledge that is a live formula. Every time a Territory Housing person is out there, they check in with people to make sure there has not been a reduction in the tenancies or if there has been an increase. Those numbers actively reflect the pressures and where the build program or Room to Breathe occurs.

Mr YAN: All of us bush members would know that when you go out to a community one day there are three people in the house and a week later there are 30. Those pressures change quickly. I am interested to hear how it is measured.

Mr PAECH: I will ask Mr McInnes to provide comment. The Australian Government is supportive of the way in which we measure those metrics on the overcrowding. As a bush member, sometimes I will stay with constituents and there will be three of us in the house and other times there will be 15 or 20. We definitely understand that it fluctuates. As part of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, we work with people to understand the pressure and that at some point, due to ceremony business, the house might not have the usual number of people in it.

Mr McINNES: Going back to your previous question on the \$217m, I have some more simplistic figures here for you, if that is okay?

Mr YAN: Yes.

Mr McINNES: HomeBuild NT is \$116m; Room to Breathe is \$50m; upgrade program is \$8m; and \$41m for government employee housing. That gets you close to that.

Mr YAN: Thank you.

Mr McINNES: Regarding how we measure overcrowding, we use a generally accepted model called the Canadian National Occupancy Standard. It is used by other jurisdictions as the standard measure of measuring overcrowding. It has been adopted by the Australian Government for reporting purposes. CNOS—Canadian National Occupancy Standard—assesses the bedroom requirements of the household. It recommends that:

- there should be no more than two people persons per bedroom
- children less than five years of age of different sexes may reasonably share a room
- children five years of age older of opposite sex should have separate bedrooms
- children under 18 years of age of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom
- single household members, 18 years or older, should have a separate bedroom as should parents or couples.

We have adopted that formula, fed it into our remote housing needs assessment model, which draws information from the tenancy management system at any point in time to give us details about the household and that tells us the level of overcrowding in a household by the number of people but also by the people per bedroom.

Mr GUYULA: How long ago did the passage you read come to be there? I know this has never been possible since the intervention came through; it is impossible to house children and families and these people into those separate bedrooms. It has been overcrowded since then.

Mr McINNES: It has been in place since the intervention, when we started gathering tenancy information and signing up people to tenancy agreements. Before that it was difficult for us to determine because we did not have the level of detail, electronically. Prior to that a lot of it was manual collection. It has been an adopted measure for some time. I am not sure the year this model was adopted in Australia, but in terms of the Territory and using this—it has not been that long since the intervention. As the Member for Braiting points out, the mobility in the Aboriginal population is very difficult to measure and it relies on the tenancy management system to be up to date at any given time. If the household dynamics change in a week, we will not have that information and will not be able to identify which households.

Mr GUYULA: Housing has been overcrowded for a long time. If that is being presented now, how long before you get it to that standard where there is breathing space with people living in their own bedrooms and spaces? I find it very hard to believe that, minister.

Mr PAECH: You are absolutely right, Member for Mulka. Based on the current formula, the raw figures we have tell us we would need a total of 11,000 bedrooms to address where we are at. Our remote housing program in place is equipped to address a large majority of that—around 9,500/10,000—but it is crucial that we continue to work with the Australian Government on the progression of a future remote housing program because families continue to grow and people want to be back on country. That can only be delivered through additional bedrooms and new houses.

A great opportunity for all bush members would be to encourage our constituents to talk openly with Housing. For some time there has been a level of anxiety of resistance. People sometimes do not want to accurately tell the true number of overcrowding for fear of rental figures changing or for fear of people saying that you have to kick out people. That is not my role or desire, as minister.

When I am out bush, particularly in my own electorate or in other electorates, it is important that we tell our constituents—when Housing is here, make sure you tell them the proper number of family in the house so we get a real picture of where we are going. That will help us project the growth happening in those communities and help us forecast how many additional bedrooms we need. There has been a legacy issue for some time in the Territory of not enough remote housing. This program will address that. But we will need to consider and work with the Commonwealth on additional programs moving forward.

Mr MONAGHAN: Does the 11,000 beds figure include homelands?

Mr PAECH: No. That is across the 73 remote Aboriginal communities. We also acknowledge that there are a number of places in the homelands, which will also need additional bedrooms.

Mr YAN: What are your latest figures for upgrades made under the Room to Breathe program?

Mr PAECH: As we enter the new financial year or as we close this current financial year?

Mr YAN: The reporting period. That keeps everything the same—less confusion.

Mr PAECH: In the reporting period, there have been 90 additional bedrooms, 168 additional living spaces and 59 bathroom/wet room facilities. There are more scheduled or forecast. That is driven by the tenants when we determine the level of overcrowding and what needs to be done. We have programs under way, with 94 additional bedrooms, 94 additional living spaces and 41 additional bathrooms.

Mr SLOAN: Have there been any incidents of non-compliance in the financial year to date?

Mr PAECH: Non-compliance? It is just such a big program.

Mr SLOAN: Remote Housing contractors.

Mr PAECH: I would need to take that on notice. I am not aware, at this stage, about any non-compliance.

Question on Notice No 9.6.

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

Mr SLOAN: For the financial year to date, have there been any incidents of non-compliance with contractors working in Remote Housing?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 9.6.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2021–2022) Bill as they relate to the Remote Housing and Town Camps; Indigenous Essential Services; and Arts, Culture and Heritage. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – HOUSING **Output 3.3 – Remote Housing**

Mr CHAIR: Outputs 3.1 and 3.2 are the responsibility of another minister. We are onto Output 3.3, Remote Housing. Are there any questions?

Mr YAN: You have provided a budget line of \$118.576m for Remote Housing and \$52.198m for Town Camps and homelands. Can you provide a breakdown of what that budget is to be used for? How much is staffing, how much is infrastructure and how much is ops?

Mr PAECH: That is the Housing operations, and I am happy to provide you with the breakdown. Employees' costs are \$8.516m and admin is \$110.323m.

Mr YAN: What comes in under admin?

Mr PAECH: That incorporates the offices, travel costs et cetera.

Mr YAN: Operational costs?

Mr PAECH: Yes—vehicle costs, transport and travel.

Mr YAN: I note that the change between last year's budget, 2020–21, revised \$159.483m, and the change was a reduction to \$118.576m.

Mr PAECH: Yes. I will step through those budget variations. There was an increase of \$5.5m in 2020–21, which related predominantly to asset-related adjustments, depreciation; it related to new properties and one write-off, when the properties were demolished and rebuilt. Then there was the decrease of \$40.9m in the 2021–22 budget, which mainly related to the machinery of government transfer of the infrastructure function to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. That transfer includes a transfer of repairs and maintenance and operational personnel.

Mr YAN: In Tennant Creek, the public housing safety officer program has not operated since about October last year. The three positions remain unfilled. When will this program be operating again in Tennant Creek and how many of the positions will be filled?

Mr PAECH: The service has always been there; it has been a drive-in drive-out service. In a couple of weeks, it will have enough people—three positions—to effectively be in the community, working in hotspot areas.

Mr YAN: Those three positions, and those people, will be based in Tennant Creek?

Mr PAECH: The objective is that they will be local recruits from Tennant Creek for Tennant Creek.

Mr YAN: As they are drive-in drive-out, I take it they have been driving in and driving out from Alice Springs?

Mr PAECH: That is correct.

Mr YAN: Are you able to provide how many days a week those staff spend in Tennant Creek?

Mr PAECH: I do not have that information at hand, because the public housing safety officers are a matter for Minister Worden. You would have to redirect that question to her regarding the operations and expenditure.

Mr YAN: The big question is, how many people are currently on the waiting list for public housing in remote areas?

Mr PAECH: I can talk to you about where we are with that.

Mr YAN: I would also like a breakdown by region, please.

Mr PAECH: Absolutely. For 2021 we are at 2,803. When we break that down into applicants by region in Central Australia there is 580, Big Rivers region has 484, Arnhem has 730, Barkly has 174 and Arafura has 835. That also takes into account that there are a number of transfers scheduled to take place, dependent on availability of tenants who may wish to move from an urban centre or an existing community to another.

Mr YAN: Does that include homelands?

Mr PAECH: No.

Mr YAN: Do we have any figures for homelands?

Mr PAECH: We do not have those figures. Homelands are currently under a funding agreement between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory Government to supply a basic level of municipal and essential services. We are working with the land councils and other stakeholders on the establishment of that independent body. Part of that will be a forecast of the number of homes and rooms that will be required for the homelands.

Mr YAN: I find it interesting that we do not—whilst we record what is happening on communities, which is great. Homelands are still occupied by Territorians—it does not matter who is responsible for funding them—and it is interesting we do not have a breakdown of how many people in homelands are waiting for housing. This might be something to consider in the future.

Mr PAECH: A large number of people who are on the waitlist currently reside in homelands. One of the issues in relation to the Commonwealth agreement is that it did not and does not require the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities to do the tenancy management and support. Taking into account that the assets are on Aboriginal land and owned by the Aboriginal Lands Trust—we are willing to work with the Commonwealth on the independent establishment of that body should they wish to. They would need to be aware of the level of overcrowding because that will help us determine the need and priority for new houses in homelands.

We want to see new homes and Room to Breathe homes in the homelands, but we need to establish an independent body to leverage Commonwealth and external investment. At the moment we contribute \$38m into homelands and acknowledge that is not enough, but this is part of the agreement that the Commonwealth—they cashed out the responsibility, which was \$150m over 10 years. It costs us \$40m per year to maintain what we have, and what we have is not good enough. This is why the independent review highlighted the need for the independent body and to look at investment from the ABA for brand-new homes in homelands.

Mr YAN: What is the average time a person will spend on the waiting list for remote housing?

Mr PAECH: That is a good question; it is a varied question. It takes into account that applicants might be on the waitlist for priority housing and there are criteria for this. It goes to the Housing reference groups, which look at recommendations for people to be triaged for the housing waitlist.

In terms of the overall waitlist, it varies from community to community. We would have to take that on notice—in relation to finding a general number. Each community is different, so is the population and demand. The housing program delivers different outcomes depending on whether people are opting for duplexes, which provide dual tenancies. Are you after a general number?

Mr YAN: For urban housing the waiting list is between six and eight years. There would be an average for remote housing, so I am interested in what that is.

Mr PAECH: New allocations for this current year were 415. I imagine that currently the waiting list—I could not give a definitive answer, because it would depend on the consultation with the housing reference group. One of the positions we have is that priority is often considered where we can reunify an Aboriginal child with an Aboriginal family member in a community. If they do not have a house, they are considered to be a priority for the housing reference group.

Where we have children who are non-able bodied—either wheelchair bound or need walking assistance—they are also considered a priority if they do not have a home of their own with their family. Where children are attending school and have an attendance rate of over 60%, that family or household is considered to be priority housing because attendance will go up when that child has a home environment and is not sharing a room in an overcrowded house. Where we can reunify our aged care so that they are not in facilities in urban centres, where they are back out in community and on country—they are our key areas in terms of determining priority. The housing reference groups will always consider those and make a recommendation, which is definitely considered by the agency.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you minister. We will now take a three-minute comfort break.

The committee suspended.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back, minister. Are there any further questions on Output 3.3?

Mr YAN: Yes. I go back to my original question that you were taking on notice. What is the average time a person will spend on the waiting list?

Question on Notice No 9.7

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

Mr YAN: What is the average time a person will spend on the waiting list for remote housing?

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

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.7.

Mr SLOAN: Following on from before, you mentioned there were 415 new allocations to date?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr SLOAN: Can you define what an allocation is? Is that 415 people, rooms or houses?

Mr PAECH: That is a tenancy. There have been 415 new tenancies.

Mr SLOAN: Not 415 properties?

Mr PAECH: Yes. It could encompass a family. It is not an individual; it would be a tenancy agreement.

Mr SLOAN: Like a lease agreement?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr GUYULA: In northeast Arnhem Land communities, can you advise how many new houses will be built? What building will have begun during the 2021–22 financial year? Of these, how many will be replacement houses and how many will be newly built additional houses?

Mr PAECH: In the electorate of Mulka there are 106 under way; planned between 2021 and 2025 are 181. I will ask the general manager to provide context on what are new builds and replacement builds.

Mr McINNES: Of the 106 homes under way, 87 are dedicated to Galiwinku. They are all new dwellings to be constructed in the next five years, not replacements, on some subdivisions. That is the same for Ramingining. The majority of those will be new homes. There are 19 of those and they will be new homes constructed on new subdivisions. Of that 106, they will all be new builds, not replacements.

Mr PAECH: As we continue to work with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics on pushing through those subdivisions and understanding those numbers, particularly in a community like Milingimbi where we understand a subdivision has to take place, we are working with the department to determine how many lots will be in the subdivision. That will result in a direct number of properties that we can forecast and work to put out a tender on. We have to get that subdivision through the appropriate approvals first.

Mr COSTA: Is Ramingining included in that?

Mr PAECH: Yes, Ramingining is featured in the Member for Mulka's response. The biggest issue is that we have those numbers and forecasts—we constantly work with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. Where there are subdivisions planned, we have not taken those numbers into account because we have not worked with the community on the number of available lots that will be developed.

Once that is online, those numbers will be incorporated into the forecasting. An example would be, where we did the subdivision in Maningrida; once the subdivision was in place, we knew how many lots there were to forecast how many houses we would build.

Same with Milingimbi; once DIPL can work with us and say how many lots will be there, we will work in the pressure of the housing requirements of the community and be able to forecast and put together a piece of work that could go out to tender for those builds.

Mr SLOAN: Are there any plans for additional remote housing at Port Keats in the upcoming budget?

Mr PAECH: I knew I opened a can of worms when I started giving out these numbers. Between 2021 and 2025, our forecasting and plan is for an additional 91 homes in Wadeye.

Mr SLOAN: And for Peppimenarti?

Mr PAECH: For Peppi, at this stage, there are six planned.

Mr SLOAN: Woodycupaldiya?

Mr PAECH: We would need to confirm. I believe Woody is considered an outstation—but we want to see new homes there.

Mr YAN: Shall I start rattling off names?

Mr SLOAN: Do you want to just pass us that piece of paper, minister?

Mr PAECH: We are happy to work with you all on a briefing on the planned works at a later date.

Mr YAN: What is the current value of uncollected rent for remote public housing?

Mr PAECH: Will you allow me to take that on notice so I can provide you with an accurate figure.

Question on Notice No 9.8

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

Mr YAN: What is the total value of uncollected rent for remote public housing?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.8.

Mr PAECH: Member for Namatjira, I will take this opportunity to provide you with a bit of context to some of the work we are doing in rent reform?

Mr YAN: Maybe you could mention recovery methods because that is my next question?

Mr PAECH: Rent reform is a priority of our agency and something I am passionate about. We have embarked on a rent reform process to look at how we charge rent and how we can streamline it. It is my intention we will be in a position to do away with the rebate system we currently have because once a rebate expires the rent does change and then we are often chasing people to sign a rebate, which is then potentially backdated.

My intention is that through rent reform we look at a flat rate for a one-bedroom, two-bedroom, three-bedroom, four-bedroom and up to five or six bedrooms—whatever the size of the house. A flat rate would mean there is no longer people being subjected to having to sign a rebate or being in arrears because a rebate has expired and they have been out participating in their cultural obligations, or to South Australia for medical treatment, or in Royal Darwin Hospital or Palmerston hospital and we could not get a hold of them.

That is a volume of work we are looking at doing, to streamline it and provide certainty for remote Territorians, so that when they sign a lease it is just a flat rate and they are not subjected to changes with a rebate.

Mr YAN: What recovery methods are being used to recover any outstanding rents?

Mr PAECH: We work with the tenants when there is an arrears to look at coming up with a payment plan. These are things that also affect a tenant should they end tenancy, then come back and go on the waitlist. We often talk to them around the importance of having a clear record before coming back on to the list for public housing. We work with the tenant to understand where the arrears have come into effect and if it is because of rebates we work with them to fill in the appropriate paperwork.

Sometimes the primary tenant of the house moved out and has been under the impression that whoever was staying on in the property—whether it was a spouse or grandparent—would pick up the rent, but that was not the case. We try, as the Housing division, to maintain and support those tenancies. I am not sure if the CEO of the deputy would like to add any further commentary, but that is how we do the remote rent reform. That is how we currently work with those in debt.

Mr WARREN: Further to the minister's comments, we are in the process of renewing our work with having tenancy contractors who work with clients in remote communities. A key part of their work is about developing living skills with the tenant and that goes to how they care for the house, manage their tenancy and manage their rent obligations. We are very aware of the fact, as the minister touched on, people's rent payments can fall away for a range of reasons. Many tenants, when they sign up to a tenancy, have a deduction made through their Centrelink payment—it can fall away for various reasons. We are very focused on monitoring if payments fall away, we go back to refresh the arrangement with the tenant. That is some of the other work we are doing. We make sure that rent is being appropriately identified and collected from the tenant.

Mr PAECH: One of the issues we had to date is the Commonwealth Government's Community Development Program, that I refer to as CDP. When tenants were being breached they were suspended for a period of six weeks and were unable to make payments. That has caused some of the rental arrears, because that is their only form of income and being breached the six weeks has that consequence.

With the federal government suspending the mutual obligation component of the Community Development Program, that will not have an effect now because they will not be breaching people.

Mr SLOAN: Are regular inspections done on these properties?

Mr PAECH: Yes. Regular inspections are carried out. We find that when our Housing staff are on the ground, people often come to them and report an issue. Part of the regionalisation we are looking to achieve is to

have a local recruit on the ground who can do property inspections and get on top of things before they get to crisis point, were a tap will not stop leaking or something has worn out. That is our objective. As people leave, we may be able to offer voluntary relocations, where appropriate, to larger communities.

Mr SLOAN: How often would you have inspections?

Mr PAECH: Inspections are usually done a minimum of once a year, as per the funding agreements. Particularly in smaller communities, once they know there is a Housing person on the ground they will come to talk to them.

Mr YAN: How many newly constructed dwellings have been delivered in this reporting period?

Mr PAECH: There were 167 completed and 275 are under way.

Mr YAN: When you say 'completed', is that completed, delivered, on-site and people living in them?

Mr PAECH: That is correct.

Mr SLOAN: They are tenanted?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr YAN: You mentioned it before, so I will ask the question. Can you provide a breakdown of where the new additional dwellings will be going, by regions?

Mr PAECH: I am happy to take that on notice, I do not have that information at hand. Are you after new?

Mr YAN: New additional.

Question on Notice No 9.9

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

Mr YAN: Minister, can you provide a breakdown of where the new additional dwellings will be going, by regions?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.9.

Mr YAN: 'Remote public housing dwellings managed' is a new measure. Why has this been separated?

Mr PAECH: That was brought in because the agency was split between urban and remote. That has enabled us to keep an eye on that for our reporting and accountability purposes with the structural split.

Mr YAN: Was this recorded previously?

Mr PAECH: It would have been reported as the whole of Housing. With Minister Worden taking on the Urban ...

Mr YAN: Previously, remote would have come under Urban as well?

Mr PAECH: Yes, it would have been the Housing figures.

Mr YAN: We have been able to separate that out?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr YAN: That is excellent; thank you. In your opening statement you spoke about the contracts going to Aboriginal business enterprises and local employment. There was a great percentage of contracts awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises. Could you provide a list of which business enterprises were awarded the contracts and for what projects?

Mr PAECH: Is your question in relation to the whole of the Remote Housing agency, tenancy management or property management?

Mr YAN: The whole of the Remote Housing agency.

Mr PAECH: We have information, but to give you the entire picture we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 9.10

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

Mr YAN: There has been a great percentage of Aboriginal business enterprises awarded contracts. For the reporting period can you provide a list of which business enterprises were awarded the contracts and for which projects?

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

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.10.

Mr YAN: In previous estimates and in commentary over the last eight months, the government has said the delays on delivery of remote houses was due to ensuring Aboriginal employment. What are the current statistics on Aboriginal employment within the program? Do you have those?

Mr PAECH: Is that construction and delivery or property and tenancy management?

Mr YAN: Construction and delivery.

Mr PAECH: For the 2020–21 financial year, under the Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes. Program, the proportion of Aboriginal people employed to deliver housing works and services, including property and tenancy management, was 44.2%—at headcount—or 38.2% full-time equivalent. For the life of the program the proportion of Aboriginal people employed as part of the program, including property and tenancy management, was 47.3% as the headcount and 43% full-time equivalent.

The procurement strategies focus on delivering Aboriginal business enterprises, including for joint ventures. As of 31 May in the 2020–21 financial year, a total of \$69.8m worth of works was awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises for capital works and contracts, including land servicing and repairs and maintenance. This represents 27% of contracts awarded. As of 31 May in the 2020–21 financial year, 101 contracts have been awarded to deliver property and tenancy management services in remote communities, of which 33 contracts—33%—were awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises including contracts issued under remote panel contract arrangements.

Since the commencement of Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes. until May 2021, 43% of contracts have been awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises for capital works. Those contracts include land servicing and repairs and maintenance with a total value of \$160.6m. Alternative procurement initiatives have been pursued to maximise Aboriginal and local participation in the delivery of project works to enable Aboriginal business enterprises to develop a local skilled workforce.

In particular, there are four Aboriginal business enterprises that I will take the opportunity to talk about. Bukmak Constructions has been awarded a \$51.5m contract over five years in Galiwinku to construct homes in Galiwinku. Delta Reef Gumatj industries has been awarded a contract worth \$4.9m per annum in Ramingining. Thamarrurr Development Corporation, based in Wadeye, has entered into a remote contracting framework agreement as well as Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation based in Ngukurr. I would love to see more of that. We will continue as an agency to ensure that we are working to support Aboriginal business enterprises to take on those projects.

Mr MONAGHAN: The question that was prefaced by the delays in building and housing—one of those is ALPA. Can you tell us how that has progressed?

Mr PAECH: ALPA is partnered with Bukmak Constructions and is about Ramingining and Galiwinku. That project will allow a pipeline of works for Aboriginal people to enter into trainee and apprenticeships. That delivers a pipeline of work to enable the corporations—the Aboriginal business enterprises—to put on local recruits and give them the necessary opportunity to participate in apprenticeships, traineeships and internships. That is not just directed at building and construction, it is also about the possibility for young people to be involved in the administrative and project management side of things, which is important.

Furthermore, as of this year the total number of \$69,283,548 has been awarded to Aboriginal business enterprises. That is an outstanding figure; we want that to continue to grow as we see business enterprises growing. In terms of a hold up, I would disagree with that comment. The remote housing program was always designed to scale up. The early years was about making sure we worked with Aboriginal businesses to determine the need and capacity in their organisation and to help them build up to take on the work.

The green shoots are now coming up. There are Aboriginal businesses far and wide across the Territory which are ready, willing and equipped to take on the work, which is outstanding. Everyone should be proud of that because that is how we achieve self-determination: local Aboriginal corporations in the communities having the skills, capacity and opportunity to tender for the work.

Mr SLOAN: In regard to the tender for Thamarrurr at Wadeye, how much was that?

Mr PAECH: That is a contracting framework agreement. I will ask Dwayne McInnes to respond.

Mr McINNES: There is no dollar value attached to the remote contracting framework agreement. It is a procurement agreement, which streamlines the procurement process rather than going out to tender each time. The agreement allows us to approach Thamarrurr for a price on a works package. That certainly helps streamline the procurement process. In terms of their current delivery, they already have a couple of packages. I do not have the details now, but their second package will be going out soon, or they have just been awarded a panel contract—I think—to deliver more dwellings in Wadeye.

Mr SLOAN: The 91 houses at Wadeye—that we spoke about earlier for 2025—would Thamarrurr do that?

Mr McINNES: The intent is that if they continue to show the capacity, they will get the works in Wadeye.

Mr PAECH: It is important to highlight that where these frameworks are in place and where these conversations and agreements are held, we still go in as part of that compliance to determine if there is the capacity to deliver the projects. We do not want Aboriginal business enterprises not to succeed because we are overwhelming them with work.

We will work with a staggered approach over a period of time, similarly to how it happened in Galiwinku, but we will always work with them to make sure they are comfortable and in a position to say, 'Yes, we have the capacity', or, 'Maybe not yet'. It is something we need to do.

We are also doing that with the remote property and tenancy management. There is a great story of Aboriginal enterprises taking on that work. The Northern Territory Government delivers remote property and tenancy management through a partly funded and outsourced model in line with the National Partnership Agreement that we entered into for 2018 to 2023.

The joint funding of \$36.2m is provided annually to fund the delivery of remote property and tenancy management contracts to deliver services on behalf of the Northern Territory Government.

The Northern Territory Government is the landlord for about 5,230 properties located across 73 remote Aboriginal communities, 17 Alice Springs town camps and seven Tennant Creek community living areas. Through that process the Northern Territory Government delivers the social responsibilities, including working with tenants to achieve a better understanding of management of their homes, home inspections—as you mentioned, Member for Daly. That is included in that funding, a minimum of a once-a-year inspection, under the repairs and maintenance.

One of the priorities in the National Partnership Agreement for Remote and Indigenous Housing is to engage and develop Aboriginal businesses and employees in the delivery of housing works and services in remote

communities. That includes having works delivered by remote Aboriginal business enterprises and creating as many local jobs in the communities as we can.

This comes back to the earlier conversation about local recruits, tenancy managers and housing officers. Of the current remote tenancy management contracts, 37% are delivered by Aboriginal business enterprises, including tenancy management. Eight of the 13 are Aboriginal business enterprises; that represents 62% of tenancy management. Housing and maintenance services—12 of the 17; that represents 71%. Twelve of the 56 panel contracts represent 21%, being Aboriginal.

The current contracts for remote property and tenancy management will cease on 30 September 2021. Procurement for new services is under way. Tenders for all new service contracts were released in May 2021 for commencement of those services from 1 October.

All new contracts will cease on 30 June 2023, in line with the National Partnership Agreement expiring, in line with that funding. Procurement will be a mixture of select and open tender processes, in line with the priorities of the National Partnership Agreement for Remote and Indigenous Housing and the Northern Territory Government's Local Decision Making policy.

In addition, following the machinery of government changes, some functions of the Housing portfolio focusing on infrastructure and investment have been transitioned to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, including the management of current property and management contracts from 1 July.

I can give you a breakdown of the remote property and tenancy management by region, if that is of interest to members.

Mr YAN: Not at this stage, thank you. You mentioned that there have been 167 completed new dwellings in the reporting period. Can I get a breakdown of those 167 dwellings? How many were transportables, how many were bricks and mortar and how many were built on site from scratch?

Mr PAECH: We are happy to take that question on notice. That is often a result of consultation on whether people opt for a modular or a brick home. Also taking into account that, where we have communities that are water-stressed across the NT, the current policy position is to look at modular because they do not require the on-ground water consumption that a brick home would require.

Question on Notice No 9.11

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

Mr YAN: Minister, of the 167 new dwellings completed in the reporting period how many were transportable and how many were constructed on site?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.11.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 – Town Camps and Homelands

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.4, Town Camps and Homelands. Are there any questions?

Mr YAN: Minister, how much was spent in the last reporting period on town camps across the Territory?

Mr PAECH: As at 31 March 2021 the Town Camps Futures Unit has overseen \$41.3m in housing infrastructure upgrades, with 306 projects completed across the town camps in Darwin, Adelaide River, Pine Creek, Elliott and Katherine. That comprises \$4.2m in 2019–20 for 70 housing and infrastructure upgrades across Bagot, Kalaluk, Knuckey Lagoon and Elliott town camps. There was \$1.2m in the 2020–21 budget for the Elliott town camps, with 17 upgrades completed as of 31 March 2021.

Mr YAN: Minister, you read that list off and it did not include Alice Springs.

Mr PAECH: That is correct. Alice Springs received a significant contribution through the Alice Springs transformation plan. The priority area was additional town camps, as they had not received any financial upgrades for a number of times. Alice Springs remains a priority and we will work with the Tangentyere Council as part of its local decision-making agreement on housing investments, upgrades and infrastructure.

Mr YAN: What is the level of funding provided to Tangentyere Council by the Northern Territory Government to provide those services to town camps?

Mr PAECH: Because there is a range of funding agreements, given that they are not serviced by a local council, there are different avenues of funding.

Mr YAN: What is the level of funding provided to Tangentyere Council to provide services to those town camps, like we you have spoken about for the other town camps.

Mr PAECH: That funding comes from within the remote property and tenancy management, so if you want an individual breakdown, we are happy to take that on notice.

Mr YAN: Please, that would be wonderful.

Question on Notice No 9.12

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

Mr YAN: Can you provide detail on the level of funding provided to Tangentyere Council for the provision of services to town camps in Alice Springs?

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

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 9.12.

Mr PAECH: The government's local decision-making agreement has entered into agreement with the Tangentyere town camps looking at the future of housing delivery and services. That will allow us to forecast the number of renovations and Room to Breathe houses et cetera. Whilst the town camps require a significant infrastructure upgrade, that was part of the Alice Springs transformation plan. The other home town camps had not received investment, which is why the priority for the \$40m-something was to be allocated to them.

Mr YAN: I welcomed Town Camps Reform Framework 2019–24. Can you provide an explanation of what measures have been undertaken to begin delivery of those review outcomes?

Mr PAECH: I ask Ms Jarvis to join us. She had carriage and the responsibility of working through the Town Camps Future Unit to ensure we continue looking at the infrastructure and housing resources in the town camps and work with the services and membership groups.

Ms JARVIS: In terms of achievements against the Town Camps Reform Framework, we have five key outcome areas. There has been a big priority over the last 18 months to address critical housing and infrastructure, acknowledging that it was difficult to have broader reform questions when there are so many poor standards of housing and infrastructure across the Top End town camps.

There have been a number of activities. We have looked at partnering with Yilli Rreung, for example, and have introduced community education programs for residents on the money story and managing humbugging and visitors. We are working with the Department of Infrastructure, Logistics and Planning to better support lease holders to effectively maintain the houses that are there and work with a couple of leasehold organisations to take greater responsibility for their houses.

There has been a suite of measures, predominantly focusing—in the short term—on infrastructure. The next stage for us is to work with Power and Water to look at a transition of responsibility of services to normalised arrangements across town camps where we do not have leasing arrangements in place.

Mr PAECH: The government's commitment is to make sure that town camps, which border onto municipal places, have the same level of infrastructure as the municipalities. One of the issues that Ms Jarvis has been working on is that the land tenure is difference across all of the town camps in the Northern Territory. From a housing process, one of the challenges is that we do not have available lots in those town camps to deliver new housing upgrades. We are working on subdivisions or infilling existing lots.

For some town camps, the whole town camp is on one lot which proves challenging in terms of Power and Water services. There is the challenge of metering for water and power. When it comes to our agreements to deliver homes and new lots, it is only sometimes one lot. We have to work through that and are looking to do so with the town camp providers. An issue raised by some of the land councils is how we can support the land tenure in sorting through those historic issues.

Mr YAN: That is my next question; you might be able to provide some detail on that. I understand that land tenure is a big issue for the town camps. One of the outcomes of the review recommendations was to work with the leaseholders to transfer the select special purpose leases across to Crown leases. Have you commenced discussions with leaseholders to surrender the special purpose leases to create Crown leases?

Mr PAECH: I will ask Danyelle Jarvis to provide context to that. But I make it very clear that I have no intention of removing town camps from any picture in the Territory. Town camps are here to stay. For too long they have been ignored in the hope they would go away. I want to make sure that we deliver that critical infrastructure to bring them up to standard.

Ms JARVIS: In 2019 we took over an additional lease over the north camp in Elliott at the request of the NLC. As part of that response we are undertaking, all up, a \$12m upgrade across 60 houses for the two town camps and Marlinja to bring them up to a *Residential Tenancy Act* standard and then create a public housing-type model for the two camps in Elliott and Marlinja.

Regarding negotiations with leaseholders, we have not significantly progressed conversations on shifting the tenure arrangement from special purpose over to Crown lease, for example. There has been some reluctance in the Top End to see shifts by the current leaseholder. Having said that, we are working closely with DIPL, acknowledging there is a need for further investment into town camps, particularly looking at that through a community housing-type model. We have been working with the current leaseholder, the Aboriginal Development Foundation, as well as Larrakia and Yilli Rreung Aboriginal Housing.

Mr YAN: Have we started any discussions with leaseholders outside of the Top End? Have we considered Tennant Creek and Central Australia?

Mr PAECH: Certainly in Central Australia. I had conversations about the goals and aspirations of a number of town camps in Alice Springs. One of the issues we hear from the town camp holders in Alice Springs is that there is inconsistency with the land tenure; each is very different.

We are very happy to work with them. We do not want this to be a detriment to the town camps. We will work with every town camp to make sure they understand the opportunities. If town camps are apprehensive about that change, I will not push them to do that.

One of the things that this is also very dependent on is if we can get lots in town camps, we can have services like Australia Post delivering services. We can have town camp residents being able to enrol to vote in a physical location in their house. We can get those services, but at the moment in some of those town camps is just one lot.

Mr YAN: I understand. I had this discussion with a few people over the years. I do not like the term 'town camp'. It has old connotations. I like community living areas.

Mr COSTA: (Inaudible – microphone off.)

Mr PAECH: In Tennant Creek—the Member for Arafura is interjecting—they prefer to call them Aboriginal living areas. As a Territorian whose aunties, uncles and grandmothers live in town camps, there is also a very strong connection to the term of being a 'proud town camper'. We will, of course, work through every

place across the Territory that fits the definition of a town camp. If it is their objective to want to change how we refer to them, we will do that.

I would be in big trouble if I told a few town camps that they were changing their category, so we will let it be a place-based approach.

Mr SLOAN: They do it up by using the term 'satellite communities'.

Mr PAECH: Absolutely. In Anindilyakwa, on Groote Eylandt, they refer to areas that would be town camps or an Aboriginal living area as a satellite community. It is a very different approach across the Territory. We will work with all members on that reform work in town camps.

Mr YAN: Earlier this year there was the review and report on the homelands policy. A number of councils were notified that their services would be terminated as at 30 June 2021. The two councils I refer to are the Central Desert Regional Council and Roper Gulf. The termination was then withdrawn on those councils, they were told that services would continue.

I note that there has been a response to Central Desert from Mr Davies, but it created a lot of uncertainty within the regional councils. There is still uncertainty that there is no contract and they are expected to continue to provide services. Is it the intention that these regional councils will not be providing homelands services from July 2021?

Mr PAECH: The homelands policy is very important; we need to continue to work on it, deliver it and progress it. In regard to your question, one of the recommendations of the homelands review was to look at the existing homelands grants to be combined with one grant to allow maximum flexibility with the program. The other recommendations are to do with consolidating. We were working to that process, but based on feedback from people in the sector, we decided not to go through that process as our intention was to establish the independent body.

Since then, we sent correspondence out that all contracts would remain in place, as they were originally agreed to, until the expiry date. Those regional councils had existing agreements with us that have not been terminated and will run their course until they expire. Those organisations were delivering homelands services already as a result of community consultation and feedback. We have decided to remain with those contracts until they expire.

Mr YAN: There is confusion and consternation from some councils about clarity about what you just said.

Mr PAECH: We acknowledge that, but we also acknowledge that these contracts were won by those deliverers. Their contracted dates were originally 31 June 2023; as a result, those contracts will remain in place until 30 June 2023. We hope that by then the independent commission for homelands will be operational and can take on the body of work with the procurement, the awarding of tenders and critical infrastructure being delivered.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise what funds have been set aside in this budget for new-build homelands housing and if an agreement can be reached with the Commonwealth Government about contributing to new homeland houses? In monetary terms what has the government committed to for the building of new-build homeland housing?

Mr PAECH: As it stands regarding the agreement that was entered into in 2015, our current funding agreement from Commonwealth is for the ongoing maintenance of homelands. We want new houses in homelands. We have an initial meeting coming up with the four land councils' representatives from the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory Government on the establishment of a new independent body that will seek a financial contribution potentially from the Aboriginal Benefits Account as an economic generator and to address the overcrowding issues.

Minister Wyatt is aware of the process of the independent commission. As recently as last week I was in conversations with Minister Wyatt about how our remote housing program is crucial, but so is new houses on homelands. In the current budget cycle we do not have the funding to do that and we are seeking Commonwealth support to allow funding for new houses on homelands.

We have looked at some replacements in an ad hoc basis in areas like the Utopia region which have never received any benefit since the cessation of ATSIC. But to date the most crucial steps going forward is bringing the Commonwealth back to the table for that conversation. The conversations are crucial, particularly as

minister, but when we can secure federal ministers to the Territory I would welcome and appreciate the lobbying of all remote members of the Assembly, and I am happy to facilitate members having the ability to talk about the investment that we need.

I know, as well as many of you here, that this is the issue we hear most about: addressing the critical infrastructure in the homelands, whether that be refurbishment, solar, water and the road networks. We are acutely aware of it, Member for Mulka, and as early as last week we had conversations with the Commonwealth about coming back to the table for new houses on homelands.

I give an undertaking that when I am able to secure a meeting with the federal minister I will advocate and look to have you talk to him about the importance of the infrastructure of the homelands. I understand that a lot of homelands are on the islands and how high transportation costs are to deliver services and upgrades. That needs to be built into future considerations.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.4.

Output 3.5 – Government Employee Housing

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 3.5, Government Employee Housing. Are there any questions?

Mr YAN: Could you please provide details about how the \$20m for government employee housing will be spent? Will it include any new builds and, if so, where?

Mr PAECH: The \$20m is part of the capital program, that will equate to new builds across the Territory. That is based on the growing demand and need as evidenced by agencies. One of the issues we are looking at is delivering government employee housing in the community of Numbulwar so that station can be permanently based. That is an example of where that capital investment is going.

We have delivered government employee housing in Elliott. One of those houses has been taken over by police. We are working with Health and Education to understand their needs—if they are growing—infrastructure and whether assets require work.

Mr YAN: You said that part of the \$20m will be for new builds. Can you provide details of where the new builds will be?

Mr PAECH: We are sourcing the information for you; I will have it with you shortly. However, it is based on a formula for determining where and what we need to do. It is important to acknowledge and flag that we engaged a consultant last year to begin a government employee housing reform and review.

Part of that review is looking at the assets we hold. With government employee housing, we enter into a lease with the agency. We might have 500 houses across the Territory that are leased from the department of Housing to Health, Education or Police. We are doing a review to work out, of the leases held with particular agencies or divisions, if those houses are being utilised to full potential. If they are not, are we looking at options of providing share options where additional agencies can take on those houses.

Part of that work is working towards the government's commitment to local recruits being eligible for government employee housing. That is a definition that will be worked on by the Commissioner for Public Employment on what constitutes a local recruit. We will also commence discussions with the LGANT because we acknowledge it has a workforce as well. There is a huge volume of work being undertaken in the government employee space. We need to make sure that, where agencies are not utilising those properties, we will be taking the properties back.

We will consider as part of the review and reform work a centralised approach moving forward for government employee housing, where the department of Housing, or Remote Housing and government employee housing, has carriage and each agency approaches us to take a lease for those properties. We do not want to be in a position where we cannot offer housing to other government agencies where they could have a permanent base in communities.

It will also look at the eligibility of local recruits, not having to move from their existing house to a government employee suburb. It is about normalising government employee housing. An example of that might be there is a teacher's assistant who works full-time at school and she has a public housing house. Under my interpretation, given that she is working for the Department of Education, she would be eligible for local

housing. As long as she is engaged in employment with that agency she is entitled to government employee housing. If and when she or he was to cease employment they would revert back to public housing. It is about making sure we do not cause disruption for our local recruits to move in and out. I am not in the business of wanting to see racial suburbs created in remote communities. We will also look at that for government employees who are non-Indigenous, who might want to opt to live in the community rather than in a suburb on a particular side of a community.

I think I have answered that and I am chasing that additional information for you, which we will provide to you before the end of this session.

Mr YAN: You have 10 two-bedroom units in Elliott that would be able to free up other remote housing residents of that community. How many of those units have been taken up now and how many residences have been freed up for public housing?

Mr PAECH: Those houses have been allocated to agencies and departments. That would be a question we would have to look at. They have all been assigned.

In relation to the lease agreements, we enter into those with the agency. We would not be in a position—it would be up to each agency to respond about vacancies and tenancy nights for those communities. They have been committed. A number of those are part of the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services to allow officers to keep police stations open and allow other officers to go on break.

Mr YAN: You do not know how many out of those 10 are occupied?

Mr PAECH: Our response to you would be that they are all allocated.

Mr YAN: They are all allocated, but you do not know how many are occupied?

Mr PAECH: It is up to each agency. They manage their own internal lease arrangements or agreements with their staff. That is part of the process we are flagging as government employee housing reform. We would be able to give you those answers if it was brought back to a central holding position where we entered into the lease agreement.

Mr YAN: Agreed, minister. I have been in rental wars with police in Tennant Creek before. Trust me, I always lost, because my budget was smaller than theirs.

Mr PAECH: Yes. Part of that centralised approach would allow us to have direct sight on how these properties are being used and the occupancy rates. We also have issues where health services may change and we want to look at getting permanent fixtures in, as we have with renal providers who are not part of the Department of Health. We need to get a real picture of those houses so we do not end up with a few houses in communities that are held for specialists when they could be consolidated and sharing.

Mr SLOAN: Is it the case that some agencies are sitting on these houses just because they can?

Mr PAECH: I can assure you that we are hot to trot when it comes to those issues. I am very passionate about making sure we utilise every bedroom we have in a remote community. When people tell me that they are full, we will look at means to inquire if they are truly utilising those houses as they say they are.

Where government employee housing has a number of houses, we are discovering that sometimes they do not require all the bedrooms. In some communities—for instance Maningrida and possibly Milingimbi or Yirrkala—people are opting to say, 'We do not want a three-bedroom house as a government employee. We would be happy with a one-bedroom or two-bedroom unit.'

Part of the government employee housing capital works program is that we could work and have conversations where, effectively, building four two-bedroom units could result in us getting back 15 bedrooms in a community. We are looking at a capital works program where we can return stock to public housing to increase the bedroom capacity.

Mr YAN: How many new government employee houses have been delivered for the reporting period?

Mr PAECH: I will ask Dwayne McInnes to respond to that. I could provide you information—while Mr McInnes is preparing that—the proposed government employee housing program. There are 26 dwellings to be

replaced. They are either deemed beyond economic repair or require additional works. Of the total new dwellings for government employee housing, we are planning, or proposing, 64.

Mr YAN: Do you have a breakdown of where they will be?

Mr PAECH: I do.

Mr YAN: Would you like to table the document or will you read it all?

Mr PAECH: I can give you the numbers. I will give you this and I will ask as well that consideration be given to the fact this is in draft form and depends on the formula and the level of services that are required.

In the electorate of Arafura we have five replacements and 11 new builds; in Arnhem there are seven replacements and 16 new builds; in the Barkly there are five new builds; in the Big Rivers region—the communities of Beswick, Barunga, Borroloola, Lajamanu, Ngukurr, Yarralin—there are eight replacements and 15 new builds; and in Central Australia, which covers the electorates of Namatjira and Gwoja, there are six replacements and 17 new builds.

Mr SLOAN: I did not hear you read out any for Daly.

Mr PAECH: I anticipate that they have been excluded because of the potential for the Thamarrurr construction work. If you want to ask a question on this, I will take it on notice and get a response for you.

Question on Notice No 9.13

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

Mr SLOAN: How many new government houses will be built in the Daly electorate in the 2021–22 financial period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes. I will take that on notice and will confirm whether the Daly region is—for the housing program—incorporated in the Big Rivers region, or part of it may be in the Arafura area.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 9.13.

Mr YAN: How many government employee houses are vacant?

Mr PAECH: In terms of our commitment, those houses are all leased into leasing agreements. We do not have carriage of the occupancy rates. The only occupancy rates we would be able to provide are for houses that have entered into a lease agreement with agencies since they were built. Drum roll, we will, hopefully—if it goes to plan—have that for you next year, when it is centralised.

Mr YAN: That would be wonderful, minister, because then I would know if any are sitting vacant. Unfortunately, most of them are Health houses at the moment—in your electorate. There are four houses in Gwoja that I know of, two in Namatjira and a few in Barkly.

Mr PAECH: We are acutely aware of that and it is one of the major issues to prompt the reform—if it comes back to us that government employee housing sits solely in a central holding with the agency, we can enter into a lease arrangement with an individual rather than an agency. Then we will have the wastage of homes that are held for various reasons.

The Department of Education has 778 houses; the Department of Health has 591; and the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services has 125. There are other agencies in those communities that would have government employee housing, but they are the three major ones, being Health and Education first. We need to bear in mind that when a community, in its local decision-making agreement, transfers from a Department of Health clinic to an Aboriginal medical service, we need to look at how we can provide leasing for those houses as well, so we are not giving them a clinic with no housing. Hopefully this time next year we will be able to give you a more in-depth response on the leasing and occupancy rates.

Mr SLOAN: How many government employee houses are there?

Mr PAECH: Across the Northern Territory there are 1,831 government employee houses. Of those, 1,411 are owned by the Northern Territory Government. There are an additional 420 private headlease properties. An example of that would be potentially in Alice Springs, where historically, there have been doctors and nurses to secure accommodation outside of the hospital precinct; Police, Fire and Emergency Services; and particularly in the community of Nhulunbuy, because of the lease arrangements over that township, the Northern Territory Government had to enter into private headleases to secure accommodation for a range of our staff members.

Mr SLOAN: Is it financially more pliable to lease from private people than building yourself?

Mr PAECH: When it is private headleasing, the market drives the rental price—and taking into account CPI increases and so forth. As part of the reform work we are doing on GEH, we will be looking at the current assets, the work that needs to be done and exploring those options. We are acutely that there are a number of private headlease properties across the Territory—we do not want to have a negative impact on the arrangements that are in place. We will step through that very carefully.

Mr SLOAN: You could actually drive the rental market up if you become a tenant.

Mr PAECH: Yes. We do not want to be in a position to do that, because housing affordability is a priority of the government. Current government employee housing stock that may not be required would also have an opportunity in the urban centres to be returned to the public housing stock or where it is in a location that was ideal for services, we could look at transferring that to industry housing, which sits with the department of Housing. That house could then be accessed by a non-government organisation. An example would be Life Without Barriers, or Lifestyle Solutions.

Mr MONAGHAN: Going back to the Member for Daly's first questions about the numbers in government employee housing, what is the primary department they using?

Mr PAECH: Those numbers, remote and urban—the primary focus for those is Health; Education; and Police, Fire and Emergency Services. There are some historical agreements in place with the former Parks and Wildlife Commission. Some agencies have historically held on to properties. We continue to work with them. They are subject to all the regular inspections than any other public housing tenant would be.

Mr SLOAN: Are you aware if there are any government employee housing available in Timber Creek? Or how many government employee houses are in Timber Creek?

Mr PAECH: We have 15 properties in Timber Creek that fit the definition of a government employee house.

Mr SLOAN: Are they all leased?

Mr PAECH: They are all entered into agreements, but we will have a final look at that as we move through the review.

Mr SLOAN: (Inaudible – microphone off.) The police station there has two officers; they need a third officer but there is no government housing available.

Mr PAECH: They are the sorts of things we will look at. Furthermore, that is why we have the fund of \$20m committed to capital for GEH. We can then work with Police, Fire and Emergency Services on its needs to have a permanent police presence, particularly in communities where the need is.

This review will allow us to know if they are not accessing or utilising properties. Then they all come back to us and we enter into agreements. We could provide a house; if not, that will be done as the formula to determine that capital infrastructure if we have the lot to do a new build. If we do not have the lot, we will work with the existing GEH to see if we can look at an infill on the lot—a subdivision of an existing lot. Given that most people work extensive hours and do not need a huge yard, we might be able to look at a new build on the existing lot. That would then create a duplex-type model.

Mr SLOAN: Does Police have a certain standard of housing it expects?

Mr PAECH: Yes. There is a certain standard—across the board, in regard to government employee housing, there is a baseline acceptability for all government employee housing. That will be revised as we do the government employee housing reform work.

Mr GUYULA: Within the town of Nhulunbuy, how many DEAL—Developing East Arnhem Land—houses are rented by government for government employees?

Mr PAECH: In regard to government employee leased or owned properties, there are 199 properties that the agency has jurisdiction over. As we do this review, if properties are deemed not to be required by those agencies, they will be returned to the general housing stock of government employee housing where people on the waiting list in that community will be eligible for that.

Mr GUYULA: Are there plans to build more government employee housing in Nhulunbuy?

Mr PAECH: In Nhulunbuy there is one house that needs to be replaced, and on the works proceeding in the immediate future, there are two new houses to be constructed. Nhulunbuy is an interesting community; not every house of the 199 in Nhulunbuy is owned by the department. A number of those are also private headlease. That might be with the mining company that owns the assets or other service providers that we have negotiated a lease agreement with.

I am more than happy to arrange a briefing to you on the government employee housing. As we go through the review, if houses are being leased to Education or Health or another agency and not being fully utilised, they will be returned to Housing and go off the waiting list for government employee housing in Nhulunbuy.

Mr GUYULA: In northeast Arnhem Land, how many government employee houses have been built since 2016 and for which department employees?

Mr PAECH: I will take that on notice so I can give you an accurate number of how many have been built.

Question on Notice No 9.14

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

Mr GUYULA: In northeast Arnhem Land, how many government employee houses have been built since 2016 and for which department employees?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Mulka has been allocated the number 9.14.

Mr PAECH: I want to provide some context in relation to the Member for Mulka's question. I am aware that under the Remuneration Tribunal determination that the Member for Mulka has eligibility for a government employee house. The Department of the Legislative Assembly would need to ensure that your entitlement eligibility is on the wait list. It sits with agencies.

Mr SLOAN: Can you confirm with the review on government employee housing—did you say you were hoping to have that completed by next estimates, or did I misunderstand you?

Mr PAECH: We started last year; that report is finished. Now our reform management team is working through it on how we put that into practice, deliver the reform and adhere to the recommendations. Yes, our objective is to have it done very soon. Obviously, that requires a transition period as well, working with agencies and defining a time for when the assets transition back. That would mean that we would have to enter into or look at lease agreements because we would be the central holding agency for the houses.

I will ask Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive of Territory Families, Housing and Communities to provide additional commentary on that government employee housing reform.

Mr WARREN: After the review was done last year, the department created a steering committee with the other government departments to start working together on moving towards centralisation. Part of that work

has been gathering data collection from each of the other agencies so that we can start understanding their pressures for more housing. That data has been part of what has informed the draft capital program we talked about today.

For the reform, we are looking at a staged approach. Some of the things that we can do early are about reworking the allocation models so that we can get better yield out of houses. For example, we know that some departments use our houses in a VOQ context. They might need three or four bedrooms but are accessing them across three houses when we could swap around the housing mix and give them two bigger houses. That is work that is under way. We are having those discussions with departments about specific houses.

We are also doing detailed work on how to help local recruits in public housing to enjoy that house as if it were a government employee housing property, particularly whether or not they should be paying rent.

Mr PAECH: We have 77 local recruits in government employee housing. This is not about one or two people getting access to a house. We know that will increase as we can make them eligible and as we work with the Commissioner for Public Employment on those eligibility guidelines or the conditions.

This is a great way of ensuring that we can build local long-term employment opportunities because that encourages people to work at the schools or clinics in government-provided services. They get the eligibility, which is a long-term commitment that they can be in those communities. They have the conditions that government employee housing provides. Government employee housing in a remote setting—someone in a clinic or a school—is rent free. It is about providing a great opportunity for us to increase our Aboriginal participation across all levels of the Northern Territory Government's departmental position.

We have a breakdown of the 77, but we know there are a lot more. As those roll out we are very mindful that a number of people will be wanting to work at the school and the clinic. That is a great position to be in.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.5.

Output 3.6 – Indigenous Essential Services

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.6, Indigenous Essential Services. Are there any questions?

Mr SLOAN: The 2019–20 annual report showed the Indigenous employment rate for housing water infrastructure projects was 39%. What is the current rate?

Mr PAECH: That question can be answered tomorrow in the government-owned corporations. Because IES sits within Power and Water.

Mr SLOAN: Lack of water security is a real threat to many communities, homelands and outstations. What is being done to improve the quality of water in remote areas?

Mr PAECH: In April this year I announced, with the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics; and Water Security; funding of \$28m over four years available to 10 remote communities to improve water quality and supply infrastructure, prioritising areas that were determined by Power and Water as critical need. That announcement includes new bores, network upgrades, improved water disinfection systems and the installation of metres to monitor and reduce water.

Recently we did a volume of work in the community of Ngukurr. Through a similar process, we were able to save 50% of the community's water use, because a substantial consumption of water was through leakages.

This package of \$28m over four years looks at 10 communities across the Territory that had been deemed most critical. Power and Water regularly monitors and evaluates every remote community's water supply to ensure that it is of a good standard and that, in terms of water security, there is of volume of water so we can continue to do that.

An example of that is Yuendumu, which was highlighted. For the last few years, we have not been able to deliver housing upgrades or new houses to Yuendumu, because it has been severely water stressed. Now we are able to source and find alternative water in a nearby aquifer. Now we are able to look at a dual reticulation system.

Ten communities have initially been highlighted. But we will work through, at every opportunity, as Power and Water monitors and evaluates the water supply in each of the 73 remote Aboriginal communities to make sure we are across that. We have looked at filtration systems in Bulla; and are doing some work in Daly, or Nauiyu, ensuring we can provide decent filtration systems, so that the water quality and colour is filtered to be pure.

Mr MONAGHAN: You said that Yuendumu was one; what are the other nine?

Mr PAECH: Warruwi is one of the communities. It is looking at any installation of bulk metering, monitoring, a pilot trial of a water treatment plant, upgraded supply, bore works and dual reticulation. Angurugu is another one; Numbulwar; Beswick; Yuendumu; Laramba; Imanpa; Atitjere, is looking at new and better bore qualities and the installation of bulk metering and monitoring to reduce leakage; and Engalwala, with new and better-quality bores, filtration systems and installing bulk water metering to monitor potential leaks and consumption at different times of the day; and similar work is happening in the community of Epenarra.

Mr YAN: I have a question that specifically relates to the Bonya outstation in my electorate, which has been running off a station bore for a while now. It is hit and miss. The Power and Water bore is non-functioning and it got to the point over Christmas where they had to truck water in. They have been requesting funds for two years to repair or install a new bore which has been declined or knocked back. They are now in a critical situation. What measures are we taking to ensure these sorts of things do not happen in remote communities?

Mr PAECH: That is a matter that the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities has been aware of. We have been in ongoing conversations regarding a solution and have received confirmation that the Commonwealth has nominated and brought a person on board so that we can rectify this water issue and have it resolved.

Mr YAN: That is wonderful. I will be glad to be able to tell the people of Bonya.

Mr PAECH: We will endeavour to provide you with that information so you can provide it to your constituents.

Mr SLOAN: How many remote communities are not fully digitally metered?

Mr PAECH: That will be a great question tomorrow for the government-owned corporation session with Power and Water.

We are seeing good results in the communities that are. Like the project in Ngukurr, we are able to monitor when there is an increase in usage and nip the leakages in the butt. The Indigenous Essential Services Annual Report covers electricity monitoring and outages. We use a system average interruption index to determine the average quality of time per customer, measured in units.

Through that process we are able to measure the outage times. We are looking at it and will work with Power and Water on water metering. Whilst the bigger issues are water security and making sure communities have decent volumes in the aquifers—which are regularly monitored for volume and quality—we are working at IES to run awareness campaigns on water wastage. We found this is the best—the tap saving mechanisms are worked around. The best was is through education and the meters are a priority.

Mr COSTA: We talk about power, water and sewerage in outstations, but we do not tend to talk about telecommunications.

Mr PAECH: We are passionate and will continue to lobby. That would be a question for Minister Kirby, who has carriage of telecommunications. We need to continue working with the Commonwealth on telecommunications and with Telstra to identify spots. Telstra runs a program to work with homelands on their network or if the homeland's service provider has been transferred to Telstra, in looking at hotspot technology. That could be considered for a special purpose grant by the homeland service provider if they did not want other essential services infrastructure upgraded.

Mr CHAIR: I have recently see the MCG of the desert—Santa Theresa. I wonder how that has come about, it must be due to some water!

Mr PAECH: It is due to water and has become a hotspot for brumbies who try to have a feed.

Mr CHAIR: Is it well fenced?

Mr PAECH: It is well fenced. The Aboriginal corporation, AAAC, does a fantastic job there. This project has been on the agenda for a number of years. When I was the Member for Namatjira, it was a dream and a project I worked closely with. I acknowledge that the new Member for Namatjira has been involved in the project. That was in partnership with Power and Water Corporation and external stakeholders. It was from an existing bore; it was not from the aquifer for the community.

There was an existing bore next to the oval. Some refurbishment work was carried out on that. We had strict conditions on that project, where the oval was irrigated and the seeds sown at different levels and different times so that the volume of water was not required for the whole oval. It was done in sections. That is something we know about and have worked with remote communities on their aspirations to see that project—they would currently require a conversation with the Minister for Sport, Minister Worden, and also looking at external investment, because they are expensive projects.

Mr YAN: Unfortunately, Minister Paech could not attend Santa Teresa for the opening of the oval; he was noticeably missed.

Mr PAECH: I am working on making sure we bring good-quality games there, because it is a fantastic oval. It is something for the community to be very proud of. As the as the Member for Namatjira knows, this is one of my projects through the Indigenous Essential Services lens to look at how we can, moving forward, recycle water, not for human consumption but to create green spaces in our remote communities. We need blades of grass. We need people to come together, catch up which other in a positive way, sit on some lawn and have some shade trees. We are working on that to make sure we recycle water for irrigation purposes because that delivers jobs for groundsmen, nursery staff, truck drivers, watering the plants—we are very interested in working further in that area.

Mr Chair, I have responses to some questions taken on notice.

Answer to Question on Notice No 9.10

Mr PAECH: There is so much to talk about, so I will table the document; it is too big to read.

Answer to Question on Notice No 9.11

Mr PAECH: Of the 167 new builds, 102 were blockwork homes constructed in community and 65 were modular homes manufactured and then installed in the community. Of the modular homes, a component were at the request of the communities and/or given that the communities were water stressed.

Answer to Question on Notice No 9.13

Mr PAECH: The draft 2021–2022 government employee capital housing works program purposes the construction of two new additional dwellings. That will be subject to us revisiting the formula and repurposing existing properties that are not being utilised. That will be subject to their reform work; where current properties are identified as not being fully used, we will repurpose them.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.6 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – COMMUNITIES
Output 4.1 – Arts and Culture

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output Group 4.0, Communities, Output 4.1, Arts and Culture. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: We have a changeover to my departmental staff in the arts and culture space. We now have Helena Wright, Executive Director Arts and Culture, Territory Families, Housing and Communities. The heritage component is referred to Sasha Dennis, or the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Mr SLOAN: I go back to a question I brought up earlier this afternoon regarding the national Indigenous cultural centre. How much money has been drawn down to date? Can we get a breakdown of that money?

Mr PAECH: That is about \$625,000. I can confirm that of that \$20m, \$625,000 has been spent to date and the revote of the program is \$19.385m.

Mr SLOAN: Do you have a breakdown of what the \$625,000 was spent on?

Mr PAECH: Yes. That money was brought down to work on a preliminary business case for the national Indigenous cultural centre. It was also for secretariat support and formalising conversations to support Aboriginal groups to have their say.

Mr SLOAN: Are there any travel expenses in that?

Mr PAECH: Not that I have been advised. That was for the consultation processes and the preliminary work that has been undertaken.

Mr SLOAN: What consultation has there been so far about the gallery design featured in today's *NT News*?

Mr PAECH: For State Square?

Mr SLOAN: Yes.

Mr PAECH: It is a very beautiful design. It is a project that we are incredibly proud of. We announced yesterday the work proceeding in that space. Consultation has been subjected to the 10-year master plan for Darwin and Palmerston, engaging with the stakeholders. There is the State Square and Civic Square master plan as well, which is incorporated traditional owners, local government, community groups and more than 30 key stakeholders. Consultation was part of the contracts with Ashford Group architects, who have designed the building.

Mr SLOAN: I gave you a written question earlier in the year, but can you let us know if a business plan was done for this new gallery?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr SLOAN: Is it a publicly available document?

Mr PAECH: No, that document is not.

Mr SLOAN: Do you have any idea how many staff will be employed or are predicted to be employed?

Mr PAECH: With the Civic and State Square development and the State Square gallery, we are working with the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory on the business case planning. That is looking at the workforce between the Civic and State Square development, that gallery and Bullocky Point to ensure we are delivering human resources that can deliver and work in both facilities. We have not pre-empted and come up with a number yet. We will work through MAGNT, which is the intended operator of the State Square gallery, to ensure they can give and work with us on a definitive number they believe would be required to run such a gallery.

Mr SLOAN: Last year MAGNT funding from the NT Government was \$7.9m. Do you have a figure on how much the NT Government is giving them this year?

Mr PAECH: Yes, in 2021 budget MAGNT received core funding from the NT Government of \$7.24m and an additional \$398,000 for the continued operation of Megafauna Central Alice Springs. In early 2021 the government also provided \$1.3m to MAGNT for the development of exhibitions and programs for the new State Square gallery. Are you asking what the budget appropriation is in total for MAGNT?

Mr SLOAN: What was that figure?

Mr PAECH: Member for Daly, that figure is \$7.650m.

Mr SLOAN: When do you expect work to start on the State Square gallery?

Mr PAECH: Now that the design contracts have been awarded it is anticipated that construction will start in late 2021.

Mr SLOAN: Has the tender gone out yet?

Mr PAECH: Not for construction. That is being released now. As of yesterday, a development application has been lodged before the Development Consent Authority to commence works.

Mr SLOAN: Is the design in today's paper locked in?

Mr PAECH: Yes. It is anticipated that the State Square gallery will open in 2023.

Mr SLOAN: How many visitors attended museums and art galleries in the Territory in 2020–21?

Mr PAECH: That is a question we will have to take on notice and work with MAGNT to incorporate the numbers—that will only be for the galleries that MAGNT has jurisdiction over.

Question on Notice No 9.15

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

Mr SLOAN: How many visitors attended museums and art galleries in the Territory in 2020–21?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr PAECH: Yes. It will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the interstate lockdowns and the galleries that may have been closed due to the pandemic.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Daly has been allocated the number 9.15.

Mr SLOAN: Will there be an admission fee for the new gallery?

Mr PAECH: That is work that will be undertaken with Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory by looking at what collections have been sought to be displayed.

Mr CHAIR: The time being 7 pm, that concludes consideration of all output groups relating to all your departments, including Remote Housing and Town Camps; Indigenous Essential Services; and Arts, Culture and Heritage.

On behalf of the committee, minister, I thank you and all your agency staff. Mr Davies, I think this is your second, maybe third, appearance at estimates over the last couple of weeks. Thank you for your hard work behind the scenes.

Mr PAECH: I also take the opportunity to acknowledge the members of the Estimates Committee. I understand and acknowledge that I am the last minister to appear before you. You have all done a good job being here for the hours. Thank you for your time and questions from your constituencies. Thank you to the secretariat staff for estimates and Hansard ongoing.

I acknowledge the outstanding work of all my agencies and the work many people have put in, as well as those who appeared here today who, unfortunately, did not get an opportunity to present—that being the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, which continues to do an outstanding job in the preservation and protection of places of deep cultural and spiritual significance. I am hopeful they may get up next year as we look at the budget outputs. Thank you to all of my agencies involved. It is outstanding work. They will continue to deliver.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes the estimates hearing for today. Hearings will recommence tomorrow at 8.30 am. First up will be Power and Water. That concludes estimates.

The committee concluded.
