

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

MINISTER BOOTHBY'S PORTFOLIOS

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

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

I remind the committee that Standing Order 109 applies. If you need to interject at any point of the proceedings, please do so through the Chair. If you wish to interject on time for opening statements, please do so through me. I will decide if it is too long and let the minister know if they can wrap up. That is how we will do interjections on that.

Attorney-General, I welcome you and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Ms BOOTHBY: I introduce Gemma Lake, Chief Executive Officer; Leonique Swart, Deputy Chief Executive Officer; Ben Wild, Acting Executive Director, Legal Services; Brett Roach, Chief Financial Officer and Senior Director, Business and Enabling Services; and Kathryn White, Director, Crime Victims Services Unit.

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement.

The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions. I will invite the shadow minister to ask 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 for the end of the shadow's questioning on the output.

Attorney-General, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Attorney-General's Department?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, I would. Thank you, Chair, committee and all the officials I have with me today. There are few more sitting behind me and next door in case we need further details about some of the questions.

The Attorney-General's Department is a diverse and complex agency. Its vision is for a safe Territory supported by an accessible and fair justice system. Its purpose is to support community safety, enhance access to justice and uphold the rule of the law. It supports me, as first law officer to government, and provides legal services and representation to government. It administers over 150 pieces of legislation and supports the government's legislative program through review and reform. The department also supports victims of crime, ensures workplace safety, and safeguards the rights and interest of Territorians through a number of independent statutory offices.

The department is structured into seven output groups. The first is Legal Services, which delivers legal advice to government and supports victims of crime.

The second is a new group, Strategic Policy Services, which brings together legal policy; criminal justice research, evaluation and statistics; and Aboriginal justice. The team is focused on delivering quality advice and strategic reform.

The Justice Services group supports the delivery of justice by assisting courts, tribunals and the Parole Board. It also manages land titles; Births, Deaths and Marriages; and the rollout of e-conveyancing.

The Independent Offices group includes statutory bodies that play a critical role in protecting community rights. NT WorkSafe is one of those offices. It is an independent regulator focused on ensuring workplaces are safe. It supports employers and workers through advice, audits, compliance and education.

Our Corporate and Shared Services group enables the entire department to function effectively and efficiently, with a strong focus on streamlining and continuous improvement.

While the CEO is the accountable officer under the *Financial Management Act* and the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*, many parts of the department operate independently through statutory

appointments. One example is the Director of Public Prosecutions, who provides an independent public prosecutions service and supports victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process.

There is no denying that our justice system is under immense and growing pressure. That pressure did not appear overnight. Our courts, legal professionals and judicial officers are dealing with increasing volume and complexity.

This is a system our government is determined to reform. We were elected with a clear platform—reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle. We are getting on with the job.

Since being elected in August we have taken real action. In the criminal justice space we introduced Declan's law, a presumption against bail for serious violent offenders, broader definitions of offensive weapons and expanded electronic monitoring. I acknowledge the fierce advocacy of Samara Laverty, Declan's mother, who was present in the Chamber when these landmark laws passed.

We introduced mandatory minimum sentences for assaults against workers, including police and emergency personnel. We reduced the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 10 years. We created new offences for ram raids and for boasting about crime on social media. We strengthened domestic violence laws to include mandatory sentencing for certain DVO breaches and expanded the Victims Register as a first step to address the horrific rates of domestic violence across the Territory. We increased the victims levy by 40%, ensuring there is more money available to support victim services and their supports. We classified the highly potent drug fentanyl as a Schedule 1 dangerous drug, ensuring much stronger penalties apply for its possession, sale and supply.

Following a tragic incident we re-called parliament urgently to introduce and pass the strongest bail laws in the nation. This Act introduced a new two-step test for bail. It makes community safety the paramount consideration. A person cannot be granted bail unless there is a high degree of confidence that they will not reoffend or endanger the community.

In the court system we lifted the Darwin Local Court prisoner cap, enabling more bail and arrest matters to be heard daily.

In the wider legal space we supported the rollout of e-conveyancing through legal reform, which will introduce a modernised digital process to streamline property transactions and cut unnecessary paperwork for those purchasing a property.

We reformed healthcare decision-making by allowing senior practitioners to delegate their functions to appropriate staff to ensure timely and appropriate care of people with impaired decision-making capacity.

We introduced important changes to the Crime Victims Services Unit so that more assessors could be made available to reduce backlogs in victims' claims.

We are delivering on our commitment to restore fairness and common sense to the NT anti-discrimination laws. The 2022 changes went too far. We are removing unclear terms, like 'offend' and 'insult', and replacing these with a much clearer standard, one that exists in other parts of Australia. Our reversed law will prohibit conduct that incites hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule based on personal attributes like race, sexuality, gender identity, religion and more. We are also restoring protections for religious schools, allowing them to hire staff who uphold their faith whilst still maintaining strong protections against discrimination based on race, sexuality or gender. These changes reflect our belief in free expression, religious freedom and fairness to all. We consulted widely and carefully to get the balance right. The Bill will be introduced in the July sittings.

Just as we are restoring balance in our laws we are also standing up for Territory traditions and lifestyle. Thanks to the strong advocacy of our Chief Minister with the Premiers of New South Wales and Queensland, we were able to cut through layers of red tape that almost extinguished our Territory Day fireworks celebrating self-government. Our team at NT WorkSafe were on the ground to ensure nearly 100 tonnes of fireworks, which had been seized, were released and transported through to the Northern Territory, saving Territory Day.

In Legal Aid we secured a multi-year funding agreement which includes an increase of \$3.5m in the 2024–25 budget and \$5.5m each year ongoing from 2025–26, which represents a roughly 80% increase in previous baseline funding. We also selected a new director who will assist in vital change management in Legal Aid NT. We established a Legal Aid sustainability committee for the purpose of providing direction and oversight

on much-needed reform in the organisation. Legal Aid is a critical organisation to ensure everyone has an opportunity to have legal representation and, in particular, to ensure justice for victims.

We are backing reform with investment. This budget commits a record \$1.5bn to address law and order. We are developing a reducing-crime strategy focused on prevention, accountability and consequences because keeping our community safe is not just about strong laws; it is about ensuring the entire system works from early intervention through to sentencing and rehabilitation.

We are also taking real steps to strengthen the justice system itself. We have secured funding for an additional Local Court judge, the largest ever judicial complement in the Territory. We are increasing the number of prosecutors and support staff and converting temporary contracts at the DPP into permanent positions for the first time, giving staff certainty and the system stability. We have introduced the DPP's Targeted Intervention Group – Early Resolution Taskforce (TIG-ER team). This team has already resolved over 200 cases, restoring accountability, reducing court backlogs, improving efficiency and, even more importantly, engaging victims earlier in the process.

As we have said, this is not a set-and-forget approach. There is much more to do, and we are getting on with the job. Violence continues to be an unacceptable problem in our community, including domestic violence, and we will continue to strengthen the laws into the future as we reduce crime. We will not accept the status quo; we will reform, innovate and reprioritise to deliver a better justice system for Territorians.

I acknowledge and thank the department officers who are here with me today and those behind the scenes for all their work that they have done to prepare for this hearing.

I welcome the committee's questions.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any questions on the statement?

Mr PAECH: In your opening statement you spoke about your changes to the Northern Territory anti-discrimination legislation. Can you outline or explain the legal policy rationale behind your government's decision to water down the anti-vilification provisions in section 20A of the Act?

Ms BOOTHBY: As we have spoken about for quite some time, we are moving to restore the balance of our anti-discrimination laws. After consulting widely with what the community is looking for, we have come up with this position of a balanced approach.

I reject the claim that it is watering it down because in fact by removing the words 'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate' and replacing them with words such as 'incite hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule' it actually means those are the things that we, as a community, will not accept. Those people who do that will be held to account, and there will be consequences for that kind of speech.

Everyone deserves to feel safe in the community and to feel like they belong. At the same time, we also have those Territory freedoms that we can actually enjoy each other's company, go to multicultural events and enjoy what the Territory has to offer. That is a huge part of our story. We want our faith groups to be able to practise their religions with freedom of speech, without being persecuted in case they say something in line with their belief that offends someone else. Of course that is a subjective, overreaching word to use if you end up in the courts and someone else determines whether they are offended or not.

We believe that by changing these words—not only other Australian jurisdictions are doing this, but we now have protections for people. We do not want that hate speech, but at the same time we also want that freedom to be Territorians and enjoy the Territory lifestyle.

Mr PAECH: You talked about needing to restore an imbalance. What is that imbalance?

Ms BOOTHBY: The laws introduced in 2022 had section 20A which had the words, 'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate' which meant that if you were to feel that those things had happened, you could be before a hearing with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. We know that we had ...

Mr PAECH: Do you think that is a bad thing?

Ms BOOTHBY: Complaints have been brought forward in that space and the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has been dealing with those.

We did not want to remove it altogether, after consultation with the community, because we have lots of different groups throughout our community that feel that sometimes people say really awful things to them. We did not want them to feel like they were having that kind of attack on them. We have seen around Australia and the world that hate speech which we do not stand for at all.

Instead of repealing the whole section—we believed the word ‘offend’ was such a broad, overreaching word and subjective—we decided to replace those words with the new words which rule out those awful things that people can say about other people, being ‘incite hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule’.

What does not change is the fact ...

Mr PAECH: Do you feel it is okay for people to be offended because you are removing that provision? Your very own words.

Mr CHAIR: As has been well established, if you wish to interject through the minister’s answer, please direct that through the Chair.

Ms BOOTHBY: What does not change in our Act is the fact that it is still illegal to discriminate. You cannot discriminate against someone based on their gender, race, sexual orientation and a bunch of other things. There is an extensive list in the Act of the things that you cannot discriminate against when it comes to attributes.

Mr PAECH: Members of this committee and you often use standing orders when you are offended at something. Can you confirm that your government is removing the provision of someone being offended about a racial or homophobic slur or a discriminatory remark, because they do not feel that some people should be offended? You have not answered the question.

Ms BOOTHBY: Like I was saying, we are replacing the words, ‘offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate’ with much stronger words because we do not stand for the kind of hate speech that is out there. That is why we have made it, ‘incite hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule’. It is a balance of the freedoms of expression, of speech—we still want to be able to tell a joke; we still want have good freedom of speech debates ...

Mr PAECH: It should not come at the cost of offending someone.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please let the Attorney-General finish her answer. If it is unsatisfactory then you can re-ask the question.

Mr PAECH: I will re-ask it.

Ms BOOTHBY: The word ‘offend’ is a subjective word. Just because I feel offended by something does not mean that you might be offended or vice versa. We are saying that we do not want people discriminating—which is illegal, and that is clear in the Act—inciting hatred, severely ridiculing somebody or treating someone with serious contempt. Those words are appropriate to have in the Act to ensure that people can still have those freedoms, and if someone feels offended then they can speak to each other about that. We live in a democratic society where we should have freedom of speech, but we do not want for that hatred to be incited, which is why we are making these changes.

Mr PAECH: We are seeing an increase and rise across this country in racial division, anti-Semitism, homophobia and people constantly being offended. You spoke about how you have done extensive consultation and you have resolved to remove ‘offend’ and bring in additional terminology. Who have you consulted on this?

Ms BOOTHBY: We have held roundtables with different religious groups. We have spoken to multicultural groups, the LGBTQI+ groups, the sex worker industry, the HIV hepatitis industry and the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. We have had several meetings with him about the types of things he has seen.

Originally, we said before the election and at the time of the 2022 changes that we would remove the word ‘offend’ because it was an overreach and removing the rights of freedom of speech, but in consulting with those groups ...

Mr PAECH: I want to be clear that I am also after your definition of ‘consult’ because meeting with an organisation is not consultation. I want to know what you were consulting on, and what did you take to them to discuss?

Ms BOOTHBY: The conversations we had were specifically around the proposed changes we were making based on the 2022 changes that the previous government brought in because before the election—and at that time we had said that we would, we used the words, ‘reignite the flames of freedom’ to be able to ensure that we have the right balance of protecting those against that kind of vilification but also ensuring that freedom of speech.

By going out to those groups and sitting down, specifically talking about the vilification clause, section 20A, they gave me all the feedback about what they experienced in their groups, the things that they were concerned about and the fact that if we were to do a straightforward removal that could open up hate speech, which we do not accept as a community or as a government. In going and speaking to all those people and working with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, we decided to make those changes to say we will remove the word ‘offend’ because that is an overreach and does not allow for democratic community that we have, but we would include and continue that vilification. In fact, we have strengthened it by drawing a line in the sand saying, ‘We do not accept the hate speech, severe ridicule and serious contempt’.

Mr PAECH: Many of the organisations that you claim to have consulted with have raised significant concerns and have said that they are opposed to the changes that you are making. I want to be clear that there are currently 20 attributes in the Northern Territory *Anti-Discrimination Act* which are protected. You put a press release out yesterday and named a number of them and then said, ‘and more’. What attributes will remain in the Bill, and what attributes are you removing?

Ms BOOTHBY: We are not removing any of the attributes from that previous section. The thing that is changing is section 20A, and we are replacing the words ‘offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate’ with the new definition of ‘incite hatred, severe ridicule and serious contempt’—sorry; it is not in that order specifically, but you know what I mean.

Mr PAECH: Will you retain the 20 attributes?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, all of those 20 attributes are retained.

J DAVIS: I have two quick follow-up questions. One is in relation to consultation. Were any of those groups provided with the Bill?

Ms BOOTHBY: Nobody has been provided with the Bill yet. It is still being drafted. I wanted to ensure that there was plenty of time for people to see the types of changes we were making. In 2022 we went out to the community to say that if we were elected we would restore those protections and reignite those flames of freedom of speech.

That Bill is now being prepared and will be introduced in parliament in the July sittings for debate in September. My office is always open for further feedback, but in the last few months of consulting with a wide range of people across our community, including the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, it was clear to me that we did not want to remove the vilification clause altogether, because that would have an unintended consequence. We wanted to ensure that it would find the right balance. That is why we are replacing the words that are there now with the new words.

J DAVIS: Has the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner seen the Bill?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Parliamentary Counsel works in consultation with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, and that work is underway now.

J DAVIS: Has he seen the Bill?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Bill is not created yet. The OPC is going through that now. We have worked with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner on a lot of the consultation. He brought his concerns about what he is hearing in the community ...

Mr PAECH: He would have seen a draft, though.

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes. Apologies, I have just been told there was a draft originally that he has looked at.

J DAVIS: Is that the draft you were referencing in your op-ed yesterday and in what you are saying this morning?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, that is right.

J DAVIS: One of the changes is that you are now using the word 'incite'. Can you explain what that actually means?

Ms BOOTHBY: We want it to be a balance. It is not just having a joke at the pub that will land you in front of a hearing. We want something that is more serious than that. Any kind of hate speech is not acceptable in our community. Ensuring that is the case, by inserting those words ...

J DAVIS: Unless it is at a barbecue.

Ms BOOTHBY: ... that then allows for a case to be heard.

J DAVIS: Just for a plain English definition of 'incite', what does that look like? What would pass that bar?

Ms BOOTHBY: It would be based on case law and other things around the country. This is the same language that has been used in other Bills around the country, in other states. There would be a number of case laws around that. The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner touched on that when we were having consultation. The fact is we are retaining that vilification line to ensure that we do not have that kind of hate speech in the community. We believe that this balance will make sure that is clear to everybody.

J DAVIS: I am still unclear about what 'incite' might mean. People have asked me to raise that question. If you are not able to provide a clear definition now, could you take it on notice?

Ms BOOTHBY: Someone who could do that well is the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. He will be before the hearing ...

J DAVIS: I am happy to ask against that output, thank you.

Ms BOOTHBY: Just because of that experience he has had with the clause and how it has been operating since 2022. I do not want to go into any hypotheticals.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, did you want to put anything on notice or are you happy to wait?

J DAVIS: Just in case we do not get there for some reason, I will put that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.1

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

J DAVIS: Could you please provide a definition of 'incite' under the proposed changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act*?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.1.

K McNAMARA: As I understand it, we are not removing the whole of section 20A; we are just replacing those words 'offend', 'insult' and 'humiliate' with the other ones you listed. The idea of people being offended and it being illegal and like a backyard barbecue making a joke, is that not correct because this has to be in public? It does not count—you cannot use this in public places.

Ms BOOTHBY: I guess that is part of the subjective nature of the way that it is now. We have seen cases where complaints have been made and then basically dismissed straightaway because it may not meet that particular threshold. However, we are really wanting to bring back that balance to ensure that people know wholeheartedly that freedom of speech is good—we want that in a democracy—that people of faith can practise their religion without the fear of ending up in a hearing. We have created the change that it is not just about the subjective word 'offence', which really could be anything anywhere. By making it really clear that you do have to incite that hatred or there are other things then that is when something more serious needs to be answered to.

K McNAMARA: The sort of narrative that we have been hearing from the government around the fact that the old provisions were making it illegal to make jokes at a family barbecue that is not actually true, though, is it because things said in private do not come under this?

Ms BOOTHBY: Part of it is that it is so subjective that potentially we could have a lot of people running around feeling like they are offended based on just everyday conversations, and what is the definition ...

K McNAMARA: That is what I am saying—they cannot, though, in everyday conversations because ...

Mr PAECH: No, there is a higher bar.

K McNAMARA: It is a much higher bar than that is what I am trying to get at. That idea is not correct.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, we will let the Attorney-General finish her answer. If you are unhappy at any point, please just tell me the issue and I will go from there.

K McNAMARA: You keep singling out the word ‘offend’, but is not ‘insult’ and ‘humiliate’—I mean, do you believe it is okay for people to publicly insult and humiliate people based on characteristics such as sexuality and race and gender?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will not put forward my personal opinions because that is not the way to do this particular hearing, but like I have said this is about restoring the balance of protections next to freedom of speech. The consultation that we had across a lot of people—I have here a list of all the people if you want to know who they are. We just wanted to make sure we got that balance right. By changing those couple of words, which is in line with other jurisdictions around Australia, we feel that we struck that balance.

Mr PAECH: There are provisions already in section 20A that protect freedom of speech, so the assumption that there is not is misleading. Furthermore, how many complaints are you aware of, as the Northern Territory Attorney-General, that have been dealt with by the commission around vilification?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will probably wait for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to say ...

Mr PAECH: But you would have a number.

Ms BOOTHBY: ... exactly what they are because it is the way that he assesses those. There is a certain number that come in and then he assesses them based on where they go, whether they are dismissed straightaway or whether there is a further meeting or further information gathered or whether they have gone to court. That specific number I do not have. However, in the conversations I have had with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, my understanding is in the last 12 months there were 40 complaints in line with section 20A of the Act. I might get him to add further to that when he is at the table with me.

K McNAMARA: You said you had the list there. Can you tell me how many times your department have met with the Australian Christian Lobby or their representatives?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have met with the Australian Christian Lobby group officially once. I think I may have spoken to them on the phone once. The department has not met with that group.

Mr PAECH: You were talking about consultation and working with the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commissioner regarding the impacts or the changes of the vilification provision. Can you table that advice from the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commissioner?

Ms BOOTHBY: Sorry; are you asking me to table information that the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has ...

Mr PAECH: You said in your response that you met with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and spoke to him about the changes, as you have with other people. Are you able to provide what the commissioner's response was for your legislative changes?

Ms BOOTHBY: The conversations I have had with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner around this section was a face-to-face meeting. I would need to double-check to see if I have anything on file in writing about that. In any case, that is more internal documentation. He is an independent statutory body. I guess if he

would like to table or make that public himself, that is a matter for him. Those conversations we had were in face-to-face meetings about it.

Mr PAECH: You spoke about the religious exemptions, and there has always been an inherent requirement for particular positions within a faith-based organisation or school. We understand that will be removed with your changes. To your knowledge as the Attorney-General responsible for this carriage of legislation, are you aware of any cases where there has been a matter before the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner because of these changes?

Ms BOOTHBY: While I am waiting for some extra advice to get that right for you, can I clarify—or maybe it was the Member for Johnston who asked. The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner saw an earlier draft of that Bill, but he has not seen the very latest draft. Like I said, we went through a process of looking at all the different things we wanted to change about it, so he has not seen the final version yet.

J DAVIS: So, you have not had any feedback from him on the final version?

Ms BOOTHBY: No. When we catch up and meet face to face, we will be able to talk through that well before it is introduced.

Going back to the question about whether any complaints had been received about the religious section of the Act, I will need to defer that question, if it is okay, to the output when the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner is here with me. That way, he will have all that information.

Mr PAECH: Perhaps if we do not get there, you may take it on notice now?

Ms BOOTHBY: I am happy to take it on notice now in case we do not get there.

Question on Notice No 5.2

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

Mr PAECH: Are you able to provide the number, if any, of any matters that have come before the Anti-Discrimination Commission as a result of the 2022 anti-discrimination reform when it comes to the religious exemptions?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.2.

J DAVIS: You may also ask the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to answer. Is there any evidence you have been provided by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner or any other bodies that religious education institutions and faith practices have been impacted by LGBTQIASB+ teachers or students since the repeal of the former section 78A?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will defer that to when he is here at the table because he could definitely add more about the information he has at hand.

J DAVIS: I am just interested in what evidence you are basing that repeal on. Do you have any of that information?

Ms BOOTHBY: That section of the Act—we were clear before the election and in 2022. We had the faith leaders and community out the front of Parliament House when those laws were introduced and protections taken away, because they felt like they were leaving themselves open to hearings and court cases if they did not have the protection in place that they could employ staff who have their faith to continue their teachings. We made it clear to the community at that time that we would put those protections back in place.

The final part of the Bill for the old section 37A, which we are calling a new section now, is not quite the same. The old section referred to being protected from discriminating against sexuality—is one example. We removed the fact that you still cannot discriminate against attributes in the new section, but you can employ

based on the same faith they have. That is to ensure they can continue those teachings. However, also in line with their policies and Fair Work, they cannot discriminate against the attribute; it would always be about the conduct, because then that would be in line with the faith.

J DAVIS: I understand the political background to this. My question is more about whether there is any evidence that there has been any negative impact on faith-based institutions. I am happy to ask further of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner if you do not have that information.

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner can help with the feedback he had in those last couple of years when the new Act was enforced.

J DAVIS: Is that feedback the government has taken into account in making law?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is correct. Basically, the conversations I had with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and a lot of the community groups across the Territory about that section 37A, which is the protection of religious freedom—was them being able to employ based on faith. Not only were we consulting then in 2022 and made that decision to repeal that part of the Bill and make sure those protections were in place, but a few years later and now in government, we have looked at that clause that was removed and created a new section which allows for them to continue to employ based on faith and, of course, keep protections for people. They still cannot discriminate, but they can employ based on faith.

J DAVIS: I understand the context, I am still interested in whether or not there have been any examples of any negative impact on faith-based institutions.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am sure the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner can help with that.

Mr PAECH: Can the Attorney-General or the department provide advice on where they got the evidence to drive all of the changes with the *Anti-Discrimination Act*?

Ms BOOTHBY: Like I said, this was an election commitment. We said we would go through this process to reignite the flames of freedom and talk about restoring the balance of freedoms but also protections. We started working through that information. We went to other jurisdictions around the country. We spoke to many groups to find out the things they wanted to see in the changes based on their lived experience and concerns over the last couple of years. We now have a balance where those faith-based schools are protected, so they can continue their faith, yet people can still be protected in terms of vilification because we do not stand for that type of hate speech. There is that balance about it ...

Mr PAECH: I appreciate the story, but this sounds like there is not an evidence-based approach because you obviously made a commitment during an election, but there is no hard data to inform that these changes are addressing an issue that was there. We do not know how many matters were before the commission or how many matters this will potentially resolve. I appreciate that, but can you provide us with any hard data or numbers that say, 'This will change; this will have an effect here'?

Ms BOOTHBY: I said a couple of times I am happy to take those questions when I have the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner here with me, because he has that data and information at hand. I just do not have it here and it is not inside my head ...

Mr PAECH: For all intents and purposes the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner is a statutory authority who provides advice to government when required. Clearly, the government—which is you—has had to identify that there was an issue, look at the data and evidence and make a change. Where is the data? Where is the evidence that you are using to help you make an educated decision?

Ms BOOTHBY: There is evidence from the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. I said we would get to that when he is with me. He has the data of the complaints that have been made. I do not have them with me or inside my head, but I did ...

Mr PAECH: You are making the assumption that the data is negative.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, we will let the Attorney-General finish. As we had last week, if you think your question has not been answered, please tell me and then I will address the Attorney-General.

Mr PAECH: My question has not been answered.

Mr CHAIR: Please restate the question, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: A good government makes changes based on evidence, datasets, that help inform the government to provide better protections for Territorians. The Attorney-General has said that there are matters before the Anti-Discrimination Commission. We will ask him what the nature is of those because, just because there is a matter before the Anti-Discrimination Commission does not mean that it is bad. It is a good thing because someone is seeking support for a protected attribute to be supported and recognised.

What data does the department have that has informed these changes, because section 20A already has protection of freedom? What has driven you to make these changes, other than a commitment to the Australian Christian Lobby?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will be clear. We are not changing the attributes of discrimination. It will still be illegal, as per the Act, to discriminate against those attributes. We are putting in place some protection mechanisms for the faith-based schools to continue their teachings and the protection of people so that they are not experiencing that hateful speech and ridicule.

The consultation we did gave us the real-life cases of people explaining to me how those things impact them. That includes the religious schools, which talked about their worries with what is happening, as well as the other groups when it comes to vilification and the examples they gave me about that. That in itself is evidence. It is on the back of an election commitment that we made to ensure that we would make these changes.

I do not apologise for making the changes. We were elected by a majority to make changes to the Northern Territory. This forms part of that. I have been up-front with Territorians. I have even demonstrated the fact that we were able to come up with a compromise of those protections to ensure that people still feel protected and that we will not stand for that kind of hate speech. At the same time, we will not move away from the freedoms that make the Territory so special and our freedom to live in that multicultural society. We have so many people from so many places which is amazing.

I stand by the decisions I have made. We have made those adjustments along the way to meet the evidence we have received from the community. I really look forward to introducing this in July and hearing from our community as to what they think. Once the community understands that we have remained true to those protections so that they are not feeling like they are open to that kind of hate, that will be welcomed.

Mr PAECH: How will the government manage, with these changes and removing the word 'offend' or 'offends'? We are in a changing environment where people are making Neo-Nazi comments, referring to whether it is the survival of the fittest, and so forth, on social media. How will we provide that protection for our multicultural communities, Aboriginal Territorians and rainbow community when offensive language can have a significant impact on people's social and emotional wellbeing?

Ms BOOTHBY: Your point is that is why we are keeping the vilification laws and changing the way in which the wording is ...

Mr PAECH: You are getting rid of the word 'offence'.

Ms BOOTHBY: Because 'offensive' is a subjective term. I might be offended by this glass of water, but you are not. If I get offended ...

Mr PAECH: That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard come out of an Attorney-General's mouth.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, that was an insult. I will not put you on a warning; however ...

Mr YOUNG: Are you offended?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, this is not for you to chime in.

You are not a warning, but if we can ...

Mr PAECH: I will rephrase. Is it not the role of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, if someone lodges a complaint about being offended, for them to investigate and make the determination?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, and he will continue to have a role to play with the Act, as it is his Act. New section 20A is still robust and has all the mechanisms in place for someone to come forward if they feel that what has

been said to them or about them is in line with the description of the Act. That will take its course. This is still a strong measure of anti-vilification, and we do not put up with that kind of behaviour. At the same time, we still can have a conversation or debate, tell a joke or practise our faith in our churches without having to worry about someone feeling offended by a statement or a word.

Mr PAECH: You also spoke about consulting. Did you take a draft Bill to consult with all the organisations that you said you have consulted, or was it just the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Anti-Discrimination Commissioner had seen the original draft Bill, and it changed. My understanding is that OPC provided the draft Bill, and the department also consulted with him about it. With the individual groups, because we need to get the sign-off before consulting with the specifics of the Bill, after the election we started conversations based on the set of ideas that we had originally before the election ...

Mr PAECH: The question basically is: when you went to do consultation, did you take a draft Bill to NTAHC, the sex worker alliance and the Australian Christian Lobby, or was it just consultation as in a discussion?

Ms BOOTHBY: The meetings I had were discussions with lots of feedback coming my way. It was open in the fact that I said, 'Tell me exactly what you are looking for'. Of course, they had other suggestions to improve it even further in different sections.

Mr PAECH: We asked this question of the Chief Minister, and she handballed it to you. Is the CLP government honouring the \$300,000 funding commitment made by the previous government to conduct a racism review in the Northern Territory Police Force?

Ms BOOTHBY: The previous Labor government committed to conducting systemic racism reviews across all NT Government agencies under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Three years after that was announced, only one agency had started, and I believe that review is still not finalised. I think it was you who said, 'I am very confident that we will be able to roll out the review and have done that in a prompt manner', but we have not seen anything further since that comment. Basically ...

Mr PAECH: You have been in for nine months; where is it?

Mr CHAIR: Members of the committee, tell me if you feel your question is being answered, if you feel it is not being answered or if would like to make further comment. Please tell me your issues.

Mr PAECH: I do not feel my question has been answered. I asked the Attorney-General: where is the commitment of the \$300,000 to do the racism review into the Northern Territory Police Force?

Ms BOOTHBY: Upon coming to government and looking at all the funds that we did not have in the budget to spend, we had to look at all those areas in detail. After assessing where we were at, especially in the Attorney-General's Department, you may remember that we had the ...

Mr PAECH: Is there or is not there? That is all; it is a yes or no.

Ms BOOTHBY: The \$300,000 that was committed by the previous Labor government to do the racism review, we had to redirect that funding to Legal Aid NT to keep them sustainable. You will remember that Legal Aid was ...

Mr PAECH: There is no review into racism now ...

Mr CHAIR: I will let the Attorney-General finish. Once she has finished it will be the Member for Gwoja's question.

Ms BOOTHBY: I want to make it clear that the \$300,000 was redirected from the review—the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner was going to do that—to Legal Aid NT. As people may remember, at the end of last year NAAJA were having problems and could not take on new clients and had to stop some services. Legal Aid had to take on those clients. It was important that Legal Aid had the funding that they needed to continue the work so that we had representation in our courts for those people. That money is now with Legal Aid and it has been removed from the racism review under the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

Mr PAECH: The Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement is a wonderful agreement. I hope you have read the agreement. Your government says you are committing to the agreement. Your actions speak louder

than your commitments. Can you confirm now that there will be a racism review into the Northern Territory Police Force and other government departments, and if so, when?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Police review is work the police are doing. I cannot remember who mentioned it on a previous day, but Leanne Liddle is now working with ...

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, you are suggesting that ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please let the Attorney-General finish and then you will have the floor.

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not want to speak on behalf of Police, but I have information that the work is being led by Leanne Liddle, who works in that department now, covering a broad range of initiatives. I understand that the full implementation of the Kumanjayi Walker coronial, there was a bit of a hold-up waiting for that because there were some things out of that they wanted to implement in Police. I do not want to talk about what the police are doing because it does not sit in my portfolio.

Under my portfolio I can confirm that the \$300,000 that was committed by the previous government to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to do a review into Police was not able to be given to them. It has now been given to Legal Aid to ensure that they could continue their delivery of service because we had this huge court backlog. We need defendants and offenders to be represented by legal services.

It was a tough decision that we had to make at the end of last year to find that money somewhere. There were no buckets of money available to the government to find to give Legal Aid. We had to make that tough decision. I am glad we did because we have been able to make some small incremental inroads into the court system with that money, the \$300,000 Legal Aid got, because it has been able to continue that work. Even NAAJA is getting back on its feet; they have made a lot of internal changes and are taking on clients so that people are being represented across the Territory. It is important to have the two bodies that do such important work in our community to have that funding. It is much easier ...

Mr PAECH: I asked the Attorney-General a direct question. You are suggesting now that police are reviewing themselves about racism in the police force. That is what you said. I do not want to verbal you, but I want to know. You have just said that the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner will not conduct the racism review; that is being done inside Police by police. Can you confirm if there will still be a process under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which is not in Police, to review the Northern Territory Police and other government departments?

Ms BOOTHBY: Under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement work is being done on an anti-racism strategy; however, that work is underway in that unit. We will have Mr Pocock coming in later today under the Aboriginal Justice Unit who can answer extra questions about the operations and the work that is being done. I just wanted to confirm with you the direct question, the fact that we did not have that money to use towards the Police review.

Mr PAECH: You already said that review is not happening, but as far as you have been advised, police are reviewing Police about racism.

Ms BOOTHBY: My understanding is—I do not want to speak on behalf of Police because I do not have that—what we are not ...

Mr PAECH: You are not; you are just providing your understanding.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, we will let the Attorney-General finish. Once the Attorney-General has finished the answer, we will go to a break. Whilst the Attorney-General is getting advice, I remind the committee there will be no calling out 'hear, hear' or 'shame'.

Mr PAECH: There has not been any.

Mr CHAIR: Not from you.

Mr PAECH: Not from me.

Ms BOOTHBY: I have answered the question. Do you have another question?

Mr PAECH: What I am trying to understand is there was a review in place; the Anti-Discrimination Commission accepted to take the work on. There was a funding arrangement with AGD and with Police. I am not asking you to speak on behalf of Police, but to your knowledge will police be reviewing Police on racism in the police force?

Ms BOOTHBY: To my knowledge, there is an anti-racism strategy that Police are working on.

J DAVIS: The Member for Gwoja referenced the AJA commitment to identify and eliminate systemic racism in government agencies. In the implementation plan there was a target of 10 reviews of government agencies, one of which was Police, which we have heard about. You said that we will be able to ask Mr Pocock more detail about that. Are you able to give any sense of whether any of those reviews are being progressed?

Ms BOOTHBY: There was work being done prior to the election, is what I am advised. Obviously, I was not the minister then. The first agency they had chosen prior to the election was the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. That work was paused during the caretaker mode. With the MOG (machinery-of-government) changes for the department after the election, it meant that work was being done first, to work out what was next. Any further specific questions about when that may progress under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the unit that sits around implementing that—Mr Pocock will be here and he will have someone operational with him, about where they are sitting with those reviews, if you would like to ask him.

J DAVIS: Yes. To your knowledge, the DIPL review has been paused and sitting somewhere, and none of the others have commenced; is that correct?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is my understanding.

Mr CHAIR: The time now is 10.06 am. The committee will break for five minutes, reconvening at 10.11 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm if there has been a funding cut to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement by \$4m?

While you are finding that, I acknowledge that the Member for Drysdale's mum is up the back there, watching the Chair do the hard job. Welcome to Parliament House.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Member for Gwoja. Hi mum.

Ms BOOTHBY: Under the output budget line Aboriginal Justice as a whole, there has been a decrease of \$2.159m. It includes a couple of variations, both decreases and increases. I will go through what they are.

There has been a \$3.11m decrease due to the expiry of time-limited funding for the law and justice groups. I add that most law and justice groups have experienced implementation delays. The funding already provided will allow the groups to continue to operate into 2025–26. The NTRAI funds will also be available to support the law and justice groups. Then there was a \$0.418m decrease due to the expiry of time-limited funding for the Aboriginal Justice Unit.

There was a \$1.3m increase due to the expansion of the mediation, peacemaking and support to law and justice groups initiative under the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI) partnership with the Commonwealth. As at 31 March 2025 the final budget allocation for NTRAI is being negotiated with the Commonwealth. There was a \$69,000 increase in NTG parameters.

Mr PAECH: This might be a question for your Chief Financial Officer. Has the Northern Territory Government cut funding in lieu of Commonwealth funding coming in as part of the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will put it to Gemma Lake, the chief executive officer, to answer that.

Ms LAKE: Yes, as you can see from the numbers there has been a decrease. There has been, in this budget, \$1.3m for 2025–26 allocated for community courts as well. For the law and justice groups funding we will be

relying on rolling over some existing funding we have for law and justice groups to continue those, also the NTRAI funding. That will be supported through evaluation work before we then look for new funding.

Mr PAECH: How many law and justice groups are operational now versus how many is the government intending bringing forward and commencing this financial year we are about to go into?

Ms BOOTHBY: There are law and justice groups operating in five communities across the Territory—Kintore, Maningrida, Groote Eylandt, Ramingining and Barunga/Wugularr. A sixth group, the Kurdiji Wita Yuendumu Aboriginal Corporation received a readiness grant in June 2024 to support establishing a law and justice group at Yuendumu. That work has not yet progressed. My understanding is that the AJU is working with Kurdiji to make sure they can work through the next steps.

Mr PAECH: Can I confirm how many you are looking at bringing on additionally to the five, plus the Kurdiji Wita Yuendumu Aboriginal Corporation which has a readiness grant?

Ms BOOTHBY: We will continue with the five existing and the sixth one at Yuendumu as that progresses to the next step. We want to focus on how that is going and look at how each of those communities are able to engage with the law and justice groups, and at the data that comes from it ...

Mr PAECH: There is no plan for additional law and justice groups this financial year, other than the five plus the sixth which are being done. Has any money from grant funding been returned to government?

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

Mr PAECH: With your Attorney-General hat on, not the Tourism or other hats you wear, how many remote Aboriginal communities have you visited as the Northern Territory's first law officer?

Ms BOOTHBY: Coming into government—I have been visiting Alice Springs ...

Mr PAECH: That is not a remote community.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is right—and Katherine. I am very much looking forward to visiting the rest of the Territory. As we know, it is quite expansive. So far, I have had to rely on my department staff to be able to go out there. It is such a big area and a big job. As you would have heard in my opening statement, there has been a lot of work done in the Attorney-General's Department and my office, which we have had to implement. I am looking forward to going out to a lot more places in the Northern Territory in the coming months and years.

Mr PAECH: You have been the first law officer of the Northern Territory for nine months and you are telling me that you have not been to one Aboriginal community. Have you met with any law and justice group in the Northern Territory from a remote Aboriginal community?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have not sat down and met face to face with the people who are in the law and justice groups in each of the five communities, but I have, via Teams and in my office, met with a number of different Aboriginal organisations that are in different areas across the Territory. I even met with the board of Kakadu—I know that is not one of these law and justice groups, but an example of the fact that I am meeting with as many people as I can at the moment, mostly from Darwin because I am trying to get through a mountain of work and make a lot of change and fix a lot of what we inherited coming into government.

I am looking forward to going out to the community courts and getting to meet the law and justice group participants. When I have met with some of the other people across the justice system, such as the Chief Judge at the Local Court, who does a community court circuit, she is looking forward to having me out there and seeing how that runs. I too am looking forward to that.

Mr PAECH: It is clear; you have said that you have not met with any Aboriginal law and justice group.

Mr GUYULA: Budget Paper No 2 shows a loss of over \$2m and states that this is because of the time-limited funding for law and justice groups. These groups were not time limited. They were designed to work with communities. We want to expand in this area. I want to see these groups funded across the communities in the Mulka electorate.

Ramingining community has established a group which can continue to work with the NT Government. The Yolngu elders who are currently employed as part of the law and justice groups are waiting to hear from the

government if they are still employed next month. At the end of this month what funding will be provided by the government to law and justice groups in the NT, and do Ramingining elders still have employment in these areas and roles?

Ms BOOTHBY: The law and justice groups are indeed funded. I mentioned there were five operating in the Territory, with a sixth being established with some next steps. They are built into the *Sentencing Act*. All the funding continues for those already established and the new one that will be up and running.

To answer the other part of your question, the following are some of the funding commitments for those groups.

The Groote Archipelago Community Justice Group, which is auspiced by the Anindilyakwa Royalties Aboriginal Corporation. There was an operational grant in 2023–24 of \$560,000 and another in 2024–25 of \$560,000, totalling \$1.12m. That justice group has had eight sittings to date with 23 people sentenced and 41 matters finalised. They have four approved members.

The Nja-marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group in Maningrida received a readiness grant in 2022–23 of \$60,000 and in 2023–24 they received an operational grant of \$156,665, totalling \$0.216m. That group has sat three times and had eight offenders sentenced and nine matters finalised. They have six approved members.

In Kintore the Walungurru Law and Justice Group, auspiced by Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc, received a readiness grant in 2023–24 of \$60,000 and operational grants in 2023–24 of \$560,000 and in 2024–25 another \$560,000, totalling \$1.18m. That group has had two sittings to date and had two offenders sentenced and three matters finalised. They have two approved members.

In Ramingining, the Binipilingmirring Djagaging Mala law and justice group, auspiced by Aboriginal Resource and Development Services, received a readiness grant in 2022–23 of \$60,000 and another in 2023–24 of \$60,000. In 2024–25 they received their operational grant of \$560,000, totalling \$0.68m. Their first sitting was on 17 April 2025, and one offender was listed at that sitting. That group has two approved members.

The Barunga-Wugularr Law, Culture and Justice Committee, auspiced by the Bagala corporation, received a readiness grant in 2022–23 of \$49,000 and operational grants in 2023–24 of \$0.5m and in 2024–25 another \$0.5m, totalling \$1.049m. Their community court training is scheduled for June, so any day now. It is anticipated community court will commence in the second half of 2025.

Mr GUYULA: I am pleased to see that community courts will continue. We currently have one community court in my region. That is connected to the law and justice group in Ramingining, but Yolngu communities want to see community courts across the region. Is the Attorney-General's Department planning to expand community courts? Is this budgeted for in the 2025–26 budget? How many community courts are operating now? How many will be seen by the end of the 2025–26 financial year?

Ms BOOTHBY: There is \$1.3m in the budget for community courts for 2025–26. There is some funding that is rolling over. The department is currently engaging in negotiations with its partners under the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment agreement around a proposal to expand the law and justice group network.

We have a community court on Groote Eylandt in Angurugu. Their first sitting date was on 7 June 2024 and they have had eight sittings. There were 23 offenders sentenced across 41 matters. The number of offenders listed for future sentencing was seven.

In Maningrida their first sitting date was 6 December 2024. They have had three sitting days. They have had eight offenders sentenced across nine matters, with no offenders listed for future sentencing.

In Kintore their first sitting date was 19 September 2024, with two sitting dates. There were two offenders sentenced across three matters, with no offenders listed for future sentencing.

In Ramingining their first one was on 17 April 2025. They have had the one sitting date then, with no offenders sentenced across no matters because the one is listed for future sentencing.

Mr PAECH: There is a \$1.3m commitment in the budget for the continuation of community courts. Is that ongoing funding? Is the law and justice group funding ongoing? Of that \$1.3m, you have named Groote

Eylandt, Kintore and a few other locations. Are there new community court locations to be scheduled in the new financial year? That is what the Member for Mulka is asking.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is anticipated that a community court will commence at Barunga/Wugularr in the second half of 2025, but noting that these initiatives are currently subject to evaluations, the long-term funding decisions will be made once we have considered the outcomes and findings of how they have been going. As you can see from the dates of those first sittings, they are fairly new, and they have had a small number of court dates. We are very interested to see how they go and ensure that they are delivering what we want them to deliver. If they are successful, we will look at expanding them or how we can improve that going forward.

J DAVIS: I notice that one of the actions under the implementation plan was to provide community courts with improved sentencing options relevant to their location. What improvements have been made to the range and availability of culturally appropriate sentencing options for community courts where they are operating?

Ms BOOTHBY: The community court, in and of itself, is a new practice. That has now been implemented and is showing a number of sitting days. The sentencing options—as an example, the alternatives to custody. We have two of those across the Territory so far. That is a different option which was not available before ...

Mr PAECH: It was. The previous government introduced that.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will correct the record. I was not saying that our government introduced alternatives to custody; that was the previous government. We did increase the beds at Groote Eylandt, so there are 32 there now. When I say they were not there before, I mean that before they were there, there was nothing there; it was only one option in terms of incarceration.

J DAVIS: I am interested in any improvements that have been made.

Ms BOOTHBY: The dates in which these community courts have been operationalised—it is fairly new. One of them is six months in, and I think it is a bit too early to evaluate exactly how they are improving or not. That is the data we are looking forward to seeing and that includes the alternatives to custody. People go into those facilities and come out, and we want to see rates of reoffending reduce. All that data is too early to be evaluated. We all want to see improvements in terms of people reoffending less and living a life beyond crime, so I look forward to seeing what that looks like into the future.

J DAVIS: At this point, are there no new programs, developments or alternatives, apart from the ones that had been put in place that are continuing?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is correct. We want to see how these ones are working—the community courts, law and justice groups and the alternatives to custody. It was a new concept for the Northern Territory a number of years ago. They have just recently been implemented to be able to do those court hearings and the sentencing options to those alternatives to custody.

We look forward to the evaluation of those, because once we have that information we can determine if and how they are improved, expanded or not, or which area we focus on. As a government, we are keen to see what is working and what is not and making adjustments and changes along the way. We will continue to do that in this space.

J DAVIS: Is there a timeline for that evaluation?

Ms BOOTHBY: For the evaluation timeline we are looking to see what the data and the evaluation is to date. Up until November 2025 we will be able to have a look at all that and go from there.

Mr PAECH: How many people across the Northern Territory have been released on bail since your new bail laws commenced on 6 January?

Ms BOOTHBY: As you know, things fluctuate quite a bit, but I have points in time of total people on bail. I can report that on 31 May 2025 the total on bail was 1,962 adults and 210 young people.

Mr PAECH: I am after data that I know you can get from the agency and the courts because when people are sentenced it is recorded. How many people since 6 January 2025 have been awarded bail?

Ms BOOTHBY: The data I have with me at the table now is the data I said about the total people on bail. What I do not have here, and I am happy to take it on notice, is the number that—I need you to restate exactly what it is, so we can find it.

Question on Notice No 5.3

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

Mr PAECH: How many people across the Northern Territory have been released on bail since the CLP government's bail laws commenced on 6 January 2025? How many of these were or are facing a violent offence?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.3.

Mr PAECH: I understand you will probably want to take this one on notice as well. How many between your first tranche of bail laws and the new bail laws passed on 30 April 2025?

Ms BOOTHBY: Of the same data?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Ms BOOTHBY: Of those who have been released on bail?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Ms BOOTHBY: And the same data with the serious offence?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will take that on notice as well.

Question on Notice No 5.4

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

Mr PAECH: Between your first tranche of bail laws and the new bail laws passed on 30 April 2025, how many were or are facing violent offence charges?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.4.

Mr PAECH: Did you see the advice provided by the Solicitor-General to the Chief Minister about whether or not she should name the former Police Commissioner Michael Murphy as the senior public servant who was the subject of ICAC's Operation Apollo?

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

Mr PAECH: To be clear, you did not see any advice at all from the Solicitor-General in relation to the former Police Commissioner around Operation Apollo.

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

Mr PAECH: No advice at all.

Has the Solicitor-General been asked by the government to prepare any advice concerning the finalisation of Andrew Kirkman's employment?

Ms BOOTHBY: That would be a question for the OCPE. I do not have any information about that department and that public servant.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to kick that can down the road because the OCPE is on today. I will ask them then.

Has the Solicitor-General been asked by the government to prepare any advice concerning the finalisation of any other former CEO's employment in the reporting period?

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not have any information about that one either.

Mr PAECH: According to the communique from the last Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) the following matters were discussed: a national hate crime and incidents database; responses to anti-Semitism; Closing the Gap justice agreement targets; responses to gender-based violence; responses to the abuse of older people; vicarious liability and institutional accountability for child sex abuse; and the protection of children and young people in the workplace. These are all critical matters of importance; why did you not bother to attend?

Ms BOOTHBY: The SCAG meetings are held usually interstate and there is a number of them each year. Upon coming to government and being appointed as the Attorney-General, there have been a lot of things that I have had to get across and fix. I have had to look at problem-solving across the portfolio.

When opportunities arise when there are those ministerial council meetings, we need to look at all the factors of the work that we are doing, the agenda and who has been involved to date in some of those items.

In that case I chose to use a delegate, being the chief executive officer. Of course, the information from those meetings comes back to me for us to look at. It is common practice; it is not unusual for that to happen.

Mr PAECH: The Standing Council of Attorneys-General is the premier body for Attorneys from around the country to come together and talk about important law reform. How many SCAG meetings have you attended?

Ms BOOTHBY: There have been two SCAG meetings since I became the Attorney-General, both of which fell during times where I chose very deliberately to send the chief executive officer to go in my place. That decision was ...

Mr PAECH: By your own admission you deliberately chose not to attend.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please let the Attorney-General finish.

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes. I choose whether I go or not. In this case there were two. By looking at all the agenda items and the things that I had going on in the Territory—in a crime crisis and with so many laws that we were changing, trying to fix the mess that we inherited as a new government—we absolutely had to get on with the job, prioritising Territorians in the space of reducing crime. A lot of that stuff fits under my portfolios.

We will get to Tourism later, but I am also the Tourism minister. That forms a huge part of rebuilding our economy. My chief executive officer ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! It was a very particular question. How many SCAG meetings have you attended? Have you attended any virtually?

Ms BOOTHBY: There have been two SCAG meetings interstate, both of which I delegated my chief executive officer to attend. Ms Lake attended both in person. All the conversations were relayed to me in briefings and meetings that I have had with the CE since that time.

Mr PAECH: Of course, you must clearly acknowledge and identify that the chief executive officer—a very well-respected person in the Northern Territory—cannot participate at the level of an Attorney-General around the table with other Attorneys-General. They have to sit at the back of the room and they cannot participate in that dialogue. You are saying you were in the Territory. I think that justice target agreements, anti-Semitism, national hate crimes and gender-based violence are all important issues for the Territory. Will you be attending the next SCAG meeting?

Ms BOOTHBY: As SCAG meetings arise I look at the agenda and at what is going on in the Northern Territory. I will make an informed decision at that time.

You well know that my priority is with Territorians and reducing crime, rebuilding our economy and restoring our lifestyle. Every decision I make has that lens to it. If and when another SCAG meeting comes up, I will make that decision based on those facts.

Mr PAECH: One of the issues that comes up at SCAG (Standing Council of Attorneys-General) is about the age of criminal responsibility. Can you provide this committee with your understanding of *doli incapax*?

Ms BOOTHBY: Of course *doli incapax* is part of our legal system. It is there for a reason ...

Mr PAECH: I am asking you for the definition. What is it?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I remind everyone of the process of the committee. Please, if you have an interjection alert me and tell me what your interjection is. This will be the last question.

Ms BOOTHBY: I ...

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, I do not want you reading off your phone; I want you to tell me what *doli incapax* is.

Mr CHAIR: Again, Member for Gwoja, please, through me just say, 'Mr Chair, I feel my question is not being answered', and I will address it with the minister.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, I feel my question is not being answered. Attorney-General, can you please tell the committee what *doli incapax* is?

Ms BOOTHBY: Mr Chair, I know he is being really cute with me. I am okay with that, because it is just the way that he operates.

Mr PAECH: You are the first law officer; surely you can answer a question about laws you reform ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, Attorney-General, thank you. The time is 10.53 am. We will take a 10-minute break and reconvene at 11.03 am.

Mr PAECH: Hopefully, you can get a briefing about it while you are on your break.

The committee suspended.

Mr PAECH: Last week the Commissioner for Public Employment released new tools for the public service to strengthen transparency, accountability and best practice in the Northern Territory public service recruitment and selection processes. Will these new tools be applied to ensure a transparent, accountable and best-practice approach to recruitment in relation to the Director of Public Prosecutions, or will you interfere in that process as you did with the Director of Legal Aid?

Ms BOOTHBY: The DPP—I will address that part of the question first. Obviously, that is a statutory organisation. The DPP is appointed by the Administrator under section 4 of the *Director of Public Prosecutions Act*. There is a process that we are looking to undertake with that. The convention is for the appointment of the DPP to follow the same process as the appointment of judges in the judicial appointments protocol. It involves an expression of interest process with an advisory panel, comprising the CEO of the department, the Solicitor-General and a retired Supreme Court judge, who make recommendations to the minister who then advises the Administrator through the Executive Council. In this case, under the Act, the process used will ultimately be approved by me, as the minister, prior to the process proceeding.

Just on the Director of Public Prosecutions specifically, that work has not commenced yet because we need to wait for the formal resignation to be accepted by the Administrator before we can start that process.

Referring to your comment about the Legal Aid director and my appointment of that role, I put on the record that appointment is made by me, as the minister, under section 18 of the *Legal Aid Act*. The Chair of the

Legal Aid Commission at that time ran a public recruitment process with a panel, and they made recommendations to me, as the minister. The particular director that I appointed was shortlisted in the process by that panel. I, as minister, made the final decision to appoint that director.

Mr PAECH: I want to confirm some matters in relation to the Waterfront. Are you aware of any fraudulent behaviour occurring at the Waterfront at all?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is not specifically this portfolio. I am more than happy to answer the question. Given it is about not only an output but a government-organised corporate entity, which will be appearing at Estimates later today, I think it would be a fair process for them to also be here to answer further questions about that. It is your call, Chair, but I think it is important they have a right to ...

Mr PAECH: It is not the Chair's call; it is your call if you want to answer it.

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, you are free to defer it to the specific output. The Member for Gwoja is free to put it on notice if he so wishes as well.

Ms BOOTHBY: Firstly, I do not have any information about fraud and the allegations at the Darwin Waterfront. You will all well remember—for the record and the transcript—that from the outset of online claims that I was transparent with Territorians. I first requested a briefing to look into those online claims when they first emerged, and that briefing raised no questions for me and showed no evidence of wrongdoing.

Since that time, we had a referral in the parliament from the Leader of the Opposition, who put forward a referral to the Public Accounts Committee, which has Labor and Independent members. That process ran its course. They questioned the officials at the Darwin Waterfront. They concluded unanimously that there was no case to answer for and that those online claims were, indeed, baseless.

Given that the process I went through with the briefing found no wrongdoings, followed up with a process through the Public Accounts Committee, with Labor members and an Independent on that committee, which still found, basically, there were baseless claims to those online allegations, there is nothing to answer for. Like I said, those officials from the Darwin Waterfront will be appearing before Estimates later today. I welcome any further questions.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to ask the Darwin Waterfront Corporation further questions when they are here. I acknowledge that you have stated that you are not aware of any fraudulent behaviour.

You stated that you had read the report and you had made the assumption. I want to confirm whether you read the report and made a decision based on fact, or whether you assumed.

Ms BOOTHBY: When I received the briefing, I read that. I found that there were no wrongdoings in the evidence I was presented with. I made the determination that there were no wrongdoings and that nothing further was needed to be done.

Mr PAECH: Just picking up on your language there, you have now said that you made the determination, not the assumption. Do you acknowledge that was the wrong use of words at the time?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have answered the question. I have been in front of the media quite a few times and in Question Time in parliament answering this questions.

Mr PAECH: Where you have said that you assumed.

Ms BOOTHBY: The briefing that I sought I read. I made a determination that there was no evidence there of any wrongdoing.

Mr PAECH: Not an assumption.

Mr CHAIR: There has been a number of interjections. That will be the last informal warning.

Ms BOOTHBY: I have answered the question.

J DAVIS: In relation to the Director of Legal Aid, did you say that the person who was appointed was recommended through the shortlisting process?

Ms BOOTHBY: The panel that was doing the recruitment process provided me with nine names of people who were shortlisted out of that recruitment advertisement. They had been through that process. I then chose one of the nine who were on that list.

J DAVIS: Was the person who has been appointed was recommended by that panel?

Ms BOOTHBY: The panel provided me with nine names on a shortlist. As the minister, I have the final say in terms of who I appoint based on the Act. I determined that one of the people who was shortlisted be appointed.

J DAVIS: The person who was appointed was on a list of nine names, but was not someone who was recommended by the panel because your role is to make the decision; is that correct?

Ms BOOTHBY: My role is to make the decision about who I would like as the director leading Legal Aid NT into the future. I was looking for specific skill sets and character to be able to make reform within the organisation. We are making reform right across government. We have lots of challenges. I chose that person based on their change management opportunity and the skills to make those changes. The successful candidate, Catherine Voumard, has deep experience not only in the Northern Territory but in other parts of Australia and who has worked with Legal Aid, NAAJA and a private firm before. There is a huge range of experience there that she will bring to the Northern Territory and the Legal Aid Commission.

J DAVIS: Thank you for your rationale. We are all aware of the experience of Ms Voumard. I have a clear question. There were nine names provided to you. The name that was provided to you was not someone who was recommended by the selection committee. You made a decision based on what you believed was appropriate for that role. Is that correct?

Ms BOOTHBY: The shortlist came to me with the nine names. I looked at all of the nine names. I made a determination based on what I was looking for in that commission.

J DAVIS: Was Ms Voumard recommended by selection panel?

Ms BOOTHBY: I should make it clear that under the Act, the minister appoints the Legal Aid director. It says clearly that they may consult with the Chair of the Legal Aid Commission, which I did, about the appointment. Ultimately, it does not matter whether a panel was there or not. The minister still makes the ultimate decision, and I did that.

J DAVIS: I understand, but the answer is no, that was not someone who was recommended by the selection panel, understanding that you have said you do not need to pay attention to what they say; is that right? That was not someone who was recommended.

Ms BOOTHBY: The person who was appointed was shortlisted. Out of all the applications that were received by that panel, nine were put forward to me and I chose one of the nine.

Mr PAECH: The person you appointed, though, was not the preferred candidate by the panel, not by you but by the panel.

Ms BOOTHBY: I think I have been really clear about this. There was a recruitment process with a panel. There were nine names given to me on a shortlist. I looked at all those nine names and their applications, and I made a decision as the minister that I would appoint one of those nine people.

Mr PAECH: Do you acknowledge that there has been a series of resignations from within the Northern Territory Legal Aid service because of this appointment and that there have been resignations of significant highly distinguished and qualified legal practitioners from the board because of your appointment?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is true there have been resignations from the board of commissioners at Legal Aid, including the Chair. Those board members have been at Legal Aid for a very long time, and it is a matter entirely for them as to whether they would like to stay on or not.

Their experience will be missed from the board, but at the same time we were elected on a platform of change. We have been really clear and we have shown through our actions that we will be changing so many things about the Northern Territory, and in this case that includes Legal Aid.

If board members have chosen to resign—I should make it clear that none of them have been asked to leave; they have chosen to resign—it is a question for them as to why. I am not going to speak for them, but I welcome the change of the board. We will go out for an expression of interest now to see who is out there who may like to come on that board and help the Legal Aid Commission to reform themselves, so they can provide quality services for Territorians who need legal representation. They acknowledge that there is work to be done in that space. They are the outcomes I look forward to seeing with the change in leadership and the reform that we are undertaking.

K McNAMARA: Did you confer with Deputy Chief Minister Maley about the appointment?

Ms BOOTHBY: Can you clarify what you mean by ‘confer with’?

K McNAMARA: Talk, discuss, consult.

Ms BOOTHBY: I cannot speak exactly in terms of Cabinet confidentiality, but with appointments under Acts the recommendations need to go to Cabinet to be signed off. I cannot talk about what happens in those meetings as such, but the appointment of Ms Voumard, who is the right person, in my opinion—I recruited her in terms of I saw her on the shortlist, saw the skills and the character that I needed for change reform, and I appointed her. I am looking forward to that change going forward.

K McNAMARA: There has been some confusion around this. Was the Deputy Chief Minister’s brother a work referee for Ms Voumard?

Ms BOOTHBY: No, he was not.

K McNAMARA: It is public knowledge that they used to work together. Was that a conflict of interest? Did you consider that a conflict of interest?

Ms BOOTHBY: As far as my decision to appoint her, I took into account her whole work history. Maleys law firm in the Territory is quite significant; a lot of people have worked there in the past. I see that as a quality, given it is a private practice, alongside her skills and experience in Legal Aid and NAAJA as well. It is a good complement to have that variety.

I did not see that as a conflict. There were no recommendations from the Deputy Chief Minister or his brother to me about that specifically; it was more along the lines of I saw the resume and could see where she worked before. I took that into account based on her entire application.

K McNAMARA: When you spoke before about the confidential discussions in Cabinet about the application, did the Deputy Chief Minister recuse himself from those under conflict of interest?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, it has been a longstanding rule under the Ministerial Code of Conduct that Cabinet does not discuss what happens in Cabinet outside of Cabinet. Those records become available after 30 years ...

Mr PAECH: How your tune has changed.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, that will be the last interjection before a warning.

Mr PAECH: Apologies, Mr Chair.

K McNAMARA: I think you were answering it, but I want to confirm whether you are able to tell us—I understand it is confidential—whether that conflict of interest was managed?

Ms BOOTHBY: I cannot speak about anything that happened in Cabinet. Those will be released in 30 years’ time.

Mr PAECH: We will all be dead by then.

Mr CHAIR: Hopefully not, Member for Gwoja.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I go back to your opening statement, Attorney-General. You made reference to the stronger legislation this government introduced.

In my electorate—and I am sure in other electorates—community safety is a key issue and people are looking for tougher consequences. I am sure it is not just my electorate, but shared across all. When we came to government we made a commitment that in the first weeks of parliament we would introduce certain legislation under your portfolio. Obviously, they revolved around stopping the revolving door of bail—all in our plan, as I always remind people—make breach of bail an offence, new minimum mandatory sentencing for assaulting frontline workers et cetera, introducing ramraid legislation and posting-and-boasting legislation, plus others which strengthen police powers and so on.

Having introduced those, do you have any sense or evidence that it is starting to work in terms of people who used to be released on bail are no longer being released and so on and that is making the community feel safer? Can you give me any evidence? I know it is early days, but if you can, give me some evidence that the impact of these laws is working in the right direction to improve community safety.

Ms BOOTHBY: You are right; we have made a number of changes since coming to government. It is a good question to ask about the impact or the outcome of the changes we have made. You already mentioned we came to government and in the first six or eight weeks—the first sittings—we passed a suite of crime-reducing pieces of legislation, including Declan's law and the others you mentioned. I can share with the committee some of the outcomes of how they are working in practice and where the reductions have occurred in our community.

There is some data here that is a point in time. I might use the 31 March 2025 number, because that is this reporting period. The numbers speak for themselves. The Deputy Chief Minister always talks about the 550 additional people behind bars now due to our laws. That is an important measure, but I also think—sorry, I am trying to read the statistics I have been given.

You mentioned remand, and that is a good measure. In March 2024 there were 903 people on remand, but in March 2025 there are now 1,323 so that is quite a significant number of people who are not getting bail right now. As you know, we came back to parliament urgently in April to strengthen the bail laws further, because we needed to send a clear message that if you commit serious crimes, you do not get to be out in the community. You cannot do that and keep the community safe. That has impacted—there is no bail anymore. They are not getting bail. They are not able to go out and commit more crimes and so that ...

Mr PAECH: That is not true because bail still exists.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I hate doing it to you, but that is your official warning.

Mr PAECH: It is all right; it is my first one.

Ms BOOTHBY: The message we have given to the community is that Territorians and victims come first now, not only with this budget but with our whole approach to governing. We took to the election that we would reduce crime, and those new laws are in play. People are being apprehended by police, and we have more police on the beat. Once they are before the courts they are being dealt with, but with the right strongest laws that we can possibly have to keep Territorians safe.

I will find a couple of extra stats for you, Member for Karama, on the offences.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, may I so kindly ask you that once the Attorney-General has answered, I have a few of follow-up questions to the Member for Karama's.

Mr CHAIR: Of course.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will continue my answer about the impact these new law changes are having.

We always talk about how the crime statistics are only one measure of how a community is feeling when it comes to people being able to live their life as they want without fearing going to the shops or filling up the car at night and sending kids on the bus to school. It is more than just the crime stats; it is about how they feel when they are doing that. We know that over previous years, those decisions people were making were literally impacting their lives.

Now, while we are not there yet in terms of people feeling safe, we are seeing signs and indicators that the number of crimes is reducing. Across the Territory, up to the March 2025 quarter, we have seen property crime go down by 12%, and break-ins have dropped sharply by 43%. In some regions we are seeing that drop by over 54%. That is huge to be able to have a decrease in property crime. That could be where you

live and your kids are sleeping and there are people breaking in, or when you are not home and they are coming through and you arrive home to see a break-in. That is devastating to go through as a victim.

We have seen in Alice Springs in particular house break-ins are down by 53% and commercial break-ins are down by 28%. We saw over the last number of years Alice Springs going through a terrible time.

I want to acknowledge the fact that we still have a lot of work to do in relation to assaults and domestic violence. That still continues, but we have only been in government for 10 months. I think we have demonstrated through our actions that we are serious about reducing crime. We will continue that work so that Territorians can enjoy their lives here.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: You referenced that Corrections has more people behind bars, 500 or 600. You also referenced that the number of people on remand has increased. This puts more pressure on our courts, as one would expect. I would like to know what is being done to reduce court delays, improve prosecution capacity and deliver faster outcomes for victims?

Ms BOOTHBY: I talked about this in my opening statement, which I guess is why you are asking the follow-on question.

With the courts in particular, we recognised that there was a massive backlog. They were clogged and facing increased demand pressures. A number of factors were involved with that. We inherited this. It did not happen overnight; these demand pressures were growing over a lot of time.

We know that when you invest in police you also have to invest in courts and Corrections, which is something that we have started to work towards. We have the biggest law and order budget that we have had in history, with \$1.5bn invested.

We put on an additional Local Court judge to deal with the number of cases that are coming through, given our police are now proactively out there and doing an amazing job. They were given a directive from the Chief Minister to be out there, be seen and be proactive. They are doing that, which means now the courts are seeing higher numbers come through. We have the extra judge, and the support staff will go with that as part of this budget.

We topped up Legal Aid, which I have talked about quite a bit here today, because they needed the extra funding to see more of their clients because they need to be represented. If people are not represented in court it slows down the justice system, which makes it longer for victims of crime to go through the process when they are trying to recover from a crime, let alone having to wait so long because our legal service is underfunded and not being able to deliver.

On the other side of the fence, under prosecutions, we found that the office had prosecutors employed by the government who were on rolling 12-month casual contracts which gave them no certainty whether they would be there from one year to the next. We have made all those prosecutors permanent now. We have also increased the number of prosecutors by four and some staff. That also will help the courts' backlogs.

I talked earlier about the Targeted Intervention Group – Early Resolution. They are going through a lot of cases and if they can determine that something can have an early plea of guilty—or kind of triage where it is at, grab all that evidence. There was a pilot program going on with the police being involved to provide the evidence so that they can make those decision early.

That has been quite successful. There have been 290 remand cases reviewed and 240 of them have now been finalised. That is a huge number that were sitting in the system for such a long time. In this case 104 of them were guilty pleas, which means those people now have their sentence, can start their sentence if there is one and if there is rehabilitation or programs—whatever it is they have to do—they can now get on with that. It also means the victim has that point in time when there has been that justice. I think that is important and something that had been forgotten about for a long time.

Mr PAECH: Attorney-General, you spoke about remand numbers. Could you confirm that the additional 500 presentations before Northern Territory Corrections had an outstanding warrant for their arrest; these are not all new offences?

Ms BOOTHBY: I believe that is a question for the police in terms of the warrants, and the numbers about which part of the Corrections system that extra 500 and 550 came from would be for Corrections.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that bail is still being granted?

Ms BOOTHBY: Bail is part of our legal and justice system, and the courts and the decision-makers will determine that, both police and judges.

Mr PAECH: You can acknowledge that someone who commits a violent offence may still be getting bail.

Ms BOOTHBY: The new laws put in place that the decision-maker must have a high degree of confidence that the person will not go out and reoffend or endanger the community and that is after Declan's law has been applied, that presumption against bail. The extra tests they have to determine whether they have bail means there are less people getting bail, but ...

Mr PAECH: People can still get bail for committing a serious violent offence in the Northern Territory under the laws.

Ms BOOTHBY: The bail laws are now in place with the extra tests being applied. They are the strongest in the nation. There is still an element of bail which must be applied because that is our justice system. The decision-maker, either the judge or police ...

Mr PAECH: I know it is not you, but the laws you set still allow the potential for the judiciary to consider a violent offender could still be awarded bail.

Ms BOOTHBY: A decision-maker, being police or the judge, will be the one who assesses all those things, but ultimately it is their decision based on the strong laws that we have put in place. They were not there before. We have strengthened those, because we make no apology for the fact that we want Territorians to feel safe. We have a lot of work to do. We want to reduce crime. We know that by having these strong bail laws, those offenders, who in some cases are repeat offenders or serious and violent offenders and we do not want them back on the street ...

Mr PAECH: What I am hearing is yes, there is the potential for that to happen. It is not your decision, but there is a potential for that to happen; is what you are saying?

Ms BOOTHBY: The judge and police have the final decision, but they have to apply those tests which means there are less people getting bail under the new strong laws.

Mr PAECH: The Member for Karama was talking about stats. Earlier this week the Chief Minister said stats cannot be cherry-picked. Is your department confident that the statistical validity issues with SerPro have been resolved? From what month is it reasonable to start looking at an analysis of compatible data?

Ms BOOTHBY: Carolyn Whyte, Director of the Criminal Justice Research, Evaluation and Statistics Unit in the Attorney-General's Department, has expertise in our statistics area. She has been doing these statistics for a long time, and I will throw to her to explain how that all works.

Ms WHYTE: In terms of the crime statistics that data is continuing. We are in the process of starting to put out comparisons, starting from January 2024 through March 2024 compared with the same period in 2025.

Mr PAECH: Is the statistical unit confident about the validity of the SerPro data?

Mr KERLE: A point of order! Chair, I think that is a hypothetical question.

Mr PAECH: No, it is not.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Blain, if you have a point of order, please turn on the microphone and direct the point of order to me. I will then decide, without input ...

Mr PAECH: He is making himself look stupid.

Mr KERLE: Mr Chair, I believe according to standing orders it is a hypothetical question. Can you rule on that, please?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, could you restate the question?

Mr PAECH: Absolutely; however, I do not think asking the department if they are confident or not is out of order.

Is the department working through, and can the department confirm that they are happy with the conduct of SerPro and its validity? It is not a hypothetical ...

Mr CHAIR: I will give that to the Attorney-General.

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, I will answer the question and move to the department if needed. It is not hypothetical, but it is asking for an opinion. I am happy for Ms Whyte to answer the question because she has detailed experience in the statistics and the changeover between the old PROMIS system and the new system, SerPro. Ms Whyte, I am happy for you to answer the question.

Ms WHYTE: My team works closely with the police in looking at and understanding the data from SerPro and how it is collected and recorded. The data quality is improving. There are always changes in the first month of a new process. As we learn more about the work processes that happen with SerPro, we are better able to extract the data. We are working closely with police to ensure that both agencies have the same understanding of what that data is and how it is best used.

Mr PAECH: Have the issues been ironed out with SerPro to start giving us accurate, comparable data year on year?

Ms WHYTE: The change in the data from SerPro appears to be permanent. There are different business processes that happen with the entry of data into SerPro. Therefore, we will not be—from what we can tell—in a situation where we can compare data that we are getting now through SerPro directly with data that was previously collected through PROMIS. That means currently we are, if you like, quarter on quarter, and as time goes past then we will be getting into year-on-year comparisons. We do not, at this stage, believe that we will be comparing post-SerPro data with pre-SerPro data, simply because it is a different program.

Mr PAECH: Is there a figure that is a percentage of consideration? I note that there was previously an estimated 15% variation in the numbers. Is that still the same?

Ms WHYTE: We do not have a specific figure in that variability. The change that we saw varies with the type of offence, the location of the offence. There are a number of changes that have happened. We are seeing the links between some of the SerPro data and some of the data that we are getting elsewhere in the system linking up much better because we have an electronic link now. There is no specific figure of change, but with the post-SerPro data that is where we will draw the line and continue to go from that point.

Mr PAECH: The child death review committee has not met in six months because it cannot make a quorum, yet there have been 10 child deaths not reviewed as a result. Do you find that to be a significant issue? What will you do to rectify that?

Ms BOOTHBY: You are right; the child death committee has not met.

We are looking at a number of governance structures that sit with boards and committees across my portfolio. I have had the department go through each of them to give me advice on how they work, what they do, how many times they meet. We are now looking at seeing which boards and committees we slightly change or we might improve in some way.

With the child deaths committee, the Coroner also does reports into deaths, including child deaths ...

Mr PAECH: The question I am asking is: has there been a directive from you or the chief executive to other responsible agencies to mandate that there is the relevant staff so that there is a quorum? There have been 10 child deaths that have not been reviewed as a result.

Ms BOOTHBY: I have not given any directive on this particular board. I have asked for it to be looked at along with all the other boards and committees. I have a number of them under my Attorney-General portfolio which do a variety of things. Like we have done with many areas of governing since coming to government in August, we have not accepted the status quo ...

Mr PAECH: You have just said in your response that there are other boards on hold. What are those boards?

Ms BOOTHBY: I did not say that. I said that we were looking at all the boards and committees across my portfolio and that there are quite a few of them. We are looking at their role, what they look at, what the outcomes are and how they support government to be able to implement different reform.

Mr PAECH: Is it your understanding that those committees and boards have all still been operating for the 10 months or have they been like the child death review committee and not been meeting?

Ms BOOTHBY: For that particular board, it does not have a quorum right now, so it has not met recently. That process is being looked at, alongside the other boards and committees in terms of what they do for government, how many times they meet, what it costs and how the outcomes of those meetings inform government to implement reform.

Mr PAECH: Would you be willing to take on notice to undertake work to advise this committee, under your portfolio of Attorney-General and justice, which committees have been in operation, how many times they have met, and how many times there has not been a quorum?

Ms BOOTHBY: I believe I can answer that now. Let me attempt to, based on some information I will find.

Can you clarify for me exactly what you are looking for?

Mr PAECH: Within the agency Attorney-General and justice, how many committees are there, how often they meet, and has there been a quorum at those meetings?

Ms BOOTHBY: Apologies; I thought you meant of the one committee that we originally spoke about. There is quite a bit of detail in that. I could read it all out, but that might take a while. I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.5

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

Mr PAECH: Please provide the number of committees operational within the department of Attorney-General and justice, how often they meet and whether or not there have been quorums.

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.5.

Mr PAECH: On the Child Deaths Review and Prevention Committee, I understand that there has been no work to date by the government to pursue recommendations from committee members to fill positions.

Ms BOOTHBY: We are still doing the work involved to look at the outputs and all the meetings that happen around that committee to work out what we need, what works and what does not. Like I said, that committee also has a Coroner's report that is done for every death, including a child's death. We are looking at that. We will see if we need to make any changes to that Act or that board, but there have been no changes so far in that board in this period.

Mr PAECH: Was there no consideration to appoint interim or temporary members to continue the work of the child death review committee? There are 10 child deaths that have not been reviewed. Was there any consideration to have interim or temporary members until a review was undertaken to provide a different pathway?

Ms BOOTHBY: When it comes to child deaths the Coroner does a report. That information is available to us as government.

Mr PAECH: Sure, but it is statutory, under legislation, that this committee needs to meet. This committee has not met. There are 10 child deaths, and it has still not met.

Ms BOOTHBY: For clarification, that committee has met once during the reporting period.

Mr PAECH: Once, and when was that?

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not have the date, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.6

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

Mr PAECH: Please provide the date that the child deaths review committee last met.

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.6.

J DAVIS: You talked a bit about the review of boards and committees. Can you let us know who is undertaking the review and what process there is around all those boards and committees?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is an internal review run by the agency to show me all the workings of each board. We will then determine if there are any changes to be made. If there are, what recommendations they provide to me and then some decisions will be made.

J DAVIS: Will affected bodies be consulted as part of that review?

Ms BOOTHBY: There is not a generic answer to that because I have a number of boards and committees across the portfolio. They all function differently. I would not want to generalise and say yes or no. It would be dependent on the board, what its function is and how it works.

J DAVIS: For example, with the Youth Justice Advisory Committee, will affected bodies be consulted?

Ms BOOTHBY: That particular committee sits under the Corrections portfolio, so it is not an example that I can refer to.

J DAVIS: In relation to follow-up questions from the Member for Karama, can you tell us how many people on remand are currently serving more days than they would be sentenced in Territory jails?

Ms BOOTHBY: We have Mr Chris Cox from the courts area, who has more of that data available. I can either take it on notice or you can ask it in the courts output if you wish. I just do not have it right here is all.

J DAVIS: I am happy to put it on notice to make sure it gets covered.

On remand, how many people are currently serving more days than they would be sentenced in Territory jails?

Ms BOOTHBY: I just need clarification about the question and the specifics around it. We have the data on how many people have been sentenced and time served. I just do not know if we have that correlation that you mentioned specifically. Would that be the data that you are after?

J DAVIS: The data I am after is whether or not people are spending more time on remand than they would if they were sentenced.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is a hypothetical, because we do not know what the sentence would be and how many days they will be given by a judge. It is a hypothetical and tricky question to answer without knowing that. If you are looking backwards, that data would need to be pulled from lots of different areas. Then again, Mr Cox would be able to assist with that question. I just do not want to paint the illusion that I have those exact facts when it may be slightly different in the way it is asked.

Mr PAECH: It is time served that you are asking for.

J DAVIS: Yes.

Ms BOOTHBY: I accept that question with time served.

Question on Notice No 5.7

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

J DAVIS: On remand, how many people ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, can you guide the question?

Mr PAECH: Can the Attorney-General provide information or data in relation to time served versus the amount of time people have been on remand?

Member for Johnston, are you wanting to understand when the courts sentence someone, are they going back into prison or have they already served time on remand?

J DAVIS: Yes, and I am also interested in knowing whether they are serving more time on remand than they would be had they been sentenced, which I think is what the Attorney-General said is hypothetical.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is the 'would be'—would be, could be, should be.

Mr PAECH: The second part would be hypothetical, but the first part is the data telling you how long and whether or not after their sentence they are being incarcerated or their time on remand is accounting for time served.

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes. If we can provide that, we will.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.7.

J DAVIS: How many people have pled guilty before trial for each month from October until now?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is quite a bit of detail, but I will take it on notice.

J DAVIS: Just to add to that question, the second part is: can you confirm those statistics across the same months in 2023 and 2024?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you want that on notice?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Question on Notice No 5.8

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

J DAVIS: How many people have pled guilty before trial for each month from October until now, and can you confirm those statistics across the same months in 2023 and 2024?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.8.

Mr CHAIR: The time is now 12.01 pm. We will break for 30 minutes, returning at 12.31 pm.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: We are still on questions on the opening statement. Are there any further questions?

J DAVIS: I am continuing with some follow-up questions from the Member for Karama. Earlier in answer to that I think you said there are 290 remand cases being reviewed, of which 240 are finalised. I think you said 104 are guilty pleas, which means 136 had a different outcome. Could you break these down for the committee?

Ms BOOTHBY: You are right; of those cases, about 72% resulted in guilty. I will see if I have a breakdown of the other ones, but they are made up of a few different things where they move on to a more complex part of a case—actually, I have some information here.

The team reviewed and finalised just under 200 outstanding case files. Of these, 89 files with open representations were identified as already being substantially finalised, 66 of which resolved via a plea of guilty; 78 matters resulted in appropriate early guilty pleas; 12 were pending a response to an appropriate offer; 16 were marked as ready to be listed for hearing; and six matters were withdrawn.

J DAVIS: Can you say that figure again? What did you say was guilty? I have a different figure written down.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is okay. Of the 200, 89 files with open representations were identified as already being substantially finalised, 66 of which were resolved by a plea of guilty. However, 78 matters resulted in appropriate early guilty pleas; 12 were pending a response to an appropriate offer ...

J DAVIS: Sorry; my question was not clear. I had written down that you said 290 cases had been finalised. Is that the data you are working off there?

Ms BOOTHBY: It was 200 in that reporting period to 31 March. That is what I am reading from in this breakdown. We know now that it is 290 so far year to date.

J DAVIS: An extra 90 are from March to date.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is right.

J DAVIS: Do you have any information on the impact on court wait times since the new bail laws came into effect?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will have Mr Cox at the table with me when we get to that output, if that is okay. He definitely has a lot of the other data available.

Mr YOUNG: Your office received written questions 70 and 81. Given that the answer for written questions is supposed to be given to the person who asked the question within 30 days, why were those two written questions not answered until after the 30 days?

Ms BOOTHBY: My department prepared responses to two lots of written questions from the opposition within three months of each other. The first one came in December and then in March, both of which have been completed.

It has been convention over many years that the work is done and put back to the opposition ready for Estimates. I note that by doing both lots of written questions only three months apart, it created a lot of extra work, costing the taxpayer a lot of extra money ...

Mr PAECH: They were important questions.

Ms BOOTHBY: ... which is unusual. When we were in opposition we asked them at once and got the information late as well, but we were still able to ask the questions we needed during the Estimates process.

Mr YOUNG: It is part of normal practice to put written questions to the government before Estimates. I am trying to get an understanding. We have had the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and the Treasurer on now. All of those ministers replied to those written questions after the 30-day period, but replied on the day of Estimates, including you as Attorney-General. Why, when those questions were being asked by Territorians and you came into government about being transparent and open, have you given the answer to those questions on the day of Estimates that you are before us?

Ms BOOTHBY: I think you will find we are being transparent. We are here in Estimates explaining to Territorians what we, as a government, are doing. We are also answering the questions from the opposition and the crossbench. We have been open about that. We are happy to take any questions and if we do not know the answer, we will come back to Territorians about that.

I note that when the former government was in power, it regularly provided those written question answers either well after the time ...

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, as I have indicated we will not be going back to any other Estimates hearings. I was not at any other Estimates hearings. I will just focus on the Estimates hearing now in this parliament.

Ms BOOTHBY: The opposition put forward two lots of written questions leading into Estimates, one in December and one in March. Our agencies have spent a lot of time working through both of them to give the answers. I believe it was approximately \$400,000 in taxpayer money for hours spent working on the two lots of the written question answers. They have been provided to the opposition. We are here today answering further questions in addition to any follow-up questions that may have been responded to in the written questions.

Mr YOUNG: What I am trying to get at is you send the questions through the morning of Estimates, which does not allow opposition members to look through those answers to then do any follow-up questions. I am trying to have an understanding of why they were provided on the day of Estimates. The whole point and the role of the Estimates Committee is to scrutinise the government regarding the budget.

When did you receive the answers to the written questions from the department, your ministerial office?

Ms BOOTHBY: We handed down the budget in May—quite some time ago now—and there were a lot of budget books circulated on that day, so the opposition and crossbench members can work through them to identify the questions they would like to ask. We received the first lot of written questions, which we thought would be the Estimates questions, in December based on whole-of-agency information ...

Mr YOUNG: I just want to know when you received written question 70 and written question 81. When did the ministerial office receive the answers to those questions? There should be a date attached to it. I understand when written questions go to the minister it goes through secretariat down to the department and back up through secretariat. There would be a timeline of when they were received and you should have that information in front of you. I am just wanting to know when the ministerial office received those written questions.

Ms BOOTHBY: When the department spent all those additional hours preparing the second lot of written questions after the first lot had been asked three months earlier, that information—you are right—comes to the minister's office. I read through all of that information and then I approve it ...

Mr YOUNG: I just want a date when the ministerial office received questions 70 and 81. I do not need the spiel; I just need to know when you received the written questions.

Ms BOOTHBY: The date is whatever date I received it, and I would have looked through it and decided they were ready to be put to the registry to go back to opposition. I did that once I was satisfied that the written questions had been completed.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a date when you received it from the secretariat? It would be recorded.

Ms BOOTHBY: I receive the written questions from the agency. I read through them. I provided them ...

Mr YOUNG: It goes through a secretariat. Is there a proper process? You would have a date of when you received it in the ministerial office. That is usually the process.

Ms BOOTHBY: The date on which it went from registry to the opposition is the date you received it.

Mr YOUNG: I am not asking about when we received it. I am asking about when you received it from the department—the ministerial office received the answers to the question from the department.

Ms BOOTHBY: I receive them within a timeframe after the department and agency had gone through all of those questions. I then read through them all and signed them off and gave them to registry to pass to the opposition.

Mr YOUNG: Can you take that question on notice? I am sure you could go back and find out a date.

Ms BOOTHBY: Can you be specific about the exact date, because there is a number of moving parts with written questions and answers?

Mr YOUNG: Yes, I can. When did your ministerial office receive the answers to written questions 70 and 81?

Ms BOOTHBY: I feel like I have answered that question, so I do not really feel ...

Mr YOUNG: She has not answered it.

Mr CHAIR: I have noted it. Attorney-General, you are free to accept or not accept the question. We have restated the question. Attorney-General, do you accept it?

Ms BOOTHBY: I feel that I have answered the question in regard to the process and how it works, how it worked in my office at the time, the fact that I check through that information before I send it on ...

Mr YOUNG: For clarification, it is pretty straightforward. The question was about a date when her ministerial received the answers to those questions. I have not heard you say a date from when you received it, so you have not answered the question.

Ms BOOTHBY: Mr Chair, I think I have answered the question.

Mr YOUNG: That means you are not taking it on notice.

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

No questions.

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 PAECH: How many matters were briefed out by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory to external counsel in the reporting period?

Ms BOOTHBY: Do you want to know how much is being briefed out for whole-of-government through the SG?

Mr PAECH: What I want is how many matters AGD outsourced and how many whole-of-government have been outsourced.

Ms BOOTHBY: Is that both?

Mr PAECH: Yes, please.

Ms BOOTHBY: As you know, the Solicitor for the Northern Territory outsources legal services to private law firms under the NT Legal Services List (NTLSL) and coordinates the briefing of counsel and government. Where SFNT cannot take on a matter due to capacity or conflict, then government needs to engage outsourced legal services, which you know.

In the reporting period 92% of outsourced matters went to local firms. More matters were outsourced to local firms compared to 2023–24. There was an increase of 31 matters from 356 matters in 2023–24 to 387 in 2024–25. Law firms on the NTLSL grew from 43 in 2023–24 to 46 in 2024–25, which provided government more options for private legal services and advice.

One law firm removed themselves from the list, which was Squire Patton Boggs. The reason for this was the closure of their office in Darwin. Three firms were added to the list. One of those firms is local and two are

from interstate. Also, one firm closed their office in Darwin, so they were reclassified as an interstate firm, and that was MinterEllison.

I will take you through the numbers. In 2024–25 the number of matters outsourced was 422. The breakdown of the types of matters is litigation matters, 282; child welfare, 134; commercial matters, 140; and contract procurement was 85.

Mr PAECH: How many of these matters were briefed out to Maleys Barristers & Solicitors?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have looked at the list of the AGD briefings out, and there are none for Maleys lawyers, but what it does not include—and I do not have that right now—is the whole-of-government legal briefings.

Mr PAECH: I would like you to take that on notice, please.

Question on Notice No 5.9

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

Mr PAECH: Could you provide, if any, the number of matters briefed out to Maleys Barristers & Solicitors?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.9.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, I would like to put on notice that I would like the Anti-Discrimination and the Children's Commissioner outputs.

Mr CHAIR: Acknowledged.

J DAVIS: Can you explain what protocols are in place to ensure the independence of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory when legal matters involve potential conflicts between government departments or statutory officers?

Ms LAKE: Can I get an understanding of the question? I can explain how the Solicitor for the NT receives matters and then either makes a decision to keep them in-house or outsource them, but if there is a question about conflict, we would have to ...

J DAVIS: I am interested specifically in how conflict of interest is managed. Is that too broad?

Ms BOOTHBY: If you can be specific in what area the conflict is managed.

J DAVIS: It is when there are potential conflicts between government departments, statutory officers when you are providing legal advice.

Ms LAKE: The Solicitor for the Northern Territory on receiving an instruction has a process where it conducts a conflict check to determine if there are previous matters or other matters. Lawyers are also required as lawyers and as public servants to declare any conflicts of interest that they might have. That is determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on what the circumstances are. If the SFNT, for example, was representing a particular agency on a matter and then perhaps a statutory entity had a matter which involved that agency, SFNT would not be able to represent both of them because they will be conflicted. That is where we would look to outsource matters under the Legal Services List. I hope that has answered the question.

J DAVIS: Yes, that broadly answers it, thank you. If there are declarations of conflict of interest, are they publicly available? Not in terms of department, I understand what you just said. For example, if SFNT would not ...

Ms LAKE: They would be managed internally because they would be declarations by employees, and we would not make them public.

K McNAMARA: Can I ask about the budget for Legal Aid—is that under Legal Services?

Ms BOOTHBY: That would be Output 2.1.

K McNAMARA: I will move on to another one which I believe comes under Legal Services. Since the closure of the Alice Springs youth detention centre, all youth detainees are now held at Holtze outside of Darwin. I understand that this means they can only engage with their legal practitioners over videoconferencing. Could you confirm if that is true? Is that a different output?

Ms BOOTHBY: We do not represent the people in those facilities; that would be under Corrections. NAAJA and Legal Aid NT are the ones meeting with the people in there. It is not part of this government's remit, if you like.

K McNAMARA: I assumed under Legal Services—we cannot talk about how youths are accessing their legal practitioners?

Ms BOOTHBY: We do not represent the people; it would be inappropriate for us to talk about something that is not in our wheelhouse.

K McNAMARA: Are we able to talk about the access people have with specialist services such as the Congress' Child & Youth Assessment & Therapeutic Service, which assesses and diagnoses young people with neurodevelopmental disorders such as FASD and how that is being done over videoconferencing?

Ms BOOTHBY: Because those videoconferencing meetings, or personal meetings, happen in the Corrections facility, I cannot answer those questions under this portfolio.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Solicitor-General

No questions.

Output 1.3 – Crime Victims Services

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

Mr PAECH: With the money in the budget that has been allocated, what work is being done to ensure that victims of crime in remote Aboriginal communities have access to the information and support to access the same level of service?

Ms BOOTHBY: You would know that recently in parliament we increased the victims levy by up to 40% to try to have more funds available for those victim services. I will hand over to Kathryn White to explain some of those services.

Ms WHITE: CVSU has staff who are based in Darwin; however, we work with a number of stakeholders to support applicants throughout the Territory to lodge either an application for financial assistance or for the Victims Register. We are doing a number of things to improve that. One of those is about developing some resources to help victims better understand their rights and what is contained in the Charter of Victims' Rights. That will be made available to all public servants and the external sector to help people understand what their obligations are and what the rights of victims are. We are also looking to institute a community of practice for victims' services so that we can help the sector better support victims and better understand what rights and facilities are out there for victims across the Territory.

Mr PAECH: Through this particular program and investment, is there any work being done by the agency or the victims of crime support unit in remote communities about awareness? Of this portion of funding, how much goes to Aboriginal victims?

Ms WHITE: In terms of the amount of payments that are made and how many of those are made to Aboriginal victims versus non-Aboriginal victims, I have some data on the total number of payments. I am uncertain whether that has been done on the basis of a person's ATSI status.

We have awarded \$4.3m in the reporting period. I would have to take on notice how much of that was made to applicants who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – STRATEGIC POLICY SERVICES
Output 2.1 – Legal and Strategic Policy

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Strategic Policy Services, Output 2.1, Legal and Strategic Policy. Are there any questions?

K McNAMARA: In the budget there was almost \$9m for Legal Aid NT for their demand pressures 2024–25. Then in 2025–26 this will be just \$5.5m. Is this a top-up of the funding that comes from the Commonwealth to fund our public legal services?

Ms BOOTHBY: The money we put in the budget—the \$5.5m ongoing—is in addition to the Commonwealth funding. It is from the Northern Territory Government. It is specifically to address those demand issues that we saw over the last number of years, particularly the last 12 months. That allows Legal Aid to have that certainty so that they can continue to deliver services in a time when demand is growing.

K McNAMARA: Are you able to describe what that \$5.5m covers?

Ms BOOTHBY: The additional \$5.5m funding that the Northern Territory Government provides covers the representation of offenders in the criminal space. It also includes domestic violence legal services.

K McNAMARA: Are you able to tell me how much the Commonwealth and NT Governments will spend together on legal services like NAAJA and Legal Aid NT?

Ms BOOTHBY: We are just adding that up for you.

K McNAMARA: Sure, thank you. I can take that on notice if that will make it easier.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will take that on notice because there is a couple of tricky parts about it.

Question on Notice No 5.10

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

K McNAMARA: Could you tell me how much the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments will spend together on legal services, like NAAJA and Legal Aid NT?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nightcliff has been allocated the number 5.10.

K McNAMARA: Has there been any increase in funding either from NT Government or the Commonwealth Government to ensure that legal and health practitioners are able to travel to Holtze facility—this is where I was going before about the youths who are getting transferred—for them to be able to conduct assessments and progress legal matters?

Ms BOOTHBY: To be clear, the Northern Territory Government funds Legal Aid for those criminal matters and the Commonwealth funds NAAJA for their legal services. The Territory will give funding to Legal Aid to deliver those services in a way that works best for them, and the same for the Commonwealth giving the funds to NAAJA. Under the National Access to Justice Partnership the funds going from the Commonwealth to NAAJA have increased. They will then use those funds based on their operational requirements.

K McNAMARA: On the National Access to Justice Partnership, how much of this funding will the Northern Territory receive each year over the next five years?

Ms BOOTHBY: The NAJP funds coming from the Commonwealth to the Northern Territory in 2025–26 will be a total of \$61.921m; in 2026–27, \$63.283m; in 2027–28, \$64.551m; in 2028–29, \$65.843m; and in 2029–30, \$67.162m. The total of the five-year funding is \$322.760m.

K McNAMARA: How will the funding be distributed to each different type of service?

Ms BOOTHBY: Looking at 2025–26, Legal Aid Commissions will receive \$10.711m; community legal centres will receive \$2.095m; women's legal services will receive \$6.385m; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services will receive \$27.744m; and family violence prevention and legal services will receive \$13.960m.

K McNAMARA: Do you have that breakdown for every year?

Ms BOOTHBY: I do. I can take you through that.

K McNAMARA: Could I just get it on notice to save you reading it all out?

Ms BOOTHBY: I am happy to take it on notice and give that to you. There is a website that is public, and you can get them on that. It is a Commonwealth website. We might have to google it for you.

K McNAMARA: Is the decision about how the funding is allocated made by the Commonwealth or by the Northern Territory Government?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is made by the Commonwealth.

K McNAMARA: It is my understanding that there have been changes to what expenditure can be supported under the NAJP contract; for example, things such as rental assistance for remote areas are now prohibited to some Aboriginal-led legal services. Are these changes due to Commonwealth restrictions or have they been introduced by your department?

Ms BOOTHBY: The scope of the NAJP is defined by the Commonwealth, but I will pass to Ms Janet Hanigan, Executive Director of Strategic Policy Coordination of our department, to explain what that means.

Ms HANIGAN: The NAJP agreement, which is also available online, sets out a very clear scope of what the funding is intended to deliver. In its renegotiation it made specific focus on gender-based violence, so it is clear in terms of its scope, but it allows for flexibility of organisations to take reasonable discretion in terms of how they then deliver their services with the funding provided.

K McNAMARA: Under the previous Commonwealth funding arrangements, these organisations had the autonomy to make decisions that directly supported their wellbeing, retention and upskilling of their workforce, many of whom are Aboriginal women living and working in remote areas. Without these supports now, how are these organisations expected to attract qualified legal staff and retain them in remote communities, or offer basic wellbeing and professional development opportunities?

Ms HANIGAN: As part of the NAJP funding there is a specific stream regarding pay parity. That goes to organisations being able to utilise those funds to manage their workforce in terms of recruitment, retention and development. The manner in which we are working with those organisations is we are leaving it very much open to them in how they manage that.

K McNAMARA: NAAJA is able to provide its staff with airfares, women's legal services can send their staff to conferences and the NT Legal Aid Commission as well as other NT community legal aid services all offer relocation assistance. It seems that these Aboriginal-led family violence legal services are being held to more restrictive standards now under this NAJP contract, while other legal services appear to maintain flexibility in how their funds are used. Would that be accurate?

Ms BOOTHBY: Obviously, it is a Commonwealth agreement.

Ms HANIGAN: No, there is no restriction or any delineation between different organisations and subsectors. It is quite broad deliberately at the Commonwealth level. Certainly from an NT perspective that is how we are administering those funds.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes questioning on Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Criminal Justice Research, Evaluation and Statistics

Mr CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 2.2, Criminal Justice Research, Evaluation and Statistics. Are there any questions?

J DAVIS: Can you briefly outline how criminal justice research and evaluation findings are being used to inform policy and legislative decisions within your portfolio, in particular your recent legislative changes and the trial of the OC spray?

Ms BOOTHBY: As you can see from the officials who are here today, there is a lot of expertise in a lot of areas in the legal and justice system. In this case specifically, I will hand over to Ms Carolyn Whyte, the director of criminal justice research. She has a lot of information she is able to share that might assist with answering the question.

Ms WHYTE: Some of the ways in which we are using our resources are to monitor the effects of legislation and what is happening in terms of bail, the number of people charged, the number of people sentenced, the number of young people who are coming before the court and the number of times different facets of the legislation are being used.

J DAVIS: How is that information being taken into account in the development of new legislation and, specifically as an example, into the proposed trial of OC spray?

Ms BOOTHBY: The way in which we are developing and putting forward new legislation, in the first few tranches we have done—obviously, leading from the election—was we made a commitment, so we went to work on getting that legislation prepared.

The Attorney-General's Department, along with other members of government agencies, all contribute to putting that forward. They have input into what might work and what might need more work, so we take on board that advice from each of the people involved. We want to make sure that the intention we have as ministers putting forward changes in legislation has the desired outcome, which is why we involve the public servants who work across the agencies that the legislation impacts.

The OC spray you mentioned sits with Police under the Firearms and Weapons Acts and policies, so I will not speak to that specifically because it is not within the AGD portfolio, but this was an explanation of how we create that legislation to put forward to parliament, which then goes through the process of parliament.

J DAVIS: When evaluation is used to inform lawmaking—I understand that much of the law you have passed has not been subject to a pre-evaluation process, you said, but when it is—is any of that evaluation publicly available?

Ms BOOTHBY: Legislation and amendments to legislation take all sorts of forms in terms of their creation. If there is a Have Your Say or a wide public consultation, there might be elements of that legislation which is public, and it has been that way historically. Many factors go into it. It is not always made public. There are often conversations across agencies and ministries through the legislation process, but there is always an opportunity for everyone to put forward views or feedback or their own evaluations or evidence that they have, once it is tabled and introduced to parliament. It usually sits on the table for 30 days or more. In other cases it might not—it might be on urgency—but that is the general way in which the legislation is done.

Ms LAKE: There is an evaluation framework that sits with the Department of Treasury and Finance that applies to all government agencies and we work under that framework. When we do a formal evaluation under that framework once it is complete it is published by the Department of Treasury and Finance, so that is a bit of additional information.

J DAVIS: On what basis would you decide to develop a law based on evaluation and research, and on what basis would you decide to just go ahead and do it?

Ms BOOTHBY: That would depend on what is involved. From the outset this first 10 months of legislation that we have introduced, in the main, has been off the back of a Territory election. We took to the election the commitments we would make if we were to be elected. In being elected and having 17 seats we are now delivering on that, which means the evaluation part of it happens as we are starting to work through the legislation—as I said, the different people in the agency who contribute to creating the legislation and how that works through the process.

There have been other pieces of legislation that might have been worked on for a long time. I do not want to pre-empt debate, but we put forward the Defamation legislation which was legislation that had been worked on for a long time in the background. We did not go out to public consultation about that because it has been in the works, and it is national—there are all sorts of reasons why. The point is that it does depend, and so far most of the work that we have done was on the back of our election commitments.

J DAVIS: To be clear, it is not based on any evaluation but based on the election.

Ms BOOTHBY: There are certainly things taken into consideration about the legislation we put forward. There are many facets of putting that together and many people involved in pulling that together, including feedback from the community and the people who are working in that space. That is the work of government in creating legislation which eventually ends up in parliament for the 25 of us parliamentarians to debate and then ultimately pass or not.

K McNAMARA: What are some of the issues that your department faces when establishing data and reporting requirements for a new project?

Ms BOOTHBY: Can I get a bit of clarification or a context?

K McNAMARA: Could you just step us through how the unit is involved in the development of data requirements for monitoring of new projects?

Ms BOOTHBY: When you say projects ...

K McNAMARA: New initiatives like the OC spray.

Ms WHYTE: In developing reporting and data requirements usually we would start by considering what questions we are trying to answer; what the issues, aims or objectives are; and basically set out a monitoring and evaluation framework up-front. From that point we work to what the indicators are that we would like to use to be able to answer those questions, and at that point we start looking at the actual data and whether we have that data available. In some cases, it might involve a project with DCDD to set out the IT requirements if the data is not currently being collected in a way that we can report it. In other cases, it might be just that we develop a new report based on existing data if we have it.

K McNAMARA: In the interests of time, we will move on.

Mr CHAIR: I will go back to Output 2.1 for the Member for Mulka; that is only because we had a prearranged understanding. Member for Mulka, apologies; you made me aware of a question for Output 2.1, so please ask the question.

Mr GUYULA: For Budget 2025–26 has there been an increase or decrease in funding for services that provide alternative dispute mechanisms such as the Community Justice Centre mediation or other alternative dispute resolution programs?

Ms BOOTHBY: To clarify, that is Output 3, but given you have been waiting a long time to ask that, we can attempt to answer it here.

Ms LAKE: I can confirm that the Community Justice Centre's baseline funding has not changed; it has remained the same in this budget. There is some additional funding for the Community Justice Centre, and I will give you some information on that.

The function of the CJC (Community Justice Centre) is to reduce the pressure on other justice services through the resolution of disputes outside the justice system. At the moment the Community Justice Centre is involved in a number of additional projects which are funded through Commonwealth funding. They are the Barkly Regional Deal community mediation initiative, the town camp peace project in Alice Springs, the West Daly Peace Project and the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) peacemaking project. I can provide more information on the funding for those if needed.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Aboriginal Justice

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 2.3, Aboriginal Justice. Are there any questions?

Mr GUYULA: How many staff are working as part of the Aboriginal Justice Unit (AJU), and what salary level are they paid?

Ms BOOTHBY: I introduce Mr Robert Pocock, the Director of the Aboriginal Justice Unit, to help answer that question.

Mr POCOCK: There are currently five FTE employed in the Aboriginal Justice Unit—that is, six staff, with two of them part-time. There is an executive officer 2, which is me; an executive officer 1, who is a deputy director; a senior administrative officer; an AO6 project officer; an administrative officer 5 project officer; and an administrative officer 4 executive assistant.

Mr GUYULA: The Aboriginal Justice Agreement states that by 2027:

... this Agreement aims to:

1. *Reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians.*

Earlier this year the government supported this statement in the motion that I put up before parliament.

When this agreement was signed in 2022 prisoner numbers were approximately 1,900; today prisoner numbers are over 2,800 and growing. Since signing the agreement imprisonment has increased by approximately 47%. Can the minister outline how the government will reduce incarceration by 50% within two years? How will you keep to the agreement, or is the government's commitment untrue?

Ms BOOTHBY: The government continues to support the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. It has those three aims. They are aims that our government is also committed to pursuing. We recognise that we may have a slightly different approach to how we deal with crime and the crime crisis that we have experienced for a long time and that we inherited. We will continue to do that work. We continue to support the framework of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and those endeavours. They line up with the platform that we have which is to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore our Territory lifestyle.

To support medium to long-term solutions, we are developing—I mentioned it in my opening statement—the reducing-crime strategy, and that focuses on prevention, accountability and consequences. That is a comprehensive approach to tackling crime at its source. We have talked a lot over the last 10 months about addressing the root causes. There will be a focus on those root causes within that, as well as across a number of other agencies, which you have no doubt heard all the ministers talk about at every opportunity.

We have those action items that have been implemented, such as the community courts which are operational, the alternatives to custody which are operational and the law and justice groups—we had that conversation earlier today. There are five currently operational and there is one which is working through the steps needed. We are looking to evaluate the outcomes of all those different parts of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement in November 2025 to see whether it is making an impact. We look forward to seeing what the evaluation shows us.

Mr POCOCK: In terms of the reducing-crime strategy, it is still under development and consideration is being given to how the Aboriginal Justice Agreement can work within that strategy. There is clear alignment between the AJA and the strategy relating to prevention, accountability and consequences. For example, those initiatives currently on foot are law and justice groups, community courts and alternatives to custody.

Mr YOUNG: Just picking up on the answer regarding prevention from Mr Robert Pocock, he talked about prevention but all the three supposed preventive measures he outlined are once a person is in touch with the justice system. Can you outline what other preventive measures you have before someone gets in touch with the justice system and how that aligns with the AJA?

Ms BOOTHBY: Crime prevention sits across multiple agencies. We all work hand-in-hand to look at how we can address those root causes. Of course, the prevention of crime is important because we do not want to see it in the first place. The reducing-crime strategy is being developed through the Attorney-General's Department as the lead agency, working hand-in-hand with other agencies.

I will take you through a couple of high-level plans supported by implementation which will focus on five strategic priorities. We want to address the root causes of crime, hold parents and families to account, create a safer community, reduce reoffending, deliver effective justice and reform the system. You can see

by those five priorities that it will sit across multiple agencies. For example, police working on the streets as they do, and parents and families come under Children and Families. We speak a lot about the Circuit Breaker Program and in education, the school truancy officers. A lot of these things will come together in this reducing-crime strategy.

Of course, there will be law changes but also all the other mechanisms in place to allow us to continue to find what is causing the problems that lead people to crime, and work to reduce crime by making sure we are not having it in the first place.

Mr YOUNG: On that, one of the principles within the AJA speaks of the value and support of Aboriginal leadership and local decision-making. What are you doing as Attorney-General, and who are you working with in that space with the AJA? What Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal people are you working with?

Ms BOOTHBY: Five law and justice groups were established. We will continue to evaluate and monitor how they have gone through the community courts ...

Mr YOUNG: Have you ever met with them?

Ms BOOTHBY: We had that conversation earlier about whether I have met with them or not ...

Mr YOUNG: That was a no.

Ms BOOTHBY: The work will continue ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, if you have an interjection, please let me know what it is. If I need to address it with the minister, we can go from there.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will hand over to Robert Pocock to talk about the things that are happening in the community with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and how the implementation is going because it is an important part of the reducing-crime strategy, as well as ensuring that there are those sentences which are in line with the local community and the law and justice group within the community courts.

Mr POCOCK: The staff in my unit have been engaging with the law and justice groups—five currently exist—and their auspicing organisations since taking responsibility for law and justice groups from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet through the machinery-of-government changes.

We also regularly engage with NAAJA in terms of community court operations. My staff have also attended with the community courts registrar in the communities where the law and justice groups are operating to assist with provisional training about community courts.

We also, until recently, had some staff in Alice Springs who were engaging every few weeks with the law and justice group at Kintore. They would travel from Alice Springs and spend days to weeks at a time out there, working to get that group the support it required to get it off the ground.

Mr YOUNG: To note, Attorney-General, you have not met with any of those law and justice groups, just your department. You personally have not met with any of those law and justice groups.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am looking forward to meeting as many of them as I possibly can over the coming months and years as we see the work that they have been doing. They have only been in operation for a relatively short time. As a new Attorney-General I have been focusing on the priorities of implementing a lot of new laws to fix the Territory, and I make no apologies for that.

Mr YOUNG: The law and justice groups are not your priority; is that what you are suggesting there?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Daly, we have established if you feel the question is not being answered or you feel your question has been answered, there is a difference between putting it through the Chair and just saying it. Please bring up an objection with me and then we will go from there.

Ms BOOTHBY: Can I continue my answer?

Mr YOUNG: I just want clarification. Law and justice groups are not a priority for you as the Attorney-General; is that what you are saying?

Ms BOOTHBY: I did not say that they were not a priority. I have a very senior public servant who understands the history of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the unit. Mr Pocock works closely with the law and justice groups, and has outlined the work that he and the department have already undertaken. I have colleagues who are ministers up and down the spine of the Northern Territory who have met with law and justice groups before. I trust the work they have done in terms of chatting with them and understanding what is happening in some of those communities. I look forward to personally going out and meeting some of the law and justice groups, sitting in a community court to see how that goes.

I make no apologies for the work that I have undertaken since becoming the Attorney-General since the election. There has been a mountain of work. I think our actions are proof that the work we have delivered on continues. As a whole government and as a minister, we will continue that work; that will mean going out and visiting Territorians wherever they live. We will do that across multiple ministers at multiple times.

J DAVIS: Part of the Member for Mulka's question was: can you outline how you will reduce incarceration of Aboriginal people by 50% within two years? How are you planning to keep to that agreement?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is a hypothetical question in terms of how and what the results will be. I will say that there are things we are doing differently under our term of government to reduce crime. You have heard us talk at length about those things that we have changed. We have just heard from Mr Pocock about the work they are doing in the Aboriginal Justice Unit about the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. You have heard me talking about the reducing-crime strategy we are working on and the areas we will touch on. You have heard me talk about addressing root causes, holding parents and families to account. Some of that work is already well underway and is showing real results. This is a government of action. We have showed, in our actions, that we are doing the work needed, and that work will continue.

J DAVIS: The question from the Member for Mulka was how you will be reducing incarceration, not reducing crime. It is not a hypothetical question. I am interested in tangible answers.

Ms BOOTHBY: Before I hand over to add a bit more detail regarding some of the specific areas, particularly alternatives to custody, I will say that they are a fairly new option for sentencing as part of those community courts. They have only been in operation in some cases for under a year and in some just over a year. I went through those numbers earlier of the people who appeared before those courts and where sentences have been delivered to an alternative to custody. We also look forward to evaluating that to see what is working and what is not. Obviously, we will look at the data and see where we are sitting with that original target of 2022 in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement—I do not know if I got that exactly right; it has been a number of years.

I will hand over to Mr Pocock, the Director of the Aboriginal Justice Unit, to add to the alternatives to custody. We are working to deliver for those alternatives in those areas under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

J DAVIS: Are the alternatives the only thing in train at the moment to try to reduce incarceration of Aboriginal people?

Ms BOOTHBY: No. There is a number of things we are doing around reducing crime as an overarching theme, and it is across a number of the portfolios. I touched on, and we talk about it in parliament all the time, the Circuit Breaker Program that has family responsibility attached to it. I have touched on the truancy officers getting kids to school. The Education minister is on next, and she will talk about that. There are, of course, our law changes. We know that if there is a reduction in crime there is a reduction in incarceration rates, which is what we want. We will keep doing that work.

Mr POCOCK: I will just run through the two alternative-to-custody facilities currently operating in the NT. There is the life skills camp for Aboriginal women in Alice Springs and the Anindilyakwa Healing Centre on Groote Eylandt for Aboriginal men. Both facilities are currently operated by Drug & Alcohol Services Australia.

In relation to the healing centre, construction of that facility was completed in January 2025. The facility has residential capacity for 32 clients, with day programs commencing in August 2024 upon completion of stage 1 of the facility. As at 31 March 2025 there were 17 clients undertaking day programs and case management at the healing centre. These clients will transition to residential programs with the commencement of residential programs on 31 May. Residential operations will scale up in three phases; four residents in June, doubling to eight in July and 12 in August, before becoming fully operational. This is to allow testing and the adjusting of programs. Day programs will continue at the facility in the meantime.

Drug & Alcohol Services Australia was awarded a service delivery grant in December 2024 to operate the facility for a further 12 months to December 2025. The total amount of that grant is \$3,012,168. Operational funding is available in each of the 2025–26 and 2026–27 financial years for that facility, as it is for the life skills camp. The life skills camp continues to operate with capacity for 10 women. A total of 42 women have completed the six-month residential program since August 2020, with a further seven clients currently nearing completion. Drug & Alcohol Services Australia is currently contracted under a service delivery grant to operate the facility to 30 June 2025. Operational funding of \$1.6m per annum is available in each of the 2025–26 and 2026–27 financial years.

I will talk a bit more about some of the outcomes we have seen out of the life skills camp facility. In terms of the comparison of female reoffending rates versus the reoffending rates for clients of the life skills camp ATC it is complicated doing an apples to apples comparison, but I will attempt it.

The Productivity Commission defines 'reoffending' as:

- *the proportion of people aged 10 years or over who were proceeded against more than once by police during the year*
- *the proportion of adults released from prison after serving a sentence who returned to corrective services (either prison or community corrections) within two years, with a new correctional sanction*
- *the proportion of adults discharged from community corrections orders who returned to corrective services (either prison or community corrections) with a new correctional sanction within two years.*

That data has not been published yet for 2024–25, so the comparison will be based on 2023–24 data that is available to us. As at July 2024, 39 women had successfully completed the life skills camp alternative-to-custody program. Of these, 16 have reoffended, either proceeded against by police or returned to prison. There is a number of variables to consider in attempting to make a binary comparison between the reoffending rates of ATC clients and the female prisoners, as I noted.

Carolyn Whyte's team at research and statistics have provided a comparison, and the rate of female offending in the NT for 2023–24 was 39.58%, whereas the rate of offending for ATC clients was 31.2%, demonstrating the program's success in reducing offending.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will just add that we all have the same goal to reduce incarceration, including of Aboriginal people. We know that the Productivity Commission said—because NAAJA put it in their media release recently—that Aboriginal people in prison in the NT increased by 40% from 2020 to 2024. That is a horrific number, so we acknowledge that and want to make sure it does not increase.

At the same time, our priority has to be that if you are committing crimes there needs to be consequences and accountability, because innocent Territorians and families going about their day become victims and we want to protect them and ensure their rights are upheld over the rights of offenders.

I just wanted to paint the picture that this is not a new problem we are trying to solve. It has been years and decades in the making. We are all committed to this, to make sure that we can reduce incarceration rates, especially for Aboriginal people, because the numbers are so high. We must continue that work and find other ways. Like I said from the outset, our priority is making sure people are safe and reducing crime.

Mr GUYULA: The Aboriginal Justice Agreement also aims to support Aboriginal leaders. Can you outline what is in this budget to meet this aim? What policies and processes support Aboriginal leadership?

Ms BOOTHBY: We have always said that we want to engage with Aboriginal leaders to help us drive down the incarceration rates and support us addressing the root causes of crime. I will hand over to Mr Pocock, the Director of the Aboriginal Justice Unit, to talk through some of the things under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the leadership who they have been working with throughout the Territory.

Mr POCOCK: In terms of supporting leadership of Aboriginal people in communities, the key focus in this budget has been through the ongoing funding of community courts and the rollover of funding in relation to law and justice groups of current NTG funding and the negotiation of funding for additional groups through the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment agreement.

As you would be aware, law and justice groups and community courts are about supporting Aboriginal community leaders to take a stand and be at the forefront of justice in their communities. The funding they

receive supports training for law and justice group members, the ability to visit other law and justice groups to learn from them and allow for participation in the justice system through community court by elders within the community.

In the communities in East Arnhem, Groote, Ramingining and Maningrida, community courts have been operating and there has been, at this stage, anecdotal feedback from the groups that there has been great uptake by the community in the law and justice groups and the community court process. There has been a raising of elders in that process as they are being seen as having responsibility and authority in the justice process, which was not necessarily there prior to these initiatives.

Some examples are from the group at Kintore where there have been elders who have been given supervision of young offenders in community to be able to make sure that they are complying with their orders. That is building respect and giving that responsibility back to community leaders. If the kids or adults are not complying, those elders have the ability to notify the court of noncompliance and work in terms of the options for the court in dealing with that.

Mr GUYULA: Are there any Aboriginal community-controlled programs running on country for early intervention, prevention, diversion or alternatives to prison that come under the Attorney-General's Department? Please provide where the programs are, the organisations and the funding amount they receive.

Ms BOOTHBY: Under the Attorney-General's portfolio we have the alternatives to custody, which we have talked about today. There is one in Groote Eylandt and one in Alice Springs. There are programs which sit under Corrections and early intervention arrangements and programs under Children and Families. They are outside my portfolio.

Mr POCKOCK: There are some of the law and justice groups which run their own programs out on communities. The primary one is the Maningrida Nja-marleya law and justice group. It has been, for some time now, running a youth justice program and a number of youth programs and that supported work through the law and justice group.

There are other law and justice groups operating which are in the process of developing programs for youths. For example, the group at Kintore is looking at establishing a program to get problem youths out of town and into outstations for some timeout from community where they have had behavioural issues. I do not have any further specific data on me presently regarding the programs that each of those groups are running.

Mr GUYULA: As the first law officer, I understand the Attorney-General provides legal and policy advice to the government on human rights matters. On 13 May in the Chamber you stated:

If you do the crime and assault someone, we are not worried about the trauma you may have by being in a watch house or a correctional facility.

But half the people in the prison are innocent until proven guilty because they have not yet been convicted.

As the Attorney-General, your job is to uphold the rights of everyone, including prisoners. What advice is your office providing to the government in relation to the treatment of the NT prisoners?

Ms BOOTHBY: I stand by my comments that if you are caught breaking the law, especially some of those serious violent offences which hurt other people, then if the police arrest you and you find yourself before the court and you have to wait for your court date incarcerated, then that is what has to happen because we cannot accept the levels of violence in our community. We must deal with those who are offending to make the Territory a better place because those levels of crime are just unsustainable.

These problems we have with numbers of people in remand and days in remand have not just appeared overnight; it has been a long time coming. It is a terrible state of affairs that we find ourselves in. I look back and think that is because over nearly a decade we have had no or very little accountability or consequences for offenders. The rights of offenders, time and again, were put above the rights of victims. We were elected as a new government to change that. That is exactly what we have done.

We still have a huge mess to clean up. In the short 10 months we have been in government we have made a lot of changes. The impact of that is incremental and small. Even the days that people are on remand is quite small. It is a slight decrease in the number of days on remand in our court system compared to what it was.

We will continue to make the changes that are necessary to make our community safe and reduce crime. I question anyone who is thinking about the trauma that is caused by being incarcerated. What about the trauma of the victim? The victim has gone through something horrendous. Those people who perpetrated their crime on the victim need to be held to account and face a court, and for the system to determine whether they are guilty and, if they are guilty, a consequence for that.

J DAVIS: To confirm, you are not worried about the trauma that someone may have by being in a watch house or correctional facility, knowing that two people can have trauma at the same time. As the Member for Mulka said, your job is to uphold the rights of everyone, including prisoners.

Ms BOOTHBY: My priority lies with striking and changing the balance, I guess, from where we were in putting the rights of offenders above the rights of victims ...

J DAVIS: I am interested in a yes or no answer, thank you.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is not really a yes or no answer I can give to the question. It deserves the explanation of the fact that law-abiding Territorians are our priority, next to victims of crime that is perpetrated against them. Whilst neither watch houses or correctional facilities are in my portfolio, they are places for people to be held until they face court or their sentence in some cases. Then, of course, they go through rehabilitation. That whole system has been broken or is breaking under a huge mess which was not created in the last 10 months. In fact, we are working to try to solve the problems that we have in the Territory. I will keep doing that work and putting the rights of victims above the rights of criminals.

J DAVIS: I have further questions, but in the interests of time I will move on. I have one last question, which is under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement under this output.

Under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, part of the agreement says it will revisit and review relevant reports, inquiries and recommendations from royal commissions. This would include reviewing the Aboriginal deaths in custody recommendation that police do not investigate police deaths in custody. Will this government, through the AJA, support an independent inquiry into Kumanjayi White's death?

Ms BOOTHBY: Our government has been clear from that moment in time of the tragic incident. It is a sad time for a lot of people in our community. We have been clear that we will not interfere with that investigation. That will take its course. The police will do their investigation and the Coroner will do hers, then the outcomes of those will be presented to government. We will look at that then.

Mr CHAIR: We will now take a five-minute break. This will be the last break of this session, so please utilise it if you need.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – JUSTICE SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Higher Courts

No questions.

Output 3.2 – Lower Courts

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Lower Courts. Are there any questions?

J DAVIS: In action plan 2, funding was provided for the specialist domestic and family violence court in Alice Springs and provided for developing training. Can you advise what the outcome was of that funding? In action plan 2 it says that it was to develop training and deliver it to judges and legal services.

Ms BOOTHBY: I can confirm the Local Court received additional funding in Budget 2025–26 for activities associated with the domestic and family violence court of \$1.068m in 2025–26, \$9.598m over five years and \$2.554m ongoing. That funding provides support for the existing Alice Springs specialist court, including the employment of a registrar, legal support workers, non-legal support workers, legal training and program

evaluation. The funding also provides for expansion of the domestic and family violence court to two or more sites in 2027–28.

J DAVIS: I am specifically interested in the outcomes of the funding to develop training.

Ms BOOTHBY: I introduce Mr Chris Cox PSM, the Executive Director of Justice Services, to answer.

Mr COX: We are currently developing a training plan for that budget. We received a specific allocation this year. We are currently working with the project control group now to roll out that training. The training will be for judges and for lawyers.

J DAVIS: Is that allocated funding still existing?

Mr COX: Yes.

J DAVIS: I also note that \$0.6m was provided to AGD for funding legal services to provide representation as part of the specialist court. Can you advise what legal services that funding was allocated to and what date the grants commenced?

Ms BOOTHBY: We do not have that level of detail, but we are happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.11

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

J DAVIS: In action plan 2, funding of \$0.6m was provided to AGD for legal services to provide representation as part of the specialist domestic and family violence court in Alice Springs. What legal services were this funding allocated to, and what dates did the grants commence?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.11.

J DAVIS: In action plan 2, \$180,000 was allocated to AGD to undertake an external evaluation of the domestic and family violence specialist court. Has this evaluation occurred?

Mr COX: We are currently developing an evaluation plan, and there will be an evaluation during 2025–26.

J DAVIS: Just to clarify, will the money put aside for that be used for that evaluation plan?

Mr COX: That is correct.

J DAVIS: Under the NT *Coroners Act*, I understand that if the Coroner makes recommendations to a CEO of any agency, they must provide a response within three months of receiving the recommendations from the Attorney-General. Noting that the Coroner handed down her report into domestic, family and sexual violence deaths, which included 35 recommendations to a number of agencies on 25 November 2024, what date were agency CEOs informed of the recommendations by the Attorney-General, and when did the agencies respond?

Ms BOOTHBY: To clarify, is it the DV coronial that you are referring to? I have that information here.

J DAVIS: Yes.

Ms BOOTHBY: On 25 November 2024 the Territory Coroner, Judge Elisabeth Armitage, wrote to the Attorney-General—me—under section 35 of the Act, forwarding a copy of the coronial findings regarding the deaths of Ms Rubuntja, Hayward, Yunupingu and Ragurk, the deceased persons.

I wrote to the CEO or commissioners of the following agencies requesting a response to the recommendation relevant to their agency: Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; Department of Children and Families;

Department of Health; Department of Corrections; Attorney-General's Department; and Northern Territory Police.

The Department of Children and Families coordinated a whole-of-government response to the domestic violence coronial, incorporating input from other responsible agencies. The response has been finalised. I received the final agency response in mid-May. Under the Act, the next step is to report on the Coroner's report and recommendations and the agency responses to the Coroner's report and recommendations. With the timing of the final response, that report was not ready for the May sittings. We are now working closely with the Department of Children and Families to complete the full report for tabling in the next sittings.

J DAVIS: Given that it is seven months since those recommendations came down, is the expectation that it will be tabled in the next sittings?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, it will be tabled. However, I add that a lot of the work that the recommendations highlighted has already begun through the agencies. Once the response is tabled in the next sittings—we have had lots of commentary about the recommendations and a lot of discussions in parliament about the things we have already implemented based on those recommendations.

Mr KERLE: We had a few high-profile and very important coronials in the last few years. Do you have any information about how much they might have cost compared to, say, the median cost of coronials previously—specifically, the Walker coronial and the domestic violence coronial that we were just talking about?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will hand over to Mr Cox to answer.

Mr COX: Can I ask what the question is again?

Mr KERLE: Sorry; I will restate the question for you. I am curious how much the Walker coronial and the domestic violence coronial cost. You can potentially look at what the average of other coronials is. They are very important coronials and we have invested quite significantly in them.

Mr CHAIR: How many coronials have been done in the reporting period?

Ms BOOTHBY: We will have to take both questions on notice,

Mr CHAIR: Member for Blain, are you happy to add my question, being how many, in your question?

Mr KERLE: Yes. Are we looking at all coronials that are covered by the reporting period, as they would start before and finish after, or just the ones which are completed within the coronial period?

Question on Notice No 5.12

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

Mr KERLE: How many coronials were completed during the reporting period, and how much did the Walker and the domestic violence coronials cost? Could you also include the median cost of coronials in the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.12.

J DAVIS: I am going back to my question about the response to the coronial recommendations. I think you said you got the response from DCF in May.

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes. I received the final agency response in mid-May. As I said, we did not make the cut-off for the May sittings.

J DAVIS: Would it be possible to get a copy of that response?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is what will be tabled in the July sittings.

J DAVIS: Will it be your report that is tabled in the July sittings?

Ms BOOTHBY: It will be my report and it includes the agencies' recommendations.

J DAVIS: Would it be possible to get a copy of the report prior to the next lot of sittings?

Ms BOOTHBY: That particular part of the response is owned by the Department of Children and Families, and I cannot answer on their behalf. The response will be tabled in parliament in July.

J DAVIS: It could be a question to the relevant minister.

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal
Output 3.4 – Registrar-General
Output 3.5 – Parole Board

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS
Output 4.1 – Director of Public Prosecutions

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – INDEPENDENT OFFICES
Output 5.1 – Anti-Discrimination Commission

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 5.0, Independent Offices, and Output 5.1, Anti-Discrimination Commission. Are there any questions?

Mr YOUNG: Why was its funding subsequently reduced from \$1.924m in 2024–25 to \$1.655m in 2025–26?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Anti-Discrimination Commission has a decrease overall of \$269,000, of which \$240,000 is due to the finalisation of short-term funding reallocated from within the Attorney-General's Department budget for volume, and \$50,000 is due to the finalisation of sexual harassment bystander training that was delivered in partnership with the Department of Children and Families. There is an increase of \$21,000 in NTG parameters.

Mr YOUNG: Did the commissioner request additional resources to manage the anticipated increase in workload due to recent legislative changes?

Ms BOOTHBY: I am happy for the commissioner to answer that question.

Mr YOGARATNAM: Yes, we put in a request for additional funding for additional resources as a result of the reforms that came to the commission but also in relation to ongoing need for complaints officers to manage the backlog of complaints that we have at the commission.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will add to the commissioner's response. The reason we gave that top-up funding for that short-term allocation was exactly for what the commissioner described—the \$240,000.

Mr YOGARATNAM: I will just clarify. The additional \$240,000 was not made for purposes of the resourcing needs in relation to complaints officers; that was the contingency fund that was put to the commission in relation to operationalising some parts of the new reforms. For example, we needed to build capabilities of our own staff in relation to the positive duty reform that came in, so we used some funding from there for that purpose. However, none of that funding was for purposes of the long-term needs in relation to additional resources of complaints officers but also then the long-term needs in relation to operationalisation of the new reforms that came to our commission, especially in relation to positive duty, so the answer would be no.

Mr YOUNG: How will the reduction in funding impact the commission's capacity to effectively handle complaints related to disability, sex or racial discrimination, which your 2023–24 annual report identifies have significantly increased?

Mr YOGARATNAM: Without the additional funding, that has clearly provided a backlog resourcing issue for us in terms of the number of complaints we have. We manage about 300 complaints that are handled every year. At the moment we have only two complaints officers. Their load is about 30 to 40 cases a year. That has put a real wedge in terms of managing the ongoing matters at the commission. What was requested in terms of actual funding that has not come to the commission has created a greater backlog for us in terms of complaints at the commission that we are handling at the moment.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will add to that. The positive duty legislation that was introduced in 2022—the former government had not put forward any funding for that either, and it now just continues on.

Mr YOUNG: Given the rise in racially motivated incidents and hate speech nationwide, do you consider the existing NT legislative framework and protections adequate for effectively responding to and preventing racial vilification and discrimination?

Ms BOOTHBY: Just to clarify, I think you might be asking the commissioner for an opinion.

Mr CHAIR: I will uphold that. It is an opinion of the commissioner. Could you rephrase it in a way that he can answer without giving an opinion.

Mr YOUNG: Do the existing NT legislative framework and protections effectively respond to preventing racial vilification and discrimination?

Mr YOGARATNAM: The current version of the vilification provision in relation to section 20A is sufficient for our purposes in terms of meeting the needs of vilification in the Northern Territory, hence there was no need to look into amending or repealing it. From the commission's perspective, the current provision in section 20A is sufficient.

J DAVIS: I think these were questions you suggested we put when the commissioner was here. Can you advise, in the reporting period, how many vilification complaints have been received by the commission?

Mr YOGARATNAM: To date, the statistics we have show that we received about 46 vilification matters at the commission.

J DAVIS: How many of them were accepted?

Mr YOGARATNAM: For this financial year the vilification complaints accepted were three out of the 46.

J DAVIS: How many were conciliated?

Mr YOGARATNAM: The number conciliated is zero to date.

J DAVIS: Can you outline what protected attributes the complaints were in relation to?

Mr YOGARATNAM: The protected attributes vilification complaints were in relation to race, religious belief or activity, gender identity and disability.

J DAVIS: How would the commission generally handle those complaints?

Mr YOGARATNAM: That is a good question. Generally, when we receive a complaint within our case management system, we first put it through a process where we consider whether it is trivial, vexatious or has no ground. That goes through the usual complaint management process. Once it has gone through that process, then we consider the substantive law elements in relation to vilification in section 20A. That requires us to look into not a subjective standard but an objective standard. That needs to be made really clear. It is an objective standard that we apply, not a subjective standard in terms of how we assess it. We clearly apply jurisprudence in relation to the vilification provision in using provisions that come from either the Commonwealth position or other jurisdictions that use similar principles.

J DAVIS: For example, if I were offended by this glass of water, that would not be taken as a complaint.

Mr YOGARATNAM: That would not be taken as a complaint. It is important to note that these vilification complaints are only in relation to statements that are made in public and the threshold for assessment is a high threshold, not a low threshold. This is why it is the job of the commission through the first assessment process, from a complaints management perspective from looking at whether it is trivial or vexatious, we then put it through the substantive law element. So, things like your jokes at the pub et cetera would not amount to vilification in the context of the way in which we assess it. A mere joke in itself, clearly if that joke is one that incites hatred in relation to one of the 24 protected attributes—like race, gender, identity or disability—then that would be something we need to consider, but it is based on an objective standard not a subjective standard in relation to someone just feeling precious about the matter.

J DAVIS: I understand you have seen a copy of the new Bill; is that correct?

Mr YOGARATNAM: No, I have not seen a copy of the new Bill.

J DAVIS: Given what you know of it in the public space, do you feel that it is going to assist with your work? That may be an opinion.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, that is just a straight opinion. Can you rephrase.

J DAVIS: Given what you have outlined in terms of how you currently investigate complaints the fact is from what I heard only two of the 40 complaints that were made to the commission were actually accepted?

Mr YOGARATNAM: Three.

J DAVIS: Three, sorry. From the perspective of the commission are there needs to strengthen that Act? That is not really my question.

Mr CHAIR: We are going to opinion again.

J DAVIS: You have given us some useful information, thank you, commissioner. It is useful in terms of what we are talking about in relation to potentially change laws. How do we take that information into account and whether it has been taken into account in the development of the new laws?

Mr YOGARATNAM: The current version of section 20A, the vilification provision, I think is one of the strongest pieces of vilification law that is already in place. It is highly visionary in terms of where we are going with that reform. I think it is one that, and perhaps this is an opinion piece, we need to protect in the Northern Territory. Any other version of the vilification provision would be watering it down. What we say at the commission is that the current version holds, and it is the strongest piece of vilification law that we have in Australia and there is no need for further amendments to that provision.

Ms BOOTHBY: To add to that, to be clear, having the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner next to me, the decision on the changes to the current Act is based on government policy. We are listening to the community, and we have now taken steps based on that information. That will be brought forward to parliament in July. I wanted to make that clear for the committee and for yourself.

J DAVIS: Based on the data that we have heard, currently vexatious complaints are not part of the commission's work. They may come there, but you do not do anything to ...

Mr YOGARATNAM: If the matter is a vexatious matter then that is the first point in which it is sieved through, and it does not progress further.

It is also important to note for a point of clarification that the current section 20A is drafted with the words 'offensive behaviour', taking note that there is some unease in terms of reference to the words 'offensive behaviour'. However, it must be noted even the section 37A that is being considered now for re-enactment also has the offending provision in it, so it is interesting to note that there is a different view and the unease in relation to the use of 'offensive' in one provision where it is in relation to one protected attribute which is religion, but not the other which applies to all 24 protected attributes.

Ms BOOTHBY: We are talking about the budgets and the output, and this is a government policy position. I went through a lot of stuff in detail this morning. It still has to be introduced into parliament; we are not at that stage yet.

Mrs ZIO: I have a follow-up question in relation to the vilification matters that have come before—46, and only three have been accepted. Can you please give us an idea of how much time, resourcing and money was spent on disregarding the remaining 43 that were not accepted? How much in terms of resources does it take for your Anti-Discrimination Commission to clear and say, 'There is no argument here'?

Mr YOGARATNAM: I will have to take that on notice because we do not have stats or collect data in terms of how much time has been spent on matters that we have not considered. Is that what you are saying?

Mrs ZIO: I am assuming there is a process that you undertake to be able to disregard those matters and then provide a response saying, 'We are not taking on these matters'. I am wondering how much time and resources that takes. I am happy to take that on notice as well, but if you can give an idea how many hours each complaint takes just to understand whether or not you will accept it or not.

Mr YOGARATNAM: Generally speaking, by way of the legislation, it is within three months, but because we have a backlog of cases we have now put it to many of these new complainants that we can only allocate it after six months, if at all. In terms of answering your question, from a general perspective it would be three months.

Mrs ZIO: That is a required response time. If you have a staff member who receives a complaint, how long does it take them to assess whether or not it is accepted? Does it take a day, a week, a month for them to assess all the components to determine whether or not it is accepted?

Mr YOGARATNAM: It depends. Every matter has a different complexity to it. There is no straightforward answer to your question. Generally, once the matter has been allocated and the parties and the wheels of the process go into play, it would take between three and six months. It really depends. It is not a straightforward answer. If you want, we can do some case studies for you and take that on notice.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Fannie Bay, would you like some case studies on notice?

Mrs ZIO: Yes.

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

Mrs ZIO: Could the commissioner please provide an overview, of the 43 out of the 46 cases presented that were not accepted as a suitable case, in terms of how long did it take and what was the resourcing and the financial cost to determine that they were not acceptable cases to take? Does that make sense? You can give an overview; you do not necessarily have to give specific case studies. I am assuming that staff take time on each of those 43 cases and resources go into determining that is not an acceptable case.

Mr YOGARATNAM: If the case was one that has not been accepted based on the first sieve, which is the fact that it was frivolous or vexatious, then it will take minimal time. We are not talking here about the 43 cases. There are over 300 complaints that are not vilification related but discrimination related, as to the reason why we are requesting more resourcing and funding.

Clearly with the 43 vilification cases that were not accepted, they also have to go through their own process in terms of verification and case management. I cannot give you a number in terms of how long it took. Each one of them would have taken a different period of time.

In terms of the resourcing and funding that has been put into each one of those cases, we only have two complaints officers at the commission. It is really time cost that we need to peg against an AO7 and an AO6 who are managing those matters.

Mr CHAIR: Do you have a question on notice?

Mrs ZIO: Yes. I would like to get an understanding of the cost involved for cases that do not progress, whether it is vilification or discrimination. I would like to get an understanding of the kind of resources that go into determining that something is not suitable for following through on.

Mr YOGARATNAM: It may be best that we take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.13

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

Mrs ZIO: Can the commissioner please provide an overview of the cost involved in cases that do not progress, in terms of resources and financial expenditure?

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, do you accept the question?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 5.13.

J DAVIS: Attorney-General, I note in your media release you said that you had consulted with the commissioner in relation to the changes. What were his recommendations?

Ms BOOTHBY: I spoke about this earlier today. Before the election, in 2022 we were talking about repealing the whole section 20A. When I met with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, we had in-depth conversations about the fact that if we did remove that altogether, a full straight repeal, that there may be some unintended consequences for making that policy decision as a government. Those conversations are valued, and we took on board the information and feedback. We have now come forward with the amended version of not repealing section 20A in its entirety, keeping it there, but altering the words.

J DAVIS: Are you able to share his specific recommendations?

Ms BOOTHBY: I think I answered this earlier today in response to the Member for Gwoja's question in relation to those meetings that were held. They were face-to-face meetings in my office. I am not aware or can recall any documentation around that.

J DAVIS: Is the commissioner able to answer that question?

Ms BOOTHBY: I am happy for him to answer the question about the feedback he gave me.

Mr YOGARATNAM: Our recommendations were, one, to retain the current version of section 20A and section 20B and, two, not to revive or re-enact section 37A. In relation to section 37A the recommendation was that it was legally redundant because to date there are no matters that—at the time it was repealed or the historical reference to section 37A there have been no cases brought in for exemption at the commission.

Also, there are other provisions that are already providing exemptions, in section 35 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act* and also in section 51. There was no case for a need for another exemption that then impacts certain attributes like sexuality and other religious beliefs.

Ms BOOTHBY: We are now consulting in the community, and part of that consultation was with the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. That consultation will continue now there have been those adjustments because we are listening to the community across the Territory and different groups.

K McNAMARA: In terms of 20A, there were 46 complaints and only three were accepted. It is an objective standard, not a subjective one, with a very high threshold. This goes against the recommendations of the commissioner, so it is fair to say that the idea of people getting into trouble for cracking jokes at a barbecue is factually incorrect under the current standard; is that right?

Ms BOOTHBY: No, that is not entirely accurate. The standard of an objection measurement of how a person feels about a statement is emotional, so it cannot be subjective.

K McNAMARA: But not subjective; it is objective threshold.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is based on common law and case law. There are plenty of cases; therefore, it is subjective in its very nature.

K McNAMARA: You are intending to reinstate 37A of the *Anti-Discrimination Act*; is that confirmed?

Ms BOOTHBY: Not in its entirety. We have inserted a new section, which will be introduced in parliament in July. Basically, it is not exactly how it was. What we have done is included protections for religious institutions so that they can continue to hire people faith-based without finding themselves in court.

K McNAMARA: We already have provisions that protect occupational needs in section 35 which balance religious freedoms with the rights of other. The point is being made that reintroducing these things in 37A is redundant, legally confusing and symbolically harmful. Why is your government misleading people by saying there are no provisions for religious freedoms in hiring when there is in section 35?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will state again what I have been saying most of the morning about these changes. We promised the community that we would make these changes. We are now putting in place those protections because we believe in religious freedoms and being able to continue to teach the faith in faith-based institutions.

K McNAMARA: Which they already have, though, under section 35.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, come to me if you ...

K McNAMARA: I know; time is ticking.

Mr CHAIR: If your question is answered, just say, 'Chair, I think the question is answered'.

K McNAMARA: Chair, I think the question is answered.

Reinstating this religious exemption under section 37A would permit religious schools to discriminate against staff based on sexuality or beliefs; is that correct?

Ms BOOTHBY: The changes are not exactly the same as what they were. We have not referred to any attributes in that part of the Act. What we have said is that they can now hire based on faith and that if there is any cause for future issues, it cannot be based on attribute; it needs to be based on conduct. For example, if there are some problems in the workplace, they cannot discriminate against an attribute. They can only discriminate against a conduct.

K McNAMARA: I think my question is answered.

Mr CHAIR: Attorney-General, if you could briefly sum up; otherwise, we will go to the next question. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have answered the question.

Mrs ZIO: I wanted to check—how long have you been advocating for additional funding for the commission?

Mr YOGARATNAM: I have been advocating for additional funding since I got into commission in August 2023, and I believe that advocacy is one that my predecessor was advocating for prior to that.

Mrs ZIO: Do you have any reasons as to why that was declined in the past?

Mr CHAIR: If it is not in this reporting period, I do not think we need to ...

Mr YOGARATNAM: Mr Chair, it was in this reporting period for some of the requests that we have put for additional funding. My understanding was that because there were other priorities—there is a need to understand that we are doing frontline services at the commission, so the response was that it was meant to be diverted or prioritised to other frontline services when, in fact, the commission's work in discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation are very much frontline services work too.

Ms BOOTHBY: I might add to that. I cannot speak for the past government, but in our new government we were inherited a very large debt. Operationally, there is not a lot to go around, so we had to do the reprioritisation and focus on things like the Local Court, the DPP and Legal Aid, so the budget bids from the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner—it was a policy decision of government of reprioritisation. We could not make all the money go around to all the places it was needed. We had to make that tough decision and invest those funds into those broken systems, which I have spoken about today.

J DAVIS: Did you say that there have not been any complaints in the past under what will now be 37A?

Mr YOGARATNAM: There have not been any complaints. Clearly, that provision was repealed in the previous financial year, and even in the previous financial year, historically, there were no complaints in relation to section 37A to my knowledge since I came in as commissioner in August 2023.

J DAVIS: Do you know if there were any prior to your time?

Mr YOGARATNAM: From what we have done in terms of the data mining just to prepare for this, there have been no cases that I am aware of.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes this session. On behalf of the committee, I thank all of you for being involved. Thank you, Attorney-General, for attending and appearing before us today.

Final points—I like giving my stats. In today's session in 309 minutes of question time, government questions were 20 minutes, which was 6.4%.

I am pleased to let the Member for Gwoja know that he is officially off his warning, and look forward to him rejoining the committee.

The committee will take a short break and resume at 3.30 pm with questions for the Minister for Education and Training.

Ms BOOTHBY: Mr Chair, I thank all the committee members, and the officials who joined me at the table.

I am sorry we did not get to many of the outputs, including a whole other agency and portfolio. I know the work you do is beneficial for the whole of the Territory. Thank you for all the work you have done and will be continuing to do in the portfolios.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I say a big special thank you to Tourism and Hospitality and Territory Wildlife Parks and for what I know would have been a huge body of work in preparing for today. Unfortunately, we could not get to them. The committee gives our sincere thanks for that work.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER HERSEY'S PORTFOLIOS

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

EARLY EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome to day four of Estimates. My name is Laurie Zio, and I am Deputy Chair and Member for Fannie Bay. I welcome everybody and say hello. Education, as most people know, is my previous area of work. Hello to everybody who is watching from Education.

I welcome you, minister, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Mrs HERSEY: I am pleased to introduce officials from the Department of Education and Training who are appearing with me at today's hearing. We have Susan Bowden, Chief Executive Officer; Paul Van Holsteyn, Deputy Chief Executive Officer; Aderyn Chatterton, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Early Years and School Services; Tony Considine, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Strategic and Business Services; and Jasmin Aldenhoven, Chief Financial Officer.

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

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

Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Education and Training.

Mrs HERSEY: It is an honour to be at my first Estimates as the Minister for Education and Training.

Our government is investing a record \$1.55bn in Education and Training. This includes \$120m for vocational training and higher education. The 2025–26 budget allocates \$976.6m for government education, an increase of \$52.5m to the prior year. It allocated \$343.3m for non-government education, an increase of \$10.2m to the prior year. The 2025–26 budget is an increase of \$66.5m compared with the 2024–25 budget. This increase is primarily driven by additional NT and Commonwealth funding under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement.

The 2025–26 budget will support delivery of key government priorities, including creating pathways to employment; reforming secondary education; improving school attendance; expanding qualified school counsellors in schools; boosting literacy and numeracy; providing free swimming lessons for all primary school children; and keeping and attracting our teacher workforce.

Demonstrating our government's commitment to training and higher education, the sector will receive a \$10.2m boost in this budget, bringing the total investment to \$28.6m to support apprenticeships and traineeships. Recognising the importance of students needing choice in their education journey, our government is pursuing an ambitious agenda aimed at specifically increasing youth participation in these career pathways.

We are implementing the Skills NT Plan which will support the vision of the Northern Territory Economic Strategy 2025 by targeting energy, Defence, agriculture, mining and tourism.

Work is taking place with businesses, industry and the community to build the NT's workforce, including strengthening partnerships between industry and schools. We are further supporting the creation of meaningful employment pathways through reforming secondary education to ensure all students can finish school and move to jobs and training.

In urban areas, government schools are shifting away from middle schools, Years 7 to 9, to comprehensive schools, Years 7 to 12, to improve retention, Year 12 completion and post-school outcomes. The department has been engaging with middle and senior school parents, students and staff across Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs. The department has also engaged peak and representative bodies, conducting over 30 stakeholder consultation sessions across the NT. A staged transition is planned to begin from next year, 2026.

After eight years of Labor, school attendance levels hit record lows. The Northern Territory had 1,628 students who were on the intensive support roll, a list of students who have not attended school for 20 days or more. This list was kept secret by Labor and used to try to make their school attendance figures look better. We took a plan to the election to raise school attendance and get kids back to school. Since the rollout of our school attendance officers, as of week eight, Term 1 this year, there were 1,164 students on the intensive support roll, a decrease of 464.

Our government has a clear focus of getting children in school and holding parents accountable. This year new legislation was introduced to support the important work of school attendance officers by enshrining their role in legislation. To support this, the 2025–26 budget includes \$12.9m to boost school attendance through the school attendance officer program with the overarching goal to increase school attendance rates, protect vulnerable children from disengaging from our education system and ensure that every child in the NT has access to the education they deserve.

During Term 1 of 2025 to support raising school attendance and holding parents accountable, school engagement and attendance officers conducted 2,597 compliance visits, with 1,539 of these having successful outcomes. Compliance visits focus on educating parents and families about the legal requirements to send children to school and are a primary step in holding parents accountable and the compliance process. During this period, 188 compliance notices and 26 infringement notices were issued to families of chronically disengaged children across the NT. In addition, 121 compliance and infringement notices were revoked, evidencing that compliance is working and families are responding.

Students who have been absent for 20 or more consecutive days for unnotified or unacceptable absences are placed on the intensive support roll. These students are the priority cohort of school attendance officers. During Term 1 of 2025 the number of students on the roll—which will be different from what I just said, in

case there is confusion on the numbers—decreased by 273 compared to the same period in 2024. This is further evidence that government's tough approach to holding parents to account is having an impact.

In Term 1 of 2025 as part of the department-led campaign to raise school attendance, staff from the department visited Katherine High School to engage with students and promote the importance and lifelong impact of attending school every day. This opportunity created positive connections, meaningful conversations with students, sharing information on the role of school attendance and engagement officers and the work they do to support students, families and schools.

A recent successful re-engagement is a Katherine High School student with chronic non-attendance who the team have worked with for more than a year. Through strong collaboration between the team, family and school they were able to create a modified timetable, allowing flexibility for the student to build up their capacity to work towards attending school every day.

Our government has committed to keeping students and teachers safe through the expansion of properly resourced counsellors based in schools. Budget 2025–26 provides \$1.9m to expand qualified school counsellors in schools. School counsellors have historically been qualified social workers or psychologists who hold professional registration with the relevant professional board. There is a national skills shortage of these professionals. To strengthen service delivery, the department has been working with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment to broaden school counsellor qualifications, redesigning existing roles, and have established a dedicated team of school counsellors based full-time in schools, supported by team leaders responsible for professional supervision and practice standards.

From Semester 2 of 2025 there will be 10 school counsellors based in designated schools, with numbers of school-designated counsellors progressively increasing through to 2028. This will see more schools receiving a dedicated school-based counsellor over time. All schools will continue to receive wellbeing support and services, including student counselling from qualified social workers and psychologists through multidisciplinary support teams.

For NT children to get the jobs of the future and be competitive, educational results must be improved. We have committed to getting back to basics by investing \$14.23m to boost literacy and numeracy in government schools. By launching the Boosting Literacy and Numeracy Plan, we are helping every student to have the strongest start in life by investing in what matters most—foundational literacy and numeracy.

The plan ensures there is an evidence-based approach to teaching that reflects how children learn best. The plan requires explicit instruction in reading and mathematics by providing teachers with guidance, resources and professional learning, ensuring all students learn foundational skills and helping students who need additional support. High-quality resources, professional learning and advice provided to our NT Government schoolteachers will help reduce teacher workloads. Through this plan, every NT Government school will embrace a consistent evidence-based approach to explicit teaching that reflects how children learn best so that every learner can thrive and Territorians of all ages are learning the skills and developing capabilities to contribute to the Territory's economic and social future.

Gray Primary School has a whole-school focus on improving student reading through explicit teaching of phonics in the early years. Students are supported in their reading progress through high-quality teaching, a focus on understanding where each student is at and providing explicit teaching to support them to continue to develop their reading skills. Student progress is monitored and celebrated through a whole-school data wall, with each student able to speak to how their reading is going and celebrate their growth.

The status quo is not an option for our government when it comes to attracting and keeping teachers. That is why before the election we made a commitment by giving them financial security, moving them off short-term contracts into permanent places. Our commitment is to increase the permanent classroom teacher workforce to 75% by 2027, and we are well on the way to achieving this. As of now, 69% of classroom teachers are permanent employees—an increase of 6.7 points compared to the same time last year.

The 2025 budget provides \$13.84m to attract and keep teachers in government schools and includes a focus on increasing the retention of teachers by moving them from short-term contracts into permanent places, so they can put down roots in the NT. Increasing the safety and wellbeing of teaching staff is also a priority, with government introducing tougher penalties for assaults on teachers.

For all primary school students, Years 1 to 6, in government and non-government schools we have committed \$3m in 2025 to fund free swimming and water safety lessons. This investment will ensure that all children learn essential life-changing swimming and water safety skills as part of their education, and is part of the

broader initiative to provide cost-of-living relief, reducing financial burden on families. Fourteen swimming providers are delivering these important lessons.

We have done a lot in almost 10 months of government. We have grown strong foundations and are building strong outcomes for the future. This is critical to ensure every child has a chance to get to school, learn and contribute to the Territory.

I say a sincere thank you to all the principals, teachers, educators and staff across every early years service and schools throughout the Territory. Your dedication and tireless efforts are truly appreciated and make a huge difference in the lives of our children and young people.

Thank you also to the staff in the Department of Education and Training for their support and hard work in preparing briefings for the Estimates process, which has been a significant effort.

I am happy to now take questions, Chair.

Mr PAECH: You spoke about classrooms. I want to get an understanding from you. Given you said that it is a priority to get kids to school, how does the department or you justify the reduction of \$8.7m in the budget for Alekarenge School?

Mrs HERSEY: While we go to that brief—as you would know, being part of the previous government—we came into government last August with an \$11bn debt. There were many things that were already in train across the infrastructure projects. That is something you would have been well aware of. I note there were four Education ministers in your term of government. I ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I am not interested in how many ministers; I am interested in whether you confirm that there has been an \$8.7m reduction in Alekarenge School?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr PAECH: She needs to do it, then.

Mrs HERSEY: As this is the first question, you need to calm down a little. We have plenty of time to get the answer to your questions. As I continue to say, that project had been on the infrastructure project list for some time under your government and you chose to not do anything with it.

With an \$11bn debt that we came into, there had to be some reprioritising for Alekarenge School. Yes, I had to break that news to the Member for Barkly. I cannot tell you how disappointed he was, but as the Education minister we had to reprioritise that money because there is not enough money in the infrastructure budget to build the things that were already in train.

Mr PAECH: I want to correct you; you are misleading. There was cash allocated towards that project. That was in the last budget. Are you able to confirm that you spoke to the Member for Barkly about it and there has been a reprioritisation?

Mrs HERSEY: There was a total of five Department of Education and Training projects that we had to reprioritise, because of lack of funding, as part of the 2025–26 budget process. Through this process \$16.7m of projects that existed in 2024–25 have not been continued because there is not the funding to move forward.

Mr PAECH: You just said that there is a number of projects. Can you let us know what those infrastructure projects are?

Mrs HERSEY: The projects were Yirrkala School, Alekarenge School, Yuendumu School and the Energy Smart Schools program.

Mr PAECH: The Treasurer, Bill Yan, was before us last week and he said that the \$3.1m in Budget 2024–25 for Yuendumu School was not an issue, other than the design issues from the Department of Education and Training. Is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: In regard to Yuendumu School, stage 2 of the project will not proceed under the reprioritised capital program. There is \$10.5m for stage 2 upgrades of Yuendumu School, which was intended to be funded to include the new bilingual resource development unit.

Mr PAECH: The \$3.1m is still occurring, but the stage 2 is not; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: That is correct. The stage 1 project is still being negotiated. There is an exterior company that they are negotiating with, being the Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation, to construct school-prioritised components of the Yuendumu School master plan. Following on from that, the \$3.84m is still on the program for stage 1.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that it is design issues from the department of Education that has held up the project? That is what the Treasurer told us last week.

Mrs HERSEY: This funding is coming from the Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation, so that is not correct, as far as I am aware.

Mr PAECH: Is it that the Treasurer got it wrong? He said that it was design issues from Education.

Mrs HERSEY: I am not sure, and I will not verbal what the Treasurer did or did not say, but it is contract negotiations through the Granites Mine and design issues with Power and Water.

Mr PAECH: Has there been a cut in the budget to homeland learning centres?

Mrs HERSEY: I point out that we have not cut anything in the budget; we have reprioritised some things.

Mr PAECH: Which is a flash word for cut.

Mrs HERSEY: With the homeland learning centres, it is \$11.7m, which is actually an increase of \$746,000. I am not sure why you thought the money was not there. In 2024 there were 42 homeland learning centres operating, managed by eight schools. The \$11.7m is for that budget, which is an increase.

Mr PAECH: Is there a reprioritisation of any funding that is currently being delivered to a homelands school or scheduled?

Mrs HERSEY: The only reprioritising for the homeland learning centres is the reprioritisation in the infrastructure program.

Mr PAECH: What is the value of that?

Mrs HERSEY: Member for Gwoja, I think you answered your own question before. Budget Paper No 4 allocated the reprioritisation of the whole-of-government capital program of \$3.39m for homeland learning centres.

Mr PAECH: Which homeland learning centres or which locations will be reprioritised?

Ms HERSEY: That question is on notice for the minister for Infrastructure; is that correct?

Mr PAECH: Yes. It is a question I am asking now for some confirmation on.

Ms HERSEY: The reprioritisation is Bremer Island (Dhambaliya)—that is the one being reprioritised at the moment— and Mungkarta.

Mr PAECH: Is that three locations?

Ms HERSEY: Two.

Mr PAECH: Have you visited homeland learning centres?

Ms HERSEY: Yes, I have.

Mr PAECH: Which one?

Ms HERSEY: I have visited remote schools, but not specifically a homeland.

Mr PAECH: You have not visited a homeland in the last 10 months for Education purposes?

Ms HERSEY: I have visited many schools across the Territory—Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. I have been to Nhulunbuy and Shepherdson College, Galiwinku. I have been to many schools, but not specifically a homeland, no.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I just remind everybody to direct their questions through the Chair.

Mr PAECH: What homelands learning centres will you visit to talk about the reprioritisation?

Ms HERSEY: In due time we will get to homeland learning centres. As you would know, as a minister it is very busy. It is not relevant to what we are talking about here today. We are talking about the budget, and I have been to many ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! We are talking about the homeland schools that you are reprioritising. It is very relevant.

You said you visited remote schools. What remote schools are they?

Ms HERSEY: I have been to Nhulunbuy, Shepherdson College, Barunga, Manyallaluk and Borroloola, but not specifically a homeland.

Mr PAECH: Have you been to a Central Australian remote school?

Ms HERSEY: Not specifically a Central Australian remote school.

It is not relevant, Chair.

Mr PAECH: How is it not relevant? You deliver the funding to remote schools, so you should understand the challenges that they are talking about. Never mind.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, if we could move on. This is a reminder that the Estimates process is to discuss operational aspects from the department as well as financial aspects. Please keep on task.

Mr PAECH: That is true. A point of order, Chair! Being in those remote schools should not be considered as not relevant.

Ms UIBO: The cuts that we have seen to remote school infrastructure, just in the first couple of questions—\$8.7m, \$3.1m and \$3.4m, which is a total of \$15.2m. It sounds like you have not visited either of the schools that have the major cuts in school infrastructure. Will you make a commitment to make sure that you are out there explaining to the schools, staff, students and communities affected by the millions of dollars' worth of infrastructure cuts to their schools the reason your government are not supporting those upgrades?

Mrs HERSEY: We had plans to go to Alekarenge a couple of weeks ago, but there was bad weather when all that rain was around. Yes, I am committed to getting to schools right across the Territory, whether they are remote, very remote, homelands or regional. As the minister for Education, I will be visiting as many schools as I can. We had plans to go there, but they were aborted at the last moment.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate that weather gets in the way of bush travel. As a bush member I can attest to that.

Was the Member for Barkly consulted with the cut to Alekarenge School? He spoke about it for many years while in opposition, which is the reason why the former government allocated the cash against the project of the Alekarenge School infrastructure, which was \$8.7m and which has been cut. Has the Member for Barkly been consulted or conferred with, or have you made the decision without even visiting the school or your colleague Minister Edgington?

Mrs HERSEY: I have had many conversations with Chris, the principal, at Alekarenge. These were all conversations that we have had as Cabinet discussions. They are not easy discussions that we had to reprioritise some of that important funding, like Alekarenge, for example. As I have already stated, yes, the Member for Barkly was extremely disappointed, as was I, that funding did not go ahead.

As I have also stated, coming to government last August there was \$11bn of debt and we had to reprioritise some of that funding. There were already projects that had to be finished. It is not a priority this year, but it is not off the table altogether. Through further budget processes in the future Alekarenge will be a priority.

Mr PAECH: You spoke about—I made a note here—about the Energy Smart Schools program. You signed off on the \$2m cut from the Energy Smart Schools program which would have reduced operating costs to make schools more energy efficient and sustainable.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Is there a question, Member for Gwoja?

Mr PAECH: Yes. I am asking her why she has done it.

Mrs HERSEY: As I have explained, there were a lot of extremely difficult decisions that we had to make coming into government with the \$11bn debt that we were left by your government. Yes, there were many very difficult decisions that we had to make of reprioritising.

Mr PAECH: I want to make the point that you are the government that has lifted the debt ceiling and brought further debt in.

How many attendance officers are employed across the Territory? Where are they, and how much are they costing Territorians?

Mrs HERSEY: Twenty-four school attendance officer positions have been established within the department and 18 are filled, with recruitment ongoing.

Mr PAECH: The second part of the question is: where are they across the Territory, and how much are they costing Territorians?

Mrs HERSEY: There are five in the Barkly, eight in Big Rivers, 10 in Central, seven in Darwin, seven in East Arnhem and seven in Top End.

Mr PAECH: How much is that costing Territorians?

Mrs HERSEY: That is at a cost of \$21,007,002.

Mr PAECH: You have taken a punitive approach to getting children and young people to school. What are you doing to address the underlying reasons that cause children and young people to not go to school? That is mental health services, unmet educational needs, poverty, bullying and family circumstances. You have spoken about this at length. How is the Education department addressing or elevating these concerns?

Mrs HERSEY: Our government came in saying that we would bring back school attendance officers. We have done that. There have been attendance officers right across the Territory. Some of those conversations to get kids back to school are through programs like Clontarf and Stars. There are also lots of conversations that those engagement officers have with families in communities to have them understand the importance of their child getting to school.

There are many schools across the Territory that have those ones coming off the intensive support to go to schools like the Top End School of Flexible Learning. We have one in Katherine. There is the Juno Centre in Alice Springs and the Palmerston Youth Skills Centre. There is engagement through things like Youth Voice Peak Group as well.

Our government has a large focus on attendance. Fifty-eight per cent of students and 85% of Indigenous students were failing literacy and numeracy before. With the Better and Fairer Schools funding, schools can also play more of a part in attendance. For children to have a bright future, they need to turn up to school every day. They cannot be the next Member for Gwoja or Member for Mulka if they do not turn up to school every day. They need to be educated to go into meaningful paths of employment, to boost their literacy and numeracy. It gives them a better economic and social future as well.

Mr PAECH: You have just been talking about attendance. Can you confirm the statistics in Barkly from 24 December to 28 January? There has been a decline in school attendance.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you confirm that you are talking about now, not 28 January?

Mr PAECH: I am asking you a question within the reporting period. From Term 4 in 2024 the Northern Territory Government schools by region, average attendance and enrolment, the comparable data in January is lower than it was in December.

Mrs HERSEY: The most recent data that I have is Term 1 in 2024 showed 44.7% attendance and Term 1 in 2025 showed 45% attendance, which is an extremely small increase but an increase nonetheless. Let us just keep in mind ...

Mr PAECH: I did not ask you that. I asked you from December 2024 to January 2025.

Mrs HERSEY: I am not sure if that is a trick question because school finishes in December and does not start until the very end of January.

Mr PAECH: I am trying to paint the picture of why you would cut infrastructure funding to a school in Barkly when they have some of the lowest attendance rates in the Northern Territory and we are trying to get kids to school.

Mrs HERSEY: We are getting kids to school right across the Territory. As I have explained, I think at great length, there were some extremely difficult conversations that we had to have as a team and as a Cabinet to work out where we were going to reprioritise funding. In fact, in the Barkly region there has been a decrease in children on that intensive support roll, which is children who have not been to school for 20 days or more. There has been a considerable decrease to that roll.

Mr PAECH: What data are you keeping on families who have been subject to fines and attendance enforcement? I acknowledge that you spoke about that in your opening statement, but I want to understand it a little more. How many have you issued that you have retracted? Of that nature, what is the proportionate balance of mothers and fathers or men and women?

Mrs HERSEY: Can you please restate the question?

Mr PAECH: What data are you keeping on the families who have been subject to fines and attendance enforcement? How many families of children have disabilities? Of the fines that have been issued, what is the proportion that have been issued to the females—the mothers, aunties or nannas—and the males?

Mrs HERSEY: In regard to that the department keeps regional data, but not specifically on what you are after.

Mr PAECH: The department keeps no data on who they are issuing a fine to.

Ms CHATTERTON: The department does on a daily basis collect data in relation to the number of compliance actions taken, one of which may be the issuing of infringement notices. We then also monitor parental response to the compliance action taken per interaction. That is around seeing whether the young person has returned to school, if they are enrolled. We do not report by gender or family as such. While we have data that tells us who the enrolling parent is in our system, we have student engagement and attendance officers who are connected to on the ground in community and in schools, so they may understand who it is they need to be talking to—who the appropriate person is within the family—as well.

Mr PAECH: Are you suggesting that a department is issuing infringements or enforcement notices, and you cannot tell the committee of the infringements that have required a fine to be paid, what proportion of those have been men or women?

Mrs HERSEY: The data is collected that they are families, but not specifically men or women—not to that extent.

Mr PAECH: The Department of Education and Training cannot confirm when they are issuing infringements if they are issuing them to either a male or female in relation to a child? Who are they issuing the fine to? They must know who they are issuing the fine to ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, you are repeating the same question. I believe the minister has answered the question.

Mr PAECH: I believe the minister should be able to answer that herself, not you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Excuse me, Member for Gwoja. I will put you on a warning if you do not start behaving through the Chair.

Mr PAECH: It is a simple question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: She has answered the question. This is your warning.

Mrs HERSEY: The department collects data on who the fine is issued to, but not specifically whether they are men or women.

Mr PAECH: You are unable to say whether it is a man or a woman?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Again, Member for Gwoja, I believe she has answered the question ...

Mr PAECH: I have not finished. Excuse me, I have not finished the questioning.

I accept that is the position you are saying—you just issue the fines; you do not collect the data on whether it is a male or a female. Do you collect data on whether the child who is receiving the infringement has a disability?

Mrs HERSEY: As I stated before, the specific data you are after is not recorded.

Mr PAECH: Okay, thank you. I get that the department said that they issue enforcement notices and at times, if they work with the family, they can be retracted. What number of enforcement actions have been issued versus the number that have then been enforced? I get that there is part where you said that the department will take action, but if the remedy is done, they will retract that. Do you have the data on what has been issued and what had to be actioned or what has been rescinded?

Mrs HERSEY: You are talking about the revocation notices of ...

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: In regard to your previous question, it is by parental status, but in fact AGD may hold more information through the Fines Recovery Unit.

In regard to the revocation, in compliance notices there were 117 revoked; and in infringement notices, four revoked.

Mr PAECH: Four?

Mrs HERSEY: That is in Term 1 of 2025.

Mr PAECH: How many students had a recommendation to be enrolled in the flexible learning options and are currently unable to access those options?

Mrs HERSEY: In 2024 there was an average of 66 students enrolled at Top End flexi learning, excluding the Tivendale campus. At Katherine flexible learning centre there were 29 student enrolments.

At the Juno Centre there was a total of 25 enrolments. For the period 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025 there was a total of 25 Tennant Creek High School students engaged in VET training at the Juno Centre, and six students have accessed Juno Centre through the bail-supported accommodation program.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, did you say 2024, or are they the 2025 numbers?

Mrs HERSEY: They were 2024.

Mr PAECH: Do you have the 2025 first Term enrolment numbers?

Mrs HERSEY: No, not in this reporting period.

Mr PAECH: Is there a waiting list for people? I can acknowledge that these placements are restricted because of the nature of the campuses where they are. Is there currently a waitlist for kids to be taken in at this learning centre?

Mrs HERSEY: We are not aware of any waitlist, but I have the 2025 enrolments. At the Top End School of Flexible Learning there are 64, and the other ones are enrolled at the school, so that is not dissected data.

Mr PAECH: You are not aware of any waitlist or demand pressures currently with that program.

Mrs HERSEY: No, not that we are aware of.

Mr PAECH: What funding within that budget has been set aside to continue the remote Aboriginal teacher program, given that it is so critical to student engagement in remote communities?

Mrs HERSEY: Obviously the department is extremely committed to increasing, developing and retaining the Aboriginal workforce in education. In remote and very remote areas they are imperative to learning for Aboriginal students.

As part of the Northern Territory Government's commitment to attract and keep our teachers, the 2025–26 budget allocation for supporting growth of the department's Aboriginal workforce is \$2.4m, including \$1.96m for Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education, which is what you were talking about; \$0.21m for Aboriginal teacher scholarships; and \$0.26m for growing the Aboriginal workforce.

As a government we are committed to growing and continuing the Aboriginal workforce and also having Aboriginal teachers, whether they are team teaching in bilingual schools or teaching in schools right across the very remote regions or whether they are in a town setting.

Mr PAECH: Does the department have a target it would like to see in the Northern Territory of remote Aboriginal teachers?

Mrs HERSEY: In the workforce across in my other portfolio we are at about 11% and getting close to the Aboriginal employment which I think is at 16%, but not specifically in Education, but we have those programs going and we are absolutely focused on making sure we get Aboriginal teachers. It is imperative and they are extremely valued in those remote areas.

The number of Aboriginal employees at the moment, as at pay 20 in 2024–25, was 918, or 17.3% of the total workforce in Education, which is an increase of 154, or 20.2%, since the same reporting period last year. I think you would acknowledge that is very good.

Mr PAECH: Was it \$2.4m overall, and then it was \$1.9m for education?

Mrs HERSEY: The budget allocation for supporting growth of the department's Aboriginal workforce is \$2.4m, which includes \$1.96m for the RATE program; \$0.21m for Aboriginal Teacher Education Scholarships; and \$0.26m for growing the Aboriginal workforce.

Mr PAECH: Can your department confirm how many Aboriginal teachers are there currently in the Northern Territory? How many Aboriginal people are currently employed in the Department of Education and Training? I acknowledge that you may need to take that on notice.

Mrs HERSEY: I just read out those numbers before. We can take it on notice, but it may come up in the next output—as in the OCPE.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to put it on notice.

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

Mr PAECH: How many Aboriginal teachers are in the Department of Education and Training? How many Aboriginal staff are in the Department of Education and Training?

Mrs HERSEY: Aboriginal team teachers, 328; executive contract principals, one; principals, 16; senior teachers, 32; and 101 teachers. That is a total of 478.

Mr PAECH: Does that include council employees—Aboriginal members who will be on a school council?

Mrs HERSEY: No, it does not. The workforce numbers I read out before do not include Aboriginal staff employed by school councils or boards.

Mr PAECH: What entitlements do school council members receive?

Mrs HERSEY: Across those school council members, the department is trying to line them up with the NTPS to try to get them into an employment stream. I note that we are trying to move more from school council to NTPS. There are also the Aboriginal Teacher Education Scholarships to support Aboriginal students to study as well.

Mr PAECH: While we are talking about entitlements, does the Education department still engage with and notify Aboriginal community members that they are eligible for government employee housing? How much is that costing the department at the moment?

Mrs HERSEY: That would be a question for Minister Edgington, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development.

Mr PAECH: Can I just confirm that the Education department is the department that pays for that level of entitlement?

Mrs HERSEY: I can confirm it is from the Education department budget. As at 31 March 2025 there are 65 recipients of the remote public housing rental concession.

J DAVIS: In relation to how many Aboriginal staff are employed, can you advise how many Aboriginal people are employed in their home community, in what positions and in what schools?

Mrs HERSEY: We would not have that level of detail. Given that some of those staff are not always local to their community, it is a bit like finding out where they are from no matter who they are as a teacher. That level of data is not kept.

I can give you the Aboriginal team teacher data. As of March 2025, pay 20, there were 235.9 Aboriginal team teachers.

J DAVIS: You do not have the data on whether people are working within their own communities; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: No, not that level of data. I can confirm that regarding those Aboriginal team teachers that is an increase of 34.8%, which I think we all agree is great. Where possible it is preferable to have them working in their community, but that does not necessarily always happen. I suppose they would go to where the job is.

J DAVIS: Is it the department's intention to support people to work in their own communities?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, wherever possible.

Mr PAECH: There are 65 Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory who are currently receiving government employee housing assistance. Does the department know what that number should be, given that it would know a number of people who would be eligible?

Mrs HERSEY: That is a question for the minister for public housing. There are a lot of different stipulations, depending on who is on the lease agreement.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to ask the Housing minister. He is on tomorrow morning, so I will ask him then.

Mrs HERSEY: Or you can send through a question.

Mr PAECH: Yes.

I am not sure; this might be for the Aboriginal Affairs minister. Is there still a commitment to establish an Aboriginal education peak in the Northern Territory?

Mrs HERSEY: In short, the answer is yes. As part of the Closing the Gap Northern Territory Implementation Plan, the department is committed to leading several actions to achieve the socioeconomic targets outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. In line with action 6.1, the department and Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) are joint leads to establish a steering committee of Aboriginal educators to oversee the development of an action plan for the formation of an NT education policy partnership and an NT Aboriginal education peak body.

Mr PAECH: In your capacity as Education minister, have you met with APO NT or the Aboriginal education steering committee about that?

Mrs HERSEY: Not as yet.

Mr PAECH: When will this Aboriginal education peak body be established? Is it in 12 months, or in this term of government?

Mrs HERSEY: To date the department has provided APO NT, through NAAJA, with \$0.7m of a total \$1.5m grant allocated for the period May 2023 to December 2025 to support establishment of that peak body.

Mr PAECH: There has been a grant provided to APO NT. Obviously, \$700,000 is not to establish the peak, but to do the work around what the peak looks like. Is there a timeline on when the peak would be established?

Mrs HERSEY: As I said before, we are aiming for December 2025.

Ms UIBO: In your opening statement you spoke of a secret roll, and you spoke of this in a media release as well. Can you explain the use of this terminology, basically accusing the department of having a secret roll, which most educators know in the past has been referred to as the passive roll of attendance. You have reframed and renamed that as the intensive support roll under your government. I assume it is still the same roll. Why do you keep referring to it as a secret roll and saying that the department has covered up the names of those students?

Mrs HERSEY: We refer to it—yes, you are correct; it was a passive roll—now as intensive support, given that those students on that roll have not been to school for 20 days or more and need intensive support.

That data was not made public under your government. As one of the four Education ministers, I ask you why that data was not made public. We have made that data public now and have made a conscious effort to make sure that the engagement officers work closely with the families and students to bring those children back to school.

Ms UIBO: The data was always there; it was not secret. Your issue is that it was not publicly announced—which student were not attending school and which families were not sending their kids to school. Is it the fact that you will start doing that—naming the children who did not attend to school who were on the intensive roll, and you will be naming parents and making that public, which is the difference and what you are inferring at the moment?

Mrs HERSEY: They are your words; they are not my words. Yes, we said that this roll was not made public. I did not say that those students' names or anything would be made public. That is not the aim of that roll. It is about making sure that the public knows that there was this list of students—I think there were 1,600 or something when we came to government. It is high-level data; you would not be letting people know the names of students under any circumstances.

Ms UIBO: This list still exists; you have just renamed and rebadged it. What is the difference with calling it a secret list previously under the former government to now changing the name? The list still exists; the data is still collected by the department. There is no secret; you have just renamed the list.

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, that is correct. It was the passive roll; now it is intensive support. This list, as I have articulated several times, was not made public under your government. We have brought to the attention of Territorians that there is this list with the number of students on it. As a government, we are making sure those students are worked with closely to get them back into the education system.

It does not matter what you call it; it is still the list. These students are students who have not been to school for 20 days or more and they are now receiving intensive support, as I explained previously.

Ms UIBO: The data of the passive list is always available through the department. You have not changed any public data available regarding names, which you just confirmed. Why is it still referred to as a secret list when the data has always existed, and it still exists today under your government?

Mrs HERSEY: What I think you are confused about is that what I said was under your government—of which you were one of the Education ministers—that list was not publicised. The difference between your government and ours is that we have publicised this list. As I said, there were 1,600-odd students on it. Now

we are working closely with those families. It is about putting in wraparound services with the student and families, and making sure they are worked closely with, which is why we call it intensive support—for the exact reason they are getting intensive support to make sure these students come back to get an education.

J DAVIS: In relation to the intensive support roll I note in written question 6, part 9, there was a question about funding for those students. The answer to that question was that students on that roll are not funded. Is that still the case?

Mrs HERSEY: The change with the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, which was on attendance and is now on enrolment—those students are captured under that now, and all students are funded under the enrolment with the new agreement.

J DAVIS: To confirm, is any student on that list now funded?

Mrs HERSEY: If they are enrolled in a school, yes, they are on that list. If they are not enrolled and then become enrolled, they will be funded. If they are not present at the Age Grade Census, we will not receive the funding from the Australian Government. They need to be present to receive that funding.

J DAVIS: Students who may not have been at school for 20 days or more who are on that list may not be funded.

Mrs HERSEY: If they are enrolled, they would be on that list.

Ms ALDENHOVEN: For students who are enrolled there are two things happening. One is how we receive the money from the Australian Government. When we take that collection point at the Age Grade Census if there is a student who has not attended for the 20 days, they will not be counted for the Northern Territory to receive funds from the Australian Government. However, once we have received the relevant funds from the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government, the department of Education has their funding model, so we have moved to enrolment-based funding. In about early October schools will receive their funding for the next year. If we have a student who is enrolled, they will receive the funding. We have two collection points, which is week 4, Term 1, and the Age Grade Census and the average period.

J DAVIS: Are you able to provide data on how many students on that list are not receiving funding?

Mrs HERSEY: To clarify, are you talking about the Australian Government funding of students on that list?

J DAVIS: I understand that is what you have explained, you are not receiving funding for that. That is right; yes.

Mrs HERSEY: That list is not the same; it varies almost daily. We can take that on notice if you like and maybe get you some information by the end of the session.

Question on Notice No 6.1

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

J DAVIS: How many students on the intensive support roll are currently not being funded under the Commonwealth funding agreement?

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

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.1.

J DAVIS: In relation to trying to understand about teachers working in their home communities, do you have data on how many teachers are fluent in the language of the community they are working in?

Mrs HERSEY: No.

J DAVIS: Do you think that would be useful information to have?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I query whether that is an opinion answer. Can we move on.

J DAVIS: Is there any intention to collect that data?

Mrs HERSEY: Schools potentially might have that data, but it is not collected by the department.

J DAVIS: Is there no intention to do so?

Mrs HERSEY: It would not be something easy to do and it could be ever-changing as well.

Mr GUYULA: I thank you for your commitment to bilingual education. As a multilingual speaker, I know that bilingual education is very important for Yolngu. This year some of the smaller schools in my electorate have relied on the continuation of bilingual targeted funding because their budgets have not seen big increases, such as the school at Yirrkala. Could you advise which schools retain the bilingual targeted funding this year? Was it all nine schools? Will all nine schools continue to receive the targeted funding for next year? This funding is important for the specialist positions that are required for the bilingual program and resource development for the program.

Mrs HERSEY: I note that you are extremely passionate about bilingual education. We have had many conversations over time over this. In the 2025 budget allocation to schools to support bilingual education there is \$3.5m which includes \$3.1m funding to support schools to maintain funding levels for programs and to allow schools to continue their programs to the same standards. The 2025 calendar year budget also includes \$0.37m for centrally based support for schools.

There are nine schools that have bilingual education. Four of those schools have done bilingual education for 50 years. I went to Shepherdson—where you were—where they had 50 years of celebrating bilingual education. I did not get to the Yuendumu one, but the CE of Education went to that as well. That funding is ongoing.

I would like to add that as members of our electorates, it is incumbent on us to make sure that we spread the word on how important it is to get children to school and to be educated. As I continually say, you are not going to have someone come in and fill your shoes if they do not attend school. Whilst four of those schools have done 50 years of bilingual education, as the minister I look forward to seeing their attendance rates be significantly boosted because most of them sit between 30% and 40%, which you would understand, Member for Mulka, is not getting them the education they need to get into meaningful employment.

When we were at Shepherdson College, there was the young girl who had finished her schooling there and was working at the language centre. That is how attending school every day can make a difference in a young person's life.

Mr GUYULA: I understand that this year many remote schools are now being funded properly for enrolled students; however, the department has also transferred some centralised costs to schools, so some of the increased school budgets are being absorbed by costs that did not belong to the schools previously. I understand from written question 6 that \$648,000 that was spent on vehicles by the department in 2024 is now being paid for by East Arnhem Land schools; is this correct?

Ms BOWDEN: Prior to 2025 there were inconsistencies in how schools were funding motor vehicles. Some schools were funding out of their own resources and some schools were funded centrally. There was \$3m in the central budget for the 2025 year. That \$3m was allocated across all schools in the Northern Territory, and as part of the student needs-based funding formula for 2025, there was an element of that for the budget for vehicles in schools.

There has been a change in approach so that there is more equitable distribution of the vehicles funding across all schools in the Northern Territory, and we now have consistency rather than historical inconsistencies with the treatment of vehicles across schools.

Mr GUYULA: I understand schools are also having to pay the cost of an 8% EBA wage rise for this year, and I am told schools now also have to buy teacher laptops from the school budget and pay for Ochre Cards, which were previously a centralised cost; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: Under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement there is a considerable uplift to some schools to cover these costs, and that was also negotiated under the EBA.

Ms BOWDEN: I will talk specifically about the question regarding the laptops. Teachers in schools will have laptops replaced in 2025 and that will be funded by the department's corporate budget. We have already been communicating to schools that there is no central budget for ICT replacements in schools and that is including what was historically the one to 10 student device funding program, as well as the teacher laptop program. What the department has been doing over a number of years is where there have been underspends, we have been channelling that directly to schools for teacher laptops and other sorts of devices. There is no central budget for that; however, for 2025 there will be the replacement of teacher laptops centrally.

The department is also currently working with DCDD to explore a service model that provides more enterprise level of services. There are representatives on that particular group so that we can ensure we are getting quality service and support for our devices in our schools.

Mr GUYULA: For our smaller schools, like Yirrkala, which only received a \$211,000 increase this year, based on enrolment and excluding the bilingual targeted funding. How do they operate efficiently and effectively when all the extra funding they receive will go on vehicle expenses, teacher laptops and EBA pay increases?

Mrs HERSEY: The increase in the funding for Yirrkala is \$211,814, so there is a considerable amount of extra money for those things that you are asking about. It is up to schools to manage their budgets, and each school has that difficulty of managing the budget to make sure they can deliver and have the services they require. There will also be a further uplift in 2026 for those schools under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement.

Mr GUYULA: In relation to the vehicle costs I note in 2024 that the Darwin region's school vehicles cost \$95,844 and all the remote regions' costs were considerably high and more. The Big Rivers region schools cost the most at \$821,381, showing the cost is up to 800% greater in remote areas. Who made the decision to centralise vehicles costs to schools and the strategy of asking schools to pay their own vehicle fares?

Mrs HERSEY: We spoke about this before. Some schools were already paying for their vehicles. Under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement—in 2025 school vehicles, other than executive contract vehicles, were paid for by schools, by the region or by the centre, with arrangements differing from vehicle to vehicle. Funding of \$3m was transferred into the school funding pool, and from 2025 all school vehicles are paid for by each school.

There was an increase in the base per student rate of \$30, on top of the 5.39% increase to the base rate. There was an increase to the school size supplement of up to \$6,842. There was an increase in the remoteness weighting as follows: category 2 increased from 0.03 to 0.06; and category 3 increased from 0.05 to 0.08. That was distributed to schools.

Additional funding was also provided through targeted funding for homeland learning centres' travel for select hub schools which previously had their targeted funding offset for centrally funded vehicles. It is all being distributed back to schools.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: In the interests of giving everybody a comfort break, we will take a five-minute break.

The committee suspended.

Mr GUYULA: Will Year 1 children at bilingual schools undertake the Year 1 phonics testing in their first language? Students in our bilingual schools do not start to write in English until Year 4 because they are first learning their literacy in Yolngu Matha. The English letters exist in Yolngu Matha; however, our alphabet has 31 sounds, and these are the sounds that the Year 1 students are learning, so will these kids be tested in Yolngu Matha rather than English?

Mrs HERSEY: You have raised an interesting point. The test generally is done in English. The whole idea of bilingual education is learning both, but that could be something that is taken into consideration in the future. I point out that bilingual education is learning both. When they go to school it is about learning English and their language side by side.

J DAVIS: Is that something that you will be exploring in the future?

Mrs HERSEY: We will consider that feedback. The Member for Mulka has raised an interesting point.

Mr GUYULA: For the same reason I just stated, why are Year 3 children in bilingual schools or other Aboriginal ESL students having to sit English NAPLAN tests?

Mrs HERSEY: NAPLAN is a national test. It is Australian Government. As I explained before, when these children go to school it is a side-by-side learning. NAPLAN is done in English. These children potentially will move around and go to other areas where they need to learn English, so it is relevant that they do the NAPLAN in English. From the moment they start school or they are at a FaFT program—there are many FaFT programs across the Territory and in remote regions—then go on to preschool or Grade 1 they will always have that side-by-side learning.

Mr GUYULA: Written question 8 states that 38% of students in the NT are English as a second language learners. Why does the department not record how many teachers in the NT have university-level ESL training, given this is what almost 40% of the students need?

Mrs HERSEY: All teachers across the schools, whether they are in a bilingual school or not, are qualified teachers.

The 2025 budget allocated for centrally based services for English as an additional language resourcing is \$0.99m and the schools receive direct funding for English as an additional language through the School Resourcing Model.

In semester 1 of 2024 there were 13,250 NT Government school students identified as learning English as an additional language, which was an increase of 131 students from Semester 1 of 2023. Within this cohort 63% of Aboriginal NT Government school students and 37% of non-Aboriginal students were monitored using the English as an additional language or dialect learning progression.

All teachers and assistant teachers can access the online professional learning program of the NT EAL/D hub to build their capability to teach EAL/D learners. From July 2024 to March 2025 there were 18 completers of that EAL/D hub and 68 new enrolments.

In 2024 to March 2025 teacher and learning services responded to 82 requests to support schools in relation to Aboriginal languages and English as an additional language or dialect, but the data is not available prior to these dates. This support ranged from access to resources, professional development and coaching and school improvements. This was in addition to providing regular universal professional learning to schools.

Mr GUYULA: What is the 2025–26 budget in the department in the following curriculum areas, explicit instruction and ESL or EAL/D instruction, to be bilingual education for Aboriginal curriculum development?

Mrs HERSEY: The budget allocated for supporting Aboriginal language in schools is \$4m. There is \$14.23m for boosting literacy and numeracy. The EAL/D resourcing is \$0.99m and the schools receive direct funding for English as an additional language or dialect students through the School Resourcing Model.

Mr GUYULA: Explicit instruction like Read Write Inc has been running for over a decade. What evaluations of the program have been done to see if it is achieving any results? Why have there been no programs developed especially for the needs of our NT kids?

Mrs HERSEY: Programs like Read Write Inc can still be done because they go through explicit teaching. It is not like we are throwing the baby out with the bathwater there; those programs will still run alongside.

For Northern Territory children, through boosting literacy and numeracy, to get jobs of the future and be competitive, school results must be improved. As I said earlier, we saw literacy and numeracy at shocking levels across the Territory. As an election commitment, we said we would get back to basics and boost literacy and numeracy. We have done that by rolling out explicit teaching, which we did as an announcement in Katherine a couple of weeks ago at Katherine South Primary School.

The government launched the Boosting Literacy and Numeracy Plan, which is our approach to ensuring a consistent and evidence-based approach to the teaching of literacy and numeracy, starting with reading and mathematics. The plan supports teachers to explicitly teach the fundamental skills that will set students up for success. Action will occur under the following elements: high-quality teacher resources; student

resources; professional learning for school staff; screening assessments for early identification of students at risk; and intentional and planned support for students falling behind.

The comprehensive high-quality teacher and student resources will ease the burden of administrative planning and support our teachers to focus on students and quality of teaching. Those resources are on eLearn and can be accessed by teachers. There are a whole lot of resources, so they do not have to reinvent the wheel. It is an administrative burden that they do not have to worry about. They can find that teaching instruction already done for them. Those results will be measured by NAPLAN results in the future.

Mr GUYULA: Why do homeland schools continue to be classed as learning centres instead of schools for homelands with regular attendance of a number of students? We would like to see the same quality of infrastructure and amount of funding that small schools such as Dundee Beach and Douglas Daly receive. Why is there not an equal funding system happening for all small schools in the NT? What will happen for the homeland schools in 2026?

Mrs HERSEY: The budget for homeland learning centres is \$11.7m, which is an increase of \$746,000.

Member for Mulka, as a remote member you would be aware of the complexity of delivering education in remote areas across the Territory. Those homeland centres are seasonal and are managed under eight schools. The schools that service the homeland learning centres receive student needs-based funding for enrolled students, targeted funding to support travel costs and the homeland learning centres supplement, where eligible. The homeland learning centres supplement is an interim funding arrangement to support schools to increase the provision of education at their homeland learning centres and for reasonable associated costs to the equivalent of a small mainstream school.

There was an average of 449 enrolments at all centres, which is a slight increase from 2023.

Mr GUYULA: In the reporting period, what whole-of-community consultations with remote communities have taken place to discuss barriers to getting kids to school? Are there any plans to hold a community consultation in the future?

Mrs HERSEY: In remote settings, those conversations happen with the school, families and students and the attendance officers have those conversations with families, explaining the importance of getting their children to school. Every school needs community input.

The government's focus is on attendance. We took that to the election because if children do not attend school, they cannot get an education to get into meaningful employment. We need them to thrive in education.

As of 26 May 2025 there are 55 out of a possible 82 communities that have established LEaD committees across the Territory. This will strengthen governance in schools. Whether it is a LEaD committee or a school council, it is giving that stronger governance and support to the school.

Mr GUYULA: How does the department recognise Aboriginal knowledge and our traditional educators? How do we bring two systems together equally in education? This is not really happening yet, because for the most part, the principals, senior teachers and classroom teachers are all from outside the communities, and the elders and leaders in our communities are not paid and recognised for the work we do to teach Aboriginal knowledge, languages, discipline, respect, songlines et cetera. How do we fix the problem and properly bring the two systems together?

Mrs HERSEY: We were just talking about LEaD committees and things like that, so you could encourage families to get involved through LEaD committees, but also there is \$3.1m funding to schools for bilingual education. All schools may offer languages through the language learning area of the Australian Curriculum, using Indigenous languages and culture curriculum.

In schools where Aboriginal languages are the first language of most students they may also be used alongside English—we spoke about that before—team teaching, to teach both English and Aboriginal language. The NTPS Educators' 2024–2027 Enterprise Agreement provides a classification for Aboriginal team teachers, and this was the assistant teacher classification under the previous enterprise agreement.

For schools that have vacancies in remote areas, I would encourage the people you are potentially talking about, leaders and cultural authority people, to be involved in the school programs and potentially—again, as I was talking about earlier—to have a stream into the NT Public Sector.

Mr GUYULA: Madam Deputy Chair, I would like to make a free speech in my language, just for a couple of minutes, to explain a bit more about education.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Mulka, I am not sure that this is the forum to be doing speeches; it is more about asking questions of the minister. You are able to send any kind of recommendations through to them via the right channels, but I am not sure that this is the right forum for that.

Mr GUYULA: Okay; no worries. I will do it another time, to explain language needs and why we need English and Yolngu Matha in with the language.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Mulka, I am sure that the minister is happy to meet with you outside of this forum.

Ms UIBO: Member for Mulka, you will also get a chance on Thursday in the Appropriation Bill wrap-up. Any member can contribute then in parliament.

Off the tail of the Member for Mulka's question in regard to the bilingual education funding—you spoke about this already in the opening statement—will the nine schools that are identified as bilingual schools be expected to pay for their own bilingual budget out of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement funding or will they still get the departmental funding that was always allocated to those nine schools because of their bilingual program?

Mrs HERSEY: The bilingual education is targeted funding. Yes, in short, to answer your question. The funding comes through the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement and it is targeted through the school resourcing.

Ms UIBO: Does that mean the previous \$43m, or something to that effect, that was specifically allocated by the department for those nine bilingual schools will no longer exist and the schools will have to use their own resources through the agreement?

Mrs HERSEY: No, that is not correct.

Ms UIBO: I am happy to be corrected if you can provide the detail.

Mrs HERSEY: I have said that and specified the answer to that question before, but in the 2025 calendar year, the budget allocated to schools to support bilingual education is \$3.5m, which includes \$3.1m funding to support schools to maintain funding levels for programs and to allow schools to continue their programs to the same standards. It also includes \$0.37m for centrally based support for schools.

Ms UIBO: Is that last figure you just quoted purely for the nine schools, or are more schools involved in the funding you just said?

Mrs HERSEY: That is across the nine schools.

Ms UIBO: Can you explain the back-of-house support and where that money goes to if it is not going to program delivery from the schools?

Mrs HERSEY: The \$0.37m is for the schools delivering bilingual education programs to employ specialist staff to lead, coordinate and support the bilingual approach used by the school and to develop appropriate resources.

Ms UIBO: You quoted a second figure that said it was for the support of those schools, so I am assuming it is not for the programs. Would it be for the department and back of house?

Mrs HERSEY: The \$0.37m that I read out before—centrally based support for schools—is the very small team in teaching and learning services.

Mr PAECH: Have you or has your department issued a directive to staff employed with the department who have a teaching qualification that they cannot apply for a job in corporate services because of the teacher vacancies that currently exist?

Mrs HERSEY: I am not sure where that information came from, but that is not the case. As you would be aware, there is a teacher shortage across Australia, and we want to have teachers in our schools and in front of students. That is our priority.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, neither you or the department have any measures in place that would prohibit or not work in favour of a teacher applying for a job in corporate services?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, our priority is staffing schools first as there is a teacher shortage, and that is the main priority.

Mr PAECH: When you say priority, are there measures in place that would look at ...

Mrs HERSEY: Chair, I have answered the question. There are measures in place to make sure that we staff schools first.

Mr PAECH: What was the retention rate of teachers from 2024 to 2025?

Mrs HERSEY: The date that you gave me—I have here assistant teacher separations 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025. There were 43 assistant teachers and 497 class teachers, which is 14 fewer than the year prior.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm how many children are currently enrolled in school in the youth detention centre?

Mrs HERSEY: The number fluctuates. At the moment it is between about 50 and 60 students.

Mr PAECH: Would you be able to take on notice how many children are enrolled today?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.2

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

Mr PAECH: Could you please confirm the enrolment number of children in the youth detention centre today?

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

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.2.

J DAVIS: This is staffing related. Looking at data online, I can see that numbers are significantly higher. What additional resources and funding have been given to Tivendale School?

Mrs HERSEY: The funding for Tivendale in 2025 has increased to \$3.11m. In 2024 it was \$1.36m, so there is a considerable increase to allow for that.

Mr PAECH: When a child is in school in a detention centre how many hours of class do they attend a day?

Mrs HERSEY: Students who are in Tivendale attend school. They have four one-hour blocks plus activities for 45 weeks of the year.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm if there have been children who have been unable to attend due to operationalising the closure of the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre and staffing shortages in the Top End?

Mrs HERSEY: That is a question for Minister Maley under Corrections. I think he has already been.

Mr PAECH: Your department delivers the education component, so do you not record the attendance and how long and if there have been issues? Your department is the same department that would be charging parents for their kids not attending school.

Mrs HERSEY: Whilst we provide the service, that is operational for Minister Maley and the Department of Corrections. We record daily and weekly.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.2

Mrs HERSEY: There are 55 children in detention today.

Mr PAECH: Are the Aboriginal police liaison officers in schools being paid for by the Education department?

Mrs HERSEY: That is paid for by the department, but it has not commenced yet. The school-based policing program is another election commitment, and we are committed to rolling that out across the Territory.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: In my electorate of Karama I have a lot of schools—possibly eight, if you take some of the ones on the border—so it is a very important part of my work, and it certainly chews up a lot of my electorate allowance, I can tell you that. It is something that I enjoy doing. I enjoy sponsoring awards for the schools and going to their assemblies, as every other MLA does.

I thank you because you have come out and visited at least four schools in my electorate, including Karama Primary School, Malak Primary School, Manunda Terrace Primary School and Sanderson College. It was wonderful that you took the opportunity to come out and invited me to join you. I am just trying to get a sense of the task if you were to go out and see every school in the Territory; it is quite a long list. Can you advise me the total number of schools in the Territory, both private and public, and even if there is a small breakdown in terms of primary, middle school, senior college?

Mrs HERSEY: There are 153 government schools and 44 non-government schools.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: That is a sizeable task.

Mrs HERSEY: It is a sizeable task, and I look forward to getting out and visiting most of those schools. I have visited many schools in the short nine months so far. It is great to get out there and see the good work that schools do across the Territory. It is also good to get out and see them, whether they be in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine or out in the Member for Arnhem’s area of Barunga or at Manyallaluk. I have not been to any in the Member for Gwoja’s electorate.

Mr PAECH: I have 40 of them.

Mrs HERSEY: It is a huge task to visit schools. Just like the complexity of delivering education to all these remote and very remote schools, it is at a huge cost to get out and visit them as well. I was looking forward to going to Alekarenge a couple of weeks ago, but with the extremely bad weather I was not going up in a plane, so we could not get there. I look forward to possibly doing that by road maybe in either July or August.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: In your opening statement you referred to reforming secondary education, so I am assuming this revolves around the concept of removing middle schools. Where are we going in that process? What is the consultation process, and have you had any feedback from the communities about it?

Mrs HERSEY: There are nine schools impacted under the secondary reform. Term 1 saw engagement and consultation with teachers, staff and students. I attended, along with the Member for Fannie Bay, the consultation that the department is doing at Darwin Middle School and Darwin High School. I also had a trip to Alice Springs to listen to the concerns of Centralian Middle School and Centralian Senior College and the complexities that they have around delivering that middle school reform. This will be a slow implementation starting next year and finalising in 2028 because we must make sure that we get it right.

There is a lot of consultation being had. The department has done consultations with communities, teachers, staff and students in Term 1. The final system design will be informed by community input. I have been to Alice Springs to listen to the input of teachers, council members and students.

For regional, remote and very remote areas, regional planning is focused on ensuring all students have access to local pathways that enable them to complete the NTCET. The work carries on. I look forward to that being started next year.

J DAVIS: I have two follow-ups from the Member for Mulka. I want to clarify, so I understand, the funding for vehicles. That was \$3m. What happened to that? Was it distributed across all schools?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes. As I stated to the Member for Mulka before, that was reallocated across those schools.

J DAVIS: Based on what? How was it divided up?

Ms ALDENHOVEN: In our School Resourcing Model we have a remoteness equity factor. As the minister described earlier—she read out how that worked—it was distributed through the remoteness weighting. That remoteness weighting recognises the additional costs that are incurred by schools due to their remote locality and includes things such as vehicles required at a remote school and other factors.

J DAVIS: Could you give me an example of Shepherdson school versus Darwin High School?

Ms ALDENHOVEN: I do not have numbers with me like what a school got for their remoteness factor.

J DAVIS: I am interested in the comparative and what that might mean in terms of redistribution of those funds and what a remote school might get compared to an urban school. Is there a way to get that information?

Mrs HERSEY: There were inconsistencies across schools. That money has now been divvied up between those bilingual schools. It was \$3m.

J DAVIS: Has the \$3m for vehicles been divided up between bilingual schools?

Mrs HERSEY: I will repeat what I said before. The motor vehicle expenses were distributed to schools via an increase in the base per student rate by \$30 on top of the 5.39% per cent increase to the base rate; an increase to the school size supplement of up to \$6,842; and an increase in the remoteness weighting, which is as follows. Category 2 increased from 0.03 to 0.06 and category 3 increased from 0.05 to 0.08. Additional funding was also provided through targeted funding for homeland learning centres' travel for select hub schools which previously had their targeted funding offset for centrally funded vehicles. It is a technical student resourcing model.

J DAVIS: I am trying to understand where that money has gone; I have a bit of a picture of it.

I know I asked earlier about clarification—we talked about that a bit—but I remain confused about the bilingual education. Can you clarify that in 2026 schools are paying for bilingual education from their own budgets or will the targeted funding come from centralised funds, as it has in the past?

Mrs HERSEY: It will remain the same for 2026.

Ms UIBO: Can you share with the committee some of the strategy to address the teacher shortages across the Northern Territory?

Mrs HERSEY: The budget allocated for teacher and principal recruitment strategies in 2025–26 is \$1.97m. A range of talent attraction and retention projects, programs and initiatives promote the Department of Education and Training as an employer of choice and to grow and acquire skilled educators to address current and future workforce needs.

The teacher talent attraction projects, programs and initiatives are essential to promote the Department of Education and Training as an employer of choice and to grow and acquire skilled educators to address current and future workforce needs—restructuring the talent attraction and recruitment team to include talent acquisition, taking the administration burden away from principals and schools; implementing the Accelerated Classroom Teacher Practice Program with 24 pre-service teachers participating between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025; and working with education recruitment professionals to ensure more Australian and international teachers are aware of opportunities to teach in the NT and to support recruitment to hard-to-fill positions.

On that note, in Tennant Creek there has been a fantastic result recently. I was speaking to COGSO on the weekend. Tennant Creek have had a problem with hard-to-fill positions. They have gone to international teachers. They have recruited and got a full complement of teachers there now through applying for international teachers. It just goes to show that the targeting programs that the department is working through are actually working.

Ms UIBO: Of that \$1.97m, how will the department track the outcomes? Do you have key performance indicators attached to that particular funding for teacher attraction and retention?

Mrs HERSEY: Along with the teacher attraction and retention, we will continue to look at progressing such programs as the RATE program, getting students through Year 12 and talking about the great teaching opportunities in the Territory. They can go to CDU and study to become a teacher. There are plenty of young people in the Territory who have had great opportunities, whether they have gone away to uni and come back to the Territory—which is what we want—or have learned through university here, to get into teaching. We are always promoting that.

The measure for KPIs is the decreasing number of vacancies for teachers. Today there are only 58 classroom teacher vacancies.

Ms UIBO: I will clarify my question. Of the \$1.97m for teacher talent attraction, will the department track how much money is spent campaigning in Victoria or New South Wales or another jurisdiction? What would be the measure to show that the money was well spent in that campaign in that jurisdiction to attract teachers to the Northern Territory? What is our bang for buck, essentially, with close to \$2m of government money?

You mentioned the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education program, which has \$2.4m for growing our own. How do we know that close to \$2m is being used in a way that will attract teachers and talent to the Territory—or internationally, as you said in the Tennant Creek example? How do we measure the money that is spent? What is the output and how can we find that out?

Mrs HERSEY: I forgot to mention that the NT contributes \$18,500 for Teach for Australia teachers. In your electorate you had Teach for Australia teachers, and we have had them in my electorate. They are teachers who come from different fields and enter as an older student in the teaching system.

Attracting and retaining teachers is a concern across Australia. As you would be aware, it continues to be a challenge. We track where teachers come from, but with teacher vacancies and such shortages across the nation, we are grateful for all teachers—whether we are growing our own through the RATE program, or Teach for Australia, or we are getting them from overseas—we want to make sure that the money spent on recruitment is achieving a result in getting those teacher vacancies down.

Ms UIBO: When you were in opposition, you attended education rallies, particularly in Katherine, regarding teacher retention. Do you have a specific strategy for Katherine for teacher retention or attraction in your home town, or have you already forgotten about them?

Mrs HERSEY: I choose to ignore the last part of that question. As you know, I am extremely passionate about education. I may not have an education background, but my family does, and I have been on my children's education journey throughout their lives, from preschool to primary and high school. I may not be a teacher or come from that background, but I am 100% focused on making sure we have the best teachers and the best people in roles in our schools.

Specifically in my community of Katherine, there is a \$4,500 retention pay for teachers in that area. It continues to be challenging to get teachers to regional and remote areas, but I note teachers in Katherine get that \$4,500 in retention.

Ms UIBO: Is that \$4,500 after 12 months of service in Katherine or in what timeframe is the retention bonus then received? I recall out bush it was \$1,000 after 12 months, so obviously Katherine is getting a lot extra, but I want to know what the timeframe is.

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, that is after 12 months.

Ms UIBO: Per teacher \$4,500 if you stay per 12 months of service, or is that the initial 12 months of retention?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, after 12 months.

Ms UIBO: What would the teacher numbers in Katherine be in the cost to the department for the extra \$4,500 per 12 months, if we were looking at the reporting period of the Estimates process?

Mrs HERSEY: I will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.3

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

Ms UIBO: For the teaching numbers in Katherine, can you please provide an update of the number of teachers in the Estimates reporting period who will receive the 12-month \$4,500 bonus?

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

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.3.

Ms UIBO: This is the last one regarding teacher shortages and strategic approaches. Is this something that you and the department of Education have worked on with the Australian Education Union Northern Territory Branch regarding retention, or is this something that has been put forward either by the department or you as minister?

Mrs HERSEY: In opposition and now in government, I continue to meet with the Australian Education Union, as does the CE of Education, and we continue to have those conversations ongoing.

Ms UIBO: Is there a specific place you can point to, either on the Education website or through the partnership with the AEU NT around strategic approaches to teacher retention?

Mrs HERSEY: In the Department of Education and Training Strategic Plan 2025–2028, under 'Our Priorities' is 'Attract and keep our teachers'. You will see that it says:

- A. *Increase teacher permanency through more ongoing appointments and investing in teacher capability*
- B. *Prioritise reducing administrative burden for schools*
- C. *Improve staff wellbeing and safety*

That is on the website.

Mr PAECH: I have got to ask: what is crime costing Education in the Northern Territory? How many assaults on Education staff have there been in the last reporting period? What vandalism costs have been associated for the Department of Education and Training? I just know how much you loved asking that in opposition. Then I promise we will go on to outputs.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you for your enthusiasm in this area.

Mr PAECH: I am eager.

Mrs HERSEY: In 2024–25 to 31 March 2025 the cost to repair reported damage to department property reported to the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure was \$1.16m, with 88 department properties experiencing vandalism or break-ins. The breakdown of that is \$618,636 for vandalism and \$538,132 for break and enter.

From 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025 there were 138 incident reports made to the department in which an employee was assaulted by a person or persons, which is a decrease of 86 for the same period last year.

Mr PAECH: To be clear, does that encompass all staff within the Department of Education and Training?

Mrs HERSEY: That is NTPS employees.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Have you finished opening statement?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

J DAVIS: To finish up the follow-up questions in relation to bilingual education and NAPLAN. I understand ...

Mrs HERSEY: I feel like we have done that to death.

J DAVIS: I still have a question, so you can help me with it. I understand the bilingual education begins in a child's first language and then English starts around Year 3 or Year 4; is that right?

Mrs HERSEY: That is correct, but the idea of bilingual education is side-by-side learning. That should be happening from when that child goes to school. They team teach. I have seen it happen in remote communities. The whole idea of bilingual education is that they learn their own dialect or language and then they learn English as well. The measures are through NAPLAN, which is managed by ACARA.

J DAVIS: I am new to this area, so this may not be a proper understanding of it. When someone does their Year 3 NAPLAN test and they have not formally begun bilingual education, if that begins in Year 4, they are essentially doing it in a foreign language. In reference to your answer to the Member for Mulka before about something similar, you said that was something you would consider. I wonder whether you would consider advocating for students to do NAPLAN in their first language?

Mrs HERSEY: I note, Madam Deputy Chair, that I answered that question earlier. We said we would consider that. Member for Johnston, as I am sure you would be aware, it is extremely challenging. That is a national test.

J DAVIS: Understood. I thought that was in relation to a different test. That was NAPLAN. Thank you for your clarification.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES **Output 1.1 – Early Childhood Education and Care Services**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0, Early Childhood Education and Care Services, Output 1.1, Early Childhood Education and Care Services. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: What is the Northern Territory Government's plan to ensure that there are enough early childhood education places, particularly in remote and regional communities, to meet increased demand for universal access?

Mrs HERSEY: In the early years education there is a range of programs ...

Mr PAECH: I am happy to repeat if that helps. I know we have shifted from the statement to the output. What is the Northern Territory Government's plan to ensure there are enough early childhood education and care places, particularly in remote and regional communities, to meet the increased demand for universal access?

Mrs HERSEY: There is a number of programs in the early years education output. Preschool is a universal one that is out there in remote areas. The current Preschool Reform Agreement, which expires on 30 June 2026, is providing program funding until the end of this calendar year, 2025. There is a process where the new agreement is required for Commonwealth funding to be available to support preschool in 2026 and beyond.

We will continue to advocate for a guarantee of adequate needs-based funding for the NT, but also Family as First Teachers is a fantastic program that happens across many areas. It builds capacity in families as they are their child's first teacher. There are some fantastic results that have come out through the FaFT education programs.

In fact, recently at Barunga I ran into a lady who is from your electorate, Member for Gwoja. She spoke of a young person from Kalkarindji FaFT who looked after a young teen while she was pregnant. She attended

FaFT when she had the baby and was helped and supported through that child's journey. The real outcome is that child now is involved and educated and is an employee of the FaFT program. That is a fantastic story of real outcomes. It is creating generational change and has affected so many lives—the mother, the child, the family and anyone who is involved with her in that community.

There are many FaFT programs across the Territory.

Mr PAECH: I am very supportive of FaFT. This question might be directed to the CEO. The federal government has obviously changed, and there is now a requirement for universal access. What is the Northern Territory Government doing to meet that demand, and has the department measured what that demand is?

Ms BOWDEN: Currently there are 234 approved education and care services across the NT. That comprises 231 centre-based or long day care services and three family day care services. Of the centre-based there are 79 preschools across the Northern Territory providing universal access. In addition, there are 98 long day care services and 53 outside-of-school-hours care services.

In addition to that the Australian Government funds a number of what we call non-regulated services, which are funded directly by the Australian Government, and there are 41 of those services across the Northern Territory. There is quite significant access for a whole range of different early childhood and education care services. Some are run by not-for-profit, for-profit or local organisations within the community. There is a whole range of different models there.

There has been considerable mapping done by the department of all the services, and we continually look for where there may be increases in children numbers by community using census data and also our local intelligence. We might also be looking at student enrolments in programs such as FaFT and preschool to get an indication of how many children are in each of the communities.

Mr PAECH: Are you aware of areas within the jurisdiction of the Northern Territory that do not currently have a service in a remote community for early childhood?

Ms BOWDEN: We have pretty good coverage across the Northern Territory. There may be smaller communities where there is a small number of children, potentially there may not be a service. However, under our current funding model, all children who enrol in schools at preschool age receive funding for a preschool. There is always a preschool access regardless of the size of the school.

Mr PAECH: When you talk about 'unregulated'—it is a term that people pricks their ears up to—you are still talking about a service that provides care and support; it is just that it is not authorised caregivers with a particular qualification; is that correct?

Ms BOWDEN: When we talk about unregulated services, they are run and funded by the Australian Government. That is funded directly through the Australian Government. The Department of Education and Training works in partnership with the Australian Government to ensure that there are quality services. Sometimes there is some anxiety when we talk about unregulated services. We are working with the Australian Government and those services to transition them to regulated services to ensure high quality.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm how this early childhood care and development has been factored into the budget? Is there a particular budget line which talks about where that investment will be rolled out?

Mrs HERSEY: Can you restate the question?

Mr PAECH: Can you please confirm if there is a particular budget amount or a budget line which highlights the investment to be rolled out through the early childhood education and care services?

Mrs HERSEY: The 2025–26 budget allocated for the Early Childhood Education and Care Services output is \$25.7m. There is a number of programs in that. Do you want me to go through all those?

Mr PAECH: No, that is fine.

How will the Northern Territory ensure that vulnerable children, including remote children, children living with a disability and those experiencing disadvantage, are prioritised and supported to access their guaranteed three days of subsidised care?

Mrs HERSEY: That was a federal election commitment that has not been implemented yet. It was \$426.6m for the new three-day guarantee to ensure families are eligible for at least three days, as you said, of early childhood education and care. That will start from January 2026. All families will be eligible for at least 72 hours of subsidised early childhood education and care per fortnight, regardless of their activity levels. Families caring for a First Nations child will be eligible for 100 hours of subsidised early childhood education and care per fortnight.

Mr PAECH: Has there been work done in terms of mapping, with that additional investment, how that guarantee for children with a disability or living in a remote community will be guaranteed to access or have a place in a remote community for those guaranteed hours?

Mrs HERSEY: There is a community childcare fund regulatory project and emergency management and infrastructure, but that is all to be negotiated with the Australian Government. The guidelines are not yet available.

Mr PAECH: Expanding on that, is there work being done on understanding how many new or expanded early childhood education centres will be needed and expanded when that funding is rolled out? At the moment we have X amount. We are reaching or are at capacity, so has there been or will there be work undertaken to determine how many new or expanded services will be needed?

Mrs HERSEY: It is in the very early negotiation stages and the department has commenced early discussions. I note that the first Education ministers' meeting is coming up at the end of the month, and I am sure that will be on the agenda.

Mr PAECH: Will you be attending that meeting?

Mrs HERSEY: A hundred per cent, I will.

Mr PAECH: That is wonderful to hear.

Given the expected increase in early childhood education care participation, what strategies is the department looking to put in place to recruit, train and retain early childhood educators and allied health staff across the Northern Territory?

Mrs HERSEY: I spoke about that before with attracting and retaining teachers, which is something across Australia.

Mr PAECH: Is that the same money or is it a separate pool of funding?

Mrs HERSEY: There is a significant amount of work happening in the VET space to boost the industry numbers there and build capacity.

I will get the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Skills, Pathways and Quality, Cathy White, to come forward and explain further.

Ms WHITE: Early childhood educators are a national skill shortage across the country, and in the Northern Territory we feel it extremely. We are putting a significant amount of effort into vocational education and training. The Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care is our top-funded vocational education and training qualification, and it is the third-top in our apprenticeship programs. Significant effort is going into thinking about building our own workforce.

We have the PALM childcare pilot—the first in Australia—where we have workers from Papua New Guinea working in Alice Springs and Katherine. They are fitting in beautifully. We know we have to think creatively about how to make sure we have a good-quality and local-first workforce, but also looking interstate and overseas to meet that need.

Mr PAECH: Ms White spoke about the level of funding in the VET, what is that level currently for early childhood development?

Ms WHITE: I cannot give you the exact funding for childcare and education. I can give you student numbers and a percentage of the total budget. There are 1,924 total funded students in community services, health and education so far this year. Last year there were 3,449, and it is likely to be very similar. Our community

services, health and education are the top priority. At least \$8m of funding goes directly into that area. If you want the exact breakdown, we would take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 6.4

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

Mr PAECH: Could you confirm what the level of funding is for early childhood education and care services; what the enrolment level is; and what proportion of the enrolment is male, female and identify as Indigenous or non-Indigenous?

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

Mrs HERSEY: I note that is a different question.

Mr PAECH: I accept that. I was going to ask a follow-on question. If you want me to retract the other parts of it, I am happy to do so.

Mrs HERSEY: We cannot get that level of detail with the number of students, because it is quite complex. We can take it on notice and get the training data to you.

Mr PAECH: I am very appreciative, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.4.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will break for half an hour and return at 7.02 pm.

The committee suspended.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that the pay conditions and entitlements for early childhood education staff are competitive and reflect the new federal worker retention payment and other workforce initiatives?

Mrs HERSEY: This will be with the Department of Education and Training continuing to work with the Australian Government because that comes under its jurisdiction. That is also under review at the moment.

Mr PAECH: Earlier we spoke about training of Territorians to become early childhood educators. The department spoke about the PALM scheme. How many early childhood educators in the Northern Territory have come in under the PALM scheme?

Mrs HERSEY: We have those PALM workers in Katherine.

Ms WHITE: There is only one PALM pilot. Technically, it is a program that the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations runs. We are involved with it because when the workers come to the Northern Territory they do accredited training through CDU. There were 16 people who came in on this one national pilot. Following the pilot, it will be evaluated and they will consider whether that is a good outcome for Australia more broadly.

Mr PAECH: Is there work being done with remote communities when people are leaving school, or through any Commonwealth initiative that you are aware of, where we are able to capture people to potentially take on a role in the early childhood workforce?

Mrs HERSEY: I will let Cathy talk about that. It is a Trade, Business and Asian Relations question, though.

Mr PAECH: Not a problem. They are up tomorrow.

What is the timeline for the public release of the Families as First Teachers report? What are the reasons for the delay?

Mrs HERSEY: The NT Government is committed to continuing with the delivery of the FaFT program.

The scope of the FaFT evaluation included 40 very remote, remote and urban FaFT sites that commenced operating from 2009 to 2023. The evaluation excluded the FaFT Stay Play Learn sites and the Learning with Families program as they have a different program design to the standard FaFT model. The evaluation found that FaFT is delivering positive outcomes to children, families and communities. The department is still considering the findings of the evaluation and its recommendations.

Mr PAECH: Have you seen the report?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, I have seen that report.

Ms BOWDEN: We are still considering the FaFT evaluation. There were a number of recommendations. It is difficult for us to release it until we have finalised the NTRAI negotiations with the Australian Government. Once we have worked through those negotiations, and the report is informing that, we will be in a position to release it.

Mr PAECH: Will the report be released once the negotiations have been completed?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes. The plan would be to release, but not until all those negotiations are finalised.

Mr PAECH: Are there any plans to increase the number of funded preschool hours or expand access to three-year-olds? If so, what budget provisions have been made available for this?

Mrs HERSEY: I note that comes under the negotiations that are under the preschool reform at the moment. The three-year-old preschool trial that you are talking about was under the previous government and it came to an end in December 2023.

Mr PAECH: Are there plans to work in that space of three-year-old preschool?

Mrs HERSEY: Currently, three-year-olds can access three-year-old preschool in remote areas, but there are no plans at this stage.

Mr PAECH: Is that only a limited set number of hours that three-year-olds can access?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes. We spoke about that earlier, which is the 15 hours.

Mr PAECH: Is there no plan currently to expand that at the moment?

Mrs HERSEY: No, not unless we get additional funding. There was nothing that came up. Under your government, that finished in 2023. There were reasons you did not continue that. There are no plans. Should there be places in preschool, those children can go to preschool already, but the priority would be given to the four-year-olds.

Mr PAECH: Many remote communities lack mainstream-style preschool facilities, making it difficult for children to access the guaranteed 15 hours of early childhood learning per week. What is being done to address access to services, particularly given access to culturally appropriate early childhood education is a Closing the Gap target?

Mrs HERSEY: We spoke about this earlier with the FaFT program and what a FaFT program does. It is operated in many regional and remote communities to build capacity of families as they are their children's first teacher. I gave that story about the family in your electorate in Kalkarindji. There are many programs like that and many sites. I think there are 55 Family as First Teacher program sites.

There is also Families as First Teachers Stay Play and Learn, which is learning through their families coming in but also child and family centres, place-based early childhood hubs centred on the integration of services focusing on children and their families within a community. Those child and family centres provide a single point of contact for children and their families to connect with coordinated, universal, targeted and specialist services. There is also the remote early childhood and integrated services which is working with the child and family centres directly. In Darwin there is also the Mimik-ga Centre in Wanguri, which I have been to with the Member for Wanguri. It is a fantastic centre for all different nationalities.

With the negotiations with the Australian Government on the early childhood and preschool reform, going to the Education ministers' meeting we look forward to continuing the negotiations with the Australian

Government about equitable funding for NT children to improve the access. We certainly will continue to lobby the Australian Government for that to make sure we get equitable funding, given the remoteness and complexities of delivering programs across the Territory.

Under the minor new works there is in progress at Borroloola the new preschool playground, at Bradshaw Primary School, Braitling Primary School as well as the Driver Primary School upgrades to the playground.

That is it in the preschool space.

J DAVIS: Can you advise what planning is underway to provide foundational supports for children with disability, especially those who fall between mainstream services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, under early childhood?

Mrs HERSEY: I mentioned the Mimik-ga FaFT in Wanguri that provides childhood support for different nationalities and children with disabilities. Foundational supports are specific supports outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and will be delivered through a mix of new and reformed programs and services and will reflect the evidence of what works. These supports will be phased in over time with the initial rollout starting in the 2025–26 financial year.

J DAVIS: Can you give any information, apart from the centre in Wanguri, about where that might be sitting?

Mrs HERSEY: The department is still working with other departments for this initiative, mainly Health and the Office of Disability. They are in early negotiation stages at the moment.

J DAVIS: I think I heard you say that you are expecting that within 2025 to be some development there; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – GOVERNMENT EDUCATION

Output 2.1 – Preschool Education

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 2.0, Government Education, Output 2.1, Preschool Education. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement was meant to deliver an extra \$1bn into classrooms over the next five years. Why is there only an extra \$50m in this year's budget?

Mrs HERSEY: Over the next few years there will be a slow rollout of that, which was part of the negotiations, so in 2025, 59%; in 2026, 59.15%; in 2027, 59.3%; in 2028, 59.55%; and in 2029, 60% of that funding will be delivered. There will be a glide path up between now and 2029.

Mr PAECH: On that, are you or the department able to provide a breakdown of how that money you have just spoken about will roll out to schools over the five years, and what that funding contribution split will be between the NT and the Commonwealth?

Mrs HERSEY: The breakdown of the Commonwealth Government funding for 2025 is 59% from NT Government and 24.92% from the Commonwealth Government, giving a total of 83.93%. There can only be that at the moment.

Mr CONSIDINE: Under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement there were targets, and the minister started to go through those targets. The targets reflect the NT Government and Commonwealth contributions. Those targets rise over a period of time to reach 100%, which is the agreed standard. They rise in increments that are significantly more for the Commonwealth and a little bit less for us. That is why the amount increases over time.

The final amount in dollar terms is difficult to determine, because it is driven by our Age Grade Census where, every August, we have a look at the numbers of kids in government and non-government schools across the country. That determines the multiplier for the student amount we receive. I cannot give you a final figure for that. What I can tell you is it increases over a period of time. At the moment we can only know the amount for 2025 that has gone to schools, because I cannot give you an accurate figure.

Mr PAECH: Is there forecasting done where you are able to provide a school-by-school breakdown of how that money will be distributed to each school over the next five years? It is not set in concrete, but you would do projections based on growth—yes?

Mrs HERSEY: In short, no. When the budgets are released in October, then 2026 figures will be out with the school budgets.

Mr PAECH: How many schools have to fly or drive students to swimming pools to comply with your swimming lesson mandate?

Mrs HERSEY: This was another election commitment that we rolled out, and we have spoken about it numerous times in parliament. It was a \$3m commitment to NT schools to deliver free swimming and water safety lessons in 2025 for all children from Years 1 to 6. The Department of Education and Training has worked with Royal Life Saving and 14 other providers to deliver the nationally accredited Swim and Survive program, and it is well underway.

The department is supporting schools with implementation of swimming and water safety lessons for students in Years 1 to 6 by mapping schools to their nearest pool, investigating portable alternatives for suitability, reducing red tape through an online prepopulated excursion form and progressing funding agreements to the non-government sector.

As of 9 May 2025, 33 schools have participated in a Swim and Survive program, with 3,648 students taking part in Term 1 of 2025. Of those 33 schools, 16 did not deliver Swim and Survive in 2024, which means this year there are already more children gaining essential swim and survive skills, with more to come.

All of the NT Government schools have received their funding. Non-government schools have received their grant funding.

In the Barkly region there were four school communities that came into Tennant Creek for their swimming lessons.

Our data is about whether it is booked or not, how many students participate and the level attained.

The department does work with those schools to work out some of the complexities of getting them in—for example, very remote schools. I think Shepherdson came in while we were in parliament recently. The department is working with them with their excursions. They came in on an excursion, but other schools come in at different times for excursions. It is about the department working with them to make sure that when they come in they use that time to potentially do their swimming lessons. Some come in and go to the Michael Long centre, and it is whether they come in and do swimming lessons as well. The department is working closely with schools to provide that Swim and Survive.

Mr PAECH: You made a commitment of \$3m. Is there also additional funds that are coming from the schools to allow for transportation, accommodation expenses, or is all of that coming out of the \$3m?

Mrs HERSEY: Through that \$3m, \$80 per student goes to swimming tuition fees and \$70 is allocated for travel subsidies. For example, some schools might be close to a pool and they might walk there, so they do not need the travel subsidy. To date, no schools have applied for additional financial support.

Mr PAECH: The initial fund is \$150 per student, but you are saying that might vary. Could it be pooled across Education because a school might be around the corner from a pool, so they do not have transportation costs and that can be reallocated to a school that has to factor in remote travel?

Mrs HERSEY: As I said, to date no schools have applied for additional funding, but they can put in a request for additional financial support should they need to.

Mr PAECH: To you or your department's knowledge, what is the most remote school that is engaged in this swimming program to date?

Mrs HERSEY: I can give you some examples. Amanbidji School has accessed the program in Kununurra with Royal Life Saving NT. Batchelor Outdoor Education Centre has registered Swim and Survive partners, qualified swimming teachers and is working with Batchelor College to explore the opportunities for remote schools to access the Swim and Survive program at the centre. Shepherdson College is working with their

urban satellite school to schedule programs as students attend urban excursions. Kintore Street School in the Big Rivers region and Forrest Parade School are planning to register as Swim and Survive program providers, because they have their own purpose-built pools. Mililingimbi School in East Arnhem is being supported to run a Darwin-based program with Pymble Ladies' College from Sydney. Pymble Ladies' College have a Swim and Survive-aligned school base in New South Wales, and they will send their qualified instructors up.

Ms UIBO: I thought you were going to say they were going to Sydney for their swimming lessons. I thought that is going to cost a little bit more than \$3m.

Mrs HERSEY: Pymble Ladies' College may actually be paying for them, but, no, they are bringing their instructors up, which I think is fantastic. There are a lot of schools that have—whether it is through Yadha Muru Foundation, or whatever they have—great relationships with teaming up with other schools down south; it is a great thing to see.

Willowra School has successfully delivered a tailored swimming and water safety program, and travelled by community-funded bus to Yuendumu pool each week for eight weeks.

You would know, Member for Gwoja, what is extremely remote more than I would. I am aware of places across the Territory, but I am not sure—maybe Shepherdson College or Mililingimbi is the most remote.

The School Of Sport Education helps coordinate that with the school through the Department of Education and Training.

Mr PAECH: Has the department been engaged with any school across the Territory that has considered putting in a pool?

Mrs HERSEY: Not that I am aware of, but I have heard some great initiatives from other people who would be happy to do a mobile pool to communities. The short answer is no, I have not heard of any. Have you?

Mr PAECH: No, I thought you would be able to tell me if anyone has been to Clark Rubber.

Mrs HERSEY: No, no-one has been to Clark Rubber. Just for the record, that is a joke, Member for Gwoja. Nice to get that one in, though.

Mr PAECH: I had to try.

Mrs HERSEY: They have some great pools there, though, I must say.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will bring it back a bit, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: Sorry; I was engaging in some good chat with the minister.

Some schools have told us that they are having to do land-based lessons. What is a land-based lesson?

Mrs HERSEY: I taught swimming lessons many years ago in Katherine. Land-based lessons are about learning some safety aspects of swimming. There may be some children in the early years who might be a bit too young to come in from a remote setting; therefore, they would do some land-based lessons.

Ms BOWDEN: Royal Life Saving Australia provides free online classroom resources for schools. They call it dry land water safety education, and this can support the younger children who you would not necessarily take on an excursion when they are in the early years of primary school and are unable to travel some of the long distances to whatever the closest pool might be. Some of the sorts of things they do in those land-based lessons is not only, as the minister was saying, around some general water safety but also things like getting children used to having water splashed on their head. They have some engagement with the water, but it is not the same as if they were in a pool. It is regarding general safety and how to be safe around the waterways in the Northern Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: For example, to elaborate, it might be if they have a shallow pool, they might put their head in the water and blow bubbles or, as the CE said, be putting it over their head—a bit like you might do with your children in the bath, not that you have children, but I am sure the Leader of the Opposition has done that.

I am not sure why that is funny.

Mr PAECH: No, I just had the picture of you doing it to me; it is quite scary.

With the money, if there is a school that has a pool and they cannot travel, are they able to reallocate the travel costs to help with some upgrades of the pool? Yuendumu, Areyonga and Kintore have a pool—I am just using these because they are in my electorate. Where schools do not have to travel but the pool needs upgrades, can they seek the department's support to redirect to upgrade the pool?

Mrs HERSEY: Those pools are normally community pools. The funding for the swimming in schools program is specifically for the children. For example, at Yuendumu if they walked to the pool, they would get the money for the child to do the swimming program—whether it be in Wadeye or other communities—for the tuition, which is \$80.

Mr PAECH: As an example, Kintore pool is not operational at the moment, so the kids cannot do lessons there. Is there an opportunity at all for any negotiations to take part?

Mrs HERSEY: Potentially they could apply for minor new works if it is a department asset, but if it is a community asset I am sure there are other avenues they can apply for funding. Some of them, you could ask Minister Edgington about that question in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development.

Mr PAECH: You spoke earlier about the school-based policing program which has not yet started. You confirmed that it would be coming out of the Education department's budget ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am not sure. We are still on Output 2.1, which is Preschool Education.

Mr PAECH: You would be right, yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Primary Years Education

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 2.2, Primary Years Education. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: You talked about the school-based policing program, and it has not commenced yet, but that it would not be paid for by the Northern Territory Police. The Chief Minister said that it was coming from Education. Can you confirm if this is coming out of the Better and Fairer Schools funding agreement or out of classroom funding?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will double-check one more time. School-based police officers are in senior years. I am not sure if they are in any primary schools anymore.

Mr PAECH: Are there none in primary schools?

Mrs HERSEY: They are in the middle schools, as they are at the moment, and senior schools.

Ms UIBO: Does the process for allocation relate to remote schools? Often they do not have a separate primary school and high school campus. In the context of remote schools, how many remote schools have school-based police officers?

Mrs HERSEY: Maybe we can ask that in—they are all in a different output in seniors.

Mr PAECH: Can I confirm—I apologise, minister; I am happy to ask that question in secondary.

Are there still visiting police who have a role with Education in remote schools? I ask because sometimes there is not a high school or a primary school; it is one campus.

Mrs HERSEY: That was published in the Police budget. I think you have missed your break on that one.

Mr PAECH: They said that Education was paying for it.

Ms UIBO: No, they said that it was Education paying for it. The Police minister and the Acting Police Commissioner both said that the \$3m for school-based police was coming out of the Education department's budget and we should ask the Education minister.

Mrs HERSEY: The police charge the department centrally for that.

Ms UIBO: Are you saying centrally to the Department of Education and Training, which is the centre?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes. The police charge the Education department centrally.

Ms UIBO: Yes, that means you are paying for that service, essentially?

Mrs HERSEY: The Education department is charged for it, yes.

Ms UIBO: We can ask you, because it is your department and budget, in Education.

Mrs HERSEY: In follow-up to that, there are none in primary schools. We are on early education still.

Mr PAECH: Normally, the police would just be then visiting to build a relationship in the school. Education has no funding commitment in primary school.

Mrs HERSEY: If they are going to primary schools, it is about building relationships in remote communities. They would have a good relationship with schools in those areas.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any other questions on Output 2.2, Primary Years Education?

J DAVIS: I have some questions about education in youth detention, in youth Corrections—I do not know what the terminology is ...

Mrs HERSEY: That is in secondary.

J DAVIS: Okay. I think you said earlier questions about students with disability would come into 2-point-something.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I think that would be in Primary Years Education.

Mrs HERSEY: It is. You are in the right output.

J DAVIS: I am in the right output. Take your wins.

Can you confirm whether disability loadings allocated under the Schooling Resource Standard are being fully passed on to mainstream NT schools?

Mrs HERSEY: NT students are supported through a range of mechanisms, including \$99.4m in the 2025 calendar year for direct school resourcing through student needs-based and targeted funding to schools, which is an increase of \$4.6m compared to 2024.

There is a \$16.7m budget allocated in the 2025–26 financial year to support schools through programs and direct service delivery from regionally based multidisciplinary teams comprising social workers, psychologists, inclusion advisers, speech therapists, occupational therapists and behaviour support coaches. Direct service delivery supports whole-school approaches, small groups and individual needs.

There were 72 of 112 service-based multidisciplinary team positions filled. Of the 112 positions, 85 are professional client service roles, with 54 currently filled; and 27 are support roles for professional practice and training for all staff employed in multidisciplinary teams and providing advice and intake functions to schools, with 18 currently filled.

The school resourcing for students with disability is based on the NCCD data on school students with disability, which is a mandatory annual collection of information on Australian students receiving adjustments to access education. In 2024 the proportion of NT students receiving disability adjustments was 32.9% compared with 25.7% nationally.

J DAVIS: I am interested in whether the disability loadings allocated under the Schooling Resource Standard are being fully passed on to mainstream NT schools.

Ms BOWDEN: The Schooling Resource Standard is funding for the system as a whole. There is a large proportion, or most of it, goes directly to the schools and there is a component that funds the centrally based services and programs.

J DAVIS: Can you outline what proportion is retained centrally?

Ms BOWDEN: The funding that goes direct to the schools through the schools resourcing and the student needs-based model and targeted funding is \$99.4m. The budget that is used to fund our multidisciplinary teams who provide support for our students is \$16.7m.

J DAVIS: What is this out of a total of?

Mrs HERSEY: Can you clarify the question? It will depend if we take it on notice or not.

J DAVIS: What is the total allocation of disability loading under the Schooling Resource Standard? How much of that is centrally held, and how much is allocated to students directly?

Mrs HERSEY: The figures that the CE and I gave you of the \$99.4m and \$16.7m is the funding.

J DAVIS: Is that the total funding? Do both of those go to particular programs; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: The \$99.4m in the 2025 calendar year is for direct school resourcing through student needs-based and targeted funding to schools, which is an increase of \$4.6m compared to 2024. The \$16.7m budget allocated in 2025–26 financial year is to support schools through programs and direct service delivery from regionally based multidisciplinary teams which comprise social workers, psychologists, inclusion advisers and therapists.

J DAVIS: In light of the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations to invest in inclusive education, can you speak to the way funding is allocated and whether there are any reforms being considered to shift funding and policy towards mainstream inclusion for students with disability?

Ms BOWDEN: The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has handed down its report in September 2023. There is a number of recommendations which were specific to Education that were accepted in principle.

The particular recommendation that you are referring to, there was a mixed view even within the commission themselves around mainstream versus students going into particular high-support-needs schools. Certainly, there was a mixed review from the commission on that.

In the Northern Territory where we have a very strong history of high-support-needs schools, we provide parents with the opportunity to choose which education provision, whether it be mainstream or a high-support-needs school, would best meet the needs of their child. We will continue to offer both options.

Mr MACKAY: Earlier this year I tabled a petition on behalf of concerned parents and community members regarding the Humpty Doo kiss-and-go. Can you confirm that there is money in the budget to rectify this issue with the current kiss-and-go?

Mrs HERSEY: There is \$800,000 in the 2025–26 minor new works program to undertake an internal traffic upgrade, including reduction of hazards to pedestrians and students entering and leaving the school. The current scope for the works will explore the viability of a kiss-and-go internally on school grounds, as well as a covered walkway to the bus interchange. That has been in collaboration with DLI.

Mr PAECH: Is there no money in this current budget to move the kiss-and-go, rather undertake a study?

Mrs HERSEY: I will bring Adam Walding, Acting Deputy Chief Executive of the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, forward.

Mr WALDING: The \$800,000 is on program and that will get the design, the initial study done and some of the construction work once the design has been finalised. If we need some additional money, we will work with our colleagues at the department of Education to get additional money to finish it off and put it in place.

Mr PAECH: Your colleague the Deputy Chief Minister often talks about things going over or under. Do you think that \$800,000 is enough to move the kiss-and-go?

Mrs HERSEY: Given my background—that is probably not in my scope—that is something for Adam Walding.

Mr WALDING: At this stage, yes it is. The initial discussions and look at the design is around \$800,000. As we go through the detailed design and find out if there are any issues with the land or we find some of that lovely asbestos underground or anything else, obviously the budget will change. At this stage that is the budget and the allocation we are working to.

Mrs HERSEY: Given the constraints of the budget as we have it, we would not like to think that would go over. There is a budget for a reason and all projects are to work to that budget, but as Adam has said, potentially they may need some more, but we certainly hope not.

Mr PAECH: I will be keeping an eye on that one.

Ms UIBO: Let us hope the Member for Goyder does not have to kiss that project goodbye.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No more comments like that. That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Secondary Years Education

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.3, Secondary Years Education. Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: Following through on the school-based policing program with the budget, can you confirm where that funding is coming from? Are those school-based constables coming out of the Better and Fairer Schools funding agreement or out of classroom funding?

Mrs HERSEY: The funding for the school-based police is reprioritised and it is from within the department fund centrally, not schools.

Mr PAECH: It is within central funding, and that will be managed by Education. You said that there were going to be 16; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: I do not think I gave you a number; I will follow up on that. Do you want the current number?

Mr PAECH: Yes, I want the number of school-based constables there are at the moment and how many there will be when the funding kicks in.

Mrs HERSEY: Currently, there are 15 school-based constables at Tennant Creek High School, Katherine High School, Centralian Middle School, Centralian Senior College, Casuarina Senior College, Darwin High School, Dripstone Middle School, Nightcliff Middle School, Sanderson Middle School, Palmerston College, Taminmin College and Nhulunbuy High School. They are either an auxiliary or a constable, totalling 15.

As for the next lot of school-based police coming in, work is being done to scope for the expansion of that program. The acting commissioner spoke about it the other day. The school-based Aboriginal liaison officer initiative, which is currently in development, is a collaborative program between NT Police, the department of Education and local schools. I look forward to that rolling out.

Mr PAECH: What formula will be used to determine which schools are assigned a constable? When the Aboriginal liaison officers are rolled out, what is the difference in the methodology or the formula to determine which schools are assigned a constable and which are assigned an Aboriginal liaison officer?

Mrs HERSEY: That is still being scoped and it is too early to say. I will use Katherine as an example, where the Aboriginal liaison officers are well known throughout the community. They have great relationships with young people and students at the school, whether they work in after-school programs or youth programs across the community. The excitement of expanding on the program is the relationships that those people have with their community, which is extremely important. That is all still to be determined.

Mr PAECH: You said that school-based constables are for secondary schools or traditionally they are. Is that the same for Aboriginal liaison officers?

Mrs HERSEY: You were asking earlier about primary school because in very remote settings, they are both. Those liaison officers will potentially, in some very remote areas, be in that setting from primary through to secondary education.

Ms UIBO: You mentioned 11 schools; can I confirm there are 15 constables spread over the 11 schools, or have I missed some of the names?

Mrs HERSEY: That is correct. Some schools have two; for example, Taminmin College and Palmerston College both have two school-based constables because they are considerably bigger schools.

Ms UIBO: Do they receive a bigger allocation based on the department's request, or is that from the police?

Mrs HERSEY: It is determined by the number of students. Both those schools are high in student numbers.

Ms UIBO: I understand you are still developing the school-based Aboriginal liaison officer program. Just a heads-up, through your next portfolio I will be asking about some of the entitlements for those Aboriginal liaison officers, who are now doing more duties, but they do not get the same entitlements as their fellow constables. You have already spoken about the great engagement they offer in Katherine, but they are not actually being financially compensated for that extra work which their colleagues are doing and get the entitlements for, including housing. In terms of this conversation, I will follow that up in the next portfolio.

Mrs HERSEY: That, potentially, would have been a question for Police. You may have to take ...

Ms UIBO: They kicked it down to you through OCPE, so I am giving you the heads-up now because it relates to the Education piece.

Mr PAECH: Will Aboriginal liaison officers also be paid for by Education and not Police?

Mrs HERSEY: The Aboriginal liaison officers who are in the school-based policing program will be funded by the Department of Education and Training.

Mr PAECH: We have spoken about the transition from middle schools which was announced by the former government. You said that the CLP government would not be getting rid of middle schools. Three days later the now Chief Minister said that we need to go back to Years 7 to 12. It looks like the Chief Minister won that battle. Have you been able to agree on a pathway forward for children? What is the timeline on that?

Mrs HERSEY: I think I answered that question earlier.

Mr PAECH: We are in this output, so you might want to have a go.

Mrs HERSEY: I can certainly have a go, but I have already answered the question. I answered it in the opening statement, but I also answered it in another question.

The timeline for the middle school is to be started next year. There has been a considerable amount of consultation that has happened from Term 1 this year. I have been to some of the consultations that have happened at Darwin Middle School and Darwin High School. I have also been to Alice Springs to hear the concerns in your neck of the woods, Member for Gwoja, about Centralian Middle School and Centralian Senior College.

It is about creating pathways for all students to complete their NT Certificate of Education and Training to achieve core literacy, numeracy and work-readiness skills. That program will start next year and finish in 2028.

Mr PAECH: Is there priority? Has the government made a determination about which region it will start the transition in first? Have you decided it will be Alice Springs or will it be Darwin?

Mrs HERSEY: All of that is taken into consideration in the consultation phase. There are nine schools that take in this middle school reform. That is something the department will work out in due course. If you want more information, maybe David Ah Toy could come in, or Paul Van Holsteyn, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Schools, can give you more information.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: There was extensive consultation in Term 1 with a number of proposals. On the basis of that consultation, the minister is taking a proposal to Cabinet for the government's final decision about the exact composition of those schools. It will commence in 2026 in a phased transition.

Mr PAECH: How many school counsellors are currently employed by the Department of Education and Training, and how many additional do you intend to recruit?

Mrs HERSEY: School counsellors have historically been qualified social workers or psychologists who hold professional registration with the relevant professional board. Obviously, there is a national skills shortage of these professionals, so the department has worked with OCPE to have some changes to the qualification. To strengthen the service delivery the department is redesigning existing roles and establishing a dedicated team of school counsellors based full-time in schools, unlike under the previous government where they all went to the Mitchell Centre. They will be supported by team leaders responsible for professional supervision. From Semester 2 in 2025, 10 school counsellors will be based in a designated school.

Today we announced \$1.9m, as an election commitment, to fund more school counsellors. More schools will receive a dedicated school-based counsellor over time. When young people in schools need to talk to someone it is important that they have someone behind a door rather than pick up a phone to have their counselling session. The new team of school counsellors will complement the existing multidisciplinary teams made up of social workers, psychologists, senior teachers, occupational therapists, speech pathologists and positive-behaviour coaches.

The schools at the moment without a designated school counsellor will continue to receive school-based wellbeing support. As of 26 March there were 19 employed counsellors by the department. There is a recruitment drive on at the moment with the announcement we did today.

Ms UIBO: Where are those 19 based?

Mrs HERSEY: There are eight in Darwin, five in Top End, two in East Arnhem, two in Barkly and two in Central as at 26 March.

Ms UIBO: Can you confirm that all 19 are based in a school and not in the department office of those regions or in the Mitchell Centre?

Mrs HERSEY: The ones I have read out to you are a mix of both, but the new ones that we announced today will be in schools.

Ms UIBO: Will that be 19 plus 10 to make a total of 29; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: That is correct, but there are some vacancies we are still recruiting to.

Ms UIBO: How many of those vacancies exist?

Mrs HERSEY: As at 26 March there were 11 vacancies.

Ms UIBO: Were 11 out of 19 vacant?

Mrs HERSEY: There are 19 employed and there are 11 vacancies.

Ms UIBO: If you had the full cohort of school counsellors you would have the 30 positions already plus another 10 which would then mean 40, not 29 as I asked earlier, which you answered.

Mrs HERSEY: That is correct; with the new ones coming on, 40 total.

J DAVIS: In relation to youth education in detention, can you explain if a young person has a school support plan that is funded how that is transferred to them when they are in detention?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: The level of resourcing in Tivendale is very high compared with what it would be in a school. It is equivalent to the level of resourcing that would be in our special schools or special centres.

In terms of the plan, it is about ensuring the information about the young person is passed on to the educators at Tivendale and then also at the end of the young person's time in detention. Through the throughcare

planning, the plan and the support for the disability is then conveyed back to the host school so that the young person can be supported to be successful.

J DAVIS: There is a transfer of information but not funds; is that correct?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: Each side is funded according to its own funding methodology.

J DAVIS: I mean if there is funding allocated to a particular student, that funding is not transferred but the information regarding their plan may be; is that correct?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: Under our funding model, NCCD funding is allocated according to the two points in the year. If a student is moving from school to school outside of those points, the funding does not follow the child, if that makes sense. It would be retained in the school where they have that enrolment at the point that the funding model is determined.

J DAVIS: Would the support plan be transferred?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: It may look different because the context is different. The nature of support that a young person may need to have whilst in detention or whilst in the community may be different. It is still contextualised to the school, but the information about the student should travel with the student.

J DAVIS: Who coordinates or oversees that?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: There is a range of functions that do that. Through the youth court program, we have staff who support with that process. That allows for information to be passed to the court. The court has that information as well. They also support young people to enrol into programs. In partnership with Corrections, there is the SATS (Specialist Assessment and Treatment Services) team. Education work closely in partnership with the SATS team to understand the needs of the young people and to develop plans to support those plans.

In terms of throughcare planning at the end of detention, the Tivendale staff will make contact with the school in the destination or the originating community or the school location. In the event where it may be unclear where the young person will enrol post that time in Tivendale, they will stay on the Top End School of Flexible Learning roll so that we maintain line of sight to that young person and can support them into their next learning endeavour.

J DAVIS: Do bail support programs have teachers and VET trainers at each location?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: There are three bail support residential facilities across the Territory. There are two facilities—one in Darwin and one in Tennant Creek. The model has changed a bit in different locations, again, to be contextualised to the environment.

In Darwin the model is operated by First Steps. Through Top End School of Flexible Learning, we deliver a learning program onsite there. However, young people in that program more so access activities—for instance, vocational education and training—either at other campuses of Top End School of Flexible Learning or through the Palmerston Youth Skills Centre.

In Tennant Creek students in that program either access vocational education and training learning programs through the Juno Centre or they can also enrol in Tennant Creek High School.

In Alice Springs in the bail support facility, students are supported to take advantage of the education and training programs across the education spectrum in Alice Springs.

J DAVIS: Is there data available on the educational outcomes of young people who have been through these programs? There will be a lot of detail there.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: It is sometimes difficult to see the big trends in this picture because the numbers of young people tend to be quite low, particularly through the bail support accommodation. For instance, in Tivendale through the learning program that is offered there we have students undertaking stage 1 and stage 2 through the Northern Territory School of Distance Education. In addition to that students are undertaking scaffolded and differentiated learning aligned to the Australian Curriculum with Indigenous perspectives embedded in the curriculum.

In Tivendale as well we have had a range of vocational education and training programs in there. Often it might not be a full certificate completion, but it may be competencies or skill sets towards a full certificate, and also things like first-aid courses or white cards. There is a range of outcomes that are achieved through those programs.

J DAVIS: Do you have data on how many young people exit into mainstream or flexible learning centres or other courses to complete things that they have begun while they are in Tivendale?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: One of the benefits of both Tivendale and the Darwin bail support facility is that young people in those programs are already accessing education programs in the community. There is currently one young person in Tivendale who accesses a course through the Palmerston skills centre. Similarly through the Darwin bail support facility they are already accessing courses through these other mechanisms, which makes that throughcare and the transition post-bail or post-detention more streamlined.

J DAVIS: For young people who might be, for example, doing Year 10, do you have data on the outcomes post-release?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: We do not specifically collect that data on that cohort.

J DAVIS: What response has the department of Education had to the Office of the Children's Commissioner's vulnerable children report released in October 2024?

Mrs HERSEY: The department has had a number of meetings with the Children's Commissioner.

Ms CHATTERTON: Both the chief executive and I have met with the Children's Commissioner a number of times where we have discussed the reports but also updated her on the kind of work we have been doing in this space, which my colleague has just detailed.

An important piece of work we have just undertaken is around the continual support for young people and vulnerable people who are engaged with the youth justice system. Also, the work we are doing in partnership with DCF through the Circuit Breaker Program and initiatives like that, but also we facilitate conversations with the Children's Commissioner and our Youth Voice Peak Group and the Leaders of Tomorrow. As they identify priority areas they want to be having input around system reform and strategy development, they are linking back to some of key reports that have come out of the Office of the Children's Commissioner. There have been a lot of two-way conversations and increased sharing of information of the work that we are doing in this space.

Mr MACKAY: Given we are in the Secondary Years Education output, which includes VET in schools, does the department have any data on the number of students who achieve a certificate through a VET program at school and then leave? What percentage of people who either drop out in Year 10, 11 or 12 or graduate have achieved a certificate of some sort?

Mrs HERSEY: In senior years education, students attaining an NTCET there were 407 non-Aboriginal students who exceeded and there were 68 Aboriginal students who exceeded. Also in the training and higher education, there were 552 students who completed a Certificate II, III or IV qualification, keeping in mind that VET is a great pathway to attain an NTCET. We see this happening across the Territory. There is also the VET graduates in employment or further study. There were 94% who exceeded.

If you want more information, I can pass to Cathy White to give you some more.

Mr MACKAY: To repeat part of the question before we begin. How many students either got a Certificate I, II or III in something and then got their NTCET or left the school before completing their NTCET? They have at least a certificate to go out into the world with. How many got their NTCET too? Does that make sense?

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry, Member for Goyder; I was reading you the non-government. There is also government information. I will let Cathy answer the question.

Ms WHITE: It is an excellent question; we are interested in VET pathways. It was quite a broad question about completions and whether students are completing during the time they are at school. I will answer the question just using those students who did a formal school-based apprenticeship or traineeship and completed that in school. That might give you an idea of the numbers.

We are keen to have more pathways because once they are connected to an employer they are more likely to complete.

In 2025 we had 344 school-based apprentices and trainees. Of those, 110 were First Nations school-based apprentices and trainees. The top qualifications, which I think are interesting and relevant, were Certificate III in electrotech, which is one of our top skills shortages, 44 students in 2025; Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance, again a big skills shortage; Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care—for which we have a question on notice—32 students; and 27 in Certificate II in carpentry.

As far as how many of them complete the full qualification while they are still at school, we would need to take that on notice to do a little more of that completion analysis for you. Those who used it for an NTCET pathway is quite high, so we can also get that for you.

Question on Notice No 6.5

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

Mr MACKAY: How many students used a Certificate I, II or III that they undertook at VET in schools to achieve an NTCET? How many students have achieved at least a Certificate I in something—if not a Certificate I, II or III—through VET in schools who have then become a school leaver?

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

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.5.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: On that note, we will take a quick five-minute comfort break.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. This concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – International Education

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.4, International Education. While the Minister for Education and Training is responsible for the delivery of education services to international students in NT Government schools, I note that questions relating to international education strategy should be directed to the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population when she appears before the committee tomorrow afternoon. Are there any questions?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Regarding delivery of education services to international students in NT Government schools, can you give me a quick overview of what those services are and what schools we are talking about?

Mrs HERSEY: The funding contributes to services and capacity building for international partnerships, student programs and marketing and promotional activities to increase the number of fee-paying students and study tours in NT Government schools. Providing international education supports the NT Government’s broader objective of rebuilding the economy by providing services that improve the attraction of the NT as a study destination.

The majority of the fee-paying international students in NT schools are dependants of other international students, who are the primary visa holder. The department provides a full fee waiver for dependants of CDU Masters by Research and PhD scholarship recipients to attend an NT Government school, and a 40% fee reduction for the dependants of any other international student type, including vocational education and training.

The department works closely with Study NT through the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations to ensure its provision of education services to international students is in line with government objectives.

In 2025 there are four schools in Darwin delivering international education programs: Anula Primary School; Moil Primary School; Sanderson Middle School; and Darwin High School. The budget allocated for intensive English units is \$3.819m.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Are refugees or children of refugees doing English language training? Is that one of the cohorts?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, Anula Primary School—I know that because a girlfriend of mine’s daughter used to work there—has a large cohort of those children at that school.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Do we have the total number of international students we are servicing?

Mrs HERSEY: Full and discounted fee-paying international students in government schools in April 2025 totalled 229 students.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.4 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION

Output 3.1 – Primary and Secondary Years Education

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – TRAINING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Output 4.1 – Training

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0, Training and Higher Education, and Output 4.1, Training. Are there any questions?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: How much funding does the Northern Territory Government give to Charles Darwin University?

Mrs HERSEY: The 2025–26 budget allocated to Charles Darwin University is \$60.4m, including \$45m for the provision of VET; \$9.3m to support delivery of higher education; \$4.1m for VET in schools; \$1.9m for the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education program; and \$0.5m for Work Integrated Learning Scholarships.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Do you have an idea what proportion that \$60.4m is of the total funding for CDU, because I am sure they get funding through the federal government as well?

Mr PAECH: That is a question for CDU.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I am just trying to get the proportion of our funding; that is all.

Mrs HERSEY: Member for Karama, we do not have that information.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Higher Education

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 5.1 – Corporate and Governance

No questions.

Output 5.2 – Shared Services Received

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 5.2, Shared Services Received. Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: I have a couple of follow-ups to questions on notice.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.1

Mrs HERSEY: The students eligible for Australian Government funding under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement Schooling Resource Standard is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Schools Statistics Collection business rules. In 2024 there were 1,628 students on the intensive support roll. At the August Age Grade Census, 194 of those students were eligible for funding under the BFSA. There are additional funding streams the Australian Government and Northern Territory Government use to provide intensive case-management support to students on the intensive support roll and their families, including central and regional school attendance officers and student engagement officers.

In that 1,628, note that this total includes 69 preschool students on the intensive support roll who are not funded through the BFSA.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.4

Mrs HERSEY: Funding for early childhood education qualifications total is \$5,106,566. The NT Government-funded students in early childhood education qualifications by Aboriginal status are 251 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, which is 26%, and 712 non-Aboriginal, which is a total of 963; and 98 out of 963 are people with disability.

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.5

Mrs HERSEY: In 2024, 50.6% of NTCET completers did VET and 29.8% required VET to complete.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.2 and Output Group 5.0. That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Education and Training.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the departmental officers who provided advice to the minister today.

Minister, would you like any closing remarks?

Mrs HERSEY: I would just like to say thank you very much. I know Estimates is a very busy time for everyone. I really appreciate the effort that the department and everyone in the background has done in getting all the folders and information together so that we can provide answers, especially to the Member for Gwoja.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consider outputs relating to the Public Service portfolio.

PUBLIC SERVICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome, and thank you all for being here at quarter to nine on a Monday night; we appreciate your time.

I note that while the outputs relating to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment sit with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, the Minister for Public Service is the responsible minister.

Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Public Service to introduce the officials accompanying you, and to make an opening statement regarding the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

Mrs HERSEY: I would like to commence by acknowledging the staff from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment who are attending as witnesses for today's Estimates proceedings, starting with the Commissioner for Public Employment, Nicole Hurwood. Joining the commissioner this evening is Brad Jackson, Senior Director of Employee Relations; Hayley Green, Director of Strategic Workforce Planning and Development; Ursula White, Director of Aboriginal Employment and Career Development; and Courtney Mabey, Senior Director of Public Sector Grievances and Appeals.

The commissioner's office is a small independent office within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The commissioner has significant responsibilities for managing the employment arrangements for the public service.

Under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act 1993* the commissioner is deemed a statutory employer of all public servants employed under the Act. This means the commissioner, through her office, is responsible for enterprise agreement negotiations and has the power to set terms and conditions of employment for NTPS employees. It also means the commissioner is the employer representative in matters pertaining to the Fair Work Commission, such as industrial disputes, general protections, claims, bullying complaints and unfair dismissals. The commissioner is responsible for ensuring that public sector agencies, chief executives and employees uphold the principles outlined in the Act, including:

- the administration management principle, which ensures the public sector is structured and managed in an efficient and effective way and responds to the needs of the community and government
- the human resource management principle, which ensures the public sector is focused on employment based on the principle of merit and that employees are provided equitable treatment in their employment, including through their remuneration, their access to training and development and their access to redress when they are adversely affected by improper or unreasonable decisions
- the performance and conduct principle, which requires that a public sector officer must abide by the code of conduct and undertake their duties with integrity to the best of their ability and in a way that does not bring the public service into disrepute.

For financial purposes the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment is identified as an output group of the Chief Minister and Cabinet's 2024–25 budget and had a budget of \$6.736m and a staffing profile of 32.68 FTE to deliver against four outputs reflecting the responsibilities of employee and industrial relations, workforce planning and development, Aboriginal employment and career development and public sector appeals and grievances.

I turn to key highlights in the reporting period. The Commissioner for Public Employment has worked with agency chief executives and unions to manage the machinery-of-government change process, which realigned the public service structure into 18 smaller, more technically focused agencies focused on delivering on our top priorities to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle.

These changes are also intended to empower quicker and informed decisions much closer to the ground, and CEOs have been challenged to consider how they can do their work more efficiently and effectively. A significant amount of work has occurred in all agencies to ensure their budgets and staffing profiles are realigned to reflect the work they need to do to make the changes that Territorians want.

Importantly, through the machinery-of-government process we made no cuts to the public service and delivered the change at no cost.

The chief executives appointed to lead the 18 government agencies are all Northern Territory based and bring a diverse range of expertise and experiences. Eight of the appointed chief executives were already in senior leadership roles, seven were promoted from within the NTPS and three of the new chief executives came from outside of the government. Having Territorians leading our government agencies means we have senior leaders who deeply understand the Northern Territory context. They are connected to the community, and they are committed to delivering on our priorities.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment plays a key part in supporting to deliver the government's rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle priorities through ensuring that, as the Territory's largest employer, the NT Public Service has attractive employment conditions and workplaces.

In 2024 the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment settled the new Public Sector Educators' 2024–2027 Enterprise Agreement, which came into effect in October 2024. In 2025 the commissioner is negotiating eight of the 13 enterprise bargaining agreements in the NTPS, with five of these negotiations in progress. These negotiations are guided by the parameters that have been set in the new NTPS Enterprise Bargaining Policy – 2025–2028 (Wages Policy), which I released to the public in February this year.

The Wages Policy provides for the negotiations of fair wages and employment conditions with a total cost of up to 3% per annum. The 3% per annum ensures costs arising from enterprise bargaining are fiscally responsible whilst protecting existing entitlements and maintaining a strong and sustainable public sector workforce. Any increase above this is to be funded by real, bankable productivity improvements and work practice reforms. We must be able to afford our wages and entitlements.

While I cannot discuss specific negotiations in detail, I can say that to date the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment team have been working collaboratively with NT Government agencies to negotiate in good faith with employee representatives and unions, considering the many claims put forward and working to put competitive offers forward to employee consideration ahead of the expiry of agreements. For example, 15 meetings have been held with the NT Police Association to consider the detail of a new police consent agreement.

Our existing remuneration package for the approximately 1,720 members of our police force covered by the consent agreement is very competitive when we look nationally, especially when we factor in the housing entitlements. We recognise that our police do very important work and are looking at ways we can enhance the existing remuneration and entitlements and gain agreement to a package that provides attractive conditions and is affordable. We will continue to work with the NTPA to achieve this.

In the NTPS General Enterprise Agreement negotiations, we are bargaining with 10 unions to consider what improvements can be made for the approximately 14,000 employees in the administrative, professional, technical and physical classification streams. Employees covered by this agreement include a large range of our hardworking public servants, including our graduates and trainees, chief correctional officers, allied health professionals, frontline social workers, legal officers, accountants, scientists, park rangers and engineers. It will also for the first time cover the employees under the former Frances Bay Marine Port Facility Port Service Workers agreement. There are in excess of 250 claims being presented, all of which have been worked through individually with a view to considering what is best to form an offer that will ensure that we remain competitive in the market for the skills and workforce we need to operate much of the public service.

Bargaining is also continuing on the Jacana Energy Enterprise Agreement which covers approximately 80 employees of the Territory's largest electricity retailer. The Aboriginal Health Practitioner Enterprise Agreement is also being negotiated, seeking to ensure the agreement provides not only a competitive remuneration package but also conditions of employment that encourage growth of the profession. We want to attract, retain and encourage more employees into this really important role in our health service system.

These negotiations supplement the already attractive conditions in the NTPS, including a range of contemporary leave and other entitlements. This includes access to leave for Defence service; to address domestic, family and sexual violence matters; to attend cultural or ceremonial commitments; and to undertake foster and kinship carer duties.

There is also a strong commitment to supporting flexible working arrangements to enable public servants to balance their work and life commitments. There are many ways in which this can be achieved, including through access to recreation leave at half pay; special leave without pay; purchased additional leave; part-time work; Flextime work, including for shift workers; as well as the option to work compressed or flexible working hours.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment continues work to support employees in many other ways. Work has continued to move employees off short fixed-term contract arrangements to provide them with ongoing employment. In the past year an additional 1,273 Northern Territory public servants have been employed in permanent positions in the public service compared to the same time last year, providing certainty in employment and gaining the benefits associated of this.

Work has continued to attract and employ Aboriginal people in the public service, with an additional 175 Aboriginal employees working in the NTPS, including an additional eight Aboriginal people in leadership roles compared to the same time last year. The total percentage of NTPS employees identifying as Aboriginal continues to increase and is now at 11.17% compared to 10.9% this time last year. We spoke about that earlier.

We continue to offer Aboriginal employees with opportunities to undertake leadership programs, access mentoring and career coaching and attend the highly regarded Aboriginal all star forums that provide important networking and connections for Aboriginal staff from across the NT.

I attended the forum held in Alice Springs last year where over 100 staff from as far afield as Kintore and Tiwi Islands ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair!

Mrs HERSEY: I am almost finished.

Mr PAECH: That is good, thank you.

Mrs HERSEY: There is a lot to get through.

One hundred staff from as far afield as Kintore and Tiwi Islands came together to talk about what was important to them and provide input into sector-wide work such as the cultural competence training framework and provide feedback on the Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy initiatives. I attended with the commissioner and it was a worthwhile forum.

In 2024, 997 NTPS employees were recognised for service milestones, having reached 10, 20, 30, 35 or 40 years of service, with three employees recognised at the Chief Minister's Awards for Excellence for 50 years of service.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment is also responsible for building and growing employee capability across the public service workforce, including through the delivery of nine core leadership development programs. These programs engage emerging and middle managers through to executive leadership and equip them with the knowledge and skills to provide strong and effective leadership in the NTPS. In this period 374 employees have participated in the programs, which are funded by their agencies but facilitated through the OCPE.

The OCPE is continuing to work at improving employment opportunities for people with a disability, with a number of people identifying as having a disability increasing from 1.6% to 1.9% since the same time last year—a small gain, but an increase all the same.

YouthWorX is supporting a pilot program being facilitated through the Department of Corporate and Digital Development through which six participants are encouraged in work programs in the NTPS. The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment hosted one participant in this program, and gained valuable insight from the participant, Aaron, about the experience of a visually impaired employee and ways that the workplace could be better equipped to support them. The OCPE has signed an agreement with genU, a job access service provider, which will assist the OCPE to develop a suite of training for employees and managers and support recruitment of people with a disability in the sector.

We continue to look at ways to attract and recruit people with the NTPS. We have signed a \$5,000 agreement with Soldier On, a not-for-profit organisation that supports current and former Australian Defence Force personnel to transition to civilian lives. Through this partnership the OCPE will work to better understand how to attract and strengthen support for Defence veterans, reservists and serving members' families who take up employment in the NTPS.

Of course, enabling merit, equity and fairness in NTPS recruitment is essential. Recent reports from the ICAC have particularly highlighted this. The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment delivers merit selection training to the NTPS and in the period March to April 2025, a total of 1,030 NTPS employees have completed that training. The suite of materials available to support recruitment panels has been strengthened, with particular emphasis on documenting the declaration and management of conflicts of interest.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment has taken the role of secretariat for Hon Acting Justice Alan Blow AO who is undertaking the independent review of senior police recruitment processes conducted between August 2023 and March 2025. His Honour is working independently with the OCPE which is facilitating his access to the information he requires to undertake the review. There is no role for the commissioner of public service in this review.

Mr PAECH: I thought you said that you were nearly finished.

Mrs HERSEY: In closing remarks, as you can see, the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment—there will be no need for you to ask any questions because I would have given you all the answers, Member for Gwoja—is a small team with an extensive and important remit in the public service. Our government's focus is on keeping frontline services strong—police, healthcare workers, Corrections officers and teachers—while carefully managing growth in non-frontline areas to ensure resources go where they are needed most.

We have not implemented recruitment freezes or staffing caps. CEOs are responsible for managing their staffing and expenditure within their allocated budgets and ensuring our frontline services are appropriately staffed and supported.

We are committed to growing our own, investing in and supporting current and future leaders to implement positive changes in partnership with the community and stakeholders, and ensuring that people who come into the public service are supported and have opportunities for a meaningful career. We are seeing growth in Aboriginal team teachers, apprentices and graduates, Corrections, police and professionals, demonstrating the public sector is realigning to support our reducing crime and rebuilding the economy priorities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our valued public service, who are working hard to deliver the very best for Territorians.

Now I am happy to take questions.

Mr PAECH: That was the longest short speech ever.

Mrs HERSEY: I thought I would cover everything and then there is no need for you to ask questions.

Mr PAECH: I still have questions.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, commissioner and all of the staff. I know it is a fun time to be doing the last session of the day.

Of the 18 CEOs you mentioned in your opening statement, how many have you sacked and how many have been forced to resign?

Mrs HERSEY: Of the 18 appointments made by the Chief Minister, two have separated from the public service—Michael Murphy and Emma White.

Ms UIBO: Is that it? You said that two have separated. I do not believe she has finished her answer, Chair, because I can think of at least six who are not CEOs anymore.

Mrs HERSEY: Of those 18 agencies, since we have come to government, there have only been two separations. One is Michael Murphy and one is Emma White.

Ms UIBO: What about the former CEO of Health and the former CEO of Education? Would you call them separations, sackings or 'made redundant and then replaced'? What wording would you use?

Mrs HERSEY: The previous CE of Education—those changes were made by the Chief Minister in coming to government, so that was a separation. There are two former CEOs who were redeployed to other roles, Marco Briceno and Craig Graham. Both are redeployed to NTPS.

Ms UIBO: I believe that would make your total more than two separated. Can I confirm it is three separated, one redeployed ...

Mrs HERSEY: Your original question was about the 18 agencies, and out of the 18 agencies, specifically, there were only two, which was Michael Murphy and Emma White. The others were prior to that.

Ms UIBO: From the 18 CEOs, you are saying that there were only three separations.

Mrs HERSEY: There were 12 CEO instruments revoked. One was due to termination of commission, two due to contract cessation, three due to retirement, two due to resignation, two due to end of appointment term, and two were redeployed to other senior executive roles in the NTPS. Noting that, of the 18, only two were the ones I spoke about first, Michael Murphy and Emma White. For example, Ken Davies, the CEO of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, retired and there were some other retirements as well. There were some changes that the Chief Minister did when we came to government.

Ms UIBO: When the CLP was in opposition, you repeatedly claimed that you had police officers' backs. Under your watch, does a 3.37% pay rise remain competitive compared to other jurisdictions? Is it a fair and rewarding offer to police when they are risking their lives every day on the front line?

Mrs HERSEY: The NTPA is in negotiations at the moment. As I said in the opening statement, there have been 15 meetings. They are held by the commissioner, not me. These negotiations commenced on 3 February and are done in good faith. It has been disappointing that the NTPA president has resorted to

name-calling of me, apart from this, because we absolutely value the police and the role that they do each and every day in defending Territorians.

This is an active bargaining process. Negotiations continue in good faith, with 4%, 3.5%, 3% and 3% over four years. CPI is 2.5% at the moment. The negotiations under the previous agreement were 3%, 3% and 3%, with CPI of 7%. This is real wages growth, as opposed to the one before. Negotiations are ongoing and are done in good faith with the commissioner. It is hoped some kind of agreement will be put to a vote by 30 June.

Ms UIBO: As the responsible minister, are you competent to lead these negotiations for the police consent agreement when the Police Association has clearly lost faith in your ability?

Mrs HERSEY: The commissioner continues to have conversations with the NTPA, and negotiations are ongoing. There is a lot more water to go under the bridge, so to speak, with the negotiations. There are still bargaining tools that we can use in those negotiations, and they can put something forward. So far, they have not brought anything to the table. There have been two offers put to them, and they have not put them to their people.

Ms UIBO: When Deputy Chief Minister Gerard Maley publicly thanked Mr Andrew Kirkman for his concluded service on 17 April 2025, was he deliberately misleading Territorians, as Mr Kirkman—we uncovered on Thursday—is still being paid as a CEO?

Mrs HERSEY: As negotiations happen six months out from contract renewals conversations are had. Andrew Kirkman had been advised that his contract will not be renewed when it expires in August. He continues to be employed in the NTPS, and I understand that he has been on leave. An acting CEO has been appointed pending recruitment to the role, which is underway.

Ms UIBO: Can you confirm those negotiations occurred in February, which would be a six-month lead-in to that time or did they occur after?

Mrs HERSEY: Those negotiations happened in April.

Ms UIBO: Was that outside the six-month scope?

Mrs HERSEY: Those negotiations happened within the scope of the timeframe for that contract. As I said, he was advised that his contract was not to be renewed, and he is on leave.

Ms UIBO: Estimates is all about numbers. If we are counting April, May, June, July and August that is five months, not a six-month lead-in time as required by a CEO contract if it is not going to be renewed. Has the Solicitor-General been asked by the CLP government to prepare advice concerning the finalisation of Mr Kirkman's employment?

Mrs HERSEY: I have answered the question.

Ms UIBO: I asked a new question about the Solicitor-General's advice and has it been requested to be prepared in regard to Mr Kirkman's appointment.

Mrs HERSEY: That has not happened by our office, no.

Ms UIBO: Has the Solicitor-General been asked by the CLP government to prepare advice concerning the finalisation of former commissioner Mr Murphy and his employment contract? As you said, he has been separated.

Mrs HERSEY: I was not involved in that matter, nor should I be. It is a matter for the relevant minister; however, there will be no comments provided in relation to individual employment matters. That sits with the Police.

Ms UIBO: When asked of the Police minister, Lia Finocchiaro, and the Acting Police Commissioner last week on Tuesday, they both reiterated that the responsibility would sit with DCDD. I am double-checking that we do not miss our run with OCPE, that there is nothing further to add in regard to the cost of that particular separation with Mr Murphy.

Mrs HERSEY: No, there is not. As I was not involved in that matter, I do not have anything further to say on it.

Ms UIBO: Why is the CLP government gutting worker protections by scrapping the redeployment register and ripping out the requirements to consult staff before changing their terms? Is it just because it is easier to sack people that way through the machinery-of-government changes?

Mrs HERSEY: As part of the enterprise agreement negotiations for the general agreement, it is being proposed to remove the extra two-year period that was only inserted in the NTPS 2021–25 Enterprise Agreement, which is about to change. The changes made to the clause are not about setting up programs to cut public sector jobs, as you stated, and there is no intention to apply staffing caps to the public service. Our government is committed to a strong, capable public service. Those proposed changes do not remove the right for NTPS employees, who are declared potentially surplus, to be redeployed within the broader public service.

Ms UIBO: Your government has repeatedly promised that there would be no public service cuts, and we have asked many questions of you in parliament. Given that you are now dismantling the redeployment safety net, was that just a CLP election line to get you through?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, you do not have to throw in that extra line. You are inferring things at the last bit of your comments. Just ask your question.

Mrs HERSEY: The premise of the question was that we are cutting public servants, which is not true, and I explained that in my previous answer. Potentially, the surplus employees will continue to be managed in accordance with the process outlined under Employment Instruction Number 14, Redeployment and Redundancy Procedures. They will continue to be placed on the OCPE redeployment register. I note that there is only one person on that register at the moment. They will be provided with priority consideration, preferential treatment and training when being considered for jobs within the NTPS, as has always been the case.

Ms UIBO: Could you confirm your government will commit to the redeployment register post the 2021–25 EBA for public servants to have the job safety net?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Ms UIBO: What does \$20m worth of cuts to OCPE look like, given it is a small budget although a very robust and important team and a part of government?

Mrs HERSEY: Given that OCPE is an arm of the Chief Minister's office, they only get a proportion of that funding. If you want anything specific, we would need to take that on notice. There are no cuts.

Question on Notice No 6.6

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

Ms UIBO: Given that OCPE has a small budget, but is a very important part of government, what does the \$20m of the budget being cut look like for that agency?

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

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.6.

Ms UIBO: Given that you have just committed to keeping the redeployment register for the next negotiations, will you guarantee in writing that not a single supernumerary or unattached worker will lose their public service job under your watch?

Mrs HERSEY: In short, yes.

Ms UIBO: We look forward to seeing that in writing.

On 10 February in the Year Ahead speech delivered by Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro she promised a cap on non-frontline roles, but OCPE say that they have received no such directive. Who should we believe, you or the Chief Minister?

Mrs HERSEY: There has been no direction for that to happen. All CEOs manage their budget and staffing in their departments.

Ms UIBO: I hope that is correct and that the Chief Minister has not done something that has not been actioned by government.

Are the changes to Employment Instructions around redeployment and redundancies being planned behind closed doors, or is it being left to each agency to cut their staff?

Mrs HERSEY: Are you asking me for an opinion? If so, that is not appropriate.

Ms UIBO: Are the changes to Employment Instructions around redeployment and redundancies—you spoke about redundancies earlier—already being planned? There is no opinion asked there.

Mrs HERSEY: No, there are no plans behind closed doors at all.

Ms UIBO: That is excellent news.

Can you tell us and Territorians that no chief executives, OCPE officials or ministers have discussed cutting the number of supernumeraries or unattached workers, or will this be another broken promise about the public service?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, there is no need to throw the extra line that is imputing an insult at the end.

Ms UIBO: But it is true.

Mrs HERSEY: I note the undertone in your questioning. It is late in the evening, but we will be done soon, so you will be able to go home and go to bed.

Agencies are continuing to settle their workforce arrangements post the machinery-of-government changes. This has to be considered in the context of this data.

Whilst it is ideal that all employees would be held against a position number in the NTPS, employees may be held as unattached or supernumerary officers for a variety of reasons. For example, the employee has taken an extended period of leave or temporary transfer promotion; backfilling arrangements; job-sharing arrangements; emergency response roles; job evaluations resulting in a different level; the position or business unit is undergoing a realignment, resulting in roles being re-evaluated or the number of roles being reduced; and administrative or system delays. All casual employees, graduates, new recruits, apprentices and trainees are held as supernumerary. Being unattached or held as supernumerary does not mean an employee becomes a redeployee.

Ms UIBO: Is that the end of your response?

Mrs HERSEY: I can continue if you like.

Ms UIBO: I have a lot of questions, so I want to make sure I am not cutting in; otherwise, I will get told off again for being rude when I am trying to ask questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, do you have another question?

Ms UIBO: I certainly do. That is why I was checking if the minister was done because last time she had a big pause and then you said, 'Was there an answer to it?' She had not given me the answer.

Are firefighters required to undertake training during their overtime hours?

Mrs HERSEY: We do not hold that information. That would be a question for the commissioner for Fire.

Ms UIBO: How much has the Fire service been spending per month on overtime? What actions are being taken by OCPE to reduce this burden on staff to ensure that the NT Fire and Emergency Service can stay within their budget?

Mrs HERSEY: The commissioner for Fire services manages that budget. We do not have information.

Ms UIBO: How many workers are currently on leave due to injury or worker's compensation claims in the NT fire service?

Mrs HERSEY: They are specific to the agency, and you would need to ask the commissioner for Fire services.

Ms UIBO: Does the OCPE hold any records in regard to injured workers or those who are on compensation claims?

Mrs HERSEY: No.

Ms UIBO: How many firefighters resigned or retired last year and what were the key reasons for their exit?

Mrs HERSEY: For the fourth time, those questions are for the agency.

Ms UIBO: I thought they were public servants.

I understand OCPE looks after executive contracts in the NT; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Do executives in the NT Fire and Emergency Service receive incentives to purchase footwear, other than PPE?

Mrs HERSEY: We will take that on notice, but you should ask the agency.

Question on Notice No 6.7

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

Ms UIBO: Do executives in the NT Fire and Emergency Service receive incentives to purchase footwear other than personal protective equipment (PPE)?

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

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 6.7.

Ms UIBO: Is it within the rules for an executive within the NT Fire and Emergency Service to purchase \$600 R.M. Williams boots?

Mrs HERSEY: The OCPE sets the terms and conditions, but these questions should be asked of that specific department.

Ms UIBO: But they are executive contracts.

Mrs HERSEY: It would not be part of the broader executive contract terms and conditions.

Ms UIBO: They would just be making it up within their department without any checks and balances?

Ms HURWOOD: The Commissioner for Public Employment sets the terms and conditions for executive contract officers in the broadest sense; they are employment terms and conditions. I think what you are referring to is specific to work health and safety provisions specific to the Fire service. They would have

policies about what they can access and what they would reimburse through their agency in relation to their own protective wear for their fire work.

Ms UIBO: Will the CLP government commit to reviewing the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act* to address the community concerns about the politicisation of appointments, transparency and integrity when hiring senior public servants?

Mrs HERSEY: At this time, there is nothing in the future to review the PSEMA in the legislative timeframe.

Ms UIBO: I thought that might be an area of interest for the new government. Can you guarantee that all senior appointments under the CLP's government term will meet the merit principles required or expected by the community?

Ms HURWOOD: It is required under the Act for merit selection to be applied to all appointments to the public service. There are some exceptions when ministers, or the Chief Minister, under their Acts have discretion to appoint an officer. That may be taken up on occasion, as was done at the change of government by the Chief Minister in appointing the chief executives.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for appearing before the committee today and the agencies and staff who provided advice.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I thank the department for all their hard work they put in to getting everything ready for the Estimates process. I thank the opposition and crossbench for their questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes Estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence at 9 am tomorrow.

The committee concluded.
