

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

MINISTER MALEY'S PORTFOLIOS

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

RECREATIONAL FISHING

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Mr CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to today's Estimates Committee hearing. I remind all members of the committee that Standing Order 109 is in session.

Minister, as the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Recreational Fishing, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mr MALEY: Mr Chair and members of the committee, I am pleased to introduce officials from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries who are appearing with me at today's hearing. To start with we have Jed Matz, the Acting Chief Executive Officer; Andrew Baylis, Acting Senior Executive Director, Industry Development and Project Facilitation; Ms Lorraine Corowa, Senior Executive Director, Biosecurity and Animal Welfare; Matthew Osborne, Senior Executive Director, Fisheries; Ms Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer, sitting at the desk; and Dr Muhammad Sohail Mazhar, Acting Senior Executive Director, Agriculture. I will introduce other senior officials as required as we go through the day.

I will start by giving a brief opening statement. Agriculture dominates the Northern Territory landscape and is by far the largest productive use of land across all Northern Territory tenure types. This is one of the reasons why the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries was created—to look after agriculture and primary production which is the economic driver and a key fundamental part of the Territory lifestyle.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries comprises four key divisions: Industry Development and Corporate Services; Agriculture; Fisheries; and Biosecurity and Animal Welfare. I will cover some of the highlights from each of these divisions as we go through today.

A mandate for the Lia Finocchiaro government is to rebuild the economy. In order to rebuild the economy we must provide industry with confidence to invest their time and money to develop the Territory.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is taking a proactive role in industry development and project facilitation, working closely with industry to help enable trade and pathways to market, and supporting sustainable land development to grow the NT agriculture sector.

This government is committed to the development of agricultural land and we continue to progress the key agriculture developments of Wildman, Larrimah and the extension of the Ord into the Northern Territory, as well as working to identify possible new developments as we move through.

Earlier this year Duxton Farms was announced to be the successful developer for the Wildman agriculture development. The 28,000-hectare area will support a mixed farming operation, accommodating multiple agricultural and horticultural activities and high-yield crops, such as mangoes and melons, as well as broadacre crops, such as hay and sorghum, alongside cattle production.

Duxton Farms has commenced work on redeveloping the old cashew farm site and is expected to have broadacre crops in the ground in time for the oncoming Wet Season. The old cashew site is on the road out to Point Stuart on the right-hand side, if anyone has an idea where that might be.

Wildman has been earmarked for agricultural activities since the late 1980s. The Northern Territory Government has facilitated this development through completing land suitability assessments, advice on land tenure, regulatory approval processes and stakeholder engagement.

The Larrimah Agricultural Development is also taking steps forward to begin production. Larrimah Farms is undertaking planning and early construction works this year, with crops expected to be in the ground in the first half of 2026. With over 1,400 hectares suitable for a range of intensive agriculture, Larrimah offers the advantage of an extended season for crops such as melons, and presents opportunities for a range of irrigated crops such as peanuts and legumes, along with the potential for pastoral activities.

At full production Larrimah Farms will contribute an estimated \$30m in additional gross value of production to the Northern Territory agriculture sector. It is expected to bring economic benefits to the region through employment, construction and ongoing supply chain logistic activities.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will continue to support both Duxton and Larrimah Farms with their developments in an ongoing facilitation role.

The proposed extension of the Ord River irrigation across the NT/WA border is also progressing, with AAM Investment Group progressing with the development plans and approvals on the land area known as Sweetwater. Development of this area will add significantly to AAM's already diversified interests in the Northern Territory.

The Australian Government has provided \$2.3m to undertake a detailed business case to properly investigate infrastructure options to deliver water from Lake Argyle in WA to the Northern Territory. This will enable the development of additional land on both sides of the border for irrigated agriculture and contribute to economic development in the region. The NT Government is working in partnership with the Western Australian and the Australian Government on this cross-border economic enabling project.

This government is also looking at new land and market opportunities across the Northern Territory.

We are focused on the diversification of the pastoral estate. Running beef cattle will always be the key economic driver; however, if pastoral land can support more optimal use of land without displacing pastoral activities, then that opportunity should be explored. A productive pastoral land estate with diverse income streams is a means to attract private investment to the Territory and to build resilience in the rural and remote regions.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is also continuing to support Fortune Agribusiness with the development of their Singleton farm project in the Western Davenport region. This project aims to develop about 3,300 hectares, or just over 1%, of the Singleton Station lease, to the Territory's largest horticultural farm. When the farm is in full production the developer anticipates over 1,000 jobs and gross revenue of \$200m a year.

Expanding the Territory agriculture sector is critical to driving growth in the regions, growing employment and boosting our economy.

The Territory is home to more than two million head of cattle. In 2024 about 274,000 Territory-grown cattle were shipped overseas, an increase of 42% from the previous year, and around 324,000 head were moved interstate. Other livestock industries, including boxed beef, buffalo and crocodile, currently are all (inaudible) growth and are trending to move upwards—again, further opportunities to support the Northern Territory's economy.

The Territory continues to be Australia's largest mango-growing jurisdiction. We produce over 50% of all the mangoes produced in Australia. Not only mangoes, but we produce 25% of Australia's watermelons and 11% of the nation's muskmelons. The Northern Territory is also the largest producer of jackfruit in Australia. Dates, grapes and a range of tropical exotic fruits, such as rambutans and star fruit, are also grown in the Northern Territory. Central Australia and the Barkly through the Arid Zone Research Institute and a focus on the farms from the southern region are growing horticultural crops, not just dates and grapes, that are also capitalised across different fruit sets and harvest times to sell to markets around Australia.

The Territory's cotton industry is gaining momentum. This year the Douglas Daly and Katherine growers planted approximately 11,183 hectares of cotton. Of that, 10,662 hectares, over 95%, was dryland, with 521 hectares receiving supplementary irrigation, which is less than 5% of that amount. Territory cotton growers have developed and adopted a sustainable cropping system based on cotton being rotated with other suitable crops with strong synergies and benefits to the Territory beef cattle industry. This will be the key to balancing the environmental, social and economic factors, creating resilient regions and driving the Northern Territory's cattle and agriculture industry.

The Northern Territory is also home to a wide range of bush foods, including Kakadu plum, bush tomato and bush apple, which have been contributing to the Territory's economy and enabling Aboriginal enterprise and jobs on country.

We have over 42,000 hectares of plantation forestry and over 18.7 million hectares of Aboriginal land owned and managed with native forests with commercial potential. Plantation forestry is becoming an increasingly

important industry and is currently the second-largest production land user in the Northern Territory after cattle grazing, with more than 42,000 hectares off the Territory used to produce forestry products and managed plantations. Emerging markets of credits for ecosystem services, biosecurity and carbon capture will add further revenue possibilities for the Territory forestry industry and enhances to offset CO₂ emissions across a range of sectors.

The NT Government continues to deliver agricultural research through a range of projects and partnerships across our department-run research farms and through group arrangements on commercial properties.

The Katherine and Victoria River Research Stations are located within the Big Rivers region and facilitate research, extension and adoption programs across livestock and plant industries. Alongside plant and animal biosecurity and animal welfare officers, they support industry to maintain the Territory's freedom from pests and diseases. Staff also provide support to Aboriginal pastoral enterprises to improve infrastructure and management.

Key priorities for the Big Rivers region include reducing the lifetime methane emissions of cattle in the Northern Territory by supplementing young cattle with locally grown crops to reduce the time on farm and breeding cycles, increasing herd lifetime productivity. This project is in its third year of data collection and has been expanded to incorporate virtual fencing and a buffalo fly management program.

The southern region research farms are demonstrating sustainable growth of quality beef. We have over 15 years of grazing data that proves that the southern region rangelands can grow premium-quality beef across all seasons. That gives the pastoral industry the confidence to invest in a strong future. Our pastoral industry is the leader in organic and climate-resilient quality beef production.

Vital research is underway on a range of annual and perennial crops, including mangoes, avocados, sesame and cotton.

Within the Big Rivers region, coordination is the focus on further strengthening partnerships with industry and the wider community which has included coordinating biosecurity training for NT staff agencies; school visits, including during Science Week; and opportunities for school-based apprentices.

In Central Australia and the Barkly vital research is extended to dates, mangoes, jujubes and citrus, with growers of grapes reaping the benefits in assessing markets based on this research. The Arid Zone Research Institute has the highest number of varieties of dates in the Southern Hemisphere that are proven to grow well in the arid environment. These varieties are continuing to be tested and improved for shelf life and marketability with our own plants and the plants of industry members from other states that have chosen our climate to test their varieties.

The NT Government is also participating in a number of national initiatives and research, development and extension programs focused on establishing northern agriculture systems for achieving the outcomes of data-driven innovation; managing natural resources, including carbon, climate, soil and water; and diversification into new crops that value-add to the products.

The department has developed comprehensive integrated management of the mango twig tip dieback research program and has started its implementation with the Top End growers who deal with this serious production issue.

Specific to our contribution to reducing methane emissions, the Livestock Industries branch will commence work on two projects of the Zero Net Emissions Agriculture CRC, while the Plant Industries branch is partnering with the Carbon Farming Outreach Program to support Territory farmers and land managers to reduce emissions and store carbon.

DAF is partnering with Charles Darwin University and other universities in the northern region and across Australia to support several master and doctorate research programs. We offer our research infrastructure and skilled staff to research students for conducting in-depth research on high-quality researchable issues in our industries in the Northern Territory. On completion of their degrees, we get locally trained researchers ready to put back into the economic growth of the sector and the Northern Territory.

The department is partnering with the International Tropical Fruits Network, established by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, for holding an International Symposium on Tropical Fruits in 2025 in Darwin. The event will encourage our growers and researchers with the international community of tropical

fruits and will help establish research and trade partnerships for the growth of the industries in the Northern Territory.

Briefly, the agriculture industry in the Northern Territory is uniquely positioned. It is vast, diverse and full of potential. Our success lies in working together in innovation and respect for land and culture.

The department has developed a research farm strategy which outlines a structured plan for evaluating and improving research farm operations which will be implemented over a multi-year period. It includes five key stages:

- internal analysis and development of a high-level strategy by the staff at the department
- external analysis reviewing the internal advice and engaging with external expertise for the medium and long-term options
- decision-making in relation to the minister approving and reviewing key strategy milestones
- implementation of that plan
- maintenance and review of that plan to make sure it remains relevant and timely.

The strategy will improve the financial positions of the farm and ensure the long-term sustainability to deliver cutting-edge research and development and support our agriculture industry and the cattle industry across the Northern Territory.

I will turn to Fisheries now.

Fisheries and aquaculture are an important part of our economy, lifestyle and our identity. Everyone comes to the Territory to catch a fish or go out and enjoy the rivers and the birdwatching around those rivers.

Collectively, the NT seafood industry, including aquaculture, recreation, tourism and commercial fishing, directly contributes more than \$250m annually to the Territory's economy, supporting thousands of jobs and providing flow-on effects and benefits across the Northern Territory. It produces and distributes 10,000 tonnes of seafood each year.

Enabling this, our fisheries management is implementing robust harvest strategies and contemporary management arrangements to support the ongoing development of long-term sustainability of the aquatic resources. This is supported by comprehensive stakeholder engagement, regular scientific assessments of fish stocks and resource sharing to consultants. This approach underpins both the development and ongoing review of fisheries management arrangements across the Northern Territory.

This government is committed to phasing out gillnets from the barramundi fishing industry, as committed prior to the election. We have invested additional resources to deliver on this key initiative within this term of government, and the department is forming an advisory group to engage with sector experts. The department is actively involved with ongoing research exploring alternative gear types for the commercial harvesting of barramundi. This will provide important information to inform how future barramundi fisheries will operate in the Northern Territory.

Since coming to government we have taken action to address sustainability concerns for golden snapper in the greater Darwin region. The department has commenced development of a recovery plan and has sought nominations from an advisory group for that plan.

The establishment of NT Fisheries Compliance Unit has significantly strengthened compliance capabilities across the Territory since its launch in 2024. The Fisheries Compliance Unit has conducted 241 fisheries patrols, including 41 joint patrols with Aboriginal marine rangers; engaged with over 2,600 individuals involved in recreational and commercial fishing; inspected more than 1,200 vessels and vehicles; seized over 250 illegal items; and detected more than 180 offences. Joint patrols have been carried out with Aboriginal marine rangers across key areas in the Daly, Nhulunbuy, Roper, King Ash Bay and the Tiwi Islands.

Engagement, education and community presence are essential aspects of effective fishery compliance and were a priority identified by traditional owners and the Northern Land Council during ongoing negotiations on access to Aboriginal waters. Territorians are encouraged to report any suspicious activities or aquatic biosecurity concerns to the Fishwatch hotline on 1800 891 136.

Aquaculture is a \$62.5m industry in the Northern Territory. At the forefront of innovation is the Darwin Aquatic Centre. This Northern Territory Government research facility leads nationally significant research in aquaculture and developing projects, including the development of the tropical rock oyster (blacklip oyster) industry, a native species historically harvested by Indigenous communities and now being cultivated commercially for the first time. The DAC has developed the world's first hatchery for manual blacklip oyster and significantly increased spat production with strong partnerships involving Indigenous corporations. This \$5.2m investment since 2020 aims to create sustainable economic prospects, particularly for remote Aboriginal communities. The government is working with communities, experts and agencies to address national regulatory barriers to bring this new product to market.

The DAC is also partnering with Aboriginal communities, Southern Cross University and the Fijian Government to investigate the potential of an NT tropical seaweed industry. The Asia-Pacific region leads production, supplying over 90% of farmed seaweed worldwide. Tropical seaweed varieties offer significant potential for new markets, especially in sustainable products like bioplastics and methane-reducing livestock feed.

A \$2.7m four-year research program is establishing commercial aquaculture for black jewfish, a fast-growing high-value species prized domestically and internationally for its meat and swim bladder.

The DAC has achieved important milestones in hatchery production and is working with industry partners like Humpty Doo Barramundi to refine farming techniques. These research initiatives demonstrate the Territory commitment to combining scientific innovation, community engagement and sustainable economic growth to diversify our aquaculture sector.

The Northern Territory Government continues to support recreational fishos through barramundi stocking program, with Top End lakes and lagoons teeming with thousands of barramundi this Dry Season. The barramundi stocking program is part of the NT Government's broader efforts to support recreational fishing and enhance the Territory's unique lifestyle.

With continued investment, the Northern Territory is well positioned to lead sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development, delivering long-term benefits to our communities, environment and the economy.

I will now turn to biosecurity.

We must have a strong system which must underpin the growth of our agriculture sector across the Territory. Our productivity and product integrity depend on us having the right regulatory settings and biosecurity surveillance and preventive systems ready in place.

There is a number of biosecurity threats in our region, to our north, that would have significant impacts on our agribusiness sector if we were to detect these new diseases and pests in the Northern Territory. Growth in the agriculture and fisheries sectors relies heavily on strong biosecurity performance, fast and accurate diagnostics and the ability to respond to incursions.

In October 2024 it was my pleasure to open the combined science services building to complete the \$44m upgrade at the Berrimah Farm Science Precinct. These new laboratory facilities accommodate world-class scientists to provide us with the capability to respond quickly to disease and pest threats, and to protect agribusiness in the Northern Territory. The team at Berrimah has the ability to quickly diagnose a range of diseases, including foot-and-mouth and lumpy skin disease. I remind you that the Northern Territory remains free of both of these diseases as we speak.

In March this year I was also delighted to launch the new biosecurity emergency response trailer (BERT). With a capability to remain in the field for days, BERT provides teams with support to collect samples and respond immediately to biosecurity emergencies no matter where they are in the Territory.

BERT was recently deployed to the Western Australia/Northern Territory border as part of Exercise Raintree, a mock emergency animal disease exercise where the team was able to road test its capabilities. It provided excellent support for the stock inspectors in the field.

Funding for BERT was provided by the Commonwealth Government, through the Northern Australia Biosecurity Strategy. We are grateful for the partnership with the Commonwealth in the biosecurity space.

The Northern Territory is on the front line when it comes to exotic pests and diseases. This year we have seen a heightened level of awareness relating to avian influenza, or H5 or bird flu as it is commonly known. As part of the northern flyway for birds that fly from other jurisdictions, livestock biosecurity are conducting surveillance for bird flu, which has had a major impact on wild birds and wildlife in other countries.

Together with the Commonwealth Government and all jurisdictions, we have agreed on how to respond to this unique threat which impacts poultry, wild birds and some mammals. We have received \$800,000 from the Commonwealth this financial year, with another \$300,000 to follow next financial year to purchase new diagnostic equipment and in-field response vehicles such as BERTs, and keep supplies up.

The livestock biosecurity team have formed an incident management team and progressed a number of planning documents, including discussions with key stakeholders such as local governments, land councils and park operators. Should the Territory remain free of this bird flu, we need to make sure that if we see any bird deaths, we report that to the animal hotline.

The plant biosecurity team continues to lead the National Banana Freckle Eradication Program and the National Browsing Ant Eradication Program. These biosecurity responses are crucially important to the Australian banana industry, the environment and our way of life. The teams are working tirelessly on these response programs, and we remain confident about eradicating these pests in the future. The national management group recently decided to extend funding for the National Browsing Ant Eradication Program through to June 2027 to achieve proof of freedom status.

It has been pleasing to see a massive uptake in the number of pastoral leases with biosecurity management plans implemented across the Northern Territory. Since the changes to the NT *Livestock Act* in 2024, 162 plans have been registered with more underway. These biosecurity management plans are an active document about safeguarding biosecurity on properties and making sure visitors come clean and go clean.

In closing, we are progressing a number of legislative and regulatory changes in the biosecurity and animal welfare space to bring clarity and efficiency and to reflect the expectations of Territorians in this important area. Amendments to the *Animal Protection Act 2018* are currently underway, considering a public Have Your Say campaign in 2024 which received 229 responses.

I greatly appreciate and thank all of DAF's professional, technical and administrative staff in their efforts in shaping our agriculture and fisheries industries which contribute to the Northern Territory's economy.

Mr CHAIR: I will shortly 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. Other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister, rather than waiting for the end of the shadow's questioning on an output.

I also remind members that questions are to go through to the minister, not the public servant. I was guilty of this as well yesterday, so that is just a procedural reminder.

I will also strictly enforce the conduct and behaviour of the committee today.

I invite the opposition to ask questions.

Mr BROWN: You slashed the agriculture and biosecurity budget by around \$12m combined. What projects have had a reduction in their funding?

Mr MALEY: Essentially, the industry has been reduced, but a lot of those decreases relate to Commonwealth appropriation and projects which are dropping off. For example, the NPA Future Drought Fund, the NPA National Water Grid Fund and one-off funding for internal governments has changed. The fast-track sustainable development precinct for agribusiness has been reduced. There has been a range of projects which have come to the end of their life. That is why the funding has dropped away. It is Commonwealth-funded money, and the programs have now finished.

Mr BROWN: Budget 2025 lists only one new initiative, the Fisheries Compliance Unit—which is not actually new; it was formed under the Labor government. How is this your only priority when it comes to fishing?

Mr MALEY: Effectively, there has been a range of things coming in relation to that. As well as recreational fishing, commercial fishing through the management of the offshore fishery was a jointly managed fishery,

and now that is coming back to the Territory. We are doing stakeholder engagement to work out how we will run that. That area of fishery basically goes from the Gulf of Carpentaria right around the Tiwis and comes down to the other side, so it is a really massive area of water, and we are working to resolve that in relation to getting things going. That is two things we have done.

In rec fishing, we are moving forward to ensure access to Aboriginal-owned land for fishing, and we are negotiating with traditional owners to ensure that remains a project moving forward.

Mr PAECH: You are talking about Aboriginal land and working with Aboriginal people. Can you confirm your government's position on finalising the Blue Mud Bay agreement in the Northern Territory to provide certainty for recreational and commercial fishers and traditional owners? What economic opportunities will be locked into that agreement?

Mr MALEY: We are working hard with traditional owners. When answering this question I want to declare a conflict of interest—the Finniss River area, which is Bulgul, which is my wife's family. I want to make it clear that there is a conflict in relation to that. Any discussions that involve the area I have nothing to do with. I want to make it clear that is a conflict and I make sure I am aware of that.

It is a key priority of this government, and we know that this has been going on for a long time to try to come up with a resolution. We are working with a negotiating team of staff that Chief Minister and Cabinet and DAF have established, negotiating agreements.

We are starting over in King Ash Bay and Borroloola, coming up with a standard agreement. We are negotiating that now, and my understanding is that is almost completed. If agreed to that will be a standard sort of agreement we can use as a starting point for negotiations as we move around.

We are trying to deal with these long-term agreements. Like I said, around the McArthur River and Limmen is where we are working. The government is working with the NLC to conduct a 10-year review of the existing agreements, and has held meetings with the Malak Malak traditional owners and are scheduled for Nhulunbuy and Wadeye in the second half of 2025.

We are working hard to do that because it is a complicated area, and we certainly respect the rights of the owners of that land. We need to get that balance right with rec fishing, which is a big lifestyle issue in the Northern Territory and also contributes a lot of money to our economy. We intend to continue working with that. What we are trying to do is get a base agreement which works in one area, then we will tweak that because all the areas are different. One side of the Territory is ...

Mr PAECH: Your government is committed to resolving the outstanding legacy issues with Blue Mud Bay and that there should be an equal settlement in recognition of the importance of that land.

Mr MALEY: We are working on that, but Minister Edgington has carriage of that negotiation, so I suggest that you direct some of those questions to him when he becomes available next week.

Mr PAECH: I am more than happy to do that.

You just spoke about the Nhulunbuy region and the Wadeye region. What is the status of the 20-year fishing access agreement with traditional owners in the Nhulunbuy region under your government? What funding in this budget is to support that agreement?

Mr MALEY: If you want the specific details you need to speak to Minister Edgington's office about that. We are involved in negotiations as Fisheries, but they have carriage of that agreement and of those negotiations.

Mr PAECH: Surely, your department should be able to provide some response in relation to that. You are the department of Fisheries.

Mr MALEY: I can get the Fisheries executive director, Matt Osborne, up here, if you like, to answer some of those questions.

Mr PAECH: That would be great, particularly for Nhulunbuy and, as you mentioned in your opening statement and your answer, the Wadeye area as well.

Mr OSBORNE: The agreements for Wadeye and Nhulunbuy have been established for over 10 years, so they are existing agreements. Those existing agreements have a financial component to them. The specific

nature of that is confidential between the NLC and the government. There is an ongoing budget allocation to meet those requirements under the agreement.

Mr PAECH: Is there any ongoing work with the department on renewing or extending those agreements?

Mr OSBORNE: As the minister said, there are ongoing negotiations around those agreements in those areas.

Mr PAECH: Is there work still being undertaken around the mapping of rec fishers, what they are taking from the rivers and the ocean?

Mr MALEY: We are conducting surveys and working with traditional owners.

Mr OSBORNE: Understanding recreational catch is an important component of fisheries management. The most recent recreational survey was done in 2018–19 and published in early 2022–23. We are undertaking a process to reflect how changes in technology and fishing behaviour can better collect some of that information from historical practices which relied on things like White Pages and random phone diaries. We are undertaking work now to see how we can better deliver that in future.

Mr PAECH: Is there money in the budget to allow for that work, so there are recreational surveys done?

Mr MALEY: You need to talk to Minister Edgington about that. He is dealing with the negotiations. He has ...

Mr PAECH: This is not about ...

Mr MALEY: This is about money ...

Mr PAECH: No, no.

Mr MALEY: The answer is you need to ask Minister Edgington.

Mr PAECH: This is not about Blue Mud Bay; this is about rec fishers across the Northern Territory, what they are taking from the oceans and the surveying that is done. It is not an Indigenous issue; this is a Territory issue.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please speak through the Chair if you want to follow up on the question.

Mr PAECH: I did direct it through the Chair.

Mr CHAIR: We will let the minister finish.

Mr MALEY: It really is a question you need to direct to Minister Edgington, but we will try to give you a bit from our side. The details you are after, you need to ask the relevant minister, which is not me.

Mr MATZ: Matt Osborne might be able to give an exact number of how much we are spending on an active survey in the Darwin region at the moment. That is all coming from our existing budget, utilising the current Fisheries appropriation. It is how we prioritise what we do when we do it.

Mr PAECH: You are talking about doing a recreational fishing survey in the Darwin region, but as we know there are many popular rivers, waterways and oceans outside of Darwin. What work is being done by this government to look at and evaluate what rec fishers are taking from those waters?

Mr MALEY: Again, that work is done with the negotiation; Minister Edgington is dealing with that. Those questions need to be directed to him.

Mr PAECH: Not all of those rivers and waterways are needing—there are agreements that have been resolved for a number of those. Is the agency, where there are already resolved agreements in place, doing work to understand and survey what rec fishing is taking from those waterways and oceans?

Mr MALEY: Again, that is Minister Edgington's portfolio. You need to talk to him about that.

Mr PAECH: It is very disappointing that Fisheries cannot answer a simple question.

Mr BROWN: What engagement does the Fisheries Compliance Unit have with traditional owners and land councils when it comes to the work they are doing on Aboriginal lands?

Mr MALEY: The Fisheries Compliance Unit delivers fishing compliance functions across the Northern Territory. It has 10 full-time staff, and they work under the *Fisheries Act 1988*. In March 2025, like I said, there were 211 fishery patrols done, of which 120 were based on land, 57 were based on water and 38 were conducted jointly with Aboriginal marine rangers on country. The answer is yes, they have been working with marine rangers. They will continue to work with them across the Northern Territory.

Mr BROWN: Which ranger groups? Can you provide a list of the ranger groups that you are working with?

Mr MALEY: The ranger groups have been Daly River, Finnis River, Nhulunbuy, Yirralka, Dhalinybuy, Manangoora, (inaudible) River Rangers, Blue Mud Bay, King Ash Bay, Roper River, Ngukurr, Limmen Bight and the Tiwi Islands.

Mr BROWN: Territory Labor committed to buying back gillnet licensing and compensating Territory businesses. Can you confirm you too will be compensating Territory businesses to buy their licences?

Mr MALEY: Yes, that is our commitment. Our commitment was to phase out gillnets by the end of this term, and we continue to work with that. We are in the process now of preparing an advisory group. There will be public consultation on how it works. There will be consultations with the industry, but we are committed to phasing out gillnetting by the end of this term.

Mr BROWN: Is there a timeframe with the reference group you referred to?

Mr MALEY: We are working towards phasing out gillnets by the end of this term, so we will get the public consultation up and running. Hopefully that will be formed in quarter 3 of 2025.

J DAVIS: What budget has the government committed to deliver on that election commitment to phase out gillnets?

Mr MALEY: We have a budget internal to do the consultation. That is in the outer years, so there is no budget this year. We are talking about this reporting period, so there is no budget in this reporting period for phasing out gillnets.

J DAVIS: In relation to the advisory group, you have commenced that work. Has there been any expression of interest?

Mr MALEY: The advisory group will be formed, and we are hoping to have it formed by quarter 3 of 2025. That will include sector experts and industry experts.

Mr PAECH: What about community experts?

Mr MALEY: We will go out to the public for consultation, so anyone is invited to be on that. We will form a group and then there will be a public consultation of what that will look like. We do not want to rush this; we want to make sure we get it right, and we want to go out to consult with as many interested parties as possible.

Mr BROWN: Have any been bought back so far? If so, how much did they cost individually?

Mr MALEY: No.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide a full breakdown of your travel to Daly Waters on 7 November 2024 and 30 January 2025, which cost a total of \$4,151.70 and \$4,717.71 respectively; the purpose of these trips; what were the costs categorised as 'other'; and what were the outcomes achieved for Territorians with these visits? This has accounted for \$5,594.36 for the total spend of these two trips. What does the category 'other' stand for, noting that on 7 November you spent \$2,785 on 'other' and on 30 January you spent \$2,809 on 'other'. What are those expenses? Are they beers for the boys?

Mr MALEY: Those trips were in relation to mining, which is not this category.

Mr PAECH: Well, you have a heads-up for what they are, but it is your opening statement.

Mr CHAIR: Firstly, if we can avoid imputations as to what the spending is for. Minister, I will hand back to you with the question.

Mr MALEY: The answer is that they are in the Mining category and not in this portfolio.

Mr PAECH: In your 2024 register of interests, you list two trusts which you are beneficiaries of—Two Up Trust and Ballanday—both trusts, according to your register of interests, in land, cattle and farming. This creates a significant conflict of interest for you, the information you receive and the decisions you make. How do you manage that conflict?

Mr MALEY: I manage that conflict with all the rules and regulations, and again that is not in this category. Those conflicts are managed as per the requirements of the Legislative Assembly.

J DAVIS: I have some questions from the Member for Mulka. In the area of Fisheries, what work is being done to create pathways for traditional owners to access commercial licences, so they can benefit from the vast resources in our sea country? Previously there have been no licences available for trepang, mud crab, barramundi et cetera and people have been locked out of the commercial systems. What is being done with the department? What resources are in this budget to support Aboriginal business development?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Matt Osborne because a lot of work has been done on that. We certainly acknowledge the Aboriginal Sea Company who have licences. I am confused that they said they do not have any. Matt will give you more details about what they have.

Mr OSBORNE: Firstly, I would like to introduce the Aboriginal coastal licence which the Northern Territory has; it is quite unique within the Australian context. That is a small-scale low-cost licence which enables Aboriginal people in remote communities to operate commercial fishing businesses, and has done so quite successfully. There are approximately 19 of those licences around the Territory coastline, enabling people to go out, practise and develop those commercial fishing skills and provide affordable fresh seafood into their local communities, which is a fantastic outcome.

That has been operating for many years now and has been a really useful pathway for Aboriginal people to enter into full-scale commercial licences. I am sure you can appreciate that it is quite a big step from nothing to all the red tape that comes with a full commercial licence and the costs associated with entering into those areas.

The fisheries you mentioned—barra, mud crab and trepang—are managed through a limited entry scheme, so the number of licences is capped, but they are available for purchase on the market. It is a transactional element to buy one of those existing licences. The government does not have licences held on the shelf to expand those fisheries; the current management arrangements has that set.

There is a number of Aboriginal corporations that are owners in those fisheries that already hold licences. The Aboriginal Sea Company was established as a primary mechanism for that purpose, to help Aboriginal participation in the seafood industry. They have a number of licences and, I understand, are engaging quite heavily with remote communities to see how they can support greater participation.

J DAVIS: On 19 July 2024 in relation to the NT barramundi fishery, the NLC outlined many traditional owners concerns about fishing on their sea country, including risks to vulnerable species, lack of data-informed quotas, supporting healthy fish stocks and inadequate monitoring and compliance. Because of these concerns, traditional owners have limited access to some areas in the hope that these protective measures and restrictions will provide a catalyst for the Northern Territory Government to address these concerns and include Aboriginal people in decision-making processes. What has the government done to address these concerns?

Mr MALEY: Effectively, we made a commitment to phase out gillnetting in this term, and that is what we are working to do. I outlined earlier that we have an advisory group and we will consult. We will work with anyone interested in that area to deal with that problem.

As you said, anyone who wants to use Aboriginal land can apply for a section 19 lease, which is available. It is a commercial decision between the landowners and whoever wants to use that land. It is really a matter of commercial arrangement. Our response is to phase out the gillnetting by the end of this term.

J DAVIS: In relation to the other concerns highlighted—lack of data-informed quotas, supporting healthy fish stocks and inadequate monitoring and compliance—are you able to comment?

Mr MALEY: The NT Fisheries Compliance Unit works with rangers across the Northern Territory. I will hand over to Matt to explain more about that, but those concerns are addressed through compliance.

Mr OSBORNE: I highlight that around that time the department undertook consultations in approximately seven remote communities within that region, providing information about fisheries and addressing some of the concerns of traditional owners on the ground.

Improving that information exchange is a key aspect of our work. We are looking to build and grow that ability to provide information in those remote regions, which are often quite difficult to get to. We are also operating under a harvest strategy now that was introduced last year. It is taking a more regional approach to managing that fishery, which is intended to provide some of the information gaps that those traditional owners identified and we are working to deliver on.

There is a position we are currently recruiting that is intending to deliver that additional capacity to go out there and meet and provide that knowledge exchange as well.

J DAVIS: I am not totally sure that answers the question in terms of ongoing monitoring and compliance, but thank you.

Additionally to that, the Fisheries Compliance team, I understand, is in charge of vessel location data. When the NLC have requested data on behalf of traditional owners about vessel locations, the information has not been shared, which means that traditional owners struggle to have appropriate oversight. Can you advise why this monitoring and compliance information is not being shared with land councils and traditional owners?

Mr MALEY: That data you are talking about is confidential. It is to do with compliance. Ultimately, the GPS location is confidential because if that gets out into the public, competitors might find where it goes.

J DAVIS: I have an example of it within the question which I did not read, which may help frame your answer—where traditional owners have seen commercial boats in the intertidal zone and, in that case, Fisheries will not provide vessel tracking information so that they can confirm that it is fishing illegally. That is some context.

Mr MALEY: If you think there is an illegal activity going on, you should be ringing the police to start with—the 000 number. Just like anyone else in the Territory, if there is something illegal going on, my response would be to call the police. The police then can investigate that. We do not want people doing their own investigation. If there is an illegal activity going on, call the police.

J DAVIS: You have answered the question which is: could you provide a process for what traditional owners should do when they believe there is commercial fishing taking place in the wrong place? They should just call the police.

Due to closure of several commercial fishing waters, there is significant demand in other areas such as the South West Gulf and Van Diemen Gulf. These areas are critical to endangered species. Has there been any consideration of creating gillnet-free areas, like in Queensland, in this intermediate period prior to the gillnet ban taking place?

Mr MALEY: What sort of fish are you talking about—reef fish or barramundi? There is a big difference.

Mr PAECH: Fish in the ocean.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please no interjections.

J DAVIS: Endangered species of fish is within the question, or endangered species of sea life.

Mr MALEY: We are operating under existing controls until we review this. Maybe Matt will want to give a few more words about that. There is a plan in place to manage threatened species across all fisheries.

Mr OSBORNE: To reiterate, as we are operating under the existing harvest strategy for the fishery, we are also operating under the existing threatened endangered species protection strategy, which includes a range of measures, including increased observer coverage, to manage those risks. There has been a significant decrease in fishing effort in the past few years as well.

J DAVIS: On 4 June 2024 it was reported in the media that commercial barramundi fishers were operating in waters that were closed by Aboriginal traditional owners in Arnhem Bay. The NT Recreational Fishing minister at that time said that the government would investigate these allegations. Can you report on the department's findings of these allegations?

Mr MALEY: I am not sure. I am testing my memory of the incident you are talking about. My understanding is that there was some fishing happening, but it was not on Aboriginal land because Aboriginal land goes to the average low-water mark, and outside that it becomes Commonwealth land which is not mapped. If you think there is something illegal going on, no matter what it is, call the police.

J DAVIS: In terms of any response to any commitment to investigating those allegations are you able to take that on notice?

Mr MALEY: It was done by the previous government, so no, we cannot.

J DAVIS: Does the department not have that information?

Mr PAECH: Must have shredded it.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I am placing you on a warning. We are not even an hour in and that is now a handful of interjections.

Mr MALEY: We have answered the question.

J DAVIS: This is a serious question. Is that what happens when government changes, department records of investigations are not there anymore?

Mr MALEY: What we are talking about is what this government is doing. If there is a question to the previous government, I ask you to write to the Member for Gwoja; he was part of that and he would know.

J DAVIS: The NT Fisheries department is collaborating on a Fisheries Research and Development Corporation project titled 'Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into fishery management review processes, using the Northern Territory Barramundi Fishery as a case study'. This project appears to have stalled. Has the NT Fisheries department sought to stall this project? Is it behind schedule, and when can we expect to see the results from this project published?

Mr MALEY: The project you are talking about is an external project and CDU are in partnership with that. I imagine that question would be to CDU—would be the answer—ask them what is going on with that. Matt can provide more information.

Mr OSBORNE: The project in question, as the minister has highlighted, is an external project. It is a partnership approach involving different organisations. That project was looking at how we engage with Aboriginal communities around the future management of the barramundi fishery. That was at a different time of where we are at, and now we are considering what we are doing to progress.

As the minister has highlighted, we will be forming an advisory group to review the current Barramundi Fishery Management Plan. That is a key focus of our next piece of work. How that project may or may not support that or may need to pivot to answer other questions still needs to be worked through with the partners of that project.

J DAVIS: Is it currently sitting, waiting on that?

Mr OSBORNE: Yes.

J DAVIS: This follows up on an earlier question I asked in terms of protection of marine species. What actions has the CLP government taken to protect threatened, endangered and protected marine species, including work on gillnet-free areas in the two locations identified to be of critical importance to threatened species?

Mr MALEY: We have the threatened species management plan in place, and that is continuing. That plan has been operating for a while, I understand, and is being continued.

J DAVIS: Is that management plan public?

Mr OSBORNE: Yes, I believe the threatened species strategy is public.

J DAVIS: Can the minister tell us the number of Fisheries observer trips conducted per year in the NT barramundi fishery for the last 10 years? I am not sure what period you are able to comment on.

Mr MALEY: We can comment on this reporting period. We have conducted 211 fishery patrols; 128 were on land, 57 were on water and 38 were conducted jointly with Aboriginal marine rangers on country.

J DAVIS: Can you outline the number of vessels in the NT barramundi fishery that currently have functional cameras on board? What proportion of the total number of vessels operating in fishery is this?

Mr MALEY: There are two vessels currently.

Mr OSBORNE: The threatened species strategy talks about a percentage coverage of vessels. The cameras rotate between the vessels. We have undertaken four monitoring trips which included cameras and two people on board for the reporting period. That was in the 2024 calendar year.

We are also currently in the procurement process to secure additional cameras to increase the coverage on those vessels and to support observations of fishing activity in other fisheries outside of the barramundi fishery, because building that information is a key part of what we are trying to do. We are also finding different ways of collecting information because some of the vessels which Fisheries operate out of are quite small, which can pose challenges for putting staff on board for a number of reasons. We are exploring new technology, cameras and artificial intelligence to find better ways of collecting this information, providing it back into a format that allows us to undertake this work safely with staff.

J DAVIS: You said there are currently two; is that correct?

Mr OSBORNE: I mentioned that there were four observer trips with cameras for the reporting period in the 2024 calendar year. The fishery only operates February to October. There are only portions of that which have been covered. Two of those trips had people on board those vessels as well as cameras.

J DAVIS: Can you provide the proportion of camera footage being reviewed from the onboard cameras to validate logbook data with respect to threatened, endangered and protected species interactions and provide the level of validation that is obtained?

Mr MALEY: The answer is between 10% and 20%.

K McNAMARA: Do you accept the science of anthropogenic climate change and the risk that it poses to our agriculture and fisheries industries?

Mr MALEY: Climate change is a consideration in all the decisions we make. The environment is hugely important. We only have one environment. The CLP was elected on a platform of restoring our lifestyle, so we consider that in all our decisions.

K McNAMARA: You consider climate change; that is great.

I had a look at other state and territory budgets and they all have a variation of different items and amounts aimed at helping industry manage the increased climate risks. For example, WA has an Agriculture Climate Resilience Fund. This supports a range of programs. One of them is a drought resilience program which supports pastoralists to investigate and design long-term solutions for on-station improvements. Where in your budget is there funding for similar initiatives for our primary producers to adapt to climate risks such as prolonged drought?

Mr MALEY: You need to pass that question to the Environment minister, Minister Burgoyne. He deals with Lands and Planning. When we are making decisions, the climate—because the lifestyle is super important to me and to the Territory, so we want to restore our lifestyle.

K McNAMARA: I will be asking questions of the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment later. My question relates to departments that manage agriculture and fisheries that rely on natural resources. All around Australia and, indeed, the world those departments have climate-risk adaption frameworks and programs and funding to support the industry specifically. Once again, do you have any programs like that?

Mr MATZ: We have a number of research projects and projects that we are undertaking to help primary producers manage the risk of climate variation and mitigate the effects of climate change.

The Douglas Daly research centre is part of the zero net emissions CRC. We are a demonstration site as part of that CRC, so producers can come and look at new technology they can use to understand more about emissions from their cattle.

We are also working on various research projects that enable us to improve our genetics and feeding capabilities to turn off cattle more quickly from our properties. The younger they are ready to go to market, the less emissions those animals have, and the more efficient those properties become.

We also provide assistance to primary producers in terms of entering into carbon projects through the Pastoral Land Board. We enable them to undertake authority certificates to enter into those carbon projects as part of their pastoral lease.

A lot of our research, whilst it is not specifically speaking about reducing emissions or improving climate change, is about improving productivity. Wherever you have a productivity gain, it generally has a positive impact when it relates to efficiencies or utilising feed and carbon more efficiently in that system.

K McNAMARA: Are any of those projects that you just mentioned—I understand some are about productivity—about drought resilience specifically?

Mr MALEY: We take the environment very seriously. We operate in the north, which is wet and dry, and then we have arid, so it changes across the Territory. As you know, we are a long and thin jurisdiction, so we need to make sure that we focus on the environment no matter where we are and which type of environment, whether it is the desert environment or the monsoonal environment up here.

Mr MATZ: In response to the drought question, we are a member of the Northern Hub, which is one of the eight national drought hubs around Australia. We invest a significant amount of in-kind contributions into the drought hub. We are in partnership with them, providing a regional node which enables people in the region to approach the hub—our node is based in Alice Springs—and learn more about drought resilience. We are partnering in a number of projects to improve pasture utilisation, water use efficiency, engaging with traditional owners through the Northern Hub in drought resilience, improving their ability to use not only traditional farming techniques but also culturally traditional farming practices for climate change.

K McNAMARA: Sorry to interrupt, but can you point out where these are funded under the budget? I am concerned that—when you look at budgets in all states and territories, in these industries specifically they talk about climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation. It does not appear to me in this budget.

Mr MALEY: It is all funded within. It is through the R&D budget, so all these programs run. Like I said earlier, a lot of the programs we run are through external providers in partnership, like CDU and a range of others. We work with those groups and use the research farms no matter whether they are in the north or the south, right across the Territory—which soil type, which environment that program operates under.

We take it very seriously and they are funded within, so every farm is dealing with these programs about environment, trying to turn cattle off more quickly and water to make it more economically viable to move forward and not only make money for those businesses—remember, those businesses employ people, have families and spend their money in the economy. They ensure that their environment is protected because if they cannot raise their cows or grow their crops, it stops.

K McNAMARA: The NT Seafood Council says that we need policies and strategies in place to prevent and navigate these changes from climate change as effectively as possible. They say that climate change is a major concern for their members. Where in your budget is there planning to support the seafood industry in mitigating these climate change risks?

Mr MALEY: We manage those decisions internally and they are all managed within our budget.

K McNAMARA: We cannot see them externally, but where are the external documents?

Mr MALEY: We spoke about methane and cows. That is a cow-specific one and that is about the environment. These are all funded internally from funds within the overall budget.

Mr MATZ: We also partner with the Commonwealth Government in delivering regional resilience plans. We have done two processes in Central Australia and the Big Rivers region around those plans. We are looking to renegotiate further funding for those activities.

We also are reviewing our agricultural strategy at the moment which has a number of initiatives to work on climate change strategies for agriculture and seafood.

We do not have a dedicated program that says 'climate change'. We have a research contracts line item in our budget of \$3.4m which we leverage quite heavily with external funding as well. That is how we deliver our climate change response.

K McNAMARA: Are you saying you have a strategy that you are developing or you have a strategy for climate change adaptation and risk management or you are developing that?

Mr MALEY: Climate change is weaved into all our strategies and we are reviewing them to make them more efficient. We acknowledge that we have some budget problems because we have a huge debt from the previous government and we do not have a bucket full of money. We need to spend our money wisely. The environment and productivity are super important because without having cows to eat the grass, crops to grow or fish in the water that will affect massively industry. We want to make sure as we move forward that it is sustainable for everyone, no matter what industry you are talking about.

K McNAMARA: I understand you have to spend the money wisely. 'Wisely' to me seems to be adapting to climate change as the biggest concern for our producers.

You mentioned work on developing the blacklip oyster industry with Aboriginal enterprises, which I am excited about because I love oysters. Did you know that climate change increases ocean temperatures and acidification which leads to decreased oyster growth, increased mortality and spread of disease?

Mr MALEY: No, I did not.

K McNAMARA: Where is your climate planning and research funding to support this industry with these impacts?

Mr MALEY: The funding for that program is funded within.

Mr MATZ: The blacklip oyster project has been going for quite some time. The initial part of the project was to test a number of varieties of naturally occurring oysters in our region and select the most appropriate ones to commercialise. Part of that analysis would have included its ability to adapt to the region's climatic changes. That is why the blacklip rock oyster has been chosen.

In terms of all our research programs it is embedded within our thinking around how long-term environmental impacts will play on our productivity for our industries.

K McNAMARA: You say that you want confidence in the sector for business to invest here. The private sector in agriculture and fisheries are leagues ahead of the government in terms of planning and innovation for themselves to adapt their businesses to the changing climate. They cannot do it all themselves and they are not going to invest in places where the government is not bothering to take climate change seriously.

What I am hearing is thinking about climate change is embedded within, but unlike every other state and territory and, indeed, the world where departments such as these have really solid, laid-out plans for adaptation and mitigation to an industry that depends purely on our natural resources, I have not seen that here. There is nothing publicly available. There is no well-researched strategy for how the industry is going to cope moving forward. How can businesses have confidence in your government to invest here?

Mr MALEY: We have our research programs and, as you have heard on multiple occasions, we have programs that cover all types of industries—agriculture, fisheries, plants and mangoes—and we invest in them. They use the information, research and the research farms to make commercial decisions.

K McNAMARA: Yes, but what I am hearing is there is no actual strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation for these industries from the government, apart from 'embedded in your thinking'?

Mr MALEY: It is embedded in everything we do; that is the answer. We think about it and make sure we have a sustainable future as we move forward. Everything we do is about how we can make the environment

better, grow the cows quicker and grow the grass more efficiently with less fertiliser and water. Everything we do is about the environment to make sure it is sustainable as we move forward, because many of these people are third or fourth-generation farmers and want to continue it for their children. Everything we do is embedded about climate change.

K McNAMARA: I hear that it is embedded, and I am glad to hear that, but without an actual strategy or framework in place—thanks; that is my questions.

Mr BROWN: What is the relationship between Fisheries and AAPA?

Mr MALEY: In what way? Could you give us some more information? What are you actually looking for?

Mr BROWN: Do Fisheries go back and forth with AAPA in regard to sacred sites that are in the water? Especially in my region of Arnhem Land, with our two rivers, Blyth and Liverpool, dotted with sacred sites—are commercial fishermen being monitored when they are in these rivers?

Mr MALEY: The Fisheries Compliance Unit respect that. They do compliance to make sure recreational or commercial fishers are complying. They would know where they all are; I am sure that their GPSs would mark them. Again, if you think that there is a fisheries officer who is doing the wrong thing and damaging or going near a sacred site, please report it. I am sure, from my experience, they are very well versed and educated. They have good equipment and they take sacred sites very seriously.

Mr BROWN: Do these commercial fishing vessels or people going out require an authority certificate from AAPA? Do the commercial fishermen who are going out require an authority certificate from AAPA?

Mr MALEY: I think you would have to talk to AAPA. We are talking about fisheries, and I think the question you are asking—I understand—is outside our jurisdiction today. We are here today talking about compliance. Whether a commercial enterprise which is fishing needs an AAPA decision or not is a decision for them—where they are using it, what time and where the sacred sites are. I think the question would be to AAPA. If you step back and look at it—does a commercial enterprise need a certificate? You would need to talk to the person who issues those certificates.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill that relate to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that the former CEO of the department, Andrew Kirkman, who has resigned, is no longer received any financial payments from the department?

Mr MALEY: I think that is a question for the Chief Minister's department in relation to his salary and position. From my understanding, he has not resigned. Again, that is not a question for us.

Mr PAECH: He was the CEO of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr MALEY: He stepped down from that role, but he has not resigned.

Mr PAECH: He has not resigned; he is still being paid by the Northern Territory Government, to your knowledge.

Mr MALEY: Yes, to my knowledge.

Mr PAECH: Is the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries a standalone department, or does it sit within a mega department?

Mr MALEY: It is a standalone department. It comes under the Chief Minister and Cabinet, like all departments.

Mr PAECH: If it comes under Chief Minister and Cabinet then it sits in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr MALEY: No, it does not. Chief Minister and Cabinet is the senior department which manages all the departments, but the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is a standalone department.

Mr PAECH: Is it not under Chief Minister and Cabinet?

Mr MALEY: No.

Mr PAECH: With the machinery-of-government changes how many ECO positions were transferred out to agencies such as Mining and Energy? How many ECO positions were either transferred in or created?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the chief financial officer. She will be able to give you that information.

Ms FRANKENFELD: Agriculture and Fisheries used to sit as a division under the former agency of Industry, Tourism and Trade. In part of the MOG all ECOs who sat under the divisions of agriculture, fish and biosecurity were transferred into the agency from DITT. A chief executive at the time, the former chief executive Andrew Kirkman, was appointed. He formally was working at DLI, but there was no transfer of him under the MOG. Obviously, he was appointed as a brand-new CEO of the agency.

As at 31 March there are six ECOs in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr PAECH: What level ECOs are they?

Ms FRANKENFELD: There is one ECO1, three ECO2s, one ECO3 and one ECO6.

Mr PAECH: What is now the recruitment process for the CEO arrangements in Agriculture and Fisheries?

Mr MALEY: That has been advertised through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. They are going through the recruitment process in relation to that position.

Mr PAECH: How many consultants have been engaged by the agency during the last financial year?

Mr MALEY: That was in a written question. We will get the answer for you now.

There is a total of seven consultants who were engaged. I can give you the total amount—\$60,419.

Mr PAECH: Has there been any redirection of grant funding over the last financial year as part of the government's reprioritisation?

Mr MALEY: Is that the grant money from external funding like the Commonwealth into the Northern Territory?

Mr PAECH: The grant money which the department may issue to community organisations or third parties to deliver services that they may have applied for.

Mr MALEY: The answer is no, not until 31 March 2025.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm if the former CEO is still being paid as a CEO?

Mr MALEY: I can confirm he has not resigned. That question would be for the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet which is managing that part of the recruitment process.

Mr PAECH: Are you unable to confirm or deny if Andrew Kirkman is still being paid as a CEO?

Mr MALEY: What I am saying is he has not resigned and he is still being paid. At what level, you would have to talk to the Chief Minister's department. I ask you to pass that question to them.

Mr PAECH: I will potentially ask the Minister for Public Service, given that Andrew Kirkman told staff he had resigned.

Mr MALEY: That is fine.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND BIOSECURITY
Output 1.1 – Industry Development and Project Facilitation

No questions.

Output 1.2 – Agriculture

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

Mr MACKAY: We all know that mango twig tip dieback is a significant threat to the developing mango industry in the Northern Territory. I note there was an announcement of half a million dollars for mango twig tip dieback research funding. How exactly is that money being spent to support our mango industry?

Mr MALEY: In the budget we are prioritising our mango industry, because it is super important to us. We know how important it is, and we have committed \$500,000 to research over the next two years. There is \$400,000 per annum for the next two years to engage professional and technical staff in field and laboratory trials. One plant pathologist and one horticulturalist will be employed in a professional capacity, along with one agronomist in a technical role. The remaining \$100,000 per annum will be used for operational costs associated with research, development and extension activities, and on-farm trials.

Further, a comprehensive research program will be integrated with the mango twig tip dieback, which is CRIPM/MTTD for short. They will work in a group approach led by DAF staff with expertise sought from leading universities and other research institutions.

It is estimated that the NT mango industry provides more than \$100m to the Territory annually and employs 2,500 local and international workers during harvest season, helping mango businesses pick and process. We are dedicated to supporting our mango industry through that initiative.

K McNAMARA: I go back to the research you spoke about. Can you give a dollar figure for the amount spent on research for climate adaptation?

Mr MALEY: We could not give you an exact figure because climate change and environmental decisions are incorporated into all our decisions, and everything we do is about making sure the environment is protected for sustainability in the future. We would not have a breakdown of that information.

K McNAMARA: Does that mean there is no specific dollar amount allocated—for example, a program to work for the increased drought risk?

Mr MALEY: What was that?

K McNAMARA: Does that mean there is no dollar amount allocated for a program or research supporting industry for drought?

Mr MALEY: I can give you some information about the drought hub we are part of, if that helps.

K McNAMARA: Is that part of the federal drought hub?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

K McNAMARA: I am not interested in what the feds are doing—I mean, I am glad you are part of it. I am more trying to get to the point of, apart from it being embedded in your thinking, where are the tangible outputs for assisting producers and industry with climate risks?

Mr MALEY: We do not have a figure. Four or five of our major projects deal with climate risks, so it is embedded in all of those. We could give you the amount for those programs in their entirety, which we are happy to take on notice if you want, but it will not give you a breakdown of, let us say, there is \$1m, and \$800,000 is for tractors and \$200,000 for climate change. It will just be the overall budget for that program. We can give you that, but there will not be a breakdown inside that.

K McNAMARA: Okay. I will rephrase the question like this, which could be taken on notice. What are those programs? How do they assist the industry in adaptation and mitigation in terms of climate change? How much are they funded?

Mr MALEY: That is a difficult question to answer because everything that we do is about the environment and protecting the environment.

K McNAMARA: It should not be a difficult question because climate change will hit these industries like a freight train. If there is no solid plan in place, we will be failing our primary producers.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, please keep to the line of questioning.

K McNAMARA: I am just very surprised that I cannot be given a tangible framework or policy to do with climate mitigation or adaptation. Can you not take that one on notice, about those programs that you say are to do with climate adaptation? I am trying to think of how I can ask a question on notice to get more information on those programs.

Mr MALEY: You ask the question. At the moment you are making statements and your assumptions. I fully accept that is your view, but we want to focus on the facts. The facts here are important about the environment, and we deal with that every day. Ask as many questions as you like, and we will answer them.

K McNAMARA: What are the names of those programs that you have mentioned?

Mr MALEY: I will start with the drought program, and then pass to Jed to give you the rest of those programs.

Mr MATZ: We do not have a list of every project here today. We have over 70 research projects between Livestock Industries and Plant Industries. As previously mentioned, many of them will have an impact on improving producers' abilities to mitigate climatic variation. It is difficult for me to list them all for you right now, but there are some that come to mind.

There is the zero net emissions CRC project, which is a new project commencing this year, and our drought resilience capacity-building projects that we have. We are undertaking the work on new crop varieties and more resilient crop varieties in broadacre cropping.

Sohail may want to add some of the projects from Plant Industries that we are doing.

Dr MAZHAR: In addition to what the minister and Jed have said, we are part of the Carbon Farming Outreach Program, which is a nationwide program. We are building the capacity of our growers and landholders in understanding how the carbon farming is and how we could benefit more out of that.

Secondly, we are part of the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program, which is implemented all over the Northern Territory, including farms in Ali Curung where we are providing soil-related innovations on how we can improve soils so that we can produce more with less. Then the Climate-Smart Agriculture practices can be incorporated in our farming systems.

Most recently, we have become part of a sandy soils project which is federally funded. When we say it is federally funded, we have to match the resources. We have to look at NTG resources so that we can take part of the federal resources.

In all 70 programs, we have put in some things in so that we can benefit from others and then we can deliver services for our stakeholders.

K McNAMARA: I would like a question on notice about those programs. I understand that there are over 70 programs; that is a lot. Can I get what those programs are, which ones roughly focus on climate resilience and how much they are funded by?

Mr MALEY: There is a website where all of that is publicly listed for you. If you want to write that down, the website is daf.nt.gov.au/livestock/livestock-industries-projects.

K McNAMARA: Does it have the funding on it? That is what I am after.

Mr MALEY: We will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.1

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

K McNAMARA: Could I please have the names of the projects that relate to building climate resilience in the sector and how much they are funded?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will break for 10 minutes. It is 10.35 am; we will return at 10.45 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Fisheries

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

J DAVIS: You mentioned that there were cameras on two boats and coverage of only four fishing trips in the barramundi fishery. The government threatened, endangered and protected species strategy outlines 100% of monitoring of fishing activity by July 2025. Will this goal be reached?

Mr OSBORNE: We are currently undertaking procurement for cameras, depending on the number of vessels operating in the fleet—at the moment there are only two vessels operating—to deliver on that commitment for 100% camera coverage.

J DAVIS: When do you think that goal will be reached?

Mr OSBORNE: Procurement is taking place now. The expectation is to have that completed by the end of the financial year, but we will wait to see when the cameras get here. July is not too far away, but we are doing our best.

Mr MACKAY: What has been the uptake of the NT Government's recreational fishing grants in the reporting period? Do you have any examples of successful projects that have been funded through that scheme?

Mr MALEY: The Northern Territory Recreational Fishing Grants Scheme recognises the social and economic value of rec fishing in the Northern Territory. The scheme offers grant funding to community projects that support and grow recreational fishing in the Northern Territory.

In 2025 the fishing grants program was split into two rounds. The first round, which has just closed, grants up to \$15,000. The second round will be open in the second half of the year and it will provide grants up to \$75,000.

I am excited to announce next week who the winners of the grants will be, but to give you an idea, last year's winners were the Katherine Game Fishing Club for the 2024 Kids Fishing Fun Day; the NT Barramundi Adventures Variety NT fishing day; and the Palmerston Game Fishing Club's Buddy Boats Day, which I have been on a couple of times and which is a good program. It takes onto the Elizabeth River people from HPA who have not had the opportunity to go out and catch fish. They then head back to the clubhouse for a barbecue and enjoy the atmosphere of the Palmerston Game Fishing Club. There was also the Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation to support the Ngukurr boat ramp; the Nhulunbuy Regional Sports Fishing Club to help with the upgrades of the NRSFC boat ramp; and the Darwin Game Fishing Club for activities to educate kids on fishing safety at the 2024 Junior Fun Day and Clinic. They are some examples of what the grants are available for.

I will be announcing the winners shortly, but I encourage anyone who thinks they have a program that falls within this grants program to apply for the next round; there is more money available. This is about getting out to improve fishing with the social and economic values of recreational fishing across the Northern Territory.

Mr MACKAY: The Darwin Aquaculture Centre maintains a stocking program for barramundi. I recently participated in the release at McMinns Lagoon. How many barramundi have been stocked into our lakes and recreation areas in the reporting period? Do you have a breakdown of where they have been stocked?

Mr MALEY: Recreational fishing is important. I can tell you that 109,000 barramundi have been stocked into Manton Dam this financial year. I too have been to McMinns Lagoon and have seen fish being stocked into that. McMinns Lagoon is a great location in the middle of the rural area where people go for weddings. You can walk out through the walkway to the island where you can sit down on the green grass or on chairs, have a fish or take the family. Lots of dogs go walking. We know that the lakes have a whole swag of fish in there as well. This is a great program to restock for barramundi fishing. In Palmerston in the lakes and Durack a number of fish have been stocked as well. It is about restoring the lifestyle in the Northern Territory.

We know that recreational fishing brings in a lot of money to the Northern Territory. It is good to see that people who do not have an opportunity to have a boat can go out into these areas and catch a barramundi and feel the experience of putting lines in the water, fighting a fish and getting it in.

Mr MACKAY: Do you have a total across the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: It is 109,000.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 – Biosecurity and Animal Welfare

Mr CHAIR: I now call for questions relating to Output 1.4, Biosecurity and Animal Welfare. Are there any questions?

Mr MACKAY: What work is happening, and is there money in the current budget for strengthening animal protection laws?

Mr MALEY: The *Animal Protection Act 2018* and the Animal Protection Regulations 2022 govern the administration and provide for a regulatory framework to ensure animals are treated humanely and regulates people to use or allows them to keep animals for specific and scientific purposes.

We are in the process of amending that legislation now. The scope of the proposed amendments in the Act are informed by legislative review and the feedback received from the public Have Your Say campaign that was open for a period of four months, which closed on 20 September 2024. A large proportion of the Have Your Say responses regarded the charging and the sentencing of Mr Adam Britton arising from animal cruelty and bestiality. Over 250 responses were received. We had great feedback in relation to that.

The amendments will be considered in parliament in August this year. They will include:

- clarify and increase the maximum penalties and prison terms for them and minimal care of animal cruelty offences
- new simple, strict liability minimal care offences
- clarify the use and exempted use of electrical devices on animals
- clarify the restraining of animals when riding in the back of utes and on trailers
- new strict liability offences for the possession and the use of prong collars on dogs
- clarify animal welfare officers' compliance and enforcement powers
- enter locked vehicles to rescue animals in distress; for example, if someone sees an animal locked in a car with the windows up they will have the power to break in and save the animal

- inserting additional codes of practice in regard to campdrafting, boarding kennels and the racing of greyhounds and horses.

Mr CHAIR: If a pet goes missing in the Northern Territory, is there a mandatory time before that pet is put down?

Mr MALEY: 'Goes missing' as in is picked up by ...

Mr CHAIR: If a pet in Palmerston goes missing and authorities pick it up, is there a mandatory time period before that pet is put down to allow the owner to claim the animal?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the Senior Executive Director, Biosecurity and Animal Welfare.

Ms COROWA: Animal management is mostly dealt with by the local governments throughout the Territory. They have by-laws which are in place around the behaviour and management of animals. We deal with animals in the Animal Welfare branch when we receive complaints about animals being dealt with in a cruel manner. We receive about 700 of those complaints per annum. The team triages the situation, and we only ever seize the animals when we believe the animals are in jeopardy.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 2.1 – Corporate and Governance

Output 2.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. On behalf of the committee, I thank all the officers who provided advice to the minister.

MINING AND ENERGY

RENEWABLES

DEPARTMENT OF MINING AND ENERGY

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to consider outputs relating to the Department of Mining and Energy.

As the Minister for Mining and Energy and Minister for Renewables, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Mining and Energy.

Mr MALEY: I thank the department officials for coming and for all the work they have done. There has been an extreme amount of work done in preparing this and getting this ready.

Appearing with me today is Alister Trier, Chief Executive Officer; Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer; Ian Scrimgeour, Senior Executive Director, Northern Territory Geological Survey; Joni Woollard, Acting Senior Executive Director, Mining Development; James Pratt, Senior Executive Director, Energy Development; and Anne Tan, Deputy Chief Executive Officer. I will introduce other DME officials as required as we move through the whole process.

Our mining and resource sector is the economic backbone of the Northern Territory and is critical to the CLP's commitment to rebuilding the Territory economy. Since coming to government last year, the Lia Finocchiaro government has been focused to make the Territory the leading jurisdiction to explore private investment and job creation. Back to the sector—we do everything we can to make the Territory a competitive place. We need to ensure that this sector can compete with other jurisdictions across Australia.

The Department of Mining and Energy is one of the fundamental agencies responsible for delivering to rebuild the Territory economy. The department's remit focuses on the responsible development of the Northern Territory's energy and mineral resources for the benefit of all Territorians. This includes the development of our mineral extraction and downstream processing industry, the implementation of renewable energy

programs and the development of our energy resources across Central Australia and in the Beetaloo Sub-basin.

The department delivers these critical functions through expert scientific advice to the government and the general public, and the granting and regulation of petroleum and mining tenure. The department is divided into five output groups, each with their own role to suit their responsibility. These include Energy Development, Beetaloo Project Management Office, Sustainable Energy Development, Northern Territory Geological Survey and Mining Development.

The Northern Territory's future is our gas industry, and we are very lucky because we have lots of it. In fact, the Territory arguably has the nation's most significant energy assets, and it lies just a few hundred kilometres south of where we are sitting today.

The Beetaloo Sub-basin is estimated to contain five trillion cubic feet of gas in one shale layer alone. Permit holders in the Beetaloo are projecting they could produce four billion cubic feet of gas per day from around 2030. While that is a mere four years away, we are expecting first gas sales from the Beetaloo later this year or early next year. The Beetaloo has enough gas in one shale layer to not only meet the energy demands of the Territory but also provide low-emissions energy security for the east coast and additional LNG exports from Darwin.

Ensuring the Beetaloo Sub-basin reaches its full potential is the number one priority of this Lia Finocchiaro government. As well as driving energy security for our country, it will create jobs and opportunities for Territorians for years to come.

That is exactly why the NT Government set up the Beetaloo Project Management Office in the Department of Mining and Energy last year. This office's exclusive job is to ensure a whole-of-government approach to delivery of onshore gas, the development of that industry and to maximise the economic and community benefits of the Territory's natural resources in the Beetaloo. The office will work closely with the Territory Coordinator, who has the ability to provide the strategic grunt needed to enable such a significant undertaking. The members of the Beetaloo Project Management Office will engage and work closely across agency to identify the shared responsibilities, constraints and resources required to develop the Beetaloo, including workforce requirements and road and rail infrastructure. In addition, the agency has been undertaking a substantial amount of work on legislative reform to enable gas production.

In February we introduced the Petroleum, Planning and Water Legislation Amendment Bill, which removed provisions for third-party merits review of decisions. Third-party merits review created uncertainty for business and the regulator, increasing the risk of project delays and disruption. Such actions by a government demonstrate to the industry that we are laser-focused on rebuilding the Territory economy and making our jurisdiction and its regulatory environment attractive for the investment that it requires. Our government has acted swiftly to eliminate delays, disruption and uncertainty, laying the foundation for major economic revival.

We have known about the potential of the Beetaloo for some time now, but exploration data from last year from Tamboran delivered flow results that were the highest recorded in the Beetaloo to date and equivalent to some of the largest shale wells in the US. There is more to come. Flow results from Tamboran's Shenandoah South 2 well are expected later this month.

Empire Energy is set to stimulate the longest lateral well in the Beetaloo next week as it progresses towards pilot production and appraisal gas sales later this year or early in 2026.

Santos recently announced it will invest over \$200m in 2026 to drill and flow test three wells on its permit in the Beetaloo Sub-basin as it eyes gas production in 2027–28.

Daly Waters Energy, headed by Bryan Sheffield, will become the fourth operator in the Beetaloo following some binding agreements with Tamboran Resources. Daly Waters Energy will hold key acreage in the Beetaloo as it has a plan to increase development in its world-class shale basin.

While there has been lots of exploration happening in our onshore gas sector, we have also seen investment to critical infrastructure in the region. Earlier this year Tamboran signed an agreement with APA Group for the development of the 37-kilometre-long Sturt Plateau pipeline. This is the first direct pipeline from the Beetaloo Sub-basin that will enable gas sales from the region. APA has since lodged its application for a pipeline licence and expects to commence construction of the \$70m pipeline in September this year. This is a key investment towards strengthening the Territory's infrastructure.

The NT Government is investing in enabling infrastructure, last month announcing the Territory Energy Link, a proposed infrastructure corridor from Elliott to Darwin which will enable gas and other vital lines to develop in the Beetaloo and come up the Northern Territory.

We often talk about the Beetaloo; however, in April I toured Central Petroleum's gas field on the Amadeus Basin to see firsthand a demonstration of the long-term viability and economic value of onshore gas in the Northern Territory. Recent drilling of the West Mereenie 29 and 30 wells has yielded exceptional results for Central Petroleum and its joint venture partners. This group is also planning two additional wells in each of Palm Valley and Mereenie fields to further increase its supply for much-needed energy security.

All of this bodes well for the Northern Territory's economic future and for long-term jobs in the Territory.

It is not just our onshore sector that is affording significant opportunities in the Northern Territory. I visited the INPEX Ichthys natural gas processing plant in April to see the size and scale of the largest private investments in the Territory.

With private investment comes opportunity for Territorians, and there will be lots of opportunities when carbon capture and storage and the utilisation of this becomes a reality. The NT Government is doing the groundwork to enable the carbon capture and storage hub at Middle Arm, and is working with INPEX, Santos and Vopak, which are undertaking their own CCS projects. In a critical milestone announced just a few weeks ago, INPEX has commenced its primary front-end engineering work to develop the Bonaparte Gulf CCS project.

A milestone for Santos will be the delivery of first gas on its Barossa field to the Darwin LNG facility in the coming months.

Territory gas will continue to remain an integral part of our electricity system for years. Our pathway to emissions reductions for the energy sector is centred on affordability, grid security and reliability, not aspirational targets.

In March we announced the scrapping of the former government's unachievable 50% renewable energy generation by 2030. We will not make Territorians pay the price for chasing a previous government's unrealistic targets. Instead, we have announced our plan to secure the Territory's energy future by developing vital reforms to improve grid stability and lower costs to ensure energy transition.

Our government's legislative, regulatory and economic work program in the Northern Territory energy space is guided by the key principle of enough energy followed by affordability, reliability and, of course, energy security. The benefits of this to Territorians will be cheaper energy, and it is widely recognised that an abundant, secure and reliable source of energy is critical to attracting and growing businesses and investments in the Northern Territory. We have capped retail electricity prices to 3%, and are undertaking strategic investment in energy infrastructure and expanding large-scale solar and battery storage.

This government recognises that Territory consumers are important, not the need for these lofty targets. We are here to focus on the Territory consumers to make sure that they pay an affordable price for electricity. This is why we have made reforms to improve the incentives for households and businesses to do things that support the security and reliability of our power systems.

On 1 December last year we doubled the Home and Business Battery Scheme (HBBS) to manage the impact of rooftop solar systems by increasing the self-consumption of solar through rooftop and batteries. What a great success that has been. The \$6m scheme is now fully allocated, with 300 Territorians receiving grants and completing their installation, with another 250 approved ready for installation. Since the scheme started, we have seen about \$70m of work injected into the Northern Territory economy, supporting small businesses and local employment.

Mining is also important. We know of the gas industry's economic value and potential for generating wealth for generations to come, but it is the Territory's mining exploration and mining sector that is currently the single largest contributor to the Territory's own-source revenue. This sector contributed over \$200m in mining royalties alone in 2023–24, with a similar amount expected in 2024–25. The revenue and employment generated by mineral exploration and mining is critical to our government's commitment to rebuilding the economy.

The CLP government is continuing to back mineral and gas exploration through our \$9.5m per year ongoing Resourcing the Territory program.

In February we announced the opening for applications for round 18 of the geophysics and drilling grants program. Yesterday I was joined by Mark Edwards, Managing Director of Prodigy Gold, to announce the successful recipients of round 18 who share almost \$4m in co-funding. Prodigy Gold was one of the 30 successful recipients. Mark said:

Without the co-funding support of the NT Government some of these programs would take a lot longer to be initiated, delaying our geological understanding of the regions we work in. These sorts of programs significantly increase our knowledge of the local and regional geology of our projects and could fast track the next major discovery.

Critical to the NT Government's plan to rebuild the economy is providing a regulatory and investment environment that facilitates projects moving swiftly and successfully to production. One example of our government's work in our jurisdiction to make it more attractive is our recent amendment to the NT payroll tax system, increasing the payroll tax threshold from \$1.5m to \$2.5m. Such actions make it easier for small to medium businesses—many of which contract to major mining and energy projects across the Territory—to thrive and grow, boosting our local economy and our population, and providing certainty and security to Territorians which they deserve.

Other actions include removing unnecessary barriers that stifle project development. Again, this ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! I remind the minister this is supposed to be a brief opening statement. He has been speaking for 15 minutes now. The opposition, Independents and The Greens have questions.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I take note. Minister, just continue.

Mr MALEY: Other actions include removing unnecessary barriers that stifle project development. Again, that is where our government sees the Territory Coordinator playing a major role alongside our new Approvals Fast Track Taskforce.

We have seen encouraging new investments in the Territory mining sector in recent months, such as the major investment by Pan African Resources into Tennant mining. The NT's newest mine, Tennant's Nobles Nob gold project, commenced production last month, marking the recommencement of large-scale mining in Tennant Creek after a break of more than two decades. As the Mining minister, I was proud to attend the opening of the Nobles Nob mine, along with the Member for Barkly, Steve Edgington, which has a current mine life of at least eight years, with plans to extend that to double, with the mine forecast to produce at least 60,000 ounces of gold, creating hundreds of jobs.

I was also pleased to see the recommencement of production and export operations in May of South32 GEMCO operations on Groote Eylandt following the destruction of vital infrastructure by Cyclone Megan in March 2024. GEMCO represents one of the largest manganese mines in the world and one of the largest contributors to both the mineral production value and mineral royalties payable to our Treasury department.

I was also pleased to grant Verdant Minerals' Ammaroo phosphate project tenure by two mineral leases in March this year. This is a critical step to moving the Ammaroo project forward to production by 2026, sustaining hundreds of jobs in construction and operation for a mine life of 25 years-plus.

Last week I visited Newmont's Tanami goldmine, which has no end in sight for gold production from their operation, producing over 300,000 ounces of gold per annum, with the mine life extending beyond 2040, employing hundreds of people and providing tens of millions of dollars in royalties to the Northern Territory. The significant expenditure across a large range of infrastructure programs at the Tanami mine include a 1.5-kilometre shaft; that is 5,000 feet straight down, which shows they have considerable confidence in the Northern Territory and their investment. The Tanami expansion project alone is estimated to cost over \$1bn.

We know the Territory also has the opportunity to become an important player in global supply chains for the critical minerals that are required for new technology and energy transition. Earlier this year we released the fully updated 2025 version of the Critical Minerals in the Northern Territory guide, which defines the Territory's 17 critical minerals along with the 13 emerging others.

It is clear that we are moving into an exciting time for the Northern Territory resources sector, and the government is working with industry on realising the Territory's resource potential.

Just as important as granting new mineral leases and seeing the commencement of mining projects is the work that goes into remediating our old mines. The Territory has a long history of mining, with historical

mining activities occurring across the Territory. Remediation of legacy mines is critical to protect the public from the impact of legacy mines and provides valuable employment and economic benefit to the Northern Territory in regional and remote areas. That is why I was pleased to announce in January this year the completion of a significant body of work remediating mines in Tennant Creek. The \$5.5m program of works was undertaken as part of the legacy Small Mines Safety Program and saw over 200 legacy health and safety issues at small mines addressed.

The NT Mining Remediation Fund is a 1% annual levy on the mining securities held by the department of Mining, which currently stands at just under \$100m. By growing our mining exploration and mineral activities across the Territory we will, therefore, grow the size of the Mining Remediation Fund which enables the department to undertake larger scopes of work to address legacy mines' environmental issues across the Northern Territory.

The next 12 months are a pivotal and extremely busy time for the Department of Mining and Energy and me as the Mining minister. We will be delivering broad economic and legislative reforms designed to rebuild our economy and improve Territorians' lives. These activities include:

- production of the first commercial gas and petroleum royalty revenue from the Beetaloo, which will help to resolve our energy security issue
- legislative reforms to modernise our electricity market, making it more efficient and better able to deliver cheap energy to Territorians
- legislative reforms to modernise and streamline our mineral titles and regulations
- legislative reforms to facilitate the development of carbon capture and storage across the Northern Territory
- the approval, facilitation and commissioning of new mine developments, creating hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in royalties.

We are in a great space and have a bright future. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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

Mr PAECH: I asked you this question earlier, and you said it was in the Mining portfolio area.

Can you provide a full breakdown of your travel to Daly Waters on 7 November 2024 and 30 January 2025, which cost a total of \$4,151.70 and \$4,717.71 respectively? What was the purpose of these trips? What were the costs categorised as 'other'? What are the outcomes that were achieved for Territorians with these visits that has accounted for over \$5,500 and the total spend for those trips? I note you charged Territory taxpayers \$1,300 for one of the charters and \$1,900 for another. What are the other expenses that amount to, on 7 November, nearly \$2,800 charged to Territory taxpayers and \$2,800 on 30 January?

Mr MALEY: On the trip of 7 November, we went to the Beetaloo and travelled to EP98. The visit was hosted by Tamboran Chief Operating Officer Faron and Executive Vice President of Gas Markets Michael Flynn. Did you also want who went on that visit?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr MALEY: I went along; Khoda Patel, the assistant minister for Mining and Energy; Abigail Trewin, Chief of Staff for Minister Maley; Alister Trier, Chief Executive Officer, Mining and Energy; James Pratt, Senior Executive Director, Energy Development. That trip went along and it was total of \$10,646.

Mr PAECH: You have charged Territory taxpayers \$2,785.33 listed under 'other'. What are those expenses?

Mr MALEY: Can we take that question on notice?

Mr PAECH: Absolutely.

Question on Notice No 3.2

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

Mr PAECH: Can you provide a full breakdown of your travel to Daly Waters on 7 November 2024 and 30 January 2025, which cost a total of \$4,151.70 and \$4,717.71 respectively? What was the purpose of these trips? Who was on these trips? What were the costs categorised as 'other'? What outcomes were achieved for Territorians from these visits?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: No, I do not accept the question in its entirety because I have just explained who was on it and the purpose of it. What I was saying was about the cost because the question was specifically the \$2,000 cost for 'other'. That is the question we are happy to take on notice.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, are you happy with ...

Mr PAECH: I will rephrase the question. Minister, your travel on 7 November 2024 and 30 January 2025 has an expense in November of \$2,785.33 listed as 'other', and the expenses on 30 January 2025, \$2,809.03 charged as 'other'. What were those expenses?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

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

Mr PAECH: Is the Department of Mining and Energy a standalone department?

Mr MALEY: Yes, it is.

Mr PAECH: It does not sit under Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr MALEY: Chief Minister and Cabinet is the overarching senior government department, but Mining and Energy sits by itself.

Mr PAECH: What recruitment process was undertaken to appoint the CEO of your department?

Mr MALEY: When the MOG changes occurred the CEOs of departments were appointed by the Chief Minister and Cabinet, and that is how that recruitment process was undertaken.

Mr PAECH: Were you involved in the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer of Mining and Energy?

Mr MALEY: No.

Mr PAECH: How many ECO positions were either transferred out or transferred in under the machinery-of-government changes?

Mr MALEY: Is your question 'how many executive contracts'?

Mr PAECH: With the machinery-of-government changes, ECO positions are usually transferred out of one agency or brought into an agency. How many were transferred out, and how many were either retained or established?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to Jo, the chief financial officer, to answer the question.

Ms FRANKENFELD: This is a newly created agency, the Department of Mining and Energy. The staff came across from the former agency of Industry, Tourism and Trade. All ECOs at the time of MOG were transferred out of the divisions of Energy, NTGS, OSC, the deputy of the former Mining and Energy, so nobody lost their jobs; everyone who was an ECO transferred across from that agency. We also had ECOs transferred in from

the gas section of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Alister was appointed as CEO, as just explained; he also was formerly in DCM. As of 31 March, we currently have 18.6 FTEs who are all ECOs.

Mr PAECH: How many of those ECO positions are based in Darwin?

Ms FRANKENFELD: All of them.

Mr PAECH: In your opening statement you spoke about the battery grant scheme. During the election you promised the \$6m commitment for what was then said to be 500 homes for batteries. The website now says that the scheme is closed and there is no guarantee that submitted applications will be assessed, yet the 2024–25 revised budget shows only \$2.8m of the promised \$6m was spent. Can you speak to us about how you have reached the full allocation, if less than half the money was delivered?

Mr MALEY: We allocated the \$6m. From that, 300 people have received the grants and completed their applications, with a further 250 ready to install. We have put it in 550 homes, which is more than the commitment. We finished that program. The money has been spent, and the remaining 250 homes have been approved and are ready for installation.

Mr PAECH: Will those 250 homes be approved?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that you have reached dead on the \$6m in terms of expenditure for that?

Mr MALEY: Yes. The scheme has been fully allocated.

Mr PAECH: Is this a scheme that will be renewed in future financial years or is this a one-off?

Mr MALEY: This is a one-off scheme that has been fully allocated.

Mr PAECH: Talking about renewable energy, as you did in your opening statement regarding Territorians relying on and wanting to see a greater emphasis on renewables, many energy companies are talking about the transition to renewable energies. You have scrapped the renewable energy target. What is your government's commitment around reaching a renewable target of 50%?

Mr MALEY: We will not aim for unachievable targets. The previous government had a target that was unachievable. It was nowhere near being able to hit that target. We have focused on the best cost-effective energy for Territorians. We want to focus on cost of living. We will focus on and work towards providing reliable energy at the least cost to Territorians. That will include a mixture of renewables, gas—whatever it takes—to provide cheap, secure energy to Territorians.

Mr PAECH: Can you give the guarantee today that the \$6m will be fully expended when it comes to the batteries?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

K McNAMARA: As reported by the NT Independent in May this year, the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment recently disclosed that it resolved three incidents relating to the activities of Imperial Oil & Gas, a subsidiary of Empire Energy, at its well pads on EP187. While the details of two of these incidents were set out in a regulatory statement and published on DLPE's website, the details of the third incident have not been provided to the public. Can you confirm there was an issue with the casing of a well on EP187?

Mr MALEY: I will pass that to Alister Trier, the chief executive officer.

Mr TRIER: We received that question as a written question on notice, so we will provide that back in writing. We want to make sure that we do not mislead the committee.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, would you like to make that a question on notice?

K McNAMARA: He is saying that it is already on a written question. Yes, I will put it on notice to make sure that it comes back to me.

Question on Notice No 3.3

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

K McNAMARA: Can you confirm there was an issue with the casing of a well on EP187?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

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

Mr MALEY: Can I just correct the record? I think we spoke earlier about the ECOs in Darwin. There is one interstate. I just wanted to correct the record.

K McNAMARA: Can you confirm that well was intersecting the Anthony Lagoon aquifer? I can put that on notice, unless you know.

Mr MALEY: I will pass that to James Pratt, Senior Executive Director, Energy Development.

Mr PRATT: There are five wells that have been drilled on EP187. Are you able to clarify which well you are referring to?

K McNAMARA: I cannot confirm which well. Do any of them intersect the Anthony Lagoon aquifer?

Mr PRATT: Several of them do, but we can clarify that in the response to your question on notice.

K McNAMARA: Okay. Maybe I will add that just to clarify if the well that had an issue with the casing was intersecting.

Mr CHAIR: We will do another question on notice, Member for Nightcliff.

Question on Notice No 3.4

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

K McNAMARA: If there was a well with an issue with the casing, was it intersecting the Anthony Lagoon aquifer?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

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

K McNAMARA: Was there any concern from you about this potential casing problem having implications for the aquifer?

Mr PRATT: I want to put on the record there are no casing issues on EP187 with any of the wells. We perform integrity checks. There are no cracks, splits or casing issues on there, but we will take your question on notice and come back to you with further information.

Mr PAECH: You mentioned that you have one ECO position outside of Darwin. Where is that position?

Mr MALEY: Based in Perth.

Mr PAECH: Why are Territory taxpayers paying for a position of an executive contract officer outside of the Northern Territory?

Mr TRIER: I will go to Anne Tan, the deputy chief executive, in a second. This is a highly technical position relating to electricity market reform, and that technical expertise is hard to get. The person lives in Perth.

Ms TAN: We have one individual, as the minister and Alister have said, located in Perth. I confirm that the position is a challenging one to recruit to. It is a position that is heavily engaged in the electricity market reform process, and that requires expertise not only from the Territory but from outside the Territory to understand what is happening elsewhere in Australia, because there are learnings we can take out of that. It is a position we sought to engage locally, but that was not successful, so the current incumbent was successful through a competitive recruitment process.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm this position was originally advertised in the Northern Territory? Was this person appointed or did they go through a recruitment process?

Mr MALEY: I confirm it was advertised in the Northern Territory and went through a recruitment process.

Mr PAECH: It went through a recruitment process for the successful applicant who is now based in Perth?

Mr MALEY: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: How many consultants have been engaged by the department over the last financial year?

Mr MALEY: That was provided to you in the global written question. The answer is 24.

K McNAMARA: I will go on with my original question around the three resolved incidents at well pad EP187. You said that there was no casing issues on those wells. If not, what was the nature of the third undisclosed incident?

Mr MALEY: We took that question on notice about what the nature was. In that written question on notice you already have that was the question.

Mr CHAIR: I will confirm.

Mr MALEY: We are happy to amend it if needed.

Mr CHAIR: Question on notice 3.3 related to whether there was an issue. Minister, if you are happy I can amend 3.3 to add the nature of the issue?

K McNAMARA: Yes, thank you.

Mr MALEY: We are happy to amend that.

Mr CHAIR: Question on Notice 3.3 has been amended to add the nature of any incident.

K McNAMARA: As those incidents, I think, have been deemed resolved, who makes the decision that the incident is resolved under the *Petroleum Act*?

Mr PRATT: As I stated before, there are no issues with this well. I wanted to clarify that. When matters arise that require further interest and understanding, we have a team of engineers who look into it. They diagnose if an issue is there or if mitigation efforts are suitable. Through delegations within the department of the *Petroleum Act*, a decision is made on whether to escalate it to the minister or make a decision in-house. That is how that matter was resolved.

K McNAMARA: I hear you are saying there is no issue with the well, but there were three incidents. Two of them were publicised and one was not, so there was some incident; is that right?

Mr MALEY: We can take that on notice. I think that was the issue of the question on notice we modified; what was the nature of that question. I am happy to amend it again.

K McNAMARA: I will ask another question. What was the nature of the third incident that occurred at EP187 that was not provided to the public?

Mr MALEY: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.5

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

K McNAMARA: What was the nature of the third incident that occurred at EP187 that was not provided to the public?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

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

K McNAMARA: Do you provide statements describing the process by which the incident was investigated and resolved under the *Petroleum Act*?

Mr PRATT: I am not trying to be cute, but is that a hypothetical? I stated before we did not investigate the well because there was no issue. Could you clarify your question, please?

K McNAMARA: I am having trouble with the fact that there was supposedly an incident. You are saying there was nothing wrong with it, but there was an incident that got resolved.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, we need to deal with this.

K McNAMARA: I understand; I will try to reword it. I will leave it for now and wait until I get things on notice. I think it changed my line of questioning.

You have indicated that the cost of the transition to renewables should be a concern to taxpayers. Is the cost to taxpayers of gas-fired energy production also a consideration of your department?

Mr MALEY: We want to make sure that we have energy security for the Northern Territory to supply cheap energy for the taxpayer but also for manufacturing in the Northern Territory. We know that we have a lot of gas just to the south of us. We need to get that to market, whether it is in the Northern Territory or to another place—maybe the east coast. It needs to be competitive. No-one will buy gas just because it is from the Beetaloo; it needs to be a competitive price. We want to do whatever we can to make sure the gas will end up at a competitive price.

The gas industry employs, from memory, 11,000 people in over 3,000 businesses directly. The economic benefit to the Territory is not only from the gas and selling or using it in our power stations to keep the lights and air con going; it is also a way to reduce the debt through mining—we are doing mining and gas, so both of those go hand in hand. We want to focus on gas directly. The indirect jobs—we know INPEX was the largest private enterprise job here. Santos has a facility, and Barossa gas is coming online. The value-adding we can do in employment, not only directly; I can list a range of people like hairdressers, mechanics ...

K McNAMARA: That is okay. I am not asking about jobs at this stage. I have more questions about jobs.

Mr MALEY: I am just answering your question.

K McNAMARA: No; the question was whether you consider the cost of gas-fired energy, but I will continue.

What environmental and climate change considerations does the department make when determining new mines are changed? Is there a formal process in which climate change must be a detail for your department to consider?

Mr MALEY: Our department deals with the mining tenure and then it goes for environmental approval through the Environment department. That question would be better off given to the minister for the Environment. We essentially give the mining tenure and then part of the next step is the environmental approval side of it, which is not this department.

K McNAMARA: What is the cost to the taxpayers of the nine-year gas supply deal signed with Tamboran in 2024?

Mr MALEY: There were three gas sale agreements signed for Central, Tamboran and Empire. Eni for Blacktip—the gas was going down; they re-drilled and got more gas there.

The gas price incentive you are asking for is a confidential price, so we will not disclose the actual amount, but it is making sure that the Northern Territory has gas available for our gas-fired power station, which runs Darwin and Katherine, and also that gas will be available for manufacturing.

Like I said earlier, there are 11,000 direct jobs and thousands more indirectly, so we need to ensure we focus on getting gas to the Northern Territory at a competitive price to keep the lights on.

K McNAMARA: Does that mean you will not tell the taxpayers how much the gas deal was?

Mr MALEY: For one thing, they have not produced any gas. The taxpayer ...

K McNAMARA: But you signed the deal.

Mr MALEY: The taxpayer has not spent any money buying gas from Tamboran at the moment. They are, in a way, in processing. I can tell you that I hope to buy gas from them and spend lots of money buying it because we need the gas in the Northern Territory. Right now we can get our gas from ...

K McNAMARA: Thank you. You answered my question.

Mr MALEY: You asked the question, so can I get an opportunity to finish?

K McNAMARA: He answered it; he is not ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, let the minister answer.

K McNAMARA: Continue to waste time.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, if you feel time is ever being wasted or have any interjections, come to me as Chair.

K McNAMARA: I got the answer that it will not be publicly released.

Mr PAECH: You spoke about Eni; of course, they were running out of gas, as you mentioned, and they drilled and found more. Are there conversations at the department level around the Territory having a gas reservation policy in terms of security, rather than selling our gas and then buying it back?

Mr MALEY: We are exploring all options in relation to making sure that the Territory gets the best bang for buck for gas. Gas has not come out of the Beetaloo. If there is an existing contract with Eni, that is an existing contract. I assume it would be very difficult to change an existing contract, but moving forward we are trying to get the best bang for buck for gas in the Territory. We want to see production come to the Northern Territory to provide cheap electricity. We are looking at all options in relation to what we can do to get the gas into the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH: Just to be clear, you have not ruled out a gas reservation policy.

Mr MALEY: We have not ruled out anything. There are already gas agreements signed with other gas providers. Moving forward, we need to make sure that we get bang for buck because we need cheap energy for Territorians.

K McNAMARA: We will not get the cost to the taxpayers of the gas deal signed with Tamboran.

Mr MALEY: You have. It is zero because there has been no cost because there has been no gas sold. That is the answer.

K McNAMARA: There is a deal signed; is that correct? I would like to know the amount on that deal.

Mr MALEY: Unfortunately, that is commercial-in-confidence, just like any other private contract.

K McNAMARA: Would that also be the same for the contract signed with Empire Energy in 2024 and the six-year deal with Central Petroleum?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

K McNAMARA: Is there any way I can get them on notice?

Mr MALEY: No.

K McNAMARA: Four 37-year-old gas-fired generators at Channel Island Power Station will require replacement or to be refurbished in the next four years. What is the anticipated cost of that to taxpayers?

Mr MALEY: TGen is here at the end of next week. You need to ask that question to them. They are responsible for that.

K McNAMARA: There have been some reports by energy analysts—one of them is Tom Quinn—who estimated the value of all those contracts that I mentioned at approximately \$3.98bn. Would I be correct in that ballpark figure of \$4bn?

Mr MALEY: That is a hypothetical question, Chair.

K McNAMARA: That is fine if you cannot answer it.

If you are concerned about the impact of a transition to renewables on Territory taxpayers then why not be honest about the amount that is being paid to the gas industry, which is presumably in the billions?

Mr MALEY: We are being honest. We have paid them zero money. We have not bought any gas from them.

K McNAMARA: Yes, but there is an amount in the contracts that will be paid.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, we have been told that it is commercial-in-confidence. There are reasons behind that.

K McNAMARA: In March you revoked the Territory's renewable energy target, stating that it would not be achievable without immense cost to the taxpayer. You claimed the cost to Territorians would be about \$5bn. Energy analyst Tom Quinn subsequently described this on ABC's *Country Hour* as 'an out-and-out lie'. It was subsequently revealed that previous government estimates put that figure at about \$280m, not billion. What calculations were you referring to when you stated such an inflated cost for achieving the renewable target?

Mr MALEY: That was an estimated cost, and I said that. I certainly did not say that is exactly what it was. The previous Labor government failed to get anywhere near that target. We have switched the target now. We are not just going for a target that is unachievable; we are trying to achieve the lowest cost of electricity for Territorians.

K McNAMARA: Are you saying that you do not know the cost analysis you went to, to calculate the figure that you put out there?

Mr MALEY: We talked to industry and that was an estimate.

K McNAMARA: Can you elaborate on how you came up with the estimate of \$5bn?

Mr MALEY: No I cannot because it was an estimate and we discussed it with industry. That is what we estimated it at.

K McNAMARA: You have to have read it. You are putting figures like that out to the public that it will cost this amount. Do you have no ability to show us how that figure came about?

Mr MALEY: We discussed it with industry and that was the figure that we estimated. The previous government failed abysmally getting there and they were so far behind. Everything in the Territory is expensive. We need cheap and reliable gas and energy in the Territory. We will do whatever we can—whether it is a mix of gas and renewables—to make sure that Territorians are not paying high electricity

prices just because of some unachievable target that the government have put in their policy. We are focusing on cheap, reliable energy for Territorians, whether it be for electricity, business or manufacturing.

Mr CHAIR: I draw on a ruling I made yesterday. If we can remove the 'you'; it is just 'the government' or 'the department'.

K McNAMARA: The minister spoke about a cost of \$5bn. Experts in the field have said that it is in the hundreds of millions, not billions. If you cannot tell us how you came up with this cost, how can the public rely on that figure at all?

Mr MALEY: You are relying on one expert—I think you said \$280m. To the average Territorian \$280m is a lot of money ...

K McNAMARA: What is \$5bn?

Mr MALEY: We want to make sure we focus on what is the best we can do for Territorians' hip pockets. You have one particular person; others in the industry will say more. It is a hypothetical question because no-one really knows how much it will cost. We know it will cost a lot of money. It will be high, no matter what it is. The longer you leave it, the more it costs. We know that the previous Labor government kicked the can down the road and it was unachievable. To do that in such a short period of time—that time period was coming up very soon—makes it even higher because you are rushing things and trying to prioritise work that is even more expensive. We focused on reliable energy at the cheapest cost to Territorians.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, the same ruling applies. If you could refer through me to 'the Member for Nightcliff' instead of 'your'.

K McNAMARA: It is an undisputable fact at this point that the CSIRO, Australian Energy Market Operator and international energy show that renewables and solar are the cheapest form of energy, not gas. Why then, during a cost-of-living crisis, have you decided to cut investments in renewable energies?

Mr MALEY: You talk about renewables being a cheap form of energy. I said in my statement that renewables are a cheap form of energy but it is not reliable. To give you some examples, if you have an electricity market that needs 200 megawatts and you have 200 megawatts of solar, you need to have a spinning reserve ready in case a cloud comes over or there is a thunderstorm. In the Northern Territory we have monsoons, where it literally rains for a week straight.

We are talking about the cost of renewables, but you need to factor in the cost of firming the electricity market as you move forward. You can have your 200 megawatts of renewables sitting out there, but if you do not have something similar sitting in spinning reserve for those days when the sun is not shining or when there is an issue in relation to an extended period of rain—we need to make sure that the spinning reserve is available because people in the Northern Territory want the power. We need the power turned on and we need fridges, shops and hospitals and those sorts of places. If you factor in the cost of 200 megawatts of renewables, plus another 200 megawatts of spinning reserve sitting there available to cover the unreliability of the renewables, that needs to be factored into any electricity market.

We have focused on what is the cheapest, reliable secure energy for Territorians. As I said at the beginning, that is a mixture of renewables and gas as we move forward. We need to get that balance right because we cannot just have renewables or just gas—again, I accept gas costs money. Everything costs money. How do we get that balance right of how much we need to have in spinning reserve? Because we all know that renewables do not work at night-time, for example. Again, if you have renewables, you need to have batteries. We need to have batteries, so we do not have reliability problems. It is all about getting that balance right. Our main focus is on getting cheap energy for Territorians.

K McNAMARA: I will ask that the answers are concise; we have a lot to get through.

I want to clarify something about job projections for large projects. The job estimates cited by the Northern Territory Government are, in fact, job years, not the number of jobs created. This metric—to make it clear I want to clarify this with you—recounts jobs for each and every year in which they exist. For example, if a mining project creates 10 new full-time positions for 10 years, this creates 100 years of job employment but, clearly, it only actually creates 10 jobs. Your government has presented this to the public as 100 jobs. This is wildly misleading; is it not?

Mr MALEY: I am confused by your question. Can you either break it down or rephrase it?

K McNAMARA: Sure. When the government talks about projections for jobs for projects ...

Mr MALEY: Can you give an example of when government has done it, then?

K McNAMARA: You have done it for Beetaloo ...

Mr MALEY: Can you be specific ...

Mr CHAIR: Minister, let the Member for Nightcliff ask her question.

K McNAMARA: It is done regularly. For all of the projects you give estimates ...

Mr MALEY: Can you give me ...

K McNAMARA: Can you just let me finish?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

K McNAMARA: The way they are calculated by the government is in job years. You might not be aware of it but that is how—continue if you have an answer.

Mr MALEY: My answer is we are really confused about what you are saying. I have never heard of job years in all the dealings that I have done. I do not know, Mr Chair. I am really confused and that is why I am asking you to restate the question.

Mr CHAIR: I will speak with the Member for Nightcliff. Give me the question and I will see if we can get there.

K McNAMARA: I would just like the government to clarify to the public how they calculate job estimates for large projects. The way that I understand it is that they are actually job years. It is a metric they use where for each and every year in which they exist is counted as a job.

Mr MALEY: Can you give me an example where that metric is used? Like a practical example, because I have never heard that metric used ever.

K McNAMARA: Yes, for the Beetaloo job projections.

Mr MALEY: I need a specific example. You are saying ...

K McNAMARA: Here we go.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, how does the department project job projections?

Mr MALEY: We do not do that, to start with. It may be better for that question to be transferred to the department of Trade and Business (TBAR). It is about business, so there might be a way to ask the minister when she is in next week how they do that.

K McNAMARA: I have it here.

Mr MALEY: What we do is direct jobs and indirect jobs. If you have a direct job you are employed by a company in the gas industry. If you have an indirect job you are a hairdresser who cuts the hair of a gas worker.

K McNAMARA: I have a number here. The Territory government has projected that fracking in the Beetaloo will create over 13,000 jobs. How did that figure come about?

Mr PRATT: The 13,611 jobs that I think you are referring to is from the Pepper inquiry's economic analysis of jobs in the Beetaloo. ACIL Allen was contracted to do that work. Noting your comments earlier, these were jobs both direct and indirect. These were not in job years; they were full-time equivalents. There are 13,611 jobs over 25 years, both indirect and direct, from ACIL Allen's projections for the Shale Gale scenario. That equates to 524 direct and indirect jobs per year as an FTE, not job years.

K McNAMARA: Thank you; that is an answer.

Can I have confirmation from the government that you do not use the job years metric in any of your job projections?

Mr MALEY: I have never heard of that, but you should direct that question to TBAR.

K McNAMARA: I would like to direct it to you on notice.

Mr MALEY: I have answered the question.

K McNAMARA: Your answer was that you had never heard of that before.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, the minister has given his answer.

K McNAMARA: The minister said that they had never heard of it before. It is not exactly a confirmation that it is not used. I would like to put a question on notice to ask: does the department use the metric of job years when calculating jobs for their projects?

Mr MALEY: No, we do not use it.

K McNAMARA: Can you tell me what Mr Trier's relationship is with Stuart Knowles, the Territory Coordinator? How will you manage the conflict of interest, given his role as the CE of Mining and Energy and Stuart Knowles' role as the Territory Coordinator?

Mr MALEY: I think that is a hypothetical question.

K McNAMARA: It has been established that there is a relationship. I would like to understand what the relationship is and how you will manage the conflict of interest.

Mr CHAIR: There are two standing orders this crosses into—that is, Standing Orders 233 and 109. We need to have a sound basis when asking such questions. I remind you of the sound basis required. We cannot go into imputations or inferences.

I will hand back to the Member for Nightcliff, who will ask the question and we will hear the answer from the minister.

K McNAMARA: I will phrase this in a way that I believe is in line with standing orders. What is the relationship between Mr Trier and Mr Knowles, and how would any potential conflict of interest between their two roles be managed?

Mr MALEY: Two things. First, we are still on the opening statement; it is not relevant, but I will answer the question. If there are any conflicts of interest with Alister or anyone in the department, it is all managed through the code of conduct and it deals with that just as with an MLA. It will be done as per the requirements of the NT Government code of practice.

J DAVIS: What was the total revenue that the NT Government collected from all mining activities in the Northern Territory in the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: It is just under \$200m. It is in Budget Paper No 3 at page 106, from memory.

J DAVIS: What percentage of all government revenue collected came from mining?

Mr MALEY: The problem is we also get revenue from the federal government, about \$7bn. A lot of that money comes from the mining industry, so I would not be able to give you that breakdown.

J DAVIS: What percentage of Northern Territory budget money came from Northern Territory mining?

Mr MALEY: I can tell you that mining is just under \$200m, as in the budget paper, but that question needs to be directed to Treasury, because they are the ones who deal with that. We are a department, so we would not be able to give you that information accurately. I ask you to direct the question to Treasury.

J DAVIS: Can you tell us the total amount spent on subsidies to the mining industry over the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: The mining industry in general or all mining?

J DAVIS: All mining.

Mr MALEY: Not including grants?

J DAVIS: Not including.

Mr MALEY: We have the \$9.5m in grants for co-drilling and the geoscience grant. Can you narrow down your question? I am happy to answer. We need to answer a question that is answerable.

J DAVIS: Can you explain to me, like you said before—I am confused.

Mr MALEY: Your question—is it grants? You said the question was all money payable to mining, so in what aspect? Are we talking about grants?

J DAVIS: We are talking about any subsidies provided to the mining industry.

Mr TRIER: The only program we have that I am aware of is the Northern Territory Geological Survey's grants programs. There is a range of things under that, so I will ask the senior executive director of the Northern Territory Geological Survey to answer that.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: The Geophysics and Drilling Collaborations Program provides around \$4m a year in co-funding through a competitive grants process for industry to co-fund innovative programs or programs by industry—either drilling, geophysics or other programs—where industry is trying new techniques or innovating to grow the exploration industry. This program is particularly targeted at junior exploration companies and trying to provide an incentive for them to spend their money in the Territory rather than elsewhere, to reward companies that are using innovation or testing new techniques and to grow the knowledge base of the Territory's geology and resources by making all of that information open file within six months.

The minister just yesterday announced the most recent round of funding. It was 38 projects from 30 companies that were awarded \$3.896m in funding. Eleven of these are companies that were funded for the first time, many of them new entries into the Northern Territory.

This funding is based on technical merit and is awarded on a competitive process, so we do not regard it as a subsidy, as such, for industry. It is government co-funding high-quality projects by industry that will assist all companies and bring forward new resource developments in the Territory. That is the intent of the program.

The program provides co-funding up to 50% of program costs up to a capped amount, depending on the type of program, between \$50,000 and \$200,000 per program. That money is only paid out when industry have completed the program and have fully acquitted that, reported everything to government. Once we are happy with it, they receive the 50%.

Mr TRIER: I would like to add the importance of this program. Firstly, exploration is high risk and quite often very little reward. I think the ratio is somewhere between 100 and 1,000 exploration projects per mine. It is like fishing; if you do not have your rod in the water you do not catch a fish.

The second component is, as Ian has described, it is a highly competitive market. We think we have excellent geology and resource potential, but we are competing not only nationally but also internationally. We like to see people put their exploration money in the ground here to see what the potential of the Northern Territory is.

J DAVIS: Thank you, I understand the rationale.

Mr MALEY: It is not only spending the money here via this but also the jobs they create such as hiring a car and staying at regional roadhouses. The money that the junior explorers expend in the economy is also beneficial. I am sure you have travelled out bush a lot. It is expensive, and you need to make sure you have the right equipment. There is a flow-on effect from these grants.

J DAVIS: What is the total figure of all monies paid to the mining industry, whether it is grants or subsidies?

Mr MALEY: From our department, that is the only grant process that we have available. We can give you more information about it.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: In the reporting period the amount expended was \$0.978m, so slightly under \$1m. With an estimate of what was expended in this current financial year, in the order of \$2m. I should clarify the reason that is much less than what was committed by government is that many companies struggle to get those projects completed for various reasons. Unless the company completes the program, the money does not get expended. It is a lot less than that committed \$4m.

J DAVIS: That is the money from Mining and Energy.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: Correct.

J DAVIS: Can you tell me what money has been given from other departments or do I need to ask the other departments?

Mr MALEY: Yes, you need to ask the other departments or the Treasurer.

J DAVIS: Can you tell me what is the total revenue collected from the mining industry through royalties minus any payments made to them?

Mr MALEY: It was just under \$200m. Budget Paper No 3 on page 106 has the line figure. Sorry; it was \$295m. The royalties were \$298m in this reporting year only.

J DAVIS: You have outlined the subsidies from your department and I will inquire about subsidies from other departments.

Can you provide a breakdown of expected revenue from mining royalties over the forward estimates?

Mr MALEY: The next year will be \$346m and we have only gone two years. It will be an increase of roughly \$50m, and the next financial year is \$350m a year.

J DAVIS: I want to clarify to make sure. You said that the total revenue is \$200m ...

Mr MALEY: Sorry; it is \$300m. I made a mistake and I correct the record. I thought it was \$200m. It is \$298m. I apologise for misleading.

J DAVIS: That is out of our total budget of \$7bn; is that correct?

Mr MALEY: That is our revenue in, yes.

J DAVIS: What percentage is that? Is anyone better at maths than me?

Mr MALEY: We have a mathematician here who could probably do ...

Mr MACKAY: I am not working for free.

J DAVIS: You are being paid to sit there, Andrew.

Mr MACKAY: How many mines are currently operating in the Territory that are pulling something out of the ground? Are there more mines coming online than are finishing up?

Mr MALEY: Right now there are eight mines in the Territory. South32 on Groote Eylandt have just restarted mining. They had an infrastructure issue because the cyclone came through.

I was at The Granites at Tanami recently, and they have just installed a 1.5-kilometre shaft right down. That is designed because they are operating at about 1.8 kilometres underground. The time it was taking to get their ore trucks to the top and back was prohibitive for them. What they have done is they have essentially a small crushing plant one kilometre underground where they crush the rock, put it into a tunnel and then ship it so that they can save time and can do more ore.

Tennant Mining has just started in Tennant Creek, which is mining the tailings of Nobles Nob. I was there for that opening as well, with a South African company. It is great news for the Territory because international companies are looking at the Territory.

We have a great Geological Survey. We have lots of rock around the Territory. Unfortunately, those minerals do not just stop at our boundary; they go into WA and Queensland. We need to make sure that the Territory is competitive. That is why we are here to keep the community safe and rebuild the economy and our lifestyle. Mining is super important to that.

Tennant Mining is going for the tailings for eight years. When I spoke with them, they have a plan to commence mining for what they think is another eight to 10 years of mine life in Tennant Creek.

We also spoke about the program for the junior explorers. It is great to see that there are people exploring across the Northern Territory. Ammaroo phosphate in Central Australia is another great mine that is kicking off production—is it mining or is it still exploration?

Mr TRIER: It is still exploration.

Mr MALEY: It is exploration, but when I spoke to the proponents they said that there is a large volume of ore. The question will be whether they can get it to a market at a competitive price.

We are well placed in the mining industry to kick off more mines. We just need to make sure we give them certainty. It goes back to energy and making sure that we have the right environment. Things like the Territory Coordinator, payroll tax and approvals task force all work together to make sure the Territory is the most competitive place to do business.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill as they relate to the Department of Mining and Energy.

Before I go onto questions, I will introduce a new process. If you feel your answer has been given, please tell the Chair, and I will then give the minister a short period to wrap up and that will end that question.

Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

No questions.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – MINING AND ENERGY **Output 3.1 – Northern Territory Geological Survey** **Output 3.2 – Mining Development**

No questions.

Output 3.3 – Energy Development

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 3.3, Energy Development. Are there any questions?

K McNAMARA: If I have questions on solar and batteries, would that be best here or in Output 3.4?

Mr MALEY: In 3.4.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 – Sustainable Energy Development

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output 3.4, Sustainable Energy Development. Are there any questions?

K McNAMARA: Regarding the remote renewable power rollout, how will the benefits of renewable power in remote NT communities, including reduced energy costs, be shared by community members?

Mr MALEY: To clarify, is that how will the costs of the electricity be shared by community members?

K McNAMARA: No, how will the benefits of renewable power—the benefits that renewable power will bring, which will include reduced energy costs. How will that be shared by community members in remote areas? How will they all have access to the ...

Mr MALEY: I think this is a question for Power and Water because they do—I think you are talking about the hybrid power systems, which have diesel, batteries and solar panels; it is a hybrid system. I have seen a few of them at some of the homeland communities, as I am sure the Member for Gwoja has. They do a great job.

The benefit to the community would be almost unmeasurable. I am sure they have reliable power because, especially in the north, we have the Wet Season and Dry Season, and people cannot get there because roads become damaged. I think the benefits would be massive because people get cheap energy. I have spoken about cheap energy a thousand times. No matter where you live, the Territory government wants to make sure that you have cheap energy.

The government's Indigenous Essential Services Program is delivering to almost 40,000 residents in 72 remote communities across the Northern Territory. Does that answer your question?

K McNAMARA: Yes, I think so. This was a question someone asked me to ask, and I am trying to make sure that I have got it. I think they were concerned about how equitably the benefits of this renewable energy will be made.

Mr MALEY: Anyone can have a toaster. That would be Power and Water. The benefits of having reliable energy in community would be like having reliable energy at a cattle station or a fishing camp—whatever you want to talk about. It would be unmeasurable because I think we all know being able to turn the power on and have a cup of coffee whenever you like is great.

K McNAMARA: In early 2024 federal Labor Minister Chris Bowen offered \$250m to build a 70-megawatt big battery in the Darwin region to enable existing and more solar farms to join the DK BESS grid. In your opening statement you spoke about the battery subsidy. Has the \$250m offered by the federal government been paid, or is it still available? What are the plans to progress that battery?

Ms TAN: The federal government has provided at this stage \$15m, so I am not sure where the \$250m is from. It is a different program that relates to the \$250m, and I can go into that.

K McNAMARA: Yes, please do.

Ms TAN: The federal government has given us \$15m, and that has gone towards BESS 1, which is currently being commissioned through Territory Generation on their site at Channel Island.

K McNAMARA: We talked about cheap power. I talked about renewables being the cheapest, and they are the cheapest—even with the instability that was mentioned—because that instability is overcome by big batteries. The engineering and technology exists; it is just down to political will. If countries like Germany, which have way less sunshine, can have more solar than us there is no excuse. I am concerned that we are paying for gas instead of doing the battery upgrades that we need to do to get us on solar and that in the meantime it is bleeding the taxpayers dry.

With battery development, is the 35-megawatt DK BESS currently being installed, or has it finished being installed at Channel Island?

Ms TAN: That battery has been constructed. It is currently undergoing conditioning. Perhaps it is a question that could be directed to Territory Generation next week. They are probably best placed to respond to that in terms of the technical detail of where that commissioning is at.

K McNAMARA: Are you able to explain—the commissioning, is it running?

Mr MALEY: You have to talk to TGen. We do not want to mislead you. That is their battery; they are the ones who will deal with that, and you will get an opportunity next week.

K McNAMARA: The issue with that one is that it is far too small to make a real impact on our energy grid. We need to look at something that already exists. In WA, at Collie, they have a big battery which is 219 megawatts and 877 megawatt hours. Their battery is designed for a very similar amount of demand that we have here. Are we looking at having a larger battery that can actually deal with the instability that you mentioned so that we do not have to waste our money on gas?

Mr TRIER: You are going into specifics. What we are currently doing is a body of work to understand the dynamics across the supply, demand and networks, and the different mechanisms that come from a renewable point of view—the different forms of firming, which you talked about, and batteries, but there are also syncons and thermal generation. They all have strengths and weaknesses. That work is underway and being considered.

In regard to specifics some things have been done; for example, the battery you mentioned. Your view is that is too small. That needs to be worked through and understood, and further decisions will be coming.

Ms TAN: What Alister is alluding to is the work that the government is currently undertaking to develop a whole-of-system plan for our energy system. That is in progress. Some preliminary results have come through, but obviously it will be quite an extensive process to finalise what that system plan looks like. What that system plan will ultimately do is determine the optimal size, location and timing for when electricity system infrastructure should be brought online and installed, and that will then provide the evidence base for determining the level and quantum of battery energy requirements, for example.

K McNAMARA: Do you have a timeline for when you will finish that whole-system plan?

Ms TAN: We are expecting that it will be complete by Q4 of 2025.

K McNAMARA: I am glad to hear that. My overall concern, and this might be more a general policy without getting into the specifics of megawatt hours, is that we are dragging our feet with this. Every dollar we spend on gas is a dollar we are not spending on batteries. It is such a waste of money. I want people to have cheaper power.

When the technology exists to stabilise the grid through batteries, why are we wasting money on gas instead of just getting us hooked up to renewables?

Mr MALEY: It is to do with cost. We know these batteries have been in commissioning for a long time, and we need to get cheap energy to the Territory. The previous Labor government had this target which was unachievable. They had eight years. Labor had been in government for 19 out of the last 23 years—except for those four years of the CLP—and they did not get near that target. We need to focus on the best outcomes for Territorians with cheap, reliable energy.

K McNAMARA: Can I just respond to that quickly, on the cost?

Mr MALEY: Alister will answer your question.

Mr TRIER: You talked about the technology, but what we have is a series of pre-existing arrangements, particularly from a physical point of view. You cannot just take one out and put a new thing in; it is all about transition. Transition takes time because the fundamentals to transition are cost, reliability and sustainability. They all have different tensions, and we are moving from where we are now to where we would like to be, but it takes a whole lot of planning and understanding the implications across those three things—reliability, cost and sustainability.

Technology exists; some of that technology is not as robust as we would like it to be yet. Others might have different views, but it is really about the fact that we have pre-existing arrangements, and we need to get it right going forward as best we can.

K McNAMARA: If the existing technology is robust enough for Germany, I am sure it is robust enough for our sun.

I want to make it clear to Territorians that the cost is conservatively in the billions for the gas deals versus hundreds of millions for renewables.

Mr MALEY: That is a misleading statement. You are talking about billions of dollars when this is not true. What we are trying to do—remember, renewables and batteries are part of our plan. It seems to be living in

an ideal world you would only have renewables, but we know that does not work. I am not sure what the German system is, but I bet you they have a firming backup system somewhere there, which maybe you have not spoken about or maybe you chose not to spoke about; I have no idea. We need to make sure that Territorians have cheap, reliable energy ...

K McNAMARA: Which comes from renewables not gas.

Mr MALEY: We have gas, which is a couple of hundred kilometres away, and we have existing infrastructure, and we need to focus on moving forward. We have a plan to make it better, and renewables are definitely part of that. If you get the balance right, which is what we are trying to do, it takes time. We will focus and keep working hard to make sure that Territorians get cheap, reliable energy.

K McNAMARA: If it is so much cheaper then you should tell the public how much you paid for that gas. If that gas is cheaper than the renewable rollout—because nobody else thinks it is. I will leave it at that.

Mr MACKAY: Can we have a bit more information on the battery system, where it is located and what its potential outputs will be?

Ms TAN: That battery is located at Channel Island Power Station. At this stage the expectation is that battery will be able to replace an existing Frame 6 system, which is one of their thermal generators at Channel Island. How that battery is ultimately dispatched will be a question for NTESMO, who is the system operator and the group that undertakes the dispatch of competing generation systems.

Mr MACKAY: Will that battery be charged up by renewables or by gas?

Ms TAN: I would expect that is question for Territory Generation to respond to. I just do not know.

Mr MACKAY: With regard to the Home and Business Battery Scheme, does the department have a breakdown of how many were taken up by individuals versus businesses?

Mr PAECH: Member for Goyder, I might add, how many of those were in the southern region of the Northern Territory?

Mr MACKAY: How many were in the electorate of Gwoja, if you have that breakdown for my good friend?

Mr MALEY: We do not have that exact detail, but households—new ones—674; businesses, 23; a total of 697. That is from 1 December 2024 to 30 May 2025. For the whole scheme—it has been running for a while because it is the previous government's scheme and ours—it is 4,300 in total; 4,100 are homes and 189 are businesses.

Sorry, Member for Gwoja; other than that breakdown we cannot tell you a southern figure. If you want that on notice we can get that for you.

Question on Notice No 3.6

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

Mr PAECH: How many of those batteries have been awarded to Central Australians?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.6.

J DAVIS: Can you remind me of the page number where you talked about the total revenue from mining in the budget paper?

Mr MALEY: Page 106, Budget Paper No 3.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.4.

Output 3.5 – Beetaloo Project Management Office

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.5 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 4.1 – Corporate and Governance

Output 4.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0. This concludes consideration of all outputs relating to Mining and Energy. On behalf of the committee, I thank departmental officers for attending today.

Mr MALEY: I thank the committee and especially the department staff here today. I also thank all the department staff, the people who are not here, because there has been a mountain of work done behind the scenes. There have been a few sitting up here having the glory, but my guess is that more work was done behind the scenes. Thank you to all those people. I really appreciate your help.

Mr CHAIR: The committee shares that sentiment.

The Member for Gwoja is officially off his warning.

When we return, the committee will proceed to consider outputs relating to the Department of Corrections. We will break for 30 minutes, reconvening at 1.02 pm.

The committee suspended.

CORRECTIONS

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Mr CHAIR: Minister, I invite you as Minister for Corrections to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Corrections.

Mr MALEY: Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to make a brief opening statement in relation to Corrections.

I introduce everyone at the table: Matthew Varley, CEO and Commissioner; Tracy Luke, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Adult Operations; Alecia Brimson, Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Performance; Sasha Dennis, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Youth Justice; and Stephen Thacker, Chief Financial Officer. Also, there are deputy and assistant commissioners available as required as we move through and answer any questions the committee has.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in my capacity as the Minister for Corrections to outline the work that has been undertaken over the last 10 months and the priorities that lie ahead. Corrections is the front line of community safety. It is tough work, critical, often unseen but absolutely vital.

When we came to office last year we inherited a neglected and underfunded Corrections system that was bursting at the seams. We found that infrastructure was unable to meet demand. There was lapsing funding across operational areas, particularly in staffing, healthcare, industries and programs. There was a broken governance model, with youth justice in one agency and adult Corrections in another. These were not minor issues; they posed serious threats to community safety, operational integrity and the safety of staff, prisoners and offenders. They failed to keep safe frontline staff, who come to work every day and help to keep our community safe.

Following the 2024 election significant structural reforms were undertaken, resulting in the establishment of a standalone Department of Corrections. This brought together adult Corrections services from the former Department of the Attorney-General and Justice and youth justice from Territory Families and Communities.

The integration has enabled a sharper focus on community safety and rehabilitation and better alignment with government policies relating to justice, crime reduction and regional service delivery.

The department is now operating as a dedicated agency overseeing adult custodial operations, youth detention, Community Corrections and rehabilitation programs across the Territory. This change, while structural, is also strategic. It has allowed us to better respond to the expectations of Territorians who want action on crime and a system that is firm but fair.

The government moved quickly to implement major legislative reforms on bail, youth justice and sentencing. As a result, we have seen a 25% rise in the adult prison population, a sharp increase in the number of community service offenders and growing complexity of offender needs, yet through it all Corrections has delivered.

Since August the adult prison population has increased from 2,254 to 2,799 prisoners as of 3 June. Youth detention numbers have also grown from 33 to 54 young people. Community Corrections' caseload has increased 23%, with 1,459 adults under supervision.

As of Monday 9 June there were 740 EM wearers in the Northern Territory: Community Corrections, 482 young offenders; 39 at work camps; and 119—to total 640 for all Corrections. Add Police, 100, that equals 740 of those wearers.

The Corrections Infrastructure Master Plan was developed and released in October as a direct response to government reforms. These reforms were necessary, but required swift and strategic planning to ensure the correctional infrastructure could meet demand.

The infrastructure master plan is a dynamic and data-driven framework designed to address current and future demands within the correctional system. Grounded in detailed modelling, it considers projected prisoner numbers, ensuring that the infrastructure meets both immediate and long-term needs.

The plan is not static; it undergoes continuous review so that we can meet operational needs. This approach ensures that, moving forward, our correctional facilities are prepared to handle increased demand while maintaining the necessary operational requirements under the *Correctional Services Act 2014*.

We have allocated \$117.4m to infrastructure upgrades and expansions to 2028. Approximately \$30.8m of that has been spent so far. To date, the master plan has delivered 506 beds in 10 months, which includes the commissioning of the 410-bed facility at the Berrimah Correctional Centre and bringing online the 96-bed modular accommodation block in Alice Springs. We now have a total operational bed capacity of 2,846 across adult correctional facilities. Planning continues for additional growth, with a proposed 200-bed women's prison, a 400-bed men's prison and a work camp in Katherine.

Recruitment is a key priority for the Department of Corrections as we work to ensure we have the right people in place to meet the growing demands of the correctional facilities and deliver the services the community expects. Our ability to deliver on critical responsibilities such as maintaining security, supporting rehabilitation and ensuring community safety depends on a well-trained and dedicated workforce that is equipped to carry out the important task they are hired to do. It is not just about filling vacancies; it is about ensuring that every individual we bring on board is capable of performing the job and is passionate about the work they do.

Between July 2024 and March 2025 the department recruited 141 new correctional officers and an additional 61 are expected to commence before the end of the financial year. This brings the total of new commencements in 2024–25 to over 200 correctional officers.

We have also entered into a contract with G4S, with 20 personnel already deployed as special correctional officers to support transport and court services.

Our current correctional officer attrition rate is 8.1%, an improvement on the 8.3% in the previous year. This reflects a modest but positive trend in workforce stability.

During the same period Community Corrections recruited 37 probation and parole officers.

Youth justice recruited 35 officers across the Darwin and Alice Springs youth detention centres during the period 1 July to 30 March 2025.

We are also planning up to four bulk recruitment activities in the coming 12 months, with one currently underway.

In March 2025, 25 youth support officers were employed and completed an induction and training program prior to commencing operations at the Alice Springs Paperbark boot camp facility and bail support facility.

We have secured \$126m in new funding in Budget 2025–26. The funding will address rising operational and staffing costs, enhancing our capabilities and increasing the operational strength to meet the demand of growing prisoner and offender numbers across our adult and youth operations. There is:

- \$60m to address lapsing funding that the department was facing while addressing rising prisoner numbers, through additional staffing and operational capacity
- \$20m to support an increased number of assessing healthcare units
- \$40m in contingency and reserve for our workforce growth in custodial and Community Corrections and contract management, and this can be drawn down as required as we grow
- \$6m to expand electronic monitoring as our prisoner numbers increase
- a further \$4.2m in domestic, family and sexual violence prevention and reduction programs in prison.

Education and vocational training is an essential rehabilitation tool that underpins meaningful engagement, resulting in increased safety for the community and the prison network. Despite the challenges Corrections face they continue to deliver education and vocational programs across the Northern Territory, increasing training numbers beyond that achieved in the previous financial year. From 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025, 772 prisoners enrolled in education and training programs, compared with 632 prisoner enrolments in 2023–24.

Over 1,100 prisoners are engaged in internal or external employment. Community work support groups have delivered over \$1.4m in value to the community in volunteer hours. Prison employment programs and industries, inclusive of community services work programs, will provide value to the community by reducing the cost of prison operations and the provision of essential prison services. These pathways facilitate rehabilitation of prisoners by creating avenues to develop life skills in real training environments and enable their reintegration through community preparation by providing access to external employment opportunities and community volunteering.

To increase prisoner engagement and deliver outcomes across priority initiatives Sentenced to a Skill and Sentenced to a Job, the Department of Corrections will be launching a refreshed industry skills and employment three-year strategy later this year. The targeted employment rehabilitation pathway will provide focused supports for eligible prisoners in Darwin and Alice Springs that will drive prisoners into a safety net of services that lead them back to meaningful employment opportunities and community engagement. The model is design to enhance linkages between employment and education, grow opportunities and partnerships and embed evaluation frameworks to ensure that we continue to grow opportunities that align with the needs of the Northern Territory.

Delivery of offender rehabilitation programs was impacted by a sharp rise in prisoner numbers while we focused on community safety. As we move forward, we will ramp up delivery of these programs. Offender rehabilitation programs are delivered at Darwin Correctional Centre and Alice Springs Correctional Centre. Plans are in progress to deliver rehabilitation programs in the Berrimah Correctional Centre. These programs include the RAGE program, the Sex Offender Treatment Program, violent offender programs, individual treatment programs, the Safe Sober Strong Program, addictive behaviours and family violence programs in custody.

Mr PAECH: Mr Chair, this is not brief.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, I note your interjection. I will let the minister continue, and I will allow another interjection in five minutes.

Mr PAECH: I will be waiting.

Mr MALEY: I did not hear what your objection was.

Mr PAECH: That you are going on. It is not a brief statement.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, please continue. Member for Gwoja, feel free to interject at 1.20 pm.

Mr MALEY: Member for Gwoja, I will continue, so we can understand what is going on in the prison. I know he already knows because he was a previous minister. He knows how much of a disaster it was when he was the minister.

Mr CHAIR: We will go back to the statement, thank you, minister.

Mr MALEY: The department has designed and commenced the rollout of a new general offending program, not a domestic and family violence program, in the community in response to mandatory sentencing reforms.

There are three new programs approved to commence via grant on 1 July 2025. Direct grant agreements with respective Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are underway and targeted for execution by 30 June 2025. They include the DFSV Aboriginal art therapy project, DFSV Aboriginal environmental stressor program and the DFSV Aboriginal social and environmental wellbeing program.

We are responding to the rise in domestic and family violence with new intervention models and partnerships. We stood up a dedicated NDIS assessment team to support offenders with disability needs.

In 2024–25 we invested \$2.6m in external providers to deliver programs and activities in Alice Springs, Don Dale and the Holtze Youth Detention Centre. An amount of \$1.35m funded a core team to coordinate these programs and activities and focus on initiatives that support young people through the leave of absence to engage in work skills development, vocational training and back-to-school programs.

A further \$2.8m employed a specialist workforce within detention facilities to provide group delivery, positive behaviour support plans, treatment plans, counselling and therapeutic intervention, forensic risk assessment and statutory reports.

We spent \$4.21m to ensure young people with a statutory requirement subject to supervision of a community youth justice officer, pursuant to the *Youth Justice Act 2005*, the *Sentencing Act 1995* and the *Bail Act 1982* were monitored and assisted to be compliant with their court orders.

We invested \$4.81m in youth justice programs to reduce crime and divert young people from formal criminal justice outcomes. We expanded bail support facilities and implemented the sentence order program as part of the youth boot camp and bail support model.

Across the youth justice service system, the focus on rehabilitation will continue to be a priority. It is through rehabilitation we can identify and address the underlying causes of criminal conduct by changing an offender's personality, attributes, habits and skills to stop them from reoffending.

Rehabilitation at the Holtze Youth Detention Centre includes the Step Up program. The program is targeted at young people aged between 10 and 17 years or 11 and 17 years and focuses on reducing violent or aggressive behaviours, supporting families and fostering healthy relationships at home. These programs often include work group, case management and family support.

Further initiatives also include developing and implementing a (inaudible) initiative, job club and service expos to provide detainees with pathways to employment when reintegrating into the community. This is underpinned by the Department of Education and Training providing education to detainees five days a week for 45 weeks of the year.

The Tivendale School focuses on providing core literature and numeracy as well as programs that meet students' individual interests and needs, including academic, physical, artistic, cultural, social and emotional wellbeing. Detainees will continue to engage in the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training skills development through partnerships with third parties, such as Palmerston Youth Skills Centre, Life Saving NT, DriveSafe NT, Darwin Wildlife Sanctuary, YouthWorX, Indigenous Marathon Foundation, Athletics NT, Army Indigenous Development Program, Hoops 4 Health and Clontarf.

An amount of \$4m will be invested in Aboriginal community-controlled and non-government organisations across the Northern Territory to deliver youth diversion programs that have a mandatory task for young people to complete, holding them accountable and addressing criminal behaviours. These programs are community-led interventions aimed at reducing youth involvement in the justice system.

An amount of \$3m will provide for youth boot camp structured and supervised community-based interventions also designed to address criminal behaviours and equip young people with skills to support rehabilitation and reintegration. Reintegration, service coordination and ongoing support are all critical to an offender returning to the community and reduces the likelihood of reoffending.

The Department of Corrections has continued to deliver core services and major reform under significant pressure and scrutiny. With record prisoner growth and infrastructure delivery to workforce expansion, legislation reform and innovation, this has been a period of rapid and responsive system transformation. We acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead, but the steps taken this year, supported by strategic investment and policy alignment, place the department in a stronger position to meet the Territory's needs in the years to come.

I acknowledge the staff of the Department of Corrections for their commitment, professionalism and resilience during this period—not only the staff here today but all the staff across the Northern Territory who do a great job working behind the scenes. Without them it would be very difficult to operate and difficult for the people up here to do their jobs. Thank you, and keep up the good work.

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

Mr PAECH: Yes. In your opening statement you spoke about programs and staff. Can you detail what skills programs you have expanded on since coming to government?

Mr MALEY: Since coming to government the skills programs we offer and have expanded on in the prisons—there is a list, and I will run through it so you have them all. They are construction white card, CDU; construction white card, other; first aid; forklift; Certificate I in retail; Certificate II in skills and vocational pathways; QuickSmart, UNE; Literacy for Life; higher education; visual arts I, II and III, BI; tractor operator courses; Back on Track; drink driver, DASA; chainsaw operations; chemical applications; outdoor power equipment servicing; operate small plant and equipment; barista training; Certificate I in general education; Certificate II in Sport and Recreation; Certificate II in Music; food handling skill sets; infectious disease control; Workplace Skills for the Health Sector; basic culinary skills; Certificate II in Visual Arts; Certificate IV in Visual Arts; VTP set up and perform music; test and tag; welding skill sets introductory; Certificate II construction skill sets; Certificate III civil machinery; gateway to independence; learner driver theory and training; pre-training assessment; financial education; first aid certificate; and kitchen skills. I think they are the main ones. They are in the adult space.

Do you want the youth one as well?

Mr PAECH: No, that is fine for now. How much funding is allocated towards that?

Mr MALEY: The funding for those is an operational funding, which is normal funding that we use within the budget. If you want the exact detail, I can pass across. The funding is what we spend our \$495m a year on to make sure those programs—as I said in my opening statement, we prioritise rehabilitation; it is a core business, and we spend a lot of time and effort making sure that we rehabilitate as many prisoners as we possibly can.

Mr PAECH: The previous government arranged the MOU with Charles Darwin University, so it is not an additional or new program which was about retail, hospitality, trade, industry, healthcare, white cards and the arts. What programs have been added since September last year in addition to the \$1.7m MOU that was arranged with Charles Darwin University?

Mr MALEY: The additional ones are barista training; Certificate I in general education; Certificate II in Sport and Recreation; Certificate II in Music; food handling skill set; infectious disease control; Workplace Skills for the Health Sector; basic culinary skills; Certificate II in Visual Arts; Certificate IV in Visual Arts; VTP set up and perform music; test and tag; welding skill set introductory; Certificate II construction skill sets; Certificate III civil machinery; gateway to independence; learner driver theory and training; pre-training assessment; financial education; first aid certificate; and kitchen skills training.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide the completion number within the correctional environment, and a breakdown of gender participation in those programs?

Mr MALEY: I will start with the completion. Construction white card had 108 completions ...

Mr PAECH: Sorry; minister. Do you have a completion rate overall?

Mr MALEY: I do, but we have completion for each of those programs, so I can run through each of those programs.

Mr PAECH: You can table it if you want, or I can take it on notice.

Mr MALEY: No. I can just read it out. Construction white card, CDU, 108 completions; construction white card, other, 38 completions; first aid, 10 completions ...

Mr PAECH: I asked about gender, so you might want to do that while you are reading them out.

Mr MALEY: I will do that next.

Mr PAECH: So, you will just add more time to talk it out, hey.

Mr MALEY: I am answering your question ...

Mr PAECH: Go for gold.

Mr MALEY: If you do not want me to answer the question, I will not.

Mr CHAIR: I will step in here. How long will this list take, minister?

Mr MALEY: It is the same list I read out earlier. I just have the completions, so I was going to go through that.

Mr CHAIR: We might, if you are happy, table that document.

Mr MALEY: I am happy to read it out on the record.

Mr PAECH: The committee is happy for you table it.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please, this will not help anything.

Minister, I hand over to you. It is your question to answer. If you are happy to table it, we can table it. Otherwise, you can read through.

Mr MALEY: Obviously, you are scared about time. How about I just say this: 671 completions.

Mr PAECH: How many of those are women?

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

Question on Notice No 3.7

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

Mr PAECH: How many women have participated and completed programs with Northern Territory Correctional Services since September last year?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Just to clarify, are we talking about education or rehabilitation programs?

Mr PAECH: Both—for education and rehabilitation.

Mr MALEY: Okay, thank you.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to accept?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

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

Mr PAECH: How many lockdowns have occurred in Northern Territory correctional facilities, police watch houses and youth detention facilities in the most recent reporting period? Can you provide a facility-by-facility breakdown?

Mr MALEY: What I might do is pass to the commissioner. I do not want to spend hours reading through it, because there is a lot of information to give to you in relation to lock time hours.

Mr PAECH: I have further questions about lockdowns, which may suggest that you might want to take the question on notice, given that I will be asking follow-on questions. Are you happy for that or would you like to proceed?

Mr MALEY: We have information relating to the adult side and the youth side of it. The youth side is relatively straightforward because the Holtze centre is relatively new and the information is available. In fact, I can give that to you right now. There have been 25 rotational lockdowns in the youth space in the Holtze Youth Detention Centre and Don Dale and Alice Springs in that reporting period. That is the youth side of it done, so now let us focus on the adult side of it.

Mr VARLEY: As we have identified previously, lockdowns occur in a range of scenarios where prisoners are confined in a restricted sense to cells, blocks, wings, dormitories or entire facilities for various periods of time throughout the day during waking hours. Those lockdowns are a common term used to provide operational management of the facility in a safety and security sense, depending on the circumstances of the day and the availability of staff.

For that reason, we have aggregated data that talks about the average time out of cell, which we report annually to the Bureau of Statistics, but the specific detail of lockdowns by facility by day is more difficult. The point I make to the committee is that, in a sense, I expect there would be some version of lockdown in most facilities most days.

Mr PAECH: Can you outline how many lockdowns there have been in Northern Territory Correctional Services facilities since September last year? Can you outline the categories or classifications your department has used to define the lockdown events? Can you also determine whether they are overcrowding? Can you also provide the corresponding reason for each lockdown, broken down by facility, duration and classification? Has there been any increase in lockdowns attributed to staffing shortages or overcrowding in correctional facilities or watch houses over the last 12 months? If so, how many and in which facilities?

Mr MALEY: I will pass to the commissioner to give you some context, and then we will work out after that whether we need to take it on notice.

Mr VARLEY: The answer to your question as best as I can answer it is there are lockdowns across all of the facilities all of the time. They have been substantial in the last number of months because of the rate of prisoner growth and the stretch that we have experienced. I have been plain about that and open.

It is difficult for me to answer the question with specific data because the lockdowns can occur in a range of scenarios, from a cell or block or wing being locked down to entire facilities. It is relatively rare for a lockdown of an entire facility to occur. Because of the nature of staff shortages what is more likely to occur is that the entire facility is locked down for short periods of time, depending on operational events; for example, a count of the total census of the population is incorrect, so the prison stops. It is more likely that various parts of the prison, various wings and cells, are locked down or what we call rolling unlocks, which is staged locks and unlocks throughout the day.

That is the best way I can answer that question without giving you data that would be inaccurate.

Mr PAECH: I would like the information. Correctional Services would keep data, in case there are events that require legal action, around the number of lockdowns, the duration and the reason. I would like to understand over the last 12 months.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us an idea of how you define lockdown? As the commissioner just said, are we talking about locking down the whole prison or a wing?

Mr PAECH: That is the data I am after. How many lockdowns have occurred since September? What are the reasons for the lockdown, whether it is a medical incident, staff shortage, an inmate dispute or of another nature? That is the information we are after. Correctional Services would keep a log of all that.

Mr MALEY: I am being advised that they do not have that level of lockdown material, so that is not available. We can give you what we have already given you. What you just went through—which is a very exhaustive list—I have been advised is not available. We do not have the exact information you are asking for.

Mr PAECH: Are you confirming that the Northern Territory Correctional Services does not record the reason for the lockdown, the duration of the lockdown and the date of the lockdown?

Mr MALEY: I am not confirming that at all. I am just saying that your question is very detailed. We can give you information about how many lockdowns there are, but it is very hard to get the information, and it will not be accurate because there are so many different reasons for lockdowns. The term ‘lockdown’ in the general community ...

Mr PAECH: I am happy to provide further clarity. Can you confirm how many lockdowns have occurred over Northern Territory Correctional Services facilities since September last year that relate to overcrowding, prohibiting legal representation being able to be facilitated with inmates, and that have caused programs and education not to be delivered?

Mr MALEY: I am advised we can get that information which is different from what you asked. We can take that on notice. We can give you the legal visits now, but do you want it all in one?

Mr PAECH: Put it all in one; that is fine.

Question on Notice No 3.8

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

Mr PAECH: Could you please confirm the number of lockdowns that have occurred across Northern Territory Correctional Services facilities since September last year that have resulted in legal representation not being able to occur, medical lockdowns, overcrowding lockdowns and staff shortage lockdowns?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.8.

Mr MALEY: I will just add that we have the information for youth justice. We could answer that now. I will pass to Sasha for that.

Ms DENNIS: For the period you asked about, we do not have from September, but we have from 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025. At Don Dale, prior to moving to Holtze, inclusive of Holtze and the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre, we have had zero lockdowns due to overcrowding or for medical appointments. We have had 25 rotational lockdowns. They are due to operational requirements such as low staffing or high levels of escorts, including court, medical and leave of absences, so requiring transport of young people outside of the facility.

J DAVIS: Are you able to give a length of time of those lockdowns?

Ms DENNIS: We are unable to be specific. We have periods of the day which align to our structured day program for young people. We could provide you with a portion of the day, but in terms of specific hours and minutes we would be unable to do that.

Mr PAECH: You talked about programs. Can you provide us with the number of inmates who are currently participating in a behaviour change program and the breakdown of their gender?

Mr MALEY: As I said in my opening statement there are 1,100 overall, but I will pass to the commissioner who will be able to give you that information.

Mr VARLEY: As the minister explained in his opening remarks we have a series of rehabilitation programs that are categorised into different elements. As we have previously said, we have our high-intensity offence-specific treatment programs, which are clinical rehabilitations. We also have our psycho-educational programs.

In the last nine months of the reporting period, we have had a heavy focus on the delivery of domestic and family violence programs off the back of the landmark coronial that occurred last year. We have had four six-month RAGE programs delivered, with 41 offenders graduating; 12 family violence programs for remand prisoners—that is new—and we have had 103 offenders graduate from that; 17 family violence programs for sentenced prisoners that have 157 graduates; and 21 family violence programs delivered in the community with 179 graduates.

There is a series of other rates in relation to other programs, if you are happy for me to provide those.

Mr PAECH: Are these programs delivered internally or by an external ...

Mr VARLEY: No. These are our internal programs delivered by our staff, including clinicians and our offender rehabilitation and engagement staff. We have had, for example, the RAGE program, which is the intensive treatment program. We have also had the RAGE program delivered intensively but with individuals. That is done for reasons of clinical assessment and better dynamics attached to an individual participating in that program delivery as opposed to a group setting. There have been 14 individuals participate in that program. Nine remain in progress.

We have also had psycho-educational programs delivered. There are 27 prisoners who have started the Safe Sober Strong Program, with 26 completing; and 34 prisoners undertook the addictive behaviours program, with 31 completing.

Also, the general offending program, which has in the past year commenced delivery in the community, in relation to sentencing reforms. We have had that delivered in Yuendumu with two programs, seven and six respectively. In FORWAARD in Darwin we had eight and 12 commence that program in two different tranches. King's Narrative delivered another program in Alice Springs in two tranches, six and five. In Katherine we had one program delivered through Venndale with seven participants still in progress.

We have focused heavily this year on the domestic and family violence space because of the nature of the work we have seen occurring in our facilities.

Mr MALEY: Member for Johnston, you asked about the average time. The average time is 90 minutes for those lockdowns.

Mr PAECH: When we talk about the domestic and family violence programs, who is doing the evaluation piece to determine whether these programs are best suited for the need? When are they being evaluated? How are they being evaluated? What is the rate of recidivism as a result of these programs?

Mr VARLEY: We have three program evaluations underway over the last six months. All three of those evaluations are due to be completed at the end of this month, and I am waiting to see the outcomes of those evaluations.

Mr PAECH: Is that external or internal?

Mr VARLEY: External. The two programs I suspect you are most interested in is the Family Violence Program and the RAGE program. We targeted those as our principals. Those programs are under review by an external group called Allen + Clarke, who have been undertaking an outcomes evaluation of those programs. I do not want to pre-empt the findings, but we expect to be able to use those findings to identify whether the program needs refinement. Those programs, as you know, have been in place for some years.

We also have a program evaluation underway in relation to the Elders Visiting Program, which sounds a bit odd, but the work that our Elders Visiting Program and our elders do in the prison system is substantial. I am pleased to say that this year is the 20th anniversary of the Elders Visiting Program, so we felt that was a great opportunity for us to review the program and look at how it could be improved to provide service delivery for prisoners. That program is being reviewed externally by a local company called Thrive Territory, and we expect the recommendations and advice by the end of the month.

Mr PAECH: Is the Elders Visiting Program operating across all Northern Territory Correctional Services facilities?

Mr VARLEY: Yes, it is.

J DAVIS: You just mentioned the Family Violence Program, commissioner. I understand that was run in remote communities, and it has ceased; is that right?

Mr VARLEY: Yes, we are reducing that program and ceasing it, because our focus is on moving those resources and assets into the custodial space. That has been a plan for probably a year now. The men's behaviour change programs that are run and administered by the Department of Children and Families are the endorsed community-based programs for DV. Our focus will be on providing the expanded resources in the custody setting.

J DAVIS: Those men's behaviour programs only run in Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine and Wadeye—no other remote communities, so there are no plans for any family violence programs in remote communities; is that correct?

Mr MALEY: We are talking about Corrections.

J DAVIS: Within the Corrections portfolio.

Mr MALEY: Yes, that is right.

Mr PAECH: Is the RAGE program being offered to remandees? What is the completion rate or participation rate of remandees?

Mr VARLEY: I am sorry; I made a mistake then by nodding. No, the RAGE program is not offered to remandees. The family violence psycho-educational program is now.

Mr PAECH: RAGE is only sentenced offenders.

Mr VARLEY: That is correct. That is tied to the clinical nature of the treatment that occurs in that program. It is, shall we say, a cognitive therapy-type program.

Mr PAECH: Does that program align with the agency within Territory Families, the domestic and family violence framework?

Mr VARLEY: I think I understand the question you are asking.

The programs in custody are exempt from the standards that were specified for the mandatory—sorry, I will start again. The programs in custody that we deliver are not subject to the men's behaviour change program standards that were issued by the department of Territory Families about a year ago. Those standards apply to men's behaviour change programs in the community.

Our RAGE program has been in place for some years, which is why we are evaluating it. It is based on a series of other clinical principles that underpin how we approach therapeutic treatment in custody. It also requires participants to engage in that six months' worth of intensive treatment, including acknowledgement of their offending behaviour, which is why it is only available to sentenced prisoners.

Mr PAECH: You spoke about bail. Does the Northern Territory Correctional Services bail support accommodation facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin, with the machinery-of-government changes, still sit with Correctional Services?

Mr VARLEY: Yes, it does.

Mr PAECH: Are those services still managed by the Salvation Army or are they now managed internally?

Mr MALEY: Were you talking about the Paperbark facility, which is not ...

Mr PAECH: No, we are talking about bail support accommodation which is managed by the Salvation Army—or was. Is it still managed by them, and what is the capacity?

Mr VARLEY: Yes, that program, which we are very proud of, is still run in partnership with the Salvation Army. It is doing great. We have those two locations operating in Darwin and Alice Springs.

I can provide you some statistics in relation to that program. It has been in operation now for I think two-and-a-bit years ...

Mr PAECH: You would be correct.

Mr VARLEY: As you would recall. However, we are looking at how we improve and expand that program. I am also pleased to advise the committee that we intend to continue that program and extend it. We are in consultations with the Salvation Army about how to do that.

Mr PAECH: Extend in the same locations or are we looking at Tennant Creek and Katherine or Palmerston?

Mr VARLEY: The short answer to that question is I would like to look at all of the above. Our priority at the moment is in Darwin and Alice Springs. In fact, we are in consultation with the Salvation Army at the moment about expanding the program in Alice Springs to include women, which the current program does not, as you would know from the hostel in Alice Springs.

We have previously looked at the Katherine region. We were not able to find an appropriate premises in Katherine. That is not to say that we will never be able to do that again, but at this time our focus is on the consultations we are having with the Salvos—who do a great job, by the way—for the expansion of the facility in Alice Springs to help us support women.

Mr PAECH: You mentioned in your opening statement a work camp for Katherine. Where is that expenditure featured in the budget to allow that infrastructure and the staffing?

Mr MALEY: We are trying to establish a work camp in Katherine. We are looking at two sites, the CDU or the research farm. We are working on getting that up and running now. Was your question: where is the funding for it?

Mr PAECH: Yes. You are looking at an existing infrastructure site, so it is not a greenfield site, but also there are costs associated with staffing that.

Mr MALEY: So far, it is funded internally. Once we find the location and do some estimates of the costs, we will come back to budget review and ask for some more money, which is sitting there in contingency ready to go. We have a plan to move forward. We just want to find the location and get the plan right because our view is that we will get one crack at setting up and we want to make sure—it is based on Barkly. You have been to the Barkly work camp. At CDU, for example, if it ends up there, they will do some cattle work. We will integrate our Sentenced to a Skill job programs so that those open-rated or low-risk prisoners can go and have those life skills, so they are getting ready to reintegrate into the community at the end of their sentence.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, it will be a low classification facility. Obviously, I know you do not have a site identified yet, but what kind of capacity—number—are we talking about?

Mr MALEY: It will be the low to open rated. We are looking at 200 people.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm how many Corrections officers are currently in the system?

Mr VARLEY: Do you mean how many Corrections officers we currently have employed?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr VARLEY: I can give you data from the most recent payroll, which is pay 25 on 4 June. At that time I had 738 Corrections officers employed in the Territory.

Mr PAECH: How many of those are on extended sick leave?

Mr VARLEY: I would have to check the numbers. The answer to that would be not a substantial amount.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.9

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

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm how many Correctional Services staff are on extended sick leave, beyond three months?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.9.

Mr PAECH: What is the average staff-to-prisoner ratio in each correctional facility, and how does this compare with best-practice standards?

Mr MALEY: We can tell you the number of staff per facility, and we will see how that goes in answering your question. It is a complex question because there is no set best-practice ratio; it is negotiated with the union.

Mr PAECH: I am assuming there is a best-practice standard agreement in the EBA with the Correctional Services staff, so how does that compare?

Mr MALEY: We will start by giving you the numbers, and then we can work out whether you need more information.

Mr VARLEY: As at that last pay period I referenced before, 4 June, I have 446 employed correctional officers at the Darwin Correctional Centre; 207 at the Alice Springs Correctional Centre; 55 at the Berrimah Correctional Centre, although that number fluctuates and changes because those staff are provided on roster from Holtze; 12 at the Barkly Work Camp; and eight at the Datjala Work Camp.

The prisoner ratio is determined—there is not an algorithm, as such. The ratio of staff to prisoners features in the operating models for both major facilities, Darwin and Alice Springs. That specifies a certain number of posts per block per function per day. Those operating models are adjusted based on the available staff per day. If the number of staff falls below the specified number of posts, managers in the facility take remedial action according to that operating model to adjust the operations of the facility.

Mr PAECH: What is the number of the operating model per facility compared with the staffing ratio?

Mr VARLEY: The answer is the number of posts per day. From memory—I am referencing my brain here—it costs us about 145 posts for the Darwin Correctional Centre. The number in Alice Springs, off the top of my head, is 80-odd posts a day. That fluctuates according to the number of prisoners in the facility; depending on how many prisoners we have, we can adjust that ratio up and down. In Alice Springs, for example, we ratchet that ratio up. If there are extra prisoners in the facility, we have a ratio of one to 10 per shift.

Mr PAECH: Would it be helpful if I say as of a particular date, what was the ratio in comparison to the operating model versus the staff, because I understand the answer you are giving me is fluctuating because it is always going to fluctuate because prisoner numbers will fluctuate. I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr MALEY: If you wanted a particular day we would have to go back to the data.

Mr VARLEY: I can answer the question if you like. As an example for today, if that helps you ...

Mr PAECH: In terms of the reporting period, are you able to give me the numbers? As of 31 March, which is the reporting period, what was the number of staff versus the operating model of that day?

Mr VARLEY: Yes, we can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.10

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

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm on 31 March the number of staff on duty versus the operating model numbers of the day?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.10.

Mr PAECH: How many correctional officers have been assaulted in this reporting period, and what was the nature of those assaults?

Mr MALEY: For the reporting period from 1 August to 30 March there were 26 reports: nine being hit or kicked; five, body stress; two, falling from same level; four, spitting; two, scratched; two, other or unallocated; one, hot water; and one hitting object with part of the body.

Mr PAECH: How many G4S contractors are currently working in the Northern Territory correctional system?

Mr MALEY: There are 20.

Mr PAECH: Is that as of today?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: How much is the G4S contracting costing Territorians?

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a particular day?

Mr PAECH: As of today, how much has it cost since it commenced?

Mr MALEY: For the reporting period the cost is \$234,157.59. For the financial year the cost is estimated to be \$1.581m, so basically \$1.5m.

Mr PAECH: Can you table the G4S details, including the cost per head or total value of that contract?

Mr MALEY: We are happy to take questions and if we cannot answer the question we will take it on notice. Are you talking about the cost per head?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr MALEY: The cost per head is \$665.84, so \$665. That is the daily rate.

Mr PAECH: What does it cost normally, without G4S, to house a Territorian in a correctional facility?

Mr MALEY: Are you talking about cost per day?

Mr PAECH: Yes. What is the daily cost of a person incarcerated?

Mr MALEY: It is \$350.

Mr PAECH: Have you or any of your staff declared any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest in relation to G4S or any related Correctional Services procurement decisions?

Mr MALEY: Any potential conflicts of interest are dealt with as per the legislative requirements. If there is a perceived conflict of interest, it is dealt with in relation to normal legislative requirements.

Mr PAECH: Are you aware of any actual, perceived or possible potential conflicts of interest with G4S as of now?

Mr MALEY: No, I am not.

Mr PAECH: You said that G4S officers have been contracted to undertake custodial operations at the Darwin Local Court and manage medical escorts.

Mr MALEY: Not manage, just escort.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm that these are the only tasks being performed by G4S officers at the moment?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: How many additional G4S contractors do you intend to employ?

Mr MALEY: I will let the commissioner explain, because the G4S contract is an on-call contract, essentially. If we need more numbers, we can—at the moment we want to encourage G4S to have local employment. The next level is about local content and local employment.

Mr VARLEY: The 20 initial FTE for the court service and the Darwin metropolitan transfer service was the start. That was appointed under a six-month term, and it is one of a number of service types available to us under the head contract we established with G4S. Those service types are court, cell and custody management; prisoner transportation and escorts; hospital bedsits; and watch house support. To date, we have only really drawn down on the court, cell and custody management at the Darwin Local Court service, and prisoner transportation in Darwin on a metropolitan basis, Monday to Friday.

We are in consultations with G4S at present on being able to establish a local workforce to scale that up over the coming few months. Those consultations and negotiations are still underway. The final number of staff that we would need to work through those services is still being modelled. Then, of course, we would work with G4S to advertise locally and for them to run some training programs, but we expect that program to expand over the next few months.

Mr PAECH: Have there been assaults on G4S officers?

Mr VARLEY: To the best of my knowledge—I am just checking this—I think we have had one incident at the Darwin Local Court.

We had one incident where a member sustained a minor whiplash injury, and that person has returned to work. That was in relation to the restraint of a prisoner.

Mr PAECH: Are you aware of any G4S staff terminating their employment with G4S, who were supposed to be in a correctional service?

Mr MALEY: I am not personally aware. I will seek some advice. We do not know.

Mr PAECH: You often said one of the reasons for the G4S contract was to reduce the overtime bill. Have you seen a reduction in the overtime bill? What is the current overtime bill?

Mr MALEY: That is two questions. G4S is more about operational surge control. We could forecast prisoner numbers going up, so we needed to recruit. We have been recruiting through a rolling recruitment. I think we have recruited over 200 prison officers now, but the G4S contract was about surge control. We are dealing with that via this contract. That is the answer to your first question. What was your second question?

Mr PAECH: What is the current overtime bill?

Mr VARLEY: I have the answer to the question on the overtime bill for custodial operations if that is the one you are after.

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr VARLEY: This financial year to the reporting period the custodial operations overtime bill has been 266,000 hours at \$19.23m. That is an average at this time of 355 hours per prisoner essentially, which is

a ratio we look to measure our operations. That has not changed materially, and I expect by the time we get to 30 June we will probably end up with an overtime bill similar to what we did last year.

Mr PAECH: Are G4S officers at all being used when Correctional Services has jurisdiction over watch house cells?

Mr MALEY: No.

Mr PAECH: How many watch house cells are currently declared for the purposes of Northern Territory Correctional Services?

Mr MALEY: The Darwin watch house is declared. I am not sure how many cells are in it; there are two wings to it.

Mr VARLEY: There are two parts to the answer. We do not have any staff presently in watch houses, so we are not operating watch house cells. We understand watch houses, as in the major ones, are declared and gazetted as correctional facilities under the Act, and in particular, the ones where we have operated, which are Palmerston, Darwin city and then Alice Springs, the whole site is declared as a gazetted custodial facility.

Mr PAECH: Do you currently have any Territorians in watch house cells who should be held in a correctional service as of today?

Mr MALEY: Yes, we do, but we do not have any operational staff in the watch houses. In total in Palmerston today there are 51, in Katherine there are 10 and in Alice Springs there are nine.

Mr PAECH: In relation to G4S, how do you respond to the concerns from correctional staff and their unions that the increased use of private contractors is a wider step for privatisation? Can you guarantee the unions and custodial services officers that you are not moving to privatise the correctional service system?

Mr MALEY: One hundred per cent guaranteed.

J DAVIS: In relation to that last question about prisoners held in watch houses, I think you said there was a total of about 70 when added up. What is the length of time that prisoners are currently being held in watch houses—the average and the longest?

Mr MALEY: As of today, days in the watch house in Palmerston: eight prisoners have been there for one day; four prisoners have been there for two days; three prisoners have been there for three days; three prisoners have been there for four days; nine prisoners have been there for five days; three prisoners have been there for six days; one prisoner has been there for seven days; eight prisoners have been there for eight days; five prisoners have been there for nine days; one prisoner has been there for 10 days; three prisoners have been there for 11 days; two prisoners have been there for 12 days; and one prisoner has been there for 14 days.

For Katherine, one prisoner has been there for one day; two prisoners have been there for two days; one prisoner has been there for three days; two prisoners have been there for four days; one prisoner has been there for five days; two prisoners have been there for six days; and one prisoner has been there for seven days.

For Alice Springs, four prisoners have been there for one day; three prisoners have been there for five days; and two prisoners have been there for six days.

J DAVIS: When prisoners are held in watch houses, that is under conditions where they have no access to outside space and they are under lights 24 hours a day; is that correct?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: Is there a reason there is that extended length of time—three people for 11 days?

Mr MALEY: At the DCC, Corrections advise police how many beds are available each day and police determine which prisoners are transferred across. The police and Corrections staff work together hand-in-hand. Those prisoners are transferred from the Palmerston watch house to the right prison. There is a priority order: number one, urgent medical needs; two, behavioural issues; prisoners required by AVL; sentenced prisoners; and in remand prisoners. That is at Palmerston.

Effectively, the priority for Alice Springs is urgent medical needs; behavioural issues; sentenced prisoners; remand prisoners; and prisoners required by AVL.

J DAVIS: That is the priority list for when prisoners will be moved into watch houses?

Mr MALEY: No, from watch houses to a correctional centre.

Mr PAECH: What is their gender? Has it been men and women or just men?

Mr MALEY: We do not have the exact breakdown today, but we have males and females. Perhaps as we go on we might be able to get the information to you. When we get it we will give it to you. We will give you the information, as of today, of males and females. We will get that sent to us. Hopefully, someone out there is listening.

Mr CHAIR: Would you like to put it on notice, Member for Gwoja?

Mr PAECH: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 3.11

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

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm the gender of individuals who have been held on remand in a watch house cell?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes, for today.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.11.

Mr PAECH: You made comment in the media on 12 and 18 March that watch house cells were no longer being used to house inmates or offenders. Can you confirm that there has been an ongoing presence in the Palmerston watch house?

Mr MALEY: My media statement said that we no longer have Corrections officers in watch houses. I am not sure what media statement you are referring to exactly. On that particular day the Corrections officers and prisoners who were under their control were moved to a new facility. That watch house then became an operational watch house. The police were using it as an operational watch house. On that day when Corrections moved, all the Corrections officers and prisoners under their control were moved out and then the police opened their watch house as a functional watch house.

Under the previous government the numbers were through the roof. We brought in our master plan of infrastructure and provided additional beds, so we are moving people out of the watch houses as quickly as we can. We are working towards getting them to a correctional facility.

Now the police are using those watch houses, other than the Darwin watch house, because that is not an operational watch house. I want to stress that point. That is a Corrections watch house.

Palmerston and Alice Springs watch houses are what we are talking about. Prison guards and officers were out of those and have not been put back. That might be the answer to your question.

Mr PAECH: How many inmates or offenders have been in watch houses since 10 March? Has there been at any time no-one in there, or has there been continual presence of an offender waiting for a bed in Corrections?

Mr VARLEY: In relation to all operational watch houses I expect there has never been a day where there has not been a prisoner in custody in those watch houses. There are days—Alice Springs and Katherine come to mind—when we have been able to move all prisoners out, but of course it fills back up again. In Palmerston I can say that on the day we exited—from memory—we had about 80 prisoners in our custody

in March when we exited and moved most of those to Holtze. The challenge has been the daily fluctuations of fresh custodies that come in, and we manage that closely with police.

To answer the question specifically I would need to check the individual stats for each particular day.

Mr PAECH: I would like that, please.

Question on Notice No 3.12

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

Mr PAECH: Could you provide the data around the number of inmates or offenders who should have been held in a Corrections facility but have not been able to due to overcrowding and have remained in police watch house cells since 10 March?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.12.

Mr PAECH: How many offenders in Northern Territory Corrections are currently on remand? I should rephrase that—how many as of today, so it gives you an accurate reading.

Mr MALEY: There are 1,421.

Mr PAECH: What is the percentage reading of that of the overall prison population?

Mr MALEY: It is 50%.

Mr PAECH: So, 50% of the prison population is on remand. What percentage of that are women? What percentage of that are children?

Mr MALEY: We will do one question at a time. We will deal with the adults. There are 203 women today in custody.

Ms DENNIS: There are 55 young people in detention today.

Mr PAECH: Is that on remand?

Ms DENNIS: There are 84% on remand.

Mr PAECH: What percentage are women?

Ms DENNIS: Of that, 13% are female.

Mr PAECH: You have given me the numbers, and 203 are women. What percentage of those women are on remand?

Mr MALEY: We will do a quick maths calculation. We might take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.13

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

Mr PAECH: Could you provide the number of women currently in Northern Territory Correctional Services today who are sentenced who are remanded?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.13.

J DAVIS: To clarify, minister, you said in parliament—it was in *Hansard* on 18 March—that Corrections will no longer staff or use operational watch houses in Palmerston and Alice Springs. That was the source of that.

Mr MALEY: Police man the watch houses. Corrections officers do the prisons.

J DAVIS: Are the prisoners in the watch houses not counted as Corrections using them?

Mr MALEY: They are under the care of the police.

J DAVIS: I go back to some of the staffing questions asked by the Member for Gwoja. In relation to assaults, was that only assaults on staff?

Mr MALEY: Yes, it was.

J DAVIS: How many assaults by staff on prisoners have been reported?

Mr MALEY: Is that reported to police?

J DAVIS: How many assaults by staff on prisoners have been reported?

Mr VARLEY: None to me. If there are any, they would have been reported to the Ombudsman or other integrity bodies. They have not been raised with me in this reporting period.

J DAVIS: When the Ombudsman appeared here earlier, they said that their rate of complaints from prisoners was going down and that was because prisoners were not able to make complaints because of ongoing lockdowns. Are you able to comment on that?

Mr MALEY: Yes, I can comment on that. The Ombudsman reported it was from 553 down to 430, but you have to remember that there are multiple factors. While lockdowns and extended detention in police cells might have influenced the ability for those prisoners to communicate, it is also possible that improvements in the prison conditions and the resolution of those disputes internally have also played a role in reducing those external complaints.

That is not to mention there are also other avenues for the prisoners to lodge complaints. We have heard about the Ombudsman. There is also the telephone access available, written communication and in-person visits by the Ombudsman, as well as confidential access to complaints within the system that the prison deals with. They can do that securely and sensitively without fear of retribution. There is also the Official Visitor Scheme which offers another channel for prisoners to raise concerns.

Despite the increase in the prisoner population the complaint numbers have gone down, suggesting that it could be an improvement in the overall processes and conditions within the prison system.

J DAVIS: Do you have no response to the Ombudsman's reflection? You are saying that it is because conditions have got better, not, as the Ombudsman said, that it is difficult for people to make complaints; is that correct?

Mr CHAIR: I cannot remember exactly what the Ombudsman said. Is that to the transcript of what the Ombudsman said?

J DAVIS: The Ombudsman said—I am not able to remember the exact words. Somebody else might be able to help me out here.

Mr CHAIR: We can look it up. I just want to make sure we are reflecting correctly what the Ombudsman said.

J DAVIS: Sure.

K McNAMARA: I think I remember them saying—the gist of it was—the reason they had gone down was because people could not access the complaint system. That seemed to be the gist of it.

Mr CHAIR: I want to make sure that if we are quoting the Ombudsman that we are doing it correctly.

Mr MALEY: Obviously we are not quoting him exactly because the gist of it is not quoting.

I am saying that is the Ombudsman's view and I fully respect his view. I am saying there are alternative hypotheses in relation to why those numbers have gone down. For example, one, conditions have been improved; two, there is a confidential complaint system within the prison system and that could be working better; and, three, the Official Visitor Scheme is operational. There are other avenues for prisoners, not to mention the prisoner numbers have gone up, yet complaints have gone down. There is a range of reasons why the Ombudsman has made that observation. He is entitled to do that.

J DAVIS: She.

Mr MALEY: I am saying in response that there are other mechanisms for people to deal with complaints.

Mr CHAIR: The Ombudsman, we will just refer to the office, is a female office holder at the moment.

J DAVIS: How many official visitors appointed under section 26 of the *Correctional Services Act* are there currently?

Mr MALEY: You just need to bear with us. We are bouncing between outputs here.

Mr PAECH: It was a broad opening statement.

Mr MALEY: I am happy to do it, but just be aware of time, if you are worried about the time it takes us to get from page to page.

Mr CHAIR: I will step in here. Minister, if there is a question that you believe should be in an output, you can advise the committee and we can deal with it in the output, but we are on the statement.

Mr MALEY: I am happy to answer the question, but what I am getting at is the fact we are flicking back and forth. We could be answering this in the format and routine it was meant for, but we are going back and forth.

Mr PAECH: We do not mind.

Mr MALEY: Was your question: how many visits?

J DAVIS: No. How many official visitors? My follow-up question will be: how many visits?

Mr MALEY: The answer is one, but two have been recently appointed by me, so there are three.

J DAVIS: How long has there been one official visitor for?

Mr MALEY: For this financial year.

J DAVIS: Has there been one official visitor for this financial year, across every correctional facility in the Northern Territory?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: How many visits have occurred in custodial facilities in this financial year?

Mr MALEY: The number of official visits in Darwin has been six; in Berrimah there has been one; and there have been none in Alice Springs.

J DAVIS: To be clear, there have been seven official visits by one official visitor in this financial year across all the correctional facilities.

Mr MALEY: That is correct.

J DAVIS: Is that one of the reasons you think prisoner complaints might have gone down or there might be other avenues for prisoners to complain, as you said?

Mr MALEY: There is a range of prisoners and avenues for prisoners who want to complain, and official visitors is one of those.

Mr CHAIR: I note for the committee that I read the transcript of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman does not give any clear reason. She acknowledges that there are prison pressures, that they still have access to the prison and are conducting education programs as to prisoner riots. She acknowledges there are current prison pressures out of her control. I wanted to clarify that for the committee.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.13

Mr MALEY: Females in custody today—89% on remand, 140 of 203 in total.

J DAVIS: In relation to the contract, where are G4S staff being accommodated, and for how long? What is the accommodation and allowance cost to date?

Mr VARLEY: The G4S accommodation is in serviced apartments in the Darwin area. The cost to date has been \$85,892.

J DAVIS: Does that include allowances?

Mr VARLEY: No, that is the cost of the accommodation. I think the allowance is paid as part of their daily rate, from what I understand.

J DAVIS: In relation to domestic violence programs, I think I followed up on the Family Violence Program. In relation to prisoners on remand being able to access programs, I was having a look at the domestic violence action plan 2. It says that \$1.9m went to Corrections in 2024–25 to enable prisoners on remand and on sentences under 24 months to access DV programs. I think previously that was not the case because of funding limits. How many prisoners on remand have accessed a DV program in 2024–25 as a result of this funding?

Mr MALEY: As I have said previously, when prisoners are on remand the education programs are voluntary.

Mr VARLEY: Bear with me, because I might have missed parts of your question.

The ability for us to deliver the Family Violence Program to prisoners on remand is a relatively new thing, and we are happy that it is progressing and growing. We have delivered 12 of those remand programs, with 103 prisoners involved.

Could you remind me of the other parts of your question?

J DAVIS: Are you referring specifically to the domestic violence programs?

Mr VARLEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: My question was: how many prisoners on remand have access to DV programs? I would also ask: how many prisoners sentenced under two years have access to the program under that funding? That is specifically what I am interested in.

Mr VARLEY: I understand.

The answer to the first question is 103 prisoners have accessed the remand program in the reporting period to 31 March. We have reduced the eligibility criteria for our RAGE program from two years to 12 months. I do not have the data on the number of people in the new eligibility criteria who have gone through the program.

I can take that question on notice in terms of how many people with less than two years have accessed RAGE.

J DAVIS: Or have accessed any DV-related program.

Question on Notice No 3.14

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

J DAVIS: How many prisoners on a sentence under two years have accessed domestic violence-related programs as a result of the action plan 2 funding?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.14.

J DAVIS: If funding allocated to a specific thing is not spent, what happens to it? For the \$1.9m—if that number of people accessed it and there is unspent money, does that continue to be committed to DV spending?

Mr VARLEY: Yes. The money that is allocated under DV action plan 2 is being spent on the employment of the staff in our clinical area to deliver those programs. That is why I need to check for you the breakdown of the offenders who have done that. It is a complex thing because it is not just about how many people we put through a system; it is about all the other assessments, report writing and the clinical work done with each particular offender. That is why I want to take the question on notice for you.

The committee suspended.

Mr MALEY: We have some more information about the complaints. We did a bit of research in the break. The numbers have been going down since 2019, so there has been a downward trend in relation to complaints.

The commissioner has some more information about complaints and how they are dealt with in Corrections, so he might be able to alleviate some of your concerns.

Mr VARLEY: Member for Johnston, I apologise; I should have provided a bit of clarifying information earlier which would have helped add some context. The Ombudsman's office talks about the complaints that they received. They are but one part of the system that we operate.

Earlier this week I was meeting with some of my senior managers at Holtze, and we were talking about the review of the complaints mechanisms in the prison that are the internal ones. Every prisoner has access to prisoner complaint forms that are in the blocks, and they can provide a complaint form to their respective block officers on a daily basis. Some of those complaints can be frivolous, as you can imagine. People complain about things in prison from TVs to food. Others are more systemic issues such as access to the right sorts of services, and we deal with those.

Then there is the confidential access complaint system which is an opportunity that the prisoner can say, 'I wish to access the confidential system', and that provides them either an envelope that goes direct to the general manager or direct to my office. Those envelopes are not opened by the staff; that is a confidential way of raising an internal complaint issue.

There are the Ombudsman mechanisms, as you have spoken about.

There are also other mechanisms such as the Anti-Discrimination Commission, the health complaints commission and ICAC—although they are few and far between.

There is a range of opportunities for prisoners to raise complaints, and we could tabulate data on the more serious end of the scale. The block officers and the daily complaint forms would be quite regular.

J DAVIS: I have a lot of questions in relation to prison-based programs, but I will put them in as written questions, noting the time and that we still have a lot of outputs to get through.

I want to check in terms of youth detention how many official visitors there are and how many visits happen?

Mr MALEY: There are three official visitors. At Holtze there have been 11 and at Alice Springs there have been 10 visits.

J DAVIS: Is that in this financial year?

Mr MALEY: Yes. There is only one official visitor in Alice Springs who has done 10 visits.

Remember that part of the master plan is that the youths are moving to the Holtze detention centre. There are three official visitors up there. In the reporting period they have conducted 11 visits, along with the other people, like the Ombudsman, who go there and visit.

We also have the Elders Visiting Program, so if some prisoners have concerns they can be raised with them as well. That is another avenue for people to deal with complaints. As you can imagine, some Aboriginal people do not feel comfortable talking, but when the elders come in and the official visitors, that is another avenue for people to make complaints about the prison system.

J DAVIS: While I am on youth justice, I have a couple of questions from the Member for Mulka.

How many video link calls between Central Australian young people housed in Holtze Youth Detention Centre and their family have been facilitated since Alice Springs youth detention centre was partially closed?

Mr MALEY: We will take that question on notice, so we can give you the right information.

Question on Notice No 3.15

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

J DAVIS: How many video link calls between Central Australian young people housed in Holtze Youth Detention Centre and their family have been facilitated by Department of Corrections staff since the Alice Springs youth detention centre was partially closed in January 2025?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.15.

Mr MALEY: Can we clarify that question? Do you want how many visits have been initiated by family as well? Do you want us to provide how many applications or requests received from family members to have telecommunications or video links with detainees in the Holtze centre?

J DAVIS: All data in relation to any video link calls, so both ways.

Mr CHAIR: I will amend question on notice 3.15, with data going from and to.

Mr MALEY: To clarify, we will provide information on how many family members request visits.

Mr CHAIR: The question is amended.

J DAVIS: In relation to works at Holtze, are the works finished?

Mr MALEY: Are you talking about the drainage works?

J DAVIS: I am talking about all works in order for it to be fully operational.

Mr MALEY: Construction of the new Holtze detention centre is complete, with the facility operating in November. Planning undertaken to increase the capacity was achieved in January.

The youth detention centre has four of the five stages of stormwater drainage now complete. There are a whole lot of drains internally. They found in the Wet Season it flooded, so now they have been looked at.

A number of infrastructure issues have been identified since the opening of Holtze—water quality, acoustics in all areas, stormwater, security locks and door handles were not fit for purpose. All the design documents and plans to fix those have been enacted and are awaiting materials from interstate.

Due to the Holtze construction work going on, some parts of the detention centre have not been operational because contractors cannot be in there with building materials whilst there are detainees.

There has been a lot of work, but all the work has been enacted and are waiting on parts to finish. It has not finished yet, but all the work that needs to be done has started, such as door handles and door locks. There were some acoustic problems in there—it was very noisy—so they are dealing with that as well. All that work has started and we are waiting on parts to arrive. Hopefully that answers your question.

J DAVIS: I guess it does. I am interested to hear what the impact is of the unfinished work. I hear that the drainage has been finished. Can the education space be currently accessed?

Mr MALEY: Yes, two weeks ago.

J DAVIS: Is there any ongoing impact on young people in terms of the works that you are still waiting to complete?

Mr MALEY: No.

J DAVIS: The Northern Territory Children's Commissioner released a report, Our Most Vulnerable Children Bearing the Consequences of a Failed System, in October last year. I wonder how that report might be informing practice direction and what changes might have been taken into account based on that report.

Ms DENNIS: The report provided a number of government agencies information about how the service system needs to identify earlier young people who are identified as vulnerable and in highly complex social settings and environments.

For Corrections, with the youth justice system, a number of recommendations were raised about earlier screening and assessment of young people once they come into the detention centre. We have a comprehensive assessment and screening process for all young people when they enter the youth detention centre system through our specialist assessment and treatment services team. There are five qualified psychologists and a number of social workers who work within that team and complete a number of screenings and assessments.

We use that information then with our justice liaison officer to submit, where appropriate, NDIS applications for young people to come into the scheme. We also work closely with a number of service providers to support young people through occupational therapy programs, supporting young people who have cognitive delays and so forth. That is all through the assessment once they enter the youth detention centre or the youth justice system.

A number of other recommendations were directed to other agencies to do similar work. For us, as part of the reducing-crime strategy and addressing the root causes of crime, there is further work that the government is undertaking that includes the recommendations from the Children's Commissioner's report.

J DAVIS: Can you advise what is being done to provide opportunities for FASD assessment and diagnosis?

Mr MALEY: In the adult or the youth?

J DAVIS: In the youth.

Ms DENNIS: On entry into the youth detention centre, we complete a screen. It covers institutional risks and needs, and risk factors which allow us to identify early indicators of intellectual disability, medical history and physical disability. If through that assessment process we identify indicators where there may be fetal alcohol syndrome elements or indicators, we will complete a request to private providers to complete that screen and assessment process.

In Central Australia we have a partnership agreement with Congress which does that through child and youth assessment treatment services. The Department of Health is working in the Top End to model a similar agreement with an Aboriginal medical health service to do similar.

We go to an out service to complete those assessments; we do not have the skilled professionals to undertake those assessments for FASD.

J DAVIS: I note a concern that people raised in terms of moving young people from Alice Springs to Darwin was that specialist service would not be available. It will be great to see it getting on board here if it happens.

Ms DENNIS: Once a young person has commenced their assessment with Congress we transfer them back to continue that assessment process, so there is no interference with the young person being assessed while they are in our custody; we continue to do that work. When a young person is released our community youth justice officers and our case management staff will often support that young person and family to continue their assessment so that it can be completed.

Mr PAECH: What is it costing to transport young people from Alice Springs to Darwin and back?

Mr MALEY: Between January and 31 March, 33 detainees were transferred between the Alice Springs intake facility and the Holtze youth justice facility, with 91 flights at a cost of \$74,000.

Mr PAECH: Across Correctional Services, watch houses and youth facilities, what has been the usage of spit hoods over the last reporting period?

Mr MALEY: Youth justice is zero.

We have the information for adults, but in the interests of time we will take it on notice. It is highly likely we will be able to give you the answer before 3.30 pm.

Question on Notice No 3.16

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

Mr PAECH: Could you please provide the number of the use of spit hoods in watch house cells for people who are incarcerated or who are in the care of a Correctional Services facility, noting that there are zero for the reporting period in youth justice?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr MALEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 3.16.

J DAVIS: With the FASD question, I also have that question for adult prisoners. Can you advise what is being done to provide opportunities for FASD assessment and diagnosis for adult prisoners?

Mr VARLEY: The short answer to the question—I do not have the data with me to tell you how many—is that there are two broad ways that it occurs. One is through our medical assessment services in the prison system. Everyone who comes into custody has a medical assessment and can be referred for further cognitive assessment should it be needed, disability assessments and those sorts of things. The second part of it is as we work through a person's offender management plan with our psychologists, as they are working through their treatment, it is another opportunity for it to be assessed.

J DAVIS: Is there any money committed to support or work with people who are FASD affected in NT Correctional Services?

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.16

Mr MALEY: The answer to the question about the spit hoods is: Alice Springs Correctional Centre is one; the Alice Springs watch house is two; and DCC (Darwin Correctional Centre) is 13.

Mr VARLEY: Member for Johnston, thank you for the question because it gives me an opportunity to talk to you about something that we are very happy and excited about, which is the launch this year of our new National Disability Insurance Scheme offender services team. We have a specialist team that has been established in February in our offender rehabilitation engagement group. It is something that we have taken from our learnings with our colleagues in South Australia. We are grateful to the South Australian Department for Correctional Services for supporting us on the design and establishment of this Territory model. It is brand-new for us. If you will bear with me, we are very excited about it, and this gives me an opportunity to tell you this good news story.

We have established a specialised team, including a principal disability adviser, an NDIS psychologist who understands the NDIS system, an occupational therapist and a community transition coordinator. We are currently under recruitment for one remaining occupational therapist position. The purpose of this team is to work with prisoners to identify their suitability and to support the applications to the NDIS for program assessment and packages.

In South Australia this has been a remarkable success where they have been able to, in the two or so years of their operation, assist 700-odd people across South Australia's prison system to access the NDIS. It has been a remarkable transition for support for them as they exit custody.

We look to do the same. To date we have identified—for example, in Darwin there have been 47 referrals made to this new team to assess disabilities and eligibility for NDIS support. To date we have worked on 27 out of those 47 referrals. We have had a couple of early successes, with two applications being accepted by NDIS for support packages. Another two, I think, are under consideration. We have also engaged with 44 prisoners who we believe are eligible to have a disability assessed, and we are working with them to gain consent to work on their cases.

The good news story is it is a work in progress. We know that many clients in Corrections who are eligible for this kind of disability support suffer from a cognitive disability. That certainly has been the lessons we are seeing from our colleagues in South Australia, and that is why we set up the program here.

J DAVIS: I think you said there are currently 203 women in prison. What is the expected date of women to be accommodated in Alice Springs?

Mr MALEY: The women are in Alice Springs. Part of the master plan is that there will be a facility which is outside the wire and will be mended and fixed up to house the women. That is due in quarter 4 of 2025.

J DAVIS: Is that outside the wire at Holtze?

Mr MALEY: No, in Alice Springs.

J DAVIS: Currently, how many women are in Alice Springs and how many women are in Holtze?

Mr MALEY: There are 203 females in custody; 50 in Alice Springs and 153 in Darwin.

J DAVIS: Are the 50 in Alice Springs in the old purpose-built youth detention centre?

Mr MALEY: No. They are in behind the wire in the main prison.

J DAVIS: When will that be?

Mr MALEY: By the end of the year.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, for public interest could you explain what you mean by inside and outside the wire?

Mr MALEY: In the Alice Springs Correctional Centre is the prison where the industries are and all the prisoners are housed behind the security fence. Outside the wire means outside that where there are some cottages for some low and open people and also where there is a youth detention centre which is away. We plan to bring the women outside so that they are not getting catcalled and abused by men who are in the prison. This gives them an opportunity to be free and away from the catcalling that happens.

J DAVIS: Is that the same intention for Holtze?

Mr MALEY: Yes, it is. Part of the master plan is that at the moment the women are in behind the wire, but for Holtze the plan is the open-rated prisoners are at the front, which is section 11 when you first drive in, which is outside the wire, and that will be converted into a dedicated women's prison.

J DAVIS: What will be the capacity of both of those prisons?

Mr MALEY: In Alice Springs, 116. In Holtze, 88—with a new prison being built at the very end of the master plan, for women, which will be in the Holtze area, in the precinct.

J DAVIS: When you say 'at the very end', that is the final part of the master plan; is that what you mean?

Mr MALEY: In 2028.

Mr YOUNG: You mentioned in your answer that some of the women held in this facility have been catcalled and abused. Do you have any data on that?

Mr MALEY: No.

Mr YOUNG: Is there a mechanism for those women to report the catcalling and abuse you talked about?

Mr MALEY: Yes, there is. You might have missed it, but we just had a big discussion on complaints. We could go through it again, but there has been a whole line of questioning on how people make complaints. I am happy to answer again.

Mr YOUNG: No, not if it has already been answered.

Mr MALEY: There have been a lot of answers. I think the Member for Johnston was happy with our answers in relation to complaints. There has been a lot of work done in relation to that.

J DAVIS: I do not know if I was happy with them, but I got answers.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: The Leader of the Opposition has often stated that one of their roles is to hold this government to account, particularly on their election commitments. You would be aware that we made a number of commitments in this CLP plan in front of me ...

Mr CHAIR: I ask that we do not use props, thank you.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I am just referring—within that, there is a crime and Corrections plan, which goes directly to this agency. There are a couple of components there. I want you to update us on where we got to in terms of progress of these commitments, whether they are funded now or whether they will be funded in the coming budget or future budgets and so on. We talked about stronger bail and better police powers. The Chief Minister has already handled those.

I have about three areas I want to touch on, so I will go through them one at a time if I can. The clear one was new prisons, which you have touched on. It says in the plan:

With a focus on rehabilitation and skills training

We will build two new women's prisons in Alice Springs and Darwin, two new adult prisoner work camps and a new Work in the Community Home Detention program. Sentence to a Job will mean offenders serving time will go to work and come out with a job to go to.

How have we progressed on that commitment?

Mr MALEY: Let us start with the work camp in Katherine. We are planning on having a work camp in Katherine for 200 open or low-rated prisoners. That work is well underway. We are securing a location right now. We are just trying to secure whether it will be around where the CDU is north of Katherine ...

Mr CHAIR: Minister, could you turn your mic on, please.

Mr MALEY: Effectively, the work camp is looking at a location, whether it is CDU land—which is our preferred option, but we are in negotiations with CDU about that land—which will enable our Sentenced to a Skill

program. They will go hand in hand. CDU offers a range of training programs, and at the CDU site, which I have been to, there are some cows and agriculture. There is a range of Sentenced to a Skill and Sentenced to a Job programs available. For us it makes sense. I am not pre-empting the outcome of the negotiations, but we would prefer to have a work camp there.

If that is not successful and we go somewhere else—say, the Katherine research farm—there are cows, agriculture and a range of facilities, which will work hand in hand with our Sentenced to a Skill programs moving forward.

The second one was about women in Alice Springs. The plan details that the old youth detention centre, which is outside the wire but still in the Alice Springs Corrections area, will be modified to have the women moving in there. Again, it will have them out from behind the wire, so they have their own separate prison. That is the same plan here in Darwin. The sector 11 area is when you first drive in. Holtze is on the left. At the moment, that is for open-rated prisoners. We will upgrade the security and move the ladies into that, which will open up more space behind the wire. Again, this is all about building capacity for prisoners in Alice Springs and Darwin.

I hope that answers your question. We are moving forward with those.

I can give you some good examples out of the Barkly Work Camp. I was in Tennant Creek last week. I spoke to Tennant Mining, which is opening up a new mine there and repurposing the old Nobles Nob mine. They told me that they were getting low and open-rated prisoners out of the Barkly Work Camp to come and help clean up around the mine site. In fact, four of them have moved to employment there. There is an example of those programs working.

In community service work, we have been getting open-rated prisoners out to various areas like Henley-on-Todd in Alice Springs, the Red CentreNATS, the Freds Pass show, NAIDOC activities, the Alice Springs Show, Mataranka and the Brunette Downs gymkhana rodeo. This is getting those supported (inaudible) prisoners out there to do those Sentenced to a Skill and community work programs.

For hours of work in the community work program: out of the Darwin Correctional Centre, 31,000 hours; Alice Springs, 15,000 hours; and the Datjala Work Camp, 4,000 hours. There are a lot of hours in these community work programs which includes prisoners going out to do the mowing and that sort of thing around the community.

Mr BROWN: Regarding the plans that you talked about in Alice Springs and Katherine, do we have a rough timeframe of when those will be established and ready to go?

Mr MALEY: Yes, we do. The new facilities in Alice Springs, which is a women's prison, is planned for completion in quarter 4 this year. The women who are currently behind the wire will be moved into that. The women will be housed there on a permanent basis. There is another facility for the bail support, which is Paperbark in Alice Springs, where there is some bail support. A short-stay remand centre will be built as well.

Our plan is to have the boot camp in Katherine up and running hopefully later this year, but realistically probably early next year because we have the Wet Season and the Dry Season to deal with.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: You have answered a couple of the other components which related to community service and youth boot camps. Can you go a little bit further into youth boot camps? I will just read out what we said:

We will start by building two youth boot camps in Alice Springs and Darwin. Working with Indigenous mentors to provide a safe and structured environment. We will focus on skills training to give kids a future out of crime.

Can you give us an idea of the timeframes going forward as to when they may be delivered?

Mr MALEY: A lot of work has been done on that. There will be seven different areas of work in relation to the personal development of the youths.

Ms DENNIS: As part of the commitment, in December the Department of Corrections went out for an expression of interest to organisations to come back to the department with their ideas and program to deliver a youth boot camp. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful to award. Many of the organisations had excellent

ideas and an approach to working with young people; however, the administration requirements to ensure the safety and any risks were mitigated were not covered.

In consultation with a number of the applicants, we have worked with them where there will be a co-design for youth boot camps where the Department of Corrections will provide the supervision while young people attend the boot camp. The organisations will work with the young people through their area of expertise.

Youth boot camp is a structured and supervised intervention that is locally based with the young person. It will be a ministerially approved program. A young person can be sentenced by the court. It can be included as a court order if they are bailed.

We have also included in the new design of the youth diversion program where if you are a tier 3 offender—that means high-level offending, but not serious offending—one of the mandatory tasks is to complete a youth boot camp.

The process for that is an assessment where it is based on the risk, the identified needs of a young person, also inclusive of those young people who may have a disability rather than being excluded from the program. Based on that assessment there are seven categories that we have different organisations able to provide, focused on the enhancement of a young person's wellbeing, understanding that they have accountability for their actions and also working with their victim to send that message of understanding the hurt and the harm and work with their local community to pay back, and what that looks like will be part of the conferencing process.

We have a number of documents that are soon ready for release, and we are working towards early July with the first youth boot camp being based in Tennant Creek.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.15

Mr MALEY: I have some information back about Alice Springs and the audiovisual visits. There were 24 organised; five were cancelled by family, so there were only 19. I do not think any family members have asked for any.

Ms DENNIS: They were from family.

Answer to Question on Notice No 3.14

Mr MALEY: When we talked about the RAGE program for the sentences under two years, 25 met the new criteria.

J DAVIS: This is a question from the Member for Mulka—thank you for the information about boot camps—in relation to the youth diversion grants which are related to youth boot camps. Can you explain why the grants were for a maximum of \$350,000? For organisations that wanted to run these programs properly, how were they expected to employ a trauma-informed specialist and operate a program for such a small amount of funding? People also cited problems around the requirement to operate for 365 days a year. I think I heard you say that you had applications and none of them met the necessary operational criteria. These problems and the short application period meant that many organisations and Aboriginal groups did not have time to apply.

Mr MALEY: The taxpayer is not funding these businesses from scratch. What we are looking for are businesses that are up and running and have an operating model. This is about how many young offenders go on those programs and trying to make sure that we spend taxpayers' money wisely.

Ms DENNIS: The youth boot camp process is separate to the youth diversion program. The process for the youth diversion program opened in April and recently closed. We are hoping to award the new proponents to deliver youth diversion programs. The reason that there was a cap of \$350,000 is the previous community youth diversion did not have a scientific approach to the way that the money was allocated to different organisations. Some organisations had, for example, \$400,000 to deliver community youth diversion and their capacity was 10, where there are other organisations that had \$220,000, yet they took 20 young people.

We worked through the evaluation that was undertaken by Nous in 2024 of the community youth diversion program and built in the recommendations where there was a clear funding model which provided

transparency and parity across the organisations, based on capacity, the level of difficulty of the young person that they would work with and the minimum requirements that they needed to deliver as part of that program.

The previous community youth diversion program had various activities that young people could participate in, but as part of the government's commitment that there would be mandatory tasks. We had a tier 1, so organisations could work with tier 1, and that is very low-level offending. To provide a basic example, it is someone who steals the bike from the backyard. If it is a tier 1 it is immediate and needs to be done within one month. That goes through to a tier 3 where they steal the bike and also go through the house, steal belongings and the car and end up crashing the car. That is up to six months and there are far more mandatory tasks that a young person must complete, hence there is a different funding model.

We also needed to have a maximum so that we had a fair distribution across the Territory, so we could deliver local place-based interventions by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and not-for-profits so that it was a more immediate response, rather than waiting two to three months for an organisation to take on a referral.

Mr MALEY: I have one more thing to add to that. Looking at the amounts from the previous providers, there was only one over \$415,000. All the other ones were under \$300,000. The amount of money is actually higher than the average grant was previously. There is actually more money available. We are talking about the average again, going back to this being in relation to what we are spending money on.

I note the time. Will we go through the outputs or will we just end on opening statement?

Mr CHAIR: The Member for Karama has the last line of questions on the opening statement, and we will see how we go.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: As you know, being the Member for Karama, it is important to me. The community work program which was operating where prisoners came out and would mow the lawns for the elderly and people with disabilities and so on was a wonderful program. Unfortunately, it had to cease, I think because we had a boost in prisoner numbers and we needed to get more prison staff back into the prisons to control them. I understand it has started again. Could I get an update on where that is at, and what the future is for that program?

Mr MALEY: That question relates to a lot of people across the Northern Territory. The good news is that it has started again. We are focusing on that as one of our priorities. As I said, there were 31,000 hours out of the Darwin Correctional Centre. The program has come back online. We have spoken about it many times because many people relied on that program and it had good community benefit. It is about making sure some of these prisoners give back to the community.

Mr VARLEY: I know that program is highly thought of by many community members. Many people ask me questions about it.

We suspended and have partially suspended the community service work program to prioritise the operational security and functioning of the prisons. We noticed, obviously, the impact that would have and we made that decision carefully.

The good news is two things have happened over the intervening time. One is we had some of our officers who work in those community service work parties working in the prison during the week, then offering to do some overtime on the weekends. That is how we were able to get some more lawns mowed in the northern suburbs and other areas. That is continuing. Since that time we have seen some of the recruit courses graduate in recent weeks and we have been able to partially staff back into those community service work programs. Today, even in Darwin—I was looking a moment ago—I had three or four officers assigned to CSWP and I think two or three in Alice Springs.

It is certainly a priority for us. It is one that we will continue to build back because we know how important it is to the community.

Mr MALEY: Also in the youth justice space that work program is happening as well. In the reporting period over 600 hours of community service was done by the youths in community. A lot of that was done in the northern half and Windows on the Wetland. Not only the adults, but the youth justice is going back in and those communities programs are up and running.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Is it possible for you to provide us with a short statement that we could circulate to the community updating them about the current community work program and where it is at?

Mr MALEY: In relation to the current community work programs, those programs were suspended for a period of time. Now they are back on track. It was happening for the weekend, but we have recruited 202 staff in this financial year. That has allowed us now to roster back into the program during the week, meaning that those programs will start kicking off more and more as we roll forward, and hopefully more people in the Northern Territory can take advantage of those programs.

Mr BROWN: Can you confirm how many correctional officers have resigned, retired or gone on stress leave since the reporting period?

Mr MALEY: Yes, there have been 55 separations, which is an 8.5% attrition rate. The reporting period is from July to 31 March—and 8% for Alice Springs.

Mr PATEL: A lot of questions we are asking are for accurate and up-to-date information, but I understand that the department’s IT systems are seriously outdated. That has not been fixed for years. Can the commissioner explain the challenges that staff are facing when it comes to recording and accessing basic information like prisoner movements, rehabilitation progress or incidents in custody? What plans do you have to update this in the near future?

Mr VARLEY: It is one of my pet projects in terms of the digitisation of Corrections and the work we are doing on a range of different fronts. We are working on a number of projects to modernise our systems. We function off what is called the Integrated Offender Management System (IOMS), which is our basic case management system for prisoner management and Community Corrections case management. The youth justice facilities have a different system, which I can talk about separately.

We can and are continuing to work with the Department of Corporate and Digital Development to build on additional functionality to that system for better system data recording of incidents, use-of-force reports and prisoner management. That is the boring stuff.

Behind the scenes we are working on a couple of other exciting projects. One is a digital tablet solution for visits into correctional centres, being able to provide our officers with a secure robust tablet that prisoners could use to videoconference to people outside the system. That is a project underway at the moment.

The other one we are working on is a digital census system—we are looking to pilot this soon—to remove or reduce the reliance on the manual counting of prisoners each day. Every day we conduct a census of prisoners twice a day. That can take a long time, as we manually count 2,800 people. Sometimes we can have errors in the count, then we start again. We are working on a digital solution that links to a prisoner’s ID card and would enable our officers to more quickly solve that problem.

There is a series of other projects we are working on, but my team has established and will continue to roll out a digital governance committee and a digital strategy for Corrections with a whole series of projects. One of the things that I am particularly focused on is reducing paperwork. Our officers in the blocks every day are still using hundreds of different types of paper forms. We did a bit of a stocktake on this earlier in the year and at Darwin Correctional Centre alone, I think we ended up counting over 600 individual forms, many of which we believe can be archived and removed or digitised. I even found some that had carbon paper in them. There is a piece of work for us to do in modernising those systems and that would be about improving the productivity of our staff’s day.

J DAVIS: This is a question from the Member for Mulka. Are there any mattresses currently on the floor at any of the detention centres? Have there been times when mattresses are not available for any prisoners, including at Berrimah?

Mr PAECH: Detention centres or the whole correctional facilities?

J DAVIS: Correctional facilities.

Mr MALEY: Are you talking about adults?

J DAVIS: I am talking about the adults.

Mr VARLEY: Yes, there are mattresses on the floor, most notably in watch houses and also our reception facilities in the prisons. At Darwin Correctional Centre we have overnighers and people staying in reception until we can place them into the main prison. Those cells are not equipped with bunks; they are equipped with concrete plinths, similar to a watch house set-up. There are mattresses on the floor there.

To the best of my understanding, through the rest of the main prison we have fixed all the mattresses on the floor and moved them into bunks. I have not heard the question about no mattresses being available at Berrimah before. To the best of my knowledge, the answer is no.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of all outputs relating to the Department of Corrections. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for appearing today and the officers who provided advice. As I did yesterday, I will make it a thing—in 338 minutes of questioning, government members used 29 minutes today, which was 8.5%, which I am happy with.

The committee will now take a short break and resume at 4 pm with questions of the Minister for People, Sport and Culture.

Mr MALEY: I thank all the staff who helped me today. Thank you to my staff on the fifth floor. Everyone has done a power of work. Thank you to the committee, and to the staff behind the scenes who are keeping the Territory safe, keeping prison and Corrections officers safe. Behind the scenes they do a powerful job, and I thank them and appreciate their work.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER CHARLS' PORTFOLIOS

PEOPLE, SPORT AND CULTURE

DISABILITY

ARTS

YOUTH, SENIORS AND EQUALITY

MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

VETERANS

DEPARTMENT OF PEOPLE, SPORT AND CULTURE

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back and good afternoon, everybody. I am Laurie Zio, Member for Fannie Bay, and the Deputy Chair. Long-time listener; first time acting in the Chair.

I welcome you, minister, and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Mr CHARLS: I would like to introduce the members of the Department of People, Sport and Culture executive team who appear with me today to assist me to respond to your questions. These members are Ms Samantha Livesley, Chief Executive Officer; Ms Rachelle McMillan, General Manager, Corporate and Shared Services; Ms Siobhan Okely, Executive Director, Social Inclusion; and Mr Mitchell Hardy, General Manager, Sport, Recreation and Strategic Infrastructure.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I 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. During that process 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 minister's questioning on the output.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Department of People, Sport and Culture?

Mr CHARLS: Yes. It gives me great pleasure to speak to my portfolio responsibilities as the Minister for People, Sport and Culture; Veterans; Disability; Youth, Seniors and Equality; Arts; and Multicultural Affairs. I will open my comments by reflecting on the creation of this department. Can I say from the outset that it is one that I am very proud to serve on behalf of Territorians. Collectively, this department is focused on doing our part to enable the Northern Territory Government to deliver on our commitments to restore our lifestyle, rebuild our economy and reduce crime. Although we each take responsibility for the variety of work being done in the other key pillars, as the Minister for People, Sport and Culture, my brief is clear—restoring the Territory's lifestyle.

As one of the newly created agencies, People, Sport and Culture is dedicated to fostering an inclusive, vibrant and healthy community for all Territorians. It promotes active lifestyles through accessible sport and recreation programs, encourages engagement and participation in arts and cultural initiatives and supports creative expression.

The department ensures that people of all abilities, including those with disabilities, as well as diverse backgrounds and identities, have equitable opportunities to connect, engage and thrive in the Northern Territory's social, cultural and recreational life. It delivers programs for all Territorians across various sectors, including veterans, disability, seniors, gender equality, sport and recreation, arts and culture, multicultural affairs, youth, concessions and libraries and archives. You could safely say we have the Territory community covered.

To do this all from one department is the first step realising the election commitment of restoring our lifestyle. This time last year at the Estimates hearings four separate ministers dealt with the portfolio responsibilities that are a natural fit together as People, Sport and Culture. I look forward to dealing with each area under its specific output; however, in lieu of not providing an opening statement each time, I will outline some of the key initiatives under each area.

This government is committed to ensuring that veterans and their families get the support and receive the services they need. We are therefore continuing to deliver on our annual investment of \$850,000 in Operation Thrive and the Northern Territory's first Defence Veterans Strategy.

Operation Thrive supports veterans and their families with transition, employment and education, health and wellbeing and respect and recognition. Under this program, we have funded multiple initiatives, including veteran health and wellbeing grants, veteran community grants and a range of projects that support employment and mental health outcomes for veterans and their families.

I am advised on veteran-related matters by the Northern Territory Veterans' Affairs Ministerial Advisory Council.

This government is investing \$141m in Budget 2025–26 to support disability services in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government funds about one-third of the National Disability Insurance Scheme costs in the Northern Territory, a contribution of around \$125m each year, and is committed to making NDIS work well for Territorians living with disability. This includes supporting NDIS participants to access their plans and ensuring more choice of providers. Ongoing funding of \$11.5m per year has been allocated to maintain the Northern Territory's financial contribution to the NDIS, addressing the shortfall from 2024–25 onwards following the end of the Australian Government DisabilityCare Australia Fund payments.

The number of participants with an approved NDIS plan continues to grow, with an increase of 380 NDIS participants as of 31 March 2025, compared with 2023–24.

This government is continuing to deliver on the Northern Territory Disability Strategy which is guiding the Territory in its approach to the development and delivery of services, policies and programs for people with disability. The second action plan 2025–2029 under the strategy is under development and will be released later this year, signifying our government's ongoing commitment to better support and improve the lives of Territorians with disability.

We continue to work with other Northern Territory Government agencies, as well as our state and territory colleagues to respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

An additional \$120,000 in ongoing funding has been allocated to ensure face-to-face Auslan interpreting services remain available in the Northern Territory, supporting the recommendations of the disability royal commission.

We are investing in programs and services which celebrate, recognise and create opportunities for all Territorians, no matter what their lived experience is—women, men, seniors, young people, LGBTQIA+SB communities—to have a voice and actively engage in the community. Our government remains committed to creating a safe and inclusive community.

In the coming year we will be developing a Northern Territory gender equality strategy to provide an overarching, long-term intersectional approach to creating a fairer and more inclusive Northern Territory.

This government is committed to reducing gender-based violence with an investment in 2025–26 of \$250,000 and \$125,000 ongoing from 2026–27 to support prevention activities. This funding will support these activities through discrete projects and a small grants program such as Men's Places Grants.

Through community grants and sponsorships we are investing over \$700,000 in programs and activities that seek to address gender inequalities experienced by Territorians and address the systemic barriers that underpin these inequalities. These grants support events such as International Women's Day, International Men's Day, Pride and IDAHOBIT Day. The grants also support services such as the NT Working Women's Centre and activities such as the LGBTI Living Well program and, as just mentioned, Men's Places programs.

Young people play a vital role in our community, and we are investing in the energy, creativity and leadership of young Territorians. Through the NT Youth Strategy we are seeking to build safer, healthier and more connected communities for young people.

We are empowering our youth through the NT Youth Round Table and NT Youth Week, providing a platform for them to advise government on what matters to them and offer solutions to issues that impact them.

This year \$8.1m is being invested in the Regional Youth Services Program, delivering local after-hours services, safe transport and school holiday programs across six regions.

Our government is investing in the future and wellbeing of young people in Darwin. We have started community consultation on the proposed location of the youth hub at Leanyer Recreation Park to enhance accessibility for young people, strengthen community connections and offer engaging spaces. Although I am sure there will be questions coming in the first output, I can report as of today that in just under two weeks of being opened in the Have Your Say feedback online, there have been nearly 500 visits to the page and nearly 25 submissions.

Senior Territorians are some of our most valued and respected members of our community. Over the next 10 years the Territory's seniors population over the age of 65 is estimated to grow to be over 35,000. Ensuring they are safe, healthy and provided with the opportunities to increase their quality of life is essential and something that this government is focused on.

To help inform our government's response to seniors' issues I take advice from the Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians which meets regularly throughout the year. The council provides me with high-level and strategic advice on issues of importance to seniors to improve policy outcomes, providing a link between the government and the seniors community.

This government remains committed to ensuring that the voices of our senior citizens are heard, and their needs are met with compassion and dignity. In 2024–25 we funded the Council on the Ageing NT, Darwin Community Legal Service, Association of Independent Retirees Northern Territory and pensioners' workshops.

From 2025–26, \$300,000 in the older persons' abuse space will see funding for another three years to continue the successful older persons' abuse outreach model, as well as two new grants to support World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and a program to support one-off grants for services and events to help prevent and respond to older persons' abuse, especially in regional and remote areas.

In 2025–26 we will provide over \$63,000 in funding under the Seniors Month grant program to support community organisations so that they can celebrate our seniors through events and activities.

This government values the strength and positive contributions of multiculturalism to the social and economic life of the Territory. We recognise that a significant part of the Territory's success is built on the tenacity, skills

and entrepreneurship of our multicultural communities. We are committed to ensuring that everyone has a sense of belonging and feels valued and empowered to participate in community life. We will develop a new long-term strategy for multicultural Territorians that is aligned to the priorities of restoring the Territory's lifestyle and rebuilding the economy.

We are investing more than \$2.5m in 2025–26 for grants to support programs, events and activities that celebrate and support our multicultural communities and improve and upgrade multicultural facilities.

We are investing in and strengthening our regions. It is our commitment to establish a multipurpose multicultural facility in Katherine so that multicultural communities there can celebrate and share their cultural heritage with the broader community. We have committed \$1.5m to deliver this promise.

Our government is investing \$39m in arts and culture to enrich our Territory lifestyle and to support the creative and cultural lives of Territorians. We are continuing to invest \$8m through the Arts Grants Program to support our artists and art workers to create and showcase their work across all art forms and regions. We are providing long-term support and stability for 30 leading arts organisations, with \$25m invested in five-year agreements to develop our creative and cultural economy and support community participation in the arts.

This government continues to celebrate and grow the creative talent of the Northern Territory from the annual meeting of arts professionals business essentials conference to showcasing excellence at the NT Performing Arts Awards.

I look forward to launching the inaugural action plan of the NT Arts Strategy 2034 in the second half of 2025, as a road map designed to guide and energise the Northern Territory's arts and creative industries through practical actions that grow the arts, support jobs and inspire the Territory.

This government is investing in creating and maintaining quality infrastructure to support and showcase our arts and cultural practices and enhance local and visitor experiences. We have secured funding of \$2.5m a year ongoing for the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory to activate its facilities across the Territory and engage Territorians in our rich and vibrant historical, cultural and scientific collections.

We continue to fund the Araluen Arts Centre, which operates as the cultural, visual and performing arts centre in Alice Springs, hosting 13 exhibitions over the year, including the national 2024 Archibald Prize exhibition. I was thrilled to present the Young Archie awards in April 2025. The Young Archies celebrated our young Territory artists with 151 submissions to the awards, which are on display alongside some of Australia's most prestigious portrait artists.

The Department of People, Sport and Culture is partnering with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, as well as community stakeholders to maintain and deliver infrastructure upgrades that showcase our vibrant arts and culture across the regions.

In 2024–25 this government continued to support the \$30m Arts Trail Gallery Extension Program and the completion of three upgrades to community-owned arts centres in Gapuwiyak, Tennant Creek and Katherine, supporting arts and culture activity and enhancing cultural tourism in our regions.

I was proud to attend the opening of the \$7.6m upgrade of the Godinymayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Culture Centre in April 2025, as well as the official opening and naming ceremony of the Balang TE Lewis Amphitheatre.

In July 2025 we anticipate the official opening of the new Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts Centre, as well as the completion and handover to the Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation of the \$10m upgrade to the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in Tennant Creek.

Budget 2025–26 provides \$4m to complete the design and construction of upgrades to the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre in Yirrkala and the Maningrida Arts and Culture Centre and museum to support strong culture and art practices to share with visitors and the wider community.

Libraries strengthen communities and are a vital help which encourage lifelong learning, literacy and an appreciation of culture and creativity. Archives collect, preserve and make available historical material that helps us understand the past and to make decisions for today. Importantly, both provide free access to resources that everyone can enjoy.

Library & Archives NT is the premier public research library and archival organisation of the Northern Territory, dedicated to creating collections with and for communities and being a trusted steward of Territory

memory and history. In addition to providing services to the public through three facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs, Library & Archives also provides support to 31 public libraries across the Northern Territory, including remote and regional areas.

The 2025–26 budget is investing \$11.3m in Library & Archives NT, which has recently relocated its library services to Danala, the Charles Darwin University Education and Community Precinct in Darwin city. This relocation was completed in March 2025. The co-location of Library & Archives NT and Charles Darwin University creates a unique lifelong learning environment spanning early childhood to tertiary study and adult learning and enables partnership opportunities to drive the generation of new knowledge about the Territory.

The new space is home to Library & Archives NT's long-term exhibition, Meeting Ground: Territory Encounters, which showcases historical and contemporary stories of people and places that have helped shape the Northern Territory. Library & Archives NT's new home is a more modern and usable space. With increased accessibility, new programs and purpose-built facilities, including dedicated spaces for children and school activities, we are confident that visitors will enjoy all it has to offer. I encourage everyone, if you have not already, to visit the new library and experience the new services and spaces it offers.

Sport is synonymous with the Northern Territory lifestyle and has always been an integral part of Territory life. With shifting social patterns giving rise to active participation, a diverse population and unique natural environment, the Territory has a real opportunity to maximise participation. We are continuing to support the sport and active recreation sector through investment, training and development of programs and infrastructure. The partnerships created with peak sporting bodies, regional councils and community organisations help to deliver quality programs and services that aid in creating healthy, active and vibrant communities.

The 2025–26 budget will invest over \$45m in our sports to ensure all Territorians can be active members in their communities. Key initiatives include:

- investment of \$7.7m in support of our peak sporting bodies, industry support organisations and active recreation program organisations to strengthen industry, support participation and ensure vibrant community sport and active recreation can take place in a safe, inclusive manner
- implementation of a revised regional and remote funding model in partnership with local government, the sport and recreation sector and local providers to better support local initiatives for more sport and recreation activity in regional and remote communities
- continued delivery of the urban Sport Voucher Scheme to young people between the ages of five and 18 years of age enrolled in school to help reduce the cost of participating in organised sport, recreation and cultural activities
- continued delivery of the Learn to Swim voucher scheme for young people between the ages of zero and five years not enrolled in school to learn valuable water safety skills
- continued partnership with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, local government, regional councils and other key stakeholders to deliver and manage infrastructure that improves availability and accessibility for all Territorians to participate in regular lifelong sport and recreation
- establishment of a dedicated Paralympic pathways unit to further drive opportunities for all-abilities athletes' development through the Northern Territory Sports Academy
- continued support for our young athletes through the Northern Territory Sports Academy through its Open Futures Program emphasising personal growth, athletic development and pathway opportunities.

The Northern Territory Government has committed \$2m over four years to NT Cricket to support Aboriginal participation in sport programs across the Northern Territory. This investment delivers on the Northern Territory Government's election commitment to grow Aboriginal participation in sport, create local employment opportunities and enable localised program delivery across the Territory.

The Northern Territory Government continues to partner with sports to bring the best of international sport to the Territory through our commitment to the return of international cricket and the hockey Oceania Cup which will contribute to our international and trade relations whilst providing valuable economic and social return to the Territory.

This government, through strong partnerships with the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Olympic and Paralympic committees, continues to support our best athletes, coaches and officials through the valuable services of the Northern Territory Sports Academy. We were pleased with the uplift of funding received to support this program from these Commonwealth bodies.

As we are all aware, having well-maintained and accessible sporting facilities plays a major role in Territorians' lifestyle to participate in sport and attend events. This government is in the process of delivering a master plan for the Marrara Sporting Precinct, along with a commitment towards upgrading community infrastructure for the Tracy Village Sporting Precinct, Woodroffe Oval and at Centralian Middle School in Alice Springs.

Of course, I could not finish my opening statement and be talking about sport without acknowledging the fact that our national team, the Socceroos, have again qualified for the World Cup yesterday.

In closing, we have made significant investment across the sector and will continue our efforts in this space in 2025–26. I wish to acknowledge the hard work the department undertakes every day to support and invest in our people and communities. The work of my portfolios helps to build a stronger, safer and more inclusive Territory where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and succeed, helping to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore the lifestyle we all cherish.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions on the minister's opening statement?

Mr YOUNG: I refer to written question 80 of this parliament. Why did you blatantly ignore the 30-day deadline to respond to the written questions and only cough up the answers the day of your hearing, robbing the parliament of the opportunity to properly scrutinise your portfolio?

Mr CHARLS: I do not think the response went today; it went earlier this week. Did you only receive it today?

Mr YOUNG: We only received it today via email. It has gone over the time of 30 days. I am asking why you have not allowed us to properly scrutinise your portfolio, given I believe the written question was written on 8 April. That is over 60 days late—more than double the time.

Mr CHARLS: We answered a similar question earlier in the year, and this was a follow-up question. We want to make sure we provide accurate information, because of the MOG changes there was some information we were working on. We make sure that is clear and the right information is coming across to you.

Mr YOUNG: Given that it is supposed to be in that 30-day period, I question why it was dumped last minute after sitting on them for two months, considering you are talking about being an open and transparent government. Is this another tactic to avoid public accountability?

Mr CHARLS: I already answered the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I agree; the minister has already answered the question.

Mr YOUNG: I do not believe the premise of the minister's answers because what we have is Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro, Bill Yan and Gerard Maley being given written questions and all on the same day that they are in front of the hearing then putting those questions. I do not believe the answer you have given. Has the delay come from your office? Has it come from the department? Has it come from the Chief Minister's office or has it come from you personally?

Mr CHARLS: I am not sure what other information the Member for Daly receives, but the answer goes with my signature, so it comes from my office and it is my response.

Mr YOUNG: You were given the written question within the 30 days from the department, so are you suggesting that you sat on that after that time?

Mr CHARLS: I have already answered this question.

Mr YOUNG: You have not answered the question because you said you signed off on it. When did you sign off on it?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I believe that the minister has answered the question. Can we move on from this line of questioning, please.

Mr YOUNG: He has not answered the question at all. It is pretty clear going from the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and the Treasurer that they have been given written questions and then on the day of the hearing they have released it after the time period of 30 days has lapsed. Then you are coming in here saying, 'Yes, I received it'. Has it been sitting in your office for 30 days? Where did you get those instructions from? Was it from the Chief Minister, the department or yourself?

Mr CHARLS: I already gave the response and I will not make any amendments to that.

Mr YOUNG: This is about accountability. The public and we, as the opposition, deserve to hold the government to account. Your policy position throughout the last election has been about being transparent and accountable to the public. We get these questions and we write you the questions. Are you suggesting that you disregard the respect of the democratic right that people should have the right to know ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I will stop you; there were some imputations. The purpose of Estimates is to put questions around operations and financial accountability for the minister and the department. Can you please move on with your line of questioning.

Mr YOUNG: That is exactly what we have done. We have put written questions, which allow that 30-day period so that we are able to then look at the answers and scrutinise the department. The minister has instead dropped the question on the day, including with the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and the Treasurer, so it seems like there is a coordinated approach from the government to do this. We want to know ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I will interrupt you one more time. I have already asked you to move on from this line of questioning. I will put you on warning if you do not move on from this line of questioning, please.

Mr YOUNG: Showing that you do not want to be transparent and do not allow us to ask questions on behalf of the public is disappointing coming from the CLP government, considering that was your election platform. Was there anything you wanted to add?

Mr CHARLS: I have a department that broadens out to almost the whole population, so I wish you will take this opportunity to find out what are the options and the opportunities for Territorians we are investing in, rather than sticking to one thing which I have already answered and taking up the precious time of everyone.

Mr YOUNG: The precious time is for Territorians. They have a right to be able to scrutinise the government, and you have clearly come in and delayed that by dropping it on the day.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly!

Mr YOUNG: These are the facts, Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am putting you on a warning. Member for Daly, I consider your conduct to be disorderly. I have already warned you once to move on from this line of questioning. I warn that if you persist I will order you to withdraw from the hearings under paragraph 12 of the Assembly's resolution establishing this committee.

K McNAMARA: Can I ask a follow-on from that because I did not quite understand the answer. I would like to know. You said there was a delay. It was supposed to be 30 days and there was a delay in answering; we just got them today. You said that you are the final one to sign off on it. Do they come to you and then you have them for another 30 days? What was the reason for the delay?

Mr CHARLS: I am unable to talk about the internal processes within the department. I signed it two days ago at least and when I was clear with all the answers. Are you saying you received it only this morning?

K McNAMARA: Yes. I want to hear ...

Mr CHARLS: You received it this morning, or you think that you received it this morning.

K McNAMARA: Yes, this morning.

Mr CHARLS: I already answered the question. I cannot say anything further on that.

K McNAMARA: Do you think it is appropriate for us? Do you think that is a good timeframe? Do you think that is a fair enough amount of time for us to scrutinise those answers—the morning of?

Mr CHARLS: If you look under the previous questions that came to me in December and the response provided earlier, to make a comparison I do not think that there was much additional information; it was about the changes. Based on my response, I have already informed that this was sent out this—like, in the last two days.

Mr YOUNG: We got it this morning, so you just admitted that you do know.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I would like to move on from this line of questioning. I believe the minister has answered the questions.

Mr YOUNG: Moving on to the Aboriginal art gallery in Alice Springs, who did you consult with before downgrading this project?

Mr CHARLS: That is not part of the output or my portfolio responsibilities. You can ask the relevant minister.

Mr YOUNG: Who is that?

Mr CHARLS: Minister Robyn Cahill.

Mr YOUNG: What would that portfolio sit under, because you are the Minister for Arts?

Mr CHARLS: Trade and Business because it is about the planning. Once the project is completed it will come across, based on the process. That is what normally happens. At this point in time, it sits as a major project and it comes under Trade and Business.

Mr YOUNG: Does that also go for the State Square art gallery?

Mr CHARLS: Because that is in the phase of construction the project currently sits with Minister Yan. You had the opportunity already yesterday to raise any questions with him.

Mr YOUNG: Would that include the EOI process? Who would that sit with? With you? What is your responsibility for the State Square art gallery? Where does that sit within your responsibility as minister? If you could break that down so we can ask questions.

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the operational model, yes, it sits with me. The planning and operation of the facility, because the funding goes from the Department of People, Sport and Culture and the expression of interest is actually between four departments—just give me a second.

In the EOI process there will be four departments working together to work on the terms of reference. That is the Department of People, Sport and Culture; Department of Logistics and Infrastructure; Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations; and Treasury and Finance.

Mr YOUNG: Who made the decision to go to an EOI process with the art gallery? You just mentioned it sits under your department.

Mr CHARLS: Cabinet made the decision.

Mr YOUNG: How many EOIs have you received to date?

Mr CHARLS: I already answered earlier that we are in the process of developing a terms of reference to put out an EOI. Without putting out an EOI, we are unable to receive any expressions of interest.

J DAVIS: In your opening statement you said that we have the NT community covered and that you want to ensure equitable opportunities to connect and thrive for all Territorians. Given your ministerial responsibility to promote inclusion, equity and understanding across diverse communities, how do your views on Charles Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest, as expressed in the Chamber, inform your decision-making, in particular in relation to disability, multicultural affairs and racial equity?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will intervene because you are asking for an expression of opinion. I wonder if you have a question around the operations and financial state of the department.

J DAVIS: What measures are in place to ensure that in your decision-making in relation to the budget for your portfolio those views are not perpetuated as part of that decision-making?

Mr CHARLS: It is a hypothetical question, which I cannot answer.

J DAVIS: Obviously, you are in a role where you are making significant policy decisions and about the delivery of services. You have made some very clear statements about what informs that decision-making. I am asking, on behalf of the community, how can we know how those views will affect that decision-making?

Mr CHARLS: I recommend that you take this question to the next sitting of parliament, where you can ask the question, because this is a budget Estimates process, and I would prefer to stick to the outputs.

J DAVIS: This is in relation to the outputs. Your portfolios are People, Sport and Culture; Disability; Youth, Seniors and Equality; and Multicultural Affairs. For example, when you said in parliament that 'not all people can do the same things; that is not wrong; that is nature' are these the views of the direction of the portfolio? Is this consistent with the policy of the department? Isn't that statement at odds with public service principles of equity? How is that informing the decision-making of your portfolio and of you as a minister?

Mr O'GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I think we are still going to opinion.

K McNAMARA: It is entirely around what is informing the policy. I think that is just ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will get you to stay silent, Member for Nightcliff. I will seek some advice on this one.

I agree with the point of order. I think that we need to move on from this line of questioning and stick to the purpose of Estimates, which is around the operational and financial capacity of the department, please.

J DAVIS: I accept that ruling, but I think that people have a right to know what is shaping the decision-making around policy and spending for the Northern Territory, so I am very disappointed by it.

Mr YOUNG: The State Square art gallery has been built as fit for purpose to be an art gallery. How do you imagine a different operator will be able to make a purpose-built art gallery work as something else?

Mr CHARLS: As part of the terms of reference there will be information that will be factored in and put out to the proponents, and then they can make a decision on that. I cannot comment on that without seeing the terms of reference, which is currently under development.

Mr YOUNG: Have you consulted with the creative industry sector?

Mr CHARLS: As I said earlier, this was a decision of Cabinet. We want to put out an EOI to invite opportunities from all the sectors out there, to come and put their bids on what they want to do in that purpose-built facility. I cannot make a comment on that.

Mr YOUNG: You have not consulted with the creative industry sector.

Mr CHARLS: Not with this decision.

Mr YOUNG: Given this project was listed as a priority project for growing the Darwin economy by the Darwin Major Business Group, did you consult with them before making any decisions?

Mr CHARLS: When we came to government the budget for this project was around \$47m, which blew out all the way up to \$143m. That clearly shows there was no clear vision on how to build and operate a facility and there was no budget factored in for the operations as well. That is the reason we are going out for an EOI, and through that process we will be able to make our next decision.

Mr YOUNG: Just going back to it being put out to a private operator, do you agree with the Chief Minister that you will put a lock on the door of the art gallery if you cannot get a private operator?

Mr CHARLS: This is not a forum to ask my opinion. I ask you to ask questions which are related to the budget.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, as per Standing Order 109, we are not asking for expressions of opinion through this process. Move on, please.

Mr YOUNG: The Chief Minister made comment about putting a lock on the door if they cannot find a private operator.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Your question to the minister was specifically around whether he had an opinion on that, so move on, please.

Mr YOUNG: I think it is important for the public to know if the government cannot get a private operator, what would be the next steps from the minister? Would you be locking it up, like the Chief Minister suggested?

Mr CHARLS: I believe that this process is around questions about my opening remarks, but what you are referring to is completely different. I do not know how you see that ...

Mr YOUNG: Because it sits within your portfolio responsibilities; you are the Arts minister. The Chief Minister suggested that if they cannot find a private operator it will just be locked up. I am trying to get to the bottom of it.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I think we are getting ...

Mr YOUNG: If you cannot find a private operator ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, you are going into hypothetical situations again. Move on from this line of questioning, please.

Mr YOUNG: It came from the Chief Minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is a hypothetical around what might happen with the building. If you could move on, please.

Mr YOUNG: Do you not have a plan—a second plan, third plan, fourth plan?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has already identified that it does not sit in his portfolio until it actually becomes a building that sits in his portfolio, so can we please move on from the line of questioning.

Mr YOUNG: Did you consult with anyone before it went out to a private operator?

Mr CHARLS: That is a decision made by Cabinet about the expression of interest process.

Mr YOUNG: Do you agree that Territorians would rather see jails being built than galleries, which are key contributors to tourism in the Northern Territory?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Again, Member for Daly, you are asking the minister for an opinion on this matter. Please put a question that relates to the Estimates or operations of the department.

Mr YOUNG: Given you have scrapped the State Square art gallery, downgraded the Aboriginal art gallery in Alice Springs and have no plan for growing the arts sector, are you at least going to re-establish the creative industry advisory council so that you can get some decent advice on how to grow this significant economic sector? I believe you have not met with them since being in government.

Mr CHARLS: I do not agree with the first part of the question. On the second part about the creative arts, we are working through the Arts Strategy. It will be part of the strategy to develop an arts advisory council That is part of the ...

Mr YOUNG: Can you just repeat from the start, because I lost it?

Mr CHARLS: I do not agree with the first part of the question. When it comes to the specific question about the creative arts strategy advisory council, I will be looking forward to establishing an Arts Strategy advisory council.

Mr YOUNG: You will not be re-establishing a creative industry advisory council? I understand there is one established, but you have not yet met with them.

Mr CHARLS: I will pass that question on to the CEO.

Ms LIVESLEY: The Creative Industries Ministerial Advisory Council completed their tenure last year, so we have plans underway with the Northern Territory Arts Strategy to establish a new advisory council for the arts and creative industries. That will happen in the second half of this year.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a timeframe for when that would happen in the second half of the year—a month or a date?

Ms LIVESLEY: Not at this stage, no.

Mr YOUNG: Have you started that process of who would form that committee?

Ms LIVESLEY: We have started the process of how we would go out to recruit, to promote to get expressions of interest and applications for people to be on the committee.

Mr YOUNG: Is that public?

Ms LIVESLEY: Not yet. We are doing the process internally. We have not gone out to the public for expressions of interest yet.

Mr YOUNG: When would that go out?

Ms LIVESLEY: In the second half of this year. We are hoping in the third quarter.

Mr YOUNG: When it comes to community groups you are personally involved with and are a member of, how do you manage your conflicts of interest when it comes to grant decisions? Are you signing off on those grants? If not, who is?

Mr CHARLS: I am a member of the Darwin Malayalee Association; I used to be the previous president. Whenever there was any information regarding that, I always forwarded it on to the Chief Minister. If my memory is right, she signed the last two letters for them.

K McNAMARA: Recently there has been a large community outcry about the death of Kumanjayi White, a man with disabilities who was allegedly killed in police custody. The family and others in the community have been vocal in their questions and concerns about the level and appropriateness of his care. He was in residential care and on NDIS. As the Minister for Disability, why have you not made any statements on this high-profile death of a person with disabilities in police custody?

Mr CHARLS: That was a very unfortunate incident that happened in the community. When it comes to the investigation process and other things—and the information I have available was only through the media. That is the reason I did not want to make any statement based on what I am receiving, and I have not received a formal brief from any of the NDIS providers, for example, that were caring for him. No-one has informed me that this is what actually occurred. There were no circumstances—without knowing any of those, there was a limitation on me to make any statement.

K McNAMARA: Instead of just waiting for them to brief you, have you reached out to any of the organisations that were taking care of him? Will you look at doing some kind of investigation into the care or the sector?

Mr CHARLS: How is this question related to my opening statement? That is what I am asking.

K McNAMARA: I am just asking. All the other ministers so far, their opening statements have been broad to their ministry, and we ask questions on things relating to their portfolios. You, as the Minister for Disability—this is a very high-profile thing that the community is very interested in, so I am interested and people have questions about the lack of statement from you. There are questions on that ...

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Sorry, Chair. Are we discussing something ...

K McNAMARA: I am finishing what I am saying. As a person with disabilities died in the community, there is a lot of questions; that is why I am asking you.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! We cannot talk about criminal investigations.

K McNAMARA: I am not asking about the investigation into what actually happened; I am asking, as a man with disabilities died recently in the community. Will you be making any investigations or asking for briefings from the sector on this case?

Mr CHARLS: The investigation is underway. This is an NDIS service we do not fund or oversee. Also, if you listened to my opening statement, I said that we provide one-third of the contribution to the NDIS to fund the service, so there is no direct responsibility as the Minister for Disability to any organisation operating in the Territory. If you look into it further, you will be able to understand.

K McNAMARA: You still are responsible for people with disabilities, right? That is your ministry. Just because you do not directly fund NDIS, are you saying you are not responsible for people with disabilities and their issues generally?

Mr CHARLS: I do not want the Member for Nightcliff to represent me and make any comment to try to put any leading sentences because I do not feel that is appropriate, especially when there is an issue in the community and an investigation underway. I made my stance clear. I will be responsible for disability services and the governance when it comes to the policy direction. I will be working, along with my federal and other state and territory ministers, along with the NDIS and the disability policy directions, but when it comes to the other matters, I will not make any further comment.

K McNAMARA: Will you, as the Minister for Disability, be making any public statements about this high-profile death of a man with disabilities who died in police custody?

Mr CHARLS: If there is a point when I receive all the information, at that point I will make that decision. I cannot answer the question now.

K McNAMARA: You are not actively seeking any information. Is that what you said, just to clarify?

Mr CHARLS: Again, I said that there is an investigation underway. I do not think that it is appropriate for a minister to reach in to try to find information when there is an investigation going.

K McNAMARA: Okay.

Mr YOUNG: In your portfolio responsibility of People, particularly social inclusion, what proportion of funding has been allocated to multicultural affairs, seniors, youth, veteran affairs, gender equity and diversity? For all those, can I be provided a breakdown?

Mr CHARLS: Madam Deputy Chair, just to clarify, are we moving on to Output 1.1, or are we still under the opening statement?

Mr YOUNG: We can still ask these questions within the opening statement. You touched on every part of your portfolio responsibilities.

Mr CHARLS: I am happy to provide the answer; I do not have an issue with that.

By program, through the Office of Veterans Engagement and Support it is \$1.149m; Office of Senior Territorians is \$886,000; Office of Multicultural Affairs is \$3.2m; Office of Youth Affairs is \$1.2m; Regional Services is \$9.3m; and Office of Gender Equity and Diversity is \$1.5m. In total that is \$17.4m.

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide a breakdown of FTE staffing by level in this output?

Mr CHARLS: I will take that question on notice because we only have the agency level, not a breakdown of each of those areas.

Question on Notice No 4.1

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

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide a breakdown of FTE staffing by level in this output?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.1.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PEOPLE
Output 1.1 – Social Inclusion

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0, People, Output 1.1, Social Inclusion. Are there any questions?

Mr BROWN: I have questions relating to Veterans Affairs. How many current and former serving veterans are currently living in the Territory?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to currently serving around 5,000 veterans, and ex-serving is around 5,000.

Mr BROWN: How many times has your office met with ex-service organisations to identify their priorities and programs ahead of the budget being developed? You have that \$1.1m bucket. Have you met and discussed that?

Mr CHARLS: I have a ministerial advisory committee. I am trying to understand the question. You are asking about how many organisations we have met. I do not have the numbers for me or the department meeting, but the department ...

Mr BROWN: Do you want to take it on notice?

Mr CHARLS: The advice is that is part of the day-to-day business of the staff member of the department.

Mr BROWN: You meet with them daily; is that what you are saying?

Mr YOUNG: It is not the department. The question is about your office.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, would you like to take the question on notice?

Mr YOUNG: You should have a record of it. I assume you would have a calendar invite and a diary.

Mr CHARLS: I am happy to take the question on notice, because I am sure that we met with the organisations, but I do not have the numbers with me.

Question on Notice No 4.2

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

Mr BROWN: How many times has your office met with ex-service organisations to identify their priorities and programs ahead of the budget being developed?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.2.

Mr BROWN: Can you explain why you think it is appropriate for the Minister for Veterans to be quoting Nazi rhetoric? You did that at the last sittings.

Mr CHARLS: That is not part of this output.

Mr BROWN: You are the minister. I am just trying to get your rationale around that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I do not think it is an appropriate question to be asking during Estimates hearings. You are asking for an expression of opinion about something that was said previously. I think we should move on.

Mr BROWN: We are just quoting what he said.

Mr YOUNG: It was not appropriate, what the minister said, so we are just trying to get ...

Mr CHARLS: This is all incorrect information. That has been searched. Whatever I searched is said in the parliament. There is a *Hansard* and people can go and look. I think if you want to quote from the *Hansard*, yes, it is appropriate but what you quoted is your version, which is incorrect.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There is an inference—I have read the *Hansard* and the way that it is stated in the *Hansard* is not being correctly referred to.

Mr BROWN: Do you disagree that it was a Nazi ...

Mr O’GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! Can we stick to the outputs, please?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You are looking for an expression of opinion through this. I would like to move on from this line of questioning, please.

Mr BROWN: We are looking for rationale. We are disgusted by it. We just want a rationale.

Mr CHARLS: The rationale was during the last sittings of the parliament, there were three times that members of the opposition made reference to the Casuarina youth hub, completely telling lies. What I meant was telling lies again and again will not make a lie true. That is all I searched. Again, coming into this forum and trying to take that sentence and twisting it again is again like telling another lie. That is all I can comment.

K McNAMARA: I have a follow-up question ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I would like to move on from this line of questioning. If this continues I will put you on a warning. Please move on.

K McNAMARA: I have a follow-up question from that, though. It is not a misquote. Who you quoted was a Nazi, so there are general questions about whether it is appropriate for the person responsible for social inclusion and veterans to be quoting a Nazi on the floor of parliament?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, I would like to move on from this line of questioning ...

K McNAMARA: I know you would like to move on because ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is not appropriate; you are asking for opinion and expression ...

K McNAMARA: You are trying to protect him. He is not a baby; he is a minister. He can answer the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff!

Mr O’GALLAGHER: The Chair is speaking, please, Member for Nightcliff.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will move on from this line of questioning or you will be put on a warning.

J DAVIS: Chair ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Johnston, just a warning if you continue with this line of questioning you will also be put on a warning.

J DAVIS: I am willing to take that risk, Chair. Estimates is one of the few forums where ministers are directly held to account. It is our opportunity to test how public money is spent, what values underpin government decisions, whether policies are delivering for the people who it is here to serve. Preventing scrutiny of the minister's public views—the minister who is making these decisions—particularly when those views may directly influence policy direction, in my view, fundamentally undermines the very purpose of Estimates.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is your opinion for this. We need to move on from this line of questioning because we are putting references that are ...

J DAVIS: I have questions, but I have been told I cannot ask them. I would be happy to ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You can ask questions about the operations and financial state of the Department of People, Sport and Culture. If you would like to continue on that line of referencing, we are currently on Output Group 1.0, People.

Mr BROWN: Was there any increase in demand for veteran services in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: The department created a new KPI—that is a new function to the department. In this reporting period I will not be able to make a comment on that, but when it comes to the next reporting period I will be able to make some comparison between this period and the next one and will be able to answer.

Mr BROWN: What is the timeframe with every reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: It is annually.

Mr BROWN: Budget 2024 provided \$2.6m over three years for initiatives under the NT Defence Veterans Strategy launched in 2023, with an allocation of \$850,000 to Operation Thrive in 2024–25, BP3. How much of that was expended in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: It is \$201,000.

Mr BROWN: What transition, employment and education opportunities for veterans were funded in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the reporting period there is nothing to report. After that, we are just waiting for the agreement from the provider. I can list those providers: RSL Australia, \$69,438; and Human Quotient Group, \$104,500. For both of those groups we are awaiting agreement from the provider to release the funding.

Mr BROWN: What health and wellbeing services were funded in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: The organisations funded were Reeling Veterans, \$10,000 for the Shady wellness program; North West Mobile Force NORFORCE health and wellbeing initiative, reforming the NORFORCE Aussie Rules team; Veterans Motorcycle Club Northern Territory Chapter or VMCNT (inaudible) 2025; Young Diggers Ltd, \$10,000; Veterans Australia NT expansion of current community building and social connections program, \$2,500; and Happy Paws Happy Hearts Ltd for veterans building social connections and wellbeing through training rescue dogs initiative, \$10,000.

Mr BROWN: What regional and remote services are being made available for veterans outside of the major centres?

Mr CHARLS: The grant programs are available Territory-wide for anyone within the Territory to apply.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Picking up on the discussion on veterans, I note there is funding allocated in the budget for the Scott Palmer veterans centre. This is federal funding; is that correct? What is the status of that project?

Mr CHARLS: As part of the October Budget 2022–23 the Australian Government announced funding of \$3.6m over two years to support the planning, design and construction of the Scott Palmer centre in Darwin. The initiative was to include accommodation facilities with an office space for veterans experiencing or who are at risk of experiencing homelessness in the Darwin region for up to six members of the community who are veterans.

At the moment, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Salvation Army are in discussion with the department of Lands and Planning and the Department of People, Sport and Culture to identify appropriate land, then submit an application for the land and go from there. At this point the discussion is happening between DVA, Salvation Army, department of Lands and Planning, and DPSC.

Mr BROWN: How many times did the NT Veterans' Affairs Ministerial Advisory Council meet in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: I met the advisory council twice, but I am not sure if the second meeting was after 31 March or not.

Mr BROWN: What programs are being offered to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans?

Mr CHARLS: The programs are open for all members of the community.

Mr BROWN: Is there anything specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veterans?

Mr CHARLS: One of the programs on offer is the NORFORCE health and wellbeing initiative, reforming the NORFORCE Aussie Rules team. That is \$10,000. With all the programs, there may be most likely Indigenous or Aboriginal people participating in that who are veterans.

Mr BROWN: What programs are being offered to support female veterans?

Mr CHARLS: There is one program through the organisation Human Quotient Group. That is the Cowork Coplay program, facilitating community building and peer learning with childminding available for spouses of current and ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force in Darwin and Katherine.

Mr YOUNG: In regard to regional and remote services that are available for veterans outside of major urban centres, you mentioned there is a grant process in place that everyone across the Territory can apply for. Do you have a list of who has been successful in those grant applications? If you do not have it now, I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr CHARLS: I think I read it out once. I am happy to read it out again:

- Reeling Veterans, \$10,000
- North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE), \$10,000
- Veterans Motorcycle Club NT Chapter, \$10,000
- Young Diggers Ltd, \$10,000
- Veterans Australia NT, \$2,500
- Happy Paws Happy Hearts Ltd, \$10,000
- Road Transport Hall of Fame in Alice Springs, \$5,000
- Women's Museum of Australia in Alice Springs, \$10,000
- Network Tindal in Katherine, \$10,000
- Soldier on Program, during this reporting period is \$90,000, and the amount approved is \$100,000
- GROW, the amount approved is \$100,000, but not paid during the period specified
- RSL Australia Queensland branch, \$69,538, and we are waiting for an agreement from the provider
- Human Quotient Group, as I mentioned before, \$104,500, and we are waiting for an agreement from the provider, so it has not been paid during the specified period
- Veterans Medical Group, \$55,700, not specified in that period; we are awaiting an agreement from the provider

- RSL Darwin, \$20,000
- RSL Alice Springs, \$10,000.

J DAVIS: Can you advise under KPIs how you are measuring that you are achieving greater levels of social inclusion and multiculturalism? To give some context for the question, the KPIs that you have are about how many events are held. I am interested in how you measure tangible outcomes in terms of the intent of your portfolio.

Mr CHARLS: Are you asking about the multicultural or all of the social inclusion?

J DAVIS: I am asking about all of the social inclusion.

Ms LIVESLEY: Our reported performance data, as you have noted, is focused on activity and the number of grants and events that we fund and deliver. In terms of reporting on broader social outcomes, all the offices in the social inclusion area have whole-of-government strategies and action plans which we monitor and report against each year—across other government agencies and ourselves—to achieve those actions and outcomes for the population groups we represent.

J DAVIS: Could you give an example of what those outcomes in those action plans might be?

Ms LIVESLEY: For example, the Northern Territory Disability Strategy has a three-year action plan under that. We are about to complete the first three-year action plan and develop a new one. There is a range of actions across all of government from agencies and our own department, as well as some local government and community groups. We routinely meet with those key agencies and report progress against those.

J DAVIS: Do you have any mechanisms for measuring impact in terms of social inclusion in the community in general? As people may know, I often ask questions on behalf of the Member for Mulka, who has noted in parliament many times that he feels like racism in the Northern Territory is increasing and has noted the impact of that. I am wondering whether you have any way of measuring the impact of the work this department is doing in relation to that.

Ms LIVESLEY: Not at this stage, but it is something that we are looking to do more broadly around wellbeing and how we measure that social impact.

J DAVIS: Is that something we would be able to be updated on? When might we expect to see something tangible in relation to that?

Ms LIVESLEY: It is a broader piece of work that we would need to be doing with other agencies, so I cannot give a timeframe at this stage.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: The diversity and vibrancy of our multicultural community is one of the strengths of our Territory. I know there were questions around multicultural funding in parliament. Can you please expand a bit on that multicultural budget and also give us a sense of the grants that are open to our multicultural community?

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I want some clarity. At the start you said that opposition members and the crossbench had questions, but then people could come off the back of those questions. We were just talking about Veterans and then the government member has come in and asked a completely different question around Multicultural Affairs. That goes against the ruling that you stated at the start, because it is not a question off the back of Veterans. I want a ruling on that, because that is what was stated.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We moved on. There were some questions on different areas of the portfolios.

Mr YOUNG: It did not follow on from Veterans.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Neither did the question from the Member for Johnston. We have moved on from that area. I will allow the question.

Mr CHARLS: For this financial year the Multicultural Affairs grants program is around \$2.55m, which is an increase of \$115,000 from last financial year. The breakdown of that number is: Multicultural Grants Program, \$1.73m; the Multicultural Community Facilities Grant, programs for community facilities development,

\$750,000; the Harmony Grants program, \$57,000; and Charles See Kee Scholarship, \$15,000. That all adds up to \$2.55m.

The Department of People, Sport and Culture delivers the grant programs aimed at assisting multicultural communities and celebrating the Northern Territory's cultural and linguistic diversity. Do I need to go through all the grants listed? It is a very long list.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, would you like to table the list?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, I am happy to table the list.

J DAVIS: How many multicultural events has the government hosted and paid for since coming into government? What has been the total expenditure of that, and how many people have been invited?

Mr CHARLS: Can you please clarify that these are events hosted at Parliament House or the grants program for the community that is funded out in the community?

J DAVIS: Events hosted at Parliament House.

Mr CHARLS: They are Protocol events, which come under the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The question needs to be asked of them. I think there was an opportunity two days ago, but you can write that question to the Chief Minister's office.

J DAVIS: In terms of budget, or overall?

Mr CHARLS: Budget and overall—they are Protocol events, and Protocol sits under the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

J DAVIS: Can you answer about events organised not at Parliament House in that case?

Mr CHARLS: That is the grant programs, the ones that the Northern Territory Government supports.

J DAVIS: Events that your portfolio has organised with multicultural communities.

Mr CHARLS: Any multicultural community or incorporated association can apply to the Multicultural Grants Program, and that is the list that I have just tabled.

Mr YOUNG: Your own department says that the multicultural advisory council is mandated to meet at least twice a year, but since your government came to power, nearly a year ago, the council has not met once in the reporting period. Why not, and do you simply not value their input?

Mr CHARLS: That was one of the advisory councils where all the members of the council had the same expiry date, which was done by the previous government. When I came on board and tried to organise a meeting it was a time when the date was due to expire.

Also, I announced that there would be a multicultural policy review, so an expression of interest was sent out calling for applications for the new advisory council. That concluded a few weeks ago and that is in the process of finalising the members. Once that has been finalised, there will be an advisory council.

Mr YOUNG: The expression of interest has gone out for the advisory group. Will that be volunteer-based or paid positions? Do people get sitting fees?

Mr CHARLS: There is no change from the previous government's strategy, and this is volunteer based.

Mr YOUNG: Given the council has existed to help address critical issues like employment, safety and participation, what message does the minister think he is sending to multicultural Territorians by not meeting with them? It has been nearly a year.

Mr CHARLS: The message I am trying to send to the communities is that the previous government put the same last date for all the membership to expire—on the same day—and that put me in a difficult position to work with. When it comes to the EOI process and the multicultural policy, it was due to be reviewed as per the previous government's plan, which did not happen at that point either. Because of those two reasons,

I had to go for an EOI process and, as I mentioned earlier, that will hopefully be completed in the next few weeks, and I will have my first meeting with them.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know when that first meeting will be?

Mr CHARLS: It is in the process of identifying candidates to be the members of the advisory council. Once they have been finalised, we will schedule a meeting and put out—normally the process is that we ask the members the best time for the meeting. It is up to the committee to come up with a few options once it is established.

Mr YOUNG: Did you want to add anything else?

In parliament last November you said that you would announce the multicultural policy in early 2025. It is now mid-2025; where is this currently at? Why have you failed to release an updated multicultural policy?

Mr CHARLS: It is currently under consultation. Once the consultation phase is complete, there will be an update to the community.

Mr YOUNG: You stated that it would be completed by mid-2025, so what has been the hold-up?

Mr CHARLS: The membership of the advisory council all expired on the same day, so there was a delay in the process and I had to appoint all the members to the advisory council. That is one of the reasons for the delay.

Mr YOUNG: The 2020–25 Multicultural Policy for the Northern Territory is due to finish at the end of the year. How many FTEs are currently attributed to the development of the future multicultural policy?

Mr CHARLS: Within the Office of Multicultural Affairs it would be two FTEs working on that, but it will not be their sole responsibility. They will be working with other responsibilities as well. I believe I have already taken a question on notice about the split of the FTE for each of the offices, so you will be able to get the numbers. Out of those numbers, two FTEs will be looking after the multicultural policy.

Mr YOUNG: The government committed to a \$5m multicultural centre in Alice Springs. Can you provide a progress update on this commitment and what funding has been allocated in this budget?

Mr CHARLS: That project is currently sitting with the DLI (Department of Logistics and Infrastructure) with Minister Yan. He was here yesterday to raise that question.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have no oversight of that project as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the engagement, yes, I have input. I have met with the peak body for the multicultural associations in Alice Springs twice since I have been elected. Yes, when it comes to policy direction and consultation, but when it comes to the actual facility infrastructure, it sits within the infrastructure department.

Mr YOUNG: You have met with groups in Alice Springs to consult with them on the progress, so you know where it is at.

Mr CHARLS: I did not say that I met ...

Mr YOUNG: You are able to give an update on that, but you are deciding not to. You are deflecting.

Mr CHARLS: I did not say that.

Mr YOUNG: You did. You just said you met with the group.

Mr CHARLS: I will say it again. I met with MCSA, which is the peak body for multicultural communities in Alice Springs, twice since I have been elected to this role. This was part of the discussion, but not the design or anything. It was around what they wanted. What I did was I facilitated a meeting with Minister Burgoyne, as the minister for Lands and Planning, and with Minister Yan, as the minister for the DLI. At the moment, the project sits with the DLI, so the consultation process goes directly to the DLI through the process.

Mr YOUNG: You just admitted that you had both responsible ministers at that meeting, so you are able to give an update on the progress of the multicultural centre in Alice Springs, but you are denying that opportunity. You have some sort of responsibility over this, being the Multicultural Affairs minister, so why can you not just provide an update?

Mr CHARLS: Again, I already said it was only the consultation about what they wanted; it was not about where the process was at. It was in the earlier phase that I met with Minister Burgoyne and Minister Yan. The next meeting I had with the members it was just me on my visit to Alice Springs last time.

Mr YOUNG: What was discussed at that meeting with Minister Yan and Minister Burgoyne?

Mr CHARLS: They discussed the preferred location and what they want to see as a community. That was before the project was commencing. You are asking about details of information that I do not know. It is better that you refer to the minister responsible ...

Mr YOUNG: You just admitted you knew.

Mr CHARLS: What have I admitted?

Mr YOUNG: You had the ministers in the room.

Mr CHARLS: Yes, a few months ago.

Mr YOUNG: Now you are trying to deflect.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, the minister has responded by saying that he was talking about what the community wanted and what the needs of the multicultural centre would be. They were not talking about the status of the project. Can you please move on from this question.

Mr YOUNG: I have another question that is relevant to this and is a little different, Chair. Because he stated that the members talked about the location and considering that the question is about a progress update, has there been any decision about the location for where this multicultural centre will be? Was a number of locations put forward?

Mr CHARLS: If your real intention is to get the right information, I already informed you that it sits with the DLI. If you write to the department there will not be any hesitation from that particular department that is overseeing the current process to give an update through Minister Yan's office.

Mr YOUNG: You were sitting in that meeting. You admitted before that you were talking about the location of the site, over which you have oversight as the Multiculture Affairs minister. Why can you not just provide that information?

Mr CHARLS: I already informed you that was in the early stages of the meeting where there were no decisions made. Again, if your intention is to get the right information out to the public through this process, it was with Minister Yan. You missed that and you are trying to imply now that I am not the one providing the information. If your intention is clear and you want to get that update, please write to Minister Yan. He will be more than happy to provide that update because Minister Yan and Minister Burgoyne are passionate for Alice Springs.

Mr YOUNG: It is a shame you are not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I have already given you a warning and you are now insulting people. This is your last opportunity to behave in an appropriate manner in this forum.

Mr YOUNG: In the reporting period, have the Multicultural Council or groups agreed with the government's announced decision to repeal vilification protections, which would leave Territorians unprotected from public hate speech—such as what we have seen in previous sittings—actions that incite hatred, ridicule or serious offence against protected attributes such as race and religion?

Mr CHARLS: That sits with the Attorney-General, so you can raise this question next week when she is here on Monday.

Mr YOUNG: It would sit with you because you would be meeting with the Multicultural Council and groups. The question is about whether they have raised that with you regarding the repeal of vilification protections. There is an element of that where it sits with you as a responsible minister.

Mr CHARLS: I am not sure what you are trying to achieve here. On the previous question, it was clear that you said that to me, and I agreed that there was no meeting with the Multicultural ...

Mr YOUNG: Sorry, I did not mention you; I am talking about the repeal of the vilification protections.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, give the minister the opportunity to respond to the question.

Mr CHARLS: It was clear that I did not meet with the Multicultural Council, and I gave the reasons.

Your next question, and what you are trying to imply, was about whether I discussed this particular thing. Again, it does not sit with me, but the Attorney-General will be able to provide information about the consultation, next week, because that sits with her.

Mr YOUNG: Chair, I want to clarify that I made no reference to what he has just mentioned.

I am talking about the repeal of the vilification protections and whether the Multicultural Council or groups raised those concerns with you around the repeal of the vilification protections. I think you are getting confused between the two. There is a policy decision with the ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has already provided advice around the fact that the Multicultural Council has not met yet so that component of your question is not valid.

Mr YOUNG: You have not met with them.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The rest of the component of your question sits with the Attorney-General, which is what the minister is advising. The consultation process around that sits with the Attorney-General. That is what the minister is saying.

K McNAMARA: I would like a clarifying question on this. Not the Multicultural Council, but have other multicultural groups—of which there are many—spoken to you about the repeal of the vilification Act?

Mr CHARLS: There were two that I can recall. A letter came to my office, which was forwarded to the Attorney-General's office because when it comes to consultation on the legislation changes, it sits with the Attorney-General.

K McNAMARA: I understand that the consultation happens with the Attorney-General. As the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and this is a genuine question, is it not part of your portfolio, if people in the multicultural community have those concerns, to discuss them with you?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, I am open for discussion. I think I had a conversation around that as well, but that is the input I will take to Cabinet, because I have the privilege to represent my community in Cabinet and share their views there. It is about the announcement that government made, but we are waiting on the legislation to be introduced in parliament. Once it has been introduced, we will be able to discuss and have further consultation with people, not just based on the heading of the announcement, based on the details and sections.

K McNAMARA: I understand that. To clarify, you received two letters from community groups, or cultural groups, and you forwarded them to the Attorney-General regarding the vilification.

Mr CHARLS: One was open to all, out on social media, which goes to everyone and I was one of the audience members. I saw it and took it as addressing me. I can recall one letter, if I am right.

Mr YOUNG: Do you feel comfortable with the decision to repeal the vilification protections, considering you are the Minister for Multicultural Affairs?

Mr O'GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! Seeking an opinion, again.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, it clearly states in Standing Order 109 that questions should not be asked of ministers for an expression of an opinion.

Mr CHARLS: Similar to the privilege of the Member for Daly and as the Member for Sanderson, when that legislation is going to be introduced I will be taking part and I will be expressing my opinion at that point, when I have the opportunity.

Mr YOUNG: We have seen a 7.4% rise in offences against the person, under your government. What discussions have you had with multicultural communities surrounding public safety issues, in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: As part of my role I am out there almost every single day engaging and discussing things with the people. Safety is one of the things that Territorians raised with me, along with two other members as well. That is part of an ongoing discussion that we will continue to have with the community.

K McNAMARA: There has been a fair outcry from some multicultural groups, particularly the Jewish community, and others about you quoting a Nazi on the floor of parliament ...

Mr O’GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff ...

K McNAMARA: It is a simple question. Have you apologised to the multicultural ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, you are officially on a warning. I have made this comment a couple of times. Member for Nightcliff, I consider your conduct to be disorderly and warn you that if you persist I will order you to withdraw from the hearings under paragraph 12 of the Assembly’s resolution establishing this committee.

K McNAMARA: So, I cannot get an answer to the apology—has he apologised?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, warning one.

Mr YOUNG: Madam Deputy Chair, can I just get some clarity because there was an incident last year in Estimates when the CLP opposition at the time were asking similar questions in relation to this, and it was allowed.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I was not here last year. This is not about last year. This is my decision as Chair.

Mr YOUNG: But it still sits within the standing orders.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I have just read from the standing orders. If you would like to continue, you will be exited from the room.

Mr YOUNG: I am just getting clarification.

Mrs CARLSON: As the Member for Wanguri, I am very keen on your announcement about the youth hub. The new proposed youth hub sits within my electorate of Wanguri. How will the community be consulted on the new location?

Mr CHARLS: This is an opportunity; we are currently out and open for consultation. During my opening statement I mentioned there were almost 500 page visits and nearly 25 submissions already. When the previous government announced the hub in Casuarina there was no opportunity for anyone to provide feedback around the location, whereas now this government is open to the public because we need to hear from the people about the location as well.

We proposed the Leanyer recreation centre as that is a place that has already been activated and a lot of young people are using that facility. This is going to help more families and young people when it comes to accessing this facility.

The location is definitely out for consultation, along with what they want to see in the facility.

Mr BROWN: What is the total appropriation for Youth in 2025–26 and how does this compare to 2024–25?

Mr CHARLS: In 2024–25 there was a \$10.479m allocation. In this budget there is \$10.637m, which is \$158,000 additional compared to the last budget.

Mr BROWN: The Member for Braitling as shadow minister for Youth stated in a media release last May that audits of organisations receiving taxpayer funds would occur to ensure taxpayer money is being spent appropriately and delivering outcomes for the community. Have you undertaken this audit? If not, why did the Member for Braitling say it?

Ms McMILLAN: There is a broader approach to managing contracts across the grant portfolios in the whole of government, and I believe Chief Minister and Cabinet are leading some of this work.

Mr BROWN: What portion of the funding is allocated to regional and remote programs? Did that share of funding increase or decrease in Budget 2025–26? Can you provide a breakdown by region?

Mr CHARLS: The allocation of the budget for the Katherine region is \$669,000; Alice Springs is \$2.847m; East Arnhem is \$618,000; Tennant Creek region is \$696,000; Darwin region is \$2.464m; and the Palmerston region is \$2.064m. In total, this is \$9.358m.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will take a five-minute comfort break.

The committee suspended.

Mr BROWN: Is the department still committed to delivering on the NT Youth Strategy Action Plan? Can you provide an update on what funding has been allocated to this?

Mr CHARLS: The Northern Territory Youth Strategy provides a whole-of-government framework to guide services, policies and investments that seek to improve outcomes and opportunities for young people aged 12 to 25, with a strong focus on prevention and early intervention. Developed in consultation with young people and the youth sector, the strategy is implemented through three-year action plans, with the first, the 2024–2027 action plan, comprising 235 actions across seven domains. Annual progress reports will track implementation and outcomes, and will be published on the Department of People, Sport and Culture website to ensure transparency and accountability. The department is currently preparing the first progress report, which is expected to be finalised by Q3 in 2025.

Mr BROWN: The second part was the funding allocation.

Mr CHARLS: I will pass to Siobhan to talk about further details.

Ms OKELY: The NT Youth Strategy is a whole-of-government strategy that does not have specific funding attached to it. It is more around—there is funding through the Office of Youth Affairs program and other programs across government—existing funding. The strategy is around how that funding is channelled and invested into ensuring positive outcomes for young people.

Mr YOUNG: You said existing funding, so has there not been any extra funding allocated to any of these programs that sit within the Youth Strategy or action plan.

Ms OKELY: No, there has not been additional funding for the Youth Strategy per se. It is more around how, as I said before, we invest the funding that we have.

Mr BROWN: Can you update us on the progress of each regional action plan in the reporting period, what actions were complete, and funding allocated?

Mr CHARLS: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.3

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

Mr BROWN: Can you update us on the progress of each regional action plan in the reporting period, what actions were complete, and funding allocated?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.3.

Mr BROWN: Have any youth drop-in centres or programs been expanded, reduced or established in the reporting period? Can you provide a breakdown by region?

Mr CHARLS: We maintained the funding envelope for the providers during the reporting period, and we have some further allocation for the SHAK program which is not during this reporting period.

Mr YOUNG: Sorry; can you repeat that?

Mr CHARLS: There is the funding envelope that continues as the same compared to the last financial year for the programs in the reporting period, but when it comes to the SHAK program there is some additional funding allocated, but that is not within the reporting period.

Mr YOUNG: Was it your decision to move the northern suburbs youth hub? If not, whose was it?

Mr CHARLS: That was a government decision to move the youth hub from Casuarina.

Mr YOUNG: So, the government made an executive decision without any consultation.

Mr CHARLS: The Northern Territory CLP government listened to the community and the people living in Casuarina, and listened to the concerns they raised around the proposed youth hub, and that led to the decision-making on moving the proposed location to a new proposed site in Leanyer, with consultation open from 2 June to 30 June.

Mr YOUNG: Was that consultation done through Have Your Say, via the website or with youth organisations? What was the detail of that consultation period?

Mr CHARLS: Are you referring to the previous location or the current proposed location?

Mr YOUNG: I am talking about the decision to move the youth hub and what consultation was done. What informed you to move the youth hub?

Mr CHARLS: The residents of Casuarina or residents living around Casuarina provided that feedback to the Member for Casuarina during the election campaign and after he became the member as well. That led to the government to come up with the proposed location at Leanyer.

Mr YOUNG: You just stated in your answer that it came from the Member for Casuarina—sorry, the Member for Wanguri. There was no proper consultation done with the community. It sounds like there was just advice given from the Member for Wanguri; is that correct? Is that the reason why ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I will correct. The minister advised that it was the Member for Casuarina who provided the information. This is the Member for Wanguri. That was the correction when you pointed to the Member for Casuarina. This is the Member for Wanguri. It was the Member for Casuarina, not the Member for Wanguri.

Mr YOUNG: Okay. The Member for Casuarina advised you to move the youth hub, so the government made that executive decision. Was there no proper process in terms of a consultation period to make a decision to move the youth hub—you just got advice from one member?

Mr CHARLS: I already answered the question.

Mr YOUNG: I am trying to understand the process of that consultation to make this decision to move the youth hub. It sounds like there was no proper process. Did you take advice from other northern suburbs members like the Members for Johnston and Nightcliff? I am not sure. It sounds like you took advice from one member and then decided to move the youth hub.

Mr CHARLS: I have gone through the previous consultation process and the document that was released as well. In that document it was clear that people were concerned. It was in the previous government's remit and the previous government did not listen to the community because the scope was so restrictive that people were not able to provide a proposed location. That is why this government has listened to the community and made the decision to identify the Leanyer recreation centre as the new site and location, with an ability for members of the community to provide that consultation.

Mr YOUNG: How many people consulted with the Member for Casuarina? How did you collect this information? Was there any data on this? Do you have any data to provide what the Member for Casuarina has told you about people having these concerns? It seems like ...

Mr CHARLS: I already answered the question twice.

Mr YOUNG: I will ask a direct question. How many people were consulted and how was this information collected? That is pretty direct.

Mr CHARLS: I recommend you refer to the document that you, as the government before, published. As the Member for Daly, you were part of the government before. Most likely, the numbers will be there. I am not sure of the numbers.

Mr YOUNG: I am talking about specifically the decision to move the youth centre. What data was collected and what information was provided to make an informed decision to move the youth centre?

Mr CHARLS: Chair, I already provided a response to that question multiple times in multiple forms.

Mr YOUNG: Was there a survey done or was it just through doorknocking? How was it your ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I believe the minister has already responded to your question. You keep grabbing for additional information, but he has already responded.

Mr YOUNG: Is that not our role, to ask for additional information? I am asking for additional information, but I am not getting any answer.

He has made it clear that one member, the Member for Casuarina, has advised him that he wants the youth centre moved. There has actually been no process. I am trying to clarify how that decision was made. It is in the public interest that there is a fair and proper process. The government talks about being open, transparent and accountable to the people, yet we do not have a proper process. What was the process? What data do you have to back up to make an informed decision to move the youth centre? Was it through doorknocking or surveys? Usually there would be a process to go through; you put it on your website and Have Your Say and are guided through that. It sounds like—you have stated—that there has not been any process.

I am trying to clarify, because the role of the committee is to find out why.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you have any additional information to provide?

Mr CHARLS: For clarification, one more time I will respond to that. The previous government did not give an opportunity for any members or the people living in the northern suburbs to provide consultation to have that facility in Casuarina ...

Mr YOUNG: That is not true; there was a Have Your Say process.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I would like you to allow the minister to respond.

Mr YOUNG: You cannot mislead. That is not true.

Mr CHARLS: I kindly request the Member for Daly to reveal the decision the previous government with no ability for individuals to provide feedback on the location—it was only about the design of the project—and there were no options, so the previous government decided to make the location in Casuarina.

The new government listened to the community, and we put a proposal—I have not said anywhere that it is going to be the site. This is a proposed site and it is out for consultation. People are currently providing that feedback as we speak.

Mr YOUNG: You talked about the previous government, but there was a stakeholder engagement report which guided the youth centre. Now you have come back and said that the Member for Casuarina has asked you to move the youth hub centre, which you clearly stated in your answer. There has not been any proper process or consultation with the community that we can gather, so I am just trying to figure out who you have consulted with. Have you consulted with any stakeholders? If so, what stakeholders have you consulted with?

Mr CHARLS: I have answered this question multiple times.

Mr YOUNG: The question was around what stakeholders you have consulted with. Have you consulted with any stakeholders? That is not answering the question. You have not answered the question around what stakeholders ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, as far as I can understand from the response from the minister, it is open for consultation right now. Can we move on from this line of questioning.

Mr YOUNG: it is open for consultation. What is the process at the moment? Is it on the Have Your Say website, and is that in regard to where the site will be for the youth centre? The decision was made to move it, and you have said where you will move it to, but now you are going back to another consultation period. It does not add up.

Mr CHARLS: Community consultation on the youth hub opened on 2 June 2025. The public consultation will help shape the purpose-built youth hub at Leanyer Recreation Park. The consultation will be open until 30 June, and includes surveys, community information sessions and pop-up engagement events across the northern suburbs, consulting on both the location and programs to be delivered.

K McNAMARA: I am also trying to get clarification on this. I understand you have a consultation process happening now for the location which has now been chosen at Leanyer. I do not believe this has been answered: what consultation happened in the decision to move it to Leanyer? How did that process happen? Who did you speak to?

Mr CHARLS: I already responded to that question in this forum and multiple times in the Chamber when the Member for Arafura raised that with me.

K McNAMARA: I am sorry; I do not believe that you do not have an answer that lists the stakeholders, who you spoke to, what groups. Apart from the Member for Casuarina, who else did you speak to on the decision to move it?

Mr CHARLS: I already responded to and answered the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you have any additional information that you would like to provide?

Mr CHARLS: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Can we please move on from this line of questioning.

Mr YOUNG: To clarify, the only person you have consulted with, is the Member for Casuarina.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, we are moving on from this line of questioning because he has already answered the question.

Mr YOUNG: That is a fair question because he has not been able to answer the other questions, so I want clarification that the only person he has consulted with is the Member for Casuarina, as he stated in his answer.

Mr CHARLS: I repeated multiple times that we consulted with the people living in Casuarina and that includes individuals living around that area who the Member for Casuarina represents. It does not mean that it was only the Member for Casuarina; the residents of that area were included.

K McNAMARA: Could you let us know the methods? Was it through doorknocking or a letter? How did you get that feedback from the residents of Casuarina? Was it just residents or was it organisations as well that you consulted with?

Mr CHARLS: Doorknocking, at the shopping centres, at the bus stops and community events.

K McNAMARA: Did you record the data that you got around what people's opinions were about the move?

Mr CHARLS: I provided the information that there was consultation. We listened to the community and we decided to change the location from Casuarina to the Leanyer water park, with an ability for the individuals living in that area—which is only 200 metres from my electorate, 100 metres from the Member for Casuarina, in the Member for Wanguri's electorate. There is an opportunity for people to give feedback around the location and what services they want from there.

K McNAMARA: What I am hearing is that there was no specific data collected on the answers, but a general vibe that people wanted it moved.

Mr CHARLS: I answered the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If you have a question, ask a question; we are not making statements.

K McNAMARA: In addition to those residents in Casuarina who were doorknocked or whatever, were any of the organisations who work with youths consulted on the move?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the consultation there was discussion with individuals and members of the community. There was no formal way of consultation because there were more than enough reasons why the new government did not want the youth facility at Casuarina. That is the reason why we are giving the opportunity for the people of the northern suburbs to provide feedback about whether they are interested in the location that we proposed and when it comes to the delivery of the services as well.

K McNAMARA: To clarify the answer to my question, because I want to make sure that I have this right, there was no consultation with any youth organisations on the move.

Mr CHARLS: I already answered the question.

J DAVIS: Is this current consultation process about where the youth centre will be? Is that still open for consultation? I have heard two different things. It may or may not be at Leanyer; it may move back to Casuarina; it could be anywhere. Is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: For the third time I am saying that it is open until 30 June.

J DAVIS: For what?

Mr YOUNG: You said in your answer to the previous question asked, which I believe was from the Member for Nightcliff, that part of that consultation period will be the location of the youth centre. On one hand you are saying, 'We are moving the youth centre to Leanyer and that is locked in and finalised', but now you are going back to consultation and saying, 'We will consult on the location'. I am stating what the minister said, Chair. I would like to clarify whether that is the answer. It is important.

Mr CHARLS: I do not accept the premise of this question. I clearly said before ...

Mr YOUNG: Your microphone is not on, but you did say the consultation was around the location too. You did state that.

Mr CHARLS: For the proposed site of the Leanyer recreation water park, there is a consultation currently open for both the location and the services that will be delivered from there. This was not available for the residents when the previous government made the decision.

Mr YOUNG: It is about the location too. Going back to when the decision was made by, it sounds like, the Member for Casuarina, did you take into account any of the feedback from any of the stakeholders from the last consultation, considering it was nearly 800 stakeholders, including young people and organisations?

Mr CHARLS: There were some concerns in the previous Nous report in regard to the Casuarina site, and that was taken into consideration. I am making it clear there was no opportunity for the individuals during the last consultation period because the only option they were given was, 'This will be located at this site; you can participate in the design of the service.' That was the only opportunity, whereas now we are providing opportunity for the proposed site and they can provide feedback on the location and the services, how they want to run from there.

I kicked off the consultation on 1 June with my NT Youth Round Table, and that was the first official consultation of this phase. From 2 June, it is out to the community and everyone can have a say on the location and the services, what they want to see from the Leanyer Recreation Park.

Mr YOUNG: Through this new consultation period, will you be taking on the concerns that people have for the new site at Leanyer? If it is overwhelming that people do not want it at this site, it sounds like you will make a decision to move it.

Mr CHARLS: Again, it is a hypothetical question. At the same time, we will not try to make the mistakes the previous government made in not listening to the community. If the community says there is a different option, based on that I will make the decision at the time.

Mr YOUNG: It is pretty hypocritical to say the previous government did not listen to the community when there was a fair and proper consultation period with a report attached to it, yet here you are, the government, listening to one member—the Member for Casuarina—come and raise concerns with you, so you move it. There is no data around it or surveys. It has not been put on the website. It shows that the CLP government is making executive decisions without fair and proper consultation from the community.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I ask that we move on from this line of questioning. I think the minister has answered the questions. He said that it is currently out for consultation, yet you are still imputing that there is no consultation happening. Can we move on from the line of questioning, please.

Mr YOUNG: He made reference to the previous government, so I have a right to respond to that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Please move on from this line of questioning.

Mr YOUNG: The decision has been made about Leanyer. This is different because it is about decisions about how young people can access the youth centre if it is to be put in Leanyer. For example, kids and youths living in Casuarina or Nightcliff around the bus routes—were there decisions made around that?

Mr CHARLS: The current SHAK program is operating from Sanderson Middle School, and there is an average of 36 children attending this program. When it comes to the new proposed site, we have not made the decision on where it will be. It is a proposed site. One of the things we looked into was accessibility. There are two bus stops within 150 metres from the proposed location. This location is less than a kilometre from the current site. There is an existing youth centre. This will be the proposed permanent home for that.

Mr YOUNG: There is no bus route from Sanderson to Leanyer, so how will young people and youths access the centre? I believe it is your electorate. How will young people from your electorate access the youth centre, considering there is no bus route there—from Sanderson to Leanyer, to be clear—or is there a bus route?

Mr CHARLS: Transport is also part of the model which is operated currently as well. Larrakia Nation and the IBC transport provide transport. You are saying that there is no bus route to Sanderson, but I am saying that there are 36 children attending this location. That means there is accessibility, which was introduced under the previous government. That clearly shows that you do not have any information on the services that are currently operating in the northern suburbs. What I need to clearly say is that transport is available. It is in the bus route within two bus routes within 150 metres and transport is available for the children also.

Mr YOUNG: Is transport currently available from Sanderson to Leanyer?

Mr CHARLS: Transport is available for the children in the northern suburbs to attend the facility, the SHAK program at Sanderson, and if it is going to be in Leanyer in the future after the community consultation, if everyone is of the view they want this facility there, that will be part of the service delivery about how we are going to run this program as well, because we do not want young children at the age of 10 wanting to catch a bus at eight or nine o'clock at night. We want to make sure there are safe transport options available for these young children at night. This will help them to feel that it is a safe place as well.

Mr BROWN: Can you identify the bus route that kids will be able to take from Sanderson to Casuarina?

Mr CHARLS: I answered the question previously.

Mr BROWN: Are young people involved in the design to date, and have they said anything about the delay and move?

Mr CHARLS: I have not received any specific feedback about the delay directly to me, but as I said earlier, the opening of the consultation was with the Youth Round Table group who are really supportive of this announcement and who want to take part in some of the promotion because they want to demonstrate to the community there are good things happening for the young people here as well because some of the issues currently portray that young people are in a different direction. They want to step up and communicate with others to say that this is a good proposed model. Through the youth rep group—Anglicare and the Youth Round Table are the two currently consulted. It is currently open for everyone, and public consultation is available. Then we will be looking at targeted consultation during this period as well.

Mr YOUNG: Considering this was a co-contribution from the Commonwealth Government, did you consult the Commonwealth before this decision was made to move the youth hub?

Mr CHARLS: The department will answer that question because it normally happens between the departments.

Ms LIVESLEY: The department has been liaising with the Australian Government department of Transport, Communications and the Arts and a number of other portfolios. That is the department that is funding us the funding for the youth hub. We have been in negotiations with them, and they are supportive of us advising in the future of a location of the youth hub.

Mr YOUNG: With the decision to change the location, does that jeopardise any of the funding from the Commonwealth?

Ms LIVESLEY: No, that is not what we have been advised. I said they are open to negotiating a new location.

Mr YOUNG: A new location in terms of the funding.

Ms LIVESLEY: There is no identified risk to us from the Australian Government on the funding.

Mr YOUNG: Moving on to gender equity, what stakeholders have you engaged with around the government's decision to water down the anti-vilification laws?

Mr CHARLS: I already informed this committee that is not part of my portfolio. The legislation sits with the Attorney-General. There will be an opportunity for members to raise this question with the Attorney-General.

Mr YOUNG: With the 2022–2025 action plan concluding, what 2025–26 funding is reserved for developing the next NT Gender Equality Action Plan?

Ms LIVESLEY: That would be done by staff within the Office of Gender Equity and Diversity, so the funding allocated for the staff and operations of that office would be allocated to that development.

Mr BROWN: What funding is allocated specifically for youth mental health and wellbeing initiatives in 2025–26?

Mr CHARLS: There are no specific youth mental health initiatives through this portfolio, but social inclusion grant programs will support individuals and young people to have mental health and wellbeing by engaging in different programs currently available in the community. When it comes to specific youth mental health initiatives, the Mental Health portfolio sits with Minister Edgington and that is something you can specifically raise there.

Mr BROWN: What funding is allocated to the implementation of the Northern Territory Seniors Policy 2021–2026?

Ms OKELY: Similar to the answer provided in regard to the NT Youth Strategy, the NT seniors strategy does not have a specific budget attached to it. It is more around how we invest funding that we have within the Seniors portfolio and how we ensure that there is investment and programs across government that support seniors.

J DAVIS: Can I ask a follow-up question or were we about to break?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Is it a quick one?

J DAVIS: Maybe not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will come back to it.

Noting that it is 6.30 pm, we will break for half an hour and come back at 7 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay everyone, we will resume as it is 7 pm. We are still on Output 1.1, Social Inclusion. Member for Johnston, are you ready to follow up where we left off?

J DAVIS: I had a question following up on the previous statement about developing a strategy for seniors. I lost my thread, but I am interested in what process you go through to develop that strategy.

Ms LIVESLEY: The process we go through is a range of community consultation with key stakeholders, so individual seniors. We would use those mechanisms such as Have Your Say, but also look at different ways seniors might want to be engaged and go through their peak bodies and groups, and organise our group consultations. We also have our Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians, which has both community membership and organisational membership. We would use that as a key mechanism to reach out to engage as many seniors as possible as well.

J DAVIS: Is there a process used to identify priorities from those consultations?

Ms LIVESLEY: We would look at the feedback we received from seniors and other people we consulted and analyse what that feedback is. Part of that would be asking people what their priorities are for them as senior Territorians.

J DAVIS: What kind of monitoring and evaluation processes do you have in place around that strategy?

Ms LIVESLEY: Like the other ones, we have an action plan. For the Seniors Policy we have an implementation plan and we do an annual report each year as part of that. That is a whole-of-government strategy that includes commitments from other government departments as well. We report against those.

J DAVIS: This is similar to my earlier question about KPIs. The kinds of things you are measuring in that evaluation, are you able to get a sense of what they are? What is it you are measuring in terms of success?

Ms LIVESLEY: It is not a formal evaluation; it is more a measure of where we have delivered on the actions committed to in that implementation or action plan.

J DAVIS: Are there any mechanisms you have to identify whether or not things are getting better for seniors in the Northern Territory?

Ms LIVESLEY: That would be similar to my response earlier. It is something that we are looking at in terms of aspirational development or more of the wellbeing and social outcome measures for the community.

J DAVIS: I have one other question on consultation and the accessibility of that broadly. Given the nature of the portfolio, can you comment on involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from different communities in terms of the consultation around the Seniors portfolio?

Ms LIVESLEY: Our advisory council has a broad membership in terms of organisational members as well as community members. We try to ensure that when we are doing expressions of interest and looking at the membership we have a good regional spread as well as people from diverse backgrounds.

Mr BROWN: What funding is allocated to the implementation of the Northern Territory Seniors Policy 2021–2026?

Mr CHARLS: I think we already answered this question earlier. This is Seniors.

Mr BROWN: Have you answered about seniors?

Mr CHARLS: Yes. I believe that was the last question before the break, which led the Member for Johnston to ask the next question.

Mr BROWN: Sorry.

With the Seniors Policy Implementation Plan 2022–2024 now concluded, what 2025–26 funding is reserved for developing the iteration of an action plan and any preliminary work funded in the previous budget?

Mr CHARLS: That will be done from within the FTE allocation.

Mr BROWN: With around one in six older Territorians reporting that they have experienced some sort of elder abuse, how is the government addressing this significant issue, given you have cut funding to support these services?

Mr CHARLS: Darwin Community Legal Service received funding of \$0.2m in 2024–25 to deliver an outreach model aimed at supporting older Territorians experiencing or at risk of experiencing abuse. DCLS (Darwin Community Legal Service) provides a legal referral, advocacy and education service under their model, which informs all Territorians of the dangers of older persons' abuse, what it can look like and where to seek help.

DCLS has established the older persons' abuse network which brings together organisations in the community to work together to inform potential future reforms to address and reduce older persons' abuse in the Northern Territory. Representatives from the NT Government are present at these meetings so that organisations know their concerns are heard and collaborative planning can occur.

The department is currently undertaking a project to identify other issues in the seniors community related to older persons' abuse that are not currently being addressed. These can be targeted in future policies and grant funding.

I can also inform this committee that I already met with DCLS and attended one of these meetings as well.

There is no reduction in funding.

J DAVIS: What was the figure that you said? Was it \$0.2m?

Mr CHARLS: It is \$200,000 specifically for DCLS for elder abuse.

Mr BROWN: What allocation in the 2025–26 budget has been made to the operations of the Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians? Is there a breakdown available? What was expended in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: All the members of that advisory group are volunteers, so there is no paid membership.

Mr BROWN: How many council meetings are funded in 2025–26? How many took place in the reporting period? How many vacancies are currently on the council? For clarity, are you saying it is a voluntary group?

Mr CHARLS: There is a membership group which aims to meet quarterly. I have met the group at least twice in the last eight months.

Mr YOUNG: Who makes up the membership group?

Mr CHARLS: There are 13 representatives.

Mr YOUNG: Are they individuals and not representing different organisations?

Mr CHARLS: Both—there are individuals and organisations. There was a decision made by the previous government to reduce the membership of representation from organisations to one, which I had reviewed. Based on the feedback I received from the individuals on the committee, I made the decision to increase it to two as well.

Mr YOUNG: What are those organisations that now sit on the membership?

Mr CHARLS: They are COTA NT, National Seniors Australia and the Association of Independent Retirees—three organisations.

Mr YOUNG: I do not need the names of the individuals who make up the membership, but are they allocated by region—Darwin, Alice Springs, remote—if so, are there any Aboriginal people who sit on that membership group?

Mr CHARLS: During the reporting period I cannot recall making any new appointments, so I carry on the previous numbers and look at when their membership expires and see if they are interested. There was one resignation in the last few months and there is an expression of interest out to fill that vacancy.

Mr YOUNG: Who was that resignation?

Mr CHARLS: Madam Deputy Chair, can I name an individual who is on a committee in this forum?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, you can.

Mr CHARLS: Ms Marlene Hayes.

Mr YOUNG: What region or area are they from?

Mr CHARLS: Alice Springs.

Mr YOUNG: Part of my other question was are there any Aboriginal Territorians as part of that membership?

Mr CHARLS: I do not have the details to that level, only the names. The advice is that Ms Marlene Hayes is an Aboriginal person, but she resigned from the committee. The EOI has been closed, and I am waiting for the recommendation from the department.

Mr YOUNG: Is there a breakdown of urban members to remote members who sit on the council, including what communities they are from?

Mr CHARLS: We have representation from all five regions. As I mentioned, I have not made any changes, so whatever the previous minister's advisory committee—if that minister was done in the proper way it would be the same. I will look into it. I have the information but not in front of me. It is part of the process, I think, when you appoint a person to a committee you make sure there are representations from all five regions.

Mr YOUNG: Can I get that question on notice? There is two parts to it. Apologies; what was the name of the membership? Was there a particular name?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, it is the Minister's Advisory Council for Senior Territorians.

Question on Notice No 4.4

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

Mr YOUNG: Could I get a breakdown of the membership of the advisory council, and what region and communities they are from?

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

Mr YOUNG: I am more interested in the regions they are from.

Mr CHARLS: With all the names I can take on notice each region's representation on the advisory council.

Mr YOUNG: That is fine, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.4.

J DAVIS: I know DCLS produced an Older Persons' Abuse in the Northern Territory policy directive in March 2025, which had a series of recommendations. Have you had any formal response to that?

Mr CHARLS: There is no formal response yet, but it is something that is currently under consideration.

J DAVIS: I note that lots of the recommendations in that report apply to different portfolios, not only to yours. This is just an information question: what is your role as the minister for Seniors in terms of supporting those recommendations across other portfolios? Do you have a role there, if you choose to support them?

Mr CHARLS: My role, as the minister for Seniors, would be to work with my colleagues to support that process.

J DAVIS: Do you have a specific role in supporting or advocating for senior Territorians around elder abuse?

Mr CHARLS: I am the minister for Seniors, so I am the one representing in Cabinet, and taking that voice to the Cabinet.

Mr BROWN: There was a meeting in the reporting period on 26 February 2025 in Darwin with you. A concern raised by members was progress on VAD laws. What concerns did they raise with you?

Mr CHARLS: Can you please name the meeting?

Mr BROWN: VAD (voluntary assisted dying).

Mr CHARLS: I know, but where was the meeting held? You are quoting a date.

Mr BROWN: Yes, in Darwin. Do you want me to rephrase?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arafura, do you have any more detail you could provide around that?

Mr BROWN: It was a council meeting on 26 February 2025 in Darwin.

Mr CHARLS: The advice is that it was the seniors ministerial advisory council.

Mr BROWN: A concern raised by members was the progress on VAD laws. What concerns did they raise with you?

Mr CHARLS: There were concerns raised and they had priorities for the seniors advisory council. I facilitated a meeting with Minister Edgington in my office—I do not have the exact date. I discussed with Minister Edgington to give the opportunity for the seniors advisory council meetings. One was particularly around VAD. One of the other priorities was aged care, as the minister for aged care as well. They raised the concern and I facilitated another meeting.

Mr BROWN: Minister who?

Mr CHARLS: Steve Edgington, as the minister for aged care.

Mr BROWN: Did you say to those members that voluntary assisted dying was not a priority for the CLP government?

Mr CHARLS: No, I did not say that.

Mr BROWN: What update are you providing them over the coming months surrounding the government's inquiry in order to delay real action on VAD in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: I will be able to provide an update on what is currently happening in that space in the next meeting. If needed, I will be able to facilitate another meeting with the committee the Member for Fong Lim is chairing at the moment, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. We will be able to do further consultation facilitated for this group.

Mr YOUNG: In the previous question from the Member for Arafura regarding another council meeting you stated that it was not a priority for the government, but did they accept that line?

Mr CHARLS: I do not accept the premise of that question; I never said that I informed them it is not a priority. I did not say that.

Mr YOUNG: Did they accept your answer?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I believe you are asking for an opinion on what the minister thought about the response from the people. Minister, it is up to you whether you answer the question.

Mr YOUNG: It is not an opinion; it is asking what the response was.

Mr CHARLS: I cannot recall the response. I facilitated a further meeting to ensure their priorities are worked through.

Mr BROWN: Public safety was also an issue raised with you at a council meeting in November; however, this year we have seen a 7.4% rise in offences against elderly people under your government, including a case of a 101-year-old man being assaulted on his mobility scooter on Mitchell Street in March. Can you provide an update on what specific actions your office is taking to prevent violent assaults on senior Territorians, and how is it funded in the budget?

Mr CHARLS: Community safety sits with the Minister for Police. Except for the advocacy I provide in the forums I can, my office does not have any direct involvement with that.

Mr YOUNG: There would be decision-making through the Cabinet process, which, as a minister, you sit on. Is that true?

Mr CHARLS: I do not know that I need to respond to that question because I am a member of the Cabinet, so if the Member for Daly is not aware of that, I cannot help.

Mr YOUNG: It is not that I am aware; I am just outlining that there is a process where you would have decision-making powers regarding certain legislation, but you stated you do not really have input in community safety for seniors.

Mr CHARLS: Again, I do not accept the premise of that question. I made clear that I represent all my portfolios in Cabinet, and I have that to consider within the Cabinet and broader Northern Territory parliament as well.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Disability

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.2, Disability. Are there any questions?

Mr YOUNG: This question is on the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. That royal commission concluded in 2023, which allowed people with a disability, their families and a range of other people to share their dreams and aspirations for an inclusive Australia, with one participant stating:

I don't want it to be a competition for scarce resources, a survival of the fittest, where the winners are able-bodied young people who can climb a flight of stairs without needing to rest for an hour, or step over the lip of a bathtub without the risk of face planting onto the tiles.

Does the minister accept that your public statements referencing your beliefs of survival of the fittest may deter people with a disability from engaging with government services?

Mr CHARLS: The Member for Daly is asking for an opinion.

Mr YOUNG: Not an opinion. This was a quote directly from the royal commission that was done in 2023. The public statements that you have made as a minister directly align to what he is saying about 'survival of the fittest'. I am trying to get a picture, because it obviously moulds your policy positions. Does it deter people with a disability from engaging with government services, when we have a minister who is saying that?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, you are asking the minister to provide information on what members of the public might be thinking. They are hypothetical questions.

Mr YOUNG: It is not hypothetical; it is a direct question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You are asking him to provide an opinion on what other people might be thinking. It is not a question. Can we please move on.

Mr YOUNG: Will you admit that the theory of survival of the fittest which has shaped your thinking infers that those born with different strengths and talents are not all equals?

Mr CHARLS: It is not within this output, so I do not know what the Member for Daly is referring to.

Mr YOUNG: It sits well and truly within this output because you are the minister responsible for disabilities. That direct quote came out of the royal commission. When people with disabilities need to interact with the highest person in office and you are making those quotes, it makes them feel uncomfortable. It does not make them feel safe. It does not allow you to then guide your policy position. I am trying to understand what your thinking is on that policy position which then affects where funding goes towards people with a disability. That is the line of questioning.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I ask that you rephrase your question, so it is an appropriate question around policy.

Mr YOUNG: It is directly around policy. It is the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability which concluded in 2023. There are recommendations that came out of that royal commission, but there are also people who have stated that they do not want to be competing for resources.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Is there a question?

Mr YOUNG: I did ask a question, but the minister did not answer it. That is the issue.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: As the Chair, I have asked you to rephrase the question so that it is an appropriate question to ask the minister.

Mr YOUNG: With those views stated in the royal commission—it is in that report—and your quotes that are public, does that deter people with a disability from engaging with government services?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Again, you are asking the minister for an opinion on other people's stance.

Mr YOUNG: The minister should be able to answer. He is an adult. He is a minister of the Crown. He should be able to answer a pretty simple question ...

Mr CHARLS: Chair, does the member have any questions related to Estimates or has he run out of questions and is trying to make up something here?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I agree on this one. Can we please move on from this line of questioning.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, that is fine.

There were 222 recommendations from the disability royal commission that I just spoke about, including the joint Commonwealth, state and territory government responses. Can you provide a breakdown update on the progress of the implementation from the department or whole of government? What has been designated as a priority for 2025–26?

Mr CHARLS: Work has commenced on a number of joint Commonwealth, state and territory recommendations from the disability royal commission that fall within the parameter of the Disability Reform Ministerial Council relating to employment, accessible information, communication advocacy and health navigation.

The most recent meeting I attended with other disability ministers from state, territory and federal governments was last week.

Mr YOUNG: The other part of the question is: what has been designated as a priority for 2025–26?

Ms OKELY: I think what you might be asking about is progress on implementing the recommendations from the royal commission.

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

Ms OKELY: We have been working with other jurisdictions to draft the first six-monthly report on implementation under the disability royal commission. That is due for release nationally in August. The Northern Territory's input into that report on implementation will be provided in August as part of that.

Mr YOUNG: Recommendation 6.21 states:

From at least 1 July 2026, state and territory governments should ensure long-term and stable funding for disability advocacy programs in their jurisdictions to meet demand.

Can you confirm how this will occur?

Mr CHARLS: We have organisations that we are funding for the advocacy. They are Integrated Disability Action Inc, Disability Advocacy Services Inc, Darwin Community Legal Service, Carers NT and National Disability Services. Those are the organisations that we have an agreement with for advocacy services.

Mr YOUNG: They are all the organisations you have listed; is that all of them? There will be no further organisations.

Mr CHARLS: Yes, that is right.

Mr YOUNG: Was the disability sector consulted regarding the repeal of portable long service leave Bill? Did you agree with the position to remove disability workers' portable long service leave?

Mr CHARLS: It was through the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, so I would recommend the question be referred to the Minister for Public Service.

Mr YOUNG: I take away the last part of the question regarding if you agreed with that position, but I am sure you would know whether anyone from the disability sector was consulted, if any, in regard to the repeal of portable long service leave Bill.

Mr CHARLS: I can confirm that the Department of People, Sport and Culture did not facilitate any such consultation.

Mr YOUNG: Did you not bother to ask if anyone from the disability sector was consulted on the repeal of portable long service leave and, if not, why not?

Mr CHARLS: I have already answered the question. The Department of People, Sport and Culture did not facilitate any consultation through this office.

Mr YOUNG: I was specifically asking around your portfolio responsibility, which is disability, and whether you asked if there was any consultation done with the disability sector.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, the minister has answered the question.

Mr YOUNG: He has not answered the question I asked—it is a yes or no answer.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: He did answer the question.

Mr YOUNG: Okay, what was the answer? Can you repeat the answer?

Mr CHARLS: You can check on *Hansard*.

Mr YOUNG: No, it sounds like the Minister for Disability did not even ask the question whether the disability sector was consulted in regard to the repeal of portable long service leave Bill.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, you are repeating the question, and I believe it has been answered. Can we please move on.

Mr YOUNG: I am just stating that it is gobsmacking that the minister would not even ask the question whether people under his portfolio were consulted.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Please, Member for Daly, can we move on.

J DAVIS: Can you outline the definition of 'disability' used by your department in the development and delivery of programs and services?

Ms LIVESLEY: We do not have a set definition; it is more of our approach of people who identify they have a disability and making sure that we are inclusive and provide inclusive and accessible programs. There are different definitions in terms of access to services such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme. That does have very clear definitions around the requirement for lifelong care and support and a significant and lifelong disability, whereas in terms of people's self-identification of disability it is very broad and much broader than just the NDIS eligibility.

J DAVIS: Would your policy development be based on self-identification of disability in terms of who your programs apply to?

Ms LIVESLEY: Our programs are for all people with a disability, noting that a proportion of those people in the Territory—just over 6,000—are NDIS participants. In terms of our whole-of-government strategy on disability and our programs, our focus and our advocacy services, they are for all people with a disability and their families and carers.

J DAVIS: Given that you have said that you believe not all people are equal and not all people can do the same thing, can you confirm whether this view influences how you develop your Disability portfolio?

Mr CHARLS: This is not within this output; that is an entirely different context.

J DAVIS: How is it not within this output? It is directly in relation to disability.

Mr CHARLS: You are asking for an opinion about what I said in a different context.

J DAVIS: I am asking how your stated view affects how you develop policy in relation to people with disability. I cannot see how it is not relevant.

Mr CHARLS: I will respond to the question about how I develop policy. I completed my training in nursing back in 2009 and have been working with the people with disability and physical issues since that time. I started working in 2010 or 2011 and I worked for the last 13 years in the nursing, mental health and forensic disability services. When I am making a decision that will be informed by my experience, my education and the information shared by the people with the lived experience and by the carers and from broader consultation with the community. That is how I influence a decision.

J DAVIS: I believe, and I can quote from *Hansard*, you also said it has informed by a particular approach to an interpretation of Charles Darwin's survival of the fittest. I think the question is totally relevant. You are saying what informs your policy development and that is part of it. How will that impact or not impact on your policy development?

Mr CHARLS: I provided a response to that question. I want to make a quote as well. I never repeated since that parliament, which is on the *Hansard*, whereas what I can hear is people are continuously saying the things again and again. I stick onto my line. What I said is in the *Hansard*, and I already responded to your question.

J DAVIS: For the record, you said in *Hansard*:

Charles Darwin's survival of the fittest theory is a well-known theory from long ago.

You said this theory 'has shaped my thinking':

It still rings true in many ways. People are born with different strengths and talents and not all parts are equal; not all people can do the same things.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member, do you have a question?

J DAVIS: There is not a question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We do not make statements in Estimates.

J DAVIS: I know. I am sorry.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I would like to move on.

Mr YOUNG: I have a follow-up question for that. Just following on from the Member for Johnston and what she read out ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I warn you to make sure you are moving on from the line of questioning, because we do not want to be repetitive in this ...

Mr YOUNG: Yes, it is because it is important because it ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry; I am talking. We do not want to be repetitive. This is a warning on this matter right now. I am making sure that you are moving on from the line of questioning and not asking the same question.

Mr YOUNG: It is a policy question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: This is your warning: do not ask the same question.

Mr YOUNG: He said that it shaped his views, from what the Member for Johnston said. Is that a guiding principle of your laws, which have been implemented in the Disability portfolio, and your policy thinking?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, you are asking the same question. He has answered the question already.

Mr YOUNG: It is a guiding principle. It is a policy one.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will move on from this line of questioning.

Member for Karama.

Mr YOUNG: We still have questions for that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry; I have already allocated.

Mr BROWN: Did we move on from him?

Mr YOUNG: I have not moved on. I still have questions to go. It was made clear from the start that the backbenchers and the opposition would ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Karama, is this in the same line of questioning?

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I am on Disability, but it is a separate question to ...

Mr YOUNG: It is separate; it is not carrying on from the ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: What funding has been dedicated to the Northern Territory Disability Strategy Action Plan?

Mr CHARLS: For the Northern Territory Disability Strategy the funding allocation is \$174,000.

Mr YOUNG: What actions have been completed in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: As at 31 March 2025 of the 118 actions in the current action plan, 106 actions are either completed or embedded into everyday agency functions and recognised as business as usual. Twelve actions are recognised as 'in progress', 'progressing to be business as usual' or 'slightly delayed'. These actions will be considered and reframed into the next action plan where appropriate.

Key achievements include:

- increased support for disability service providers provided by small business champions, including building business capability through workforce support and targeted training modules

- greater diversity and inclusion on Northern Territory Government boards and committees
- more choice for students with disability to remain in mainstream education, with support for schools to build their capability to offer more referred subjects and pathways for students to obtain their NT Certificate of Education and Training, including transition to employment
- a Northern Territory Disability Directory to connect people with disability, their carers and families to the services, information and supports they need
- innovative programs and services in remote communities to support local providers and enable people with disability to remain on country
- employment of an inclusion engagement officer in the department's Sport and Recreation division in February 2025 to increase the number of people with disability involved in sporting activities in their respective communities, including regional and remote communities.

The second action plan 2025–2029 under the strategy is under development and will be released later this year, signifying our government's commitment to better support and improve the lives of Territorians with disability.

Mr YOUNG: How many active participants with an approved NDIS plan currently reside in the Territory, and can you provide a breakdown by region?

Mr CHARLS: The total participants on 31 March 2025 are 6,410. In the Barkly region, there are 152; Central Australia, 1,060; Darwin remote, 575; Darwin urban, 3,701; East Arnhem region, 262; Katherine region, 389; and other service districts of the Northern Territory, 271.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have an estimate of how many Territorians are eligible for an NDIS plan but are currently not signed up to one? What are you doing to get them on a suitable plan?

Ms LIVESLEY: We do not have data on how many people with disability who should be on the NDIS are not on the NDIS. What we have done since transition to the NDIS commenced in 2016 was actively work with communities and organisations to ensure the people who are identified that should be on it are supported to access the NDIS. We work closely with the National Disability Insurance Agency in that space.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a breakdown of those organisations and communities that you are working with on what you have just stated?

Ms LIVESLEY: That was in the early part of the transition. We predominantly work now with the National Disability Insurance Agency and some other agencies. Key agencies would be Education and Training and the Department of Health in terms of where people might come to the attention of people who might refer them to determine their eligibility for the NDIS.

Mr YOUNG: What investment is being made to address workforce shortages in the disability sector?

Ms LIVESLEY: The work that would be in that space in terms of improving workforce in the disability sector is driven at a national level through the National Disability Insurance Agency and was recently the Department of Social Services, but the Disability portfolio has now moved to the Commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. They are responsible—they are the market stewards responsible for a lot of that work, but supported by states and territories.

There are a lot of other workforce programs as well that people can access, and people are actively encouraged to look to work in disability and aged care. There are broader national reforms about the whole care sector workforce, not just disability.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: You may have already addressed part of the question in response to the Member for Daly, but I will ask this anyway in case there is something further you want to add. You referenced the NDIS reform in your opening statement. Can you expand, or is there anything further you want to say on the status of the reform and how it affects Territorians?

Mr CHARLS: Since the release of the final report of the NDIS Review in late 2023 our government has been jointly progressing work with the Commonwealth and states and territories to respond to the review's

recommendations to restore trust, confidence and pride in the NDIS. We will ensure the sustainability of the scheme and place people with disability at the centre of the NDIS.

The main focus of this work has been the design of foundational supports that will sit outside of the NDIS to address the service gaps that exist between the NDIS and mainstream services and the legislative changes needed to support this work.

The NDIS Review proposed that NDIS participants with low to moderate support needs would move into or receive foundational supports while higher-needs participants would stay with the NDIS, as it was originally intended. This will then reduce reliance on the NDIS and its individualised funding packages as the only way to receive disability support.

The NDIS Amendment Act 2024 commenced on 3 October 2024. Meaningful progress has been made in developing the new NDIS rules, enabled by this legislation, which sets out how this scheme will operate. These changes to the operation of the NDIS are expected to contribute to decisions made by National Cabinet in 2023 by First Ministers to moderate cost growth of the NDIS in the medium to long term and to meet the 8% sustainability target by 1 July 2026.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You mentioned in your opening statement additional funding for Auslan interpreters. How will you attract and retain Auslan interpreters in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: The previous funding was time-limited funding, so this government made sure that is part of the budget process, so that means \$120,000 is there from 2025–26 onwards. On top of that, in the last few months the government supported four individuals to complete their Auslan interpreter test, which was interstate. Some of them had financial challenges, so we supported them to travel to Perth to complete that test.

J DAVIS: Did you say that is now ongoing funding?

Mr CHARLS: It is.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Schemes

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Schemes. Are there any questions?

J DAVIS: I have some questions from the Member for Mulka. Written question 52 asks what percentage of people in the Mulka electorate receive a concession for electricity through the NT Concession Scheme. The answer was 0.87%, or 57 people, receive the energy concession in the Mulka electorate.

On 28 February this year in the electorate of Mulka there were only 95 people on the NT Concession Scheme, and it has been this way for years. Clearly, this scheme excludes people from the bush. The Mulka electorate consists of many impoverished communities, yet governments have not addressed barriers to people in the bush receiving these concessions. What is being done to address the systemic racism in the scheme?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I think that there is an imputation there is racism in a scheme that is implemented by the government. Can you restate that question?

J DAVIS: It is not my question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am not sure we can answer a question like that.

J DAVIS: What is being done to address these clear issues in the scheme?

Mr CHARLS: To be eligible to receive an electricity concession, members of the Northern Territory Concession Scheme must be the primary account holder or legally responsible for their electricity account. In addition, only one member per household can claim the concession.

There are currently 96 NTCS members living in the electorate of Mulka. Eight of those members share accommodation with another NTCS member, resulting in these members currently being deemed ineligible to claim the electricity concession due to the one-member-per-household rule. Of the remaining 88 members,

57 are currently claiming the electricity concession. There are 64.7% of NTCS households claiming electricity due to the eligibility mentioned.

Using the 2024 NT general election enrolments, there were 6,844 people enrolled to vote in the electorate of Mulka. The 57 NTCS members claiming the electricity concession only represents 0.83% of the enrolled population. That is where that number came from.

J DAVIS: They were the same figures I said to you. The Member for Mulka's question was that there are barriers to people receiving these concessions. I am not sure that you have answered that question.

Mr CHARLS: I responded by saying that only one person per household is eligible, and eight members were sharing the household with another person, so they become ineligible because someone in that house is already receiving the benefits.

J DAVIS: When people are living in overcrowded housing, they are unable to receive the benefits.

Mr CHARLS: I just set out the regulations that are currently in place.

J DAVIS: Could you provide the data for all remote communities, showing how many people are included in the NT Concession Scheme?

Mr CHARLS: I will take that on notice because I do not have that information readily available.

Question on Notice No 4.5

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

J DAVIS: Could you provide the data for all remote communities, showing how many people are included in the NT Concession Scheme?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.5.

J DAVIS: That is the end of the Member for Mulka's questions. I have a couple of questions.

In the 2025–26 budget \$30.7m has been allocated to the NT concession and recognition schemes. The key performance indicator related to this budget item is eligible Territorians who are members of the Northern Territory Concession Scheme. In 2024–25 the target for this indicator was more than 70% of eligible Territorians on the scheme, after only achieving 63% in the last financial year. Now the target has been dropped to 65%. Are there any plans to improve the scheme and the application process to ensure that more Territorians who are eligible can access the benefits?

Ms LIVESLEY: It is a process that the concessions team goes through, and we are having a look at how we can increase membership across the Territory, especially in remote communities. We are looking at how we can work with some regional staff in other departments who might be in communities to try to identify and encourage people to sign up to the scheme, to increase those numbers.

J DAVIS: Is that active work in progress?

Ms LIVESLEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: Have you considered broadening eligibility to more Territorians—for instance, those on Jobseeker and Youth Allowance?

Mr CHARLS: No, we have not considered it.

J DAVIS: Can you provide how many applications to the Concession Scheme are received each year, and the breakdown of acceptance and denial?

Mr CHARLS: We do not have that data available and we do not know whether the system has the ability to report that, but I will take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.6

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

J DAVIS: How many applications to the Concession Scheme are received each year, and what is the breakdown of acceptance and denial?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.6.

J DAVIS: What is the processing time from application to receiving the concession benefits?

Mr CHARLS: We do not have that data available.

J DAVIS: Can you take it on notice?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, I will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.7

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

J DAVIS: What is the processing time from application to receiving the concession benefits?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.7.

J DAVIS: On page 200 of BP3 there is a line item for 'Pensioner concession scheme system upgrade'. The budget for 2025–26 has increased significantly to \$2.3m, from \$407,000 in 2024–25. Can you provide further detail about what this upgrade is and how it is being undertaken?

Mr CHARLS: I will ask Mitch Hardy, general manager, to respond to the question.

Mr HARDY: That amount is related to stage 2 of the pension concession scheme system upgrade. At the moment we are in stage 1, which is verifying the data requirements for the system upgrade. Stage 2 is set to be delivered as part of the 2025–26 budget, which is a significant cost in the system upgrade.

J DAVIS: Can you outline what that will mean?

Mr HARDY: That will mean we will have an enhanced system for managing and implementing the concession scheme.

J DAVIS: Is that expenditure all in relation to the operation of the scheme?

Mr HARDY: The system upgrade that will support the scheme.

Mr YOUNG: On page 245 of the 2025–26 BP3 there is a \$462,000 decrease in the Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Schemes output from last year's allocation of \$31.167m. Can you explain the decrease in funding to the line item, and what concessions or recognition schemes have you cut or reduced?

Mr CHARLS: The decrease for the Northern Territory Concession and Recognition Schemes budget relates to the 2024–25—from the Australian Government to administer part of the national energy bill relief. The department delivers energy relief to households with automated energy and Indigenous Essential Services communities that have Ampy prepaid meters. That is related to that.

Mr YOUNG: That reduction is related to all of that together. Do you have a breakdown of each of those for the reduction in budget?

Mr CHARLS: I do not have a further breakdown.

Ms McMILLAN: In regard to a breakdown, the whole decrease is related to the national energy bill relief scheme. From a breakdown point of view, what were you after?

Mr YOUNG: Can you outline what you said previously so that I can get the exact ...

Mr CHARLS: The department delivers energy relief to households with automated energy and Indigenous Essential Services communities that have Ampy prepaid meters. Do you want a breakdown between those?

Mr YOUNG: No, that is okay. Sorry; I thought I had heard two different things.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: We have only been in government for about nine months. Historically there have been issues and complaints raised about incorrect invoices and the membership process in regard to NT concessions. Can you provide any details regarding the number of complaints and how this has been dealt with?

Mr CHARLS: During the last six years there were a number of overpayments. That equates to 687 overpayments, and the total overpayment was around \$951,796.

In December 2024 Centrelink launched an interface providing the NTCRU with real-time notification when a member is no longer eligible for the NTC or NTSR scheme. On commencement of the Centrelink interface the NTCRU identified 172 members who had received payments in 2024–25, totalling around \$277,000 of overpayment. The department was working with DCDD to recoup the money.

There were concerns raised by members of the community through the Members for Goyder and Drysdale and directly to me, which I further escalated to the Cabinet and the Treasurer. The government made the decision that we will waive that overpayment because it is going back for the last six years. There are many individuals in that situation who are not in a position to pay back as well.

Even though the previous government had not made any attempt to recoup any of this for the last six years, based on what we identified we made the decision. We are looking at if there is an opportunity for us to make some escalation on how this can be reviewed further to see whether there is any further information to be revealed.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – SPORT

Output 2.1 – Sport and Recreation

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 2.0, Sport, and Output 2.1, Sport and Recreation. Are there any questions?

Mr BROWN: There was \$1.83m allocated in the 2024–25 budget to the Sport Voucher Scheme for remote areas. How much was expended in the reporting period, and can you break it down by region?

Mr CHARLS: There was a total of 4,325. In the Belyuen Community Council, the total redemption was \$80,000; MacDonnell Regional Council, \$512,000; Victoria Daly Regional Council, \$348,000; East Arnhem Regional Council, \$784,000; Wagait Shire Council, \$55,000; Coomalie Community Council, \$125,000; West Arnhem Regional Council, \$378,000; Central Desert Regional Council, \$444,000; Roper Gulf Regional Council, \$482,000; Tiwi region, \$150,000; Barkly region, \$432,000; and West Daly region, \$234,000.

Mr YOUNG: You mentioned the West Daly region. Who is the funding allocated to? Is that towards Daly Shire Council?

Mr CHARLS: The organisations are: Build Up Skateboarding, \$104,000; Dream Impact Inspire, \$90,000; NT Gymnastics Association, \$21,000; and Yarraman Territory Trust, \$19,000.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know in what communities those organisations have delivered those programs?

Mr HARDY: The towns that have been provided those services from those organisations are Palumpa, Peppimenarti and Wadeye.

Mr YOUNG: Was any consultation done with those communities regarding what programs they would like to be delivered?

Mr HARDY: Yes, our department coordinated consultation, and we ran an expression of interest process so that any organisations or activity providers could express an interest in delivering programs to those communities. Part of the requirements of program delivery was they had to have evidence of community consultation in order to be successful in receiving funding.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have that evidence, and who was consulted on that?

Mr HARDY: That would have been part of their submissions to the department, yes.

Mr YOUNG: So, you have it. Can I receive a breakdown of those organisations that participated in the consultation?

Mr HARDY: Given that was a grant application process, we would have to obtain permission to share their information.

Mr YOUNG: As in share information that ...

Mr HARDY: From the organisations that received money, we would have to get them to share that consultation information.

Mr YOUNG: I am talking about the consultation period.

Mr HARDY: That was done by those organisations that would have received money and would have made up their application. You are asking us to share their applications.

Mr YOUNG: I am asking what organisations.

Mr HARDY: Which would have been within their application process. They would have had to provide evidence of consultation and who they consulted with.

Mr YOUNG: So, there is no way of having any transparency on who was consulted to ensure that is what the communities wanted as part of those programs.

Mr HARDY: Are you asking for individual names?

Mr YOUNG: Organisations—I am just trying to get an idea of who was consulted.

Mr HARDY: I am trying to clarify the question from the member as to exactly what information he would like.

Mr YOUNG: I think it is pretty straightforward. You said there was a consultation period with the community and certain organisations on what programs they would like delivered in regard to the Sport Voucher Scheme, so I am just trying to get an understanding of who was consulted in regard to the delivery of those programs. We have many youth services in the West Daly region. I do not need individual names, just organisations or ...

Mr HARDY: We are happy to provide copies of those successful applications and evidence of consultation as part of taking the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.8

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

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide the details of what communities and organisations were consulted to guide what programs would be run in all the communities in the West Daly region?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes. We will provide the names of those applicants and who took part in the consultation process—just the names, not the full applications.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, just the organisations. I do not need the applications.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.8.

Mr BROWN: What initiatives have been funded which grow female sports in the Territory, and what datasets are being used to track this KPI?

Mr CHARLS: We do not have any specific female data on that, but I can share that when I have been out communicating with peak bodies the feedback is consistent that there is an increase in female participation across all sports—a trend that indicates the Territory is going forward.

Mr BROWN: What funding has been allocated to the development of a future strategic plan for sports and active recreation in the Territory?

Mr CHARLS: Like other strategies, it is funded within the FTE allocation of the department.

Mr BROWN: Your government committed to a new \$15m multi-sport precinct in Alice Springs in June 2024. Can you confirm that funding for this is in Budget 2025–26?

Mr CHARLS: That funding sits with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure.

Mr BROWN: Is it still there?

Mr CHARLS: It is there, and it is done as part of the Alice Springs Town Council package. That is why the multicultural facility and all this is one package and is being delivered in consultation with the Alice Springs region.

Mr BROWN: What is the proposed timeline for the planning, development and completion of the multi-sports precinct?

Mr CHARLS: That is a question for the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure because they are overseeing the project.

Mr BROWN: Have local clubs or residents been involved in the planning stages for this multi-sports precinct?

Mr CHARLS: Again, that is a question for the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure because they are overseeing the project.

Mr BROWN: Budget 2024–25 allocated \$41.159m for sports and active recreation. How much was expended in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: Can you confirm the question, because you informed that in 2024–25 there was around \$41m; is that right?

Mr BROWN: Yes, Budget 2024–25 allocated \$41.159m to sports and active recreation. How much was expended in the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: The expenditure to 31 March is \$31.5m.

Mr BROWN: Can you provide a breakdown of the expenditure in the reporting period by employee, administration and grants?

Mr CHARLS: For the employees it is \$3.761m; administration is \$11.227m; and grants is \$16.609m.

Mr BROWN: The 2025–26 budget allocates \$46.225m, primarily attributed due to the redevelopment of Woodroffe Oval and Tracy Village Sports Precinct. Can you provide an update on both of these projects?

Mr CHARLS: In May 2024 there was \$3m in funding complemented by a \$1.2m Australian Government grant to Football NT which was approved to deliver stage 1 of the Tracy Village sporting precinct redevelopment. This investment supports the development of new football fields, lighting, a multipurpose clubhouse, change rooms and a comprehensive master plan. These upgrades will provide modern, inclusive and fit-for-purpose facilities that enable increased participation and enhanced community access to the Tracy Village sporting precinct.

To address longstanding governance challenges and unlock access to grant funding the Department of People, Sport and Culture has facilitated the establishment of a new incorporated entity, Tracy Village Sporting Affiliates Ltd. This entity represents the seven affiliated sports clubs at the Tracy Village sporting precinct, with the group currently working through a sublease arrangement with the Tracy Village Social and Sports Club. The department has worked proactively to resolve critical safety and infrastructure issues caused by ageing facilities and underinvestment at the Tracy Village sporting precinct.

Although project commencement was delayed due to complex tenure arrangements and the need for third-party approvals, the department has made substantial progress in resolving these issues. All necessary negotiations and concerns are expected to be finalised in the near future, with the 2024–25 budget pushed forward to 2025–26, which is part of the budget papers. That is the update on Tracy Village.

Woodroffe Oval redevelopment is part of the current budget process. There is \$6.45m allocated. We are keen to engage with stakeholders who are involved with and using that facility. It is in the early phase of discussions. I sent a letter to all stakeholders last week or early this week to inform them that they will shortly be contacted by the department to start the engagement process on how we can move forward.

Mr BROWN: Minister, \$3.45m was allocated in the 2024–25 budget for the Sport Voucher Scheme in urban areas. How much was expended in the reporting period, and can you break it down by region? How much is dedicated in the 2025–26 budget?

Mr CHARLS: To clarify my previous response, I thought I had sent the letters, but they have not been sent yet. They will go out shortly from my office.

The expenditure to 31 March for urban sport vouchers was \$1.8m and the Learn to Swim voucher was \$389,000; in total \$2.2m. The regional breakdown was: Darwin, \$1.091m; Palmerston, \$402,000; Alice Springs, \$201,000; Litchfield, \$104,000; Nhulunbuy, \$30,000; and Katherine, \$19,000. The breakdown for the Learn to Swim vouchers was: Darwin, \$235,000; Palmerston, \$98,000; Alice Springs, \$32,000; and Nhulunbuy, \$24,000.

Mr BROWN: Minister, \$3.996m was allocated to peak sporting bodies in Budget 2024–25. How much was expended in the reporting period, and could you provide a breakdown of the sporting bodies that received the funding?

Mr CHARLS: The budget allocation for 2024–25 was \$4.335m, and all that has been spent as of 30 March 2025.

Mr BROWN: And the breakdown of which peak bodies received the funding.

Mr HARDY: The list of recipients for peak sporting bodies funding summary 2024–25 is: Boxing NT, \$50,000; Judo Northern Territory, \$35,000; Northern Territory Badminton Association, \$50,000; Northern Territory Calisthenics Association, \$35,000; Northern Territory Clay Target Association, \$35,000; Northern Territory Rifle Association, \$15,000; Northern Territory Polocrosse Association, \$35,000; Northern Territory Tenpin Bowling Association, \$35,000; Pistol NT Inc, \$35,000; Pony Club Association of the Northern Territory, \$50,000; Skipping Northern Territory, \$35,000; Table Tennis NT, \$35,000; Volleyball Northern Territory, \$110,000; Baseball Northern Territory, \$110,000; Bowls Northern Territory, \$125,000; Equestrian Northern Territory, \$110,000; Northern Territory Athletics, \$125,000; Northern Territory Softball Association, \$110,000; Squash Northern Territory, \$110,000; Surf Life Saving Northern Territory, \$110,000; Swimming Northern

Territory, \$125,000; Triathlon Association of the Northern Territory, \$125,000; Yachting Northern Territory, \$125,000; AFL Northern Territory, \$185,000; ALC NT Ltd NRL NT, \$185,000; AusCycling, \$185,000; Basketball NT, \$185,000; Football Federation Northern Territory, \$185,000; Golf Northern Territory, \$185,000; Hockey Northern Territory, \$185,000; Netball Northern Territory, \$185,000; Northern Territory Cricket, \$185,000; Northern Territory Gymnastics Association, \$185,000; Northern Territory Rugby Union, \$185,000; Tennis NT, \$185,000; Touch Football Australia, \$185,000; and MotorSports NT, \$200,000.

Mr BROWN: Minister, \$1.039m was allocated to active recreation organisations in the 2024–25 budget. How much was expended in the reporting period, and can you also provide a breakdown of those?

Mr CHARLS: Can you confirm the number that you have as the total funding, because the number that I have for 2024–25 is \$524,000?

Mr BROWN: We had \$1.039m, but what was yours?

Mr CHARLS: It was \$524,000. I can give a breakdown of that: Riding for Disabled Association (RDA) Alice Springs, \$50,000; RDA Top End, \$80,000; Diabetes Association of the Northern Territory Inc, \$115,000; YMCA Northern Territory, \$179,000; Girl Guides, \$50,000; and Scouts, \$50,000. That is a total of \$524,000.

Mr BROWN: Minister, \$1.105m was allocated to sports service providers in the 2024–25 budget. How much was expended over the reporting period? Can you also provide a breakdown of those providers?

Mr CHARLS: The total funding as per the 2024–25 revised budget is \$925,000. Out of that \$870,000 has been spent. The breakdown is: Total Recreation NT, \$110,000; Disability Sports Australia, \$105,000; Alcohol and Drug Foundation Good Sports, \$55,000; Sports Medicine Australia, \$100,000; and Royal Life Saving NT, \$500,000.

Mr YOUNG: Can you confirm regarding the sports service what has been allocated in the 2025–26 budget?

Mr CHARLS: The total allocation is \$925,000: Total Recreation NT, \$110,000; Disability Sports Australia, \$105,000; Alcohol and Drug Foundation Good Sports, \$110,000 ...

Mr YOUNG: To clarify, the previous question was about the 2024–25 budget. Is that what you are talking about now?

Mr CHARLS: No, it is 2025–26. I think it is the same numbers; there are no changes to the locations.

Mr YOUNG: Okay, that is fine then. We do not need a breakdown of that.

Mr BROWN: How much funding was allocated to the Northern Territory Sport and Active Recreation Strategic Plan 2021–25 in the 2024–25 budget?

Mr HARDY: The total appropriation is spread across the sport and recreation strategic plan, except for depreciation of assets. All our expenditure is attributed to implementing key strategy initiatives under our strategic plan. That aligns with our distribution of funding, whether it be through grants or allocation of FTN resources. In 2024–25 our total budget of \$37.327m against a year-to-date expenditure of \$31.597m, with a 2025–26 appropriation of \$45.225m.

Mr BROWN: What were the main outcomes delivered under each strategic goal as outlined in the strategic plan; that is, active participation places and spaces and achievements?

Mr HARDY: We do not develop an annual strategic plan report. All our programs and services are attributed to the work areas within the strategic plan, so our Northern Territory Sports Academy Service Delivery Framework, our work through industry development and the management of grant programs and subsidies, our work in regional and remote funding and program delivery, as well as our assets and facilities. All our output through our Sport and Recreation division is strongly aligned to our strategic plan, and we implement and provide to executive and senior executive an annual business plan and associated budget.

Mr BROWN: What programs are being funded by the government to increase sport participation across the Northern Territory? What datasets are you using to track participation in sports across the reporting period?

Mr CHARLS: We have an annual census through the peak sporting bodies, and there is Australian player data through the Australian Sports Commission as well.

Mr BROWN: What funding is being allocated to community outreach programs surrounding sports, particularly in rural and remote areas in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: The annual budget for last year was \$4.061m, and the expenditure is \$4.061m. I provided the breakdown earlier of all the different councils; do you want me to repeat that information again?

Mr BROWN: No, thank you.

What funding was allocated to facilities, planning and consultation in the reporting period, and what was expended?

Mr CHARLS: There was a consultancy awarded to Hames Sharley to develop the Marrara sports precinct master plan. The total value, including GST, was \$361,107.

Mr BROWN: The 2021–25 Northern Territory Sport and Active Recreation Strategic Plan is due to finish at the end of the year. How much funding has been allocated to an evaluation of the plan? Can you provide an update on the outcomes of that evaluation?

Mr CHARLS: That is an internal evaluation through the Department of People, Sport and Culture, and there is no additional funding for that.

Mr BROWN: What funding has been allocated to the Northern Territory Sports Academy Service Delivery Framework in the reporting period? What outcomes were achieved?

Mr CHARLS: The funding allocation for the next financial year for the Northern Territory Sports Academy is \$2.290m.

Mr BROWN: The Northern Territory Sports Academy Service Delivery Framework 2022–2025 is due to finish at the end of the year. Can you confirm if the evaluation of the framework has been conducted? What was the outcome of the evaluation and funding attributed?

Mr CHARLS: The evaluation is in progress and expected to be completed in the next few months.

Mr BROWN: How many FTE are currently attributed to the development of the future framework?

Mr CHARLS: There are currently seven FTE funded within the department to provide support for this program.

Mr BROWN: Can you provide an overview of the KPIs being utilised as part of the 2025–26 budget? Why have the targets been adjusted?

Mr CHARLS: The variation in 2024–25 and decrease in the 2025–26 target is due to an audit and biannual renewal process of activity providers that resulted in organisations opting out of the program, no longer in operation or no longer redeeming vouchers.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You mentioned that Australia qualified for the World Cup, which is excellent; I think we all agree on that. As I lead into my question I acknowledge that Darwin Olympic, based in Malak, have qualified for the Australia Cup—the final 32—wonderful achievements on behalf of everyone.

On behalf of my Palmerston colleagues, I note in your opening statement you mentioned Woodroffe Oval and I can see that there is money allocated in the budget. Can you expand on this project and provide an update?

Mr CHARLS: I briefly touched on that project earlier with one of the questions, but I will repeat it. Woodroffe Oval has a funding allocation of \$6.445m in the next financial year, and we are in the process of consultation with all the stakeholders on how we can develop that oval and make sure all the stakeholders have a say in how they want to develop the community facility over there.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I may have been out of the room, so I apologise.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – CULTURE
Output 3.1 – Arts and Culture

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Culture, Output 3.1, Arts and Culture. Are there any questions?

Mr YOUNG: Do you agree with the Chief Minister's assertion that no-one cares about the arts and that this is a signal to the creative industry sector that the CLP will not be investing in it?

Mr CHARLS: The Member for Daly is asking for my opinion on what others think, which I cannot comment on.

Mr YOUNG: I am not asking for your opinion. I am asking for your position as the CLP government whether you value the arts sector, given that the Chief Minister made the assertion that no-one cares about arts. Does that mean you will not be investing in the arts sector?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I remind everyone that the Estimates process is about operational aspects of the department and any information around the financial aspects of the department. If we could keep our questions to that topic, it would be great.

Mr YOUNG: Can you explain the decrease in funding from \$33.828m to \$27.398m in 2025–26? That is in the BP3 document. What specific programs or grants have been impacted by this reduction?

Mr CHARLS: The \$6.44m decrease for the arts and culture budget relates to the \$7.1m for 2024–25 milestone payments in line with agreements for the national iconic Arts Trail Gallery extensions; \$1.7m of time-limited funding for the 2024–25 NT art gallery exhibition design and fixtures; and an additional \$2.5m for MAGNT operational funding. The adjustment of \$6.44m in allocation was because one major project, the national milestone payment, was complete. It was a one-off payment for a project, not ongoing funding.

Mr YOUNG: What money has been allocated towards the Arts Grants Program in the 2024–25 budget, and can you provide a breakdown?

Mr CHARLS: The budget allocation for 2025–26 for the Arts NT grants are \$7.923m. The breakdown is \$6.808m for the arts industry development and capacity building; \$463,000 for career development; \$515,000 for activating arts; and \$137,000 for venues and facilities.

Mr YOUNG: Can you confirm if these grants will be indexed to ensure artists are supported with the rising cost of living?

Mr CHARLS: Yes. It will be considered and indexed.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a breakdown of what that will cost?

Mr CHARLS: Regarding the budget parameters, the Northern Territory Government has confirmed the approach to pass on the budget CPI and efficiency dividend to grant budgets as published in the 2025–26 budget papers as follows. The Northern Territory Government applied 3% for wage increases, derived as 75% of total, and 1.7% for operational cost increases, resulting in a combined consumer price index rate of 2.675% to grant funding. A budget repair measure of 1% has been applied to all agency budgets, including grants. The grants were increased by 1.675%; this represents \$1.67 per \$100 of funding.

Mr YOUNG: How many artists did these grants support overall? Can you provide a breakdown by region?

Mr CHARLS: I cannot specifically answer about the artists, but with the artists, art workers and art organisations funded through arts and culture grant programs, year to date is 157.

Mr YOUNG: You cannot break it down by region.

Mr CHARLS: If you want that specific information, I will take it on notice and provide further information.

Mr YOUNG: How many artists was it overall, just out of interest?

Mr CHARLS: Including artists, art workers and art organisations funded through the arts and culture grant, it is 157.

Mr YOUNG: Are you able to name—just joking.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, did you want to take the remainder of that question on notice?

Mr CHARLS: I have further information. At 31 March 2025, 177 grants have supported 88 artists and art workers and 69 arts organisations across the Northern Territory. This represents a 33% increase from last year.

Mr YOUNG: Can we have that document tabled, because there are 150-something, I think you said, minister?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to table that document?

Mr YOUNG: I know you have a sore throat, so I would not want you to read it.

Mr CHARLS: This is like internal speaking points—my notes. There are 157 in total, 88 artists and art workers and 69 arts organisations. That is the breakdown of the 157. There will be further impact on the artists, because within the arts organisations there will be multiple artists. We will not be able to provide that data, because that will be sitting with the individual arts organisations.

Mr YOUNG: Can I get the question on notice? I will not ask who the artists were, but the organisations that received funding.

Question on Notice No 4.9

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

Mr YOUNG: Can you provide the committee with a list of the arts organisations that received grants under the Arts Grants Program?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.9.

Mr YOUNG: How much of the 2025–26 budget is dedicated to the implementation of the NT Arts Strategy 2034?

Mr CHARLS: As described in other areas as well, when it comes to the strategy, the allocation of funding is within the total FTE allocation of the department.

Mr YOUNG: You do not have a breakdown of any funding allocation that sits within that for the Arts Strategy.

Ms LIVESLEY: It will be done from within our existing staffing cohort of the Arts NT office. We have staff there who deliver the arts programs and strategy and grants programs and engage with the art sector. One of the things that they will be doing is developing the action plan and delivering on the Arts Strategy as part of their role. I do not have a breakdown.

Mr YOUNG: Is there no budget?

Ms LIVESLEY: There is not a dedicated budget; it is part of the role of some of the officers in the Arts NT division.

Mr YOUNG: What programs and initiatives are being funded to ensure the sector can create sustainable careers for local artists, and can you provide a breakdown?

Mr CHARLS: The budget allocation for arts industry development and capacity building is \$6.808m for the 2025–26 budget and \$463,000 for career development.

Mr YOUNG: Are there any plans to establish a program like the Arts Trail, which was funded by the previous government to support local artists and the visitor economy?

Mr CHARLS: Not at this stage.

Mr YOUNG: Has that program been cut?

Mr CHARLS: There is no change to the existing plan from the previous government. All the projects will go ahead as per the plan to be completed, but there is no plan to put in additional funding for new projects. The existing funding will carry over and make sure that whatever was committed will be completed.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a breakdown of funding for that program by region?

Mr CHARLS: In 2024 three upgrades were completed, including the \$7.6m upgrade to the Godinymayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Culture Centre in Katherine, which officially opened in April 2025; the \$10m upgrade to the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in Tennant Creek; and the \$11m upgrade to the new Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts Centre, with opening events being planned for July 2025.

J DAVIS: What proportion of arts funding in the current budget is directed towards artists and organisations based in remote and regional parts of the Northern Territory, particularly in Aboriginal communities?

Mr CHARLS: That information is not currently available, but I can take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.10

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

J DAVIS: What proportion of arts funding in the current budget is directed towards artists and organisations based in remote and regional parts of the Northern Territory, particularly in Aboriginal communities?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.10.

J DAVIS: I want to thank all of you, and particularly the public servants for being here so late. It is a long night, and we all feel it.

Can the minister provide a list of Aboriginal arts centres that have received funding this financial year, and outline what support is being offered to strengthen their long-term viability and cultural leadership?

Mr CHARLS: For First Nations Capacity Building through the Ngukurr Arts Aboriginal Corporation there was funding approved for \$58,170. The Aboriginal corporations were: Bula'bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation, \$30,000; Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation, \$14,215; Jilamara Arts and Craft Association, \$27,000; Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts Aboriginal Corporation, \$10,000; Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Indigenous Corporation, \$9,758; Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, \$10,000; and Bula'bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation, \$9,320 for the new centre facilities.

When it comes to the arts centres, the Commonwealth is the major funder and it provides supporting funding for the organisations.

J DAVIS: The second part of my question was: what support is being offered by the department to strengthen art centres' long-term viability and their cultural leadership?

Ms LIVESLEY: We have a dedicated program called First Nations Capacity Building within Arts NT in the department. They support Aboriginal arts organisations, including remote art centres, around building their capacity and delivering their creative industries.

J DAVIS: Is there a budget for that program?

Ms LIVESLEY: It is about \$650,000 per annum.

J DAVIS: What mechanisms are in place to evaluate the impact of arts grants and programs? For example, are there KPIs in place to measure outcomes such as artist employment, community engagement or cultural preservation?

Ms LIVESLEY: I am sorry, Member for Johnston, could I get you to repeat the question?

J DAVIS: Sure. What reporting mechanisms are in place to evaluate the impact of arts grants and programs? What kinds of KPIs are there? My examples, which may be different from yours, are artist employment, community engagement and cultural preservation.

Ms LIVESLEY: As part of our grant program and the grant acquittal program, the funded arts organisations report back to Arts NT on their engagement of audience members and artists and those outcomes. They have quite a rich data collection of that, of feedback and around the value-add to the community from those investments.

J DAVIS: Can you provide any data on support specifically to music as part of arts?

Ms LIVESLEY: Yes. Music NT is funded as one of our leading arts organisations. There is a range of arts programs. They are funded \$115,000 a year as the leading arts organisation peak body for music in the Northern Territory. Along with the Arts Grants Program that runs each year that is application based, there will be a range of different activities and artists and arts organisations funded under that delivering activities related to music.

J DAVIS: Do you have a figure on what the arts industry contributes to the NT economy?

Mr CHARLS: No, I do not have the number; that is not part of the budget process or the output.

J DAVIS: I have seen various things in the media, as you probably have, about the amount the arts industry contributes. I wondered whether that was something that fed into your thinking.

Can you provide, or do you collect any, data on how many jobs are supported through arts funding in the current reporting period?

Ms LIVESLEY: That would form part of that grant process before in terms of some of the reporting.

J DAVIS: Will the NT Government continue to support and provide funding to the Northern Territory Performing Arts Awards?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, the Territory government will continue to support it.

J DAVIS: Is there any support provided specifically for multicultural arts projects in the Northern Territory?

Mr CHARLS: Within the arts program there is no specific multicultural allocation, but within this program and also the multicultural grants the organisations that are applying and successful in grant programs have that support.

J DAVIS: Is there any kind of evaluation of the reflection of cultural diversity in arts grants awards? Does that question make sense?

Mr CHARLS: Can you reframe that question?

J DAVIS: How is cultural diversity reflected in funding grants?

Ms LIVESLEY: That is all part of our grant assessment process. When the panel meets it looks for a good cross-section of activities and programs to be funded. That would include regions, the different creative industries, delivery and programs, as well as the diversity in what is being offered.

J DAVIS: Are the criteria for that selection publicly available?

Ms LIVESLEY: Arts NT each year release their grants program, and that includes all the guidelines for each of those grant programs.

J DAVIS: Have you visited any of the arts centres in remote communities?

Mr YOUNG: It is a pretty straightforward question: have you visited an art centre?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, it is not your question.

Mr CHARLS: I have been to Hermannsburg and visited the facility there.

J DAVIS: It is great. I encourage you to get to as many as you can. It is something we can be proud of here in the Northern Territory.

Mr YOUNG: I find it concerning you have only visited one Aboriginal arts centre since you became minister, given there are hundreds of ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, keep it to questions; no statements, please.

Mr YOUNG: It could be framed as part of my question, so you should not cut in until I have finished my question.

On that and the importance of night-time economies and their strong connection to the creative industry, the performance sector and the visitor economy, do you have a night-time economy strategy? If not, why not?

Mr CHARLS: Can you please repeat the question?

Mr YOUNG: Night-time economies have strong connections with the creative industry, the performance sector and the visitor economy. Do you have a night-time economy strategy?

Mr CHARLS: No, we do not have a strategy. I do not think the previous Labor government of eight years was really in favour of supporting the night-time economy in Darwin and across the Northern Territory.

Mr YOUNG: We had not cut funding from the arts industry. You have shown that in your last budget ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Questions, Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: Considering that you are following on from the previous Labor government's existing programs, such as the arts program, does the CLP government have any new initiatives for any new programs in the arts industry?

Mr CHARLS: When I took charge as the Minister for Arts, one of the first briefings I received from MAGNT was their lack of funding ...

Mr YOUNG: So why did you cut it? Why did you cut funding?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, please allow the minister to finish his answer.

Mr CHARLS: The previous government neglected MAGNT, and the briefing I received when I became the Minister for Arts was that it was at the point of partial closure of all MAGNT facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs, including Bullocky Point, Fannie Bay Gaol and Megafauna and cancellation of ...

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! That was not the basis of my question. The question was in regard to all the current 2025–26 budget allocation which is exactly the same as the 2024–25 budget which is all from the programs ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Daly, I think your question was around if there are any new initiatives.

Mr YOUNG: Yes, new initiatives. He is not answering that.

Mr CHARLS: It shows the Member for Daly did not read through the budget books regarding the allocation. MAGNT was lacking continuously for many years, from (inaudible) department, they were moving on the underspend from Territory Families across for ongoing funding every June for the next financial year.

As I mentioned earlier, one of my first priorities was to ensure that MAGNT would be sustainably funded for operations into the future; otherwise, they were at the point of closure or partial closure of their facilities, including the facility at Bullocky Point. I was informed that they would at least have to cut down one to

two days of operations at Bullocky Point, and that is why this government has made the investment of an additional \$2.5m ongoing for MAGNT to ensure they are operationally funded within the budget allocation that we will provide to them.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have any other initiatives like the Arts Trail program that the Labor government funded? Do you have any new initiatives in terms of programs that will be rolled out across the Territory?

Mr CHARLS: For this financial year our priority was to support MAGNT, and in the future we will look at how we can support other sectors as well.

Mr YOUNG: Is that a no?

Mr CHARLS: We supported MAGNT by providing an additional \$2.5m as ongoing funding, and we will look into other priorities.

J DAVIS: Can you provide a breakdown of government funding allocated to major arts and cultural festivals for this reporting period, and explain how you balance funding between established and emerging events?

Mr CHARLS: Major arts festivals are funded through the Major Events department, which is under Minister Boothby.

J DAVIS: Is there any funding from your portfolio for any significant arts events?

Mr CHARLS: No. It is all funded through Major Events as a grants program.

J DAVIS: Are there any initiatives or funding in place to ensure that artists and audiences with disabilities have equal access to arts programs, venues and funding opportunities?

Mr CHARLS: Is your question specific to major festivals?

J DAVIS: In general, in terms of your initiatives and funding, is there anything in place to ensure that artists and audiences with disability have equal access to arts programs, venues and funding opportunities?

Ms LIVESLEY: Within the Arts NT program there is a number of organisations that they fund that deliver dedicated disability arts programs. The key one is Darwin Community Arts. We fund other organisations who will do a dedicated program for people with disability. It is also one of the actions within our Disability Strategy Action Plan.

J DAVIS: Are arts organisations required to meet access standards as part of their grant agreements?

Ms LIVESLEY: Is that in terms of disability access standards?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Ms LIVESLEY: I would have to take that on notice, but not that I am aware of. Trying to ensure the programs and services we provide are accessible to people with disability is a key focus for our department.

J DAVIS: If you do not have standards, can you explain how you do that?

Mr CHARLS: Can you please reframe that question, just to understand? Is it the organisations need to be compliant?

J DAVIS: Are arts organisations required to meet access standards for people with disabilities as part of any grant agreement? I think Ms Livesley said it is not formal. There is nothing formal, but there is an expectation; is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: Many of the art organisations are working from older buildings which have different disability standards. If you were to put that as a criterion it would exclude a lot of organisations. That would be almost like we are going totally against the arts industry. We can work through them and we can encourage them, but I am not aware of any single organisation that is well off for money, because they all need additional funding. If we were to further restrict the criteria, it will impact them further.

J DAVIS: There are no criteria because that might exclude people from being able to apply for money because of the physical situation they are working from; is that what you mean?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the organisations that are receiving current grants, there are limitations on how we can put standard 2025 disability access criteria for the organisations that are running programs from decades ago. The disability standard requirements for a building would normally be approved—it is not part of my department, so this is from my understanding—at that point in time when the approval was given. If there were any further modification of the building it would have the additional requirement to come up to the current standard. For the grant program if you were to put those criteria it would affect many of the providers because they will become ineligible to apply for the grant.

J DAVIS: I understand. Is it something you ask people to address? Not to be able to satisfy, but to address and explain whether or not they are able to satisfy it as part of their grant applications?

Mr CHARLS: No, it is not part of the grant application.

J DAVIS: Is there any specific arts funding allocated to LGBTQI arts programs?

Mr CHARLS: In this output, within the Arts Grants Program there is nothing specific. In the previous output there were grant programs specifically for—not for the arts, but to support gender equality.

J DAVIS: There are grants under the previous output to support gender equality, but no specific grants to support projects for that community; is that correct?

Mr CHARLS: There is not a dedicated grant program within this output.

J DAVIS: Is any funding allocated to arts programs delivered in youth justice or adult correctional settings?

Mr CHARLS: Not through this output. It is most likely funded through Corrections.

J DAVIS: You may have answered this as part of the question about the Museum and Art Gallery. Has any specific funding been allocated to carry out archiving and storage of artworks at the Museum and Art Gallery? I understand the storage capacity is limited.

Mr CHARLS: They are internal decisions that the Chair, the board and the MAGNT operational team make on how they utilise the funding allocated to them.

J DAVIS: Is there no specific funding in relation to that?

Mr CHARLS: Our funding is the overall funding to support the operations of MAGNT.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a breakdown from MAGNT regarding spending they have put towards archiving and the storage of artworks? Did they provide that information?

Mr CHARLS: Not to that level of detail.

Mr YOUNG: Are you able to get that level of detail and take the question on notice?

Mr CHARLS: We can ask MAGNT whether they have a specific allocation, but the government will not be reaching out and making internal affairs decisions for MAGNT.

Question on Notice No 4.11

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

Mr YOUNG: Can the minister provide the funding allocation through MAGNT in regard to archiving and storage of artworks?

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

Mr CHARLS: I will. It is up to MAGNT to respond; it is up to them. I am happy to take it on notice with the condition that it is subject to whether MAGNT wants to release that information.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.11.

Mr YOUNG: Does the current budget allocate any resources or include measures to improve the accessibility and ease of the grant application process, particularly for artists and organisations with limited access to technology or where English is not the first language?

Mr CHARLS: There is no current dedicated grant program, but we are open to looking to see what other additional operational ways that we can support.

Mr YOUNG: You are open to that idea. Would you be getting advice through Aboriginal art organisations such as ANKA (Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists)? How will you start that process?

Mr CHARLS: We can further explore this with ANKA and Desart, two peak bodies we fund. They will be able to counsel us about this issue.

J DAVIS: Have you met with ANKA and Desart?

Mr CHARLS: Not in a ministerial capacity, no, but the department is communicating and they are one of the stakeholders that they are working with.

Mr YOUNG: How much of the arts and culture budget is dedicated to new infrastructure or repairs and upgrading for performance spaces across the Territory? Can you provide a breakdown of where those upgrades are happening and when they will happen?

Mr CHARLS: The repairs and maintenance budget sits with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, but they work with the Department of People, Sport and Culture on which ones need to be looked into and placed on a priority basis.

Mr YOUNG: Does it sit with Minister Yan?

Mr CHARLS: Yes, that is right; the fund sits with Minister Yan.

Mr BROWN: What is in the budget to support the growth of the local music industry, noting it supports hundreds of jobs and visitors?

Mr CHARLS: As part of the leading arts organisation funding, Music NT Inc is funded \$115,000. That was money approved as of 31 March 2025.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Libraries and Archives

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 3.2, Libraries and Archives. Are there any questions?

Mr YOUNG: Library & Archives NT supports over three dozen libraries across the Territory, including those in remote communities. Not only that, it is the Territory's main archival and research hub. It is a vital institution. How much of this year's budget has been allocated to Library & Archives NT? Was it a decrease from last year's budget?

Mr CHARLS: For the next financial year the budget allocation is \$11.36m. The reduction of \$1.1m was due to the cessation of the amount that we received as part of the budget for the design, fit-out and relocation of the NT Library from Parliament House to the Charles Darwin University campus in the city.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a breakdown of funding for council libraries? How many libraries do you fund, and where are they?

Mr CHARLS: For the Alice Springs Town Council it is \$623,906; Alyangula Area School, \$22,612; Barkly Regional Council, \$168,350; Central Desert Regional Council, \$112,122; Coomalie Community Government Council, \$47,787; City of Darwin, \$1.508m; East Arnhem Regional Council, \$371,541; Katherine Town Council, \$239,364; Litchfield Council, \$295,036; MacDonnell Regional Council, \$90,685; City of Palmerston,

\$687,791; Roper Gulf Regional Council, \$219,677; Tiwi Islands Regional Council, \$93,222; Victoria Daly Regional Council, \$41,287; West Arnhem Regional Council, \$141,246; and West Daly Regional Council, \$73,860. That is a total approved of \$4.737m.

J DAVIS: With the list you read out, are there any libraries or access to libraries in remote communities?

Mr CHARLS: That is the funding we provide to town councils or the city councils, and normally it is within their remits how they operate. A further breakdown we have is about the wi-fi hotspots in the different regions or the communities.

J DAVIS: Is that something that you provide or you have information about?

Mr CHARLS: We provide the funding to the council for them to distribute and make decisions on their regions and which community needs to have it, but we do not have that information.

J DAVIS: When you talk about the wi-fi hotspot ...

Mr CHARLS: For the wi-fi hotspots I have a list of different communities with the LANT wi-fi hotspots.

J DAVIS: Is that provided through you?

Mr CHARLS: It is provided through the council and funded by us.

J DAVIS: I happy for you not to read it out, but would you be able to table it?

Mr CHARLS: I am unable to table it. I can take a question on notice to provide the list of town councils, LANT wi-fi hotspots and which area it is located.

Question on Notice No 4.12

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

J DAVIS: Please provide the list of regional councils and wi-fi hotspots.

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.12.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you for the breakdown of the funding for each of the councils. I picked up that West Daly region, I think you said, had \$77,000 allocated, which is one of the lowest funding allocations. I wonder how you get to the funding allocations. Is it based on constituency or the landmass that a council area would cover? I think Wadeye is the fifth largest community in the Northern Territory, plus the West Daly Regional Council covers many other communities in that region. How do you come to those figures for each council?

Mr CHARLS: I need to correct that amount. It is \$73,816.

Ms LIVESLEY: There is quite a methodology that sits behind it, I understand. It is based on the population of the regions and we also ensure that we do an evening-out to ensure that remote areas and regional areas are not disadvantaged by the major population areas. We try to ensure a bit more of an equitable spread.

We can have a further look into it and provide some additional information on how that is done.

Mr YOUNG: That would be a question on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.13

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

Mr YOUNG: The question is in regard to funding for libraries in community councils and how that funding is allocated to each community council, in particular in remote areas and West Daly, considering there is a large population base there.

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.13.

Mr YOUNG: How much of the budget is allocated to grants for libraries to host programs like Mums and Bubs, reading and literacy programs or school holiday programs?

Mr CHARLS: It is up to the individual councils and libraries on how they will utilise the funding and come up with their working operational model. We do not have any direct influence on that.

Mr YOUNG: Are there any plans for infrastructure upgrades for libraries or archival centres in the Territory? If so, where are they happening?

Mr CHARLS: When it comes to the library the infrastructure element of the funding sits with the council and how it decides. Our funding is mainly going to the operational needs. When it comes to archives there were upgrades in the last couple of years in some of the areas. There is no current plan for any further upgrades.

Mr YOUNG: I think I know the answer to this question. It will probably sit under the funding allocation for each of the councils, but I will ask it anyway. Libraries provide a vital service to remote communities. They give communities a chance to gain education through books and technology. How much of the budget is allocated towards providing remote libraries with computer upgrades? Which communities will be receiving them?

Mr CHARLS: As you said, it is up to the individual town councils and libraries to decide.

Mr YOUNG: Are there any plans to support and expand mobile library services in under-served areas across the Territory?

Mr CHARLS: We allocate the fund for the regional councils. They come up with their operational model. It will be up to them on how they want to provide these opportunities for those people living in that area.

Mr YOUNG: Have any of the councils come to you in regard to expanding the mobile library service? If so, which ones?

Mr CHARLS: I do not have information on that.

Mr YOUNG: What was the final cost of the relocation of Library & Archives NT from Parliament House to the Charles Darwin University campus?

Ms LIVESLEY: That was for the whole project of moving, including the construction and fit-out. That would be over a number of years. We would need to seek information from the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure which ran that construction project. Then there would be other multiple years we would need to go back and review in terms of the development of new exhibitions and fit-outs for accommodating additional staff at the archive centre and the move that happened this year. If you wanted a total figure of the cost of the new library at the CDU campus we would need to take that on notice and seek information from other agencies and us over the last few financial years.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Would you like to take that on notice?

Mr YOUNG: Yes.

Question on Notice No 4.14

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

Mr YOUNG: What was the final cost of the relocation of Library & Archives NT from Parliament House to the Charles Darwin University campus? I note that will have to go back through a number of budgets.

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.14.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I ask this question on behalf of the Member for Goyder. Has the department been contacted by Litchfield Council in regard to the upcoming relocation of the council's library from Taminmin College to Coolalinga Central? Will the council receive any additional funding for the move?

Mr CHARLS: Based on the current information we have, there is no consultation or reach-out with the department. There is no plan or there will not be any additional funding allocated for the transfer of the library as specified in your question.

J DAVIS: Has there been any specific funding allocated for the preservation of fragile, at-risk or culturally significant materials in archives?

Mr CHARLS: There is no specific funding allocation for that service, but preserving those archives is part of their role.

J DAVIS: Is there work being done to ensure Aboriginal access to culturally significant records that archives hold, including records relating to Stolen Generations?

Ms LIVESLEY: Our Library & Archives senior director has done work with Terri Janke to develop cultural protocols in terms of access of information within Library & Archives. That project is well progressed, and I think they are beginning to roll that out and implement those cultural protocols within Library & Archives now.

J DAVIS: Do you know when that will be fully implemented?

Ms LIVESLEY: It will take a period of time to roll it out and make sure it is embedded in the practice. They are looking at it being a progressive piece of work over a period of time.

J DAVIS: As part of that, are there programs or a way to work on repatriation of archives to Aboriginal communities?

Ms LIVESLEY: Not at this stage. There are other pieces of work around—there is a Regional Museums Grants Program run through the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory to support those regional and remote museums.

There is also, through the Commonwealth, AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), the key body in this space around repatriation of cultural and sacred items to remote communities and other Aboriginal organisations.

J DAVIS: Is there any financial support for that?

Mr CHARLS: I can confirm that I wrote to Minister Tony Burke a few months ago about providing that additional financial support because many repatriations are dating back to pre-Northern Territory time, before 1974. I have not received a response from the minister, but that is something that I escalated.

J DAVIS: Do you have records on how many public access requests were received in the last financial year, and how many were completed within timeframes?

Mr CHARLS: is that specifically through Archives? Because MAGNT works in the same space as well ...

J DAVIS: I am specifically interested in Archives. For context, the archives are amazing, and I am interested how much they are accessed and how many people access them.

Mr CHARLS: We do not have that information, but we can see whether they can provide that information.

Question on Notice No 4.15

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

J DAVIS: How many public access requests were received for Archives NT in the last financial year?

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

Mr CHARLS: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 4.15.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of all outputs relating to the Department of People, Sport and Culture.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and his staff for appearing before the committee and all departmental officers who provided assistance.

Mr CHARLS: I thank all the committee members and the Department of People, Sport and Culture staff members who have worked for many weeks to reach this point, as well as my staff members on the fifth floor. Thank you for your support and hard work.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes Estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence at 9 am on Monday 16 June with questions for the Attorney-General.

The committee concluded.
