

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

POWER AND WATER CORPORATION

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Good morning, everyone and welcome to the final day of Estimates hearings. Thank you for coming. Happy last day of Estimates.

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

I welcome Mr Peter Wilson, Chair of Power and Water Corporation Board. Could you please introduce the officers accompanying you today?

Mr WILSON: Good morning, Chair and members. I am pleased to be here and introduce the Power and Water officials with me today. We have our CEO, Djuna Pollard; Deputy CEO, John Pease on her right; Chief Financial Officer, Graciano Chatikobo on my left; and the Executive General Manager Core Operation, Michael Besselink. There are other executive team members present should the nature of the questions require them to join us.

I have an opening statement for committee members, but it is in your hands as to when you would like that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will invite you to make a brief opening statement. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then move on to consider questions regarding the corporation's 2025–26 Statement of Corporate Intent.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by the shadow minister.

Mr Wilson, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of Power and Water Corporation?

Mr WILSON: I would, thank you, Chair. Thank you for clarifying those protocols.

Power and Water is operating in a dynamic environment to manage the regulatory and policy reform being undertaken at the moment but, more particularly, the growth in the demand for services and changing customer expectations.

In terms of a number of critical aspects of operation, I first touch on the gas curtailment from Eni, our supplier. That is one of the most significant matters Power and Water has been managing—the impact of that curtailment. It is a four-year reduction in supply that we have been managing. It is fair to say that it is without precedent in the history of the Australian energy industry. For example, it compares with the Longford gas explosion in 1997. I well recall my time as a member of the operating committee of the state of emergency that Premier Kennet declared. That interruption of supply took two months. Here we have been working with a significant interruption to supply for four years.

It has been an ongoing challenge since 2021. The new Power and Water Board was appointed in 2022, and it has been actively managing the situation with management during those three years. We are continuing to pursue our legal rights and entitlements under the 25-year gas sale agreement with Eni. However, we also cooperate with them operationally and professionally to ensure that whatever gas is available is provided from Eni Blacktip into the Northern Territory electricity generation grid.

It remains our priority to ensure the reduction in gas supply from Eni does not impact Territory homes or businesses. Through extensive contingency planning, we have entered into gas sales agreements to support the deficiency and have delivered upgrades to the gas pipeline infrastructure to ensure we can meet electricity demand where it occurs.

At this point I pay tribute to the tireless and incredible work of people at Power and Water, led by our CEO, Djuna Pollard, during this curtailment. Their service to the community has meant applying enormous efforts and long hours to ensure alternative strategies and actions have been put in place to secure continuing alternative gas supply. This has been done on top of the demanding day jobs of operating a transmission and distribution grid for electricity, a system control centre and Territory-wide water service to businesses.

We will continue this important work to support the ongoing supply and sale of gas for electricity generation and long-term gas supplies will be strengthened further to help grow the Territory economy.

Turning to our financial position, we are also committed to operating with the efficiency of comparable businesses, ensuring we can operate in a commercial manner, but also maximise sustainable returns to the Northern Territory Government. We are dedicated to achieving this without compromising reliability or quality of the essential services we provide.

That said, we are not expected to meet several key financial key performance indicators outlined in the 2024–25 Statement of Corporate Intent, almost exclusively due to gas curtailment. When the impact of gas curtailment is excluded, our forecasts indicate stronger than expected performance relative to our budget.

Considering the changed economic conditions, the Treasurer has introduced a revised financial performance target for Power and Water of earnings before interest and tax on assets of 6%, and that will be effective from 1 July 2025.

Looking to the next financial year we look to be just shy of meeting that fiscal target if all things go to plan. The Statement of Corporate Intent for 2025–26 outlines long-term targets aimed at driving improvements to improve this metric by 2029 and supporting sustainable returns to Territorians.

Between 2026 and 2031 we project \$139m in returns to Territorians while maintaining a strong focus on cost control. Our debt-to-equity ratio is forecast to rise to 1.4 next financial year before declining to 1.3 from 2027–28. This is occurring alongside planned investments exceeding \$1.5bn, which will contribute to a total asset base of \$4.3bn and a net asset base after debt of \$2.2bn by 2027–28. These investments are designed to enhance the delivery and reliability of services to our customers.

As a regulated utility Power and Water operates under the rules that ensure fair pricing and financial sustainability. We fund around 60% of our capital investments with debt, which is a common industry practice in the energy and water fields. Our current debt levels remain low compared with other similar Australian utilities, placing Power and Water in a strong and healthy position within the expectations set by our regulators.

It is worth noting that under an earlier agreement between the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth Government our business is regulated by the Australian Energy Regulator, which has determined in the last year that not only is our debt-to-equity ratio appropriate over the next five years, but it is also comparable with other utilities regulated in Australia.

In terms of the journey on renewable energy Power and Water is continuing to play a central role in enabling the Territory's transition to renewable energy that is affordable and sustainable. As of 13 June 2025 three of the six solar farms in the Darwin–Katherine network were dispatching at their full capacity. A further two are approved to dispatch at 75% of capacity and are progressing well to achieve full capacity. The other solar farm is managing generation issues, and we are working cooperatively with them to bring them up to speed to dispatch at ultimately 100% levels.

It is fair to say that rooftop solar generation continues to grow enormously. It is often not seen, but it is a major contributor to the move to renewable energy generation in the Territory.

I turn to water. Securable, reliable and essential water provision is important for the wellbeing of Territorians and to support a strong economy, but there are big investments going on as part of that. The Manton Dam return to service has seen more than 100,000 hours to work to completion at the Manton Dam Return to Service project, and that will add another 7,300 megalitres to Darwin's water supply. By comparison the Darwin River system produces 45,000 megalitres, so there is a nearly 20% increase to that from Manton Dam's return to service. We will, as the government expects us, keep Manton Dam available for recreational use, which puts on an obligation in terms of treatment of the water for subsequent consumption downstream.

We have also been successful in securing partnerships and funding with the National Water Grid Authority, and we are working to address many water security, quality and supply issues in remote communities, including support for new housing and industry developments.

Our quiet achiever mantle also extends to a range of projects which have received national recognition. Last year we received a number of awards for treating uranium in the water sources at Laramba and more recently in cooperation with Defence to remove PFAS, a chemical contaminant from firefighting chemicals, from the water supply at Katherine. That was fully executed at the Commonwealth's expense after it admitted liability.

We aim to be a leader in reconciliation in the community. We will complete the Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan at the end of this month and will move to the second-highest level Stretch Reconciliation Plan from 1 July.

In closing my comments we would be remiss if I did not say, whilst we aspire to be quiet achievers many of our people have been acknowledged for their excellent service to the community. Among them are, Marlin Hunter-Sheeney and Ann Vincent, who received 2024 NAIDOC Awards; Carly Collins was named Water Professional of the Year at the 2024 Australian Water Industry Northern Territory Awards; and at the 2025 GTNT Group Awards early this month, Georgina Siebert, Damien Aarons, Oliver King and Jack Rentsch received individual honours. Power and Water was a finalist in the Host Business of the Year category.

I close by acknowledging the dedication and commitment of Power and Water's people and the strong leadership of Djuna and their management team. I am pleased to take questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the opening statement?

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Peter, particularly some of the outstanding achievements you mentioned in the opening statement: the great work that happened at the Laramba water treatment and Katherine PFAS treatment plant which is very impressive. Are we still saying that it is the largest, maybe, in the southern hemisphere?

Mr WILSON: I think so.

Ms UIBO: It would be good to get that clarified, it would be excellent to shout that from the rooftops. The work on the Reconciliation Action Plan for the corporation is very impressive, of course, and the ongoing community event sponsorship from Power and Water. It is fantastic to see, and many people on the committee would say, to see Power and Water giving back to the community in such a great way at Freds Pass Rural Show and Barunga Festival recently—congratulations, I know you will be busy doing the show circuit.

My first question to the corporation is: how many permanent staff at Power and Water live or are based outside of the Northern Territory?

Mr WILSON: I could quote that off the top of my head, but I will pass to Djuna to give you the exact answer.

Ms POLLARD: At the moment, Power and Water has a total of 12 employees working outside the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO: Can I clarify the permanent staff?

Ms POLLARD: Three are exec contract officers, and the remaining nine are ongoing full-time staff.

Ms UIBO: How many contractors are employed in Power and Water Corporation?

Ms POLLARD: At the moment Power and Water has 58.5 FTE of executive contract officers. We will see if we can find the answer to the number of contractors that are non-executive contract officers before this morning's session is finished.

Ms UIBO: Could you please provide a summary table of your organisational structure, if it is available, if not on notice. In particular, the breakdown of how many executives and senior management officers you have and how many staff are dedicated to operations?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I ask if you could introduce yourself as you start speaking?

Ms POLLARD: I will take the questions starting with the overall organisation level. Power and Water is structured by what we call business units. The figures I will provide today are as at the end of March 2025.

Firstly, in my office, the office of the CEO, there is one FTE. I should say from the outset that these numbers include the staff we have at Power and Water Corporation who work on Indigenous Essential Services. They are included in these numbers.

Our second business unit is Power Services. The FTE is 248.1. Water Services has 156.35. Customer and Strategy has 99.33. Core Operations has 259.86. Finance and Business Services has 64.27. Gas Services has 10. Safety People and Governance has 71.81. The total FTE is 910.72.

Ms UIBO: Can I clarify the 58.5 contractor FTEs are included in that 910.72 final figure?

Ms POLLARD: Yes, I can confirm that the total number of our executive contract officers are included in the 910 FTE figure. The 910 figure excludes our board members.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You mentioned in the response to the Leader of the Opposition that you had 12 executive contractors working outside the Territory. I think you said three ECOs and nine normal contractors. Can you explain the rationale for that?

Mr WILSON: Yes. There are a range of reasons. I will pass back to Ms Pollard.

Ms POLLARD: We have, of the total of 12, three executive contractors who are working outside of the Northern Territory. This is largely attributed to some of the specific priorities for the organisation at the moment. I will take the first one, our head of Gas Services, currently resides in Perth. The main reason is that all or most of our gas producers are based in Perth, and the law firms we work with—quite heavily at the moment in terms of the broader dispute process that Peter mentioned—are also based in Perth. It is more effective and efficient for us to have our head of Gas based in Perth at the moment.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Would that include Eni?

Ms POLLARD: Headquarters for Eni Australia is also based in Perth, that is correct. The other two roles—one relates to the person who is leading our operating model program of work which is a large body of work that focuses on technology, ICT and operating technology system uplifts and replacements. We had to replace all five of our core systems that we use at Power and Water. At the moment we are focusing on our meter-to-cash project but with the technology uplift we have taken the opportunity to look at our processes internally and streamline those to be as efficient for our customers, as much as we can. Obviously, there is a people change there. It is a significant program of work. The head of our business is working interstate at the moment, but he spends a lot of time in the Territory. He is also working with our various vendors we have engaged for that program.

The last one is closely linked to a specialist around metering. This will be for a period of time until such time as we finalise our roll out of electricity smart meters across the Territory and our meter-to-cash project, which is due to go live very soon, on 1 July this year.

Ms UIBO: Does Power and Water have a current FTE cap, and if so what is that cap number?

Ms POLLARD: We do not have an overall FTE cap from an organisational level; however, we still have a cap on our executive contract officer numbers. That cap is 68. I incorrectly stated the number of executive contract officers that we have as at 31 March 2025; it is 59.5. We are currently under that cap of 68.

Ms UIBO: Is there a budget allocation for staff since there is no cap? If so, is there a forecast around increasing any of the FTEs in regard to wages and budgets within the organisation?

Mr WILSON: I might ask Graciano, as there are strong planning numbers.

Mr CHATIKOBO: Yes, there is a budget approved as part of our statement of corporate intent. That target is what we work towards—the limit we work towards. Does that answer your question?

Ms UIBO: Yes, thank you. Can you provide the exact figure?

Mr CHATIKOBO: If I take you to the statement of corporate intent, on page 42, you will see that the personnel direct cost budgeted for 2025–26 is \$180.8m.

Ms UIBO: Just confirming, that figure is wages?

Mr CHATIKOBO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: We know that most organisations are struggling to recruit frontline workers, particularly in operations and trades, and more so in the regions like Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. What is being done to address this in the corporation?

Mr WILSON: We have put a lot of work in to ensure that, at a number of levels, we accord with the requirements of law in employment. The training in health and safety and issues around employment is a high priority. We have also done a lot of work in the last few years on what is called the employee value proposition, which is what makes us an attractive employer, where we can attract the right skills and sustain their retention.

We even have staff videos saying that it is a great place to live: family life, play golf, go swimming—in certain places. Our people are three groups: long-term Territorians; Territorians who left after school or university and then came back to the Territory; and other people who have discovered the rich life here and how suitable it is. We have a strong and competitively attractive proposition that we market to our roles. We put a lot of people on this year, in part because of the strong sense of the culture and the value of working for Power and Water in the Territory.

The demand for talent is extraordinarily high across the nation, but we have a strong niche. We are proud of it, and we have developed attractive offerings to people to come and work with us.

Ms UIBO: Is there still some further work with the corporation to convert contractors to full-time employees?

Mr WILSON: Yes. As we move through two main waves of change in our life, one is the move to renewable and sustainable energy and water, and the move to digitisation and smart systems that support our people. That is a really hot area for the pressure of skills around the country, so we have had to take contractors temporarily to move us through the curve of both those changes. Our aim, as far as practicable, is to recruit and retain our own from within wherever possible. Part of the journey of the contractors has been to train the skill of our people to bring them up to speed when the contract ends, but also there are specialist skills that we just do not have for those two journeys, so we are reliant on contractors to help fill that for some time. Our aim basically is to reduce that so that we have a strong sustainable employee own workforce.

Ms UIBO: The meter-to-cash program that was mentioned has been rolling out for some time now. What is the current cost of rolling out this program over the budget to date?

Mr CHATIKOBO: The project is in the order of \$80m. Currently we have an additional funding investment required of \$20.3m. The original budget was for \$59.6m.

Ms UIBO: Have you used any interstate or external people to be employed to deliver the rollout?

Mr WILSON: Yes we have for the specific reasons in this project relating to the general answer I gave a moment ago. Many of the skills for this project we do not have, so we have had a number of interstate people to assist.

Do we have a breakdown of that, Djuna?

Ms POLLARD: We do not have with us today a breakdown of the specific costs around contractors who have been involved on that project, but I can confirm that we have had to have external contractors working on that project, given the nature and complexity of the project. What makes it that bit more complex is that we are a multi-utility, which is uncommon in Australia. That has required bespoke skill sets for a period of time. We are happy to take that question on notice if you would like us to provide a breakdown.

Ms UIBO: That would be great, just noting the extra money and whether that has been an impact because of the skill sets not within the corporation and having to then pay for it and if that has been the reason for the need for extra budget.

Question on Notice No 10.1

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: With the meter-to-cash program rollout, how many interstate and external people have been employed to deliver this program?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.1.

Ms UIBO: What is the cost of the design to this stage of the meter-to-cash program? What is the breakdown of these costs in relation to local or Power and Water personnel undertaking this work compared with the external consultant and contractor component of the general operations?

Mr WILSON: We accept the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That was the next one.

Ms UIBO: That was the second one. Would you like to answer the second one?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If you need to take it on notice, you can.

Mr WILSON: We would need to take it on notice. It is a derivative of the other question. I would rather give you the right answer and the consistent answer with both parts.

Question on Notice No 10.2

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: What is the cost of the design to this stage of the meter-to-cash program? What is the breakdown of these costs in relation to local or Power and Water personnel undertaking this work compared with the external consultant and contractor component?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.2.

Ms UIBO: How many meters need to be replaced as part of this project and what are the timeframes?

Mr WILSON: I think Michael Besselink has those numbers permanently placed in his head. He is very proud of the rollout record too.

Mr BESSELINK: Across the Territory overall to date we have replaced 43,000 smart meters, which is about 66% of the total smart meters we have.

Ms UIBO: Can you elaborate on the timeframe on those?

Mr BESSELINK: Yes. Within the 2029 AER determination, we have committed to the complete rollout of all the smart meters by the end of 2029. Within that particular submission we were looking at around 55,000. We have quite a few now that we have done out of that lot.

Ms UIBO: Not wanting to jinx anything—just so I have the numbers in my head—but completion timeframe is 2029 for 55,000 meters, and so far to date approximately 43,000 meters have been replaced.

Mr BESSELINK: Yes, there is 43,000 and about 85,000 in total. The AER submission for the 2024–29 submission was for 55,000.

Ms UIBO: Great, thank you.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: On the smart meter rollout, I understand there were some smart meters rolled out and then had to be replaced again due to either some perceived fault or whatever. Can you update us on that?

Mr BESSELINK: Yes, we found with one of our suppliers that there was a fault within a batch of meters. There were about 5,000 of those meters. We have negotiated with that company to replace all of those meters. We are well through that process. We were aiming to have those completed by the end of June, and we will be probably a couple of hundred short due to access issues in some premises, but it will not be long after that.

Mr KERLE: A lot of my constituents in Blain come to me and have complaints that when they convert from an analogue meter to the digital meter, their power bills go up, some quite significantly. Do you have any explanation for why that might be and what testing and verification the new digital meters have had to ensure they are accurate?

Mr WILSON: We have experienced that. Part of the problem we found with the analogue meters is that they are wearing out and slowing down. A number of customers have experienced low bills for the actual consumption, which the smart meter rectified. We have been very responsive. We have a customer call centre responsive to those complaints, and we have gone through and checked them where we can to ensure people are not being short-changed. That is the main issue; the analogue meters are not working well; therefore, you get a bit of a jump on the actuated consumption that has been going for some time. We do not go after what has happened in the past; we just work through the implications.

I will also add that in this rollout people have a right not to have a smart meter, and they are advised they have a choice. I think only 25 have elected to do that; most people want a smart meter and the clarity that comes with that.

Mr KERLE: To summarise, if their bill increases when they switch over to a smart meter, it is just that the bills were anomalously low when they had the analogue meter because it was wearing out.

I have a question from a constituent. With the smart meters, is it possible for people to have access to a portal where they can view their own usage in the same rate of time that Power and Water can so that they can manage their usage better with the peak and off-peak rates? Apparently, this is available down south.

Mr WILSON: Again, I will pass to Michael. We are aware of that feature, and there is quite a lot of customer experience work being done over time.

Mr BESSELINK: There is capability within the meters for doing that. In the Territory we utilise SIM card technology to send information across the meters, whereas in a lot of the southern and eastern states they have used an almost real-time mesh radio system. The mesh radio system up here is not economic for the number of people we have, so the data is only transferred once a day. From real-time portal usage, customers generally would not get that in real time because we do not have the SIM cards running continuously with that data. It would be quite an expense to have transmissions going continuously across SIM cards.

Mr KERLE: With respect, executive general manager, the question was: would customers have the ability to view the data at the same frequency that Power and Water does?

Mr BESSELINK: Apologies. There is work going on to have that available. We do not have all of that available as the moment, but it is capable.

Ms UIBO: My question is about the life span of the meters and when they will be expected to be replaced. Obviously, some are only going in now and some will be, hopefully, by 2029. What is the general life span of each new meter?

Mr BESSELINK: The meters generally are around 15-plus years.

Ms UIBO: How many Power and Water employees are engaged to replace the old meters with the new smart meters?

Mr BESSELINK: For the program we have contractors who do the bulk of that. We have a contracting arrangement for people to do that. We also have members of our own power services team who replace a number of meters as well. I do not have the exact numbers at the moment.

Ms UIBO: I might ask that question again with another two. Perhaps if it cannot be answered today it could be answered on notice, Madam Deputy Chair, with your permission.

How many Power and Water employees are engaged to replace the old meters with the new smart meters? My next two questions are related. What contractor companies have been engaged to undertake these works? How many employees would these contractor companies have performing their works overall for the meter replacement?

Mr WILSON: We have that information, but it would probably be more efficient, if you are comfortable ...

Ms UIBO: I just bundled them up; it might be easier.

Question on Notice No 10.3

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: How many Power and Water employees are engaged to replace the old meters with the new smart meters? What contractor companies have been engaged to undertake these works? How many employees of these contractor companies would they have performing these overall works?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.3.

Ms UIBO: Can the corporation update us on the reactor bank design in Alice Springs?

Mr WILSON: We may need another officer to come to the table.

Ms SMALL: The reactor bank in the Alice Springs project is in progress. Reactor design is in the final stages of being completed. The order will be placed shortly, or has just been placed—I would need to double-check that—to get those delivered and commence construction.

Ms UIBO: In terms of timeframes, is 'shortly' a few weeks, a few months or by the end of this calendar year?

Ms SMALL: It would be—the delivery, sorry?

Ms UIBO: Yes, in terms of waiting. You used the words 'in progress' and then 'reactor design completion shortly'. Is that—sorry, mixing up some of your words.

Ms SMALL: The design will be completed—it is in progress and nearing completion. The completion of the project is still 18 months away.

Ms UIBO: For the design, you used the word 'shortly', so would that be within the next few weeks, months or by the end of the year could we expect that?

Ms SMALL: I would have to take that question on notice. I would be guessing.

Question on Notice No 10.4

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Can the corporation update us on the reactor bank design in Alice Springs and how far away is the progress for the completion of the design?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.4.

Ms UIBO: Regarding the Trevor Horman Zone Substation, how much has been spent to date on that, and how much progress has been made?

Mr WILSON: I think Graciano and/or Belinda would be able to answer that. It is in our capex budget.

Mr CHATIKOBO: We will take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 10.5

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Regarding the Trevor Horman Zone Substation, how much has been spent to date, and how much progress has been made on the substation?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.5.

Ms UIBO: How much has the Power and Water Corporation spent on consultancies in the reporting period?

Mr WILSON: To clarify, spending in the reporting period ...

Ms UIBO: In the reporting period, so 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Mr WILSON: For the period 1 July 2024 to 31 March, \$32.1m was paid for professional and regulatory fees outside of the Northern Territory Public Sector.

Ms UIBO: Can you please provide a breakdown of any consultancies that have cost more than \$5,000?

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

Question on Notice No 10.6

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Can the corporation provide a breakdown of any consultancy that has cost more than \$5,000 within the reporting period?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.6.

Ms UIBO: With the government scrapping of the 10-year underground power program, what has that meant for the corporation in terms of diverting projects and project staff for the 10-year program? From memory it was about \$60m for the undergrounding. What has that meant for the corporation?

Mr WILSON: Yes, I will probably need some help to extend the answer, but we were focusing the undergrounding on three suburbs. A design for the first suburb, Nakara, was well advanced, and the other two were underway. We ceased work on that and returned the allocation to the central treasury. If you would like, the breakdown of those numbers was done and the budget returned. It was \$60m, but we have stopped the design stage.

Ms UIBO: Were there any works that had commenced, and would that now be a deficit to the corporation?

Ms POLLARD: I can confirm that only design works have been completed to date for the three suburbs—Nakara, Alawa and Wagaman—as mentioned by Peter Wilson. Ninety per cent of the design work had been completed in Nakara, and much smaller amounts of work in Alawa and Wagaman, at 8% and 5% respectively. As Peter confirmed, we are no longer progressing any work or activity on the undergrounding power project, and we acknowledge the difficult financial decisions that have to be made by the incoming government.

Ms UIBO: In regard to the suburbs list that was planned out over the 10 years, what is the oldest date of the infrastructure for the high-voltage power for whichever of the suburbs has the oldest infrastructure?

Ms SMALL: The age of the overhead infrastructure—much of it across Darwin is Cyclone Tracy era.

K McNAMARA: On the undergrounding of power, I notice that you talk a lot about climate resilience and preparing for future climate impacts. Would you view undergrounding power as vital for that work in terms of protecting your assets and protecting people's access to power?

Mr WILSON: The purpose of the undergrounding is more for resilience in extreme weather conditions. The priority we have taken is the high-voltage line, but a pole often has high and low-voltage lines, so we were looking to take the high-voltage line, which is most exposed in cyclonic conditions, underground. Most of the time, the poles stay and the wires for other voltages stay, so the beautification expectation is not there. It is protection of the system by taking the high-voltage lines down so they do not get damaged, if possible.

K McNAMARA: Now that we are not undergrounding those lines, does that impact any of your strategies or ways of looking at making sure those suburbs continue to have access to power during cyclonic events?

Mr WILSON: Yes, we do. That puts the onus back on the age and resilience of the lines and the maintenance response time were there to be a breakage in the line—the low or high-voltage level. That protective work is still done, but we are not able to add the protection of having the high or low voltage undergrounded because of the expense. We can continue to serve that way, but it leaves that risk.

K McNAMARA: In areas affected by cyclones in other parts of the world, is undergrounding of those high-voltage lines the norm? Is that the aim to get to for power distribution?

Mr WILSON: I am aware that there are practices that do underground. I will pass to Michael to opine on that.

Mr BESSELINK: About 10 years ago I took a trip to Florida, which is well known for very strong wind and weather conditions. They still had quite a number of overhead powerlines there. There is always a trade-off with speed of repair, because if you get a fault underground there is an issue with how long it takes to repair.

If you have a fault—which you may have fewer of, but if you do, they are out for a hell of a lot longer. In Florida and places like that, it is about the response more so. They do what they can to make sure it is up, but the response is what they focus on to get it back quickly. Overhead lines you can put back a lot more quickly than faults in underground.

J DAVIS: Have you done a cost-benefit analysis or a risk assessment on the long-term costs of moving to underground power as opposed to maintaining the current aboveground—I do not know what the terminology is, but what we have at the moment?

Mr WILSON: We have looked at that, but obviously looked at the staging of the immediate plan we had and now ceasing that.

Ms POLLARD: In time gone by we have conducted a cost-benefit assessment in addition to engaging with customers through our people's panels at various times. In terms of the overall cost-benefit assessment, we largely considered three options and underlying criteria around that assessment as well in terms of each of the remaining 13 suburbs. Effectively, the three options considered were do we just underground the high-voltage network in terms of faster restoration post-emergency events like Tropical Cyclone Marcus, as an example, right through to a second option being to underground the high-voltage and low-voltage networks and then the third option being to do complete undergrounding, which was similar to what occurred previously in suburbs such as Nightcliff, Millner et cetera. From a cost-benefit assessment perspective, the least cost option was the undergrounding of the high-voltage network. I do not have the exact numbers here today, but it is a body of work we have undertaken over time.

J DAVIS: That is in terms of predicted potential long-term costs of not having underground power. When you say—I cannot remember what terminology you used—the least expensive would be the high voltage, is that taking into account the potential costs of not having underground power?

Ms POLLARD: Yes, that is correct. We would compare it with our base case which is essentially what we have at the moment in terms of the overhead networks.

J DAVIS: Is that the costs of potential cyclone damage et cetera?

Ms POLLARD: To an extent, but hard to determine; every cyclone is different in terms of severity category ratings. Sometimes we are surprised as well; what we expect to be a Category 1 into a Category 2 cyclone can cause a lot more damage and have longer restoration times than we would ordinarily expect having experienced a cyclone.

J DAVIS: How do you do that long-term risk-benefit analysis given those uncertainties?

Ms POLLARD: We have models internally that we can tap into, and we have historical data that we can use to inform that. In terms of the future forecasts we take into account impacts of climate change et cetera. There is a range of different factors that we take into account in terms of our modelling for the future.

J DAVIS: Potentially, if we had over the next decade four more Cyclone Marcus', is that the kind of data you might put in to see what would happen?

Ms POLLARD: Yes, we could run some modelling and variables around that. We have not done that at this point in time. As we said earlier, the undergrounding project is effectively stopped for us, but if we were required to do it we could do that.

Mr WILSON: I was impressed with our people's management of this, when I visited the control centre, on a daily and a forward-looking basis. On a daily basis what I saw in our system control was links to the Bureau of Meteorology of cloud cover coming over and our knowledge of photovoltaic cells in certain suburbs and prediction of wind flows, so we can see and measure at any time the power balance that we need to supply. It is much more sophisticated than it was a year or two ago.

Behind our Statement of Corporate Intent, there is a detailed framework where we look at the strength and reliability of the system going forward and the forces that can come under. If there is more information from climate change, that is fed in. The strength of the system and its reliability is fed into our forward looks. We have a framework to accommodate that, and I am sure the Member for Johnston is well aware that is changing, and we have to stay across it. That is part of the day job even though it is for the long-term. We are getting better at measuring it as far as we can.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: In relation to new subdivisions taking place, is it your policy to underground high and low-voltage power in new subdivisions?

Mr WILSON: I will pass to Belinda, who is dealing with the developers day and night sometimes.

Ms SMALL: In residential subdivisions it is now standard practice to underground.

K McNAMARA: To clarify, I thought I heard something earlier about undergrounding. Did you say you had the \$60m for the project and because the work had started and undone, and you had to return that?

Mr WILSON: Yes, we returned the unused allocation to Treasury, which was the majority of it.

Ms UIBO: Does the corporation support or endorse the Northern Territory Government's decision to abandon the 50% renewable target by 2030, and what impact does this have on the long-term investment, planning and infrastructure priorities of the corporation?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt, but I am making sure we are sticking to the standing orders and it is not asking for an opinion on this question. We do not give opinions on what is happening; we only give facts and financial information. You might want to restate your question.

Ms UIBO: Does the Power and Water Corporation endorse the Northern Territory Government's decision to abandon the 50% renewable energy target by 2030, and what impact does this have on the corporation's long-term investment, planning and infrastructure priorities?

Mr WILSON: The organisation is well known for responding to government policy expectations, and there has been a change in that policy. We have incorporated that in our planning and investment plans. That is a given to us.

Ms UIBO: Has Power and Water undertaken any modelling comparing the long-term costs of gas by electricity generation with large-scale solar generation in the Northern Territory. If so, what do the results indicate about comparative cost effectiveness?

Mr WILSON: Yes, we look at that. I will pass to Michael Besselink.

Mr BESSELINK: Currently we are undertaking what is called the Regulated Electricity System Implementation Plan, which looks at the forthcoming needs of energy requirements within the Territory. It is also looking at trends such as what is happening with growth in behind-the-meter solar and those sorts of things. It takes into account other modelling aspects of government policy, whatever that is, and works through to say that this is the type of infrastructure we will need to actually be able to give that output. That modelling is not complete yet, but it is being conducted at the moment.

Ms UIBO: What advice, if any, has Power and Water Corporation provided to the Northern Territory Government regarding the cost and reliability implications of gas versus renewable energy in the Darwin–Katherine integrated system?

Mr WILSON: I think the central point in the answer to that question is that to run a stable and well-performing electricity grid, you need firming power. Renewable energy itself has not given technologies to deliver that. The great advantage of the resources to the Territory is that gas enables us to have firming power behind the system. Whilst the mix is changing and the penetration of renewables has been extraordinary in recent times, individuals and businesses are making those choices. Our job is to accommodate that in the growth of the system. In terms of system reliability and strength, an immediate response to any drop in renewable energy generation, we need gas-fired generation, and some other assets called synchronous condensers. They are essential service schemes put in to strengthen the network.

That is all part of the picture and gas plays an important part of that.

Ms UIBO: Given the growth in both small and large-scale solar described in your Statement of Corporate Intent, does Power and Water Corporation consider solar to be cost-effective and a viable part of the Territory's energy mix?

Mr WILSON: Yes, we do. Notwithstanding that, as I said before, businesses and individuals are making personal choices to instal renewable energy. Our role in Power and Water is to ensure the transmission and distribution grid can accommodate that. We manage that, so that is a given in our life.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, we have a follow-up question from the Member for Blain.

Mr KERLE: You mentioned earlier that Power and Water is subject to the Australian Energy Market Operator and the line of questioning is about solar generation. Let me know if this is a question for TGen. Is Power and Water bound by the Australian Energy Market Operator's renewable energy target and the large generation certificates, or are we able to operate independently from that—we are not bound?

Mr WILSON: No, there are two national utilities mentioned where the role often is confused. The Australian Energy Market Operator, which we read about daily in the press, effectively runs the east coast grid. Back in time, it was looked at whether the Northern Territory, in 2015, would be part of that grid or run by the AEMO. It is not. The decision was taken—too far away to be connected properly. The issues around service provision of power in the Territory are quite different. Local control was kept.

However, for the other body, the Australian Energy Regulator, which sets—they are the surrogate for the consumer; they look at what we are intending to invest in, the cost of that, and they compare that with every utility over a five-year period. For each five-year determination we have we are subjected to the Australian Energy Regulator. We watch the practices of the AEMO, but they have no control over the Territory's power.

Mr KERLE: The question was, are we bound by the federal renewable energy target and the large generation certificate scheme?

Mr WILSON: No, we take our leadership from the Northern Territory Government on targets.

K McNAMARA: To follow from the line of the Leader of the Opposition, the government has scrapped the 50% target by 2030. Does that mean Power and Water also scrapped that target? Do you have a target or not?

Mr WILSON: Our role is to take the targets from government.

K McNAMARA: Okay, so you do not have a target anymore for 2030?

Mr WILSON: No, we do not have a target. The government target which we use, we do not have anymore. Coming back to other questions we have answered today, we look at the fundamentals of growth in personal and business activity for power and use those projections in the numbers we put up to government.

Perhaps if I could illustrate something with the numbers on renewable energy percentage. You may be interested. There is a distinction that is important with power. There is demand, which is, for example, the megawatts used at any one point in a day; time is all the minutes in a day. That is called energy.

At the moment at midday in the Dry Season, the renewable energy in the Territory is about 65% of supply at that time. There is a huge amount of supply coming from renewable energy now. Across the 24-hour period of a day it is about 17%. However, the growth of rooftop solar is huge. A number of businesses come to us, taking on batteries, PV cells, in their own business. We are accommodating the natural growth of renewable energy. That is a strong enough demand in our investment plans which we feed up to government. The priorities are set within the overall financial constraints.

It is already moving fairly significantly. We just have to model and watch that.

K McNAMARA: Do you use the metric, the levelized cost of electricity (LCOE), and if so, can you tell me the current LCOE for Power and Water's renewable energy versus gas generation?

Ms POLLARD: We do talk in terms of levelized cost of electricity, particularly in relation to our generation portfolio for Indigenous Essential Services remit. That is not something the Power and Water Corporation has done since structural separation. Territory Generation has most of the power stations and generation function now. I do not have any of the levelized cost of electricity figures here today for each of the IES communities, unfortunately.

K McNAMARA: Could I put that on notice or is that a question for TGen?

Ms POLLARD: It depends what you are wanting to know specifically.

Question on Notice No 10.7

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

K McNAMARA: I would like to know the current levelized cost of electricity (LCOE) for renewable generation versus gas generation for anything that Power and Water covers—any information you have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes, we do.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.7.

K McNAMARA: Has Power and Water done any assessment on the potential stranding of assets—fossil fuel assets, specifically—as the transition accelerates?

Mr WILSON: Our traditional fuels are gas related, so we have no coal-fired issues of the east coast.

K McNAMARA: Gas is still a fossil fuel. I mean any assessment on the potential stranded assets from gas as the renewable transition happens.

Mr WILSON: We do not see the stranded asset issue appearing in gas.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You mentioned renewable energy. In the Dry Season, 65% during the day, but overall—when you take in nighttime and everything else—17%, but there is a growth in renewable energy. Is that particularly driven, and does it help because of the battery technology? Is that what is doing it, as opposed to just being fed directly in?

Mr WILSON: Yes, it is definitely precisely because of those two statistics. It is great to have 65% in the middle of the day, but the sun sets. Battery capability and backup is important to make a renewable power system for a business—or, indeed for the Territory—to work.

In terms of the laws of physics, the third arm of that is that the transmission and distribution grid is a system that takes receipt of power and voltage frequency changes. Compared to the old fossil fuel days, where you might have had half a dozen generators and a backup generator with very stable intake, now we have tens of thousands—potentially hundreds of thousands—of supply points putting into the system, so that requires a stronger system. Also the backup of batteries, essential system service capability, synchronous generators—without getting into all the physics around it.

That is our job, to make sure the system is strong enough to take the rapid input and retreat of power from renewable sources.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: In terms of the batteries and so on, the feed-in tariff and what residents get out of that, is that a question for Power and Water or Jacana?

Mr WILSON: It is a question for Jacana.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I just want to remind the committee that we only have 20 minutes left with Power and Water and we are still on the opening statement. Just make sure questions are directly related to the opening statement, then we can move on to the Statement of Corporate Intent.

Ms UIBO: Have you conducted any recent modelling or risk assessment and the likely scale of outages and infrastructure damage when there is a major event in the Northern Territory in terms of weather around the cost of repairs or response to any major weather events?

Mr WILSON: No. Our response is very much at the time based on data for the incidents that we are seeing. We do not do very long-term modelling on that.

Mr GUYULA: For the reporting period, how many disconnections occurred in remote communities?

Mr WILSON: I think we will have to take that on notice. There are 72 remote communities and 79 outstations. We would have to go back into the core data for that answer.

Question on Notice No 10.8

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Mulka, please restate the question for the record.

Mr GUYULA: For the reporting period, how many disconnections occurred in remote communities?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.8.

Mr GUYULA: Disconnections have enormous impacts on families when food spoils in the fridge, fans and air con cannot run, and sometimes people move to other family houses which impacts overcrowding. Is it possible to create a centre pay education option for electricity payments so that households can pay for power payments on paydays?

Mr WILSON: There is a number of issues that we have thought about in our relationships with customers and we could give you a comprehensive set of answers. I will ask Djuna Pollard to focus on some of the highlights that we aim to do in that area because we are aware of that issue.

Ms POLLARD: In response to your question there are quite a few elements.

Most of our residential customers across the remote communities that we service have prepaid meters for their electricity. Over the last few years, due to Telstra decommissioning of the 3G network, we have been very active in the remote communities, replacing and installing meters that will work under the 4G Telstra network. As part of that rollout across the remote communities, we have been actively engaging with residents and community members in a number of communities, not just about what the meter change means for them but also with various strategies and communication. These are in all sorts of forms, be they video formats, fact sheets or people being there face to face to interact with customers talking about energy efficiency practices and how they can make the most out of the credit they are putting onto those prepaid meters to make their electricity last longer.

For the customers who still have forms of electricity meters that are not prepaid, if customers are experiencing financial hardship, not just in remote communities but anywhere in the Territory, we work particularly closely with customers, and we can put them onto payment plans, be they short term or long term, to help and support them as well.

Mr GUYULA: What is the current prepayment tariff? What is the current tariff for post-payment households?

Ms POLLARD: The current tariff for electricity prepayment meter customers is 32.11c per kilowatt hour. That is specified in the Electricity Pricing Order, which is the Northern Territory Government-approved instrument.

J DAVIS: Also, what is the post-payment tariff?

Ms POLLARD: Sorry; I do not have that one in front of me at the moment. I might be able to get it back to you before our session closes. If not, we will have to take it on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Mulka, we can put it on notice, so it is on the record.

Question on Notice No 10.9

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Mulka, please restate the question for the record.

Mr GUYULA: What is the current prepayment tariff? What is the current tariff for post-payment households?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.9.

Mr GUYULA: Given the increased cost of living in remote communities, such as extremely high food and fuel costs and the freight costs that apply to all goods, should a reduced electricity tariff be considered for households in daytime hours such as 9 am to 3 pm?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Mulka, you are asking for an opinion of the Chair. Can you restate the question to maybe talk about their policies, if they are considering that, rather than 'should they'?

Mr GUYULA: It is one question at the moment.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I can probably help with that one. Chair, I think the Member for Mulka is trying to ask if there is any policy direction to consider reduced tariffs during the day in remote communities due to the increased cost of living.

Mr WILSON: When we update or maintain the service in remote communities, particularly with very old equipment, we look to bring in more modern renewable equipment, including the capacity to work off-peak, which can occasion a saving. There are plans we have for customers which we can discuss with those communities as to whether they might apply. As you indicate, some of the broader issues around that, particularly crossing into other utilities, is a matter of policies for the Northern Territory Government. Our job is to be efficient on power and water, and we work very hard on that, but beyond that it is a broader matter.

Mr GUYULA: Many households which are on prepaid payment systems do not know how much money they are spending on electricity because they do not get a bill that shows how much has been spent. How do households access this information so that they can see their spending?

Mr WILSON: We have a customer education service in communities where we explain what the bill is and educate for more efficient use of energy as far as we can so that people understand the bills and can change patterns of consumption to afford themselves savings. We have a series of educational and support issues to address that.

J DAVIS: I think part of that question was—similar to a question asked before—about how can households actually access information about their bill and see their spending.

Mr WILSON: Thank you for the clarification. I will get Djuna to respond.

Ms POLLARD: We have acknowledged that there has been feedback on that. The most commonly used form of communication with Power and Water is through our 1800 number into our call centre. We have recognised that just having a common set of responses which deal with all customers across the Territory has not necessarily been as effective as it could have been. One of our new initiatives we introduced recently is a dedicated 1800 number for customers in remote communities, which is more specific to the matters that tend to be raised in remote communities, such as those you have raised today. That is one way we have listened and tried to tailor our customer offering to all our customers.

The other thing that we have been doing, as I mentioned, is we have had people travelling to communities across the Territory to better educate. We acknowledge that there is always more to be done, and we will continue to try to improve in that regard.

The last thing I will mention is that as we are changing out all the prepaid meter fleet—you will probably recall previously there was a strong reliance on the analogue prepayment meters or the pay-by-token meters. We are moving to a format where you can load credit onto your meter via your mobile phone. You do not even necessarily have to go into the local store to support that, unless you want to. With that functionality is also the ability to understand how much electricity you still have left on your meter as well.

In addition to those other methods that I mentioned, customers can also ring us and ask directly.

Mr GUYULA: In my electorate there are households paying over \$1,500 a quarter in peak season. Given the low socioeconomic makeup in many remote communities, have Power and Water had any discussions with the NT Government about how to provide electricity relief to Centrelink and low-income recipients? That may include expanding the NT Concession Scheme or otherwise.

Mr WILSON: We look at the customer information around the Territory carefully to try to pick spikes of billing like that. That is clearly a target for education leaks or problems of faulty equipment that might have caused that. We also look at the duration of any interruption to supply and the frequency of that, obviously high frequency to high duration is a problem spot, and we intervene to try to improve usage.

We are aware of those features. We will take that into account and make sure that we are focusing on where there might be rate shock or problems in billing or service experience and do our best to rectify that.

Mr GUYULA: Outstations or homelands, like rural areas, are too far away from electricity lines. It has been a bit difficult to get a drilling rig for the bores. Way back about 1978–79 it was scarce to find drilling rigs. Is there a way of drilling rigs and power with solar power—but drilling rigs for bores on outstations and homelands?

Mr WILSON: Yes, the information span we have, we look at quality of drinking water and the supply. We have very good systems to focus on where drinking-water quality might be at risk or exposed. In our risk environment centre, we intervene to improve that; we have a strong team there. The spread of those risks is set out in the drinking quality report, which is on the Department of Health website, and we use that to navigate in to improve the service or the quality where the problems are greatest. There is, as you can imagine, more to do than we have funding available, so we try to focus on the minimum standard of drinking water for people in the Territory and to make sure that there is minimised risk in the delivery of the service to them. That is a never-ending job, that is part of our job that we do.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We have time for one more question. Member for Blain.

Mr KERLE: Can I do one on notice and then ask a question?

Question on Notice No 10.10

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

Mr KERLE: Can you provide for the previous financial year and the budget year ahead the amount spent on the reconciliation action plan?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Wilson, do you accept the question?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.10

Mr KERLE: In my electorate of Blain, specifically Moulden, we have a lot of water leaks in the mains and going from the mains to the houses. I have a lot of complaints from my constituents that the same line is repaired multiple times. Each time there is a break there is a vac truck, plumbers and traffic control—a significant number of resources—that have to attend the site in order to repair the leak. Do you have a policy of how many times you repair the same section of pipe before you replace that section, and what is it? We may need to take it on notice due to time.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is 10 am, and we have a tight schedule this morning with the different utility services ...

Question on Notice No 10.11

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

Mr KERLE: Do you have a policy regarding the number of times a section of pipe has to be repaired before it is replaced fully, specifically regarding retail pipes connecting mains to households? If so, what is it?

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

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 10.11.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That now concludes our session for today. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for appearing before the committee today. Do you have any final words, Chair?

Mr WILSON: No, other than to express our thanks to you for the opportunity. We look forward to concluding those answers that you seek.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Jacana Energy. We will have a quick few-minute break for a comfort stop. We will return in maybe two or three minutes.

The committee suspended.

JACANA ENERGY

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our final day of Estimates hearings. I welcome Mr Trevor James, Chair of Jacana Energy board. Mr James, could you please introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Mr JAMES: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. On my right is Rod Hayes, our new CEO of nine months, replacing Louisa Kinnear who was here last time. On my left, I have Marco Di Somma, our Chief Financial Officer and Executive Manager Corporate Services. On the other side of Rod, we have Jo Conway, who is our Chief Customer Officer.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, and then I will call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then move on to consider questions regarding the corporation's 2025–26 Statement of Corporate Intent.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions, and the committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by the shadow minister.

Mr James, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of Jacana Energy?

Mr JAMES: I do, thank you. Thank you for the invite. We are more than happy to be here and happy to participate in the questions members may have.

Jacana has experienced strong growth, and we achieved our largest profit in recent times. The 2024–25 year saw significant improvement in reported customer satisfaction, driven by the strong performance of our contact centre. We implemented new processes and greatly reduced waiting times. Jo was the main person who led that outcome.

Our vision of leading smart energy solutions for the Territory continues, with a focus on providing value for our customers through innovation, collaboration and high-quality services. Our 2025–26 Statement of Corporate Intent is reflective of our ambition to achieve our vision where we continue to reinvest our profits to shape a more sustainable, affordable and energy efficient future for the Northern Territory.

I am very pleased to say that Jacana Energy is on track to deliver on its current and future commitments. In 2024–25 Jacana Energy continued to perform strongly against all its strategic metrics. This was despite the impact of several large projects, including a new telephone system, and late pricing changes with a major systems upgrade that was rolled out in partnership with PWC (Power and Water).

Through a combination of efforts to stabilise revenue and reduce wholesale cost, particularly the introduction of large solar generation, Jacana is now making appropriate, sustainable at-gross margins. Improved gross margins, tight cost control and high focus on reducing days outstanding for receivables and bad debt write-offs have seen us improve our balance sheet over the last two years.

Customer effort and satisfaction metrics continue to outperform forecasts, with customers consistently rating Jacana Energy services as excellent.

Employee engagement also continues to improve in 2024–25, with Jacana Energy increasing its employee engagement scores to 83% and officially being certified as a great place to work.

With the support of the NT Government we have continued to work on a trial to install rooftop solar on public housing. This includes customers with prepayment meters in regional areas like Tennant Creek. This will share the benefit of rooftop solar with customers who might otherwise miss out on the energy transition.

We are also proud to support Original Power, a First Nations energy company, in reducing energy costs for remote Territorians.

We are delivering a solar sharing project to our remote customers in the community of Marlinja, and they have signed a term sheet to advance development of a solar and battery microgrid in Borroloola.

We made great strides this last year in improving our core customer services, with a significant reduction in our contact centre wait times, despite managing 25,000 call centre and email interactions every month. We have significantly expanded our face-to-face presence, attending more events than ever, including pop-up stalls and key engagements across the Northern Territory.

Our e-billing uptake continues to improve, with 66%, or 55,000, of our customers now requesting electronic bills.

Nearly 80% of all customer inquiries are resolved on the first interaction with Jacana Energy, which is well above industry average.

We continue to invest in tools to improve customer service, with the recent introduction of the new telephony system which went live a couple of weeks ago, and successfully. The new system is modular and gives Jacana Energy the modern platform and data it needs to further improve our customer service offerings long-term on time into the future.

Developments in solar storage and control technologies are providing increasing opportunities for customers to play the role of both consumer and supplier. Our new five-year strategy recognises this change and sees Jacana Energy transition from a traditional seller of electricity to a modern retailer that enhances value for our customers through the development of new products and services.

Delivering better value to customers requires a collective effort. That is why we are committed to working alongside industry partners to find ways to reduce the total cost of electricity provision and improve customer outcomes for everyone in the NT. This includes solar where it makes sense.

We remain committed to providing value for our large commercial and industrial customers through personalised customer service and purchasing environmental certificates on their behalf.

We also remain committed to supporting our vulnerable customers with flexible payment options and innovative new products that reduce the impact of energy costs on them.

As a modern retail energy business our commitment to customers is to build a more accessible and sustainable energy future for all.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Mr James. Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Ms UIBO: If only some of the ministers who have appeared before Estimates were so diligent in providing a brief opening statement, I am sure we would have got many more questions in this week and last week. I appreciate the work of Jacana, particularly around customer service. Hearing some of the good news in your statement is very comforting, so thank you.

What is the average quarterly bill in the Northern Territory? Is it possible to get a breakdown of what this average is per Northern Territory region?

Mr HAYES: We can answer the first part of the question now. We will have to take the second part of the question on notice.

The average annual residential bill in the financial year to date is \$2,277 annually, or \$633 quarterly. The average annual small business bill is \$8,220 per annum, or \$685 per month.

Question on Notice No 11.1

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the second part of the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: I would appreciate the data especially the extra information of the business.

Can Jacana please break down the average quarterly power bill in Northern Territory regions?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr JAMES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.1.

Ms UIBO: How many customers are currently in default on paying their power bills? Is there a breakdown by region of this data?

Mr HAYES: Currently, the number of residential customers with debt over 90 days—which is where we start talking about default—is 1,337, which represents 2% of our residential customers.

Ms UIBO: Is it possible to get some data on notice on a breakdown per region in the Northern Territory, or is that overall?

Mr HAYES: Yes, that is fine. We would have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 11.2

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Can Jacana please breakdown the number of customers currently in default paying their power bills by region?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr HAYES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.2

Ms UIBO: Could Jacana please advise what steps are taken to provide customers who are in default and experiencing issues with the cost-of-living crisis what support is offered?

Ms CONWAY: There is a number of strategies that we implement to assist people with paying their bills. The first is that every customer has the opportunity for a bill extension of 21 days, and there are no questions asked for that. Post that, if there are still issues with payment we have a number of flexible payment options or payment plans. Those payment plans can go up to 12 months, and we have a conversation with those customers about what they are able to pay.

If we know that customers have significant hardship, and there are scenarios or situations that they are in where they know that they cannot pay we have a hardship program where there is a case-management type approach to customers. There is a number of things that we do. We either provide incentives, we do some bill waivers, and they are case managed over potentially a year or longer, if necessary. We work closely with our social service organisations and financial counsellors in the Northern Territory so we can put together a plan that can support those customers to stay connected.

Ms UIBO: We have had Power and Water Corporation before you, as you would be aware. Regarding Territorians who have had the installation of the smart meters and have noticed the change of cost in real time, are there any Territorians who have had the installation of the new smart meters who are affected Jacana Energy customers? I know most of the remote customers are under Power and Water Corporation. Are we seeing any smart meter changes in our urban areas to Jacana or does that sit with Power and Water?

Ms CONWAY: We have had some customers who have questioned the amount of their bill. I would say over the last year it is probably less than five customers in total who have questioned the amount. We go through a process of allowing them to investigate their usage; we can test the meter and there are a number of options we have to be able to see what is going on. There have been some customers who have questioned it but not an excessive number of customers.

Ms UIBO: Can I confirm if those five customers' queries were related to smart meters or were there different reasons for their queries.

Ms CONWAY: That is an estimate. I could get a number if you need it.

Ms UIBO: It is very low.

Ms CONWAY: It is very low, yes.

Ms UIBO: How many residential and commercial customers does Jacana service in the Northern Territory?

Mr HAYES: As at 31 March 2025, being the last definitive set of numbers, we had 66,756 residential customers; 15,938 small business customers and 438 large customers that are between 160 megawatt hour

consumption and 750 megawatt hour consumption; 2,505 prepayment customers; and 261 commercial and industrial customers. That is 87,906 in total.

Ms UIBO: Has Jacana conducted any recent customer satisfaction surveys and if so could you share with the committee what those key findings have been?

Mr JAMES: Yes we have and, in my opening presentation, I said that we had a return of excellence from all our customers. Jo, do you have any more specific to add to that?

Ms CONWAY: We do customer satisfaction surveys every three months and a net promoter score. Every week, or every day, it goes out to customers which asks them questions about their interaction. The customer satisfaction survey is one which goes out to a broad range of customers asking questions about Jacana Energy, including the effort they have to make to contact us and whether or not they got a resolution on the contact they made with us.

Ms UIBO: I remember doing one of those surveys, and it was very informative. Can Jacana confirm whether currently you are offering customers the double-solar feed-in tariff and if it is between the hours of 6 am and 6 pm, as promised by the Northern Territory Government?

Mr HAYES: As of today, no. The double-solar feed-in tariff will come into effect on 1 July. The double component of the feed-in tariff will apply between 3 pm in the afternoon and 9 pm.

Ms UIBO: What was the reason for the change between the original times of 6 am to 6 pm as the window versus now what will be offered from the 1 July 2025, 3 m to 9 pm?

Mr HAYES: It is not really a question that Jacana can answer. It is a matter that will be dealt under the Electricity Pricing Order and a matter of NTG policy.

Ms UIBO: Did Jacana offer any input into the service delivery of those times and provide advice to government on the solar feed-in tariff and what could work in practice for customers?

Mr HAYES: We provided some input during contemplation of the Electricity Pricing Order and the design of the fit. It was relatively limited and it was really about the financial impacts of the proposed option which was put to us as network peak, which was 3 pm to 9 pm.

Ms UIBO: Will it now be called that, a network peak as opposed to a premium fit?

Mr HAYES: I am trying to think what it is actually called officially in the EPO. I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 11.3

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

Ms UIBO: Is the work around the premium fit now called the network peak, or can we please get the clarification of the name?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mr HAYES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.3

Ms UIBO: Has Jacana received any direction from the government—response, correspondence or advice—regarding the implementation or scaling back of the times as obviously, the preparation for that will occur from 1 July. If so, could share that advice with the committee?

Mr HAYES: As I understand it, as of today, the Electricity Pricing Order is the main instrument. It is still under embargo.

Ms UIBO: What economic modelling has Jacana done ahead of shifting of the feed-in tariff window to 3 pm to 9 pm instead of the original commitment by the CLP government for 6 am to 6 pm, and what are the benefits to customers with rooftop solar?

Mr HAYES: The modelling we did was around some alternatives—financial impact to Jacana which is also net benefit to customers around some alternative timeframes. Our estimate of the uptake and the impact of the 3 pm to 9 pm window is that the net benefit to customers will be in the vicinity of a million dollars. The principal benefit coincides with the policy of the residential battery subsidy. The customers that will benefit the most are customers that have excess solar in the afternoon period and that will be enhanced if they have storage on site.

Ms UIBO: In your opening statement you mentioned there is still work from Jacana around the public housing rooftop trial, can you provide the committee with an update on that?

Mr HAYES: Progress has been slow. As we have worked through that project, coming to terms with the liability issues between the various parties—Jacana, Housing and the contractor—has proven to be complex. We have made some good progress with engaging of the prospective customers for the trials, so we now have a customer group identified and lined up for the trial. We have the contractor that will build and own the systems lined up and the service contractor, particularly for Tennant Creek, lined up for response, and we are just working on resolving a couple of key outstanding liability issues but expect first panels on roof in July or early August.

Ms UIBO: That is good news. With the mention of Tennant Creek is it still the one public housing tenant that has the roof top solar and the battery or has the customer base expanded?

Mr HAYES: Can you clarify, are you asking about the sun booster in this trial in terms of the customer?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I believe some of the work that went on in Tennant Creek with the one public housing in Tennant was the trigger for the public housing trial in a broader sense across the Northern Territory— they have done some work in Alice Springs—I am interested if the work in Tennant Creek, other than the one customer, have any more customers that have the roof top solar in public housing, and there is a body of work that is Palmerston and Darwin based, are there any customers online or does that wait until the July/August fit out?

Mr HAYES: Can I take that on notice, and we can provide the exact number? But the answer is yes, it is more than one. The public housing customers are reasonably evenly spread between Tennant Creek and the Darwin–Palmerston area, it is more than one, but I do not have the precise number in front of me.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, would you like to that question on notice?

Ms UIBO: Yes, please. I will make it broader, rather than just Tennant Creek if you are comfortable with that.

Question on Notice No 11.4

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Can Jacana Energy please provide an update of how many public housing customers who are part of the trial are already online to date, as of the reporting period 31 March 2025?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr JAMES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.4.

Ms UIBO: What investment has Jacana made in improving customer service technology, such as online billing and smart metering?

Mr HAYES: Our principal investment in the last financial year in customer service improvement has been, as the Chairman mentioned, the recent upgrade of our contact centre management system, which was quite antiquated and limited in functionality. As of two weeks ago we went live with a new modern contact

management system which will enhance the functionality and our ability to manage frontline customer service when customers contact us. That is the most significant single investment this year.

Also, as the Chairman mentioned, our performance metrics around customer service have increased substantially over the last 24 months, and particularly over the last 12 months. That is a culmination of significant investment in people and training. We had more people in the contact centre, extended hours and invested significantly in training.

In terms of smart meters, it is really not our investment, it is a PWC investment, which is a matter for them. It is a substantial investment.

The last part is Jacana investment to coincide with the PWC investment in the market settlement system. Concurrent with the PWC investment we have also made a \$4m investment on our side of that data exchange settlement system.

Ms UIBO: That new modern management system that you said was just brought online two weeks ago—do you have a total cost of that investment?

Mr DI SOMMA: Marco Di Somma, CFO. We will take that on notice for the exact figure.

Question on Notice No 11.5

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Does Jacana have the cost of the investment in the modern management system that has just been made live two weeks ago?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr JAMES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.5.

Ms UIBO: Does Jacana have the current average response times and resolution for customer complaints?

Mr HAYES: Chair, could we take it on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 11.6

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Does Jacana have the current average response times and wait and the resolution times for customer complaints?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr JAMES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.6.

Ms UIBO: Have there been any recent reviews of retail electricity tariffs for households and small businesses?

Mr HAYES: There is a review underway on both of those aspects of tariffs across the electricity pricing order. As stated before, that draft revised Electricity Pricing Order is under embargo.

Ms UIBO: How much of Jacana's electricity procurement is currently sourced from renewable generators?

Mr HAYES: Can we take it on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 11.7

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: How much of Jacana’s electricity procurement is currently sourced from renewable generators?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr JAMES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.7.

Ms UIBO: How many renewable energy certificates has Jacana purchased over the reporting period to meet its obligations?

Mr DI SOMMA: I can answer the question in terms of dollars, but if you would like to know the number of certificates we may need to take that on notice. In terms of dollars, the cost to date is about \$17.885m.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, would you like the number of certificates taken on notice?

Ms UIBO: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 11.8

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: How many renewable energy certificates has Jacana purchased over the last reporting period to meet its obligations?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr JAMES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.8.

Ms UIBO: What is Jacana’s strategy for increasing renewable energy uptake among its residential customers?

Mr JAMES: Are you talking about behind the meter or in front of the meter?

Ms UIBO: If you have both, that would be great. Is there a body of work for both, just to clarify, or one or the other?

Mr JAMES: Our view is in terms of solar PV, where ...

Ms UIBO: Is that behind?

Mr JAMES: It is in front of the meter, so it is the wholesale market. To bring the cost of energy down we have a clear focus on bringing more solar PV to the market to reduce the wholesale cost of electricity, so that we have a lower cost to our customers.

In terms of behind the meter, there is work in progress to work with customers to better utilise the solar panels on their rooftops, including the trial that we are doing.

Ms UIBO: How many customers are currently enrolled in Jacana’s hardship program that was mentioned earlier?

Mr HAYES: As at the end of March there were 551.

Ms UIBO: Can Jacana Energy outline the advice provided to the Northern Territory Government regarding the impact of retail price regulation on its long-term financial sustainability?

Mr HAYES: Would you mind expanding on your question? I am not sure I fully understand what you are asking.

Ms UIBO: You are a government-owned corporation, so the funding envelope from government is restricted. Is there a body of work on the long-term sustainability around energy retail or is that some of your daily operations in terms of improving practices so that you have the best bang for your buck as a government-owned corporation?

Mr JAMES: The process we follow is that we get advice from regulators and government about the direction of pricing which then goes into our long-term forecast and flows through into the SCI. As a board, one of the key tests for us is to make sure that the business is financially sustainable and viable. That is the process we follow; we get information from regulators, whether it be from regulation of the network system or pricing regulations, we put that into the SCI and then we test to make sure the business is financially viable and sustainable.

Ms UIBO: When there is a change of government policy, does that mean there needs to be a body of work that changes the economic modelling around that?

Mr JAMES: The short answer is yes. We have the responsibility to make sure that any change in government policies or regulations does not have an adverse impact on the organisation. We are constantly testing to make sure those things are financially viable. If they are not, we need to go back to government to seek changes.

Ms UIBO: What modelling has Jacana Energy undertaken to assess the level of retail price adjustment required to ensure a sustainable business model, particularly for customers who are consuming under 750 megawatts per annum?

Mr HAYES: As you would be aware, the balancing item in Jacana's—particularly for mass market customers, so those under 750 megawatt hours—is the community service obligation paid for through the department of Treasury to Jacana. Our focus is always on the nett effect of any proposed change or any change in our cost base that comes through the market. That can really only flow out in two ways—or three ways: the financial sustainability of Jacana; the quantum of the CSO; or prices through the EPO.

As the Chair alluded to, our role is to engage in that conversation as issues arise on a frequent basis with Treasury on the CSO and the calculation of it on a monthly basis, or longer term if there are major issues. It is the three corners of the equation that we sit in the middle and are trying to analyse, inform and feed back to Treasury in particular about pricing and the quantum of the CSO.

Ms UIBO: Has Jacana Energy provided advice or proposals to government in regard to staged or targeted pricing increases? If so, what are the key recommendations and rationales in that long-term sustainability for customers?

Mr JAMES: No, we have not.

Ms UIBO: Can Jacana Energy detail how retail price regulation has affected its ability to invest in customer service improvements, if any, or hardship support programs, improving digital infrastructure et cetera? Is there any advice to the committee about that?

Mr JAMES: As a board, we decided we will reinvest any extra profits into that space, and that is clearly what we will do. Part of that is our telephony system that we just put in place. We will continue to reinvest in our services and products for our customers.

Ms UIBO: In the context of rising wholesale energy and network costs in the Northern Territory, what level of retail price increases can Jacana Energy expect could be necessary in regard to financial viability without compromising the service delivery of the corporation?

Mr JAMES: At the end of the day, we sit at the end of the system, so all costs get passed through to us, and it is up to us to pass them on to the customer or work with government through community service obligations. That depends on what level tariffs governments are prepared to set from time to time.

Ms UIBO: Just confirming, there has not been a drop in the community service obligation this financial year?

Mr JAMES: No, we are on target.

Ms UIBO: That is great to hear, thank you. Going back to the urban public housing trial for energy, you mentioned there were some contractors employed for two stages. How many contractors in total are being utilised for the trial or to establish it?

Mr HAYES: There are three key parties outside Jacana and housing. One is a contract relationship for the ownership and funding of the systems. They have a principal solar install contractor, and then there is a maintenance contractor particularly for Tennant Creek.

Ms UIBO: Sorry, Mr Hayes, I missed one. You said there is the ownership funding?

Mr HAYES: There is the contract with the owner who will own the system and provide the funding.

Ms UIBO: The second one was ...

Mr HAYES: The second one is the install contractor to do the physical works.

Ms UIBO: The third is the maintenance?

Mr HAYES: That is correct.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Obviously, Power and Water, Jacana and Territory Generation are separate corporations. Is there a coordination mechanism that you use to work amongst yourselves, because there is still some overlap in operations?

Mr JAMES: We have close relationships with all those organisations in terms of commerciality. We are aware that we are in a commercial and competitive environment, so we have to be careful of what lines we tread. Obviously, it is important for all three corporations to work together where possible to make sure the system is as efficient as possible. There are times where the solution could be followed up from a customer perspective, rather than a wholesale perspective or a network perspective. We need to talk about the various options that are available when there are issues.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: A further question, which I am strong on. Local content policy for procurement, do you have one?

Mr JAMES: The majority of our costs come from TGen and PWC. That is roughly 95% of costs; the other 5% is our costs of running Jacana.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: My residents raised the issue that there seems to be a lot of estimated bills. They are trying to understand what estimated bills are and why they happen. Can you explain that?

Mr HAYES: From a value-chain perspective, Jacana and other retailers in the jurisdiction get all their metering data from PWC. PWC is both the meter owner and the meter data agent.

There is a number of reasons why there are estimates in the system. From a Jacana point of view, we would like to see the number of estimates absolutely as low as possible because the constituents who will complain to you will also call us for exactly the same reason, and we fully understand that.

A big part of what we see as the long-term benefit of the smart meter program and the MSATS investment is over time a significant reduction in the need to estimate meter reads. The reason we have them now is mostly either a communications issue with the smart meter, which is that the smart meter is not able to handshake and send the data, or issues of access to the premises to do a physical read. Our focus is working with PWC to see that number of estimated reads come down significantly over the next few years, as those two major programs are implemented.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Have you got a system in place at the moment, or is it fully functioning, of the data coming from Power and Water to you guys, or is that still evolving?

Mr HAYES: Yes, we do. It is now quite periodic, so there is a big file that comes over every 30 days, essentially, on a staggered basis. One of the key benefits of MSATS, the market settlements project, is that those files will come across daily.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You will go from 30 days to ...

Mr HAYES: We will go from 30 days to metering data every day and all the benefits that will come with that. From being able to talk to a customer about their consumption to us being able to work out whether something has been billed or not, whether there are anomalies or whether there are estimate, it will be much more granular.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Will customers be able to get some visibility of that in terms of their benefit?

Mr HAYES: Not immediately. The issue of being able to provide that portal for customer consumption is something we are thinking about and are focused on. We have to do it for 88,000 customers to make sure it works. It is in our road map for the next three or four years to continually enhance the visibility for customers, both what they are taking from the grid and, from our focus, what they are putting into the grid, if they have rooftop solar or batteries.

Mr KERLE: I will follow up on the estimation. Who actually estimates the amount? Is it PWC or is it Jacana?

Mr HAYES: It is PWC. There is a whole section and process within PWC to do estimated reads which they then provide to us.

Mr KERLE: We will ask them next year.

J DAVIS: One of the things that people often raise with me is that they get a card in their box saying that the person was not able to access the meter because the gate is locked. It is not their home, and there is no issue with access. What oversight do you have of that?

Mr HAYES: We would probably share some of the frustrations that your constituents are reporting to you. From a Jacana point of view, it is an arms-length process; our meter data is provided by Power and Water Corp. One of the key issues that we deal with in the call centre is often access and people saying exactly that—‘We got a card’ and so forth.

From our perspective, we manage that under our network access and coordination agreement, which is a service-level agreement. That is really our visibility and control.

From a workplace health and safety point of view, the policy is really it is the meter reader who can make those decisions for reasons that for us or PWC to intervene in—if the meter reader is saying there are reasons they should not access the property, the policy view is we have to go with that. We will often have, ‘It is a very small dog’. Animals in particular are often an issue for access. It is not for us to second-guess the reasons from a meter reader. It is an issue. We are working with PWC to see that there is very little need to visit physically a premises; that it is really the functionality of the investment in the meters that obviates the need to visit physically.

J DAVIS: My question is a bit technical, and a few people have asked me to ask it, so bear with me. In late 2024 Jacana Energy began a practice of levying GST on the total charges—that is, the residential flat rate plus the fixed daily charge—before deducting the solar feed-in tariff from the power used. For example, if someone with solar power used \$500 worth of power, produced \$500 worth of power and incurred the daily fixed charge of \$40, they are now charged GST of \$54 on a Jacana bill, but their bill is only \$40. Previously, the GST charged would have been \$4.

Mr DI SOMMA: We might take that on notice.

J DAVIS: GST is a federal tax set at 10% of goods and services, so I am just interested in why Jacana made the change and how it can justify a higher amount than 10% GST, because that is essentially what is happening. People are being charged GST on something that they are not actually paying for.

Mr JAMES: We will need to investigate that further.

Question on Notice No 11.9

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

J DAVIS: Why did Jacana make the change to charge GST on the total charges—that is, the residential flat rate plus the fixed daily charge—before deducting the solar feed-in tariff?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr JAMES: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 11.9.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up question to that which you may choose to take on notice. People are telling me that they were not informed of those changes. They contacted Jacana to try to find out. They have not been told why it has happened and have not been given information, as they should have been in terms of general Australian Consumer Law when what you are being charged is changed. Why have people not been informed of that change?

Mr JAMES: We are very focused on customer service. Obviously, there is an issue you have raised, and we need to understand it more. Communication with our customers is important to us, so we will follow it through.

Mr KERLE: In the five minutes we have remaining I have a series of questions about your billing system. A constituent came into my office who is a retired gentleman. He is ex-military and is religious about paying his bills on time. He got some bills at the end of last year that indicated an overdue amount. When he followed up on them it was found to be a billing error. He was told there was no issue.

I understand you have been doing enhancements to your billing system in the last few years. The first question is about the amount of testing that went into the billing system before it went live, because having incorrect overdue amounts on people's bills is something that should be caught before the new system goes live. Can you comment on the number of issues that were encountered where people were incorrectly sent bills with overdue amounts? What has been done to remediate this?

Mr JAMES: I am not aware of us changing our systems. Maybe some upgrades have happened, but we have not replaced any systems.

Mr KERLE: Maybe it is Power and Water. Probably offline I can—it has gone through the minister. We had a letter come back.

Mr HAYES: It is a matter that has gone through a complaint and formal response process. We would be happy to take the specific details. I am not aware—I do not think we are aware—of systemic issues around erroneous overdue amounts. There is a number of—I would suggest probably—more process reasons why that has happened than billing system reasons. If there is an issue we would be more than happy to look into it specifically.

Mr KERLE: I am happy to follow this offline without a written question on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Given that we only have two minutes left, are there any further questions on the opening statement?

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Going back to the feed-in tariffs, I asked this of Power and Water and they said to direct it to Jacana.

I am aware of a number of people who put on solar panels and batteries. Even over the Wet Season they were getting quite a substantial return. Then, suddenly, that has all come down to where now they are almost just square. Is there a reason for that? Was there a change in billing tariffs?

Mr HAYES: The history of the arrangements around feed-in tariffs and feed-in tariff rates is that a number of changes have been made over the last decade. We would probably need to know the specifics of the customer. There are customers who have come off the previous premium feed-in tariff rate which had a grandfather period of four years. It may be that is what has happened or it may be some other cause. What occasionally happens with solar customers is something goes wrong with their system and it is not producing

or exporting what it was. We would be happy to look into the specifics if you have particular use cases or questions from your constituents.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Is there a limit to the amount of power that a residential house can export?

Mr HAYES: There is a physical limit on system size, so under the under the network technical rules there are physical limits to how big the system is and how big the inverter is which limits the export. From Jacana’s point of view, we are happy to take whatever our customers are able to produce and the network is able to accept, so that technical rule regarding system size is really the only limit.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That now concludes the session. On behalf of the committee I thank you for appearing before the committee today. Do you have any closing statements?

Mr JAMES: No, but thank you for inviting us along today.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Territory Generation. We will have a five-minute break.

The committee suspended.

TERRITORY GENERATION

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to our final day of Estimates hearings. I welcome Mr Dennis Bree, Chair of Territory Generation board. Mr Bree, could you please introduce the officials accompanying you today.

Mr BREE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Let me introduce Chief Executive, Officer Gerhard Laubscher; Joel Dwyer, Chief Financial Officer; Minh Tran, General Manager Assets and Engineering; Rebecca McKenzie, General Manager Commercial and Business Development; Hieu Nguyen, General Manager People and Governance, and Company Secretary; and behind us we have Tim Danby, General Manager Operations and Maintenance.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will invite you to make a brief opening statement, then I will call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then move on to consider questions regarding the corporation’s 2025–26 Statement of Corporate Intent.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask questions first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may ask questions, and the committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by the shadow minister.

Mr Bree, would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of Territory Generation?

Mr BREE: Thank you. As always, I am proud to be here representing Territory Generation to provide you with an update on TGen’s activities over the past 12 months and provide an overview of our 2025–26 Statement of Corporate Intent, then address any questions you have.

Building on the positive momentum of previous years, the operational performance of the business has continued to improve, safety remains a core of everything we do, and we are again approaching 1,000 days lost-time injury free. That will occur on 6 August, all going well.

Proactive workforce safety engagement in hazard identification and rectification in the field continues to improve across all our sites. Our operational and engineering teams have worked tirelessly to drive TGen’s fleet availability to what we regard as quite remarkable at 92%—it is up quite a bit over the last few years—by completing planned outages on time and acting with a reliability focused mindset, and recovering more quickly from unplanned events.

In Alice Springs we have made major advances by transitioning Ron Goodin Power Station to hot standby, with a vast majority of energy and services in the Alice Springs power system now delivered by the generators at Owen Springs Power Station. This transition will further develop and mature towards the middle to end of next year, when Ron Goodin will start transitioning into cold standby.

We continue to participate in the Territory electricity market reforms, which will assist in transitioning to the new essential systems services framework. This framework will provide a more balanced payment structure for maintaining system stability and reliability, enabling the integration of renewables and supporting the long-term sustainable growth of the energy sector.

Some years ago, we developed our strategy for dealing with the increased solar penetration in the system from residential and commercial customers, as well as from solar farms. We identified our responsibility as generator of last resort, being to ensure the system remained reliable and stable.

To ensure this we have provided essential system services, first using our thermal generators, but from July this year partly by using our new Channel Island battery. We also decided that any future thermal generators would be hydrogen compatible and that we would look for opportunities to include solar in our portfolio to help reduce average costs.

Our major projects have now reached significant milestones. The Darwin–Katherine Battery Energy Storage System (the battery) on Channel Island, has recently successfully completed a comprehensive testing and commissioning program, including the final seven-day reliability run required by system control. As the largest BESS system in Territory, it will greatly contribute to system stability and decarbonisation. The Darwin–Katherine BESS will unlock operational fuel savings of nearly \$10m a year and reduce 58,000 tonnes of carbon emissions per annum.

We have closed a tender for additional high-performance BESS systems in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. We anticipate a final investment decision in the coming months marking a crucial step in enhancing energy system service infrastructure and strengthening our system security with the ever growing behind the meter solar installations.

Our 23-megawatt TM2500 hydrogen-capable fast-start gas turbine has completed installation works and will progress towards online testing and commissioning in the coming months. Additionally, we are looking to repurpose one of our oldest gas turbines, C1, into a synchronous condenser at Channel Island. This innovative project will transform a legacy asset, allowing it to continue supplying critical services to the network. The combined batteries and synchronous condenser will provide essential system services enabling a higher penetration of renewables. Our understanding of the different technology required continues to evolve. Since commencing market sounding for large-scale renewable energy and long-duration storage in 2024, we have identified the appropriate mix of technology to deliver reliable, stable, lowest-cost electricity. This includes high-penetration utility-scale solar energy and long duration storage batteries. We will now consult with government stakeholders on where we go from here.

In our smaller sites, including Tennant Creek, Yulara and Kings Canyon we have concluded our microgrid feasibility study. This study, supported by the Australian Government Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund, commenced in 2021 and identified pathways to achieving high-penetration or low-cost renewables in the small networks. We have followed these studies with a recent expression of interest submission to the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) for granting funding towards deployment of renewable technologies in Tennant Creek.

I am incredibly proud of our people who work diligently to achieve Territory Generation goals, and in recognition of this we have put even more focus on their health and wellbeing. We prioritise training, mental health support and flexible work arrangements. We encourage our staff to have a healthy work–life balance with a range of activities available for staff participation—things like running in the City2Surf together, which is very hard. As a result, our staff turnover is well below what we forecast; it is about 11%, reflecting the positive and engaging work environment we have cultivated.

When we last ran a survey of our staff, nearly two years ago, one of the things that struck me is that people thought the job they did for Territory Generation was important for the community, which is a really satisfying thing to see.

Our diversity and inclusion program has been remarkably successful, creating a more inclusive and supported workplace. As a technical company we are particularly proud that all our employees feel empowered to halt work if they identify a safety concern. That is anyone on the staff of TGen can stop any job at any time if they think there is a safety problem.

This year we celebrated several significant milestones and achievements that highlight our commitment to excellence and community. Our early careers program has been a resounding success, with graduates

choosing to stay on with Territory Generation for another 12 months after completing their apprenticeships. This retention speaks volumes about the supportive and growth-oriented environment we provide.

One of our standout achievements was for one of our apprentices, Asinate Bradbury, winning the NT Training Award and advancing to become a finalist nationally in 2024. Just two weeks ago Territory Generation and its staff were featured at the GTNT awards for 2025. Our electrical apprentice, Aaron Fairweather, made finalist in the Prelude to the Future Outstanding Shell Apprentice category; Matthew Blankenspoor was finalist and won Supervisor of the Year; and Territory Generation, with the help of its apprentices, supervisors and our people and capability team, was awarded the Large Employer Host Business of the Year. This was a terrific night for Territory Generation. These accolades underscore the strength and effectiveness of our training programs, which assist with upcoming succession, foster professional growth and assist in ensuring ongoing compliance with industry standards.

This year we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Tennant Creek Power Station operations, which has been the source of reliable power generation for the region for a very long time and is still going strong. Additionally, we marked Territory Generation's 10th birthday on 1 July last year, celebrating a decade of progress.

I will now turn to the Statement of Corporate Intent. Our SCI has been developed to effectively provide reliable energy, capacity and essential system services to all power systems, with a continued focus on supporting the stability and security of the power system to enable the increase of renewable energy penetration.

The Darwin–Katherine system saw a maximum of 135.6 megawatts of solar penetration in 2024, an increase of 33 megawatts from the previous year. The ongoing expansion of solar energy penetration within the Territory encompassing both behind-the-meter distributed generation and utility-scale solar continue to present challenges for the electricity system, including an increased demand for essential system services.

In 2024 the Darwin–Katherine system saw a minimum demand of 66 megawatts and a maximum of 286 megawatts, of which nearly 250 megawatts of the 286 was delivered by TGen. In Alice Springs the system varied between a minimum of 6.6 and a maximum of 53.3 and saw a peak renewable contribution of 19.7. Those are just figures, but part of my background is in the 1990s I was running operations in Power and Water, and those figures are quite amazing for the bandwidth between them. One of the big things to note is the big difference between maximum and minimum because both are an issue.

Territory Generation recognises that it is currently the default sole supplier of essential system services under the system control technical code. We are committed to continuing to provide support services for the new solar generation while the electricity system market reforms are being implemented by government.

Financially, we continue to generate positive cashflow from our operating activities, of which most will be reinvested into our fleet, supporting the transition. Our commitment to cost-saving initiatives as ongoing operational efficiencies have meant that our controllable costs—remembering that gas is a demand cost to us—have remained below budget throughout the year to 31 March 2025. Our continued efforts have resulted in ongoing strong forecasted sales, continued strong cash balance and a reduction of \$10m in total debt, strengthening our balance sheet and financial resilience.

As I do every year, I will conclude by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to the management staff of Territory Generation. Their unwavering dedication and diligence, working around the clock every day of the year, ensures that Territorians receive reliable power and maintain our energy security.

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement and to answer any questions you have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the opening statement?

Ms UIBO: How many permanent staff of Territory Generation live or are based outside the Northern Territory?

Mr BREE: None.

Ms UIBO: How many contractors does TGen employ?

Mr BREE: Twenty-one.

Ms UIBO: What purpose do those contractors serve?

Mr LAUBSCHER: The purpose is generally threefold. It is undergrads, graduates for special projects like cyber works and backfilling established routes when we are in between routes.

Ms UIBO: Can TGen provide a summary table of their organisation structure, in particular a breakdown of how many executives, senior management officers and operational staff you have?

Mr LAUBSCHER: We have 192 employees all-up. Executive contracts are 16, but we have a cap of 22.

Ms UIBO: Are you able to expand on any of the senior management staff or the operational staff in the number you provided, which was 192?

Mr LAUBSCHER: I can provide that in two ways—per area or station, or for areas like assets and engineering or commercial.

Ms UIBO: What was the first one you mentioned, Gerhard?

Mr LAUBSCHER: Either per power station or location. Is that be better.

Ms UIBO: Yes, per power station and location would be great, thank you.

Mr LAUBSCHER: At Channel Island we have 74 people; at our headquarters we have 63; in Katherine, four; Owen Springs Power Station, 27; Ron Gooden, 16; and Tennant Creek, four; it continues with Weddell, one; and Yulara, four. It all adds up to 192 (sic).

Ms UIBO: I hope the Weddell officer does not feel too lonely.

Can Territory Generation please provide the committee with an update on consultancies that have been used and paid for in the reporting period? Can they also provide a breakdown of any consultancy that has cost more than \$5,000?

Mr NGUYEN: It would be better for me to take it on notice and give you a table.

Ms UIBO: I am happy with that, thank you.

Question on Notice No 12.1

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

Ms UIBO: Can Territory Generation please provide an update on the amount spent for consultancies in the reporting period? Can TGen provide a breakdown of any consultancy that has cost more than \$5,000?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question?

Mr BREE: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 12.1.

Ms UIBO: Can TGen please provide the committee with an update of work that is currently underway, as mentioned in the opening statement, for the Darwin–Katherine Battery Energy Storage System project and provide any update on costs for the reporting period?

Mr BREE: I will get Minh to talk about the detail of this, but we are on the cusp of it becoming fully operational. It is a very exciting time.

Mr TRAN: The Darwin–Katherine BESS project is a project we are very excited about. As our Chair has indicated, it is on the cusp of being completed. The project has completed its reliability run and proven to be a reliable asset. It is actually online as we speak. We are currently using it to support the stability of the grid, and if there is any network disturbance of any sort, the battery will automatically respond to inject power to the grid. The other application we are using it for at the moment, is for load-shifting purposes. Whenever there is peak demand or peak load, the battery can release power into the system which avoids slowing up

another gas turbine. There is efficiency fuel savings by doing so. That is two applications now that is being used for the BESS.

In terms of cost, we are on budget for that project.

Ms UIBO: Is there an update on the reporting period as to how much is spent for the BESS in the period 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025?

Mr DWYER: For this financial year we have only spent, on the Darwin–Katherine BESS, just under \$1m; however, the full project to date cost is \$46.9m.

Ms UIBO: Can the committee be provided with an indication of what that cost saving is, that Mr Tran talked about, when a gas turbine does not need to be used to kick in and then despatch the energy?

Mr BREE: We can attempt to do that, but the particular savings will come about when system control finally accepts the BESS, they are doing the reports now. What they will do is allow us to leave one of our machines off that normally run as spinning reserve. That was in my introductory statement; we estimate that will be just short of \$10m a year savings in just purely gas. The other services that Minh talked about are extra to that.

Ms UIBO: Can Territory Generation confirm that the new Northern Territory Government policy on the transition to renewables and achieving net zero emissions by 2025 has affected the business of Territory Generation or has that continued to be as is and status quo?

Mr BREE: That really has had no impact on the way we go forward. Our practice has been that investment decisions were taken on a business case basis—that is, we had to see benefit and we then took that benefit to government and asked for permission to go ahead. The same practice is following.

Ms UIBO: Does Territory Generation work on the direction of the government on the transition to renewable energy and achieving net zero emissions, and how has that been reflected with the change of policy in the strategic planning and investment of the SCI?

Mr BREE: Certainly, we work within the policy framework provided by government. As I alluded to and understand, the net zero by 2050 policy is still in place. The policy that has changed has been the drive for 50% renewables by 2030. The issue of 50% renewables by 2030 was not one that was driven by TGen, our role is to support that. We respond to what is done by other players in the system up to date. We currently are looking into and have been out to the market to see whether it is worthwhile putting in large-scale renewables for Territory Generation to bring prices down. We are working through that at the present moment. To date that 50% by 2030 really was not impactful on how we did business directly. It was impactful on what other people would be doing to get there and we respond.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You mentioned that you work on doing business cases. With renewables, how important is gas? What part of the mix of that in terms of generating energy?

Mr BREE: Gas is our predominant form of energy. In our system we only have two renewables. We have the legacy solar farm in Alice Springs, which is four megawatts, and we take gas from—it is gas, but it is renewable in the sense that we take it from the dump, methane and that is about one, I think. We are dominated by gas generation.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: You will be transitioning across, and where you can use renewables you will, that makes sense but at the moment gas is the dominant source of energy.

Mr BREE: Yes, gas is our dominant source of energy. I might comment that it has been reducing over the years as householders and businesses are bringing solar into the system.

K McNAMARA: You mentioned before a savings of \$10m a year in terms of renewables instead of gas. Can you explain what the \$10m was and what other savings there is when transferring to renewables?

Mr BREE: I will talk about this generally, and somebody else might jump in with some better details. Essentially the way the system works is that we have to have generators running just in case, like a standby. The battery can become the standby once it is accepted by system control, which means one of our large machines is off all the time. That is what we based our business case on. There are other benefits such as increased efficiency to use it as a load bank so that you can smooth out your generation. We did not price

that, because it is dependent on so many variables, and we did not need to make that part of the business case.

As a broad comment I would say the first one you put in the system is the low-hanging fruit. I would not like people to extrapolate that saving to every other BESS we do. We will not do it unless there are savings, but it would not be in that order of magnitude.

Mr KERLE: For the record I would like to acknowledge that the Chair of TGen is one of the longest-serving rugby union players in the NT and is still playing regularly. He is aging like a fine wine, may I say.

My question concerns the BESS. How much have we spent to date and what is the expected lifespan on it given that batteries do have limited lifespan? Is it lithium or lead acid? What is the technology on the batteries?

Mr BREE: When it comes to the technology, I will pass to Mihn to talk about it.

Mr TRAN: The battery chemistry is a lithium-iron battery. Our contract with our OEM is for 10 years, but the battery itself should be able to last at least 15 years.

Mr KERLE: We are saving \$10m a year in gas, and we get a 15-year lifespan out of it, so it would be profitable.

Mr BREE: Yes. I think we estimated that the payback period is about five years.

Ms UIBO: What specific initiatives or projects is Territory Generation currently undertaking to support the Northern Territory's transition to renewable energies while ensuring the lowest possible cost to consumers and taxpayers?

Mr BREE: As I mentioned in my introductory remarks, our projects in regard to introduction of renewables have been to keep the system stable. Clearly, the battery is our first big one. The other thing to think about with solar, is that the size of our gas generators is probably not ideal because of the new load profile. They were correct when they were put in, but it is a different load profile, so you want more responsive and smaller machines to pick it up to get the efficiencies.

Our TM2500 is part of that. We have also thought about other TM2500s for the future, but we deferred going forward with that at the moment. To defer going forward with it, we will renew a number of our old machines because what we are after is capacity in the system rather than energy production. There is plenty of energy production occurring, but I mentioned those high peaks, and we have to provide for those. They occur when there are storms and the solar goes off, so you end up with, in a sense, a camouflage peak that was occurring all over the place but was being fed by different places.

The old machines, while they are not as efficient as new ones, will not be used that often. Overall, the price—I think we will spend about \$20m in upgrading three machines. For the equivalent, for new machines, it would be \$120m or \$130m, something in that order, so we are at least deferring the cost for quite some time by doing that.

I will hand over to Rebecca because she can give more detail on that.

Ms McKENZIE: In terms of ongoing projects that are in development regarding the transition to renewables, we have closed tenders on a further round of high-specification batteries for Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs, as well as the conversion of the C1 and C2 synchronous condenser. Those assets all provide an ability for services to be taken off existing gas-fired machines, which provides more headroom in the system for renewables to penetrate and, alternatively, allows high-efficiency gas machines to operate in their best efficiency band, again reducing gas consumption.

In our smaller regions we are working on a proposal for the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) for Tennant Creek to implement a combination of solar, batteries and there is a reasonable wind resource in Tennant Creek as well, which we have investigated during our studies. If that is successful with grant funding with ARENA, we could see a high penetration of renewables. The purpose of the grant funding is to provide support to do that in the least costly way.

For example, on our very small sites such as Kings Canyon, where we burn diesel only, studies have identified a good mix of solar refurbishment from our existing solar farm and battery to provide a high-penetration renewable in Kings Canyon which we will be going to tender for this year.

Mr BREE: There was one other matter that I think I mentioned. We have gone to the market just to get ideas about what the future system might look like. One of the things was the long-term storage batteries—we call them all batteries, but the batteries we are using that we have just finished are so different from long-term storage. Long-term storage batteries are more like the batteries we are used to in our daily life. The other ones are very responsive to the system and are really all about keeping the frequency control and other things that I have no understanding of.

We have gone to the market and have information back about long-term storage and large-scale solar. We are working through that to see what the impact might be on future costs. When we get it to a stage that is worth doing with a business case, we will be going to the various agencies that are set up to reflect on this. Then ultimately if it works, to the government.

Ms UIBO: I believe the locals in Tennant Creek call the high wind resource ‘the Barkly breeze’.

How many system risk or non-reliability notices were received by TGen during the reporting period?

Mr BREE: Can we take that on notice please?

Question on Notice No 12.2

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: How many system risk and non-reliability notices were received by TGen during the reporting period, and what were they in relation to?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Mr Bree, do you accept the question?

Mr BREE: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 12.2.

Ms UIBO: Has the gas field supply been switched off at Ron Goodin Power Station in Alice Springs?

Mr BREE: Yes, we have turned it off. We are only on diesel at the moment whenever something is run.

Ms UIBO: Can TGen speak to the committee about what the future holds in relation to Ron Goodin Power Station, and how long it will be providing power to the Alice Springs energy network?

Mr BREE: It is now in what we call a hot standby, so a few of the engines could be brought back in if we desperately needed them, but we do not expect to. We will work towards what we call a cold standby by the end of 2026, at which time for all intents and purposes Ron Goodin will be finished, but we will not be taking it away at that stage; it will be there. If we had enough notice we can put something back on. We are taking a conservative approach to it, to be honest.

Ms UIBO: Can TGen provide an indication of what the current output capacity is for Ron Goodin Power Station?

Mr TRAN: The output of Ron Goodin at the moment is 1 megawatt. That is just to clarify—that is only when it is required; when it is not required the whole station is off.

Ms UIBO: Can TGen provide any information to the committee around Owen Springs Power Station? Is it operating at full capacity, and is there a forecast for future generation expansion at that power station?

Mr BREE: It is currently running at full capacity, but we are looking at whether we need to expand it at the present moment. We probably will need to.

Ms UIBO: What challenges or opportunities does Territory Generation foresee in aligning its operations with the Territory's long-term renewable emissions reduction targets? What supports are needed from the government to achieve any reduction in energy costs?

Mr BREE: First, as I said earlier, we are working within government policy. From a business perspective, the real impact is in us trying to keep the cost down and the reliability up. To do that we monitor what is happening in the system, we react to it and make business cases and present them, ultimately, to government obviously over a certain level.

Ms UIBO: I am also interested in the reduction of energy costs overall. Obviously, it is something that is being discussed nationally. In the Territory we talk about it. What are the practical steps? As the last resort provider for the Northern Territory, can TGen offer insight? If it is something in the future, we will ask next year as well in Estimates. Is there modelling on a review and the processes for the Territory thinking about some of the old infrastructure that we have. You have given us some examples of the work you are already doing with the BESS. If there is approval for system control to turn off that turbine, then you will get the actual cost for that estimate of \$10m.

In terms of those reductions, is there anything else, as a government corporation, that Territory Generation would require. I know you take a lot of direction from the Territory Government on the policy side, but is there anything at the national level that would need support?

Mr BREE: Off the top of my head, I cannot think of anything from the national body. To bring down prices of electricity, or stop it going up too fast, the big issue is that solar generation is cheaper for energy production than gas. That is pretty clear, and that is what the market is telling us. The difficulty is that energy is not all you buy; you buy a suite of services. They have to be provided by something that cannot be solar. It is not a simple trade-off. That is what we are working through.

First, with the battery it was pretty straightforward because that was straight gas savings. However, with bringing solar energy into it from our side of the equation and trying to average down prices, it takes a lot more. That is what we are working through at the present moment.

One of the big signals coming to us at the present moment is that scale matters for solar—bigger is cheaper. It is not overly surprising, but that is what the market is telling us. Somehow then, you are looking at whether you go bigger quickly. If you do not have a market for it, what is the point?

We are doing a lot of trade-offs at the present moment to try to get the optimum point that we can see for giving the best, reliable, secure system that is cheapest, and getting all those balances right. When we have that and have worked it out, we will share it with stakeholders and government and get their comments on it. There is a lot of stuff there.

Ms UIBO: I understand that technology changes; therefore, some of the costs can change—increase, decrease, et cetera.

Can Territory Generation outline the material risk currently identified by the corporation as part of its Statement of Corporate Intent, particularly those that are related to energy reliability infrastructure and climate impacts?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am sorry, Member for Arnhem, I am wondering whether that moves into the next section in the statement of corporate intent response or if it is still part of the opening statement?

Mr BREE: There was a lot in that question, so we are trying to get a few points together here.

We address risk in that—I think at the top of our list at the moment is cyber security. We have been working through that for a number of years. We are identified as a site of critical national infrastructure—I think that is what it is called—and therefore we work with the national government on this. They come in and audit us—yes, under the Critical Infrastructure Act. That is a big one for us.

We are heading in the right direction, but, frankly, it is a scary space in a lot of ways when you have not been exposed to it before. That is addressed regularly at the board level. We have people working on it at all times, and they are doing a good job on it. We are moving in the right direction, but crooks in this field sometimes keep ahead of you. A couple of years ago I would have been much more worried than I am today, with what we had.

You mentioned gas security; there have been some issues that have brought that to the fore with us over the last year or two. We have mitigated that risk to some degree by extending our diesel capacity in the system significantly. If worst comes to worst, we can keep virtually everything going—not everything, but a lot—with diesel.

We have also mitigated by spreading—through the Power and Water Corporation, because we buy our gas off them. They have mitigated it by spreading the contracting load, so they have emergency gas from our LNG people, and we get gas from Central Australia.

These are the things that make you nervous in our game. There is no question about it, because without gas we are in trouble. We are more relaxed today than we were 12 months ago, to be honest, when we first realised what sort of issue was happening at Eni. Eni's field is now producing a lot better. All of that has come together.

Other risks for us, which is generic for the industry, is fear of system blacks in any of our areas. We had it in Alice Springs a number of years ago and have worked hard to ensure the lessons learned from that have been transferred to our other systems. You can never say never, but we are much better.

I think they are our biggest risks, but I am happy to address other things you want to identify.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: You mentioned that without gas we are in trouble. If onshore gas becomes available, do you see that as reducing that risk?

Mr BREE: The more sources the better, as far as I am concerned. It is spreading the risk. I am pretty sure I am right in saying that the gas group at Power and Water have already entered into some arrangements with Beetaloo—I do not know which company. Spreading the risk has to be one of the mitigation methods.

Mr KERLE: Going back to your comments on the system black we experienced in Alice Springs. I remember the ETU was quite strident at the time—organiser, David Hayes, made some critical comments. One of the issues identified in the post-mortem of that system black was that they did not have a reliable, accurate system model after the new turbines had been installed. This may be over in the PWC area, but are you aware that with all the changes with renewable energy and synchronous condensers, are the system models of the Alice Springs and Darwin–Katherine systems up to date and suitable in case of a similar event?

Mr BREE: From a technical point of view, I will get Minh to answer that.

Mr TRAN: The power system modelling obviously is a key part of integrating new assets into the system. Generally, it is more a question for Power and Water. We do participate in that process because our generators require to be modelled as we make up a big part of the system. I do not think we can really comment on the overall state of the power system.

Mr KERLE: When was the last time your generators were modelled by PWC?

Mr TRAN: I do not have an exact date, but it is generally an ongoing process. When the units are installed, part of the connection process is to do the modelling and submit it to Power and Water for approval. If there is any significant change to the performance of the machine, then it requires remodelling. We have not done anything in recent times.

Ms UIBO: Mr Bree answered the follow-up question I had, which was about mitigation to any risks that were identified. I have identified another source of gas, and I think that is the Northern Territory Government; you can go check out the Chamber later on this afternoon. It is getting serious, as we have a lot of energy learning about what is happening in the landscape of the Territory.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do I need to remind you of throwing out insults, Standing Order 109?

Ms UIBO: It is no insult, I am talking about another gas source for the Northern Territory.

Have you made any formal request to the Northern Territory Government for any additional support that may be required financially, regulatory or policy-based to help manage or mitigate the risks you have identified and spoken about in your former response?

Mr BREE: No. We keep government informed of them, but most of the issues are quite technical. That is why we are here; that is our key job. We do it and inform people.

Ms UIBO: What has been the response from the government regarding some of the forward planning, modelled by TGen, on energy source, keeping down costs and the energy sector?

Mr BREE: We have clearly got the message of lower costs, which is what we are here to do. We formally engage with the government through our SCI, and we see the acceptance of the SCI as being an endorsement of what we have in front of us. That is the main thing.

Ms UIBO: If there are any amendments to that, you then meet with the government to raise any concerns?

Mr BREE: That is correct. I cannot remember when we have done that, but that would be the case. We review each year, it is a rolling four-year plan.

Ms UIBO: Can Territory Generation provide an update on any recent changes to its risk profile or any emerging risks that have been identified—actively monitoring—in particular in light of the evolving energy landscape and the Territory’s transition toward renewable energy?

Mr BREE: I do not have anything in my mind. We have had these risks on our table for quite some time and our plan, our SCI and our future planning is all about those risks but there is nothing jumping out at us.

Ms UIBO: Can Territory Generation provide an update on the current capacity at your major plants and advise the committee of any capacity concerns within the reporting period or into the new financial year in relation to Darwin–Katherine, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Yulara and Kings Canyon?

Mr TRAN: In terms of capacity per site, at Channel Island we have approximately 268 megawatts, at Weddell we have 111 and at Katherine we have 37 megawatts. For the smaller systems for Alice Springs we have Ron Gooden at 22.4 megawatts, at Owen Springs we have 74.9 megawatts and at Tennant Creek we have approximately 18 megawatts installed. At the smaller sites like Yulara we have 10.7 and at Kings Canyon we have approximately one megawatt.

Ms UIBO: Sorry, what was Kings Canyon?

Mr TRAN: One megawatt.

Ms UIBO: Sorry, you mentioned that earlier in your response. Can you confirm that is the one that is running on diesel?

Mr TRAN: Correct.

Ms UIBO: Does Territory Generation still participate in a cross-GOC meeting with the government, and is that on a quarterly basis if it still exists?

Mr BREE: No, we do not. I will ask Gerhard to answer that because he is involved in that sort of thing.

Mr LAUBSCHER: Officially, not like in the past with the Eco CCC. However, we get in contact with each other all the time, with a very regular monthly catch-up—most of the CEOs. Definitely the GOC CEOs get together quarterly, so it is regular, but TGen as such is not part of the old GOC.

Ms UIBO: Just confirming for the committee, does Eco CCC not exist anymore?

Mr BREE: That is the case, yes.

Ms UIBO: Interesting; thank you very much.

K McNAMARA: Is it possible to give the proportion of Territory Generation’s capital expenditure budget that is allocated to renewable energy versus fossil fuel, gas, infrastructure and maintenance?

Mr DWYER: For our capital expenditure forecast for the next financial year, 2025–26, we have 48.8% dedicated to essential system service/renewable energy.

K McNAMARA: I understand that DK BESS is up, commissioned and almost online; is that right?

Mr BREE: It is online; it just has not been accepted as a replacement for a machine yet.

K McNAMARA: That is right. When that synchronous condenser is accepted, is that when the gas turbines at Channel Island will be decommissioned?

Mr BREE: When the BESS is accepted, not the synchronous condenser. It is another thing.

K McNAMARA: Sorry, yes, that is what I meant to say.

To clarify is the turbine that will be decommissioned the same turbine being transformed into a synchronous condenser? Is this separate to the synchronous condenser being procured by Power and Water or the same one?

Mr BREE: They are separate issues.

K McNAMARA: Okay, so two separate synchronous condensers?

Mr BREE: That is correct.

K McNAMARA: Thank you, that was a big clarification that we needed to get.

Ms UIBO: Can I ask on the back of the Member for Nightcliff, are they still on order?

Mr BREE: That is a Power and Water matter. The C1 conversion is ours. We are doing stiff with that. The other one is a Power and Water issue. I am not quite sure; I cannot speak for them.

K McNAMARA: With battery capacity, DK BESS is the 35 megawatt. Is that correct? Looking at ones interstate and at the size of our jurisdiction, I have seen one with similar jurisdiction size in WA that is a 219 megawatt, 877 megawatt/hour one in WA. Our 35 megawatt is small, relatively. Should we be looking at larger batteries? And in which case, what would be an optimum size?

Mr BREE: There is a plan. I will let Bec explain it.

Ms McKENZIE: Rebecca McKenzie, General Manager, Commercial and Business Development.

For the provision of essential systems services, it is important for us to also consider the size of a contingency on the system. Therefore, the battery, for example, is more than 10% of what the maximum demand is on the system. It is close to 50% of what the minimum demand is on the system. That is providing that incremental replacement of a gas turbine in a similar size.

When you consider introducing long-duration storage alongside of large-scale renewables, then those batteries will likely significantly increase in size because their purpose is to shift energy say, from solar energy from the middle of the day through to the evening when it is most required, and provide capacity. The size of that is, I guess, a trade-off between, again, a single large asset on the network and the recognised cost benefit of introducing larger at-scale assets as well.

The recent plan, which is currently being delivered by Power and Water, is reconfirming some of the numbers in terms of what the high-spec factory requirements are. Previously there was a report done which indicated around 105 megawatts of high-specification batteries may be required. That was in support of the 50% renewable target. That number is being revised through new modelling now.

K McNAMARA: Are you able to tell me the name of that report that you just mentioned.

Ms McKENZIE: The Darwin–Katherine Electricity System Plan.

K McNAMARA: Do you have an idea of, going on from this, the total future planned battery storage capacity and what timeline we could look at for deploying that—or is that a difficult question?

Mr BREE: That is a difficult question. The reason I say that is that a lot of what we do is responsive to what others do. It is a matter of how fast solar moves into the system through other players, that is one big part of it. The economics of this game changes a lot over time. The price of solar panels today is much lower than it was 10 years ago. Batteries have gone up and down, so it is a bit harder to predict, but you assume with the scale in China it is coming down. You have to keep on top of it from a business point of view, which is what we try to do.

K McNAMARA: Is it correct that the minimum electricity demand in the Darwin–Katherine integrated system is expected to fall below 20 megawatts by 2030? Does that sound about right?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I remind everybody this is not about opinion; it is only facts, thank you.

K McNAMARA: Yes, just the expected modelling.

Ms McKENZIE: We take our modelling assumptions from the Utilities Commission's outlook forecast. I do not have that number directly in front of me, but our modelling is consistent with that forecast. The minimum demand will be driven by any increase in behind-the-meter solar. Based on the 2023 Utilities Commission outlook forecast that behind-the meter solar was expected to increase to around 170 megawatts by 2030.

K McNAMARA: Do you know the current minimum generation capacity for the DK BESS?

Mr BREE: I think I mentioned ...

K McNAMARA: Sorry; I think you did in the opening statement.

Mr BREE: ... about 66 or something.

K McNAMARA: Yes. Sorry; there have been a lot of numbers thrown around.

Is it possible to get an update on the status of DK BESS to procurement and the size of the batteries and proposed locations for them?

Ms McKENZIE: We have closed the tender for those batteries. We are currently working with those tenderers, and we hope to conclude negotiations and put forward a final investment decision business case within the coming months. The proposed sizes within the tender specification were a 36.8-megawatt battery in Darwin, a 19.8-megawatt battery in Katherine and an 11.3-megawatt battery in Alice Springs.

K McNAMARA: Do you use the metric the levelized cost of energy (LCOE)? Do you have a levelized cost of energy comparison for renewable generation versus gas generation?

Mr BREE: The simple answer is no, we do not use that, but the reason is that energy is not the only thing we deliver. The important thing is the combined services of energy and all the system services; that is a much more important figure to us.

K McNAMARA: Given the inevitable trajectory towards renewables at some point, has there been any assessment made of potentially stranded assets in terms of the fossil fuel assets and how is that risk being managed?

Mr BREE: It is business as usual for us to be watching what our assets are doing and how they are being used. One example of us looking at that more closely recently was that we were aiming to put in a couple of TM2500s rather than just the one, and we still have that on our list, but instead we thought the right thing to do at the present moment was to renew our old machines because we were more looking for capacity than energy. That is an example of us keeping it under review. We have to be careful because we buy long-life assets. Currently in our system we have some quite old assets. Writing them off will not cause us much problem. It is not the sort of business where you fall off a cliff and suddenly wake up one morning and have to write off a lot of assets. It is something you see coming a long way off.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: One of my key points is local content and local content policy. Does TGen have a local content policy? What is it for procurement?

Mr BREE: It is identical to the Northern Territory public service's.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Is it 30%?

Mr BREE: I think that is what it is.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Can you tell me how much business in the last reporting year went to local contractors?

Mr NGUYEN: For purchases above \$50,000, there were 13 made in the NT and 2 outside the NT.

Mr KERLE: Going back to the turbines and discussions regarding renewable energy, is there any increased wear on the turbines due to—having to manage as a synchronous condenser—the fluctuations in voltage and the power network due to the solar penetration, like clouds going over? I understand there is an extra load on the turbines when they have to work in that function.

Mr BREE: I can get others to talk, but from a lay person's point of view the synchronous condenser is meant to even out a lot of that. Put that to one side. The big things that seem to hit our turbines is stopping and starting. There is no doubt there are more stops and starts, so that puts quite a load on them.

Ms McKENZIE: The increase of behind-the-meter solar as well as the large-scale solar causes Power and Water from time to time to make changes to the risk notices, which would increase the amount of spinning reserve that we hold on our turbines. When there is an increase in spinning reserve by those turbines, they start and stop more regularly and also tend to operate more run hours and less efficiently. These are the exact type of services that we are looking to transfer over to batteries.

Mr KERLE: We have talked a bit about the synchronous condensers. How many synchronous condensers does TGen look after? How many are you looking to implement? Could we get an indication of the cost?

Mr BREE: We do not have any at present. I will let Bec answer the question and explain.

Ms McKENZIE: A synchronous condenser very generally is a device that can maintain the synchronisation with the network—a large mechanical device as opposed to a battery which will respond electronically very quickly. It provides system inertia which, is a critical service to provide a very fast response when there is a disturbance in the system, as well as system strength. We currently do not have any in our network. We are planning to convert one synchronous condenser at Channel Island.

We have recently closed a tender for the completion of that project, so as we go through that tender and probity perspective we do not want to signal to the market at this point in time, unfortunately. However, it will become available once that project is approved.

Mr KERLE: The reason we need a synchronous condenser is due to the high rate of penetration of solar—sorry, I will let you answer that.

Ms McKENZIE: The services currently provided by the gas turbines in particular at Channel Island provide that inertia into the system. It really is a question for Power and Water in its technical modelling in regard to how much inertia is needed as the transition continues. However, the synchronous condenser helps us to provide those services without burning gas.

Mr KERLE: What is the expected life span of the turbines at Channel Island? When do we need to purchase another one?

Mr BREE: The thing to remember about these machines is that the original ones had a life of about 25 years, but they have been there much longer than that because we work on them. At each point in time, you can take a decision as to whether upgrading—bringing all the stuff that hangs off it up to date—is a better decision than making it an anchor and bringing in a new one. That is the way we look at it.

It would probably be misleading to give a life for each of those machines, because parts of them can be used for some time. The C1 is a classic example; we would not have foreseen 10 years ago that we would be bringing it into a new way of life.

Mr LAUBSCHER: Dennis answered 90% of the question. Every year when we do the SCI for the forward year, the short to medium-term plan, we look at it and it is really business as usual for generators to expand and provide more life to the asset. I have a plan in front of me whereby I know exactly the end of life for every one of our assets—I think we have 64 assets in the NT. We look at that all the time; it is engineering 101.

It depends on the amount of money and how long we want it. We keep it as minimalist as we can, and it is always a balance between costs, reliability and system security. That is what we are trying to do in the transition to renewables too.

K McNAMARA: What you just mentioned about having the end of life for all the assets—are you able to share that with us on notice?

Mr LAUBSCHER: It is a long list, but we can share that.

Mr BREE: We are happy to share, because it is not a secret, but can I make the qualification that on those dates they will not drop dead necessarily. We may have made decisions on the way through, because hours run is a big thing. The way the system works is if you drop the hours, you increase the life. If you can take it in that context, we are happy to share.

Question on Notice No 12.3

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

K McNAMARA: Could I please get a copy of the end-of-life projections for the assets at TGen?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Chair, do you accept the question with the caveats attached?

Mr BREE: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 12.3.

K McNAMARA: Just to clarify, from talking about the condenser and turbines, how many gas turbines are there at Channel Island?

Mr BREE: There are 10.

K McNAMARA: When we are talking about decommissioning one to replace it with a synchronous condenser, is it the plan that they will all be replaced? Will there be 10 synchronous condensers in the future? Is that how it works, or not really?

Ms McKENZIE: The synchronous condenser does not provide capacity in the system once it is converted; therefore, it is there for services. While a capacity need meets a peak demand, there will need to be a mix of assets to provide that service, some of that capacity can transfer longer term over to long-duration batteries. However, there will still be a need for the turbines as well.

K McNAMARA: People ask me all the time—and I know we sort of answered this—what do we need to do to get all the solar farms sitting there online?

Mr BREE: I am sorry to do this, but that is Power and Water. I could say that one of the things we do as part of that is to contract-out system services.

Territory Generation – Statement of Corporate Intent 2025–26

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Territory Generation Statement of Corporate Intent 2025-26. Are there any questions?

K McNAMARA: I picked up on something you said earlier, which is that you obviously have to work within government policy. I guess you are guided by that, but also you have your business case around keeping costs down. Are those two ever in conflict, and how do you deal with that?

Mr BREE: I have been Chair for quite a while, but I cannot think of a conflict occurring. We just have to put a business case and if it is a compelling business case that means that there is more benefit than cost. I have found that most people think that is a good idea.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes this session. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you all for participating today. Mr Bree, do you have any closing remarks?

Mr BREE: No, thank you very much for having us here.

The committee suspended.

SPEAKER'S PORTFOLIO

DEPARTMENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider outputs relating to the Department of the Legislative Assembly.

I note that while the Administrative Arrangements Order puts responsibility for the Department of the Legislative Assembly with the Chief Minister, by convention the Speaker administers the department and will answer questions relating to the department.

Madam Speaker, I welcome you and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you for inviting me to come before the committee today. I would like to introduce the Clerk of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Mr Russell Keith, and the Chief Financial Officer of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Ms Diem Tang.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Madam Speaker, 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.

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

Madam Speaker, would you like to make an opening statement?

Madam SPEAKER: The August 2024 Northern Territory general election generated a huge amount of work for the Department of the Legislative Assembly. There were 12 changes of seats, which involved the handing over of 12 electorate offices. With the change of government there were also 24 changes of offices in Parliament House. This, of course, was a major exercise, managing the separation of former members and many of their electorate staff, and the onboarding and employment of new members and their new electorate staff. There was a major induction program provided by the DLA to inform members of the fundamentals of Assembly procedure and their electorate entitlements.

The DLA organised two big events late last year: the formal opening of the new 15th Northern Territory Assembly was marked on 15 October 2024; and the 50th Anniversary of the first Northern Territory Legislative Assembly was celebrated in Parliament House on Saturday 23 November 2024.

There have been significant changes in the DLA executive leadership team. The former Clerk, Mr Mathew Bates, resigned to take up an appointment as the Clerk of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly in 2024. The Deputy Clerk, Mr Russell Keith, has since been appointed as the Clerk of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. Ms Klarin Sivyver, who commenced as Executive Director of Parliamentary Support in July, has since been appointed as the Deputy Clerk; and Ms Caroline Williams was appointed to the Executive Director role in April 2025.

Parliament House turned 30 last year in 2024. The ageing of Parliament House comes with a growing demand for repairs and maintenance. This is enormously expensive and requires enormous planning and coordination. The job of maintaining Parliament House is shared by the DLA and the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure. These two government departments work in close collaboration.

There are three major infrastructure works projects afoot for Parliament House. The first one is the lifts. The six lifts within Parliament House need replacing. It is expected that the staged replacement of the lifts will commence in the coming year. The cost of replacing these lifts will be significant.

Second, the air conditioning on level 5 needs to be replaced. For people listening, this is where the ministerial suites are. This is another major project. The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure is undertaking careful project design to enable the varied elements of this project to be completed with minimum disruption and cost.

Third, the Speaker's Green drainage system is blocked, causing major water damage, including leakage into level 1 during the Wet Season. A complete fix is required. Planning for this work is underway.

Another big change over the last year was, sadly, the Northern Territory Library moving out of Parliament House. The NT Library is now located at the new CBD Charles Darwin campus. We are now using the beautiful main Northern Territory Library space on level 2 as a new function and education space. We have temporarily called this space ‘The Atrium’ until a permanent name is decided. We are exploring with the Minister for Corporate and Digital Development using the huge lower level of this old Library space—level 1—as office accommodation for other NT Government agencies and as a training venue.

The Legislative Assembly is ensuring that the 25 electorate offices throughout the Northern Territory are safe. There have been increases in security incidents at electorate offices over recent years, both within the Territory and nationally. New safety and security standards are being applied to all electorate offices.

The Department of the Legislative Assembly has 30 staff, plus 13 casual staff employed by Hansard. The DLA enables the effective functioning of the NT parliament by providing support and professional advice to the 25 members of the Assembly, facilitating meetings of the Assembly, producing parliamentary records and managing and maintaining this magnificent building of Parliament House. These staff do an amazing job, and I thank them for their hard work.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee about the work of the Department of the Legislative Assembly. I am happy to answer any questions.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I will ask about electorate offices. Which output does that come under?

Madam SPEAKER: Ask now; I mentioned electorate offices in the opening statement.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: We have 25 electorate offices. You mentioned that you had to do a major changeover. What was the timeframe, because we are now 10 months into it? Is it completed?

Madam SPEAKER: For what?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: For getting everyone installed in their new electorate offices.

Madam SPEAKER: Obviously, this was a major piece of work. The bit that has taken time is the signage, which is well known to all of us. As at the end of March, out of the 12 offices, six offices have their signage in place. There are still five electorate offices—Karama, Casuarina, Nightcliff, Johnston and Wanguri—that did not have their signage completed.

A member: We do now.

Madam SPEAKER: You do now, okay. The reason for that is, like everything in government, it is not straightforward. The request comes through for signage, it goes back and forth between DCDD and—Russell, you have been managing this. It has been an ongoing drama, so maybe you can explain the process and why it has taken so long.

Mr KEITH: There is a number of steps in the installation process. First there is getting the design. We have a contractor allocated to an office, then that contractor liaises with the member to develop the sign. That process typically takes two to three weeks. If there are any amendments it typically takes a week for the amendment to be adopted and put in the proof and get a new proof out. On average there were five amendments across all the offices. That is the average—some more, some fewer. Also added in there can be the time to consider what amendments might be required. Sometimes members have wanted particular photos they have needed to pursue and that sort of thing.

The initial design, three weeks; about a week for each amendment; then there is a process where we need building over approval. For that, the Department of the Legislative Assembly liaises with NT Property Management and gets that approval. That is normally quite prompt, but there are few layers there, so it is a few days for that.

Then a brief is required to be prepared to come through me and the Speaker, and get the Speaker’s approval of the final design. Typically, that is another week. Then it can be up to three weeks for the contractor to print the sign, then a week for installation.

If it all goes quite quickly it will be a couple of months. If there are more design issues or other issues it can take a little longer.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Following up on that, you mentioned NT Property Management. Can you explain the relationship between the Department of the Legislative Assembly and NT Property Management with electorate offices and how that interacts with commercial owners of buildings?

Mr KEITH: All the offices are leased; they are not government-owned buildings. NT Property Management within the Department of Corporate and Digital Development provides leasing services across the government. They manage and negotiate the leases. They are the contact with the building owner. Within the Department of the Legislative Assembly, our Asset and Building Management team work with NT Property Management to get anything done within the offices.

In offices, generally the infrastructure side of things is managed by the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure and NT Property Management for the leasing side of things. A big part of our business in managing the electorate offices is working with those two agencies. The department has monthly meetings with each of those agencies to discuss leasing and infrastructure issues.

Also, when it comes to DCDD (Department of Corporate and Digital Development) they also provide ICT services and payroll management services. I also meet regularly with the chief executive of that agency to discuss leasing and other issues. The Deputy Clerk meets with the deputy chief executive to discuss ICT issues.

I also meet regularly with the Deputy Chief Executive of the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure to ensure coordination, both on the electorate office infrastructure and the management of Parliament House.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: If a lease was due to expire, who is responsible for initiating the identification and renewal of a new lease somewhere else?

Mr KEITH: Both the Department of the Legislative Assembly and NT Property Management keep tabs on the leases. I think it is about 12 months out, but I could be wrong. NT Property Management writes to the department to commence the process of decision; if there is an option to renew whether we do that, whether we want a new lease or if there are any alternative things to happen.

The Asset and Building Management team discusses with the member, checks the office and looks at any upgrades such as painting or any work that might need to be done as part of the renewal process. The department identifies any changes we might want through that process. Then it is signed off by the Chief Financial Officer that we have funding available for the lease. I sign off on the request for NTPM to renew, get a new lease or other options.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: My final question relates to security of electorate offices. You mentioned in your opening statement that you are looking to bring the security levels up across the board. Can you give us an insight as to what the security levels will look like? What is the timing for that?

Mr KEITH: The department has worked on some minimum standards for electorate offices. That has been in draft form for a while and is at the stage for final approval. The key element of that is providing physical separation between the officers and the public.

There are two major competing interests in electorate office design. One is accessibility. They exist to be accessible to the public. We are wanting to maximise accessibility. The competing interest there is to have electorate office staff safe. It is often one staff member in a public-facing position. A key to the minimum standard is to maintain a reasonable level of physical separation, so if there is a problem, firstly, the officer is safe from any aggressive behaviour and have the opportunity for dealing with it. We have a range of alarms and duress systems and the like in the offices there.

I have been going through a process of inspecting all the offices; we are almost finished. We have more in Darwin and Nhulunbuy. Many of them are quite good. In some of them, the physical separation is not very strong. We are going through a process of assessing both the risk of individual offices and also how easy the fixes are. There are some offices where a bit of screening or a new door will make the office a lot safer. We are getting that done as quickly as we can. There are others where the layout is more challenging to make it safer according to our current standards. There will be work on how to address that.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I have had the example where police have requested the video of our CCTV. We had to get permission through the Speaker or the Legislative Assembly. Does that process work fairly quickly?

Mr KEITH: Yes, it does. We have very good relationships with the police. They contact us. With video footage, again there are competing interests. One is the member's right to privacy—parliamentary privilege. We treat that with great importance. We are also really interested in crime prevention and crime control. The police have our contact details. They will contact us and we respond appropriately, in consultation with the Speaker and the member.

J DAVIS: Thank you, DLA staff, for all the amazing work that you do all the time, including for this process. It is greatly appreciated by everyone.

You said that security incidents have increased in the NT. Do you have any data on that?

Mr KEITH: I do a quick look for the data. Anecdotally, they probably peaked during COVID. COVID seemed to bring out a lot of security incidents around electorate offices. In the last year or two there have not been quite as many. I will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 13.1

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

J DAVIS: Can you provide data on security incidents in electorate offices? I am happy for you to determine the appropriate timeframe. It can be in the reporting period or more broadly; that would be useful.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Madam Speaker, do you accept the question?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 13.1.

J DAVIS: I was advised by the Chief Minister to ask in this output about entitlements for members; is that correct?

Madam SPEAKER: It is to some extent. Having been an Independent member of parliament since 2015, this has been an ongoing issue for the Independents and crossbenchers. What we saw in the last parliament, which you may be aware of, in the last year we were given a research officer specifically for the Independent members, and that position effectively ceased at 30 June.

Mr KEITH: It was a bit later; it was at the end of the last Assembly.

Madam SPEAKER: I was not in the job then, but at that point the Clerk made a decision that the political decision to make that position exclusively for the Independents and crossbenchers had expired. Were you in the position at the time, Russell?

Mr KEITH: No, it was Mat.

Madam SPEAKER: It was the former Clerk. He decided to open that up, because it was a political decision, and he made that research officer available to all members at the start of this Assembly. The person who was employed in that position was not employed on a permanent basis so that position changed. Ironically, the people using that position are the Independents and crossbenchers. I was informed recently that it is about 80% used by the Independents and crossbenchers. Even though it is not exclusively for the Independents and crossbenchers, it is almost exclusively used by them.

J DAVIS: Not ironically, given that the Independents and crossbenchers have no access to any other support. I note that in the budget there is \$17.3m to support ministers and the Leader of the Opposition, which includes 21 members of the Legislative Assembly, so there are four who get zero dollars.

Madam SPEAKER: But that is a political decision, Member for Johnston. It is completely political, and it is at the whim of who holds the purse strings. At the moment, it is the CLP government and Chief Minister. That is the way it is. It has always been that way, in my experience.

J DAVIS: I am happy to pursue it politically. My view is that it creates a risk to our democratic processes to not properly resource the very small crossbench to hold the government to account.

Madam SPEAKER: It changes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will pull it back to asking questions in this session rather than putting our opinions.

J DAVIS: Sorry; I will pull it back.

In relation to the services that are provided, we have a library service. I think there used to be a daily news alert service. Are you able to advise—I think that has been discontinued?

Madam SPEAKER: I do not remember that. Do you have any knowledge of that?

Mr KEITH: Yes, there was a daily news alert service in the previous Assembly. We decided to stop that because there was limited staffing and we did not know how much value there was in it, given the range of online research tools available. The service is there for the information of members. If there is demand for that, let us know and we will respond accordingly.

J DAVIS: I am letting you know, if I can do that through this process, I would love it.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You probably have to take that offline and go through the Department of the Legislative Assembly.

J DAVIS: Do you have an acquisitions budget figure for the Parliamentary Library?

Mr KEITH: I would have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 13.2

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

J DAVIS: What is the acquisitions budget for the Parliamentary Library?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Madam Speaker, do you accept the question?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 13.2.

J DAVIS: You mentioned the decision made about the old Library space; can you talk anymore to that? Is there any budget for it or any other considerations about anything else that space may be used for? I think you said that it will be used for education office space potentially; is that right?

Madam SPEAKER: The decisions we have made around the use of that space are temporary. We did not want to see that space empty. My main concern was that this beautiful big space in Parliament House should remain used. Very quickly, the Clerk and I moved to make the Library space that people use on level 2 accessible as a venue, so anyone can use that space for anything like they use all the other venues in Parliament House. We have a venue manual, and information is in the public domain around how people can access all venues in Parliament House, so that has been added to the list of venues.

It is being used. I looked out the window before into the beautiful space we call The Atrium now and it is set up almost as a polling booth—I am not sure what is going on there.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I can provide some additional context. They are using it as an educational space for students.

Madam SPEAKER: Exactly, it is being used for that purpose. There are definitely plans afoot to make it a space for educating. The Parliamentary Education team are using it. We hope to get some funding to modify one end of it for that as a permanent space to educate children and anyone around the parliamentary system here and the Legislative Assembly.

Downstairs is even bigger; it is enormous on level 1. It is like a dungeon. It does not have any windows and goes on forever. That is more of a challenge. Again, I said to Russell, 'Let's move on this. We cannot have this empty.'

I feel very sad, personally, that the NT Library moved out in the first place. They vacated one beautiful space and have gone to another, but it has left a big gap in the business of Parliament House.

There are limitations on what you can use that for. It cannot be turned into a Woolworths, for example. It cannot be there for any sort of commercial purpose; it must fit in with the culture and the work and the business of what we do here.

These are just temporary solutions, and we will continue to work at finding a permanent use for that. It is not easy. There is plenty of space in Darwin for government departments to use. I do not think there is a great demand, so we are leaving it at that now.

J DAVIS: Has there been any thought given to any kind of public engagement or consultation on what that space could be used for?

Madam SPEAKER: There has, and we are working on that. There is some consideration around that and we are working on what that consultation will look like.

Mr KERLE: Do you know who made the decision to move the Library out of Parliament House?

Madam SPEAKER: No, I do not.

Mr KEITH: It was part of the City Deal that happened a number of years ago. It was part of that with the creation of the new building for Charles Darwin University. Who made that decision, I do not know.

Mr KERLE: That was former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the government of the day.

Madam SPEAKER: The City Deal?

Mr KERLE: Yes.

Madam SPEAKER: I remember being a part of a committee process that has been talking about this for a long time—years—and because the Library was such a good fit with what we do here, there has been a lot of commiseration around the fact that they have left. The challenge has been for several years now to try to find a solution to that. As Speaker, I wanted it to be used, to open it up to the people. Whether it is the best fit now, what we are proposing, remains to be seen, but we will continue to seek ideas and there will be a consultation process at some point.

J DAVIS: Can you tell us what the cost is to the department in overtime payments to staff and equivalent value in time in lieu for senior staff for running the Estimates process in its current format—that is, with extended hours on three of the seven days?

Madam SPEAKER: We do not have the precise figure for this, but we discussed that there is a range that it might fall into. I do not know if the Clerk wants to share that at the moment because it is imprecise; it is an estimate—a guesstimate.

Mr KEITH: Back of the envelope, there were a half-a-dozen-odd staff and overtime. It will be \$1,000 or \$2,000, I would guess. If you want an accurate figure we would need to take it on notice. In the scheme of things, it is not a significant cost.

Madam SPEAKER: It would be \$1,000 or \$2,000 a day; is that right?

Mr KEITH: Yes.

Question on Notice No 13.3

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

J DAVIS: What is the cost to the department in overtime payments to staff, in the equivalent monetary value for time off in lieu, for senior staff for running the Estimates process in its current format?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Madam Speaker, do you accept the question?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 13.3.

Answer to Question on Notice No 13.2

Madam SPEAKER: The dollar figure on the acquisitions budget for the Parliamentary Library is \$4,000 per year.

J DAVIS: Do you know whether that has changed from previous years?

Madam SPEAKER: I do not.

Mr KEITH: I am pretty sure that is about the same.

J DAVIS: Has there been any consideration given to conducting Estimates in a different format?

Madam SPEAKER: I have been here for 15 years, and it has been the same format throughout that time. It is up to the Estimates Committee how they operate, and it is up to the parliament. It is a motion of parliament how Estimates is structured and run, which ultimately means the government crafts that motion. It is debated on the floor of the parliament, as you would remember.

I remind you that years ago we did not have Estimates at all. This process, although it might be a bit onerous and clunky and maybe expensive in some people's minds, provides a great opportunity for scrutiny.

Not to my knowledge, is the answer to your question.

J DAVIS: I do not want us to get rid of Estimates; it is wonderful. I was thinking about how we can do it in a way that is best for staff and the committee.

Has there been any costing done on holding parliament outside Darwin?

Madam SPEAKER: This is a question for the government ultimately, which funds these things.

The last sittings of parliament in Alice Springs was about 2011 or 2012; it was a long time ago. It is expensive, and it is a decision of Cabinet for the funding of it and whether or not it happens.

At the moment, there is no funding available for it. It is a big exercise. I wonder, though, whether it might be cheaper now than it was 14 years ago because of the way technology is. Anyway, it is a decision of government, not mine. There is no line in the budget for that.

J DAVIS: This is in relation to training for MLAs. I appreciate, having come in as a new MLA, our original training and some ongoing training. How do you identify and address training needs of MLAs? I know it is not something you can enforce, but what work has been done on that, and is there a budget for that?

Madam SPEAKER: Is there a budget for it?

Mr KEITH: Not a specific one.

Madam SPEAKER: No. Since the beginning of this parliament there have been a few training sessions conducted. I mentioned in the opening statement there has been the induction program for new members. There was training done in regard to Estimates.

I cannot speak on what has happened before because I do not remember clearly. There has not been a lot of training provided to members in the past. We are off on a positive note when it comes to that with the training we have provided already in the last 10 months.

Through the Remuneration Tribunal, members are allocated \$10,000 to pursue any professional development that they wish. That is a part of your entitlements. There is an onus for members to access the training that they identify for themselves in their own way. A lot of members prefer to pursue their own interests and training with that \$10,000 which is allocated to each member.

K McNAMARA: I heard before how the electorate allowance had those separate sections. Currently we get it as a lump sum. Is there somewhere for us to see the breakdown—that it is \$10,000 for training? Is it still considered in a breakdown, or do we just get it as a lump sum?

Madam SPEAKER: I am probably not qualified to answer that. It is a question you could put to the Remuneration Tribunal, which meets regularly. It would be more than happy to answer that.

I agree; the way we are paid these things is not that clear. We get an allowance for professional development and training, and for our car if we do not have a Fleet vehicle. It is all put together. As new members you would not be particularly clear on how that works, whereas I remember the history of it. It was paid differently in the past. Now it is all together sometimes I forget that there is money there for me to do some training that I might want.

J DAVIS: Is there any way of us getting more clarity or information on that?

Madam SPEAKER: Through the Remuneration Tribunal. That is their job. As members, you should be contacting them if you have questions. They are there to answer ...

J DAVIS: I wonder whether there has been any consideration given to some of the work that has been done in other parliaments on standards and training for parliamentarians, like the Set the Standard report, which has made lots of recommendations about ensuring safe workplaces, including for parliamentarians. Has there been any consideration of any of that report or any others in relation to our parliament?

Madam SPEAKER: Sorry; which report are you referring to?

J DAVIS: I am talking about the Set the Standard report in 2021, which was into Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces. That made a series of recommendations. There was another report done in New South Wales recently, particularly on gender and how that was addressed within parliament.

Madam SPEAKER: We do not systematically hear about what other parliaments are doing. I suppose it is about the work that we choose to do and if we are prompted to do it by members. I cannot answer that, I am fairly new to the job, but I think it is something that we should be looking at.

Do you have any comments, Mr Clerk?

Mr KEITH: There are two big parts to what you are raising there. One is the standards. A lot of it is managed by the Assembly when it comes to members' standards. There is a range of issues there that would be matters for the Assembly rather than the department to look at.

When it comes to staff, we have responsibility in relation to electorate office staff. We are working on material to help with the work health and safety of electorate offices. It has been part of the discussion of visiting the different offices and to help members in the management of their offices. Those reports are something the department does look at and we are following up on in relation to our role with electorate office staff.

The wider issues around how the Assembly works are a matter for the Assembly.

Madam SPEAKER: A lot of parliaments use their committee systems to look at these issues, with select committees and specific committees to look at codes of conduct and standards. What the Clerk is saying is true; it is stuff that we could initiate through our office and our interest. If that is something that the Assembly wishes to pursue, it is usually done through the committee system. The committee system can be as big or

as small as you want. The work undertaken by committees is critical to all aspects of our democracy not just internally or introspectively, like what happens to us as members, but for all parts of society.

I sometimes think that we are the smallest jurisdiction in Australia, but we still could be doing a lot more work to thrash out those sort of issues. The smaller you are, though, the less you do because of capacity. It is a simple case of—you were drawing our attention to the cost of Estimates. The cost of having more committees is also a burden on the taxpayer, so there is a lot we could be doing, Member for Johnston, but there are constraints.

Mr BROWN: Can you provide a breakdown of the funding allocated to parliamentary committees for the reporting period?

Madam SPEAKER: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 13.4

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arafura, please restate the question for the record.

Mr BROWN: Can you provide a breakdown of the funding allocated to parliamentary committees for the reporting period?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Madam Speaker, do you accept the question?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 13.4.

Madam SPEAKER: I can say that it has increased in this parliament. That is fair to say. The demand for the work of committees and the demand for support from the Legislative Assembly in running committees has increased substantially, but I have not got a figure for it.

Mr BROWN: That is in line with my next question. The allocated budget for 2025–26 is roughly \$4.7m compared to \$4.5m in 2024–25. Can you explain what the increase in the Assembly Services budget relates to?

Mr KEITH: Are you talking about the Assembly Services budget line?

Mr BROWN: Yes.

Mr KEITH: It is safest to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 13.5

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arafura, please restate the question for the record.

Mr BROWN: The allocated budget for 2025–26 is \$4.7m compared to \$4.5m in 2024–25. Can you explain what the increase in the Assembly Services budget relates to?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Madam Speaker, do you accept the question?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 13.5.

Mr BROWN: Is the Assembly exploring options that Parliament House should be made an alcohol-free workplace?

Madam SPEAKER: That is an interesting question. People might remember that I ran a motion in parliament to that effect a few years ago. Once again, that is a decision of the Assembly and, at the time I put that through, which was about two years ago, it was rejected by the Assembly. Any member can put up that same

motion, or something similar, and it can be debated like everything else. I do not have the power to implement an alcohol-free workplace in Parliament House.

Mr BROWN: The Member for Fong Lim said that the CLP should have their Legislative Scrutiny Committee as a de facto standard to address every piece of legislation. Is there sufficient funding allocated in the budget for this to happen or would the department staff struggle to do this?

Madam SPEAKER: There is not sufficient funding to have a bigger scrutiny committee process. The answer is no.

Mr BROWN: Is there any funding allocated for portraits of past Speakers and, if so, how much? Speakers Purick, Paech, Young, Ah Kit and Monaghan are due.

Madam SPEAKER: There are funds available. There is a procurement process that has to be followed. Any former Speaker is entitled to have a portrait painted to be hung in Parliament House and money is allocated for that. The former Speaker identifies an artist they might like to use to paint their picture, and that name is forwarded to the Legislative Assembly which undertakes a procurement process to have that work done.

Mr BROWN: Is there any funding allocated for portraits of past Chief Ministers and, if so, how much?

Madam SPEAKER: It is exactly the same. The amount is set by the House Committee. I think it is \$8,800—the \$800 is the GST component. Some artists might do it for less or more.

Mr BROWN: Is the Northern Territory Government executive paying room fees for use for political party events or government-hosted events. If not, why not?

Madam SPEAKER: Are you talking about ministers?

Mr BROWN: Northern Territory Government executive paying room fees for use for political party events or other hosted events?

Madam SPEAKER: Any political party events are separate from government, or they should be.

The events that ministers hold in Parliament House are not political party events and they do not pay for the use of the venue. That is one of the reasons Parliament House is here to celebrate Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, Red Cross Awards or whatever it is. As you would know, the various ministers tend to host those events which are line with their portfolios. That has always been the case under Labor and the CLP.

If anyone was to host a political party event in Parliament House, they would have to pay. If there have been political party events held in Parliament House, they would have to pay. I am not aware of any—if there have been political party events held in Parliament House they should have paid, whether it is Labor, the CLP or any other party.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Do the events in Parliament House have to be approved by the Speaker?

Madam SPEAKER: That is an interesting question.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Given you have oversight of Parliament House.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, that is one of the clear roles I have as Speaker in that I provide approval for people using Parliament House. Having said that, I delegate to other executive staff of the Legislative Assembly. I have oversight of all that.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: There are different events. There were certain commemoration events that were whole-of-Assembly events and there are multicultural events that are hosted. Who pays for those events? Is it coming out of the Legislative Assembly budget, our ministerial budgets or does it depend on the event?

Madam SPEAKER: The only events that the Legislative Assembly pays for are strictly speaking those that are organised by the Legislative Assembly; for example, the ones I cited in my opening statement, like the 50th Anniversary of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and the opening of parliament. We do not do much beyond that in terms of events.

All the other events, and there are many—there is a busy line-up of events every week in Parliament House. It is fully utilised, and that is great. That is exactly what it should be used for. Those events are paid by either the private people or organisations that have booked a venue in Parliament House for their event. Some of them are paid by Protocol; they are Protocol events that are organised for and on behalf of the government. There is a combination of events, who pays and who organises.

The Legislative Assembly has very few events, really, and we have a limited budget.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Does the Speaker also have to approve if people want to have a protest as part of democracy outside?

Madam SPEAKER: No, they do not. The wonderful thing about democracy is that you can front up to Parliament House—anywhere in the world, from my understanding—and protest. Many groups will pay the courtesy of telling us that they will have a protest—which is good for security because we can prepare; it is good for them and good for us—but no, they do not have to seek permission at all.

It was interesting when I went to the Scottish Parliament years ago, and there were people everywhere; there were multiple protests going on outside. It was amazing. I attended parliament and spoke to different members, and they said that is a normal everyday thing at the Scottish Parliament. That is good; I think it is great.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: The reason I ask is that I recall when they had the first crime rally outside. They openly said, ‘We have the approval of the Speaker of the parliament’, who I think was Mr Monaghan at the time.

Madam SPEAKER: Technically, they did not need the approval, but they might have notified the Speaker, which is good.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: It would have been a courtesy.

Madam SPEAKER: That is a courtesy. If you wanted to go out the front of Parliament House this afternoon, Member for Karama, and have your own little protest, you do not have to tell me, but it would be nice if you did.

There is a formal notification process, but it is not mandatory; it is just a courtesy.

K McNAMARA: Just to go back to members’ entitlements, the 1.4 FTE that we get is decided by the Remuneration Tribunal, but you say that is a political decision. Does the government ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Not the staffing allocation.

K McNAMARA: That is what I am asking for clarification on.

Madam SPEAKER: It technically is because the Remuneration Tribunal—I am not really equipped to be talking about this—do an annual review, make recommendations and they will provide that report to the government. It is the Chief Minister who tables that report. It is there to be debated in parliament. Then the parliament accepts that report. Ultimately, it is the parliament—the Assembly—that decides whether or not to accept the recommendations of the Remuneration Tribunal.

K McNAMARA: Crossbench members get the same as backbenchers of the government. We get our 1.4. Backbenchers of the government can come in here and do not have to do anything in parliament. They come in with their prewritten Dorothy Dixers and whatever. We have to be there to read all the Bills and put stuff forward. We have our General Business day ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will get you to go through to a question, Member for Nightcliff.

K McNAMARA: I am getting to my question. I knew you would try to cut me off.

Does the DLA recognise that a lack of parliamentary staff for crossbench members reduces our capacity to engage effectively in parliamentary duties?

Madam SPEAKER: The DLA is not here to preside over those questions. I have my own personal view. I am sure that Russell and Diem have their views too. That is not our job. Our job is to run Parliament House and

ensure that we have a democratic process happening within our jurisdiction and that Parliament House is looked after.

Those decisions are made by the Assembly. It is challenging. I understand what you are saying, but it is not my job as Speaker.

K McNAMARA: It is just frustrating because we asked these questions of the Chief Minister. She tried to handball to this department when really these are questions ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, we can just ask questions rather than trying to throw people under the bus, thank you.

Madam SPEAKER: The Chief Minister was referring to the fact that there was an Independent research officer in the last parliament. That was funded. The funding is still there, but it has been changed. That could be the only thing she is referring to, from my perspective, and we have answered that question. Sorry; it was funded internally. Politically, it was labelled a position specifically for the Independents. That parliament has finished.

K McNAMARA: Do we have an update on the job application for the new researcher?

Members interjecting.

K McNAMARA: They have started. Sorry; that was the same position that was advertised.

Madam SPEAKER: There are two research officer positions that all members can access.

Mr KERLE: Are we fully staffed now in the Committees area?

Mr KEITH: We have created a 12-month supernumerary senior research officer which is being advertised right now to help get us through because there is a lot of demand right now. Otherwise, all the positions in the Committees office are full.

J DAVIS: Has the 12-month position started or is it being advertised?

Mr KEITH: It is being advertised.

Mr BROWN: The Australian Christian Lobby hosted an event in Parliament House earlier this year. Can you confirm who paid for the room hire for this event?

Madam SPEAKER: I am aware of this. I had a journalist ring me up and ask me about this. The Australian Christian Lobby booked a room through the Legislative Assembly booking system, like anyone can, and they paid to use that room. There is nothing more to say about that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of the Legislative Assembly.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Madam Speaker for appearing before the committee today. I also thank the departmental officers who provided advice.

Madam Speaker, do you have any closing statements?

Madam SPEAKER: I thank the staff of the Legislative Assembly for doing such a spectacular job.

I would like to congratulate you all for the Estimates process; you have done well. It has been entertaining. I have been watching you from afar—relevancy deprivation on my behalf. Good luck and thank you very much.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: A big thank you to the Department of the Legislative Assembly. You provide us with an immense amount of support, and we very much appreciate everything you do.

That concludes the committee's public hearings on estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill, the Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and Statements of Corporate Intent for Power and Water Corporation, Jacana Energy and Territory Generation.

I remind officers that all answers to questions taken on notice must be given to the Estimates Committee by Monday 14 July 2025.

On behalf of the committee, I again extend my thanks to the ministers, board Chairs and officials who appeared before the committee. I also take this opportunity to place on the public record my appreciation of the assistance and support provided by agency staff.

I also thank members of this committee and other members who participated in the hearings for the work they have put in and the overall manner in which these public hearings have been conducted. I thank the Chair, Mr Clinton Howe, for all his work during this period. He shared the role with me, and Mr O’Gallagher stepped in as well.

I now formally close the public hearings of the Estimates Committee.

The committee concluded.
