

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

Mr CHAIR: Good morning. I welcome everyone to this public hearing of the Estimates Committee. This is the 24th year of the Estimates Committee process. The procedures of the committee have become well established over that time and are outlined in the Estimates Information Manual, which is available on the Assembly's website.

I will, however, highlight a few key procedural points. The Estimates Hearings Agenda gives the order that outputs will be considered. I remind members to seek clarification from the minister at the beginning of a hearing if they are unsure of which output a matter falls under.

It is important that each question on notice is given a number and repeated, so its terms are clear. I will interrupt whenever a question is taken on notice to ensure this occurs; I will also interrupt when answers are given to clarify the question number it refers to. Questions on notice must be answered by 14 July 2025 under the Assembly's resolution. The committee is not able to accept any answers after that date.

I ask that agency staff leave promptly when their hearing is complete so that we can admit the next agency. There will be a short break between each agency for the transition. I also remind the committee that standing orders apply; particularly, I draw your focus to Standing Order 109—no arguments, inferences, imputations, insults, hypothetical matters or expressions of opinion.

MINISTER FINOCCHIARO'S PORTFOLIOS

CHIEF MINISTER

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S OFFICE

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed with consideration of the estimates of proposed expenditure in the order set out in the Estimates Hearings Agenda, commencing with the Chief Minister and the Auditor-General's Office.

Good morning, Chief Minister. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Good morning. We have Jara Dean, the Auditor-General.

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, 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. 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.

Chief Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Auditor-General's Office?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, thank you and the committee for today. We are looking forward to continuing with the Estimates process as it has been for a number of decades.

The tradition with statutory office holders is that they be given the opportunity to speak, so I will not be making an opening statement. I will hand over to Mr Dean to do that if he likes and to answer any questions.

Mr DEAN: Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to appear today and for the opportunity to make an opening statement. I start by acknowledging the Larrakia people as the original owners and continuing custodians of the land on which we are meeting today.

This is my first Estimates hearing since the commencement of my five-year term. It is a privilege and honour to serve as the 11th Auditor-General of the Northern Territory.

I would not seek or accept the appointment if I were not determined to make a difference. Earlier this year I unveiled a strategic plan that sets the direction for my office for the next five years. My staff and I have been working on making changes to help us achieve the goals we set out for ourselves in the plan. Change is not easy, and I thank my staff and authorised auditors for their efforts and continued support.

The commitment to making a difference is also visible in a draft plan of audit, work which is currently out for consultation with the wider public sector. It is an ambitious plan, which is contingent on making changes to the way my office has operated for the past ten or more years. This is because my budget remains relatively unchanged. With only a small increase of \$36,000, I need to reprioritise and rethink the approach to all audit and non-audit activities.

My primary function is to undertake audits of the financial statements of public sector entities and the consolidated Territory accounts. There are 24 entities that are required to have their financial statements audited. My office pays approximately \$2.5m to private sector firms to undertake those audits. These costs are fully recoverable from the audited entities and do not impact the bottom line of my budget. That is not to say that there are no efficiencies to be found.

I also point out that currently the management of these audits is paid from my annual appropriation. Speaking of my annual appropriation, my office receives \$3.2m. One-third of the appropriation is spent on salaries and running the office. Two-thirds is paid to private sector firms for the audit of the consolidated Treasurer's annual financial statements and other non-recoverable audits and reviews.

In total, my budget estimates to spend \$4.4m on outsourcing audit work. This represents three-quarters of my total budget and is the most significant spend. The rates that are paid for the time of my authorised auditors are indexed in January each year. This year's indexation was 2.8%, which far exceeded the indexation applied in the 2026 budget.

I go back to the statement I made about the cost of the so-called non-recoverable audits, which is approximately \$2m. This covers the actual audit of the Treasurer's annual financial statements and compliance work in 23—now reduced to 20—agencies that support the work I do on the consolidated accounts.

While I acknowledge this work provides some level of assurance to individual agencies and to the accountable offices, it is work that I am not required to do, nor is my office specifically funded to do. I have already started reprioritising some of the work, and there is more to do in 2026.

As I said at the beginning, I am determined to make a difference. I hope that you see the potential benefits and will view the annual appropriation not necessarily as a cost but as an investment in a more accountable public sector and a better-informed parliament.

I am happy to take any questions.

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

Ms UIBO: Auditor-General, did your office submit a funding bid to implement the recommendations of the 2024 Strategic Review, and what was the outcome of that?

Mr DEAN: Yes. We have put forward a bid as part of the budget process. The bid did not progress any further.

Ms UIBO: I note the Chief Minister in her previous role described the Auditor-General's resourcing as inadequate. Since your appointment, how would you assess the current level of funding and resourcing and the impact on delivering to the full ability of the office?

Mr DEAN: As I said in my opening statement, my budget remains relatively unchanged. There was a modest increase as part of the indexation of my wages component and the component that pays for the cost of outsourced audits. My office has undertaken some changes in the way I am managing some of the contract audits and also some changes to the audit program to rebalance my budget.

Ms UIBO: Has your workload increased with the new government department since the change of government?

Mr DEAN: Yes, it has increased. The work that I am doing in the compliance phase and the work that supports the audit of the consolidated Territory accounts—given that we have six additional agencies, the workload has increased.

Ms UIBO: To be clear, the workload has increased, but the budget has not significantly increased.

Mr DEAN: That is correct. If I can add to that, as a result of that, I had to reprioritise some of the work. As you know, I made it clear that some of the smaller agencies, specifically the Ombudsman's Office, the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and the Electoral Commission, have been removed from this year's audit program.

Ms UIBO: In your view of the office and the funding regarding the staff allocations, when it comes to full-time equivalent (FTEs), what would be ideal to ensure that the statutory requirements of the office are fulfilled if you had your budget increased?

Mr DEAN: If you look at the recommendations from the strategic review to my office there are some recommendations regarding what ideal staffing in my office would be. The recommendation made some suggestions regarding, for example, providing sufficient resourcing for a deputy Auditor-General and then increasing the staffing levels within the audit section of the office.

Ms UIBO: I note that Budget 2025–26 includes a reduction of one full-time-equivalent position in your office. Will that mean rescoping the audit program because of one less staff member?

Mr DEAN: I am not aware of the reduction in the FTEs in my office. On retirement of a senior staff member I implemented a partial restructure, which replaced that senior staff member with two less-senior staff members, so my establishment in the office has increased by one.

Ms UIBO: Can you explain why the KPIs have changed?

Mr DEAN: The KPIs have changed because I felt it was more appropriate for me to measure my outcomes rather than outputs. As I said in my opening statement I am determined to make a difference, and that is reflected in strategic plan for my office. I took the view that, for example, rather than measuring the number of audits that my office does, it is better to measure the outcomes of those audits. For example, I am keen to measure the uptake of audit recommendations from those audits.

Ms UIBO: Is that why you implemented the new measure in that KPI as the number one with the average number of days taken after the balance date to issue financial audit opinions?

Mr DEAN: Correct. The KPI that measures the number of days it takes to issue an audit opinion from the end of the financial year goes to my mission, or the mission of my office, which is to help parliament hold the government accountable. The view I take is that for parliament to do that, the information it receives needs to be timely. That is why I want to make sure that the NTG reports on its financial results back to parliament as quickly as possible after the end of the financial year.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, with Budget 2025–26, addressed by the Auditor-General's repeated request for additional funding to deliver the full audit program, can you explain why the government made the decision regarding funding for this office?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As you can imagine, Opposition Leader, we inherited a debt of monumental size. Unfortunately, that means we cannot fund everything which, as a new government, we would want to. We are respectful and supportive of the role the Auditor-General has to play, as it is fundamental to the Territory, and has been for a long time. We welcome Mr Dean in his new role; his aspirations to make a difference are important.

There is that slight increase in the budget, as Mr Dean has indicated, and we continue to work through the recommendations of the triannual report. Ultimately, with the debt your government left us we cannot fund everything to the levels that you might like.

Ms UIBO: The output appropriation for the Auditor-General's Office has only increased by \$36,000. The Auditor-General has identified that there has been an increase in the workload with the six new government departments that your government has installed since coming to government. Are you worried about further cancellations of planned audits because the office is not resourced properly?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not believe that is a concern. Mr Dean is doing a lot of work and undertaking changes in how the office operates, and we have full confidence in him to make those important decisions. Ultimately, it comes down to prioritisation as well. They are really matters for the audit office.

Ms UIBO: This may be a question for the Treasurer. The audit outsourcing costs, which Mr Dean spoke about in his opening statement, have risen by 25% since 2021. Why was the Auditor-General's base funding only increased by less than 1%?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are welcome to ask that of the Treasurer, but we are alive to the fact that because of the outsourcing model that the Auditor-General has, those costs have increased. The Auditor-General may add to that.

Mr DEAN: My office, as the Chief Minister pointed out, operates on a fully outsourced model. All my audits are outsourced to private sector firms. The contracting arrangements are refreshed every few years. The outsourcing model and contracting work is done by audit firms tendering for the work with my office. They set hourly rates for their staff based on the level of the different members of the audit team. The increase that the Opposition Leader mentioned of 25% reflects new rates that my contracted auditors put forward to me and the annual indexation. That is not an unreasonable increase given wages and other costs that the private sector audit firms are dealing with.

The way I am dealing with the increase, in light of the smaller increase than it would call for to my budget, is by reprioritising some of the work that I am doing. I am also, as I pointed out in my opening statement, rethinking how I approach the audit of the consolidated Territory accounts in order to free up some of the resources that I have to do some work that I should be doing, for example, in the performance management system audit space. At the moment, my appropriation of \$2m, which I mentioned, is fully spent on the work I do in individual agencies, which is largely to support the audit of the consolidated Territory accounts.

Ms UIBO: How many audit reports has your office completed to date, and are you on track for your planned audit schedule?

Mr DEAN: Under the *Audit Act*, I am required to table at least one report. I have complied with that obligation by tabling the report in November last year. Since then, I have changed the approach to tabling reports on different audits or the different work that my office is doing. You would have noticed that, for example, reviews under the *Public Information Act* have been tabled as the work has been completed rather than as part of the main financial statements audit reports.

To answer your question, I tabled a report in November and then tabled additional reports on outcomes of my reviews under the *Public Information Act*. There will be a further report tabled in the not-so-distant future that will detail outcomes of audits of entities with the end of December financial year and any audits that have been completed since the tabling of the last November report.

Ms UIBO: In the Estimates reporting period, have you made any referrals to external oversight bodies such as the NT Police, the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption or the Ombudsman's Office?

Mr DEAN: No, I have not.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, given the rise in outsourced audit costs that we have heard from the Auditor-General and long-term reliance on those private contractors, has the government considered transitioning to a more suitable hybrid audit model which, perhaps, would increase internal capacity for the Northern Territory Government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it is not something we are looking at. Whether or not the Auditor-General is reconsidering how we could move forward is entirely a matter for him. Obviously, we would then take that advice, so there is not a lot more I can add to that.

Mr Dean, do you want to add anything to that?

Mr DEAN: It is not something that I am currently considering, but everything is on the table, including potential changes to the outsourced model or having a more hybrid model where some audits, perhaps more complex audits, could be outsourced and some of the less complex audits could be handled by staff in my office.

Ms UIBO: Has the Auditor-General been granted access to Cabinet documents as per the 2024 strategic review?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. The normal process for Cabinet documents has continued, as it has for a long time.

Ms UIBO: Auditor-General, is that something the office will pursue as a recommendation from the strategic review 2024?

Mr DEAN: I think when the need arises for me to access Cabinet documents, I would make the request and take it from there.

Ms UIBO: Auditor-General, what type of engagement has your office had with the government since tabling the strategic review regarding its implementation?

Mr DEAN: Perhaps that is a question the Chief Minister could answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. We received the review. We have introduced legislation in parliament regarding the changes to the *Public Information Act*, which were one of the key and tangible recommendations in the review. The parliamentary process has to take its course, but it would see that responsibility come out of the Auditor-General's Office and go into the Ombudsman's Office, which we believe is a really good fit given the work that the Ombudsman already does. That aligns clearly with the review.

We are moving through all the other recommendations. Some are more tangible than others, so it is an ongoing process, I suppose you could say.

Ms UIBO: I will ask the Auditor-General questions regarding the *Public Information Act*. The Chief Minister was speaking about the introduction of legislation, before parliament currently.

When did you find out about the changes that were proposed to the *Public Information Act*? How has that unfolded?

Mr DEAN: I was advised of the Bill on the day it was introduced to parliament.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, do you have a table that can break down the strategic review recommendations which the government has accepted, rejected or deferred or supported in principle?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. I do not have that because we continue to work through it. As we start to go through those recommendations—obviously we have done the one on the *Public Information Act*—then that will become public.

Mr CHAIR: I will carry that line of questioning. Auditor-General, with the *Public Information Act*, did you brief the PAC that you thought changes, taking that out of the Auditor-General, would be useful, so as not to politicise the role of the Auditor-General?

Mr DEAN: Correct. I am supportive of those changes, changing the responsibility to undertake reviews under the *Public Information Act* to another appropriate person.

Mr CHAIR: And you briefed those—you gave that advice to the Public Accounts Committee earlier in the year?

Mr DEAN: Yes, I shared my views on the recommendations—the particular recommendation where I briefed the Public Accounts Committee on the outcomes of the review.

Mr CHAIR: I will now open the floor to the rest of the committee on the opening statement, noting we will also have outputs to go through.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I want to go back to your outsourcing model. I think you mentioned that you do 24 entities—correct? The total cost is somewhere around \$4.4m, which is your largest expense. Can you share how you select those companies that will undertake those audits?

Mr DEAN: I will clarify that the figure I mentioned of \$4.4m is not only those 24 entities. That also includes the work that is undertaken on the Treasurer's annual financial statements and the compliance work of the individual entities that are consolidated into the Treasurer's annual financial statements. The firms are selected through public tender, where local firms are invited to submit a tender to be on the panel of audit service providers from my office.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Just confirming, it is local firms? Do you reach out to interstate firms or just local ones?

Mr DEAN: Yes, these are local firms. The last tender was undertaken by my predecessor, and I understand that the stipulation was that the work needed to be largely completed locally within the Northern Territory.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: That is good. I am happy about that.

Mr DEAN: If I can add, what happens quite often is when specialist skills are required, those skills or the people who provide those specialised services may come from interstate, but the main part of the engagement is still undertaken by the local firms.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Can you tell me how many local firms have been engaged?

Mr DEAN: There are six local firms currently on my panel.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up question from the Member for Mulka. You have covered this a bit, but who decides what audits and reviews are conducted by you?

Mr DEAN: There are some audits I am required to undertake under my legislation or the enabling legislation of the relevant entity. These are mainly the financial statement audits. I am required under the *Audit Act* to audit, for example, the public accounts, which are the Treasurer’s consolidated financial statements for the Territory. All other work is at my discretion.

J DAVIS: For example, in 2023–24, a review of closing the gap was completed. Will this continue to be reviewed annually?

Mr DEAN: It is not currently on my program, but again, it was at the discretion of the then Auditor-General, I assume, and she thought it was a topic worth looking into. In the same way, I have outlined a number of areas that I believe my office should be looking into as part of the draft plan that I shared with the Public Accounts Committee.

J DAVIS: Just to clarify, will closing the gap not be an ongoing review?

Mr DEAN: Not necessarily.

J DAVIS: Can you tell us what Aboriginal areas have been audited for the 2024–25 year, and what will be audited in this current financial year?

Mr DEAN: When you say ‘Aboriginal areas’, do you mean programs that address ...

J DAVIS: The question is from the Member for Mulka, so yes; I imagine that is what it means.

Mr DEAN: If the question is whether there have been any programs that might have been examined by my office—for example, under the mandate to undertake performance management system audits—there have not been any such audits undertaken in the area.

J DAVIS: I wanted to clarify in relation to the strategic review, I think you said earlier there was not any action, and then one recommendation has been put to parliament; is that correct? I think, Chief Minister, you said the others are under consideration; is that correct?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

J DAVIS: Given the outcome of that review and that the NT has consistently scored the lowest amongst states for our audit legislation, I am wondering what risks you see are poorly resourced or under resourced, particularly given our high levels of debt at the moment?

Mr DEAN: The risk is mainly regarding—if there are two risks, one risk is about the ability of my office to continue to provide adequate support to me in my statutory role as the Auditor-General. That goes to appropriate staffing and some of the systems and processes that my office has in place. As you know, the strategic review raised some risks and made some recommendations regarding, for example, key person dependencies and outdated systems. They are risks that I am trying to address within the means of my funding; that is why there was the partial restructure that I mentioned earlier.

The other risk is when you look at some of the observations made in the strategic review. You mentioned, Member for Johnston, the legislation in the Northern Territory, the *Audit Act 1995*, being consistently scored

the lowest amongst all the jurisdictions. There is a risk posed to my role and to my independence by some of the limitations that the legislation places on me.

J DAVIS: When you say there is a risk, what is the risk for the Northern Territory?

Mr DEAN: The risk for the Northern Territory is that you, as my ultimate client—I said that in my opening statement—may not be getting the information that you need to undertake your role. The risk is if, for example, my mandate does not include performance management or performance audits but simply limits my mandate to performance management system audits, I cannot tell you how government programs are delivering the desired outcomes.

J DAVIS: Is there an external risk to the NT in terms of creditors and lenders?

Mr DEAN: For example, the audit that I do on the consolidated Treasurer's annual financial statements provides some assurance to lenders and rating agencies, in the same way as the fact that the Northern Territory has an independent Auditor-General's function. How much or what level of comfort those entities place on my opinion or the strength of my legislation might be a question perhaps for the Treasurer.

Mrs ZIO: In your opening statement you mentioned that you have changed the way that you go through your KPIs, and you measure outcomes rather than inputs. I am wondering whether you have any current data on how that is occurring with the uptake of audit recommendations from previous audits that have occurred.

Mr DEAN: Our KPIs focus mainly on outcomes rather than outputs. I cannot currently measure the uptake of audit recommendations. This is something I introduced only recently.

When it comes to some of the other measures, if you give me a minute, I will have a quick look at how we are currently tracking. For example, when it comes to the completion of financial audits, we are currently sitting a bit over, I think at 110 days, if my information is correct. As I said, I am trying to bring that progressively down. As for the completion of some of the work, I might need to take that question on notice if you are interested in, for example, the length of time it takes me to complete performance management system audits or some of the *Public Information Act* reviews.

Mr CHAIR: Would you like that on notice?

Mrs ZIO: No. I was more looking at whether there was any data on the recommendations that have come through from audits and if there was an uptake of those.

Mr DEAN: Not currently, but I will be reporting on the uptake of my recommendations in my report to parliament in November.

K McNAMARA: This is a follow-up from something earlier, but I was not sure if I could jump in about the changes with the *Public Information Act* moving from the Auditor-General to the Ombudsman. The Auditor-General has said his office was not consulted about the change. How can the public be assured this was a genuine process of law reform if you did not contact his office about it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think what the Auditor-General said is that he found out about the Bill on the day. My understanding is that there had been conversations prior. Nonetheless, it is a straight adoption of the recommendations. We move forward with that. It was a tangible one that we could implement relatively easily.

K McNAMARA: The Auditor-General recently found that your government was in breach of the *Public Information Act* for using public funds to buy radio ads for the Territory Coordinator Bill. Is this move to change responsibility from the Auditor-General to the Ombudsman designed so that in future you will not be found in breach of the *Public Information Act* again?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. You just finished explaining that it was part of the triannual review, which is part of the legislation. We adopted that as part of a number of recommendations, which we continue to work through and, equally, the Auditor-General has been implementing.

Mr DEAN: If I could add to the answer for the Member for Nightcliff, the current legislation—my legislation, the *Audit Act*—gives me the mandate to undertake performance management system audits. For example, I could look at what systems agencies have regarding government advertising in order not to breach the *Public Information Act*. Simply removing the responsibility to undertake reviews under the *Public Information*

Act from me does not mean I will not include audits of how government agencies are managing government advertising in the future.

K McNAMARA: Are you able to tell us who the new Ombudsman is? Has that been decided yet?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Ombudsman will be the fourth statutory officer coming up, so we can ask then.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill as they relate to the Auditor-General's Office. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

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

No questions.

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

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the Auditor-General for attending today.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thank Mr Dean and the small but mighty Auditor-General's Office. They do a terrific job. We thank them very much for not just their preparation for today but also all the work they do on behalf of Territorians.

NORTHERN TERRITORY ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider the Northern Territory Electoral Commission.

Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Northern Territory Electoral Commission.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, we have Electoral Commissioner Kirsten Kelly before the committee this morning. As with usual practice, statutory officers are able to answer their questions. I am here if there are any for me as well, but I will not make an opening statement. We will leave it to Ms Kelly if she would like to.

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms KELLY: Good morning, Chair and members of the committee. I acknowledge that Deputy Electoral Commissioner Anna Malgorzewicz is unwell and, unfortunately, is unable to attend today. I wish her a speedy recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement. The NT Electoral Commission is an independent government agency that is responsible for the impartial conduct of Legislative Assembly and local government elections in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory Legislative Assembly elections and local government periodic general elections are fixed by legislation and conducted every four years in August, with the local government elections taking place 12 months after the Territory election. Whilst this is important to assist the commission in planning, this two-year period is a demanding time for the NT Electoral Commission.

I start by acknowledging the dedication and hard work of the NT Electoral Commission staff who have worked tirelessly over the past two years to deliver the 2024 Territory election and are now preparing to conduct the 2025 local government elections.

I also extend this thanks to the more than 500 casual staff who supported the delivery of the Territory election and to the Northern Territory Government shared service providers who assist during major electoral events across areas such as ICT systems, payroll, premises hire and recruitment.

For the Electoral Commission, election management activities extend beyond election day and include activities that take place across the election period, aligned to the election timetable, and the broader high-level activities that take place across the four-year election cycle, including election evaluation, planning, preparation and then delivery.

I also acknowledge the support of other Australian electoral commissions, including the South Australian Electoral Commission in 2024, for providing 500 laptop devices that supported electronic voter marking-off and the Electoral Commission of Queensland, which provided 500 devices to support this year's local government elections.

Looking at the 2024 Territory election, which was held in August last year, the following is an overview of the election. Enrolment at the close of rolls for the election was 153,250 people, or 93.4% of the elector population. This was an increase of 8.5% since the 2020 election, which was 86.2%.

The voter turnout average was 68.5%. The division of Goyder had the highest voter turnout of 83%, and Gwojra had the lowest turnout of 42.1%. Overall, there was an average decline of 6.4% compared with the 2020 Territory election, where participation was 74.9%. A decline in participation was experienced across all divisions, with the noted exception of the division of Daly, which saw an increase of 0.3%.

I note that in the recent federal election, the total turnout across the Territory was 71%, with Solomon at 79%, which is a decline of 0.5% since the 2022 federal election. Lingiari was 62.7%, a decline of 4.1% compared with the 2022 federal election.

In 2020 the total number of ballot papers counted for the Territory election was 105,833 compared with the 2024 election where 104,901 ballot papers were counted. That is 932 less, where our enrolment increased by 12,000 people.

For the 2024 Territory election electors chose to cast their votes through a variety of service offerings: 53.9%, or 56,500, of votes were cast at early voting centres; 16.6% were cast on election day; 10.9% of votes were cast at mobile voting services; 12.2% were cast as absent vote or votes cast out of division of the enrolled elector; 5.3% were through postal votes; and 1.3% was through declaration votes. Ballot paper informality for the 2024 election was 3%, which is a decline of 0.4% compared with 2020.

The cost to conduct the 2024 Territory election was \$5.032m, an increase of 35% compared to the 2020 Territory election. That provides a per-electors cost of \$32.84 compared to \$26.42 in 2020.

Of electoral positions, 543 were filled by casual staff, with a number of staff employed across multiple functions for the 2024 elections. Staff wages comprised about 55% of the total election costs, with other significant cost categories including travel, air charters and accommodation at 11.4%, public awareness campaign at 8.9%, ICT billing at 6.3% and the 19-week remote engagement program accounted for 8% of the cost of the election.

Next is non-voter activity associated with the election. Apparent failure-to-vote notices were sent to 21,290 electors in October 2024, with reminder notices sent in March 2025 to 15,317 electors who failed to respond to the first notice, with 1,315 non-voters admitting liability by 30 January and paying the expiation fee.

Through this process, 2,277 electors provided a valid and sufficient reason for not voting; 2,214 notices were sent back to the Electoral Commission's return-to-sender or return unclaimed; and approximately 15,500 people did not reply to the non-voter activities.

Next is the financial disclosure during the 2024 general election. The NT Electoral Commission engaged Audit NT to evaluate compliance with the financial disclosure requirements as outlined in Part 10 of the *Electoral Act*. The findings of the review indicated a high level of compliance with financial disclosure obligations by electoral participants. The compliance review is available on the NT Electoral Commission website.

The NT Electoral Commission has prepared an election overview of the Northern Territory election and intends to table a final report into the conduct of the 2024 election in the Legislative Assembly in early 2026.

The election overview is available on the NT Electoral Commission website and provides data and information about the 2024 election.

Since the Territory election in August, the NT Electoral Commission has delivered the Barkly Regional Council general election, which was held on 2 November. Elections were required for the position of mayor and councillor positions for each of the four council wards. Following the declaration of nominations, the Alyawarr Ward was uncontested, and elections were held for the positions of mayor and the remaining three wards. Electors in Alyawarr were still required to vote for the mayoral election. Voter turnout in the Barkly Regional Council election, based on the mayoral election, was 34.8%. The cost to conduct the election \$105,100.

On 15 March 2025 the Electoral Commission conducted the Groote Archipelago Regional Council general election. The cost to conduct that election was \$40,250, with the Groote Archipelago Regional Council invoiced for election costs associated with activities completed prior to the election timetable changes. The Central Ward was the only ward contested through that election with the East and West Wards uncontested. Voter turnout was 15.5%.

For the reporting period the NT Electoral Commission has conducted full fee-for-service elections, generating an income of \$23,375.

During the reporting period the NT Electoral Commission has delivered 113 education sessions to school and adult groups and conducted 10 school elections. In addition, there have been four democracy dash events run in Darwin and for remote students visiting Alice Springs. As at 31 May 2025, 5,203 participants have taken part in education programs offered by the NT Electoral Commission.

Moving on to the 2025 local government periodic general elections. Today marks 74 days until eligible Territorians will vote in the Northern Territory local government period general elections, with election day being Saturday, 23 August. Local councils are the level of government closest to the community and make important decisions about matters such as local roads, parks, sporting fields and libraries, in addition to running local community and infrastructure programs. This year, 15 of the 18 local government councils will participate in the 2025 local government elections, which is a Territory-wide event.

Electors in the Barkly Regional Council and the Groote Archipelago Regional Council are not required to vote in this year's election, having recently participated in general elections for their councils. Concurrent with the 2025 local government elections, the Coomalie Community Government Council will participate in a general election. The general election was called by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development on 23 May, with election day to be held on 23 August 2025.

For the 2025 local government elections, 54 elections will be held for 144 vacancies. Enrolment as at 30 April for the Northern Territory is currently at 94.2%, or 154,962. The eligible voting population is 164,588, meaning that there are about 9,500 Territorians still unenrolled. Electors enrolled in locations that are not part of local government areas, referred to as unincorporated areas, are not required to vote in the local government council elections, and there are approximately 3,700 people in that category. The close of roles for the local government elections is 5 pm, Tuesday, 22 July 2025.

Our service plan, as with all general elections or major election events, has been prepared for the 2025 local government election, and it is available on the website. This service plan provides electoral participants and stakeholders with early advice on how the election will be delivered. An election office will be stood up in Alice Springs mid-July to support the southern councils and electoral participants during the election. Councils will host candidate information sessions in the lead-up to the election. The NT Electoral Commission will be in attendance and provide information about the rights and responsibilities of electoral participants, including through the nomination process and campaigning requirements.

Candidates in the 2025 local government elections who receive donations and loans above the disclosure threshold are required to submit campaign donation returns. Campaign donation returns are required under Part 8.6 of the *Local Government Act* having come into effect on 1 July 2022. This is the first periodic general election since that legislation came into effect. The NT Electoral Commission has developed resources to support candidate awareness and compliance.

The communication campaign for the 2025 local government elections will be in three phases, similar to the Territory election, where we ask electors to check their enrolment in July. We are then seeking to educate and empower people to understand the importance of participating in election processes and to plan for

where people go to vote, given that not all voting centres issue ballot papers for all local government councils, and then we ask people to vote when the election starts.

Across the Territory the NT Electoral Commission will deliver a multi-channel communications campaign through TV, radio, digital social media and signage, including the newly introduced 'voting open' corflutes, acknowledging that candidates for local government may not have access to resources of a Territory election, and the NT Electoral Commission has procured some corflutes that can be put in community to raise awareness that voting is open in the absence of other corflutes from candidates, which raise awareness about elections. The NT Electoral Commission will also be undertaking letterbox drops and using print media. We will also be promoting the elections by attending community events. A dedicated service team will be stood up in July to support telephone, email and online inquiries.

For remote voting services, about 20% of Territory voters are enrolled in the 10 remote local government councils that are participating in the 2025 general elections. The NT Electoral Commission will provide remote voting services where there are 10 or more electors enrolled and where the regular mail service is not available. For the 2025 elections, there will be 16 remote mobile teams providing voting services across 140 locations over the voting period. That is based on all councils or wards being contested and will be adjusted after the declaration of nominations.

There will be six early voting centres available across the Territory. As the Barkly Regional Council is not participating, there will be no voting services in Tennant Creek. There will be 17 election day voting centres across the Territory located in major urban and regional centres. This is a reduction in the number of voting centres available in the larger municipalities in 2022 and will be trialled following requests from the larger councils.

In local government elections, as I mentioned earlier, not all voting centres issue ballot papers for all councils. Voters will be able to find their closest voting centre using the online tool which will be available again this year and modified to suit councils.

Postal voting applications are now open and were opened on 23 May. If a voter is unable to attend a voting centre in person, they can apply for postal voting. Again, urban aged-care facilities will receive assisted postal voting services. Voters interstate and overseas can access postal voting services, and there are no interstate voting services available for local government elections.

The cost estimate for the Territory-wide election is \$2.95m excluding GST. This estimate is based on all elections being fully contested. As a comparison, in 2021, 45 of the possible 60 elections were contested, with 13 uncontested, one failed election and one partially failed election.

The NT Electoral Commission does not receive government appropriation to conduct council elections, with councils responsible for the reasonable cost of conducting elections. The NT Electoral Commission, however, seeks to leverage, where possible, through the earlier Territory election, using activities that provide cost savings to councils. An example would be purchasing cardboard and materials and leveraging the branding that is developed for the Territory event and using that again for local government elections.

The NT Electoral Commission has made early contact with councils, acknowledging the increase in the category of costs for elections, and has been in discussions with them to identify some cost-saving opportunities which do not compromise service standards. It is recognised that all organisations, including the NT Electoral Commission, are experiencing increasing cost pressures.

New initiatives for this year's elections are continuing, with those introduced for the Territory election, and include:

- the misinformation and disinformation register
- the fatigue management policy, supporting the health and wellbeing of our electoral staff
- the 'find my closest voting centre' tool
- shareable stakeholder engagement packs for remote culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disabilities, youths and seniors, including new dedicated voter and candidate engagement packs for each council, in-language resources on how to vote and voting businesses in 13 Aboriginal languages are also available, and the multilingual guide with an additional three international languages added from last year.

The eSafety Commissioner referral process and protocol for all electoral commissions will also be stood up again in the lead-up to the election, which provides online access to support through the eSafety Commissioner should there be any issues regarding the electoral commission staff and online comments.

To support the 2025 local government elections, a working group has been stood up, comprising representatives of the NT Electoral Commission, the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory and the Local Government unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development. The objective of the working group is to support councils and electoral participants, such as candidates and electors, in areas including governance, promoting candidate participation and voter awareness.

The challenges we are experiencing in democracies—this is felt in Australia and internationally—include declining public trust and disengagement, growing social divisions and declining civic engagement. Threats to democracy include misinformation, disinformation, foreign interference and ideological extremism. Addressing such challenges and threats includes strengthening democratic institutions through improved transparency, accountability and participation; promoting media literacy and fact-checking; combating extremism and hate speech; and ensuring electoral inclusivity.

Challenges for the Northern Territory Electoral Commission to meet its democratic challenges are that the NT Electoral Commission must ensure the organisation structure remains contemporary with appropriate resourcing and capabilities to meet the challenges and is supported by a robust electoral management system and solutions that are aligned to our statutory functions.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide an extensive opening statement. It has been a busy two years. Thank you for your patience while waiting for that information. I am happy to take questions.

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

Ms UIBO: Thank you, commissioner, for your extensive overview; it is very much appreciated as it has been busy for the commission, particularly over the last few months.

I have a few short questions. Regarding voter education and engagement, is there a budget from 2024 that was used by the commission in relation to both the NT general election and working with the Australian Electoral Commission for the federal election that happened last month?

Ms KELLY: Regarding general elections, last year there was a remote engagement program that cost \$406,000. It was delivered from April to August. The focus of the program was to reach remote communities, and over 70 communities were visited with the objective of raising election awareness, not just about the Territory election but also talking about the layers of government. There were voting business materials available in language that was shared in community. There were over 1,000 enrolment checks done and many hundreds of contacts with people in communities. Some of the teams stayed in the community for a few days and met with women's and men's groups, speaking to people at the art centres and visiting childcare facilities to talk to people in the community about the election.

The Territory election affords a budget for us to promote the election in the lead-up, and that 19-week program was quite extensive and successful regarding the reach. A similar engagement program was not available in 2020 due to it being a COVID election and not being able to access remote communities.

Having fixed statutory elections provides an opportunity to leverage the resources, so whilst our team was in the community talking about the Territory election, the layers in government, the importance of participating and what the different levels of government do, we are mindful that there is a local government election coming as well.

For the Territory election, we also spoke with local authority groups about the election, and for this election, we are sharing resources through councils with local authorities. It is important. We work with the Australian Electoral Commission; since 2022, they have received funding for an Indigenous education and engagement program where they have staff who move across the Territory, raising awareness. We are looking forward out of our two-year election period to work closely with them to look at opportunities to share resources and information and use the data to see where we need to focus efforts in remote communities to raise awareness.

Ms UIBO: I have written down the figure that you provided at the start of the answer. You mentioned in your statement tabling an overview of the election outcome in early 2026. Will that include a detailed post-election report concerning turnout, including demographics and booth-level data? Will it go to that level of detail?

Ms KELLY: It is quite a substantial election report—that is, the one produced in 2020, just as an example. An overview has been provided, which has that level of data regarding voter participation, and next to that document, which was shared with all members, circulated a week ago to all members and is now available on the website. That provides information about voter participation. It also includes—after the election last year, we provided all remote communities and Aboriginal organisations with a snapshot of participation for remote communities. That was based on feedback through previous Your Voice Your Community programs that remote Territorians want to know what the outcomes are of the elections.

We were mindful to ensure that information was available as to who was elected, what the participation was and the number of additional hours. That has been shared, and I am happy to share that again. That is an election overview, but not the significant report that we are looking to table in early 2026, which has more detailed data, including case studies and recommendations from the Electoral Commission following the election. That includes electoral reform.

Ms UIBO: My final question is about the decrease in voter turnout we have seen in the Northern Territory; you gave us examples of the data on that. In greater Darwin we saw the turnout fall from 80.6% to 76.6%. Why then do we see a decrease in the number of election day booths if we want a voter increase? What is the commission's role in deciding where booths are cut or reduced?

Ms KELLY: It is a good question. The Electoral Commission will maintain the minimum service standards, making sure electors have reasonable access to voting services. Many Territorians are early voting in elections. Having access over that two-week period, the data is showing that people are engaging in that service. The balance is that we are seeing increases in costs of election service delivery across all categories. This presents problems for councils that are responsible for paying that cost.

While we look to leverage where we can following the Territory election, there are costs—55% of costs are staffing costs, and you have to manage wage growth. They will not get smaller, but we are looking for ways to reduce costs. Using council venues and facilities can assist somewhat.

It is an ongoing challenge for electoral commissions as they have uplifted and expanded their service offerings, so people can access two weeks of early voting, election day voting, absent voting, postal voting and declaration voting, and they will continue. Now it is about raising awareness among electors to say that all elections will be different. Federally, they will use different venues for the Territory. We try to keep them the same, but sometimes, logistically, we cannot.

We are always looking for ways to improve the services on data. Some voting centres have taken 200 to 400 votes over a day, and then it becomes about educating people on where their voting centres are, so it is an ongoing challenge for all electoral commissions to look for cost-saving, particularly in local government elections, whilst not impacting the minimum service standards. Education is a part of that—letting electors know where their voting centres are.

Mr CHAIR: This kind of ties in. How does the commission—who decides on the time allocation, especially in remote areas? How is that process decided?

Ms KELLY: For Territory elections, in February last year the draft remote voting schedule was sent to all stakeholders, which included parties, members and key stakeholder groups for feedback. That feedback resulted in about 25 changes to the remote voting schedule before the election. The Electoral Commission policy, which is consistent with the Australian Electoral Commission, is that we provide a voting service where there are 10 or more people on the roll. If there are 10 people on the roll, the voting service may take half an hour to 45 minutes. It is important that we communicate with the community through community pages and stakeholders on the ground when we are coming for those.

That is how we determine how it has been done. For Territory elections there is a consultation process. After voting commenced last year there were 11 changes to the voting schedule. That was based on feedback from community. It might have been that there was a reduction in voting because of sorry business happening in community, or a plan may have been delayed. We publish those changes on the website and let people know on the ground that those changes are coming.

We are always looking at data to see where the elector base is around the voting centres and then make sure there are hours and enough staff to support that.

Mr CHAIR: Is there a set time allocation per person to a remote area?

Ms KELLY: No, apart from if you have a community that started using the phrase, particularly for Galiwinku or Gapuwiyak, which are more substantial remote communities that were having service offerings for a couple of days, acknowledging the population there as well as the elector base.

It may be, as I mentioned, that you might have half-an-hour or 45 minutes when there are 10 people on a roll at an outstation, then it might go up to a couple of hours where it is 50 or more. Another thing we have to take into consideration is the long distances that our remote staff are travelling, ensuring that they can get to these stops for a period before they can safely move to the next location as well.

Mr CHAIR: My line of questioning is trying to get to ensuring there is an egalitarian layout for the Northern Territory so that people in certain communities do not get a much longer opportunity to vote than others. If we look at some areas in the NT general election, like Daly booth times, Wadeye was open. It was a lot longer for the number of population than other areas, even of similar population. Is there a reason behind that?

Ms KELLY: There is no reason for that. It would have been comparable based on the population size. Wadeye had one day reduced due to a death in the community. The population in those communities is in excess of thousands, which warrants a longer extended voting period. Certainly, the Electoral Commission will continue to look at the service offerings based on the population base. Also, outside communities come into those larger communities to be able to vote.

I do not have anything further to add to that. I am happy to take the question on notice if you would like me to provide some more details about the voting hours for those larger remote communities.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, I will.

Question on Notice No 1.1

Mr CHAIR: Why were voting hours in Wadeye longer than those in other communities of similar size?

Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.1.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up question.

Mr CHAIR: I have a couple more. I also note, unfortunately, we had a decrease in the general election of voter turnout, yet we had longer hours in some of our remote seats. Was there a standard time each electorate was increased in hours in the general election?

Ms KELLY: Overall, particularly for remote divisions, there was an increase in hours across the election services. I am looking for that data now.

For remote divisions, there were 507.5 hours of voting services compared to 423.5 hours in the previous election.

Mr CHAIR: We have done the increased hours. Unfortunately, we saw it decrease. Why do you think that is?

Ms KELLY: It is a question that the Electoral Commission and I get asked. My response is that there are a lot of stakeholders involved in delivering a successful election, and that includes the Electoral Commission in providing an accessible service, raising awareness about the nomination process and making sure that voters are aware that they are enrolled.

It is also up to the candidates to promote their candidacy. I note that all the remote divisions, with the exception of Namatjira, had two candidates contesting the election. Namatjira had three. There is a responsibility for candidates to promote their candidacy. It is the responsibility of electors to attend and exercise their democratic right. It is also the responsibility of media to raise awareness in coverage and give candidates the opportunity to raise their profile and talk about the election with them.

If all those things are going well and all those stakeholders are participating, then we would like to see a successful election.

Regarding the decline in participation, whilst the Northern Territory Electoral Commission has not done any study, we hear through peak bodies in the media that they talk about voter apathy and what the government does. That is not commentary for the Electoral Commission; we are more concerned about the service delivery. We would like to see voter participation improve. I noticed in recent media that civics awareness in schools is in the low 30%, so there is a really important focus for all stakeholders, education and the NT Electoral Commission, to start with young people to talk about civics and the importance of democratic institutions. Hopefully, that will, to some extent, improve participation in the future. As to reasons why the decline exists, they are probably many and varied.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you for the overall increase in hours. Do we know how much that cost?

Ms KELLY: We saw a 35% increase. I can take it on notice to give you a category of costs by remote voting versus urban voting.

Mr CHAIR: Would you be willing to also take it on by electorate?

Ms KELLY: I will look to see whether we have that detail of data, but I am happy to take that on notice and look to see whether that can be provided.

Mr CHAIR: The idea would be, so if we saw in Daly—in the 2020 election we saw 55.25 hours given, then in 2024 we saw 79.25. Could we see how much those additional hours cost?

Question on Notice No 1.2

Mr CHAIR: Can we have a breakdown of how much the additional hours cost by electorate for remote voting?

Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.2.

Mrs ZIO: We talked a little about the increasing costs to run a general election, and then talked about how on voting day, only 16 to 17% of people turned out on that Saturday, the day of the election, to vote. I have had a lot of people—my constituents and residents of general areas—come to me and say that there were too many options for them to be able to go in the Darwin city area. There was Darwin city, Parap, Ludmilla and Stuart Park all within a couple of kilometres of each other.

We know that there is reduced availability of volunteers to cover those locations in such a small area and the increased cost for resources and staff that is coming up. Is the commission looking at that and justifying the ability, given that only 16 to 17% of people turn out on that voting day? Is that something that you are considering regarding everybody's ability, and all the services that are involved, to cater to the increase in services and cost when we are trying to reduce cost at this point? Does that make sense?

Ms KELLY: It does. As I mentioned earlier, it is a practice of the NT Electoral Commission to evaluate an election afterwards, and we look to see where electors participate in the voting services offered. Correctly, 16.6% of electors participated on election day. We acknowledge that all electoral participants must find volunteers and support to man those voting centres as well, but it is about the accessibility to the voter, looking at the divisions, where they are and ensuring candidates have access to be able to campaign in that as well.

Given the cost pressures, we will definitely be looking at the locations, particularly in your division. We trialed an extended Saturday in Parap. There were not as many electors participating in that second service offering as we would have thought, based on the Parap markets being a popular place. We certainly need to look at options for voter convenience and balance them with the cost and impact across electoral participants.

J DAVIS: Thank you, commissioner, for all your work and the commission's work. I have a couple of follow-up questions, some of which you already covered. I am happy to take some of them on notice because they are on detail of expenditure.

Thank you for the information about the remote engagement program. I am interested in whether there has been any evaluation of that in terms of the impact of voter turnout in remote communities. If so, how did that evaluation take place, who was involved in it and how was it conducted?

Ms KELLY: There has been an initial evaluation of that program with the team that delivered it, bringing them back to the office post-election to look at what went well, successes and how it would be restructured if it were done again. Regarding an external evaluation, particularly people in communities who were engaged, that has not occurred to date. Regarding the impact of the program on the participation in the election, that is unknown and something we can look at evaluating through the contacts we made, but I do not think we will get the granular level of, 'Did you participate in this program and did that then result in you participating in the election?' Given it was the first significant program that has been delivered for some time post-COVID, there is an opportunity to evaluate the success of the program.

Regarding enrolment checks with people in communities, we are successful in achieving that. Another function of that group was to talk to communities about the best place to provide voting services in communities. That was important on the ground. Whilst a lot of it is not quantitative, it might be more of an awareness of the remote engagement program and the contacts with those stakeholders to understand whether they believe it was impactful and to seek suggestions. That is something we can look at doing.

J DAVIS: Leading on from that, was culturally appropriate training provided to all staff operating in remote and Indigenous communities?

Ms KELLY: The Northern Territory Government training resources were shared with our teams, which were required to attend remote communities.

J DAVIS: When you say they were shared, can you expand on what that means?

Ms KELLY: They were required to do that training is my understanding, particularly for getting remote ready as well as four-wheel drive and first aid training and culturally appropriate training. That is what is offered through the Northern Territory Government. No special training was created for the NT Electoral Commission.

J DAVIS: I have some questions about expenditure, which I am happy to take on notice. I am interested in the total expenditure on the following components in the 2024 election and the comparison to the 2020 election: translation and interpreter services; culturally appropriate training, which you already covered; and culturally appropriate voting materials, which I think you referred to already.

I also have a non-money question, which someone has asked me to ask. Given the number of people in communities with health issues, disability and general access issues, with a lack of access to cars, has the NTEC looked at working with other agencies, for example, the department of Education, to utilise school buses or otherwise to help people get to the polls? That is two questions.

Mr CHAIR: We will pause for morning tea, and we will resume with the Member for Johnston having the floor on these questions. Morning tea has just arrived.

J DAVIS: Can we do the question on notice and get it finished?

Mr CHAIR: Yes.

Ms KELLY: Regarding the remote resource expenditure that is included in the global public awareness budget, we can take that on notice to get some details about how much it costs to do the translations and create the remote resources. I am happy to take that as a question on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.3

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

J DAVIS: Could you outline the total expenditure of the 2024 NT general election and the 2020 NT election in culturally appropriate voting materials?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Ms KELLY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.3.

Question on Notice No 1.4

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

J DAVIS: What was the expenditure in the 2024 and 2020 elections on translation and interpreter services?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Ms KELLY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.4.

We will now break for morning tea.

The committee suspended.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill as they relate to the Northern Territory Electoral Commission. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – ELECTORAL SERVICES
Output 3.1 – Electoral Services

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 3.0, Electoral Services, Output Group 3.1, Electoral Services.

I note that while the Chief Minister is responsible for NT Electoral Commission responsibilities under the *Electoral Act 2004*, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development is responsible for NT Electoral Commission responsibilities under Chapter 8 of the *Local Government Act*. However, the committee has agreed that any questions for the commissioner regarding local government will be asked during their appearance with the Chief Minister, and the Electoral Commissioner will not be reappearing before the committee with the minister for Local Government.

Are there any questions?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: We have had the 2024 election. I have been involved in previous council elections and the 2020 election. One of the issues I have—a number of other members and candidates have also expressed this—is on election day, rules seem to keep changing on the day about the protocols. There was a thought that maybe these protocols should have been sorted out well in advance. I will give you a simple example. We can hand out how-to-vote cards, but you can have a table in your tent, but you are not allowed to display your how-to-vote cards. That seemed to be a rule that came in quickly. You can hand out how-to-

vote cards, but you cannot have them on the table; you must get them from a box underneath. That seemed to be a rule that came in quickly. It is also about where signs can and cannot be put up, which changed at Eaton. After a day or two, people were then advised, 'No, you cannot have your signs there; you have to move them again.' Can these rules be sorted out well in advance so that everyone knows, or is there a reason for it?

Ms KELLY: Regarding the location of signage, where they can be put is governed by the landowner; if it is a council property it would depend on their government policy. Road reserves would be government policy. In regard to Eaton, it was Commonwealth land, and the landholder made the decision that there should be no signage on their road reserves, which is why they were removed. There are exclusion zones where materials cannot be displayed near voting centres, with regard to the example of Eaton. There is no reason why candidates cannot hand out how-to-vote cards outside the prohibition or exclusion zones of voting centres.

A few elections ago we provided how-to-vote campaign display holders. That was to support voters to make informed decisions, as they moved into areas where candidates could not be, and to acknowledge that candidates may not have volunteers at all voting centres to allow them access to information. From the feedback and some complaints we got, we will be reviewing that following the 2024 elections.

Regarding the ability to hand out how-to-vote cards outside an exclusion zone and what was permitted in the how-to-vote displays, the rules were that what was included in the how-to-vote display holders related to the divisions where the votes were being issued. The divisions were related to that area, and it meant that we could not go outside that zone—the reason for that was that we did not have the space to hold all candidates for all divisions. Decisions were made and communicated in the service plan as to what could be put in those places during the election period in those displays. We will be reviewing it because it presented—and I acknowledge your feedback today.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Does the Electoral Commission tender for early voting centres, and how is the decision made as to what commercial tenancies are used?

Ms KELLY: We look for locations that are accessible to electors. On election day, there are a lot of schools, and we enter into hiring agreements with them. Because we operate in a shared service environment, we also work with NT Property Management, which kindly assists us in securing commercial premises. At Eaton, the facility is managed or leased by the Australian Electoral Commission, and we entered into an agreement with them to lease that premises. There are different arrangements depending on what is available. It is about location and availability, particularly for commercial tenancies, when we need the service or space for a limited period. It is not always the most suitable for someone to hire it to us. There is a variety of locations.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: When you select a commercial tenancy—this question is from some other members—why does the Electoral Commission continue to lease commercial spaces for elections which put restrictions on voter engagement; an example given was the Coolalinga shopping centre?

Ms KELLY: With regard to using shopping centres as voting centres, the Electoral Commission will be looking at that post-election. The management of the voting centres put in place certain requirements not to interfere with other users of the voting centres. The Electoral Commission complied with those requirements regarding their campaigning restrictions. During last year's election there was feedback through voting centres that they were happy to allow some form of campaigning at Casuarina, so some dedicated campaigning areas were created in some of those shopping centres. The position was clear at the beginning and then there was some laxing of that by some of the shopping centres, and the Electoral Commission was looking to balance voter access versus candidate participation and being able to access as well. It is certainly something we will be reviewing following last year's election and the use of voting centres at shopping centres.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: A further specific question is that it was claimed that you were not allowed to have how-to-vote cards for Nelson in Palmerston, despite that electorate encompassing Marlow Lagoon. Why would that be if it covers part of the electorate?

Ms KELLY: I am not familiar with that complaint. I am happy to look into that.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I will put that on notice, please.

Question on Notice No 1.5

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

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Why were candidates unable to hand out how-to-vote cards for Nelson in Palmerston, despite that electorate encompassing Marlow Lagoon?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Ms KELLY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.5.

Ms UIBO: Excuse me, Mr Chair. I think we are going into wider, almost briefing kind of questions in generics rather than back to the Appropriation Bill, which is the Estimates Committee process and focus. Can we work on the Appropriation Bill as opposed to wider questions that could perhaps go to a request for a briefing from the Electoral Commissioner for any member who wishes to ask more details regarding specifics not related to the Appropriation Bill?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Karama, do you have any more questions?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I will take that on board, but I have a couple more specific questions going back to earlier comments.

Can you confirm if it is just for council elections that you do overseas voting but not interstate voting? Is that correct?

Ms KELLY: There are no interstate voting centres for local government council elections, and that has always been the case. For example, for last year’s Territory election electoral commissions in other jurisdictions provided interstate voting services at their offices.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I am thinking you would have more people interstate who probably want to vote, as opposed to being overseas. That was my rationale.

Ms KELLY: Interstate Territorians are still able to access postal voting services if they have a fixed address whilst they are interstate.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I go back to postal voting. We send out the postal votes overseas by standard mail; is that correct?

Ms KELLY: We put that as priority mail.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: What about the return vote?

Ms KELLY: It depends on the country that they are in. We include a priority return, but it is usually under the postal rules of the country that it is at as to how it comes back.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Can you tell me what is your link in relation to the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission), in terms of how you operate together?

Ms KELLY: The Australian Electoral Commission operate under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*. We obviously have our elections, but we have a strong collegial arrangement through electoral commission meetings. Even at the deputy level we have community practices with operations areas, so it is quite a strong relationship that we have across all electoral commissions.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Is the electoral roll the same electoral roll?

Ms KELLY: That is correct. The Australian Electoral Commission manage the electoral roll on behalf of the Northern Territory, so through a funding arrangement they support the roll management.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: In terms of opportunities to increase voter participation, is there any thought being given or are you investigating any possible options to bring on electronic voting options, like return by email voting or something like that, particularly for those who are interstate or overseas?

Ms KELLY: There is certainly no intention at the moment to look at progressing towards electronic voting. I think something like that would have to be led by the Australian Electoral Commission. The New South Wales Electoral Commission has publicly released a report about its iVote process and the challenges it had in having online voting available where there was an uploading demand and the system was not able to cope with that.

At the moment, there is nothing we are looking at, but options to look at things we do not have in the Territory. An option for overseas and interstate electors could be telephone-assisted voting. That is a significant project which would need to be funded appropriately to be able to resource and set that up, but with the service timeframes for Australia Post, it is increasingly difficult to get postal votes out to people, even though there is a 13-day period for them to be returned. That is something we would look at doing, acknowledging that any change in service delivery would need to be project managed, costed and funded to be successful.

Mrs ZIO: I want to turn our thinking to by-elections. Given we have talked about the declining voter turnout, do you have an overview of the costs involved in recent by-elections?

Ms KELLY: I do not have any actual costs on me, but I am happy to take them on notice. I can say that by-elections usually have a reduced cost because it is a smaller event. We can absorb some of the resourcing within the commission, and it is not a Territory-wide event, so the communication strategies are not as extensive because you are providing services to a more refined area. For local government elections, we often do a one-week early voting because it is confined and restricted. We find that by-elections are good opportunities to trial new initiatives, and the costs are generally less.

We have not done a by-election in the reporting period, but I am happy to retrieve some if you are looking at Legislative Assembly and local government by-elections. Is there any specific duration you would like?

Question on Notice No 1.6

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

Mrs ZIO: Could you provide an overview of costs of local government and Legislative Assembly by-elections since the 2020 election?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Ms KELLY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.6.

Mr CHAIR: In the last Northern Territory general election, how many complaints did the commission receive?

Ms KELLY: There were 186 formal complaints, 119 of which were from electoral participants; 61 from the public; and six from NT Electoral Commission staff.

Mr CHAIR: Once a complaint comes in, what does the commission do and what are the outcomes?

Ms KELLY: Complaints can come through the service centre. Our service centre received just under two-and-a-half calls through that. Then, if it is an inquiry, it is managed through scripts that are given back. If it is a complaint, it is escalated through to the compliance manager to be looked at and responded to accordingly. There is a published complaints process that was communicated through the election and is available on the NT Electoral Commission’s website so people could see how that complaint would be managed through that process.

Mr CHAIR: Does it identify, say, if political party A does something they should not at a booth, and it is reported—will the public see the outcome of that complaint?

Ms KELLY: In regard to our election report and the election summary that has been shared with members and on the website today, it does provide complaints by category, so it will not have—rightly so, some people want to make complaints and remain anonymous, but I can say that 47% of the complaints were in the advertising and campaign material category, and 26% of the complaints related to the conduct of candidates and campaign workers.

Mr CHAIR: The conduct is the one I want to hone in on. If anyone participating in an election breaches the conduct rules, what mechanisms, if any, does the commission have to take action against them?

Ms KELLY: Very little at the moment. There is no ability to issue any infringement notice, so it is about asking them to refrain from the behaviour that is not appropriate. That would be the way we would address that at the moment. It is again an area we are looking at strengthening.

Mr CHAIR: Currently, there is nothing?

Ms KELLY: No. There are provisions in the legislation to allow for police assistance if necessary. That being said, I do not believe that in the last election there was anything that was not able to be resolved through a conversation with electoral staff or through compliance officers.

Mr CHAIR: We have heard commentary, even recently in the federal election, from an NT senator, that in remote areas of the Northern Territory there is a lot of behaviour that may be questionable and not meet the public's expectations. What does the NTEC currently doing to ensure we have fair, transparent elections, particularly in the remote areas of the NT?

Ms KELLY: Can I clarify in regard to the behaviour of campaign workers, or just generally?

Mr CHAIR: The behaviour of campaign workers would be part A and part B would also be information, particularly from participants of the election—being political parties.

Ms KELLY: In regard to complaints they have made?

Mr CHAIR: No, it would be the behaviour of the individuals and information being given out by those involved in an election. What does the NTEC do to ensure that is managed as best as it can be?

Ms KELLY: All of the electoral participants, whether they be candidates or registered parties, are provided with information and offered briefings by the Electoral Commission which clearly sets out their rights and responsibilities in participating in the election. That includes campaign authorisation and appropriate behaviour and exclusion zones whilst in remote communities.

Our staff are also trained in remote communities with regard to ensuring that exclusion zones are set and that people are working appropriately. That includes briefing campaign workers and things like that. We set up a remote hub during an election. That hub receives information during the election about whether there is anything that needs to be resolved in remote communities.

We have experienced staff—usually long-term Territorians—who provide leadership in remote voting teams. They are well aware and versed in briefing campaign workers. It was not something I was aware of being a big issue in the 2024 election. I appreciate in the recent federal election there was commentary.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 4.1 – Corporate and Governance

Mr CHAIR: We will now consider Output Group 4.0, Corporate and Shared Services, Output 4.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.1

Output 4.2 – Shared Services Received

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 4.2, Shared Services Received. Are there any questions?

That concludes consideration of Output 4.2 and Output Group 4.0.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Electoral Commissioner for attending today.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I too thank the Electoral Commissioner and all of her hardworking staff. It has been a busy period for them. That will be continuing with the local government elections soon to come. Thank you for all of your preparation for today and the work you do across the Territory.

Mr CHAIR: We will have a few minutes break if anyone needs it.

The committee suspended.

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER AGAINST CORRUPTION

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, with me at the table is the Acting Independent Commissioner Against Corruption, Mr Greg Shanahan PSM, and Director of Corporate Services, Kathryn Clet.

Mr SHANAHAN: I was appointed acting commissioner on 19 December 2024, and I continue to hold this statutory appointment until a new commissioner is appointed.

Since the start of the financial year to 31 March 2025 the Office of the ICAC received 223 reports of improper conduct, containing 257 allegations and this compares to 268 reports received for the whole of the last financial year; we are tracking a little above where we were previously. Thirty matters have been referred to other public bodies during the year and for the full year last year that compares to 34. Our numbers are holding out. We had 12 investigations carried over from the beginning of last year and a further two have commenced during this year, 11 investigations, many of them were historic matters, have been completed as of today and that means we cannot enter any investigations on hand. I can also report there are a couple of others which are almost at the investigation stage.

I commend the entire office for their continued commitment and professionalism during the period of transition and acknowledge the outstanding leadership of Ms Naomi Loudon who was acting commissioner and deputy commissioner during this period. The office has made strong progress in addressing legacy matters in addition to continuing to deliver our prevention and engagement function. The Office of the ICAC has a strong focus on delivering education and training sessions. From 1 July to 31 May we have delivered 92 sessions to approximately 5,120 Territorians. Of these sessions 50 were face to face sessions and 42 were delivered online with a live presenter.

Of the 5,120 participants approximately 64% have done their training in the last three months, which was understandable following the directive given by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the Commissioner for Public Employment in March. It mandated that all ECOs and senior officers undertake mandatory ICAC training before the end of April, and a reminder that other people need it as a compulsory element of their introduction to the public service and have it renewed every three years. Three years is almost up for most of them so by about the end of this year we should have hopefully covered most of our public servants.

The budget, as presented in this year's budget papers—the office has an output appropriation of \$5.592m for 2024–25 with a slight increase of \$5.667m in the next financial year. This figure includes an amount of \$550,000 ongoing which we received in 2023–24, and that has flowed through to the current reporting period.

The 2026 expenditure budget for the office of \$6.671m will be a decrease compared to the 2025 revised budget of \$7.079m. This is primarily due to a one-off expenditure we incurred in hosting the Australian Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference (APSACC) in July 2024. This was a successful conference held at the Darwin Convention Centre with over 500 delegates from across 15 countries. It provided an opportunity for public officers to participate in a conference highlighting integrity as well as promoting the NT to national and international participants.

APSACC did not require any direct government funding as the conference was funded from own-source revenue through the collection of ticket sales. The conference resulted in a surplus of about \$230,000 across the two financial years.

Our office expenditure budget is largely made up of employee expenses of \$4.731m. This budget can accommodate a total of 26 FTEs. As at 31 May, the office had an FTE of 16.5 but we currently have five active recruiting processes in place to fill existing vacancies.

The plan, from my perspective, was to delay any further recruitment activity until the new commissioner has been appointed and they will be able to structure the office according to where their priorities lie. That is the plan.

In terms of reports and investigations during the year, we have made one public statement, released three investigation reports and two general reports in November 2024 and January 2025. It is important that the public is aware of our activities to the extent possible.

I acknowledge the challenges the office has faced over the last 12 months. I give credit to the staff for their resilience, dedication and commitment to their duties and responsibilities. Staff wellbeing and maintaining a positive workplace culture was the focus of my leadership team. We continue to provide all our staff to employee assistance programs and professional development opportunities.

Despite these challenges, we are proud to continue to operate effectively and as efficiently as our resources allow.

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

Ms UIBO: Has the ICAC submitted any requests for additional funding in this budget? And what was the government response?

Mr SHANAHAN: No. We have not.

Ms UIBO: Is the current staffing level of 22 full time equivalents sufficient to deliver all the investigative and educative prevention functions of the office?

Mr SHANAHAN: Leader of the Opposition, on current levels of activity, it is sufficient but it is also one of those matters where you have a small office and if you get a couple of really big matters, there will be a need for some arrangement with the government of the day to seek TA or something like that.

My guess as to what has happened is that since 2023 and the amendments there mandated that the office refer matters of which do not amount to the most serious levels of corrupt or improper conduct or anti-democratic conduct. Those that fall within misconduct and unsatisfactory conduct have to be referred unless it involves an MLA or a head of an agency, or it is systemic or a highly sensitive matter.

The upshot of that is we are almost heading towards a steady state following those amendments. If you look at other jurisdictions, the number of investigations are about 1% or 2% of the number of reports received. Going on those numbers, we are probably only looking at about 6 to 8 investigations a year. That is probably steady state, which on current levels is probably enough to focus then on prevention rather than cure. That is probably the way we need to go. That is not abrogating our responsibilities to investigate serious matters. There are lessons to be learnt from most of the reports that we deliver. You will find that raising awareness will have a much greater impact on the operations of the public service as we go forward.

Ms UIBO: How many investigations were finalised in the reporting period?

Mr SHANAHAN: It was 11.

Ms UIBO: How many of those were findings of improper conduct?

Mr SHANAHAN: Two that I am aware of. I am not sure of any before I got there. We did have findings of improper conduct. Some of them had no findings where it went from no findings to making recommendations to improve things. They were all done prior to my arrival there. I can take the question on notice.

Ms UIBO: Can you remind the committee the date you commenced?

Mr SHANAHAN: December.

Ms UIBO: I want the reporting period, if you could take that on notice please?

Question on Notice No 1.7

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

Ms UIBO: How many results in the reporting period resulted in findings of improper conduct?

Mr CHAIR: Mr Shanahan, do you accept the question?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.7.

Ms UIBO: How many recommendations were made by the ICAC last year, and how many of those have been fully implemented by the agencies affected?

Mr SHANAHAN: We do not have that information with us. We will take the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.8

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

Ms UIBO: How many recommendations were made by the ICAC last year, and how many of those have been fully implemented by the agencies affected?

Mr CHAIR: Mr Shanahan, do you accept the question?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.8.

Ms UIBO: Are there any agencies persistently failing to implement ICAC's recommendations?

Mr SHANAHAN: None that I am aware of.

Ms UIBO: Are there any reoccurring themes or systemic issues that are emerging from recent investigations?

Mr SHANAHAN: Recruitment is an ongoing issue, and the processes behind it is something we probably need to engage with OCPE to look at ways we can jointly review recruitment across the public service. It tends to come up quite often, not always to the level of serious misconduct that we are required to investigate under our legislation. I think there is enough there to suggest that we will be doing more in that space in the near future.

Ms UIBO: As a result of Operation Beaufort, has NT Police implemented any systemic reforms in response to both its cultural and operational concerns?

Mr SHANAHAN: They have reported to us on their response to the report and their recommendations. The advice we received was that they had been making significant progress now that we have given them a deadline to report on full implementation. They certainly have accepted the recommendations and are taking steps towards implementing them.

J DAVIS: What is the deadline?

Mr SHANAHAN: I do not have the correspondence. I can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.9

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

J DAVIS: Please provide the deadline for the response to the recommendations from Operation Beaufort.

Mr CHAIR: Mr Shanahan, do you accept the question?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.9.

Ms UIBO: Following Operation Tasman, what systemic controls have been introduced to prevent similar misuse of leave?

Mr SHANAHAN: I do not have the information in front of me, but we have given deadlines to report back. We have received some reports back, but off the top of my head I cannot tell you which ones have been completed and which ones are still in progress. I will take that on notice if you like.

Ms UIBO: We will put a written question to you, so that is all right.

What was the response of the responsible agency to ICAC's findings in Operation Apollo regarding recruitment and conflict of interest?

Mr SHANAHAN: The recommendations were accepted. I do not have the details of timeframes.

Ms UIBO: Has the Commissioner for Public Employment updated any recruitment guidance or instructions following the Operation Apollo report, noting that ICAC described it as a learning opportunity?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes, mandatory training was one of them—a reminder of that. Other than that I do not have any specific details. I can take that on notice.

Ms UIBO: I will keep rolling through. Regarding Operation Apollo, when the ICAC briefed the Chief Minister on their findings, what details did you provide to the Chief Minister?

Mr SHANAHAN: The report that was tabled was provided to the Chief Minister. There was also a redacted report which was provided for publication, and it was tabled in the Assembly, as I understand. The recommendations in terms of not naming people were done by the delegate having regard to the limitations in our Act. In compliance with that the delegated provided those decisions, and the delegate was Patricia Kelly who is an ex-South Australian Supreme Court judge and a judge of the Court of Appeal. It was her call because she was delegated the matter, and we followed that process.

Ms UIBO: What date was the report provided to the Chief Minister?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I believe it was 27 February.

Ms UIBO: Did you provide details regarding the department, the role and the panel involved, or was that also a decision that was made by the delegate, Ms Kelly?

Mr SHANAHAN: It was in the actual report but not in the public report.

Ms UIBO: I will rephrase. Did the report that was provided to the Chief Minister include that detail?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was your question, Opposition Leader?

Ms UIBO: Did the report by the ICAC delivered to you include the details of the department, the role and the panel involved in the operation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Not the panel members, as I have said many times.

Ms UIBO: Were all panel members investigated, and were any details provided to the government, particularly the Chief Minister about the conduct?

Mr SHANAHAN: I did not do the investigation, but I presume it was done because there were no findings against any of the panel members.

Ms UIBO: Would the delegate, Ms Kelly, have that detail?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Ms UIBO: What information available to the Chief Minister would have been made to confirm who the senior public servant was who was investigated through this operation and other recruitment panel members? When would that have been made available to the Chief Minister?

Mr SHANAHAN: Whenever she got the stuff ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The details of the person was in the original report that was given to me on 27th. What you are trying to get at is when I found out who was on the panel, which has been the subject of much public commentary. That was obviously after the President of the Police Association talked about it on radio.

If you go back to the report, it does not say who the panel members were.

Ms UIBO: Confirming that you found out publicly on radio?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I found out, full stop, when it was made public.

Ms UIBO: Made publicly on radio by the Acting Commissioner?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Correct. No, no, sorry. By the NTPA President.

Ms UIBO: By radio?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I believe it was on Monday morning.

Ms UIBO: You did not seek to find out before that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I did not. Nor was I told prior to that as well, to make that point clear.

Ms UIBO: Commissioner, as part of your investigation, did you consider reviewing senior appointments to the NT Fire and Rescue Service? Was that the time they were still a joint department?

Mr SHANAHAN: I do not believe that was investigated by Ms Kelly, no.

Ms UIBO: Commissioner, has the ICAC faced any barriers in accessing documents or information from public agencies or through the Cabinet process?

Mr SHANAHAN: I have not, since I have been there. I understood there was some controversy with the former commissioner, but I am not aware of the details.

Ms UIBO: Has ICAC ever been refused access to documents that it believes are essential to its investigations?

Mr SHANAHAN: Again, not since I have been there, but I am not sure. I have read some stuff in the news about the former commissioner made some statements previously.

Ms UIBO: Commissioner, what is the government's response to the Inspector's September 2024 report which raised concerns about structural and legal constraints on the ICAC's effectiveness? Should I ask it of the Chief Minister?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you mind restating ...

Ms UIBO: Yes, please. What is your government's response to the Inspector's September 2024 report which raised concerns about structural and legal constraints on the ICAC's effectiveness?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is fair to say that the ICAC has been an important part of integrity in the Territory since its formation. It certainly, over a number of years since its inception, had its challenges. We have seen more challenges play out, obviously, over the last 12 or so months.

We have been open about that with the community and about what is next. That conversation is now at the next stage of what needs to happen—what is working well and what is not and how we can make sure we have a strong, highly functioning ICAC into the future that Territorians can get behind and have confidence in.

Ms UIBO: Will your government act to align the ICAC legislation with the nationally endorsed fundamental principles?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In what we have committed to doing, that may well end up being the case. A process will take place now where we look at what is next, basically.

What is important is that continuity is in place and that the ICAC is fully functioning. We have the Acting ICAC in place so people can have the confidence that all of that work continues on while we work through what those next steps might look like.

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, this may go to the Chief Minister or the Acting Commissioner. Is stronger whistleblower protection under consideration as part of the ICAC Act reform?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a high level at this stage, so I imagine that would all form part of it. We are working through what this next process will look like.

Ms UIBO: How many investigation reports or summaries have been provided to you, Chief Minister, in the reporting period?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Give me a minute for that. Just Operation Apollo.

Ms UIBO: When briefings or investigations are provided to you in regard to the example we just spoke about, Operation Apollo, with panel members, conflicts of interest and background details, is that included as standard practice or was that an anomaly to have it redacted by the delegate?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is the only one I have received. I do not know what used to happen in the previous government, but it is the office of the ICAC that delegates the work, so it is a matter for them.

Ms UIBO: Acting Commissioner, do you have anything to add in regard to that? Would it be normal practice to provide a redacted report to the Chief Minister, who is responsible for the legislation?

Mr SHANAHAN: I do not know what was in Ms Kelly's mind, but there are limits on identifying people. I understand that when you compel evidence there is a limit on what you can include in reports. There is some element on striking a balance between being fair to the people you are making findings against and making comment without providing evidence to back it up. I understand that is a challenge for the person writing the report, and it is something they need to take into account. I do not know what Ms Kelly decided in that matter.

Ms UIBO: Is there future work happening on restoring confidence in the ICAC for the public when we have seen the operations, findings and inconsistency in the information provided to, for example, the Chief Minister or publicly? Will there be work on the restoration of public confidence?

Mr SHANAHAN: The person who does the reporting will look at the legislation and what the limits are, what fairness is involved and what is in the public interest in terms of what they report upon. If that is not satisfactory, the answer is to change the legislation.

J DAVIS: In regard to that, Chief Minister, you said that acknowledging the concerns around ICAC, a process would be taking place. Can you give us any detail about what that process might be, what the timeframe is and what we can expect in relation to it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I do not have any of that.

J DAVIS: No timeframe for that process.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, will you be looking to refer any future integrity concerns to the ICAC where there are clear conflicts of interest in recruitment and when they occur?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is mandatory reporting to the ICAC across a range of measures. If something came to my attention, that would be standard procedure.

J DAVIS: Following on from my earlier question, these are questions from the Member for Mulka in relation to Operation Beaufort. I understand you say there is a review process. Is it considered an issue that police were told that no adverse findings will be made at the beginning of the investigation, and that police were offered anonymity, which meant that no evidence could be presented to those being investigated?

Mr SHANAHAN: I was not the person involved in that. It was a decision made by the then commissioner. I do not know what the basis of that decision was. He obviously thought it was in the public interest that he proceeded that way, and that is the decision he made, so I cannot really comment on it. I did not see all the evidence, so I do not know the propriety of—I do not know what was involved in that, so it is probably not appropriate for me to comment on it.

J DAVIS: Are you able to comment on whether if a similar thing was referred to ICAC you would approach it in the same way?

Mr CHAIR: I will jump in. Standing Order 109; hypothetical matters. If you could rephrase your question, so that it is not getting into hypotheticals.

J DAVIS: That is okay. I will leave that.

Also from the Member for Mulka—I am not sure if this is for the Chief Minister—when will a new ICAC commissioner be appointed? And given the number of conflicts of interests within the NT, will this appointment be sought from outside the Northern Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That process will not happen until we work through what the next steps are and what changes we need to make to strengthen the system. That process is yet to take place.

What was the second part of your question?

J DAVIS: Will the appointment be sought from outside?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not aware of every nut and bolt of how they advertise but that would be a national recruitment process.

J DAVIS: In relation to recruitment, acting commissioner, you said that at the moment there are five acting recruiting processes and that you are also holding off recruiting until the new commissioner was appointed. I was not totally clear.

Mr SHANAHAN: We have five to restore it to what it was when I got there. Some of our money was tied up with two commissioners being on the payroll. That money is now freed up. My assessment is that we are operating with enough resources once we recruit those other five. But the additional money that has been freed up is better placed with a permanent commissioner going forward putting his or her stamp on what the priority should be.

J DAVIS: In relation to that, are you able to comment on the impact on the operations of ICAC of having two commissioners being paid for an extensive period of time?

Mr SHANAHAN: As I said in my opening statement, I give credit to the staff there. Their commitment to try and make a difference in doing something good is second to none. Having gone in there, they are certainly in a better place than I expected, in terms of what was going on. They are very resilient. There was a lot of stuff happening, including the review and all that sort of stuff. I give full credit to them that the place has continued to function. I do not see at the moment any need to increase the resources. That is available on a short-term basis if we need it. In the longer-term view on how that office might operate going forward then that is best left to the permanent commissioner.

J DAVIS: I pass on my gratitude as well to the staff of ICAC. Can you talk us through the current processes for handling conflicts of interest within the ICAC?

Mr SHANAHAN: If any of us identify a conflict of interest, we are required to identify to the others. We have a fortnightly operations meeting which deals with all the matters we are investigating. When we are dealing with a particular matter that someone has declared a conflict of interest on, they leave the room and the matter is then dealt with those remaining.

Are you directing that to me, being a long-term Territorian? I am not sure.

J DAVIS: I am sure you are very familiar with it.

Mr SHANAHAN: Conflicts arise all the time. There is no sin to have a conflict. It is not an offence to have a conflict. It is a small place. It is how you manage that conflict that is important and what we are very aware of.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I had a follow-up question I was trying to get to you on the Member for Johnston's earlier question. Can I do that quickly?

Mr CHAIR: Yes.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Acting Commissioner, you said that you have 16.5 staff at the moment and five under recruiting. Is it your plan to hold off from recruiting those five until the permanent commissioner is in place? Is that correct or not?

Mr SHANAHAN: The five will bring us back to 21, which is where we were when I go there. We have had people on and off because there are also some temporary vacancies from when people have left the office and found other employment.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Will the five come in to make it 21?

Mr SHANAHAN: Exactly, yes.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Will you then hold off the rest until the future commissioner?

Mr SHANAHAN: Correct.

J DAVIS: I have one other question in relation to the two commissioners. How long were two commissioners being paid for?

Mr SHANAHAN: Ten-and-a-half months. The issue was that Ms Loudon was Acting Commissioner. She was paid at that, but she was not backfilled. It is very difficult to recruit people with an open-ended back end. The fact that the place kept going and functioning is a huge credit to them.

J DAVIS: Finalising the conflict-of-interest question, yes, I know it is a small place. We all work out ways to manage it. Is there anything you can share in how, in a tangible way, a conflict of interest is identified and managed within ICAC?

Mr SHANAHAN: We do an annual conflict of interest declaration, but people are also required to declare any conflict on matters that come through the door.

J DAVIS: Is that public?

Mr SHANAHAN: Not that I am aware of, no.

J DAVIS: Do you know why not?

Mr SHANAHAN: There is a bit of privacy involved in that because the declaration is broad. It is just that individual matters are probably the most important, because you need to be reminded that these matters represent conflict. We rely heavily on people understanding the importance of that. It was reinforced. You declare the conflict and then you manage it.

A conflict can be more than actual; it can also be perceived. We are also aware of what the community thinks about things like I am supposed to be best mates with lots of senior people. That is not the case, but the perception is there, so we need to manage that carefully.

J DAVIS: If that cannot be made public, is there a way of reassuring the public that it is being dealt with if they cannot see it?

Mr SHANAHAN: Is there a way? I suppose if the question is asked about that matter. For example, I have recused myself from certain things. I am happy to share that.

J DAVIS: Are you able to tell us how often conflicts of interest have been declared?

Mr SHANAHAN: We have some ex-police investigators there, so anything that involves police they tend to recuse themselves. We had a conflict last year in a matter that was aired in Estimates. It is not that often. I have declared conflict in a couple of matters as well, mainly because there are people I have worked directly with for a long period of time.

J DAVIS: I imagine many ...

Mr SHANAHAN: There are a lot them, yes. There are also a lot of people I do not know who hold senior positions. I can still deal with most matters that come through, but when there is an obvious potential for a perception of a conflict then I will be aware of that—mainly for the reputation of the office, if it can be seen to be getting involved in matters using officers to complete it. That is pretty much my rule: you need to be careful about managing that and we are aware of that.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill that relates to the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government question on budget and fiscal strategy?

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

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES Output 6.1 – Corporate and Governance Output 6.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption for attending today.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I also thank Mr Shanahan and Ms Clet for all of their work and the office for pulling it together and, of course, the important work they do across the Northern Territory. It has not been the easiest period, and they have done it very well, so I thank them.

OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, we have Candice McLean who is the Acting Ombudsman and Bronwyn Haack who is the Acting Deputy Ombudsman. I will not be making an opening statement, but Ms McLean is more than welcome to.

Mr CHAIR: Ombudsman, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms McLEAN: The Ombudsman is responsible for functions under the *Ombudsman Act 2009* which provides for review of administrative actions in the Northern Territory Public Sector, including local government and the conduct of police; as the Information Commissioner under the *Information Act 2002*, reviewing and overseeing freedom of information (FOI) and privacy in the Northern Territory Public Sector; we provide secretariat and investigative support for the Judicial Commission; and act as the interim Northern Territory national preventative mechanism under the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and other forms of ill treatment, referred to as OPCAT.

There have been significant changes for the Ombudsman's Office during 2024 and 2025, with Peter Shoyer completing his statutory term as Ombudsman in November 2024 and three other long-term staff leaving. I joined the office in mid-March 2025 as the Acting Deputy Ombudsman, and I was appointed Acting Ombudsman and Information Commissioner on 1 June 2025 for a three-month period. I acknowledge the long-term contribution of Peter Shoyer to the integrity of the public sector as well as Brenda Monaghan as his long serving deputy. I also acknowledge the work of Traci Keys who has recently acted as Ombudsman to support and provide stability for our office.

For data for the Ombudsman operations, in 2023–24 there were 2,010 approaches to the Ombudsman's Office, including matters outside of our jurisdiction. In-jurisdiction approaches were made up of 369 police complaints, with 453 complaints against Correctional Services, 118 complaints against Jacana Energy, 118 complaints against the former Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, with the remainder being complaints against other government departments, including local government councils.

As of 31 March 2025 there have been 1,820 approaches to the Ombudsman's Office, including matters outside of our jurisdiction. In-jurisdiction approaches were made up of 498 police complaints, 327 complaints against Correctional Services, 521 complaints against government departments and 39 complaints relating to local government councils.

Towards the end of this financial year we expect over 600 police complaints, which we consider may be due to increased police presence and operational activity. Our office works closely with the Northern Territory Police Professional Standards Command to ensure timeliness of the work and fairness of process to complainants and subject officers.

Correctional Services complaints appear slightly reduced despite some periods where we have found they have peaked. We expect approximately 430-odd complaints by the end of the financial year, and we consider this decrease may be due to a number of factors, including inability of prisoners to access our office, potentially due to lockdowns and being accommodated in watch houses.

For the Office of the Information Commissioner, between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025 there have been 160 freedom of information-related approaches to the Information Commissioner, with 20 of these resulting in formal complaints against organisations. This is an increase from the 129 FOI-related approaches at the same time last year.

Between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025 the commissioner received 69 approaches from members of the public claiming breaches of privacy, which is a decrease to the 73 approaches received by the commissioner at the same time last year.

An increasing aspect of the work of the Office of the Information Commissioner is providing policy advice, training and education to organisations in areas of privacy, data protection and information sharing. This increase in general indicates we consider that organisations are becoming more cognisant of the risks to government through inappropriate information management.

For the Judicial Commission, between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025 there have been 33 new Judicial Commission matters, being 22 approaches and 11 complaints. This compares to 11 complaints received in 2023–24.

The OPCAT function remains unfunded, and the office is not undertaking any of those functions.

The former Ombudsman, Mr Shoyer, completed the following reports in the last 12 months:

- 'Can We Fix It? Report into building certification in the NT', which looked at building certification and safety
- Compliance with Part 2 of the *Police (Special Investigative and Other Powers) Act 2023–24* Report

- Surveillance Devices Compliance Report (July 2024)
- 2023–24 Ombudsman Annual Report
- Information Commissioner Annual Report
- Judicial Commission report, which was jointly prepared with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- a statement on the use of spit hoods by Northern Territory Police.

An own-motion investigation is also currently underway and is expected to be completed in the second half of 2025. I am happy to take questions.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Acting Ombudsman. I appreciate your work and echo your sentiment to Mr Shoyer and his amazing work in the public service over many years.

Could you please provide some information on the changes of government and what impact the machinery-of-government changes have had, if any, through the Ombudsman's Office?

Ms McLEAN: In terms of the machinery-of-government changes, the main impact we see is the recording of statistics in the Office of the Information Commissioner, particularly when you have complaints being handled from one agency and transferred into another. We are in the process of working through that and how it will be recorded in the annual report.

Ms UIBO: Given the slight budget increase and additional responsibilities, are there sufficient resources to maintain existing complaint handling functions effectively in the Northern Territory?

Ms McLEAN: The majority of our budget is operational employee expenses. We are managing in terms of new functions that we expect to receive in the second half of this year. That is currently under consideration.

Ms UIBO: What additional resources or funding bids leading to the second half of the year, as you have highlighted, will be requested to accommodate some of the new oversight roles?

Ms McLEAN: That is still under consideration.

Ms UIBO: I look forward to seeing that.

Did you foresee needing additional resources or legislative changes to effectively undertake future investigations or maintain the oversight functions and effectiveness that you already have?

Ms McLEAN: Sorry; could you repeat that, please?

Ms UIBO: Do you foresee needing additional resources or any legislative changes to ensure that you have an effective role to undertake future investigations, complaint handling and to maintain the oversight effectiveness of your office?

Ms McLEAN: I do not currently foresee any legislative changes needed.

Ms UIBO: In terms of the additional resources that is part of the process in the second half of the year.

Ms McLEAN: We are still considering that.

Ms UIBO: Is there still a view of the office that there should be a legislative ban on the use of spit hoods for children in line with the previous Ombudsman and the OPCAT recommendations?

Ms McLEAN: The statement on spit hoods was a statement of the former Ombudsman, Mr Shoyer, and that is his view that is expressed.

J DAVIS: Are you able to say how many approaches, general inquiries or complaints received during the reporting period have concerned the use of spit hoods?

Ms McLEAN: I am not aware of that, but we can take that on notice and have a look at our data.

Question on Notice No 1.10

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

J DAVIS: How many of the approaches, general inquiries or complaints received during the reporting period have concerned the use of spit hoods by NT Police?

Mr CHAIR: Ombudsman, do you accept the question?

Ms McLEAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.10.

Ms UIBO: Ombudsman, does the government accept the Ombudsman's findings regarding the risks and lack of evidence supporting the reintroduction of spit hoods for children?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is probably a question for me. This topic is something we ventilated with the community for a number of years and was an election commitment, so that tool for police has been provided.

Ms UIBO: What consultation has occurred with the Ombudsman regarding the decision to reinstate spit hoods for children in police custody?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have not had any. That is not to say that perhaps at an official level they had it, but I am not aware of any.

Ms UIBO: Will your government implement all the recommendations by the Ombudsman's Office related to spit hood alternatives, such as de-escalation training and improved personal protective equipment?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is probably something we could flesh out a bit more with Police coming up. Certainly, police have a number of training protocols and procedures around all sorts of different tools they have. Whether it is specific to the Ombudsman's recommendation, I cannot comment at this point. If you ask again when Police are here, they will have all those details.

Ms UIBO: This is probably similar, so giving Police a heads-up. Has the NT Police fully implemented the Ombudsman's recommendations regarding de-escalation training, improved PPE and stakeholder engagement to reduce reliance on spit hoods?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sure they will come ready with your answer.

Ms UIBO: Can you please update the committee on OPCAT implementation and the role implementing the national preventative mechanisms (NPM)? Where is this currently at for the Northern Territory?

Ms McLEAN: The OPCAT function is not currently funded. We previously had fixed-term funding for one position and that funding lapsed. There is no plan, I believe, to allocate us further funding for that function.

Ms UIBO: Where does this leave the Northern Territory if there is no improvement or progress when it comes to the NPM?

Ms McLEAN: The NPM function. The Ombudsman has general jurisdiction to investigate complaints. They can include complaints about places of detention. That is something we receive complaints about and we look into.

Ms UIBO: Further to that, can you talk the committee through the OPCAT process if there is no funding to show the rest of the country that we are working towards the national preventative mechanisms? What issues will be in the process in Northern Territory prisons and able to go to a complaint mechanism if the NT is not supporting the OPCAT implementation?

Ms McLEAN: I understand that there is no specific process for OPCAT, but state and territory governments and the Australian Government are yet to come to an agreement on funding for that activity. We are not currently undertaking the functions. As I said, there are other ways that we can write to places of detention.

J DAVIS: Congratulations on your three-month appointment. I heard you say that your expectation was that prisoner complaints may go down due to the challenges for prisoners to make complaints because of rolling lockdowns. I wonder whether you have any suggestions about how we can make sure that prisoners are able to access your complaint service.

Ms McLEAN: Our office undertakes engagement and education functions where resources permit. There are occasions where we attend the Corrections facilities for that purpose, where we engage with senior staff so that people have an awareness of their rights.

J DAVIS: Is there anything further you are considering, given that we are in a time of greatly increased prison population and are expecting that to continue?

Ms McLEAN: I understand there are operational challenges within prisons, but I have little control over that. We are in engagement with Northern Territory Corrections about how things can be improved.

J DAVIS: Understood. At the moment, is there no mechanism in place to deal with the pressures that prisoners may be under or the challenges that prisoners face in being able to raise complaints with the Ombudsman?

Ms McLEAN: No.

K McNAMARA: To clarify, your role is acting for three months; is that what you said?

Ms McLEAN: That is correct.

K McNAMARA: Is the recruitment process under way for the new permanent Ombudsman?

Ms McLEAN: That is a matter for the government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, not at this stage. The Act allows three-monthly appointments. As with our legislation transferring the *Public Information Act* over to the Ombudsman, we are now looking at how we can strengthen the ICAC. We think it is prudent to settle some of those issues before moving to the recruitment phase.

K McNAMARA: Chief Minister, given the recent media scrutiny of government appointments and their alleged political connections to the CLP, can you reassure Territorians that the new Ombudsman will be chosen, or the person recommended, will be chosen without any political input from the CLP?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not accept the premise of your question. Like all these recruitment processes for statutory officers, there are robust processes in place. Once we settle on what the roles and responsibilities of the Ombudsman are moving forward, then we can put out the right information and people across the Territory and the country can then go through that recruitment process.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nightcliff, there were definitely imputations and inferences in that one.

K McNAMARA: I was referring to things that have been reported in the media; I was not bringing them.

Mr CHAIR: It is still Standing Order 109. It is clear.

K McNAMARA: Okay. I will take that on board. My final question is for the Ombudsman to do with the movement of responsibility from the *Public Information Act* from Auditor-General to the Ombudsman.

Previously the Auditor-General found the government was in breach of the *Public Information Act* for spending public funds on political advertising, if similar accusations are made in the future will your office investigate?

Mr CHAIR: Could you try rephrasing, so it does not become a hypothetical.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Ombudsman will become responsible for the *Public Information Act*. If and by the will of the parliament, obviously we have not passed that Bill yet, that responsibility would transfer.

Ms UIBO: How many freedom of information requests have been received by your office in the last financial year of the reporting period?

Ms McLEAN: In the reporting period, as I said in my opening statement, there has been 160 FOI related approaches and 20 of these matters have been formal complaints against organisations.

Ms UIBO: Have any of the 160 been rejected by the office?

Ms McLEAN: I do not have that information on me, but I can take that on notice/

Question on Notice No 1.11

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

Ms UIBO: Of the 160 freedom-of-information requests by your office in the reporting period for Estimates, how many have been rejected.

Mr CHAIR: Ombudsman, do you accept the question?

Ms McLEAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.11.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2025–26 as they relate to the Ombudsman’s Office. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 7.0 – OMBUDSMAN’S OFFICE Output 7.1 – Ombudsman’s Operations

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 7.1, Ombudsman’s Operations. Are there any questions?

Mrs ZIO: Can you outline any systemic issues the office has identified in the reporting period, and how government agencies have responded to recommendations for improvement?

Ms McLEAN: Member for Fannie Bay, I do not believe we have identified any systemic issues, but I am happy to check that. I can take it on notice.

Mrs ZIO: No, if you do not believe there are any that is fine. Have you seen improvements on how agencies have responded to complaints compared to previous years?

Ms McLEAN: Yes. There was quite a lengthy complex investigation that was dated, that has been kept open on our books where we have monitored agency implementation and improvement and it is one of the success stories that we have seen work in the office.

Mrs ZIO: Are there any main barriers that you can identify that affect the timely resolution of complaints?

Ms McLEAN: Yes. Each complaint can have its own unique factors. Sometimes there might be complex issues that there may be delay. Difficulty achieving information from a complainant or where we have police matters, subject officers may be on leave and that can impact the time that it takes to resolve the matter.

Mr CHAIR: I have one question. Do you have a ratio figure of the number of complaints against police and Corrections and how many are actually substantiated?

Ms McLEAN: Member for Drysdale, I do not have that ratio on me, but I am happy to make that inquiry to take it on notice.

Mr CHAIR: I will restate my question.

Question on Notice No 1.12

Mr CHAIR: Could you please provide the figure for the ratio of Police and Corrections complaints and the number that is substantiated?

Mr CHAIR: Ombudsman, do you accept the question?

Ms McLEAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.12.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 7.0.

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

No questions.

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 9.0, Judicial Commission, Output 9.1, Judicial Commission operations. Are there any questions?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Can you tell me if you have the categories of the complaints? Do you break them up into particular categories?

Ms McLEAN: I have the number of approaches and the number of complaints. Are you able to clarify ‘categories of complaints’?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: What are the complaints about in terms of broad categories? Do you have any segregation?

Ms McLEAN: We receive complaints against Supreme Court judges, Local Court judges and NTCAT members.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Do they indicate the nature of the complaint? Is it a miscarriage or something like that, or whatever? I do not know.

Ms McLEAN: When you speak of ‘miscarriage’ is that ...

Mr O’GALLAGHER: When you say you get a complaint against a Supreme Court judge, do you have particular categories within that or is it just listed as a complaint against a Supreme Court judge?

Ms McLEAN: I am happy to go back and check that. I can take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.13

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

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Could you give me a breakdown of the complaints, by category if possible?

Mr CHAIR: Ombudsman, do you accept the question?

Ms McLEAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.13.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 9.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 10.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 10.1 – Corporate and Governance

Output 10.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thank the Acting Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman, their entire office and team, not just for their prep today but for the important work they do across the Territory. I am sure it was well appreciated by the panel here today.

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, I have with me today, Luccio Cercarelli, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; Mr Tom Leeming, Deputy CEO Policy Reform and Regions; and Mrs Jean Doherty, Deputy CEO Strategic and Corporate Services.

It is an honour to be here today, addressing everyone at our first Estimates hearing as a new government. Nine months ago, Territorians voted for change for the better. They wanted strong action to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our unique and beautiful Territory lifestyle.

The day after the election, I met with the then CEO of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the Police Commissioner to get them moving on crime, being our number one priority. That resulted in about 60 police back in uniform and on the streets. Within two weeks of the election, we redesigned the Northern Territory Public Sector centred around the three key priorities of Territorians with particular focus on smaller and more agile agencies. What we did is build a government ready for action.

Within our first eight weeks, we had delivered our reducing crime laws, on urgency through the parliament, as we promised Territorians. Some of these laws included: Declan's law, delivering stronger bail and better powers for police to wand for knives; new ramraid and post-and-boast laws; nuisance public drinking laws; and minimum mandatory sentencing for assaults on workers.

We also took some simple steps that Labor failed to do including bus drivers who had been begging the previous government for protective screens. In just 12 weeks we had delivered them for every driver on every bus. We moved to make our prosecutors permanent and delivered a much-needed Corrections master plan and secured legal aid funding, just to name a few. We also rolled out our school attendance program, holding parents accountable and making sure kids are in the classroom.

The Circuit Breaker initiative was stood up prior to Christmas and is going well with family responsibility agreements holding parents accountable. We made law and order the cornerstone of our first budget with a record \$1.5bn investment in Corrections, courts and police, to reset the focus and budget on what matters most to Territorians.

As promised, we are currently conducting an audit of Northern Territory Government-funded and externally provided services and programs for children and young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system. The audit supports our priority to reduce youth crime and will look at Northern Territory government funded and administered programs and services, duplication of services, how services can be strengthened and whether there is appropriate accountability and performance monitoring.

In October we commenced four months of consultation on the Territory Coordinator and passed this most significant piece of economic reform in a decade. Payroll tax for small business was abolished from 1 January with the lifting of the payroll tax-free threshold. From 1 July, apprentice and trainee wages will also be exempt from that threshold—I know plenty of businesses are excited about that.

Importantly, through Budget 2025–26 we are also removing the commercial and competitive test from payroll tax exemptions that apply to charities and not-for-profits. This means that not-for-profit aged-care and childcare providers will no longer have to pay payroll tax. For a non-profit with a payroll of \$5m per annum, the entity will save up to \$206,250 in payroll tax alone which means that money can be put back into that aged care or childcare facility—I am sure you can imagine that will be meaningful.

We always said that we would pull the levers of government to make the Territory a more competitive place to live, work, visit and invest. It is what we have been doing to deliver action, certainty and security for all Territorians. Other initiatives we have worked through include removing third party merit reviews from the *Northern Territory Petroleum, Planning and Water Act*; Approvals Fast Track Taskforce, which consists of industry representatives providing advice to government on approvals processes; excitedly launching Australia’s biggest homeowner scheme with the HomeGrown and FreshStart grants stimulating our construction sector, which was set to hit the worst numbers since records began and also to have more Territorians into home ownership and build their lives here.

Status quo is not an option for our government, and it is why we have been delivering that change for the better that Territorians asked for. In March I launched our Rebuilding the Economy Strategy 2025–28 which provides a framework for the public and private sectors to move forward together. It sets targets that can be measured, and are publicly available, giving all Territorians the opportunity to track our progress and get involved.

It is a meaningful strategy and focuses on five key areas:

1. It is to be the best place to do business.
2. build a bigger, better workforce
3. deliver for Australia
4. unlock regional growth
5. connect the Territory.

Of course, a strong economy is essential for restoring our unique Territory lifestyle, and our work on that priority has begun with really important cost of living measures for Territorians. Those measures include:

- no increases in car registration for 12 months
- free driver’s licences
- free meningococcal B vaccines for under-twos and a catch-up program for adolescents
- free swimming lessons for all primary school-aged students
- expanded services at our local pharmacies
- new solar Home and Business Battery Scheme
- three-year trailer registration.

As a result of the machinery of government changes, the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet is a much leaner agency, giving it sharper focus on economic reform and whole-of-government leadership to deliver on our three strategic priorities. As at 31 March 2025, CMC had an FTE of 377, including 38 staff on executive contracts. Prior to the MOG change, at 31 March 2024 we had an FTE of—sorry; whoever has written this wrote it very awkwardly. I will come back to you on our FTE for March, including 62 staff on executive contracts. We decreased by \$151.52m and \$241.261m to \$89.741m as a result of those MOG changes.

In 2025–26 CMC will continue to drive cross-government efforts across the three strategic pillars. We are one of five central agencies in the public service. Our agency provides support and advice to me as Chief Minister, Minister for Defence NT and Minister for Territory Coordinator and to other ministers. CMC plays a critical role in leading strategic policy and coordination across government, including in the regions and driving our agenda with the Commonwealth.

Chief Minister and Cabinet coordinates whole-of-government responses to emerging issues and matters of strategic importance to the Northern Territory. It leads positioning of our interests at a state, national and international level through strategic reforms, negotiation and engagement with the three tiers of government, industry and the community sectors. Through Defence NT it also advocates the interests of the Territory as a critical Defence and national security hub for the Australian Defence Force and our other allied partners.

Our government remains laser focused on the job that we need to do. We are not here to overpromise and under-deliver as we saw Labor do for many years. We want to bring back that can-do Territory spirit and realise the potential which the pioneers before us saw in the Northern Territory. We want the Territory to be a place where everyday Territorians are inspired and empowered to achieve their dreams and aspirations for the future.

I draw to the committee's attention that Chief Minister and Cabinet also reports to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and questioning relating to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment should also be directed to the Minister for Public Service.

Mr Chair, I am happy to take questions.

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

Ms UIBO: We have some Written Questions—71, 84, 86 and 87—that were sent to your office on 8 April. As you know, it is a 30-day turnaround. That was nearly two months ago. My office only received the response and the answers to these questions at 9.15 this morning, 10 June 2025, nearly two months late, and these questions were pertinent to our work ahead of the Estimates session. They related to your agencies—Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, which we are now in the hearing session for; Territory Coordinator; Police; and Fire and Emergency Services.

Have you deliberately left this process to this morning to get the answers to the opposition, or has this been an oversight by your office?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Neither. Opposition Leader, you are pretty familiar with this practice. Written Questions are normally responded to within 30 days, but obviously the volume of questions that come through in preparation for Estimates is significant. I think it has been standard practice for a very long time. I can get the date in which we would have received your questions from opposition, but I do not think it would be dissimilar.

Ms UIBO: I am hoping that the outstanding questions for every agency do not get received on the day of the hearing to then put the opposition and any of the crossbenchers out in the Estimates hearing process. As you know it is a well-regarded process for the Northern Territory and an important one. We want to make sure that we do our job, so you can do your job as well, and make sure that no-one is left in the dark at the last minute. Hopefully, all the agencies will provide their answers to the Written Questions, as outlined, the ones that are still outstanding. Each agency and minister listening will know which ones are outstanding. Hopefully, we do not receive them all each day of the hearing.

The 2024–25 budget for DCMC was \$241.2m with 525 FTE. Your 2025–26 budget has a total of \$85.1m and 293 FTE. Can you detail what areas or functions have come out of the department and where they have been transferred to?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We decreased from 525 to 293, which is a reduction of 232 full-time equivalents. We had some movements due to the MOG changes and the transfer of different responsibilities. Quite a few functions went to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development. They were Territory Regional Growth, Local Government and Regional Development, Aboriginal Interpreter Service and corporate overheads to go with that.

It is a very deliberate streamlining of Chief Minister and Cabinet so they can be focused on economic reform and the whole-of-government leadership that we need. These are better placed in Housing, Local Government and Community Development. They are a better fit. There were some functions that went to the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations, Investment Attraction being one of them, the Local Jobs Fund, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art gallery.

We had some functions transfer to the Department of Mining and Energy, which was Mining Development. You can see by the list that CMC used to have a mix of responsibilities. We had some transfers to the

Department of Tourism and Hospitality. That included Activate Territory and Darwin Waterfront. From the transfers to the Department of People, Sport and Culture, we have Veterans' Support.

For Health, the transfer was Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment, Remote Community Stores and Alcohol Policy. Transferring to Attorney-General's was the Liquor Commission. For the former Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism—no, that is fine. A new function is the Office of the Territory Coordinator.

Ms UIBO: Can you confirm, of the 232 FTEs with the redeployment of other agencies, which you just outlined, that all 232 positions remain or have they been downscaled or cut out?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are all still there. They just transferred across to their new home agency.

Ms UIBO: What internal restructuring has occurred within the department with all the changes?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, what do you mean?

Ms UIBO: Now that there are changes to the structure of the department—as you said, a leaner, meaner machine type of approach—what internally has changed in terms of your operational organisational chart.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Obviously, the ones I just listed are now undertaking those roles in their new home agencies, and our agency is focusing on that strategic coordination and support, regional development, the Territory Coordinator, Defence NT and all those economic focuses.

Ms UIBO: Have your machinery of government changes been fully bedded down in 10 months' worth of governing.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, they have.

Ms UIBO: What change management processes, if any, have been followed throughout the machinery of government changes?

Mr CERCARELLI: A change management plan was fully implemented with the machinery of government changes, which included consultation with staff, advising staff of their movements to other agencies. Each agency then put into place their change management plans to embed the new functions coming in, as well as to inform existing staff of the changes occurring. That consultation also included any movements of staff to new buildings and locations. A full consultation and change management plan was in place throughout the period of the MOG.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, throughout that process, was feedback received by staff in regard to the changes, and was there anything unable to be implemented through the change management process?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Not that I am aware of. It went pretty smoothly, by all accounts. There were some significant changes. We wanted much smaller, more agile agencies and clear lines of decision-making, having—where we could—one agency, one minister. We also focused on those economic agencies, given one of our three key priorities was not just about reducing crime but rebuilding the economy.

We looked at how we supported agencies to focus in on their key areas of expertise. We want agencies to be able to do their area well. We saw the structure under the previous government was spreading everyone thin and not allowing for that development and focus of expertise.

By splitting up those economic agencies we are allowing those agencies to work through their strengths and getting their people able to have an in-depth understanding of what it is we can do to move the Territory forward, given that is such a significant priority for us.

Ms UIBO: Is there a costing to the significant machinery of government changes? Are you able to outline that to the committee?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not have that.

Ms UIBO: Could we put that on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 1.14

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

Ms UIBO: Given there are significant machinery of government changes, can you please outline to the committee the cost of these changes?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.14.

Ms UIBO: How many people are on executive contracts in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet? Can you please break down those by the number of ECO and what their levels are?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. That is in the answers to written questions we provided you this morning. I am happy to go through it. The number of executive contracts is 34, broken down into five ECO6, one ECO5, two ECO4, five ECO3, 11 ECO2 and 10 ECO1.

We have four part-time as well.

Ms UIBO: How many of those ECOs sit in your ministerial office?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are from the department.

Ms UIBO: Does the department have information about the number of consultancies that have been used in 2024 to 2025?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would be three.

Ms UIBO: How much department spending has been on these three consultancies?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is \$167,187.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, to break down these consultancies being three, were any above the amount of \$50,000 individually?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, all three were.

Ms UIBO: How many staff are dedicated to internal and external communications in the department and are you able to provide the committee with a break down of the costs for communications staff and their activities?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Just while we are waiting for that, I want to confirm that you were provided the written questions at 5 o'clock yesterday as per previous convention when you were in government, but you also asked the Estimates questions twice, so we provided it to you twice which is unusual. That cost agencies across government over \$400,000 in costed hours to collate.

Ms UIBO: That is probably because we did not get the answers in the first place.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is not the case. You just asked them twice. One at the end of last year and one now. In answer to your question, it is 16.3 FTE.

Ms UIBO: The second part of that question was what are the activities that the staff in the communications, external and internal, are undertaking?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass over to Ms Doherty.

Mrs DOHERTY: The Strategic Communications and Engagement team in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet undertakes a range of strategic communications and engagement services, including

but not limited to community consultation engagement, design and development of cross-government and public consultation surveys and sessions for the community in relation to government policy. They also undertake protocol services on behalf of the government, ministers and Leader of the Opposition as well as design of digital and marketing communication services.

They provide a governance role in terms of cross-agency communications and provide assurances around things like sponsorship across government, cross-agency coordination of various communications and engagement proposals and policy reforms which relate to strategic communications. They provide sharing of communications review subcommittee which provides cross agency coordination on those types of functions as well as things like the public information rules and other contemporary communications practices for the Northern Territory and nationally.

Ms UIBO: We heard from the Auditor-General earlier this morning regarding some of the reports that he made in his statutory office concerning the contraventions of the *Public Information Act*. Has there been work by the department to ensure that it is in line with the *Public Information Act* and that public spending is not political spending?

Mrs DOHERTY: I can confirm that as a result of the various reports that have been released in the last year by the Auditor-General that the existing guidelines for the application of the *Public Information Act* which are socialised and shared amongst the various communications teams across government are in the process of being updated to reflect those contemporary interpretations by the Auditor-General.

Ms UIBO: Are there any repercussions within the department for contravening the *Public Information Act* through the communications team?

Mrs DOHERTY: There were no recommendations as a result of the report into the Territory Coordinator advertisement directed at the department. The advertisements in question had already been finalised when the report was released. However, notwithstanding the department is actively working to progress the updated guidelines as I mentioned which should bring our advice into contemporary best practice across government.

Ms UIBO: With 15.3 FTE in regard to the comms team in the department, how does that compare to the previous budget in terms of FTE?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was 16.3.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, you have a commitment to cutting all approval timeframes across government by 50%. Can you provide the committee with a breakdown of all approvals and their timeframes for 2023–24 and 2024–25.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is an ambitious but important target, and it is sort of an overarching ambition across whole-of-government. We talk a lot to our CEOs about it and we use as a goal in which to drive change. I mentioned in my opening statement about status quo not being an option, and in our 2025–28 Rebuilding the Territory Economic Strategy we are excited about making the Territory the best place to business. It is our number one goal in that entire economic strategy, and to do that making it easier to business is an important part.

I went through some of the ways in which we have done that, which includes changes at the Motor Vehicle Registry. For example, moving trailer registrations from one to three years is a significant reduction in approval timeframes.

The Territory Coordinator has specific and set powers should the need arise to expedite timeframes should the process be required. With the third-party merits review there has been a wide range of measures, including the work we are doing with pharmacy scope of practice and a number of things.

It is from what people might consider big issues to small issues, I do not like to categorise it that way, but what we are trying to do is reduce people's unnecessary interface with the government. The approvals fast-track taskforce undertook a lot of this consideration on how we measure risk, for example, as a Territory and what do we need and not need in order to continue to function in the most efficient way whilst protecting whatever it might be, depending on the type of regulatory process.

I do not have a percentage for you, it is an overarching target that drives all of us every day to deliver that change. I use MVR a lot, and I feel bad for the people at MVR because they do an amazing job, but it is one

of those places that people do not like to go and line up to do various things, so we are working through some of those through to the significant pieces of regulation for businesses. Payroll tax is another one, for example.

Ms UIBO: Whilst I am sure there is some internal tracking of the progress around the 50% reduction of timeframes and approvals for government, will there be some outward facing coms that would then provide an update to the public for each and every agency to see where they are tracking with the 50% target of approvals and fast tracking, and where would people find that if it is available, and if it is not, when would it be available?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not available at the moment, but I can assure you as we move—it is fair to say it has been a busy nine or 10 months. We have been undertaking a lot of change, reorganising a whole-of-government through the MOG changes, focusing on legislative reform, community safety, delivering a budget—all these types of things. Plenty of work has been done but as it starts to consolidate then we will be the first ones to loudly and proudly shout the numbers from the roof top. We can look at ways to make that more consistent going forward, but at this stage it is very much part of what drives us every day.

Ms UIBO: Yes, it would be great to see something that was a public outward-facing database so people can see all the examples of the timeframes and how they have or have not been fast-tracked.

There is around a million dollars set aside for the NTRAI service evaluation monitoring reform, will your department be undertaking this work?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is part of what the agency does.

Ms UIBO: Will it be done in conjunction with the Aboriginal peak organisations of the Northern Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: How will this support improve outcomes, particularly in ensuring the additional NTRAI investment negotiated by the former Labor government is invested in the Northern Territory in the proper way?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, we resigned that—I think it was earlier this year. February was it? Yes, that is right. I went to Alice Springs and met with the Prime Minister and the Member for Lingiari and others who were that for that. It is a significant portion of funding.

For some more of those details, I will pass over to Mr Leeming.

Mr LEEMING: The allocation we have under the NTRAI for this department over six years was \$7.66m to coordinate the evaluation accountability and learning aspects of the NTRAI, so that all of the elements of the \$842.6m are being spent over six years across the various parties to the agreement. We are tracking, monitoring and evaluating those, holding each other accountable and we are learning how to implement those various programs and how to improve them based on experience.

The monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning framework is being developed and will be implemented, consistent with the partnership agreement that the Chief Minister signed in February. That means it is being discussed through joint standing committee on NTRAI, which includes our partners from Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT and the Commonwealth Government. I am chairing a meeting of that tomorrow to discuss this issue—how the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning framework will be designed.

The funding allocation we have for that—the \$7.66m over six years— will coordinate all that monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning effort. It will also be incumbent on each of the various parties funded to provide program delivery on the ground, including but not limited to different agencies to integrate monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning into the way they implement those programs.

Ms UIBO: On that \$6m over three years, will that be an equal split of \$2m per year for the next three years or will it depend on the activities for the implementation of the evaluation and monitoring of the NTRAI?

Mr LEEMING: The total allocation for the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet to coordinate monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning is \$7.66m over the six years of the agreement. It is mostly evenly spaced across the six years, except for the one-off external evaluation in the third and sixth years for which \$0.5m has been allocated.

I can tell you the exact numbers. It is \$1.05m in 2025–26; \$1.076m in 2026–27; that jumps up to \$1.598m in 2027–28 because we are funding a one-off mid-year agreement external evaluation; then it drops back down to \$1.121m in 2028–29; \$1.144m in 2029–30; then it jumps back to up again because we are doing an end of agreement external evaluation to \$1.671m in the last year 2030–31.

Mr CHAIR: I will now open to the floor.

Mrs ZIO: My question is specifically about reducing red tape and public sector reform. As I have spoken about in my maiden speech in parliament, I am keen to see the reduction of red tape across government and frontline services. I am wondering if the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet is leading any reform in that space to reduce red tape and the administrative burden that goes along with a lot of our frontline services like police, health and teaching.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What is important is, as much as structural change to the way we have done the machinery-of-government changes, we are also on this cultural reform journey. We are trying to empower public servants to take ownership of their patch to push up and drive through those reforms. It is not just police, which is a good example. When I am out on the front line I am asking them a thousand questions like, 'Explain this process to me' and, 'How can it be made better?'

I know that within Police they are encouraging police to come forward with law reform or whatever it might be to help support better justice outcomes. It is the same across the whole of government. We are asking agencies and every level of public servant—just because we have done something for 20 years it does not mean that is the best way to do it. How can we make things more efficient? Do we still need that process? Has something else come in its place? Maybe 10 years ago it was important, but it is not as important anymore. We want to make sure that leadership within the public service understands all those efficiencies.

As I said earlier in response to the Leader of the Opposition concerning the 50% reduction in approval timeframes, it can be the smallest thing. It could be a five-page form that we now turn into a two-page form. For the person filling out the form, it gives them more of their time back. We want to be respectful to Territorians about how that interface with government looks, particularly people who are running businesses. The less touchpoints they have that do not result in any outcome, the better.

There is a lot of work being done including the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce and a lot of legislation we have already done, but we continue to encourage everyone at every opportunity we get. I know it is something we talk to the CEOs a lot about, saying to them, 'What is it that we can do differently? How can we challenge this so we can do it better and why?'

Mr CERCARELLI: Just to reinforce what the Chief Minister said, agencies and CEOs have been asked to look at day-to-day business and how we can simplify processes for the community and restore the economy, lifestyle and reduce crime. It is about making things easier, not harder. It is about looking at what we are doing and whether it is still valid in today's environment, whether it is a current policy of the government and how we move that forward in a smooth transition. All agencies are committed to working on this. The MOG resulted in more agencies but focused agencies which allows each agency and each of its CEOs to work with the minister and relevant stakeholders to look at the processes that are in place and how we can streamline them.

This is a large task; this is decades of inbuilt culture, processes and behaviour that are being looked at, but every step we make forward is a step of improving for Northern Territorians on how we can make life easier and better with improved processes for them. We are committed to that process and, as the Chief Executive of Chief Minister and Cabinet, it is something that I look at on a daily basis and have various discussions with CEs of agencies.

Further to the Chief Minister's point, it is about empowering staff. Within my agency we have increased presence in regional Northern Territory and empowered the staff in the regions, which is important. It is not just about having people on the ground; it is about having people that can make decisions on the ground based on local knowledge and input. There are moves afoot, but it is a journey.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have one final point to add to that. It is also about job satisfaction for our public service as well. I think it is giving them the opportunity to call out things that do not necessarily add value to the Territory or to a particular process and then have ownership of it and feel like they have been part of making a difference. When you are spending a day doing something that you think is not necessary, if we can remove that from someone's daily life and they are doing things that they do believe is necessary, you immediately have improved engagement and job satisfaction which is important.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I have a couple of clarification questions. Which output should I ask Defence NT and Approvals Fast Track Taskforce questions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Defence NT is 11.1, and the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce is 11.2.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: This was touched on by Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Jean Doherty. This is about the marketing comms that the Leader of the Opposition referred to. Can you tell me how much the Boundless Possible campaign cost? Are we still pursuing that, or is this part of our cost savings?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is part of a lot of things, Member for Karama. Boundless Possible has gone. From time to time, we still find a sign or something around the place. We are then able to respond accordingly.

I will just seek some advice if we have a figure for that.

The previous government allocated \$1.1m annually to Boundless Possible—if you can believe that—on top of the—gosh, you are stretching my memory—rockets going into space. We had sign wrap on construction sites and all sorts of stuff. We have been able to identify that \$1.1m as part of the \$20m agency savings.

J DAVIS: I have a question from the Member for Mulka under Defence. Can you advise of any Defence discussions or plans in relation to the Gove region? Previously there has been discussion about Defence use of Rio Tinto assets and local discussion about Defence use of the Gove port.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, not to my knowledge.

J DAVIS: To your knowledge there are no discussions or plans in place?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. Defence NT is quite different to the federal responsibility for defence. We would not necessarily know. I encourage the Member for Mulka to speak to the federal government about that because I could not rule it in or out. It is just not to my knowledge.

J DAVIS: I have one short follow-up question in relation to consultancies. Are you able to advise which external companies’ consultancies have been awarded to?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can. It was Kent Australia Pty Ltd, ACIL Allen Consulting and the University of Queensland.

J DAVIS: Is that in relation to the MOG changes? Or more broadly?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They were the three that the Opposition Leader asked me about.

J DAVIS: Are you able to outline what other external agencies’ consultancies have been awarded to?

Mrs DOHERTY: In relation to the companies listed by the Chief Minister, Kent Australia was awarded to provide a consultancy for process modelling for Glycol implications in the NT gas transmission pipeline system. ACIL Allen was contracted to develop a Northern Territory countering violent extremism strategy ...

J DAVIS: Sorry, perhaps my question was not clear. It is not what did those consultancies undertake but what other consultancies outside those three, more broadly, have been awarded to? Contract, sorry.

Mrs DOHERTY: Can you clarify the question? There is a number of small value tier one consultancies that are awarded throughout the year for things like stationery, invoicing and so on. I want to make sure I have the parameters correct.

J DAVIS: I am interested in all of them. I am happy to take it on notice.

Mrs DOHERTY: They were provided in the global questions this morning.

J DAVIS: Okay, great.

The committee suspended.

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, before we start, I have an answer to a question on notice.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.14

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Opposition Leader asked about the cost of the machinery-of-government changes. The Treasurer issued a direction and noted that the changes of transferring functions did not result in any additional cost to government, so it was cost-neutral and all came from within. That answers our component, but the Opposition Leader is more than welcome to ask the Treasurer further questions about that. Every agency was able to absorb it from within.

K McNAMARA: I believe this is the best place to ask this in terms of outputs. It is about the removal of the climate change portfolio and ministry and the existence of the office of climate change. Does the CLP government accept the science on anthropogenic climate change and the risks climate change poses to the Northern Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, we do.

K McNAMARA: That accepts that climate change is a risk to people's livelihoods?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We know that climate change is real. It is an issue that we need to be cognisant and mindful of in policy development and our decision-making, so to that extent.

K McNAMARA: Does the CLP government accept that it is a risk to the Territory's economy?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We are conscious of it. Equally, when you talk about risk, there is opportunity as well. I think we are probably coming at it from a slightly different angle, Member for Nightcliff, but we acknowledge that it is something successive governments over many decades have had and will continue to manage through public policy.

K McNAMARA: Can you confirm, has the CLP government axed the office of climate change, or is that still in existence?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That has never been in this agency. You could ask the Environment minister.

K McNAMARA: So, there is no-one under your agency, or any section of the department, that is responsible for overseeing mitigation or response to climate change?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Correct.

K McNAMARA: Why is that, given that you acknowledge the risks?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Because environmental matters are best dealt with by the Environment minister and agency. They are the ones with interfaces across the whole of government, so they are best placed to be leading and advising in that space.

K McNAMARA: Was the decision a previous ministry—there was a minister for Climate Change. Would the decision to remove that have been under your responsibility?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: My understanding is that it was never with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The previous government did have a minister for Climate Change. We do not have a minister for Climate Change as a portfolio title, but that does not mean that climate change is not a responsibility of the Environment minister; that sits with him.

K McNAMARA: Are you aware that the Top End has had its latest monsoon on record and that Mparntwe (Alice Springs) has had its hottest 100 days ever, with nearly three-and-a-half months above average maximum temperatures of 40 degrees?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I knew about the Wet Season. I did not realise about Central Australia.

K McNAMARA: According to the federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, state and Territory governments have the following responsibilities:

- deliver adaptation responses in their area of policy and regulation; this includes service delivery and infrastructure
- provide local regional science and information through collaboration with all governments
- work with the Australian Government to implement national adaptation priorities, monitoring and evaluation arrangements
- encourage climate resilience and adaptive capacity.

Are you meeting these obligations and keeping these considerations through your government's policy approach?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Without speaking for the Environment minister—and I encourage you to ask during that portfolio—there are a number of things that ministers are part of. I imagine—I do not know, because I am not the portfolio minister—the federal government has a lot of ministerial councils that meet as a collective and as a federation on a number of issues. I am sure there would be an Environment ministers meeting that takes place. That would be where I imagine those high-level Australia-wide targets I discussed. I encourage you to speak to the portfolio minister.

K McNAMARA: I will be. I am just aware there is no ministry of Climate Change anymore.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is not exactly true; it is just not called that. There is a minister for Environment, and that comes under it.

K McNAMARA: It comes under that. I also have questions on another topic, but I am happy to be pointed towards an output. I believe there was an output previously that has been removed on the lobbyist register.

Mr CHAIR: If you like, you could pose the question and ask which output it is best suited under.

K McNAMARA: I have a line of questions on the lobbyist register, if that would be appropriate now.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Go for it.

K McNAMARA: There has been a lot of discussion for decades around NT with the issues with lobbyists and issues around perhaps influencing policy decisions. In December 2023 you stated:

Currently in the territory there is no official lobbyist register, of which the community can keep track of how many times government ministers are meeting with lobbyists, and what lobbyists ... are working the Territory.

We see that as a major missing integrity piece in the Labor government.

Despite this, the lobbyist register that your government introduced in February does not include any mechanism for the community to keep track of which ministers' lobbyists are meeting with or how frequently. Do you therefore think this continues to be a major missing integrity piece in the NT?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We are the first government to put in place a lobbyist register. I appreciate it might not be where you want it to be. I know you have been vocal about it, but that is not to take away from the fact that Labor refused to do it and the CLP moved very quickly to introduce that in February this year. There is a public component to it. I believe it is on the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet website. Lobbyists can register themselves. That all gets uploaded, so people can see in real time people who are on the lobbyist register.

K McNAMARA: I understand the website and that they can see who has registered themselves as lobbyists, but they cannot see who is meeting with which ministers and how frequently. Does the government not think that Territorians are entitled to know who may be influencing decisions through having a real functional register that publishes who ministers are meeting with?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a policy position that we took to establish the register how we have. As I said earlier, I appreciate that is not where you would like it to be. We have 15 registrations on that online format. What it does is it gives that transparency component, that opportunity to understand who lobbyists are when meeting with them. I know, and you have been vocal about this, that it does not land where you would have liked it to land, but it is something that we have brought in for the first time as part of a suite of measures.

K McNAMARA: It is not just about where I would like it to land; I was referring to your previous quote where you spoke about having transparency around ministers meeting with lobbyists. That is why I was getting to that question.

Why in this lobbyist register did you decide to only include third-party lobbyists instead of all lobbyists?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We looked at different models around the country. Ultimately, it is about understanding an angle people might be approaching government on. For example, if you are the head of the Chamber of Commerce it is obvious that you are there to represent business. Your interactions with a minister or government are on that basis. It is a member-based organisation, so it has that buy-in, I suppose you could say, as opposed to third parties as defined by our policy.

K McNAMARA: Say it is the head of the Chamber of Commerce, they already know who that is, so is the purpose of the lobbyist register for ministers to know who they are meeting with, hence having third-party lobbyists registered?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, so if someone is being paid to push a particular position it then gives ministers the opportunity to understand that transparently.

K McNAMARA: Okay, but does the government not believe that part of the purpose of a lobbyist register is for the public to know who the ministers are meeting with?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As I said, that is not the policy decision we took.

K McNAMARA: Why did your government not include any enforceable code of conduct or financial penalties for breaches, like there are in other states and territories?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is a breach. You can then be deregistered from the register, so there is a tangible outcome.

K McNAMARA: Yes, but are there no financial penalties?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No.

K McNAMARA: What was the reason for that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is the policy position we took. There are different ways to do it around the country, or not at all. We opted with moving forward with the register that we put together earlier this year.

K McNAMARA: Do you agree that as elected representatives we are mandated to make decisions in the best interests of the public and not just of corporations, business and lobbyists?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of course, we are here to represent Territorians. My team and I wake up every day with the sole focus and drive of making the Territory a better place.

Under eight years of Labor, we all watched the Territory we know and love slip away from us. We have seen crime spiral out of control, our economy flatline and people from long-term generation families pack up and go because they did not see a future for themselves or their children here anymore. That is a devastating outcome for the Territory. It is a beautiful, special and unique place.

Boundless Possible was raised earlier. We feel that under the previous Labor government they were trying to make the Territory something that we are not—almost ashamed to be Territorian. That is something we are working hard to build back. We think we should be proud of being different; it is one of our competitive edges, a distinct advantage, we believe, in what the Territory has to offer. We are doing a lot of work to reposition the Territory and being seen around the country as able to solve a lot of this nation's problems.

We are saying as loudly as we can that the Territory is here—whether it is through onshore gas, our Defence strategic location, mineral resources or whatever else it might. We are small population in an extremely large land mass, but we have an abundance of wealth, richness in unique offerings that are unrivalled anywhere else in this country.

K McNAMARA: To go back to the start of your answer, which answered my question—that we are mandated to make decisions in the best interests of the public. How can Territorians be sure that these decisions that we are making are meant to benefit them when the CLP government has included the transparent element within the lobbyist register and letting them access information on who and when they are accessing ministers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I disagree with you, Member for Nightcliff. This is a huge step forward—something again I said Labor refused to do. This has not happened before. We are proud to have quickly delivered it as part of a range of transparency measures that we increased—whether it be in parliament or elsewhere.

We are moving forward and making sure we are focused on the key areas that Territorians asked us to focus on.

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

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

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2025–2026 that relates to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government question on budget and fiscal strategy?

J DAVIS: Excuse me, Chair, I have a question for the Member for Mulka at 11.3.

Mr CHAIR: We are not there yet. We are just about to go into 11.1, Member for Johnston.

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

Ms UIBO: What has been the cost to taxpayers of executive contract terminations since August 2024?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We will not be able to provide that breakdown, Opposition Leader, due to confidentiality.

Ms UIBO: In terms of the budget and looking at the advice and coordination output for your agency there is obviously a variance in what was advised to the actual budget before us in the budget papers. Is any of that cost then absorbed by the agency as opposed to what we may expect in next year's budget?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Could you try to explain the question again, Opposition Leader?

Ms UIBO: How much has it to cost the taxpayer to terminate chief executive officers since you came to government in August 2024?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is probably better asked of DCDD, Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: Similarly, how many chief executive officers' contracts have been terminated since coming to government in August 2024?

Mr CERCARELLI: There has been one termination of a contract in my time as CMC CEO. In relation to anything beyond that it would be a question best directed to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development.

Ms UIBO: Further to that, did the expense of this one termination of a CEO come out of the department's budget or did it come out of the overall CMC budget?

Mr CERCARELLI: It comes out from the relevant agency as a payment.

Ms UIBO: In terms of the financial cost, Chief Minister, to the Northern Territory government for former Commissioner Murphy's separation in NT Police, including contractual termination payment of legal fees and settlement cost, what were they to the taxpayer?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That question is better asked of DCDD.

Ms UIBO: Let us hope DCDD get onto the Estimates hearing this fortnight. Regarding the legal dispute or mediation process, where is that up to in Police Commissioner Murphy's case?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As I have said, matters around a dollar figure are best for DCDD.

Ms UIBO: Obviously this is an important aspect that Territory taxpayers would like to know, so I will make sure those questions are asked to that agency; hopefully they will be able to provide that information. In the interest of time, I am more than happy to move on to other committee members to make sure we get through some of the outputs.

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

OUTPUT GROUP 11.0 – ADVICE AND COORDINATION

Output 11.1 – Strategic Advice and Coordination

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, can you explain what has been cut here?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, could you give more detail for that question, please?

Ms UIBO: Yes. The revised budget was \$8.6m, and the new budget under the CLP government is \$5m so what has been cut is an estimated \$3.6m from this output.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What that change in funding represents is the expiration of time-limited Commonwealth funding, but negotiations are underway. It is just the way the timing lines up. We would expect that to be negotiated and delivered and topped back up. It has expired now so we had to reflect that in the budget.

Ms UIBO: Are you able to say which of those either policies or grants have been affected under that \$3m decrease?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. It is the Disaster Risk Reduction National Partnership Agreement, the Living Safe Together Intervention Program Expansion Federation Funding Agreement and the Countering Violent Extremism high-risk rehabilitation and reintegration program federal funding agreement.

Ms UIBO: With your indulgence, I note we have a question later in one of the other portfolios for NT Fire and Emergency Services regarding the disaster funds and the enhancing emergency management; would it be better asked in that output?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I am interested in Defence NT. It is an important sector for Australia and the Northern Territory from not only the security perspective but also an economic perspective. It is not only the Australian Defence Force; we are also talking about their allies and so on.

Can you quickly restate what is the role of Defence NT? What achievements or initiatives have they already undertaken, or plan to undertake in the near future, to help advance the benefit of the Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Defence is very important. As part of our five pillars of economic focus for the Northern Territory, Defence is one of them. It represents 9% of the Territory's gross state product, so it is significant.

We believe that this investment comes to the Territory naturally in terms of we are an obvious location to increase Defence spend due to our proximity in the region. What we are trying to establish for Defence NT is a much stronger presence and partnership with the federal government. We believe there is more gains to be made, particularly for local contractors. A lot of work has been done over a bit more than a decade, particularly between Master Builders and successive Northern Territory Governments on breaking down contracts and making sure it is able to be delivered by local providers. We have also had the Marine Rotational Force for 12 years. They are some of the things that are working well but need constant vigilance.

With the Australian Defence Force we have seen some movement in military units, and that is something we are focused on. We believe there should be more boots on the ground as well as greater investment in infrastructure. That continues to be an important advocacy piece for us, as well as showing tangibly why the

Territory is a great place to live. That feeds back into all our other areas of focus, including reducing crime, restoring our lifestyle and those types of issues.

We want to make the most of any additional investment that Defence is making. We want to really position ourselves as being a key partner to our allies. We have a tried and tested partnership and relationship with the United States Marines, and that has been fantastic. Late last year, I think it was about November, the Japanese Defense minister came to Darwin as part of the trilateral meeting. That resulted in a commitment of sorts to have the Japanese Self-Defense Forces rotate through the Territory. We are keen to establish ourselves with our Japanese allied partners as being a fantastic place to train and somewhere that they see value in for their people.

That is a bit of the work we are doing now and making sure that we have the right intelligence to put Territory businesses front and centre. We recently had the Defence Summit. Our team goes out to all the national summits and globally. We have had our people in Hawaii a couple of times since coming to government because the focus for our region is governed out of Hawaii. Plenty of work is being done across the board, but it is a strong focus for us, which is why it is in Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I support the work to get local Defence contracts for local businesses.

What is the budget allocation staffing for Defence NT within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The budget for Defence NT is \$1.9m, and they have 4.6 FTEs.

Mr CHAIR: I have a follow-up question for the Chief Executive Officer. Of the 4.6, do you know how many are veterans who have previously served with the ADF?

Mr CERCARELLI: I understand it is not a requirement to identify specifically, but I believe there are three. We are in the process of trying to recruit, of which having former defence experience is considered part of the skill set that we are looking for and understanding of the industry that we are trying to work with. We do not keep a statistic. You do not have to identify as a former serving veteran. I can only speculate on the information I have.

Mr CHAIR: That is good to hear.

That concludes consideration of Output 11.1.

Output 11.2 – Strategic Police, Reform and Aboriginal Partnerships

Mr CHAIR: We will now move on to Output 11.2, Strategic Policy, Reform and Aboriginal Partnerships. I note that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for Aboriginal Affairs policy and coordination and will respond to questions on this component when he appears before the committee next Tuesday. Are there any questions?

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Chief Minister, you mentioned the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce. Can you give us an idea of what consultation process they are undertaking, who they are talking to and when are we likely to get a report from them?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce was one of our key election commitments alongside the Territory Coordinator, which we also took to the 2020 election, like the Territory Coordinator. What we specifically did with this task force is make sure it was made up of industry representatives. We did not want it to be government-led or controlled; we wanted to give the freedom and the opportunity to the private sector to tell us what it is like being them, and we are embarking on this. This cultural reform I talked about earlier is not just empowering public servants but making sure they are aware and cognisant of how they can make the Territory a better place by making sure we are making those interactions as seamless as possible.

The Approvals Fast Track Taskforce was made up of Mark Garraway as the Chair, Rebecca Bullen, Michael Buckley, Andrew Dalglis, Stuart Kenny, Hermanus Louw, Dan Richards and Tony Smith. They met eight times since their first meeting in November last year. They put together some subcommittees and did various amounts of work. They met with a range of different businesses and industry groups, and they met with many of the CEOs across government because they wanted to better understand where the greatest impact could be made. They have been working hard, and I thank them for the work that they did. It is valuable. As per

their six-month timeframe, they have provided the report to me, and we will be preparing our response to that and then publish it altogether so it will be made public once we have gone through it.

It is fair to say that some of it is tangible things we can do, and some of it is about reframing how we do business—for example, taking more of a risk-based analysis approach rather than a blanket approach to everything. They are things we have to work through. We have not adopted any particular recommendation or point. Some of it is interesting in terms of how we could do things better.

I thank all of them for doing that work. They all got stuck into it. It goes to the Opposition Leader's earlier question regarding reducing approval timeframes by 50%; this is all work that will contribute to that overall aspirational target to reduce timeframes across government.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 11.2.

Output 11.3 – Territory Regional Coordination

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 11.3, Territory Regional Coordination. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: In regard to this output can you specifically explain what falls under Territory regional coordination?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know Mr Leeming is dying to answer this question, so I will not steal all his thunder.

Basically, we want to make sure—I think Mr Cercarelli spoke it to it earlier as well—there are really strong connections across the Northern Territory and that we are very much not a Darwin-centric government. I am many times on the record as saying that places like the Barkly, for example, should be the epicentre of the Northern Territory. Big Rivers—where your electorate is, Opposition Leader—is rich in many attributes that can help drive the Territory forward.

We want to make sure we have that strong coordination across government. Making the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet a leaner agency, how we have moved out many of the components that Labor had back into their rightful home under agencies means that we can have that really clear focus and be supporting our people which is what we want. Locally led ideas, decision-making and engagement on the ground are really important to us.

I pass to Mr Leeming to go into a bit more detail.

Mr LEEMING: The Territory regional coordination area drives policy leadership and reform coordination across government at the regional level. It is a different footprint and a different scale than used to be the case. CMC's regional footprint before the machinery-of-government changes did a lot of operational work. It was responsible for delivering services, like the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, community development and other things.

What we did as part of the machinery-of-government changes was to transfer that operational work to an operational agency in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development where it sits better with their set of operational functions at the regional level, leaving our regional footprint in Chief Minister and Cabinet to really be that strategic coordination, policy leadership and reform coordination. We have a significantly smaller FTE and budget footprint as a result.

It is an important part of the system in translating the Territory-wide policy direction of government around the three pillars of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our lifestyle into what that means at regional level, by consulting and engaging with local stakeholders and using the regional coordination committees to identify the big things that will make a change in those regions and drive accountability across the NT Public Sector and beyond, for delivering on those key initiatives that will make the difference at that regional level.

Ms UIBO: Can you confirm that the regional coordination committees still stand, that they have not been scrapped?

Mr LEEMING: The regional coordination committees certainly still stand. Their terms of reference have been adapted to focus on the strategic coordination driving the change, rather than just information sharing. The terms of reference have been changed to enable going beyond information sharing to making collective decisions across senior people across the NT Public Sector responsible for decisions in that region to identify

issues, solve issues and hold each other to account for implementing them rather than just sharing information. There has been a number of changes to the terms of reference, including to the membership of those regional coordination committees, to give effect to that change, but they remain a key part of the architecture of driving regional coordination.

Ms UIBO: Where would you be able to find the new terms of reference? Where would they be available?

Mr LEEMING: They will be available on the CMC intranet page within government because they are an internal NTPS coordination mechanism.

Ms UIBO: But they also involve stakeholders, you said, so in terms of the stakeholders that engage in that committee, how would they know then what the references are if they have changed?

Mr LEEMING: The new terms of reference to regional coordination committees clarify that the regional coordination committees themselves are only NT public servants, which is how we are able to crash through and identify the actions.

The terms of reference are also clear that the NT public servants in each region, coordinated through the regional coordination committee, are expected to establish bespoke mechanisms in each region to engage with the right set of regional stakeholders so that those conversations happen and so that input comes from regional stakeholders. They are expected to do that at least once every two or three months to convene some kind of group of regional stakeholders to get that regional input.

We have left it up to each region to figure out what the best mechanism is to achieve that and to engage with those stakeholders because the nature of each region drives quite a different set of stakeholder interactions, which means we need bespoke arrangements in each place for the regional coords and its members to formally and informally engage with non-government stakeholders.

Ms UIBO: Can you assure that the regional and executive director roles—which have been quite pertinent in regional service delivery and coordination across the Territory—have not been downgraded?

Mr LEEMING: They have not been downgraded. Two of them were recently advertised and are in the assessment process. One of them is apparently being advertised at the same level that they were previously, despite significantly reduced managerial responsibility. They are at the same level and the majority are currently being advertised or being assessed.

Ms UIBO: There is a significant cut in funding under this output. On page 15 of BP3, it largely states that it relates to the Gove Futures. Have you cut funding to the Gove Futures transition process?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Gove Futures had some time-limited funding which has now come to an end. We will continue with that work. It remains considerable and important work. That will be funded from within.

There was some decrease in Commonwealth funding due to the movement of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to its new home agency and its transfer of funding to the Department of Health.

J DAVIS: I have a question from the Member for Mulka to follow on from that:

‘As noted, this output has been reduced by several million dollars and the notes indicate that it is due to the funding profile for Gove Futures. I am concerned about the Gove Futures reference group because it should comprise all the clan groups of the Gove Peninsula, but right now many clan groups and traditional owners for the region are not part of the discussions and decision-making about the future of Yolngu country.

‘I have raised this issue with the department of Chief Minister in Nhulunbuy previously. My concern is that less money will reduce the capacity to bring in all the Yolngu groups to be part of the decision-making about the future of Yolngu country and future business developments.

‘Can you explain what is going on here with the funding and with the inclusion of all clan groups that are part of the Gove Peninsula?’

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There was that time-limited funding. The work will continue and will be funded from within. That funding expired.

Regarding the Gove Futures reference group, there has been no change to that. It is continuing as it was under the previous government.

Ms UIBO: Is your government still committed to Gove Futures and the transition?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. We are very alive to the fact that the mine is looking to close in the outer years. What will happen moving forward is really important. A lot of work was done by the previous government, and we have continued that work, as it was.

Ms UIBO: In terms of Gove and the East Arnhem peninsula is there an economic vision from the CLP government around this, particularly feeding into the transition work? What would that be?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have made sure we continue the engagement with Rirratjingu, Gumatj and others who started that work under the previous government. Obviously, it needs to be a vision for the region from the people of that region. What do the next steps look like? I have not had the opportunity to head out there yet, but that work has been continuing since coming to government.

Ms UIBO: Does that mean you have not been to Nhulunbuy in the 10 months of being Chief Minister?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is correct.

Ms UIBO: I am sure they will look forward to a visit from you, Chief Minister.

Will there be a specific part of the budget that is purely for Gove Futures? You said around the time limit, the change and the decrease, will there be through your government that commitment in the budget? I know you said from within, but what does that look like as a Gove Futures package?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Gove Futures package under the previous government ended. As per many things, there was no future funding allocated for it outside of the last budget cycle, which means there are many areas across government that faced cliff funding because your government did not put the funding in the budget, presumably to try to stop yourselves from hitting your fake debt ceiling which we have had to abolish.

I think I answered it in an earlier question today that when you are left with a \$10bn-plus debt and a flailing economy, it is difficult to fund things at the levels that you might like to. We know that funding has ended, and the Gove Futures work will continue. It will have to continue under the existing funding arrangements with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Ms UIBO: To put all that in plain, simple English, there will be no specific Gove Futures funding under your government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is not correct. It is funded through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. They will not be given time-limited cliff funding like you gave them.

Ms UIBO: Nothing specifically around futures.

J DAVIS: To clarify, part of that question which I may have missed highlighting is the concern is that right now many clan groups and TOs for the region are not part of the discussion and decision-making. I heard you mention two clan groups. I understand there is 13. Speaking on behalf of this question, I am interested in how you are going to make sure there is inclusion of all clan groups that are part of the Gove Peninsula.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What I am highlighting is we have not changed how that work is happening. I am not aware of exactly who is on it, who has done what before or who will do what going forward. I think that will unfold as things progress. I am merely making the point that there has been no change to that reference group now. If the Member for Mulka believes there should be other people on the reference group, he is more than welcome to put that forward.

J DAVIS: I note that in his question he said that he raised this issue with the department of the Chief Minister in Nhulunbuy previously, so I believe it is an active question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Great.

Ms UIBO: In regard to the redevelopment of Jabiru, is there a specific budget for this under your government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. That is now with Housing, Local Government and Community Development, so you can ask Minister Edgington.

OUTPUT GROUP 12.0 – OFFICE OF THE TERRITORY COORDINATOR
Output 12.1 – Office of the Territory Coordinator

Mr CHAIR: The Committee will now move to Output Group 12, Office of the Territory Coordinator, Output 12.1, Office of the Territory Coordinator. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: How many staff sit in his office?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are 16.9 FTEs.

Ms UIBO: What are their roles composed of?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The work the officers do?

Ms UIBO: Yes. For example, do you have communication engagements officers, manager or general manager?

Mr KNOWLES: The team comprises the Territory Coordinator, the general manager of the office of the Territory Coordinator and a team which sits under the general manager to the 16.9 FTE. We do not have a dedicated allocated comms resources within the team. The team is focused on delivering the functions of the *Territory Coordinator Act*.

Ms UIBO: Would that include project officers, admin officers—is there a mix of those types of positions?

Mr KNOWLES: There are administration officers within the team, and we have different levels of seniority with project experience fulfilling the functions of the *Territory Coordinator Act*.

Ms UIBO: Do you have an organisational chart available for the public to see what those positions are?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Our org charts are internal, but we have 16.9 FTEs, and as the Territory Coordinator said, a range of positions from the Territory Coordinator through to administrative support.

Ms UIBO: To provide a background on the reason for the question, is essentially what the staff makeup is: Territory Coordinator, general manager, senior project managers—plural I assume—and administrative officers. I am just trying to get an idea of what makes up the 16.9 FTEs.

Mr KNOWLES: That is correct. There are some resources allocated within the team who carry out some functions on energy security within the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, that is helpful. How many projects in your office are currently investigating the possible designation of a significant project or program of works?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people are working on those?

Ms UIBO: No. How many projects of works are currently afoot in the Territory Coordinator office?

Mr KNOWLES: As of today, there has been no designation of any significant projects, Territory development areas or programs of work. The focus now is on identifying those potential designations and when we are in a position to add value to those investments and grow the economy.

Ms UIBO: That leads to some of my other questions, but I want to put them on the record. Are there any Territory development areas that have been declared?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. Reaffirming what Mr Knowles has said, none of the three have been finalised yet. The team is working hard to pull together all the structures and regulatory frameworks of the legislation and doing all the important investigations.

I remind everyone that we always wanted this to be a way to empower the public service to be doing their important work as well. Whilst the Territory Coordinator has a range of powers, if for example there was to be a Territory development area, we want agencies taking ownership of their decision-making processes on

whatever projects they might be working on. Their work is continuing, but we are also seeing great engagement from the other agencies which are doing their important work.

Ms UIBO: Has the Territory Coordinator used or issued any step-in notices to date?

Mr KNOWLES: No. Just to round that out, to date, the Territory Coordinator has not used any of those powers officially.

K McNAMARA: This follows on from that. to clarify, does that mean the Territory Coordinator or the office has not issued any ministerial notices under the *Territory Coordinator Act*?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Correct.

K McNAMARA: Once they are, will ministerial notices under the Act be published on the website? If so, how soon after signing a ministerial notice will it be published there?

Mr KNOWLES: There is robust transparency and reporting requirements within the *Territory Coordinator Act*. Notices and requests that are directed by the coordinator will be published and publicly available. There are also reporting requirements whereby the minister for the Territory Coordinator will table reports in parliament. In addition, the Territory Coordinator must maintain a register of all these notices and requests as well, which is also publicly available.

The timeframe for making the report tabled in parliament is the next sitting day and for it to be publicly available within five days after the decision.

K McNAMARA: The next question is probably to the Chief Minister. In regard to the submissions, out of more than 300 submissions to the government regarding the Territory Coordinator Bill, only two were in favour of it. The vast majority disagreed that the Bill was in the public's best interests. In what ways were the submissions in opposition to the Bill considered by the government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There was an extensive consultation process and period for the Territory Coordinator legislation. Not only was it an election commitment of the CLP at the 2020 election, but it was again at the 2024 election. We released the consultation paper in early October, which was then released publicly. We then undertook the entire process with the Bill and had the scrutiny committee. It was about four months of public engagement on this.

It was a policy decision of government that we took to the election. We were not asking people, 'Do you like the Territory Coordinator, and do you want one?' That is not what we asked. We were doing it. The question was, have we hit the right point to make it effective? Part of that work included going around the country looking at other like models and making sure ours was a step ahead and above—sharper, stronger better—so we could have that competitive edge, because that is what we are looking for.

When we go back to our 2025–2028 Rebuilding the Economy strategy, number one is about making the Territory the best place to do business. The Territory Coordinator is part of that. There were consultation opportunities in writing, a number of public forums were held and a number of ways for people to get involved. Plenty of people would have loved to see the legislation never get through parliament—including you, Member for Nightcliff—but that was not the proposition we were putting to the community. Territorians elected us on this platform, so we were delivering it. It was a question of how we could make it the best piece of legislation that drives the best possible economic outcomes for Territorians.

K McNAMARA: Nonetheless, over 300 and only two in favour; what is the point of public consultation if the government is unwilling to take on board the public feedback from those that were opposed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have answered that question, and you misunderstand the process. I think there were about 559 written submissions received, 89 stakeholder meetings and six community information sessions. Plenty of people wanted to become directly involved with it, but many more just wanted us to get on with the job. The people who were engaged or interested in the process got involved. Everyone else was going on with their lives and expecting us to get on with the job that they put us in the seat to deliver on.

I stand by the consultation; it is important. Not everyone gets the outcome they want in their submission, but that does not make the process not important. It gave everyone an opportunity to have their say and be heard. It gave a lot of public ventilation of the different issues about it. Ultimately it was a strengthening of

the act. There were a couple of changes that made it better. That came out of the consultation which is a good thing.

K McNAMARA: I have some questions regarding the appointment of Mr Knowles. The government indicated that a formal assessment process was undertaken as part of that recruitment. What did this process consist of?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, I will pass you onto Mr Cercarelli.

Mr CERCARELLI: An advisory group was established of members of the public service who undertook a review of Mr Knowles against the Act and the requirements within the act. That was provided in relation to his appointment. Part of that consideration was meeting the requirements of the act.

K McNAMARA: How many other candidates were part of this process?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: None. I appointed Mr Knowles as the interim Territory Coordinator in November last year. He has overseen and supported that entire consultation process. Obviously, the legislation then passed, and it was important to do another process to ensure that Mr Knowles met the compliance within the Act and the suitability for the role, which has taken place. That has been authorised by the Administrator and gazetted.

K McNAMARA: During that process, was there at any point the committee aware that Mr Knowles was previously investigated by NT Animal Welfare for animal neglect?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I have already answered that question. I was not aware. I will let Mr Cercarelli answer that.

Mr CERCARELLI: No, the committee was not aware.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: However, there has been much public commentary on this. Mr Knowles has answered all of those questions and is remorseful for what took place 10 years ago.

K McNAMARA: What steps have been taken to ensure that the Territory Coordinator decision-making on mining and energy projects is not inappropriately influenced by Mr Knowles' relationships in previous roles in the industry?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The legislation is rigorous. Obviously, we sat in parliament until—I think it was past 1 am on the day we debated the Bill. There are many checks and balances to safeguard publishing requirements, tabling in parliament, depending on what triggers are pulled at what time and which powers are being used under the act.

We need to have a sharp eye on economic growth and development. That is why we created the primary principle as part of the act; to give that economic development a clear focus to make sure we have, as a government, a core group of people focused on this issue.

That is why it sits in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet as well. We have leaned out that agency to focus on whole-of-government coordination and making sure that every agency is striving to achieve our targets. That requires a lot more cross-agency coordination because we are so focused on those three key areas and we want everyone playing their part—equally, the role of the Territory Coordinator.

As we answered the Opposition Leader, none of the powers have had to be used yet and the team continues to work through what the next steps look like. We are excited and looking forward to it. I thank all the other agencies which have key roles in decision-making and approval processes. They have stepped up and shown great leadership, and that is exactly what we want to see.

Mr CHAIR: I have a follow-on question on that, then we will come back to the Member for Nightcliff.

Mr Knowles was talking about the idea of what the Chief Minister has just put forward. Have you been contacted by individuals, businesses or corporations with concerns about their interactions with government? Have you seen a common thread with that? Ultimately, what is your assessment of the reception that you have had from departments?

Mr KNOWLES: Yes, there has been a lot of interest by industry, business and other people who are passionate about the Territory about what the opportunity of the Territory Coordinator is. There has been an

element of managing some expectations through this process because I am getting a range of different people who have experienced different challenges and different experiences within government departments, but really the focus of the Territory Coordinator and the office is on those opportunities that will make a difference economically to the Territory in terms of population growth, revenue and those sorts of things.

Some of that, I think I could call it frustration, has been around that uncertainty, particularly on timeframes and the approvals processes. The response has been very welcoming of having an opportunity to provide certainty around timeframes, approvals processes and the ability to see the end of that approvals timeframe to get return on that investment coming back.

To the Chief Minister's point, the response from the government agencies has been fantastic. I do not see this working unless it is in a collaborative fashion. I also want to as best possible be proactive as opposed to reactive in how we implement the *Territory Coordinator Act*. Where we can work together to identify those opportunities down the track and find that pathway through is really a space that we are working on.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: This follows on from the Chair's question. What is your actual engagement process or plan to discover what these potential projects of significance are? Are you looking for people to come to you or do you go and market that directly? Do you go to the private sector, or do they come to you? Do government agencies feed you information, or is it a combination of everything?

Mr KNOWLES: It has been a mixture of all of the above. The entity Investment Territory that existed before the creation of the Office of the Territory Coordinator did a lot of work on investment opportunities. I have met I think just about every one of those opportunities and engaged in that regard.

The Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations do investment attraction work. I am working closely with that agency so that when they are identifying those opportunities they can use the Territory Coordinator as another marketable statement of the Territory's capabilities. I am more than happy to work with the department to engage in that process.

Also, there has been quite a bit of engagement in other jurisdictions. I have been working with the Queensland Coordinator-General. The South Australian Government is implementing their own version of the Coordinator-General, and Western Australia as well. When we are looking at the cross-border opportunities that could benefit the Territory, obviously I have an interest in the Territory, but if there is a cross-border opportunity we do not want to see the project get to the border and then stop because the two jurisdictions are not aligned. That is providing other opportunities for engagement with investors in those jurisdictions as well.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: In terms of the type of projects, do they seem to align with the critical industry sectors that the government is looking to progress in terms of agriculture, energy, Defence, tourism et cetera?

Mr KNOWLES: Absolutely, the five key sectors, including mining, energy, tourism, Defence and agriculture. There have been conversation in each of those sectors that I have been engaged in and looking at those opportunities, for sure.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Going back to the budget allocation, we went from a revised budget of \$15.603m to \$6.382m for 2025–26. Why have we gone from \$15m down to \$6m?

Mr CERCARELLI: That is a legacy issue to do with energy security and gas. It sat in the Investment Territory portfolio. As a result of the MOG it is administrative catch-up. It will be adjusted obviously, as you can see from the budget figures moving forward.

J DAVIS: Can I just clarify in relation to that, as I had a quick question about that too, noting that footnote 2 describes what happened. Just to clarify, that gas purchase came out of the Territory Coordinator budget last year, but will not be ongoing; is that correct?

Mr CERCARELLI: It was prior to MOG. It was budgeted in Investment Territory. Investment Territory no longer exists. It has come to the Office of the Territory Coordinator. That budget process of transitioning that funding out to a relevant area has not occurred but will occur as of 1 July.

J DAVIS: So, the purchase of gas is not part of the Territory Coordinator's remit.

Mr CERCARELLI: No.

K McNAMARA: I will finish my line of questioning from earlier around recruitment of Mr Knowles. Mr Knowles was previously a managing director at Scyne Advisory. Scyne was the public sector arm that was spun off from disgraced consultancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers after the 2023 tax scandal where PwC leaked sensitive tax information to clients. Despite being spun off Scyne Advisory have retained many of the same partners and employees. PwC has since been banned from taking government contracts; however, Scyne has picked up over \$12m in government work.

Given the enormous taxpayer expense of this scandal, was Mr Knowles link to that disgraced consultancy firm scrutinised during the recruitment process?

Mr CHAIR: I remind everybody of Standing Order 233: Exercise of Freedom of Speech. We will continue with the question, but please, everyone on the committee, just be mindful of when people cannot respond.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Whatever your thoughts are about PwC that is a matter for you, Member for Nightcliff. What is your actual question for me?

K McNAMARA: Because that scandal had an enormous cost to taxpayers, that is how it is relevant to the budget. Was Mr Knowles relationship and link to the advisory into that tax firm scrutinised during the process of recruitment?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: He worked there for a short period of time as Scyne. It has nothing to do with whatever happened prior to that.

K McNAMARA: Okay, but it was a spun-off part of PwC.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As I said, whatever your thoughts are about PwC, that is a matter for you. We picked the best person for the job.

J DAVIS: In terms of picking the best person for the job, and you have explained the process, can you tell us who recommended Mr Knowles for the job or how you became aware of him being appropriate for that position?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, Mr Knowles is well known. He sat on the Chamber of Commerce board, for example. He spent a very long time at INPEX, and prior to that he was in government doing the project work. A number of people recommended him to me. He suits the role perfectly because he has walked in both of those worlds, the private and public sector. As Mr Knowles said earlier in answer to another question, it is about that collaboration that is going to make this work.

Despite the fact there is much misinformation about what the Territory Coordinator can or might do—there is a lot of fearmongering and fear campaign around the role—what we have in Mr Knowles is a very steady hand. We are already seeing across government a nice change in culture and that ownership that Mr Cercarelli is driving as well. That ownership and decision-making by the public service is great, so the Territory Coordinator stands ready to do what is required in terms of Territory development areas and significant projects, but a lot of those powers would only come in if the agencies were not doing what they needed to be doing. We can see that agencies are doing what they need to be doing.

J DAVIS: It sounds like there was a broad range of people who you said recommended.

You said you have drawn on rigorous legislation in terms of the appointment. I note that in the draft Bill section 79 referred to eligibility for appointment. That was then removed. Can you explain why?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, in the original version it was drafted a but more like what you might see for an integrity commissioner-type function. As a result of the consultation and when we looked around the country—Mr Knowles mentioned WA, South Australia is fairly advanced with its; Queensland has obviously had its for a long time. It was not reflected to that degree anywhere else. That was then put out and was able to be consulted on as part of that full, transparent and open consultation process.

J DAVIS: The removal of, for example, maybe a reportable donation to a political party or an associated entity of a political party—I am asking this because it is an issue of concern that people have raised with me. You said integrity; obviously this is also a position of integrity, I would imagine.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not an integrity function ...

J DAVIS: I understand the difference, thank you, Chief Minister, but it is a position which people are looking to hold with integrity. To note that has been removed, you have given your rationale why.

K McNAMARA: Will the Office of the Territory Coordinator rule out any outsourcing to private consultancies?

Mr CHAIR: It is a bit hypothetical. Chief Minister, if you are happy to answer it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, we cannot rule it out.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 12.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 13.0 – GOVERNMENT SUPPORT
Output 13.1 – Support to Ministers and Leader of the Opposition

Mr CHAIR: We will now proceed to Output Group 13.0, Government Support, Output 13.1, Support to Ministers and Leader of the Opposition. Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Can you provide a full breakdown of ministerial staff salaries by classification level, including how many staff are employed at each level, and their total cost to the Northern Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is all part of the answers to the Written Questions you received yesterday. I can take it on notice again if you would like?

Ms UIBO: Yes. I confirm that you may have sent them at 5 pm yesterday but they were not received by the Opposition Leader's office until 9.15 this morning. Yes, please take it on notice, Mr Chair.

Question on Notice No 1.15

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

Ms UIBO: Can you provide a full breakdown of ministerial staff salaries by classification level, including how many staff are employed at each level, and their total cost to the Northern Territory?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.15.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Can you give me the staffing levels and cost provided to the Leader of the Opposition's office?

Ms UIBO: Not enough, I can assure you of that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have been there.

I would have to take that on notice.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Could I have it as a question on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 1.16

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

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Can you provide the staffing and costs provided to the Leader of the Opposition's office?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I accept the question.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.16.

J DAVIS: Are you aware of the support that is provided to crossbench members in other jurisdictions, noting that in the Territory it is zero?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, I am aware of this legacy issue. I have been around long enough to know that crossbenchers always want plenty of resources. What they forget is they ran as an Independent and they are, therefore, an Independent. The Legislative Assembly, I believe, offers research support—and other bits and pieces every day—with a senior researcher and a librarian to help support you. I take your point.

J DAVIS: I note that I ran as a representative of the community, like every other person in the Chamber.

Mr CHAIR: We will bring it back to direct questions.

K McNAMARA: The researcher position has been vacant, so we have not had ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Department of the Legislative Assembly is on at the end of the fortnight, so ask them as many questions as you like.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 13.1.

**Output 13.2 – Support to the Administrator
Output 13.3 – Government Services**

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 13.

I note that Output Group 14, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, is the responsibility of the Minister for Public Service, and questions relating to this output group will be considered when Minister Hersey appears before the committee next Monday, 16 June 2025.

**OUTPUT GROUP 15.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 15.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 15.2 – Shared Services Received
Output 15.3 – Shared Services Provided**

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of all outputs relating to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. On behalf of the committee, I thank the departmental officers for attending.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thank all the officials who are with me today and all the people who have been working very hard to prepare all the material required. It has been a real privilege and honour to work with the CMC team, and I am looking forward to the future.

Mr CHAIR: The committee will break for seven minutes and recommence at 2.55 pm.

The committee suspended.

POLICE

NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE FORCE

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you as Minister for Police to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Northern Territory Police Force.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am pleased to introduce the officials joining me at the Estimates hearing. I have with me Mr Martin Dole PM, the Acting Commissioner of Police; Mr Matt Hollamby APM, Acting Deputy Commissioner; Ms Emma O’Leary, Chief Financial Officer; and Ms Lisa Wilson, Acting Deputy Chief

Executive Officer. I will introduce other senior officials as required. We have our fantastic team ready to go if required.

I will start by thanking Acting Commissioner Martin Dole for the work he has done since stepping into the role of commissioner in March this year. Policing is never without its challenges. I appreciate the professionalism he has displayed during this time and that of his entire team.

We were elected on a promise to reduce crime. Our number one priority has been that since coming to government. It is about community safety and supporting our police.

Budget 2025–26 is about restoring confidence for Territorians and the Northern Territory Police Force which is at the forefront of ensuring safety, security and stability for all Territorians.

As we discuss Budget 2025–26, I want to reaffirm our commitment to reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our unique Territory lifestyle, objectives that are deeply embedded in the work that we do every single day.

The Northern Territory Police Force operates across an expansive jurisdiction of approximately 1.42 million square kilometres, making it one of the largest policing areas in Australia. This vast territory includes some of the most remote and isolated communities requiring specialised policing strategies to ensure effective law enforcement and community safety no matter where you live.

The Northern Territory Police Force maintains a strong operational footprint, servicing 49 police stations and 15 police posts, strategically positioned across the Northern Territory as well as a multi-jurisdictional facility in Warakurna on the Northern Territory and Western Australian border where one officer is stationed to collaborate with the WA police in cross-border law enforcement efforts. This partnership enhances policing capabilities in remote areas, ensuring coordinated responses to crime and community needs.

In our year of action, certainty and security this budget represents an historic investment in law enforcement, with a record \$1.5bn allocated to law and order. This includes \$608m specifically for the police, which is an increase of \$36m on the previous years. This funding is not just about the numbers. It is about strengthening our front line, supporting our hardworking police, expanding our capabilities and delivering tangible results that will make the Northern Territory safer, which is a mandate we took to the election and have every intention of delivering to the people of the Northern Territory.

Public safety is the foundation of a strong community. This budget ensures that the Northern Territory Police Force has the resources necessary to combat crime effectively and protect communities.

Key measures of the budget include:

- \$95m to continue the police funding package, ensuring operational stability
- \$10.2m for the remote policing implementation plan, reinforcing law enforcement presence in remote communities
- \$4.7m for airwing police aircraft replacement and leasing, enhancing our rapid response capabilities
- \$3.5m for school-based policing, fostering early intervention and youth engagement
- \$3m for the Police, Fire and Emergency Services wellbeing strategy, supporting mental health and resilience
- \$1.3m for increased CCTV monitoring staff, improving surveillance and crime prevention
- \$1m per year for the Police banned drinker order support team, tackling alcohol-related offending.

Since coming to office, 135 new police officers have joined the ranks, with a further 20 due to commence before the end of this year. These investments will increase police visibility, improve response times and enhance crime prevention strategies, ensuring that every Territorian feels safe in their community.

Beyond immediate policing efforts, this budget also delivers:

- \$186m over four years for major police infrastructure projects, including \$143.5m for remote police infrastructure and housing upgrades, ensuring that officers stationed in remote areas have the facilities that they need
- \$35.7m to construct a new multipurpose police complex in Maningrida, strengthening the law enforcement presence in that region
- \$6.6m for upgrades to the joint emergency services communication centre, improving coordination and emergency response capability.

These investments modernise our policing infrastructure ensuring that officers have the best possible resources to serve and protect Territorians.

My government has also introduced stronger policing powers to reduce crime and improve community safety. These reforms include the strongest bail laws in Australia and removing detention as a last resort for youth offenders; mandatory electronic monitoring for repeat offenders ensuring accountability; new offences for ram raids, post-and-boast and nuisance public drinking; mandatory minimum sentences for assaults on frontline workers; and expanded wandering powers under Declan's law, enabling police to detect and prevent knife crime more easily.

These legislative changes empower our officers to act decisively, ensuring that criminal behaviour is met with swift and effective consequences. These are consequences that we are realising a generation has never seen under the previous government. The changes we have made has led to more than 550 people off the streets and in prison, because the community expects that those who wish to cause harm on others will face a consequence.

This budget is more than just an allocation of funds; it is a strategic investment in the safety, security and resilience of the Northern Territory. By strengthening our police force, expanding infrastructure and enhancing legislative powers, we are ensuring that law enforcement remains a cornerstone of our community's wellbeing.

Mr Chair, members of the committee and colleagues, this budget reflects our unwavering commitment to protecting Territorians, supporting our police and ensuring that the Northern Territory remains a place where people can live safely and businesses can thrive. Ensuring public safety is fundamental to fostering a stable and prosperous business environment, making the Northern Territory a more attractive place for investment. A safe and secure jurisdiction also instils confidence in businesses and invests in industries looking to expand or establish operations here.

By supporting and strengthening law enforcement, crime prevention measures and emergency response capabilities, we can create an environment that will be encouraging people to invest here across our key focus sectors of tourism, agriculture, Defence, mining and gas. We know that investors seek locations where their assets, workforce and their customers can be protected and safe. Our strong commitment to public safety enhances that economic resilience, it reduces disruptions and promotes long-term business and population growth.

With a well-supported police force maintaining law and order, the Northern Territory stands out as a secure and thriving destination for new opportunities and sustainable investment.

This year has also presented significant challenges for the Northern Territory Police Force through ICAC investigation, Operation Apollo, which raised serious concerns of conflicts of interests involving former Police Commissioner Mr Murphy. These concerns ultimately resulted in the commissioner's termination and prompted the Northern Territory Police Association to call for an independent review into all senior executive appointments within the force. Our government responded ,appointing Hon Justice Alan Blow AO to lead a review aimed at restoring integrity, internal confidence and public trust in police leadership. The outcome of that review is expected in the coming months. At the conclusion of it there will be a formal recruitment process for a new Police Commissioner.

In closing I take the opportunity to put on the record our appreciation to all the men and women of the Northern Territory Police Force who pull on that blue uniform every day. To those who not only put on the uniform but all the important staff we have behind the scenes and all the families who support out officers and our staff to go out and do what they do every single day, thank you for your unwavering commitment to protecting our communities and ensuring the safety of all Territorians. Whether serving in our cities or remote areas, your resilience and professionalism are invaluable.

Policing is demanding, and we recognise the sacrifices our police make every day. That is why our government stands firmly behind our police delivering record investments in the policing budget and making sure they have the support and powers they need to do their job. Your dedication does not go unnoticed, and your service does make a difference.

I am now happy to take questions.

Mr CHAIR: As the Member for Drysdale, I thank you and everyone in the Northern Territory Police Force for the work you do.

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, I echo your words, and the Chief Minister's in acknowledging the hard work of our police officers. It is something we often agree with each other on, that our police are out there day-in and day-out, working hard to protect, serve and keep our community safe. We thank them for that, from the Top End to the Central Desert to the east and west Northern Territory borders. Thank you to our men and women in blue and the supporting staff.

Chief Minister, you made a firm commitment to Territorians that you would fix crime. That is one of the three key areas you often talk about, and you promised to restore law and order. It is becoming increasingly clear that only after the fact do you focus on crime rather than the prevention. What is actually making a difference is preventing crime in the first place.

In the seven months of your government, we have seen serious assaults go up by more than 11%—that is an increase of 553 assault cases. Sexual offences have gone up almost 20%—that is an increase of 41 assaults against an adult. Total offences against the person have gone up 7.4%, an increase of 550 cases. Total property offences are up by 4.5%, an increase of 527 cases.

You often say the crime stats are only one measure, which is ironic because when you were in opposition you said otherwise. It is a very important measure, and another important measure that Territorians are talking about in relation to crime—many people I speak to are saying that crime is no better or getting worse under your CLP government. You can, of course, blame Labor all you like, but the reality is, Chief Minister, you have now been in power for 10 months with your government. Territorians want to know when you will actually meet your commitments. When can Territorians expect you to deliver on this key commitment you made to Territorians for their safety?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is almost laughable that you would expect me to fix your government's mess—which took eight years to create—in 10 short months. Our government has shown, in very stark contrast to the government you belonged to and were the Attorney-General of, an absolute commitment to drive down rates of crime.

We have delivered on our commitment to quickly pass legislation through parliament. We have given police a wide range of new and additional powers that they did not have before and which they had been asking for, powers that we heard about from the front line that would make their job better and our community safer. I mentioned in the opening statement that there is an increase of 550 people in prison since we came to government, and we have built those beds, which is a huge project and legacy of Labor leaving behind a totally unfit-for-purpose Corrections system that could not take the demand.

We continue to do that work. I have always been very clear that crime statistics are one measure, and they are important. Now that we have had a significant enough period of SerPro, we can compare apples with apples. How people feel is most important. Crime statistics are one thing, and they are patchy—I have been open about that, and they are available for people to see. When we look at comparing the December 2023 to March 2024, then December 2024 to March 2025, we are seeing some good outcomes when it comes to offences against property, with an 11% decrease there and a 4% decrease in victim-based offences. Burglary is down significantly at 30%. Theft is down 16.8%.

We have some good data coming through, but it is a bit patchy. When you compare last month on the previous year, assaults were still higher than we want them to be, but property crime was down across the Territory, with the exception of Tennant Creek. We continue to work hard on this. It is also about increasing our police numbers. We have seen 135 graduate in the last 10 months, and 44 on Friday. It is fantastic to see all those new constables hitting the ground running.

There is lots of fantastic work being done. On top of that, that is what we call the pointy end, but there is all the work that must be done to stop young people in particular from turning to a life of crime in the first place.

Significant areas of reform that we have already delivered on—I mentioned this earlier in Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet in regard to family responsibility agreements, the Circuit Breaker Program, school attendance officers, holding parents accountable.

We have been doing a lot of work with the federal government, and we have an officer-level working group which is a result of many back-and-forth conversations with Senator McCarthy, the Member for Lingiari and the relevant federal ministers about what changes could be made at an administrative level.

We had a quick win on was the NT CASA exemption. The federal government provided really quick changes to CASA exemptions so that we could better utilise the drone in Alice Springs. When you are out on the ground in Alice, the coppers down there love that drone. It has been a really terrific tool they use on the top of Billy Goat Hill.

We are also working through that expansion of referral pathways to income management. That has been a bit of a work in progress, but we are starting to get some really good work there. Both levels of government have been working well together. We are even getting a small amount of traction on whether or not there could be a trial or some sort of pilot of aligning Centrelink payments with alcohol-free days in Alice Springs. That is really early days, but I am acknowledging the collaborative way the federal government is working with us on some of these issues.

There is plenty of work being done in that root causes space, and probably some of the most significant of that is getting kids into school. To quote your former Chief Minister, 'When kids are in school they are not committing crimes'. That is certainly what we want to see. When we have some of the most hideously low attendance rates for schools, we have to be throwing everything at giving these kids a future.

Ms UIBO: Do you agree with Acting Commissioner Mr Dole, who said on 15 April, 'You can't arrest your way out of this problem, and it is clear and evidenced by what we are seeing across the Territory right now'?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can arrest people who do the wrong thing. That is what our men and women in blue do every day, and they do it very well. What you cannot do is stop crime from happening in the first place. That is where that early intervention work is much greater.

We talked a lot in the previous session about the whole-of-government coordination of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, having a much tighter focus and having that agency really bringing other agencies together to be stepping up and doing their part. Under the previous government—I talked about this a lot from opposition—everything was just being dumped on the police. They are the last line of defence for a lazy government that does not want to hold other agencies accountable and do the hard work. They just pour it all onto our police who cannot say no.

We recognise that acutely, and that is not what our police are there for. I often say on radio—you would have heard me—that police are there to catch the bad guys. That is what police should be doing. Children and Families are there to make sure children are safe, families are supported and parents are held accountable. Education is there to make sure kids are going to school. There are a number of other things that we have stood up to have that greater agency accountability, and everyone is really welcoming that.

As I said earlier, because we are putting more decision-making and ownership back in the hands of public servants in their respective fields, they are able to make that on-the-ground decision-making. The way we have changed the regional coordination committees also allows for much more frank and fearless discussion and accountability within each other around what is or is not working and what we need to do to change.

Ms UIBO: Total offences against the person have jumped, as I said earlier, by 550 cases in the first seven months of your government and your leadership, which is an increase of 7.4%. Property offences are up by over 500, or 4.5%. How do you justify this surge of crime under your leadership?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not know how you are cherry-picking your data, to use a quote. It really depends how you are cutting up the numbers. When I look at offences against the person, when you compare December 2023 to March 2024 with December 2024 to March 2025, there is an 8.9% increase, which is 369 offences. I do not know where your 500 is coming from.

As I said, we have to keep working on this. This is an unprecedented erosion of accountability. There are young people who were five or six years old when Labor came to government and have never known accountability or consequences. Their parents have never been held accountable. You have an entire generation of young people who are having a shock to the system because, all of a sudden, we have come

in and said, 'No, there needs to be appropriate measures. Young people need to be safe above everything else. They need to have access to education. Their parents need to be held accountable. As they get older if there is offending, then we need to be holding the young person and their parents accountable for that as well.'

We have seen a significant uptake in family responsibility agreements which, at this point, are not enforceable because the previous Labor government made them not enforceable. We are doing the legislative work to address that. I note that the Member for Lingiari wrote to me pretty soon after coming to government—I cannot remember the exact month—echoing that same point that family responsibility agreements need and should be enforceable. I agree with her wholeheartedly on that.

Ten months in some ways is a long time, in the sense that we have achieved a lot. However, in order to unwind the mess of a lack of consequences and accountability over nearly a decade is huge. If you zoom out more broadly, Labor was in power for 19 out of the last 22 years. It is a significant period of time where there has not been a focus on our police and law and order.

By me holding the Police portfolio as the Chief Minister is something that has not been done in a long time. It sends a clear message, not just to our police but to all of the public service, that this is important.

We talked about restructuring government agencies with the machinery of government changes et cetera. Law and order and reducing crime is not just the sole remit of police. As I said, they are at the pointy end dealing with the offending. It is a responsibility of multiple agencies.

We have a firm focus on those three core things because, as I said in my opening statement, we want to rebuild our economy and for people to enjoy their beautiful lifestyle. If people do not feel safe, neither of those things can come true. We have to work hard if we want tourists to come back. We have to restore the reputation of somewhere as beautiful and amazing as Alice Springs, which has hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons in the last few years. It is driving people away and that is removing opportunities for people in Central Australia.

There is a lot of work to do; we are not shying away from it. Later this year, there will be reform for the Banned Drinker Register, mandatory alcohol treatment—there is a range of things still to come.

Ms UIBO: On Alice Springs, home break-ins are up by 23%, property damage is up by 32%, sexual offences are up by 34%, robberies are up to nearly 40%. You have probably barely been there this year since February, I believe, Chief Minister. The community in Central Australia is crying out for leadership. What is your plan to address the surge of crime in Alice Springs? When will you be there next?

Mr CHAIR: Before the Chief Minister answers, under Standing Order 109, I remind the committee about insults.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Again, Opposition Leader, it is difficult to engage meaningful with you. You are not letting us know where you are picking your numbers from, but ...

Ms UIBO: To clarify, the first seven months of your tenure in government is where we have added all of the numbers up and the percentage. The first seven months of the CLP government is where those numbers go in each month onto the dataset. It has been added up; that is where we are getting it from.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What are you comparing it to? You are just adding it up?

Ms UIBO: We are comparing it to the last seven months of the former Labor government.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You will not be able to do that. You should know that because it was your government that brought in SerPro. SerPro started from November. Yes, November 2023. I know John's here, but it changes how it is calculated so you cannot really compare prior to that point.

Ms UIBO: Then it would have been 12 months after—like you said, comparing apples to apples—so November 2024 would have been the first data comparison since SerPro was brought in. Obviously, we are well and truly past that point now. In regard to the question about Alice Springs, is there a plan to support the community in Alice Springs who have experienced a surge in crime in the Central Australia region?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will answer your question this way: when we compare December 2023 to March 2024 with December 2024 to March 2025, which is a traditionally a time of high incidence of crime in Alice Springs, we are seeing for total offences a decrease of 8.7%, which is a decrease in 253 offences.

I might pass to the acting commissioner, because he is based in Alice Springs and has firsthand knowledge of how crime is tracking there. As I said, it is patchy and not perfect, but I do not accept the doom and gloom that you are painting Alice Springs out to be.

Mr DOLE: In addition to that, incident type in Alice Springs—we talk about SerPro data, which is the record of offences. Incident types that are rung up to the police are recorded by us in Alice Springs, and there has been a decrease in incidents and contacts to police in Alice Springs over the reporting period as well. It is not just offence data you can use; you can also use reported incidence to police, and there has been a decrease over that period. I can get those figures on incident data for you, if you would like.

Ms UIBO: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 1.17

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

Ms UIBO: Will the government please provide the incident data for Alice Springs?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.17.

Ms UIBO: Is there a specific plan for Alice Springs to reduce crime?

Mr DOLE: Commander Gray-Spence, who is in charge of Alice Springs, has been embedded in Alice Springs for over two years now. He continues to work across the government to target the drivers of crime in Alice Springs. There will be an effective Summer in Central Australia plan again leading into this summer period. Planning is already underway to commence that work.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, moving to my hometown of Katherine where assaults went up by 12%, serious harm offences jumped by 40% and crimes against the person were at a 16-month high. When was the last time you visited Katherine, and can you tell the people of Katherine what the plan is to prevent crime and the surge the town is experiencing currently?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will actually be in Katherine tomorrow. I am looking forward to it. If I go to the December 2023 to March 2024 numbers compared with December 2024 to March 2025, there has been a 1.4% decrease in all crime types, which is 12 offences. You can see that those small numbers make a big shift, but it is not a small number when you are the victim. It is significant.

Recently there has been a lot of media attention and public commentary about Katherine. We have had a strong police response there which has resulted in hundreds of banned drinker orders being issued and proactive policing.

I asked whole of government to take a look at what might be driving some of—I do not like to call them spikes in crime, but sometimes there tends to be a bit more activity than at other times. I think there were a number of things happening in Katherine over a reasonably short period of time in terms of football, funerals and some royalty payments, which may or may not have contributed at that period.

Over the school holiday period we stood up Operation Oxley, which that ran from November. We had additional resources from Darwin go to Katherine, and from the last two squads we have sent officers to Katherine, which is terrific. I know the Katherine team was looking forward to having that increased operational capability.

Ms UIBO: How many graduating squad members went to Katherine in the last two graduations?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will grab that for you. Some of the stats for Operation Oxley—during that ten-week period, the team did a great job. There were 1,432 reassurance patrols, more than 100 licenced premises inspectors, 1,094 litres of alcohol seized and destroyed, 3,258 traffic apprehensions, 35 random breath testing stations with 3,248 roadside breath tests conducted, 351 arrests made with a further 58 individuals dealt with by summons or notice to appear. It was significant.

Ms UIBO: What was the timeframe for that operation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That was ten weeks from November—it ended around the end of January. We do not have the information on us, but we can have it for you and take that on notice about the number of police.

Question on Notice No 1.18

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

Ms UIBO: Can you please identify the number of graduate police officers from the last two squad graduations who have been sent to Katherine?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I sure do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.18.

Ms UIBO: Since coming to office there have been 4,481 domestic violence-related assaults, 428 more than the previous seven months—that is an increase of nearly 11%. As you said, any small increase or large increase to any victim is a huge increase. In Darwin domestic violence assaults are up by nearly 23%. In Katherine, Tennant Creek and regional areas there are double digit increases. Is this a damning indictment of your failure to implement effective prevention measures to support police when it comes to domestic violence?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a damning indictment on the previous Labor government who oversaw domestic violence increase by 82% in eight years. Again, there are people who think they are above the law. We are catching up with them, Opposition Leader. Part of the work we are doing includes the work of the Fugitive Task Force which we stood up late last year and they have been doing targeted operations around the Territory. They are a permanent fixture and part of their job is making sure they are out there getting people with outstanding warrants and people who think they are above the law.

We cannot use your numbers, Opposition Leader, because of that SerPro factor, so I will just find some better data for you.

Ms UIBO: While you are doing that, and I appreciate the officials doing the same, are you saying that the last seven months of data we have been following and referring to is incorrect, which is the information that is published?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, when you are comparing the last seven months to the previous seven months, the issue is the comparison. You calculating the seven months based on the crime stats is not a problem, but it is what you are comparing it to which is why we are comparing December to March with December to March, or we compared March to March last year. It is because if it is pre-SerPro, then it is apples and oranges versus apples and apples.

Certainly, domestic violence—is it the number one call you are getting to the JESCC? Yes. It is the single biggest offence type coming into the triple zero centre and then the requisite police response as a result of that. When you look at July 2024 to March 2025, Darwin is 28% down, Palmerston is up 3.8%, Alice Springs is down 15.8% and Katherine is up 17.1%.

There are some patchy numbers, but a lot of work is being done. We had the coronial as well and a lot of work is being done across the whole of government. Police have done their own work to implement those recommendations, and the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence is looking at the strategy and has rolled over the funding for the organisations, so they have certainties that we can do the work to make sure

these programs are working and see if we need to invest money elsewhere. It continues to be a big focus and, as the Acting Commissioner mentioned, it is the number one call coming through the 000 centre.

Ms UIBO: Are there any specific regional plans concerning community safety when it comes to domestic violence reduction and prevention in the Territory to be able to support the work of police if it is the number one incident that police are dealing with across the Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Would you like me to bring Assistant Commissioner White up here? He manages domestic violence.

Ms UIBO: Yes, please. That would be helpful.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is Michael White. Michael focuses on the domestic and family violence space, so perhaps if you repeat your question, I am happy for the Assistant Commissioner to answer.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Chief Minister and Commissioner White. The question is regarding the community safety plans about prevention and reduction of domestic family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory. If it is the number one incident that police are dealing with, do we have specialised regional community safety plans or regional town plans in place to support the work of police, also understanding what the Chief Minister spoke about. I understand this cross-agency collaboration and am well aware of that but, unfortunately, we continue to see domestic violence incidents and assaults rise over the last 12 or so months, and deaths from domestic violence that police have been the first responders to.

Are there community safety plans regionally based around the reduction of domestic violence?

Mr WHITE: I am the Assistant Commissioner, domestic, family and sexual violence, and youth. Under the funding arrangements that are being published for next financial year, one of the key improvements or reforms is the rollout of the co-responder model across Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and one regional location. That is purely focused on joint response by police, non-government agencies in respect to working with victim-survivors and perpetrators of violence, with the Department of Children and Families working collaboratively to intervene early with victims and perpetrators to try to realign the behaviour of perpetrators and provide that ability to support victims earlier through greater engagement and referral into other services.

The other component that has been working for a significant time now rolled out in 2012 originally in Alice Springs was the Family Safety Framework which is, again, a joint response to immediate risk of harm or imminent harm of victims of domestic violence where all agencies involved in those regional groups work together to share information and provide support to victims predominantly. There are behaviour change programs as well to make sure there is intervention to prevent further harm.

J DAVIS: In relation to what you are describing in terms of agencies working together, can you talk a bit more about what that might look like in a tangible way?

Mr WHITE: The co-responder is designed to expand in relation to the pilot program that ran in Alice Springs since last year. That is aimed at co-location as well as cooperation and working together, and at times attending to premises and engaging with people at the time. Each area will be slightly different depending on the service providers available. Geographically, there is not one apart from Police and the department of Territory Families, who will be the consistent people involved. In Alice Springs it is the women's shelter of Alice Springs (WoSSCA) and Tangentyere Council working with us to provide that support. In other areas, that will depend on the availability of the resources, which we are yet to negotiate with organisations to roll out.

J DAVIS: When you say 'in other areas', I understand other areas have been flagged that this model will be rolled out in?

Mr WHITE: That is right. We have been working with, in Darwin, a number of agencies that are already committed to working with them. I cannot publicly talk about that yet, but they are working through setting up standard operating procedures together and will roll out in Katherine, Tennant Creek and one remote location.

J DAVIS: In terms of community safety plans, are you able to tell us how many of the 63 local police stations have a current community safety plan?

Mr WHITE: That is outside of my remit. That would be regional and remote policing.

J DAVIS: This is a question from the Member for Mulka, talking about the implementation of the recommendations from the coronial. In 2019 there was a successful 10-week trial of Aboriginal interpreters in the Joint Emergency Services Communications Centre. Last year, as part of the coronial, there was a recommendation that interpreters be embedded in the communications centre. Has this been budgeted for? Given the high number of Aboriginal language speakers in the Northern Territory, is there any reasonable rationale for not doing it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That was recommendation 10 in one of the coronial inquests. Police have accepted that recommendation in full, and they are the ones leading how that will happen. I had the opportunity to be at the JESCC when there were language speakers there, and it was pretty amazing.

The cultural reform team in police have been embedded in the JESCC and additional language speakers are commencing on 17 February, so all JESCC officers have been trained to use the Aboriginal Interpreter Service through that. We continue to grow and work on that.

J DAVIS: To clarify, people are trained to use the existing Aboriginal Interpreter Service, but there are no interpreters embedded in the JESCC; is that correct? I understand that was the recommendation from the coronial.

Mr DOLE: We have had Aboriginal interpreters embedded in the JESCC for a trial period, but we are still working on making that a permanent fixture. That trial commenced and was successful. We are working on how we can make that a more permanent feature.

J DAVIS: Is there a budget item for that?

Mr DOLE: There is not a specific budget. That is encompassed in our community resilience and engagement command budget.

J DAVIS: While we are talking about the coronial, you said that the police have implemented and taken on board various recommendations from the coronial. Could you outline what they are?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, I can. Recommendation 8, which was information sharing through SupportLink, was accepted by Northern Territory Police in full and is being led by police. They are working with DCDD to review SupportLink's operational protocols and are going through that work now. That work is ongoing.

We just talked about recommendation 10.

Recommendation 11 is the PARt training. This recommendation was accepted in full and is being led by Northern Territory Police. As at April we have had 10 in-person training sessions, and 327 police have completed that training. That work is continuing to be rolled out across the force.

Recommendation 12 is a permanent Northern Territory Police domestic, family and sexual violence command. That recommendation has been accepted in full by police and is being led by police. That reform is happening in line with action plan two. That work is happening to date.

Recommendation 13, family coordination, has been accepted in full by police and is being led by police. An audit team is conducting their work of DV matters across the Territory. Some positions have been expanded as part of that as well.

They are the recommendations that specifically related to police.

Ms UIBO: It has been 200 days of rising crime under your leadership. How will Territorians be assured that work you are doing will make a difference to make the community safer?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The big point of difference between our government and the previous Labor government is people know that we will do whatever it takes to make the Territory safe. We have evidenced that through our actions. Actions speak much louder than words.

We had eight years of a government that talked reams and volumes of guff and fluff, and the rubber never hit the road. People were beside themselves. We saw people leaving and businesses shutting their doors. The Territory was, by all accounts, going backwards.

We came in strong and early and have shown the strength of the legislation we are willing to put through the parliament. An example is Declan's law. People were crowing about Declan's law being too strong. We felt that it was an important piece of significant reform to target people on bail, those reoffending and repeat and serious violent offenders.

From that point, we had the tragic death of Mr Feick. We wasted no time in recalling parliament—something that had not been done in a long time—to make sure that we now have Australia's strongest bail laws.

I talk a lot about our laws needing to reflect community expectation. We have reversed a number of changes that Labor made as a result of this permissive approach to offending. It put the rights of offenders above the rights of people to be safe. The mess the Territory is in now is as a result of that. We are having to systematically unpack and work through that to meet all of the deficiencies.

We can strengthen a law, and then Corrections has been underfunded and buried at the bottom of the Attorney-General's Department for far too long, not able to meet prisoner numbers. We saw the previous Labor government utilising watch houses as prisons, so we had to do a lot of work on that.

Legal Aid is another example of where it was continually getting bandaid funding, whereas we fixed and addressed that issue because people having good legal representation is better justice for everyone.

We had to invest more in our courts to get the court system moving.

The legacy of issues under the previous Labor government are monumental across the entire spectrum, from crime prevention through to addressing crime through the courts or the prisons. I talked about school attendance numbers being low, family responsibility agreements being non-existent, a lack of accountability for parents—the list goes on and on.

I say to you what I say to all Territorians: judge us on our actions. Right now, whilst the data is patchy 10 months in, I do not think anyone would say we are not taking a strong approach to this and doing whatever we can to make sure community safety is our number one priority. We have done everything from reshaping our entire government, the systems within and the accountability to deliver on the three core election promises, through to being on the ground with the people interfacing with the systems and laws, seeking guidance about how we can continue to do everything we can to make the Territory a safer place.

That work will continue. I know your goal is to make cheap political points about how there is not zero crime after 200 hundred days, that is a matter for you, Opposition Leader; fill your boots. My job, as Chief Minister, is to make sure I am focused on community safety being a number one priority and not just police—they put on that blue uniform to do every single day. It is across whole of government—how we are supporting better outcomes for young people, strong families, making sure there are jobs and opportunities for people across the Northern Territory, that there is hope and aspiration for the future and that everyone can understand that they have as much opportunity and access as anyone else. That is the work we will continue to do.

Opposition Leader, I have an answer to the Katherine police question.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.18

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: From Squad 175 we had 11 go to Katherine, and from Squad 158 we had five go to Katherine. It is a total of 16.

Ms UIBO: My question is to the Acting Commissioner about the Chief Minister's recent public statement which calls for an independent investigation into the recent deaths in custody in Alice Springs. The Chief Minister called those asking for an independent inquiry, unhelpful and uneducated. Is this a fair assessment of people asking for that enquiry?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The questions come to me.

Mr CHAIR: We will not ask public servants for opinions, in accordance with Standing Order 109. Would you like to rephrase the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to answer the question

The comments being made by federal members of parliament are quite frankly appalling; they should know better. This is a sad time for the community; our police have an incredibly important job to do, and the politicisation of this issue helps no-one. It does not support our police or the Coroner to do their work, or the families who are grieving and communities who want answers.

I stand by the comments I made as, frankly, Senator McCarthy and Marion Scrymgour have been members of parliament for a long time at both the Territory and federal level; they should know better. I am happy to pass to the acting commissioner to talk about why the Northern Territory Police are best placed to do this work.

I urge all people with a voice and power to influence to use it for good and reinforce the strengths of our institutions, particularly the Northern Territory Police Force which investigates matters and supports the Coroner.

Mr DOLE: The comments are really in relation to a misunderstanding of the processes in place in the Northern Territory and the fact that the Northern Territory Police has the statutory responsibility to investigate all crimes that occur in the Northern Territory.

It is not simply a matter we can bring in an external body that does not have any powers the *Police Administration Act* established the Northern Territory Police Force for the purpose of preventing, investigating and detecting crime. That is not something we can just hand to someone else and if we were to bring in an independent investigator, they would have to be sworn in as members of the Northern Territory Police Force to utilise our powers under the Act.

That is for the criminal investigation; the Coroner is another issue, where it is her jurisdiction and she has the ability to bring in whatever assistant she required to investigate the coronial aspect, which is broader and covers more aspects than just the criminal investigation. That is an explanation of the process and why we are best placed to do it.

J DAVIS: I understand your answer. What policies and procedures do the NT Police have in place to address either actual or perceived conflicts of interest, for example police investigating police?

Mr DOLE: There are quite strict policies and procedures in place in relation to serious incidents or deaths involving police contact with the public. There is a standing general order on that. We have also got oversight of the Northern Territory Ombudsman and the Northern Territory ICAC and direction of the Coroner regarding investigating this matter.

The oversight mechanisms are well established in the Northern Territory, so are our procedures and policies in place. This is being directed by an Assistant Commissioner of Crime, a senior executive member of the Northern Territory Police Force, who is also overseeing those investigations.

J DAVIS: What are the NT Police policies, procedures and practices in relation to standing down officers when they are subject to a criminal investigation?

Mr DOLE: That is a decision for the Professional Standards Command and depends on what is being investigated and what evidence is available at the time. Just because a matter sits in the current realm of a criminal investigation, does not necessarily dictate that a member would be stood down. It depends on how much evidence is available and what stage the criminal investigation reaches before that decision is made, in conjunction with Professional Standards Command.

J DAVIS: A question from the Member for Mulka: can you confirm that police will allow the family of Kumanjayi White the opportunity to see the CCTV footage and body-worn camera footage of their loved one in the Coles store in the lead up to, during and after the police interaction with him?

Mr DOLE: I cannot confirm that because I am not leading that investigation. I cannot give assurances on behalf of those who are. A simple answer to that is, while it remains a criminal investigation, that footage is an exhibit and the integrity of that needs to be maintained.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, this morning, the Northern Territory Police Association put out a statement condemning your government on your latest pay offer to police officers as insulting and inadequate, and they accused you of betraying frontline officers and breaking your law-and-order promise to police. Let us start

with a simple question put out in the NTPA media release; it is a yes or no answer they are seeking. Do you believe the current pay offer to Northern Territory police officers is fair and rewarding?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have a whole of government wages policy, which is 3% and is above CPI. The Northern Territory Police Association has an important job to do in negotiating a pay deal with the OCPE and the Minister for Public Employment. There will be a lot of water to go under this bridge and that is how negotiations work; there is backwards and forwards. I respect that process. Our police do an incredible job. We want them to get a great pay deal. Questions on this are for the Minister for Public Employment.

Ms UIBO: For the benefit of *Hansard*, may I please table the NTPA media release, because I will quote from it?

I quote from the NTPA President Nathan Finn from today's media release:

... when it comes time to show up for police—with meaningful recognition and pay—the Chief Minister is nowhere to be seen.

Chief Minister, why are you not meeting the commitments you made to police prior to the election when it comes to paying police and duly rewarding them for their service to the Northern Territory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have already answered this question. We are in an EBA process. There are eight EBAs this year. We will be seeing a lot of this type of debate play out in the public sphere, as is normal for that EBA time. I encourage you to ask the Minister for Public Employment questions specific to the EBA. As Police minister, I want to see our police get a great pay deal. We certainly value the work they do, as evidenced by all the reforms, funding, support and legislative powers we have been able to deliver. Obviously, as part of an EBA, there is backwards and forwards and this is yet to run its course.

Ms UIBO: Noting that in your budget the revised figure of \$520.6m has increased to \$557.9m in the budget, would you say you are preparing for the NT EBA with the police which will come essentially from the police budget? I know you are kicking the can down the road to the Minister Hersey, but in terms of the Police budget, is that ample in replying to the EBA request for more than the 3.37% that has been offered to police currently?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Police budget has had an increase by about \$36m from last year which is significant, and that is for a range of things. Obviously, the whole-of-government wages policy is 3%, but I will not speculate or hypothesise about where all of this might land into the future.

Ms UIBO: What message do you think it sends to the frontline officers who are waiting for the EBA to finalise and, as you said, are exhausted, under-resourced and facing record attrition rates when it comes to making sure our police are the best paid in the country?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is great. Our police are the best paid in the country, and we are proud of that. We have had some good results with attrition. I do not know if anyone has them here, but we saw some of the best numbers in about three or five years. I will just grab that.

Ms UIBO: While you are getting that, when you say the highest paid in the country, are you also attributing that to the inclusion of the housing entitlement that police receive?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Looking at 2024–25, attrition is at 4.58%—that is down from 8% the previous year under the Labor government, which was 9% the year before that, which was 10.65% the year before that, and 8.5% the year before that. In 2019–20 it was 4.53%, and in 2024–25 we are 4.58%, so it is the best it has been for a very long time. There is plenty of work to do. Obviously, we would love to see those attrition rates come right down, and ultimately one of the fastest, most effective ways in which we can put more police out on the front line is to stop our police from leaving in the first place, which has been a core focus for us. Remind me of your last question?

Ms UIBO: Does your claim around having the highest-paid police officers in the country include the housing entitlements our police officers receive?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, it does.

Ms UIBO: When it comes to the police responsibility of the police pay deal, you are obviously the Chief Minister and very proudly the Police minister, as you keep telling everyone. However, you are the one who

made the promise to police that they would be fully backed, looked after and resourced under your leadership. You are now hiding behind your junior minister, who cannot even explain what is on the table before the EBA. How do you explain that to our police officers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not accept your condescending assessment of Minister Hersey who is the Public Service minister, or the OCPE, who \ negotiate the EBAs. As I said, there will be eight this year.

Ms UIBO: Just to clarify, I am not condescending. I am quoting from the NTPA media release.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Minister was answering the question. I ensured you were heard in silence; we will now listen to the Chief Minister.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you quoting junior minister from the press release?

Ms UIBO: These are not my words Chief Minister, but the NTPA said that this is Public Service minister Jo Hersey's problem—that you were kicking it down the road—and said:

... a minister who can barely articulate what's been put on the table for police when asked in Parliament.

They are their words, not mine.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay, I believe that is rather derogatory language, but it is a matter for the NTPA. We will continue to negotiate in good faith; that is what governments must do and the work that will continue to be done.

Ms UIBO: Do you believe that the pay offer is a fair and rewarding deal for the NT Police? That is the yes or no question they would like answered.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, 3% is a position we took for the whole of government because 3% is higher than the CPI rate, which means it represents real wages growth, whereas under the previous police EBA—I am stretching my memory a little—I believe it was four, three, three when CPI was tracking much higher than that.

The negotiations are playing out. I understand the NTPA is representing its members as it should. It is doing its job, and we are doing ours. At the end of all of this there will be a pay rise for police, and everyone will be happy.

Ms UIBO: Some of your rose-coloured glasses as well, Chief Minister, would be helpful.

When it comes to supporting police, are there other elements that are on the table or off the table during the EBA process, such as the housing entitlements that have been in the media recently?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Again, all of these detailed questions are for the Minister for Public Service.

Ms UIBO: Despite making commitments to police that you will be the Police minister who champions and rewards police for their hard work, you do not have an answer for us today?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As I said, Opposition Leader, you have a job to do, as does the NTPA and I. At times like EBA negotiations those three roles will collide. Ultimately, there will be an end to all of this. The NTPA is focused on negotiation. The Minister for Public Service is focused on negotiation.

I am doing what I can to make sure we have the right budget for our police; they have the laws and powers they need; we have more prison beds so we can get prisoners out of watch houses; we have more boots on the ground; our attrition rate is dropping, so we have more boots on the ground; our police are feeling heard and valued; and we have the wellbeing and mental health support for them.

There is a lot of work being done. I understand pay is an important component. Even without whatever this pay deal looks like, we have been able to significantly drop attrition by nearly half in just the short time we have been in government. I am confident that if we continue to listen and support our police that will be the case.

I find it ironic, to some extent, that you were questioning me earlier, almost defending your federal colleagues for their attack on our police over the death-in-custody investigations, yet you are asking me whether we back our police. We back our police unequivocally. It is an important part of our plan to reduce crime.

It will pay to remind you that if you go back and look at the NTPA surveys, the last three showed in excess of 90% of police did not believe the Labor government supported them. It is clear to any police officer to see that Labor is continuing that trajectory of failing to back our police.

Mr CHAIR: We will now break for 10 minutes.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: We are currently taking questions on the statement. I will hand over to the Member for Arafura in place of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr BROWN: How many sworn police officers are currently in the NT Police Force?

Mr DOLE: The number of sworn members is 1,743.

Mr BROWN: Can you provide a breakdown by station or by division?

Mr DOLE: Not by station or division, but I can give you a breakdown of rank.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is the answers to the Written Questions you received. Would you like me to read out the ranks?

Mr BROWN: Is it short?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not that short, but I can. We have 3.89 Aboriginal community police; four Aboriginal community police first class; five acting commanders of police; 267.2 constables; 299.2 constables first class; two examiners; 80.99 police auxiliaries; 23 police auxiliary first class; 22 police auxiliary recruits; 4.5 principal examiners; 59 recruit constables; 34 remote sergeants; 42.84 senior Aboriginal community police officers; 270.62 senior constables; 55.92 senior constables first class; 8.6 senior examiners; 80.84 senior police auxiliary; four senior principal examiners; 90.25 senior sergeants; 271.88 sergeants; and 45.96 superintendent.

J DAVIS: Can you tell us how many vacancies there are at each rank? I am also interested in unsworn positions. I do not know if you have that data.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Unsworn positions are 39.2 administrative officer 2; 57.55 administrative officer 3; 53.3 administrative officer 4; 27.95 administrative officer 5; 31.09 administrative officer 6; 24.4 administrative officer 7; one chief pilot; one executive officer 2; four physical 2; 1.5 physical 3; two physical 5; six professional 1; 3.5 professional 2; 16.4 professional 3; 21.9 senior administrative officer 1; 13 senior administrative officer 2; seven senior pilot NT Police; 7.5 senior professional officer 1; one senior professional officer 2; three technical 2; 8.5 technical 3; nine technical 4; five technical 5; one technical 5X; four technical 6; and two technical 6X.

With the vacancies, we are happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.19

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

J DAVIS: How many vacancies of sworn and unsworn police at each rank and level?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.19.

J DAVIS: With the unsworn positions, are ALOs unsworn positions and what level are they at?

Mr DOLE: ALOs are at the AO2 level, and we have some AO4 senior ALOs.

J DAVIS: Are you able to tell me how many ALOs there are currently?

Mr DOLE: The total number of ALOs is 81 currently.

Mr BROWN: To follow on, how many sworn officers are on extended sick leave?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.20

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

Mr BROWN: How many sworn officers are on extended sick leave?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.20.

J DAVIS: I will ask a follow-on question to that in relation to remote policing specifically. What is the average number of days of sick leave remote sworn officers are taking? In terms of leave, what is the current rate of excess recreation and long service leave, broken down by division and region in relation to remote policing?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 1.21

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

J DAVIS: What is the average number of days of sick leave remote sworn officers are taking? What is the current rate of excess recreation and long service leave, broken down by division and region?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.21.

Mr BROWN: I believe you answered this earlier. What is the current attrition rate from March?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For 2024–25 we are sitting at 4.58%. We are really proud of that number compared with last year when it was at 8%. We have nearly halved it. Going back to 2022–23, it was 9.16%; in 2021–22 it was 10.65%; and in 2020–21 it was 8.15%. It has not been since 2019–20 that we have seen those mid 4.5% numbers; in 2019–20 it was 4.53%, and we are sitting at 4.58%.

We have plenty of work to do, but we are really focused on ensuring police are supported, ensuring health and wellbeing and that they feel empowered to do their jobs. In times gone by, we would call it a catch-and-release program that police felt like they were running. Now it is 'catch and caught'. That is making a big difference. We are really empowering them to be part of how we can drive further solutions. Plenty of the law reform we have done and are working on—we are working on significant projects, including the *Youth Justice Act* review and changes to the *Traffic Act*. That has all come from police on the front line who we have been talking to. I know police are really fostering a culture of making sure the front line feels like they can bring these issues forward, which is empowering for them and helps them feel connected to the bigger picture. That is on top of the work we are doing to hold other agencies accountable and providing support for the

roles they have so everything does not fall back onto police. There is more work to do but these numbers are going in the right direction, and we want to see it keep going that way.

J DAVIS: Are exit interviews held for police? Can you give us the participation rate of exit interviews for sworn officers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not compulsory and has been this way for some time. Under the previous government there was a third-party arrangement doing exit interviews which has been discontinued as there was low participation rate which meant the data being collected is not useful. There is an internal model now, and reports are that there has been a much bigger improvement in participation. I do not have the numbers of people in front of me, some of the top reasons cited during those exit interviews were 'lifestyle' which reinforces to me why that part of our three-point focus is important for liveability—when you come home from work you want to be able to enjoy your life.

Closer proximity to family was also cited, reinforcing the work we are doing with airlines and connectivity as part of our Rebuilding the Economy Strategy. Connectivity is a key component. Job fatigue with high demand pressures on our police, more trauma and serious incidents that police are will. Even increases in road fatalities resulting in our frontline workers being exposed to more trauma and more often and workplace risks. Those were the four top cited reasons.

J DAVIS: May I take on notice the actual participation rate?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We certainly can. We may not have it, but if that is the case we will detail it in the answer.

Question on Notice No 1.22

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

J DAVIS: What is the participation rate for exit interviews for sworn officers?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.22.

J DAVIS: To follow up, I hear you talking about the impact of policing on police, and I acknowledge the NTPA's concerns for staff welfare and wellbeing. I am wondering if you can advise the status of the review and welfare strategy.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It might be a good time to bring up assistant commissioner Janelle Tonkin, as this is the area she looks after. I will talk to the work the wellbeing reform team are doing, and Ms Tonkin can speak to it in more detail, noting there is a coronial into Mr Deutrom so that will undoubtedly provide police with more ways in which we can improve our support to our police.

In 2021 there was an independent review. It made recommendations on short, medium and long-term goals. This was rolled out prior to the separation of the tri-service. That still remains a service that is being shared across Fire and Emergency Services as well. Janelle, are you happy to speak to this?

Ms TONKIN: Yes, Chief Minister. The implementation of the wellbeing strategy is supported by two teams—the Wellbeing Reform Team and the Wellbeing Services Unit. Both of those sit under my portfolio.

The Wellbeing Reform Team is charged with leading the implementation of the elements under the strategy. The Wellbeing Services Unit is the multidisciplinary team that consists of psychologists, social workers, occupational rehabilitation advisers, peer support coordinators, chaplains and the administrative support staff. They work in Alice Springs and Darwin to support our workforce with a range of services.

We are also supported by the Employee Assistance Program, which is specifically designed to meet the needs of first responders. That aligns with the commitments under the wellbeing strategy. Effectively, that

ensures that if the team is unable to meet the services for the workforce, we have a secondary option for the workforce to reach out to, to get support.

J DAVIS: In terms of the police review—the Kelly report—are you able to advise whether any of those recommendations have been implemented? What is the state of them?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you talking about health and wellbeing or ...

J DAVIS: Yes, in relation to health and wellbeing. While the Chief Minister is looking, Assistant Commissioner, I wonder whether there are ...

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Excuse me, Chair. I want to make sure that the questions follow up; it is still the Member for Arafura’s ...

J DAVIS: Yes. I am happy to ...

Mr CHAIR: Yes, after this question I will hand back to the Member for Arafura. However, I note we also have only one more hour with the Chief Minister. If the opposition could move quickly on their questions so we can give other members an opportunity.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In terms of the Kelly review, recommendations 17 and 18 were about that wellbeing space. Recommendation 18 is complete with the wellbeing strategy, which Assistant Commissioner Tonkin was explaining.

Recommendation 17 is about modernising, I suppose you could say, the *Police Administration Act*, which is ongoing work.

J DAVIS: Can I ask whether you are able to provide any—sorry, total mental blank. I will move on.

Mr CHAIR: I will give you the floor next, Member for Johnston.

Mr BROWN: How many incidents have been recorded where police officers have been assaulted while on duty?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Needless to say, assaults on our police are totally unacceptable and something our government condemns in the strongest possible terms. It is why we moved forward with our mandatory sentencing for assaults on police—in fact, any workers—in that first sittings of parliament within about eight weeks of coming to government.

We want to send a strong message to people that it is not acceptable, and they will face the full consequences of the law if they do. Despite that, we continue to see people lashing out at our police. In total 252 officers were assaulted for that reporting period.

Mr BROWN: How is the anti-racism strategy progressing?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Work has been done, and Leanne Liddle is leading that work. We are ready to go, but the Coroner has deferred the coronial. We are just waiting for that to happen first, and then we will be ready.

Mr BROWN: Can you advise where the independent inquiry into senior police hiring practices is at and when can we expect to see the report?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Justice Blow is continuing that work. We are hoping for it to be finalised as soon as it can be. I was clear from the start that he can take as much time as he needs, supported by OCPE. Hopefully, not too much longer, but again, it is a matter for him, and he must do what he has to do.

Mr BROWN: What steps are underway to recruit to the role of Commissioner of Police?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: None. We will wait for the Blow inquiry to finish and then we will move forward.

Ms UIBO: On the end of the Member for Arafura’s question, will the cost for that inquiry be coming from the police budget, OCPE or a combination of both?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I happy to get you that information, but we will be making it public as well as the report being made public, as to which bucket of money it will come from. Someone in the next 50 minutes will have it to me, and I will let you know.

Mr CHAIR: Would you like to place the question on notice, Leader of the Opposition?

Question on Notice No 1.23

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

Ms UIBO: Can you please let the committee know who will be paying for the independent inquiry by Justice Blow? Will it be the police department, the OCPD or will it be a combination of both?

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.23.

J DAVIS: Could you provide a copy of the strategy you referenced in relation to wellbeing?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is an internal document and is something the police use to guide all the work they are doing. We can go through a lot of some of that work with you, but it includes mental health; first aid training; and a healthy eating program—Assistant Commissioner Tonkin spoke to the chaplain services—the peer support program; a partnership with Fortem Australia, which provides physical and mental health support as well; the respectful workplace training program; the well check training program; and the employee assistance program. There are several components to it, including psychosocial support after the traumatic events our police are exposed to and the early intervention program as part of that strategy, which goes to recommendations 17 and 18 of the police review.

J DAVIS: To clarify, is it an internal document available to police?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

J DAVIS: Following the questions from the Member for Arafura in relation to the racism review, last year in Estimates we heard that \$170,000 was allocated to the Anti-Discrimination Commission for the Attorney-General to conduct a review into systemic racism within the police force. Further to this, the Attorney-General committed up to \$300,000. Can you comment on that review?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would be a question for the Attorney-General.

J DAVIS: In relation to the role of Leanne Liddle within the police force, I understand—I heard you comment that you are waiting for the outcome of the coronial. She has been in that role for 12 months now; are you able to give an update of anything that has happened within that timeframe?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What do you mean?

J DAVIS: Over those 12 months, what has been the focus of that review? Have there been any outcomes? Have there been any recommendations, noting we are still waiting on the outcome of the Kumanjaya Walker coronial?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Ms Liddle is doing a wide range of work within the police force. It is not limited to the racism strategy; it is work across ALO streams and cultural reform—all sorts of different things that she is working on.

J DAVIS: Is there a strategy around the racism review?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What do you mean by racism review?

J DAVIS: That is my understanding from last years' Estimates and a media interview where in 2024 she stated her position would be to implement an anti-racism strategy within the police force.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is correct. That is done, and we are awaiting the Walker coronial.

J DAVIS: So that work has been done, but it is not publicly released yet?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Chief Minister, the biggest issue I have in my electorate of Karama—which covers Malak and Knuckey Lagoon—is crime and antisocial behaviour associated with public housing. Similarly, some of my colleagues in Palmerston, particularly the Members for Drysdale and Blain, will probably have similar concerns. I go back to the coordination and collaboration police use to work with people like public housing, Mission Australia or Venture Housing? Do you work together to tackle those issues?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will call James O'Brien, but to go to your point, it is different depending on where we are in the Territory. In Alice Springs, for example, we have daily patroller meetings which are fantastic. I have attended many of them, and it has all the stakeholders involved. There are standing committees at government levels where they are meeting, too, but I will pass onto acting Assistant Commissioner O'Brien.

Mr O'BRIEN: I run the Territory Community Safety portfolio, and that has the Territory Community Safety Coordination Centre as part of it. They are stationed at Nightcliff Police Station, along with the Territory Safety Division. They coordinate cross-government frontline services, so councils, DCF, Education, particularly PHSOs (public housing safety officers), as well as transit safety officers.

We use local intelligence. From all of those frontline services, as well as members of the community such as yourself, we receive information about your local concerns and hotspots. What we do then is we target joint operations. You would have recently seen some operations with public housing safety officers, PORU, which is the private security company, and our Territory Safety Division officers in high-visibility outfits. They went all the way through Malak and the Malak housing estates to try to combat antisocial behaviour.

It is not just about going in there and dealing with what they see in terms of antisocial behaviour; it is actually engaging with the people who live there, to try to find out why and be a bit more proactive to try to deter it from happening in the future. We do that every day. We do that not only across the areas of Malak, particularly your electorate of Karama, but also, for instance, at the Palmerston markets, through Parap and in the Member for Fannie Bay's area and across all of greater Darwin. I wish I had the staffing to make sure that we do it all day, every day, but we do our best with the resources we have at the moment.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I congratulate you on the efforts to date. I have noticed a much higher visible police presence. I know you have been doing some operations around Karama. Members of the community would say, 'Can you do it in the afternoon?', not necessarily in the morning, because that is when they tend to have more trouble.

Do you collect any statistics that identify crime or antisocial behaviour associated with public housing, as opposed to elsewhere in the community?

Mr O'BRIEN: Yes, we do, and we work closely with the department of Housing and the PHSOs in relation to that. We share information quite a bit in relation to what happens in those housing estates. For instance, we did an operation out at Gray, and we have statistics relating to not only the antisocial behaviour but also how many incidents we found, how many litres of alcohol were tipped out and the times of day we experienced those.

I take your feedback in terms of evening shifts. It is something I have been trying to mix up a bit, because if we keep it during the day and the morning, it is good getting the alcohol out of the system early, but we still have that evening shift time where we need to do that as well.

Yes, we collaborate with Housing in terms of the stats in and around housing estates.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Are those statistics available publicly or are they internal?

Mr O'BRIEN: They are internal, and I say that because we use those to feed our intelligence operations. The intelligence we gather then feeds into the operations; we can target our resources so they are not inefficient and we know where we are targeting, rather than going somewhere and when we turn up there is nothing happening.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Is there any way of aggregating those so that we can plot a trend over time, to get a rough idea whether it is going up or down?

Mr O’BRIEN: That is what our Territory Community Safety Coordination Centre will be doing. I have shown them some old intelligence products that show trends for things like suburbs, which include housing estates. At the moment, we have that information and will trend it eventually. They will obviously come out in the crime stats, but internally, so that we can work with the PHSOs and TSOs, we need to know that information. Whether we can publicly release it, I do not know. We use it internally to trend.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Maybe, Chief Minister, you could look at seeing if the stats could be adjusted so they would be available, particularly for MLAs so they can understand their suburbs, without compromising the internal workings.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, we can look at that. It is probably one for the Attorney-General, but I am sure someone is listening.

Just to add to your line of questioning, for the Opposition Leader’s electorate, in Katherine there is the weekly meeting and then there is the nightly pre-muster meetings as well, with all of the organisations in Katherine.

Ms UIBO: Thanks, Chief Minister, just a reminder Katherine is not my electorate. It belongs to your minister.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know, but you are very interested in things in Katherine.

Ms UIBO: I am; that is my home town. Yes, I am resident of Katherine.

Mr CHAIR: Was that a question on notice, Chief Minister?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, I was just adding. I have an answer to question on notice 1.23.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.23

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was the one about which agency will pay for the Justice Blow review. I can confirm that will be Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mrs ZIO: My question is about—taking it back to my favourite topic—administrative burden. I know we have rolled out SerPro across the NT Police Force, as opposed to PROMIS, which was previously implemented. Some of the feedback that I have received from police officers is that it is quite arduous in the administrative burden side, and it takes officers a long time to either get data or use the data. It is a long process for people to be able to do the administrative side of the work that they have been doing on the road. I am just wondering if there has been any support provided to try to reduce some of that administrative burden. What is happening in that space to make sure our police can get with the job being on the road?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: SerPro, like with anything, has been quite the adjustment, and I have certainly heard police finding it clunky. Commander John Atkin has been leading SerPro for a very long time so I might ask him to help answer your question.

Mr ATKIN: The question that I commonly ask our frontline workers is: is it better today than it was in November 2023? SerPro, like any of those commercial off-the-shelf systems are things that you cannot just leave; you need to continue to update. We have had various different things happen, including law reform, you have to make updates to the system. We are continually trying to make it better for our workforce. We work closely with DCDD, who do all of the technical work. We do quite a lot of feedback sessions with the workforce to try and see what process improvements we can make from an end user’s perspective. We are consistently looking at how we can make it better. Since November 2023 we have done dozens of various different changes and improvements to continue to make it better.

Mrs ZIO: Is there anything in planning to try and support police officers not having to go back to a desk and do the hours of admin that they are doing, in relation to getting support for that work? Has that happened?

Mr ATKIN: Yes, that is a thing that we are working with DCDD on. We did actually do a mobile data terminal trial a number of years ago. The technology was not quite right when we did that, particularly in our remote

areas where communication is restricted. That is something that we are working on with DCDD and doing some scoping activities exactly on that point, so that we can allow our police officers to do more in the field.

Mrs ZIO: I have another question in a different field about the election commitment around the police retention bonus. I am just wondering if you can provide an update. I know that might be in the EBA negotiations, and we are talking through that, but I am just wondering if there is any update on that one.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that will be ready to go come 1 July, as promised.

Mrs ZIO: Just my last point on the social order side of things. I know that in the Fannie Bay electorate one of the main things people talk to me about is the antisocial behaviour and the escalating violence that comes with that sometimes. You have talked about what happens in police. I am wondering if there are any plans in the future to grow our response to social order with the NT Police; is anything happening? Given that is one of our main concerns with the mandatory alcohol rehabilitation going forward.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, it is a huge issue for us. We have been working to make sure that we are finding new ways to deliver better outcomes for safer communities. Through our Banned Drinker Register review, we are hoping that there are some new things we can do or work through to deal with alcohol-fuelled violence and harm in our community. We have already done the work on nuisance public drinking. What alcohol mandatory treatment looks like going forward will also be incredibly helpful.

It is about boots on the ground, making sure we have police able to do that frontline work. As Commander Atkins said, his role with digital transformation provides opportunities for us to keep our police out. If you go into a police station you do not really want to see any police in there; we want them all on the road. Inevitably, there will be police there typing away doing the work they have to do.

How can we better support them with best practice technology? It is all in the mix. We are looking forward to doing some further and broader work specifically on antisocial behaviour, how we can work better with the public housing safety officers, transit safety officers, the PORU team. There are a number of people doing a number of things across government; they all have their bit. It is about making sure that is working as efficiently as possible.

J DAVIS: This is a specific question for the Acting Commissioner. Have the recommendations from the inquest into David Gurrappa's death in 2009 been implemented—specifically, recommendation 195 relating to operational police being trained and retrained using reality-based training techniques to a sufficient degree to ensure a proper understanding of the dangers of sudden cardiac arrest and positional restraint asphyxia? Also recommendation 196 that the Northern Territory Police should ensure that all members are trained and retrained in strategies to deal with mentally ill persons both in custody and generally in the course of their duties?

Mr DOLE: I apologise, Member for Johnston. Could you repeat the first part of that question and the name of the inquest.

J DAVIS: Yes, David Gurrappa in 2009.

Mr DOLE: Member for Johnston, we may have to take that on notice because there have been several changes to policy and at the college in what we implement. I am sure 2009 recommendations would have been met and dealt with, but I am not sure if that is still in place. I will have to take that on notice and get that information for you.

J DAVIS: All right. I am happy to pause for a minute, because my next question might satisfy it. Can you provide us with details of the NT Police training that addresses the prone hold and how to deal with mentally ill individuals or individuals with an intellectual impairment?

Mr DOLE: I will ask if I can provide you that information in totality in response to your questions, because it delves at our operational training at the police college. Part of that would be an OSTT answer, and part would be the coronial recommendation implementation. I will take it on notice to provide a complete answer, if that is okay.

Question on Notice No 1.24

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

J DAVIS: Have the recommendations from the inquest into David Gurrulpa's death in 2009 been implemented? Specifically 195 relating to operational police being trained and retrained using reality-based training techniques to a sufficient degree to ensure a proper understanding of the dangers of sudden cardiac arrest and positional restraint asphyxia? Also 196 that the Northern Territory Police should ensure that all members are trained and retrained in strategies to deal with mentally ill persons both in custody and generally in the course of their duties?

Can you provide details of the NT Police training that addresses the prone hold and how to deal with mentally ill individuals or individuals with an intellectual impairment?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.24.

J DAVIS: On a different tack, acting commissioner, can you describe what the policing model is that is adopted and used by NT Police?

Mr DOLE: Community policing is at the forefront of everything we do.

J DAVIS: Can you talk more on this model and how you follow this model and provide some practical examples?

Mr DOLE: It is about engagement before enforcement and being physically seen in the communities. It is about informing ourselves of the issues. It is creating a safe police presence where people feel safe to report matters to police. This is what we do every day across the Northern Territory by engaging with the public and engaging with the communities we proudly serve on. All our officers are aware that we are a community police force.

J DAVIS: Does NT Police have a crime reduction and prevention strategy?

Mr DOLE: We do, but if you are happy, I might defer some of these questions to Deputy Commissioner Hollamby who can take you through those specifics.

Mr HOLLAMBY: We have a lot of strategies. I could not recite them all to you because there are many of them. I can say that we have a crime reduction strategy which, in recent weeks, we have gone back to the future and picked up an old one and are reimplementing that because it was a good strategy.

J DAVIS: I appreciate you have many strategies. There are four I am interested in specifically: crime reduction and prevention; social order; alcohol policing; and domestic, family and sexual violence. Would it be possible to have copies of them if they are current?

Mr HOLLAMBY: We have domestic, family and sexual violence strategies. The others not so much, but they are internal guiding documents, so we do not publish them publicly. That is the status of those.

J DAVIS: Would they be in line with the overall community policing strategy?

Mr HOLLAMBY: We have a strategic plan on an A3 page, which is a guiding document. All our senior sergeants and above are very experienced police officers. We give them guidance and ask that they deliver services to the community. That is not just reactive policing; it is also the preventative stuff. You can write a strategy, but that will not necessarily get runs on the board. It is the guidance and mentoring of experienced frontline police where we get our biggest bang for our buck.

J DAVIS: To be clear, there are some strategies which are internal policies, but none of them are public?

Mr HOLLAMBY: That is pretty much it. I can say we did have all those strategies. A change of commissioner usually comes with new strategies, and not all of them have been implemented by the time the new commissioner left. It is probably not an ideal time to start writing new strategies pending the arrival of a new commissioner, but that is not to say that we do not want to take business forward either. There are some strategies we will implement because they are no-brainers.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: Excuse me, Chair; just a reminder that we have 25 minutes to go, and we have another agency looking at coming in and may want to ask questions. I am conscious of time.

Mr CHAIR: I will let the Member for Johnston continue. It is just the Member for Johnston and me who have questions remaining on Police.

Ms UIBO: Mr Chair, I also have some questions.

J DAVIS: I have some questions from the Member for Mulka. What is the department’s capacity to hold independent inquiries in the Northern Territory when Northern Territory Police are involved in an incident? I am asking this question generally but also in relation to the current investigation into Kumanjayi White’s death. Given this is another young man from Yuendumu who has died in police presence just a few years following Kumanjayi Walker, why are you not listening to the family, community and the federal Minister for Indigenous Australians to provide an independent investigation so that NT Police are not investigating NT Police? If others can be sworn in under the *Police Administration Act*, why is that not occurring in this case?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I feel we have answered this question. Politicisation of this issue is inappropriate; it has been done before by Labor and looks like they are happy to tread this well-worn path again which is not something we will do. The Acting Police Commissioner has made it clear that police are best placed and in fact have statutory obligations to undertake this work both on behalf of the Territory and the Coroner. I am happy for the acting commissioner to provide any further information about that, but I feel like we are clear on the record on this.

Mr DOLE: This is not something unusual for this jurisdiction; every state and territory in Australia has an Act which sets out the duties and responsibilities of their police force, and we are no different from the rest of the country.

The *Police Administration Act* establishes the police force of the Northern Territory and sets out what our roles and responsibilities are. They are to investigate these matters and criminality within the Northern Territory, and that is where this current investigation is sitting. It is inappropriate for us to bring someone from another jurisdiction who does not have the expertise in Territory legislation and the numerous case law rulings and difficulties that investigators in the Territory have to navigate through. The Territory community is best served with the experts who do this work every single day of the week, and I have complete confidence in their ability to do so.

Like I said, the call for an independent investigation is probably slightly misinformed by the people who do not understand the processes in place. There is plenty of oversight to those investigations with the mechanisms available already in the Northern Territory.

J DAVIS: I have a couple more questions from the Member for Mulka. He says:

‘I have spoken a lot about peacekeepers for our communities. These are elders and leaders in our communities who hold equal status with a police officer of high rank. They are equal with the Police Commissioner, the deputies and the superintendents. Peacekeepers also come under the authority of our law and have deep knowledge of Yolngu *rom*. Will this government support partnerships between our clan leaders, our peacekeepers and the police? How will you do that?’

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Acting Commissioner Dole will answer that question.

Mr DOLE: We work across communities every day of the week, 24 hours a day. We currently work with a lot of the peacekeepers in communities such as Southern Tanami Kurdiji and across north-east Arnhem. Superintendent Nobbs is active in engaging senior community leaders, and it is something we embrace and are happy to continue to work with and take that advice to us on the culturally appropriate way in dealing with community members and issues that may rise. One of our key points in our plan is engagement before enforcement which is a key driver of what we do, and we always consult those with the best knowledge of the local solutions for the community involved.

J DAVIS: Further to that, what requirements or guidelines exist for police to work with elders or leaders in remote communities, before for example executing a warrant or searching a house or arresting an individual.

Mr DOLE: There is no specific policy in relation to it. It is broad-sweeping trust and engagement, and we encourage our officers locally to build those connections in the 49 permanent police stations we have across

the Northern Territory and 15 police posts because nothing is the same across the Territory. A solution in north-east Arnhem Land will not be the same in Central Australia in the desert country, so it is a localised solution by local officers with community leaders that best fit the response to a specific incident.

J DAVIS: How many hours per week are police officers learning the language of the community they reside in?

Mr DOLE: That is not something I have the information on, Member for Johnston. There are 49 permanent police stations across the NT, 15 police posts, I believe there are 64 languages across the Northern Territory so it is something I would have to look into.

I know that across the Territory the dedicated officers who serve on communities are making efforts to engage. Some of them are learning the language, but it is not a specific program the Northern Territory Police has in place.

J DAVIS: There is no requirement for people to learn language?

Mr DOLE: No, there is no requirement currently.

Mr CHAIR: I have a couple of questions. The first one is specific; Chief Minister, please let me know if this is more suited for the Infrastructure minister. It refers to the accidents that have occurred on Kirkland Road.

Are road safety issues identified by police and communicated to the Infrastructure department to be improved upon, noting the accidents and the amount of people in my electorate who use that road?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Kirkland Road is a very busy road. I am a local member in Durack as well. We have had a traumatic few weeks with both those road incidents and a number of other tragic incidents in our community. I will pass to Deputy Commissioner Hollamby to go through how that works in a practical sense.

Mr HOLLAMBY: I drive that road every day, so I know it really well. We meet regularly with the department of Infrastructure. There are a series of meetings, and one is a legislative review, but the important one is a major crash review. We meet with DLI to talk about the causal factors, which includes road conditions and whether they contributed to it.

Both of these matters are before the court, and it is not appropriate to express views and opinions on the causes of those crashes right now.

Mr CHAIR: Understood. You guys would then pass that information on to DLI in the event you believe it is relevant?

Mr HOLLAMBY: Yes, and vice versa, they will pass information on to us if there is a causal factor on or about the road.

Mr CHAIR: Going back to current police numbers, I note the figures given and thank you. Are there any targets you hope to see in the short and medium term, knowing we always want more? Are there targets you have set for the police force?

Mr DOLE: The targets set, basically, are in relation to the funding given to us in relation to the Kelly review. It was a commitment to 200 police over the next four years. We have been given the first stream of funding, and I believe that 50 positions have been created. That is ongoing funding for the next few financial years.

Our target is to reduce attrition, maintain the numbers of police we have, and increase our police force by at least 50 a year. If we are doing well with our recruitment strategies and our attrition slows, we may be able to bring some of that funding forward and increase those numbers sooner, rather than the three-year period we have left.

Mr CHAIR: My third point is about nuisance public drinking. We raise this because the parliament has passed these laws, so we want to see them enacted. Do we have any figures since implementation of that law? How many times have police used that law on the ground?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, our nuisance public drinking offence is an automatic trigger for police to issue a banned drinker order as well. Four people for the reporting period have been charged with nuisance public drinking: two in Darwin awaiting a court outcome; one in Alice Springs, which was withdrawn in court; and

one in Katherine, which is waiting for a court outcome. In addition, 170 infringements have been issued and most of those have been in Alice Springs and Katherine.

Mr CHAIR: I still see a lot of nuisance public drinking in Palmerston. Would an officer be able to see if an individual has a prior infringement?

Mr HOLLAMBY: Yes, if they look for it. It will not immediately stand out that they have previously been issued with an infringement. I will say that one thing Palmerston and the northern suburbs have been grappling with is the overwhelming demand for services. That puts us in a response mode where we were continuously responding to request for assistance from the police and have not been engaging as much as we should in proactive and preventative policing.

We have been working hard to get on top of that so we can get in front of the game. This last week has not been too bad in terms of allowing us to engage in preventative policing, but that is where we want to be where we are actively targeting problem drinkers before they become a nuisance.

Mr CHAIR: A follow-on to that would be police numbers for Palmerston. Are there any indicative figures for current students at the collage, and how many will be coming to Palmerston.

Mr HOLLAMBY: I cannot give you those figures. I can say that in the new positions that are coming online on 1 July, as a part of the Kelly review, seven of those have been allocated to Palmerston.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will add that for the reporting period police have issued 10,368 BDOs, which is pretty amazing.

Mr CHAIR: My final question is on school-based constables. I know we have a fantastic school-based constable at Palmerston College; how is that looking for the wider Northern Territory and in remote areas and schools? Are they getting the engagement with the local police as well?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We are very supportive of our school-based policing program. Obviously, the more police we have the more energy we can pour into the program. It goes to that root causes of crime issue we are trying to deal with as well, making sure that young people are growing up with a strong respect for our police and seeing the work police do and understanding more about their role in the community and having that respect for them.

We see a lot of the very high numbers of assaults on police. I note the Member for Arafura asked me about that earlier, because this breakdown in respect for our police is something we need to change. Amongst other things school-based policing does, one really important thing is to make sure young people have a healthy respect for our police that they learn that at a young age and obviously carry through them for life. That investment early will hopefully mean at the end we are seeing some of those assault numbers, amongst other things, reduce and young people being supported to making better choices right from the start.

Mr DOLE: In addition to the school-based policing program, which is staffed by constables on auxiliary, there is a plan to expand our Aboriginal Liaison Officers into schools, and that is co-funded with the department of Education. That is well underway, and we are currently in the process of finalising the first stage of that, which will be remote-based Aboriginal Liaison Officers employed by the Northern Territory Police. Working in remote schools is that conduit between community and police and that trusted person of respect in the community who has the ability to take concerns off the student and their families and liaise with the police.

That program is well underway and is due to roll out in the coming months with several trial sites. I cannot give you the sites at this present moment, but it is across several communities....

Mr CHAIR: That is okay. My question more goes to is it something you are working on growing?

Mr DOLE: Absolutely; that school-based Aboriginal Liaison Officer will be the next step into that remote service.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, I have some answers to questions taken on notice for the Opposition Leader.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.7

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The question was how many results in the reporting period resulted in findings of improper conduct. This was when we had the ICAC this morning.

For the period 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025, there were two reports of findings of improper conduct, Operational Apollo and Operation Tasman.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.8

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have an answer to question 1.8 by the Opposition Leader. The question was: how many recommendations were made by the ICAC last year, and how many of those have been fully implemented by the agencies affected?

The answer is the ICAC made 58 recommendations for the financial year ending 30 June 2024, with 12 recommendations fully implemented by the agencies affected. The rest of the recommendations are in the process of being implemented.

Answer to Question on Notice No 1.9

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Question 1.9 asked by the Member for Johnston was: please provide the deadline for the response to the recommendations from Operation Beaufort.

The answer is that there were no recommendations made from Operation Beaufort.

Ms UIBO: Chief Minister, you made the commitment to expand school-based policing. However, in your budget there is \$3m for this program, which is the same as the last budget and the year before that. Can you explain how there is an expansion in this year's budget?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Acting Commissioner just talked about what next step plans are. Our budget has the baseline and then it will be the department of Education which will fund the ALOs through that expansion because it sees such a significant value, particularly in supporting getting our kids back to school. It is a wonderful opportunity to expand the service.

Having spoken to a couple of the ALOs about it, they are looking forward to it.

Ms UIBO: I agree with you about the good work of the Aboriginal Liaison Officers in the police force. Is there something in your government's remit that will focus on improving the entitlements received by the ALOs because they are obviously well-respected and are doing great community engagement. However, they are not getting the same entitlements as their fellow constables.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is part of the work that Leanne Liddle is doing—going to your question earlier, Member for Johnston about whether the levels are appropriate. The Acting Commissioner mentioned AO2s and AO4s and whether that needs to be changed. It is also providing those pathways. There has been a lot of focus.

We just had 17 Aboriginal community police officers graduate into constables on Friday. One was an ALO at the start of their career, which is fantastic. It is about providing the support and pathways as well for our people.

I guess the short answer is yes that is work being led by Ms Liddle.

Ms UIBO: Just to confirm, will that also include conversation about perhaps pro rata of housing entitlements for those ALOs?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Ms Liddle is doing that work. Once she comes forward with that, we will know a bit more about what it looks like.

Ms UIBO: I missed the opportunity, as the Member for Drysdale, the Chair was doing a line of questioning. You spoke earlier about the banned drinker orders. In Katherine there was an increase of 354% between the

months of February and April this year, including 332 BDOs in the month of April alone. Is this not a red flag to show that the alcohol-fuelled violence and the antisocial behaviour in Katherine has got to an all-time high?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will pass onto Deputy Commissioner Hollamby about that. My understanding from the team on the ground out there is it is because they were doing such amazing proactive policing—they were out there across the community. I will let the deputy commissioner answer that.

Mr HOLLAMBY: I can say it was a targeted strategy to put problem drinkers on the Banned Drinker Register. It had minimal impact on the general population, but the problem drinkers were the ones who were subject to the banned drinker orders. There are no apologies for that; it was a targeted strategy.

Ms UIBO: With the surge of motor vehicle thefts in Alice Springs, is there a proactive plan of policing for this to keep the people of Alice Springs safe?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have seen some hideous incidents with stolen motor vehicles in Alice Springs, not the least of which have been ramming of police vehicles and endangering the lives of our officers. It is a serious issue. I will pass to Acting Commissioner Dole for some more details on how police manage these violent and dangerous incidents.

Mr DOLE: The theft of motor vehicles is a continuing problem for Northern Territory Police. One of the things we are actively doing is encouraging people to make themselves less target-friendly—hiding of keys and things like that. Something the Northern Territory Police is always focusing on is that it is difficult to target the theft of unlawful motor vehicles to any specific residence because it occurs all over the greater Alice Springs area.

We have proactive strategies for resolving and finding stolen motor vehicles and resolving the issues of stolen motor vehicles driving around Alice Springs dangerously; that is with the use of the police drone. We have far more success now in preventing the harm that comes with stolen motor vehicles and a higher rate of recovery of stolen motor vehicles. Stopping the original theft is an ongoing problem that needs the community's support to help target-harden themselves and make those keys not available.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We are also doing some work through the *Traffic Act* working group whether there are any law changes we could make or anything to better support our police. Sometimes Alice Springs has quite nuanced repetitive incidents compared to Darwin. That working group is also looking at changes to the *Traffic Act*, which I think we are expecting later this year.

Ms UIBO: How many people have been charged with the ramraid offences and the breakdown of statistics between adults and youths and who have been charged under the new legislation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The new legislation was introduced 30 October 2024. Between 30 October 2024 and 31 March 2025, five adult offenders have been charged with the offence, for a total of five charges. Between that same reporting period for 30 October 2024 and 31 March 2025 there have been a total of 18 youth offenders charged with the offence for a total of 41 charges.

Ms UIBO: Are there any prisoners being held on remand in police watch houses?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr DOLE: This morning the count of Police prisoners on behalf of Corrections was 31 correctional prisoners in the Palmerston watch house. I do not have the figures for Alice Springs, but I believe it was fairly low.

Ms UIBO: Would you be able to take on notice a breakdown of the number of prisoners held in police watch houses broken down by the facility itself, the number of adults, young people and their gender?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For what period?

Ms UIBO: I would assume you could not answer on the spot for today—up to today would be great.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Although it is not part of the reporting period...

Ms UIBO: If it is on notice, it would be within the 30 days which then covers you until ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Did you want a snapshot for today?

Ms UIBO: Yes. This reporting period.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This fluctuates every day. People are not in the watch houses long, compared to what they were—it might be a few days. Every day is different.

Ms UIBO: If we could get a breakdown of the facility they are in—adults, age and gender breakdown.

Mr HOLLAMBY: We can do that. I will point out that Sunday, in this case being Monday because of the public holiday, is probably the worst example which is least representative of what we have because we have effectively got three days' worth of people in our cells. If you want to pick this Wednesday, it might be a better day to give you a better description.

Ms UIBO: Unfortunately, we do not have your hearing on tomorrow, so I would be appreciative if it was the 31 today.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is a point in time; it fluctuates daily.

Mr HOLLAMBY: An hourly basis.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, an hourly basis.

Question on Notice No 1.25

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

Ms UIBO: Of the 31 prisoners currently held in watch houses across the Northern Territory today, 10 June 2025, can you please breakdown the number by facility, number of adults and young people and their gender?

Mr HOLLAMBY: Can I ask that we reframe the question by saying at 7 am?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: To be more specific?

Mr HOLLAMBY: Yes, more specific. Because a good chunk of those would have gone to court at 9 am this morning.

Ms UIBO: Yes, I will amend to include at 7 am this morning.

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

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 1.25.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Minister, for your time today. Thank you to the members of the Northern Territory Police Force. I also thank all the members of Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services for all their work and the hard work everyone behind the scenes has put into preparing for Estimates even though we have run out of time.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I extend my thanks to the team with me today and to everyone in the agency also who have put a lot of work into preparing for today. It is a huge piece of work that people do; it is important and for good reason. I also thank our Fire and Emergency Service teams who have put in equal amounts of work and did not get the opportunity to showcase the work they have been doing. Let us not forget it is also a new agency, and they are proud of what they have been able to achieve to date. We will keep spruiking their praises at different times. I look forward to and welcome questions in parliament about the work Fire and Emergency Services are doing.

The committee concluded.
