

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

## MINISTER BURGOYNE'S PORTFOLIOS

### DEPARTMENT OF LANDS, PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

**Mr CHAIR:** Good morning, minister and officials. I welcome you, as the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment and Minister for Water Resources to today's hearing. I now invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Good morning. I am pleased to be here today to talk about the important work of the Departments of Lands, Planning and Environment and advise you of some of the key activities the department has undertaken in supporting this government's priorities.

I am joined today by Ms Joanne Townsend, Chief Executive of the department; Ms Leah Clifford, Deputy Chief Executive; Ms Desiree Ng, Chief Financial Officer; Mr Doug Lesh, Senior Executive Director, Planning and Development; Ms Jasmine Husson, Executive Director, Land Development, Ms Kerri O'Brien, Executive Director, Crown Land Estate; Ms Hanna Steevens, Acting Executive Director, Planning; Mr Mark Meldrum, Executive Director, Land Services and Building Advisory Services; Mr Richard Smith, Senior Director Land Information; Mr Paul Purdon, who is up here with us upfront today, Executive Director, Environment and Heritage; Ms Sally Strohmayer, Acting Executive Director, Environment Regulation; Dr Alaric Fisher, Executive Director, Flora and Fauna; Ms Amy Dysart, Executive Director, Water Resources; Ms Nerida Beard, Executive Director, Water Security; Ms Maria Wauchope, Executive Director, Land Resources; and Ms Kathleen Davis, Executive Director, Mining. I thank everyone for their input into today's effort.

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

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

Minister, I now invite you to make an opening statement regarding the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The change in government saw the coming together of the Northern Territory Government's key economic enabling functions within the Lands, Planning and Environment and Natural Resources team to create an agency that will facilitate the progress of economic development opportunities across the Territory.

The department's role is to support the Territory's economic development and protect its natural resources and cultural assets through integrated planning, evidence-based advice and efficient regulation.

This government was elected on its three pillars of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle. To support pillar two, rebuilding the economy, government has committed to cutting red tape and improving regulatory efficiency and approval timeframes.

The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment plays a pivotal role in supporting pillar two. Since coming into government, over the past nine months the department has undertaken a broad range of activities to facilitate this, including legislative amendments, as well as policy and process improvements, with the initial focus of reducing approval time frames for onshore gas and mining planning approvals.

I now take this opportunity to make you aware of some of the achievements delivered over a relatively short period to support economic development across the Territory.

In December 2024 the requirement for the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NTEPA) to provide me with advice on every environmental management plan for onshore gas activity was removed. This came on the recommendation of the Chair of the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority, Dr Paul Vogel for the NTEPA's confidence in the environmental regulator and the regulatory framework for onshore petroleum in the NT. This is a credit to the department's Petroleum Operations Unit and has reduced EMP approval time frames by up to a month.

December 2024 also saw the revocation of the large emitters policy and gas policy statement, which were initially established to fill a gap in regulatory oversight of greenhouse gas emissions, which are now captured through other means including the Commonwealth safeguard mechanism. This removed duplication of regulation.

In December I declared the 10-year water allocation plans for Mataranka and the reallocation of the Western Davenport regions to guide the control of water resources in making water extraction licence decisions, confirming the sustainable take of water for development in these regions.

Rolling into 2025 has seen the introduction and passage of two key pieces of legislation—first legislative amendments which removed third-party merits from the *Petroleum Act 1984*, Petroleum Regulations 2020 and Petroleum Environment Regulations 2016. The *Planning Act 1998* and Regulations; and the *Water Act 1992* were passed in March 2025. The amendments remove the current uncertainty, delays and disruption to the decision-making process and project implementation borne by regulatory agencies and project proponents.

In May 2025 amendments to the *Water Act* were passed to facilitate access to the Aboriginal Water Reserve. There are over 70,000 megalitres a year available through the reserve in water allocation plans across the Northern Territory. However, to date no applications have been received. These amendments will help activate the reserve, and already the department has received encouraging feedback from traditional owners who are keen to see this happen.

Separation of the regulatory activities under the code of practice for onshore gas activities in the Northern Territory, allocating regulatory responsibilities to the Department of Mining and Energy for well integrity, environmental regulation responsibility sitting with this department occurred earlier this year and removes regulatory duplication and clarifies regulatory roles and compliance responsibilities.

The Territory consistently leads the country in planning approval timeframes; however, there is always room for improvement to ensure we continue to provide the best service to Territorians and continue to grow our economy. The department has established a dedicated fast-track position to create an accelerated pathway for low-risk planning applications.

The department has actively engaged with the approvals fast-track task force in its work to develop options to decrease regulatory processing timeframes through regulatory policy and practice initiatives. It has undertaken a review of its systems and process and has identified a more effective use of delegations and exemptions.

Amendments to the NT Planning Scheme to improve planning approvals as well as a review of risk criteria and standard conditions of the mining licence regime—this is a remarkable achievement by the agency all achieved whilst carrying out its day-to-day responsibilities. Most notable has been the extraordinary work to enable, monitor and plan for residential land release across the Territory to underpin the government's new home own grant scheme.

As of end of March 2025 the Territory has over 4,000 lots in the hands of developers, including 160 titled lots ready for construction of new homes and a further 350 lots that are selling off the plan. A big portion of this supply is within the greater Darwin area, with lots for sale across Zuccoli, Berrimah, Holtze, Marrara, Durack Heights and Humpty Doo. In Katherine there are over 50 lots available for sale in Katherine East, with around 580 lots in the land supply pipeline under investigations or land use planning. In Tennant Creek, which is on the cusp of mining-led recovery, there are around 250 lots in the land supply pipeline, while there are only six titled lots available for sale.

The department is working closely with key stakeholders to progress housing opportunities and increase this number to support economic development in the region. In my home town of Alice Springs, there are around 2,750 lots in the land supply pipeline, including 30 titled lots and a further 36 soon to be titled at Kilgariff. There are a further 80 lots identified for the next residential land release in Kilgariff, at potentially Mount Johns an additional 2,650 lots under investigation or land use planning.

This pipeline positions the Territory to provide residential land now and into the future. The department will continue to monitor residential land supply across the four key urban centres and will work closely with the development industry to support the timely delivery of lots to the market. With respect to land available for industrial development there is an abundance of land for industrial use in the greater Darwin area through

Crown land developments and private developments as well as through the Land Development Corporation, with lots available for purchase or lease.

Industrial land in the regions of Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs is currently limited the department is actively planning for future releases to support regional growth amid long-term demand. For the nine months to March 2025 the planning team processed a total of 400 applications under the *Planning Act 1999*, excluding planning scheme amendments and is on track to process around 520 applications for the year, an increase of more than 10% on the previous year, reflecting the confidence we have restored in the market.

Whilst I am talking about planning, I thank Dr David Ritchie, who has been the Chairperson of the Northern Territory Planning Commission since 2017. Dr Ritchie, who will step down from his role at the end of September, has provided the Northern Territory with invaluable leadership and decision making in guiding the commission's strategic planning work across the Territory. I sincerely thank him for his commitment over many years.

This government has finally resolved two long running, outstanding matters which have impacted Territory homeowners, the defect-plagued properties built by George Milatos in Bellamack in 2013 and the Tomazos Group in Johnston in 2015. The department has been working with the owners of the remaining Bellamack homes to resolve this long-standing issue.

The department has \$1.6m on program to subdivide the Sienna Village in Alice Springs and is working with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure on the delivery of the works. This project will create three new strategically located serviced lots. In doing so, this will unlock them for potential tourist commercial development by private industry.

The department has also led the process that saw Commonwealth approval for the development of St Mary's in Alice Springs, providing \$14m to the Territory through the Housing Support Program, Priority Works stream, to allow subdivision and accommodation option to be provided to the Alice Springs community on the St Mary's site.

The department will continue to work with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure; the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development; and the Department of Children and Families, in the delivery of these works.

Turning to the Top End, residential land release negotiations are progressing with the Larrakia Development Corporation for the residential subdivision of approximately 42 hectares of Crown land at Farrar west. As part of this intertidal zone access compensation package for the Kenbi land claim settlement, this too forms part of the Housing Support Program. We are glad to be working with the Commonwealth on this project, which will see approximately 300 new homes delivered over the coming years.

The Holtze Land Company is releasing land in the Holtze development area through a development agreement with the government. The department has been planning for this development in the Holtze region for years, progressing through land use plans, environmental approvals and planning for all the enabling infrastructure to support the development capacity of the land. Through this budget, we have provided \$49.6m to complete this work, with part A construction of enabling works due to be finished this year, meaning builders will be able to start construction of homes for our first residents. Part B works are likely to be tendered later this year through the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure.

Government's release of Crown land policy provides for eligible community groups, including sporting, cultural and religious groups, to apply for a lease over Crown land at nil or reduced cost. In 2024–25 the department completed two community land grants, one for BAPS NT and another for St Savvas of Kalymnos Greek Orthodox Parish. Both are for the development of a church, community centre and car park.

The department has been bedding down the implementation of mining reforms which commenced 1 July 2024 and saw the establishment of a new environmental mining licensing scheme under the *Environment Protection Act* and responsibility falling under the department.

As 1 July 2024, 120 pending applications under the previous scheme were transferred to the department from the Department of Mining and Energy. The department has been powering through these applications. As at the end of May 2025, 74 of these applications (62%) have been finalised. At the same time, the Mining team has received 38 applications for licences under the new framework with 63% finalised.

The experience gained over the past 12 months in implementing the new licensing scheme has enabled the mining division to identify where improvements can be made. This will see a review of the risk criteria and standard conditions for exploration and extractive activities in consultation with the industry. In addition, guidance material to assist mining operators to submit higher quality applications is currently developed.

While there is no doubt there will be some teething problems regarding the implementation of the new regime—not helped by a backlog of applications inherited—I am pleased to say that the industry feedback on the regime has been positive.

With respect to onshore petroleum activities 51 environment management plans have been submitted since responsibility for the environment risks and impacts from onshore petroleum activities were transferred to the Minister for Environment in 2019, resulting in 45 EMP approvals over that period, with four still under assessment.

While the community focus is on the approval of EMPs, the department is also very active in the compliance and enforcement space, with 24 site inspections conducted across nine active petroleum sites in the first nine months of this year. This ensures that proponents are complying with their approved EMPs and the very stringent requirements applicable to onshore gas activities in place.

Development of the unconventional gas resources in the Beetaloo sub-basins is an essential element in achieving this government's goal of rebuilding the Northern Territory economy. The department will continue to play a key role in ensuring that this resource is developed safely and that interest holders comply with all regulatory requirements, whilst also making sure that regulation is not unnecessarily burdensome for industry and there is a clear and efficient process for the assessment and approval of proposed activities. This government understands that there will always be concern in the community about the potential impacts of gas development, and we recognise the need to ensure our ground waters and rivers are protected from harm, and I am confident that there is a robust regulatory regime in place, largely administered by my department to ensure that.

Additionally, the budget includes \$2m per annum ongoing to implement a long-term regional environmental monitoring program in the Beetaloo region. This work will largely be undertaken by Charles Darwin University overseen by the department with the information it generates made transparent and available to the public. The potential risks posed by onshore gas development were exhaustively examined by the inquiry which was finalised in March 2018. That inquiry produced a large number of very detailed recommendations and there has been a huge amount of work to implement these, which has given the robust regulatory system we have today from the great work done by the department of the Beetaloo Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessment, commonly known as the SREBA. We also have a very good understanding of the environmental baseline in the Beetaloo. This means we can confidently allocate water to the gas industry and other users to secure economic growth without any environmental harm.

It is important to recognise that it is seven years since the inquiry report was handed down, and we now have a modern regulatory system and a strong compliance framework, along with seven years of experience in supporting the safe development of the industry, including assessment and approval of 45 environmental management plans. This government is committed to the principles underlying the inquiry's report and recommendations and to ensuring the gas industry develops in a safe and responsible way. That does not mean that we will adhere to the letter of every single inquiry recommendation, some of which were overly prescriptive or are now outdated, especially where these pose impediments to industry that are disproportionate to risk.

I have touched on some of the regulatory efficiencies that we have already achieved earlier in my speech. The department undertakes programs that monitor and protect our land, water and biodiversity, and it regulates environmental and natural resource matters across the Territory playing a key role in facilitating government's goal of balancing development objectives with its environmental management obligations.

Of interest is the role the department plays in managing the Territory's flora and fauna, including threatened species. A particular problematic threat to many threatened animal species across the Territory is predation by feral cats and my department has a long-term program to develop effective cat control in the MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs to protect species like the critically endangered central rock rat. This work has been boosted recently by Commonwealth Government funding for the MacDonnell Ranges priority place project, which is addressing the key threats of feral cats, large herbivores, wildfire and buffel grass. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to recently visit the flora and fauna team in the field in the West Macs, where there is a trial of the new Felixer cat traps. These devices use a sophisticated array of senses and AI to detect cats walking nearby and spray them with a lethal gel. The cats then, which are fastidious groomers, groom it

off their fur and obviously that gets rid of the cats. The flora and fauna division, working with Parks and Aboriginal rangers, is testing these devices as an additional tool to add to aerial poison baiting in the war on cats.

The environment regulation division has continued its role as a leading regulator in the environmental space. The division has a range of statutory and regulatory responsibilities directed at supporting sustainable economic development and protecting and managing the Territory's natural resources. It supports four statutory decision-makers, including the NTPA and the Controller of Water Resources. The environment regulation division has a published compliance and enforcement plan that identifies priority sites for compliance inspections which the division is on track to deliver a 100% of its commitments.

Illegal dumping continues to be an issue in Alice Springs and is a matter that is close to my heart. The department has rolled out its operation Don't be a Dumper in Alice, working with partners across government to understand that nature and scale of illegal dumping and to change behaviour for improved environmental outcomes.

The environment and heritage branch has continued its work in supporting the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority to assess the impacts of proposals with the potential to have a significant impact on the environment. There are nine proposals currently undergoing environmental ...

**Mr PAECH:** It has been 20 minutes, and this was supposed to be a brief opening statement. I love the environment, and I would like to ask some questions. If the minister could actually get a wriggle on to the questions?

**Mr CHAIR:** Thank you, minister and Member for Gwoja. I will allow another interjection in five minutes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am pleased to report that in the past year 88% of the Northern Territory EPA's decisions have been made within statutory timeframes. The branch also plays an important role in supporting the Heritage Council and myself in making decisions on the conservation of heritage under the *Heritage Act*.

This year, the Water Resources Division celebrates 70 years, which is an amazing achievement. Over this time, the department has undertaken extensive monitoring, modelling and assessment of our water resources, building our knowledge of the Territory's water resources. This is why I have confidence in our scientists who are involved developing our water allocation plans and assessing applications.

Two water allocation plans were declared recently, and the department has been working on a number of others, which include a new plan for Katherine and Berry Springs and the development of the first water allocation plan for the Adelaide River catchment, which will support the Adelaide River Off-stream Water Storage project to augment Darwin's long-term water supply. This is a key economic enabler for the Territory.

The Commonwealth, through the National Water Grid Authority, has contributed \$7.1m to develop this plan reflecting the confidence the Commonwealth has in this project. Year to date, the department, through the Office of Water Security, has been able to secure an additional \$33.6m in National Water Grid funding for the Better Bores for Communities program. This provides critical water infrastructure across 10 remote communities as well as for the Aboriginal science program. In total, the Office of Water Security has coordinated securing more than \$400m in National Water Grid funding for a variety of projects across the Territory.

The Office of Water Security has continued to deliver on the priority actions under the Territory Water Plan. In particular, in addition to securing National Water Grid funding, it has worked collaboratively with other Northern Territory Government agencies to deliver and improve water security for remote communities and homelands. This has been through developing a regional and remote community water infrastructure priority list and continuing capital delivery. Delivering water information forums in priority remote communities and improving water security outcomes for Aboriginal homelands through the delivery of a knowledge program to build the capacity of water providers.

It has also collaborated with Power and Water Corporation to engage with government agencies and the community to develop and implement water efficiency measures to align with the Northern Territory Government's water security priorities. This will see new policy measures be introduced aimed at enhancing water use efficiency across relevant government sectors and through agency demand management plans for the government's 16 largest water use agencies. In addition, the Living Water Smart program is being expanded to the regions including Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. These activities combine with developing educational matters to educate rural property owners on, best-practice bore maintenance,

with a refresher of Know Your Bore, development of safe drinking water legislation and progressing a detailed business case for priority investment in recycled and greywater alternatives. These all contribute to ensuring water security for all Territorians.

As the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, I have responsibility for Northern Territory Government's response to climate change. I represent the Territory on the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council, with my colleague, the Honourable Gerald Maley, Minister for Mining and Energy. Supporting me in this role is the Office of Climate Change, which sits within the department's environment and heritage branch. Climate change presents both opportunities and risk to the Territory's economy and lifestyle. The Territory is a relatively small emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, contributing 5% of Australia's total emissions in 2023. Our emissions profile is dominated by emissions from our exports, and it is through growth in the export of our resources that the Territory will prosper.

We are committed to rebuilding the Territory economy and tackling climate change. These two objectives do not need to be in competition, as climate change is a global challenge, and the Northern Territory is well-positioned to play to its strengths to grow its economy and support national and international decarbonisation efforts. We can achieve this by growing a low-emissions gas industry for local consumption and export, including the production of low-carbon gas from the Beetaloo. By increasing gas production and supporting large-scale solar generation, we can ensure a stable and well-managed energy transition in the Territory and Australia by integrating renewables with gas to optimise energy, reliability and affordability.

We can reduce the emissions intensity of our resource exports by supporting projects and technologies that deliver emissions abatement at scale, such as electrification, carbon capture and storage technology, and the beneficial use of appraisal gas. We can benefit from our natural advantages by generating renewable energy for local use and export. Our proximity to suitable geological reservoirs provides the unique opportunity to import carbon for permanent underground storage, offering an international solution to nations with limited abatement options.

By growing the extraction and processing of critical minerals we can supply the raw materials required to support the energy transition. Our largest emitters have their own commitments and obligations to reduce their emissions and are well progressed in their planning to meet these commitments. Our role as government is to facilitate their plans by setting a supportive policy and regulatory environment that provides certainty and does not duplicate other regulation. This is why government rescinded the Large Emitters Policy which duplicated Commonwealth regulatory requirements.

The Territory's largest emitters are obligated under the Commonwealth safeguard mechanism to reduce their emissions over time to net zero by 2050. This includes stringent requirements on gas production in the Beetaloo to be net zero from entry into the safeguard mechanism. The department provides support to land managers to reduce emissions from their activities and encourages engagement in carbon markets. In 2024–25 the department provided \$160,000 to the NT Cattlemen's Association to assist pastoralists to manage emissions, and \$140,000 to the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network to support expansion of Indigenous engagement in the carbon market.

The department is engaging in a range of work to assess the risks of a changing climate to the Territory, including coordinating a first-pass climate risk assessment for the Northern Territory, undertaking an assessment of climate risks to the operation of the department, and contributing to the National Climate Risk Assessment being led by the Australian Climate Service and a national adaptation planning process led by the Australian Government's climate change department. This has also included working with the Bureau of Meteorology to explore future water security climate risks, which will inform detailed work on climate risk and adaptation for water security in the NT.

The findings of the NT risk assessment will be considered against the outcomes of the National Climate Risk Assessment and the national adaptation plan once they are finalised to inform government's response to managing and adapting to the impacts of climate change. I have directed the department to provide advice to me on the whole-of-government climate policy position that aligns with government's priorities of rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle.

This government made an election commitment to tackling gamba grass in the Top End and buffel grass in Central Australia. We all acknowledge that gamba grass is a highly invasive species that creates high fuel loads and increases the frequency and intensity of wildfires across the Top End. While its eradication across the Darwin region is not achievable, this government is invested in managing gamba in this area. In the 2025–26 budget we are committing over \$400,000 to gamba grass mitigation programs, which include the gamba action program and compliance activities in the Darwin emergency response area, capturing the

urban area and urban fringe of the greater Darwin region, which saw more than 950 properties inspected last season.

In addition, we are investing \$150,000 per annum over three years for the new Litchfield neighbours project, which will focus on implementing a gamba management program for the Coomalie region that complements current management activities in Litchfield National Park by Parks and Wildlife in the Department of Tourism and Hospitality.

A further \$150,000 ...

**Mr PAECH:** A point of order, Mr Chair! The minister has spoken about the environment in here longer than he has ever spoken in parliament about it. We need to get to questions. It has been half an hour.

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, will you be able to conclude in the next five minutes?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Certainly, Mr Chair.

A further \$150,000 per annum over five years will be allocated to support CSIRO's research into biocontrol agents for gamba grass to develop effective landscape-scale biocontrol solutions.

We also recognise that buffel grass has long been a grass of controversy. It is highly valued by pastoralists as a grazing fodder, and we continue to work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the management of the risk into the future. This government has committed to working with property owners to control buffel and reduce its fire risk, but it is equally committed to working with pastoralists to ensure it can continue to be used as a feedstock where needed. The Buffel Grass Weed Advisory Committee is currently preparing a draft weed management plan, which will be made available for public consultation in the near future.

The department is working with the Buffel Grass Weed Advisory Committee (WAC) to develop a weed management plan with landholders and land managers to actively improve on-the-ground management. Ongoing, \$750,000 has been allocated per annum to the management of buffel grass, including \$150,000 to support private and public land managers in actively improving buffel grass management through the purchase of herbicides and spray equipment. As a key landholder, the department invests a further \$1.5m annually for fire and weed management, primarily gamba grass and, more recently, buffel grass on vacant Crown land.

One of our election commitments was to terminate the grant funding arrangements in place with the Environmental Defenders Office, which occurred in December 2024. Given the change in focus of this government, the funding arrangements of the Environment Centre NT and the Arid Lands Environment Centre were also terminated early this year. The funding has gone towards on-the-ground initiatives and activities to support positive environmental outcomes.

In April 2025 I was pleased to announce that Landcare NT would receive \$150,000 per annum under a five-year funding agreement, commencing in 2025–26. This will enable Landcare to coordinate and support 25 Landcare community groups to take on-the-ground action to address weeds, litter, soil erosion, water management, fire mitigation and feral animal management for the benefit of our environment.

We recognise the Darwin Harbour is highly valued by our community for its significant natural, cultural and social values. We are also working with the harbour to ensure we have a healthy and productive harbour for future generations. The department is also actively involved in ensuring the protection of the harbour. Through the department's mangrove management plan, wastewater management framework and biodiversity indicators from Darwin Harbour, supported by the Integrated Marine Monitoring and Research Program, the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment is one of the government's key economic enablers. Across the agency, it is an important assessment role that looks at proposed developments and ensures developments can proceed with appropriate mitigation of risk to the environment.

Wrapping up, I am proud of the work that has been undertaken by the department in a very short space of time and look forward to working closely with the department in the future to meet this government's commitments. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these highlights in more detail with the Estimates Committee and welcome any questions.

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

**Mr PAECH:** You spoke about the Northern Territory Government's commitment and working through regarding emissions targets. I am trying to clarify—I understand there is a position of the CLP to abandon the net zero emissions target and withdraw from the Paris Agreement, a position that has been communicated to Territorians by the CLP Senator Jacinta Price. Is that the Northern Territory Government's position, or are you committed to reducing emissions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Our position on net zero emissions has not changes since the position we took to the election. If there is any other information you are aware of that has been officially produced, I would be happy to receive it.

**Mr PAECH:** Is it the CLP government's position in line with the CLP that you will abandon net zero emissions targets and withdraw from the Paris Agreement?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There has been no formal information provided by my department in regard to a change about net zero.

**Mr PAECH:** I will take that as a no.

I want to ask about your emissions policies and about something that has been on the department website since last year. Are you aware of the regulatory statement, Regulation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the Northern Territory?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Would you like to just confirm what you are talking about? Something on a website?

**Mr PAECH:** Your website. I am asking if you are aware of it.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** If you would like to elaborate on exactly what you are referring to—there are a lot of websites and a lot of pages.

**Mr PAECH:** Are you aware ...

**Mr CHAIR:** I will step in. Member for Gwoja, if you could elaborate because I am not sure.

**Mr PAECH:** Are you aware on your website, as the responsible minister, of the Regulatory Statement: Regulation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the NT?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will make it clear to the member that I am not across every single webpage and exactly what is written on every webpage, but if the member would like to read out what he has referring to I can answer a question in relation to it.

**Mr PAECH:** I am not asking whether you are aware it is on the website; I am asking whether you are aware of the regulatory statement which you would have, I assume, had to approve which is on your website.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I do not believe the minister is responsible for approving every single statement that is on every website across government. If the member has a question in relation to one of these things I am happy to answer it.

**Mr PAECH:** I will table the Regulatory Statement: Regulation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the NT.

**Mr CHAIR:** The Member for Gwoja has tabled documents. I will allocate tabled paper number 9.1.

**Mr PAECH:** This regulation of greenhouse gas emissions in the Northern Territory has removed the NTEPA greenhouse gas assessment guidance surreptitiously. This guidance requires an assessment of carbon emissions. Did you approve this regulatory statement?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have been advised it is a description of how emissions are regulated under the legislation, but I am happy to pass to the chief executive who will be able to provide further information regarding the questions I believe you are asking.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** What you are referring to is a description of how emissions are regulated under the legislation in the Territory, particularly under the *Environment Protection Act* and the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations, both of which require the consideration of emissions in the granting of approvals

and the making of decisions. That document outlines how those decisions are made. Where a decision is made there is also a statement of reasons which also explains how emissions have been captured.

**Mr PAECH:** This statement removes the NTEPA greenhouse gas assessment guidance—yes?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to pass to Paul Purdon who can answer that question in more detail.

**Mr PURDON:** I approved that statement, so that is where the authority comes from to publish it.

As the minister and chief executive have explained, it is an expression of the state of play in terms of the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions, both at the Territory and Commonwealth level. The statement itself does not remove anything from the responsibility of the Northern Territory EPA; it is purely reflecting the fact that the Northern Territory EPA made a decision to review their atmospheric processes guidance.

The *Environment Protection Act* requires the EPA to assess the impacts of a changing climate from development proposals. That is a statutory requirement that is still in place. The EPA has developed guidance to advise proponents on their expectations of how to assess those impacts.

Following a number of things, including the Commonwealth Government strengthening its safeguard mechanism and the Northern Territory Government rescinding the Large Emitters Policy, the Northern Territory EPA decided to review their own guidance to make sure it was contemporary and fit for purpose. That is not taking away from the EPA its responsibility to assess greenhouse gas emissions. The EPA has considered its atmospheric processes guidance and is very close to publishing a revised version of that guidance.

**Mr PAECH:** How does that guidance demonstrate how the EPA should now assess the lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions from industries like fracking, gas, gas exploration and land clearing?

**Mr PURDON:** As I just explained, the EPA is about to release a revised version of that guidance. The EPA will be using their revised version of that guidance to inform how they assess greenhouse gas emissions.

**Mr PAECH:** When can Territorians expect a revised guidance to be publicly released?

**Mr PURDON:** The EPA is about to send out correspondence to relevant stakeholders, being proponents who might be using that guidance. We are expecting that to be sent out in the next two weeks. Following that, that guidance will be published.

**Mr PAECH:** To understand when you talk about the NTEPA reviewing the guidance, was that its decision or was it a recommendation from the department to review or revise that?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is the NTEPA which decided to do that.

**Mr PAECH:** What consultation has been done about the withdrawal of the guidance?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Once again, we are talking about guidance regarding this. The Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority is working amongst the legislation framework which is put in front of it to ensure the environment is protected. That is what it is there to do. It is ensuring that everything it does is in line with the current regulations and approval processes.

There has been a change in relation to the Large Emitters Policy, and it is now rewriting its guidance framework, as Mr Purdon has outlined.

**Mr PAECH:** This obviously might sound like a small change, but it is a huge policy change in how and what is measured in emissions. Again, will there be an opportunity for the public and our environmental groups to have input into this work that is being undertaken?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is important that the committee understands that it was removed because it was duplication. Previously when that was put in place the Commonwealth safeguards were not in place. They are now in place. They are an overarching set of rules and regulations regarding emissions which large companies must comply with. We have removed the duplication. Now the NTEPA is ensuring that its rules and regulations are in line with that.

**Mr PAECH:** Has the EPA consulted the gas industry on this?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I can pass to Paul Purdon, but that is really a question for the EPA to answer. Mr Purdon, I believe, sits on the EPA, so I will pass to him for any further advice he would like to give.

**Mr PURDON:** I do not sit on the EPA. I am a public servant, but I support the Northern Territory EPA in its role.

The EPA has elected not to consult on its review of that guidance. Its understanding of where the guidance needed to go to, given the change in government policy and changes in the Commonwealth safeguard, seem fairly clear to it. It has not consulted with the gas industry, environment groups or any other stakeholders.

**Mr PAECH:** Are you saying the NTEPA is not consulting with anyone about this huge policy shift and the guidance?

**Mr PURDON:** That is correct; it is not consulting with anyone. I do not see it as a huge policy shift. This is guidance to support how the EPA administers legislation. The legislation is unchanged.

**Mr PAECH:** I disagree. This obviously will be how it measures emissions—correct?

**Mr PURDON:** Incorrect. It is not how it measures emissions; it is setting the expectations for proponents on whether they need to consider greenhouse gas emissions when they are going through an impact assessment process.

**Mr PAECH:** Right. Is it changing the way in which it needs to consider how it measures?

**Mr PURDON:** No, it is not. It would be worth waiting to see the revised guidance when it comes out and then pose some questions to the EPA. I think you will find that there is not as much change as you might be suggesting.

**Mr PAECH:** To understand, there is obviously a lot of work happening at the moment on the emissions. You spoke about it in your opening statement. However, there have been significant commitments that you have said are under review and are being reformed.

Last year in August your government last year-in August—the then shadow environment minister, Jo Hersey—said that the CLP was committed to a target of 43% reduction of emissions by 2030. Are you aware of that and is that still the position of the Northern Territory CLP government?

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Gwoja, I have ruled multiple times in favour of all sides that we will not be going to past parliaments. I will allow you to rephrase the question.

**Mr PAECH:** I will table a letter from the Member for Katherine, and I seek confirmation from the minister what the Northern Territory CLP government's commitment is on a target of emissions reduction by 2030?

**Mr CHAIR:** The Member for Gwoja has tabled a paper, tabled paper 9.2.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** This is not current government policy, no.

**Mr PAECH:** What is the Northern Territory CLP government's commitment and target to reduce emissions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is important that when we talk about emissions, and we look at what we are trying to achieve, we look holistically. We know the Northern Territory is an emerging player in this space and we need to ensure the energy we have in the Northern Territory can power not only our own country—as we are seeing a gas shortage on the east coast and around the world—I say loudly and clearly that I would love to see Northern Territory gas supporting a move away from coal on the eastern states.

We have many other states around Australia. Victoria is a classic example where I believe 60% of its energy production still comes from coal. The Northern Territory can assist other states and countries around the world to move away from this form of burning energy, which means that it is dirtier, and it produces more emissions than burning gas. Regarding ...

**K McNAMARA:** A point of Order, Mr Chair! Standing Order—misleading statement. There actually is no gas shortage in Australia, that is misleading and an incorrect statement. We export 70% of our gas; there is no shortage.

**Mr CHAIR:** The facts of that—I will not get into any argument. I note it.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Our government will continue to improve efficiencies across government and industry so that we as a whole are making sure that Territorians have cheap and reliable energy to keep the lights on. We will continue to support other initiatives such as I spoke about in my opening statement, about the Savanna burning, where they are ensuring that they are creating carbon credits which other companies can then purchase to offset their own emissions. This is what we want to see if there will be an industry created and the Territory can benefit from it. These are all the sorts of things that our government is supporting in relation to greenhouse gas emissions.

**Mr PAECH:** The minister still has not answered this question: what is the Northern Territory CLP government's target for reduction of emissions? It is very simple; there has to be a number the government is aspiring to achieve.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I believe what the Member for Gwoja is after is an energy-related topic. Our department works across departments to ensure that where we can improve efficiencies and reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> we are emitting, that we are doing so. This comes when we are moving towards electric vehicles—which I will speak about later—and improving other efficiencies. That is what we are doing. We are ensuring that we have, as far as the energy space is concerned, affordable electricity to keep the lights on for all Territorians, and we will continue to do that.

**Mr PAECH:** We have had every other minister. You are the last minister to appear before Estimates. Every other minister has been able to answer a very simple question, which is, what is the aspired outcome or target that the government wants to reach on a particular policy setting or an agenda.

You are saying today that there is no particular aspiration or target when it comes to reducing emissions in the Northern Territory. There must be data being kept, whether it is in the Environment department or across government somewhere. How do you know what you are working towards if you do not have a goal? What is the reduction-in-emissions target?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Prior to the election, our government spoke of its commitment to net zero and growing our economy in a way that supports the broader decarbonisation objectives. The department has an important role to play regarding climate change and regulatory decisions. This is again speaking to the broader piece of the puzzle.

Projects that are assessed and approved under the *Environment Protection Act* must consider climate change, including greenhouse gas emissions and climate impacts. Greenhouse gas emissions are also regulated under petroleum regulations. I have spoken to all this before.

Everything that we do across government, we look at how what we are doing will impact. There is the overall arching target of net zero by 2050 which has yet to change. I look forward to working with the department to further improve these outcomes over the years to come.

**Mr PAECH:** There is a whole range of measures or programs in which government introduce to respond to climate change and the work that needs to be done to ensure that we can curve the trajectory away from increasing temperatures. Can you confirm that the target of zero emissions by 2050 is still in place and is still being worked to by your department? What work is being done with other agencies to ensure that they are actively working to reduce their carbon footprint?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have stated a few times today and will go to the work that is being done regarding the second part of the question.

The department has undertaken a first pass assessment of climate risk to the Northern Territory. I have yet to see this work, but I understand that its findings will be considered against the outcomes of the National Climate Risk Assessment and the National Adaptation Plan once they are finalised. This is talking about climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. There is work being done to ensure that we are working towards this. I look forward to receiving that report and its recommendations.

**Mr PAECH:** In less than a year, you have attempted to silence environmental groups by cutting their funding. You have sat on water advisory committees. This is in the reporting period.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Gwoja, we will not be reflecting or using his attempting to silence, et cetera. Please just speak to your question.

**Mr PAECH:** In less than one year, you have reduced funding to environmental groups, removed the voices of the Water Advisory Committee members without notice, scrapped third-party merits review of development decisions, slashed funding to Aboriginal ranger groups—a commitment made by your government in the 2024 election—watered down environmental and human health protections for gas industry, and you have walked away from climate policies. Do you think that you deserve the self-proclaimed title of the greenest credentialed member of parliament? What is your government actually doing to respond to climate change in the Northern Territory?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I like to say that I put the conservative into conservative. Regarding the reduced funding, the Northern Territory Government has invested for the first time into NT Landcare, \$150,000 over five years. This is something that we are very proud of.

That organisation came to me and said previous governments simply did not see the importance of that organisation. I sat down with them and have been on the banks of the Todd River busting buffel. I would like to see whether the Member for Gwoja has been.

In regard to the water advisory groups, once these groups have conducted their extremely important work which results in a water allocation plan, those committees are essentially disbanded. That is what should have been happening the entire time. The previous government simply failed to do so.

In regard to the ranger groups, I would love to see where the Member for Gwoja put any money to it. Not one additional dollar was in the budget when we came into government. That is a shame ...

**Mr PAECH:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Stop lying!

**Mr CHAIR:** Gentlemen, I understand you are both passionate about the current output ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Hear, hear!

**Mr CHAIR:** Bring the energy down a little—questions and answers.

**Mr PAECH:** I am waiting for the Environment minister to answer the question that he has walked away from the Large Emitters Policy. He has not shown what tangible programs the Northern Territory CLP government is investing in when it comes to renewable energy targets. How is it meeting those guidelines and agreements to respond to climate change in the Northern Territory—tangible programs that this budget will fund?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding those renewable energy targets you have spoken of, we are doing real work on the ground. One of the main proponents I have met with, probably more than any other proponent in the Northern Territory, is SunCable. What is proposed is to be one of its largest renewable projects in this country.

I do not know if you have ever heard of ghost bats, Mr Chair, but I hear about ghost bats just about every week. A large renewable energy project is trying to get its power up here to Darwin so that we can all power our future industries off renewable energy. This department has worked with that industry at length to ensure that we can get the power from the Barkly up to Darwin to ensure we have renewable energy power into the future. It has quite literally worked with SunCable.

It was amazing yesterday to hear of the work it has been doing. There have been large culverts that have been implemented to ensure that the homes of these ghost bats can be protected. Whilst we all acknowledge that we need renewable energy and to reduce our emissions, we also want to protect the environment that is in place. When you look at running a large cable all the way from the Barkly up to Darwin to power future renewable energy industries, these are the things that come into play.

Every day the department is working with proponents to ensure that they are protecting the environment and deliver real renewable energy in the Northern Territory. I support its work every day of the week. I look forward to seeing future proposals that are put forward. Our government will continue to ensure that we are encouraging the private industries to invest in these spaces.

We have seen previously the lack of foresight regarding large solar fields being powered up yet unable to connect to the grid properly. These are all things that are big issues. When we look at what has been happening regarding SunCable and a range of other proponents, our government will continue to work with

them to ensure that they can get these projects off the ground and we can have this renewable energy coming into the grid in the future but also protecting our natural environment.

**Mr PAECH:** I hope you are as passionate about the Gouldian finch as you are about ghost bats.

We know about SunCable; it started under the former Labor government. If you are so interested in that project, why did you scrap those targets?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I believe it was the minister for Energy who spoke about those targets when he made the announcement.

**Mr PAECH:** You are not denying that there has been a removal of that target.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have sat in the Chamber for many years—if I am allowed to elaborate, Mr Chair, for but a moment—and spoken about where we are in regard to reaching those previous targets that were set by the previous government.

We were not on target to meet those. It was frustrating for me then, as shadow minister for those essential services, to see that we simply would not achieve them. Our government is ensuring that we are doing real on-the-ground work wherever possible to ensure we are getting as many renewables into the grid, but also ensuring that it is stable, because it is important. If we have the power or the lights going out—we are walking into the energy space here—it simply will not work. Our government is working on what is in front of us. Every day our departments are ensuring that we are improving our efficiencies across government. We are looking at how we can better reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and our CO<sub>2</sub>, there is a lot of work being done and I dispute the fact that the Member for Gwoja is trying to imply we are walking away from all that.

**Mr PAECH:** You said that this was a decision of the Energy minister. As the Environment minister, were you involved in any part of the decision to remove that target?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will be very clear; it is a decision of government, and I am a part of government. The Energy minister was the one who spoke in regard to that announcement.

**Mr PAECH:** Do you not think the targets are important? You are not essentially prepared to be accountable to a particular standard if you will walk away from the target.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is not at all what I am saying. There are many different targets which we can speak to across departments and across government. We are committed—and I spoke about it earlier—the government still has not changed its position on net zero. Later in this piece, I do not want to pre-empt debate, I have been working with DCDD and NT Fleet about how they are changing over their vehicles to electric. There are a range of targets across the Northern Territory Government. They may not be the ones the Member for Gwoja likes, but at the end of the day there are many and vast.

**Mr PAECH:** It seems that when government does not like a target, they remove it—a bit like the debt ceiling. Minister, you have reduced funding to the Office of Water Security by more than \$1.2m. This office is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Territory Water Plan. As you should be aware, this plan is the result of extensive consultation across government, community and the private sector and sets a course for water security across the Territory. Are you walking away from it and relegating Territorians to a chaotic water policy like the last CLP?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to what is being spoken about by the Member for Gwoja and reduced funding for Territory water resources, the Territory Water Plan has not had a reduction in funding. It has been wrongly reported in the media as a cut to funding when this is plainly not the case. There has been \$13.53m provided over three years from 2023–24 to implement the Territory Water Plan, allocated across NT Government agencies responsible for the implementation of individual actions. Of this the Office of Water Security receives \$2.31m annually to deliver on the coordination of the plan and around half of the plan activities. The \$3.52m allocated in 2024–25 included \$1.2m that was rolled over from the previous year given the initial start-up issues associated with establishing the new initiative in the first year. That is what has occurred there. It has been a rolling over into the previous year's budget, which was not then rolled over into the next, but that water allocation plan is very important and continues.

**K McNAMARA:** We have just heard a whole lot of gas propaganda from our Environment minister, including about a gas shortage. When you say there is a gas shortage, what is your source for saying that? Where did you get that information?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In the Northern Territory over the last few years, we have had contractual obligations that have not been able to be met. This has all been revealed through Estimates, which I have been sitting in for years and years. The Northern Territory as a result has had to go and buy spot gas because we have not had enough gas to meet our contractual obligations. I hope everyone here is listening and asks the Power and Water Corporation tomorrow all about these interesting questions. In the Northern Territory if we do not have enough gas to meet our needs, we are buying gas at the market price. That means everyday Territorians are paying more for their energy through one means or another, whether it is an increase in CSO or another means. It is important that people understand, while you might think there are copious amounts of gas out there—absolutely, gas is being exported to other nations that need to ensure their energy security.

**K McNAMARA:** To clarify, there is no gas shortage, so when you say there is a gas shortage on the east coast, it is factually incorrect. We export 70% to 80% of our gas. If there is any shortage, it is a manufactured one, because all governments apart from WA failed to make a reservation policy for people.

When you talk about gas as low emissions, what is your source for that?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Burning natural gas produces less sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and particular matter compared to coal. This is a commonly known fact.

**K McNAMARA:** What you did not mention then was methane, which is 80 times more powerful in terms of damage to the atmosphere and climate than carbon dioxide. The only people who say 'low emissions gas' are the gas industry, so are you just spouting gas propaganda.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am absolutely not spruiking a gas propaganda. In the Northern Territory, as the Environment minister, I want to make sure we are contributing and working towards ensuring that we can get people off burning dirtier forms of electricity and energy and onto cleaner forms. That is what we need to do. I will support any industry to ensure they are operating in an environmentally regulated way to achieve this.

**K McNAMARA:** You said earlier in your statement that climate change presents opportunity and risks; which is greater, the opportunity or the risks?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** When we look across the Northern Territory, the opportunities are something I always look to. When we look at the savanna fire management exercise that has been happening for a few years—I was glad to speak at the forum recently, because \$280m of carbon credits have been generated as a result of that. That happened as a result of people putting a price on those carbon emissions, which are being reduced because of what they call cool burning.

As we look across the industry, as large industry is trying to reduce its overall emissions, we can support industries like this as well as traditional owners, who are working on the savanna burning exercise to create carbon credits which they can then sell to larger corporations. Many opportunities are available. There will always be risks, as we have spoken about. In the Territory, as I spoke about earlier, as a jurisdiction that only emits 5% of the emissions in all of Australia, we must do our part but also take up the opportunities that present themselves.

**K McNAMARA:** Am I getting it right that you think the opportunities from climate change outweigh the risks? I am just trying to clarify.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** This is not about asking for an opinion. What we are working through is the opportunities and the risks, as I have outlined. As a government, we will always seek to take advantage of the opportunities that present in this space.

**Mr CHAIR:** This is for all the committee, because we have had a few instances of it this morning: we cannot put words in the minister's mouth. We can ask him a question, and we get the answer we receive. As we go through the outputs, we may end up coming back to this a few times. I cannot rule on every private contract regarding fossil fuel and the allocation of it, so I will put that out there. I cannot determine supply facts. Questions and answers—if you have an objection, put it through me.

**K McNAMARA:** Every minister I have asked in Estimates about climate change when it pertains to their own portfolios, such as economic risk to the Treasurer, have all tried to handball it to you, so I am glad to have this opportunity. In a climate crisis your government scrapped the Minister for Climate Change, and I have barely seen the word 'climate' mentioned in this budget. Are you the minister responsible for addressing climate change? I want to confirm that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I would like to read something, if I can.

I and the government accept the science of climate change. As Environment minister, I am the minister responsible for leading the Northern Territory Government's response to climate change. The Office of Climate Change—which has been referenced many times during these Estimates—is in the Environment and Heritage branch, and it supports me in my role by coordinating and leading climate change policy and actions across departments.

This government's approach to climate change is one that aligns with our clear priorities of rebuilding the economy and restoring the Northern Territory lifestyle. Prior to the election, as I have said many times today, the government spoke of its commitment to net zero and growing our economy in ways that support broader decarbonisation objectives.

The department has an important role in considering climate change in regulatory decisions. Projects assessed and approved under the *Environment Protection Act 2019* must consider climate change, including greenhouse gas emissions and climate impacts. Greenhouse gas emissions are also regulated under the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations. The work the department is doing on a new environmental code of practice includes emissions management requirements and water allocation plans and, therefore, decisions on the extraction of water are informed by climate science. The department is also responsible for the planning and environmental approvals that enable projects that reduce emissions such as renewable energy projects and NT-based carbon capture facilities.

I have been listening all week, and I know you have been keen, Member for Nightcliff, to find out about our climate change policies.

**K McNAMARA:** Thank you very much, minister; you have been listening.

What is climate change, and what causes it? If you can say it briefly, in a nutshell.

**Mr CHAIR:** Committee, we cannot ask opinions ...

**K McNAMARA:** It is not an opinion. It totally informs the policy of someone responsible for climate change.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nightcliff, you could rephrase it and ask, potentially, does the department have a definition. Try to rephrase it so that it is not an opinion from the minister.

**K McNAMARA:** Does the minister have a definition of climate change and what causes it?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In all seriousness, Mr Chair, if the Member for Nightcliff wants a definition she can go to the dictionary and seek one. This is the whole point; if you have any questions relating to the budget I am happy to answer ...

**Mr PAECH:** The question was: what is the Northern Territory Government, and you as the minister's, definition of climate change? That is what we are asking.

**Mr CHAIR:** The minister is allowed to answer his question.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have been advised that regarding climate change our department uses the international definition.

**K McNAMARA:** What would that be?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is the United Nations framework definition.

**K McNAMARA:** Off the cuff, the minister responsible for climate change cannot give me a definition of climate change. That is what I am hearing.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nightcliff, I just ruled that we cannot take what the minister has said and do our own summary. He has given the answer. If it is not the answer you are looking for ...

**K McNAMARA:** The second part of that was, apart from the international definition, what causes climate change? From the department, can you tell me what your definition is of what causes climate change? It is pretty simple.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will refer to our Executive Director of Environment, Heritage, Lands and Planning regarding how our government defines and deals with climate change.

**Mr PURDON:** Climate change is caused by the human release of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere.

**K McNAMARA:** Are you able to tell us some of the changes that the NT has already experienced from climate change and some of the changes projected for the NT?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding some of the risks you have posed by climate change, the first step in responding to climate risk is to identify what they are so they can be prioritised for a response. The department is undertaking a first-pass assessment of climate risks to the NT for this purpose. I am yet to see this work, but I understand that its findings will be considered against the outcomes of the National Climate Risk Assessment and National Adaptation Plan once they are finalised to inform the government's response to adapting to the impact of climate change.

**K McNAMARA:** I will get onto the work you are doing on climate risk, but I was asking can you tell us some of the changes the NT has already experienced from climate change and some of the changes that are projected for the NT?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The existing things we are experiencing regarding this—it has been widely reported on—are an increase in temperatures, an increase in sea levels and an increase in the severity of extreme events. Something which has been impacting many people when we look at insurances.

**K McNAMARA:** Thank you; I am glad to see you put some through. I will add that we have the number of days of 40 degrees will increase from seven days a year to 43 days a year in Katherine and from approximately 14 days a year to 48 days a year over 40 degrees in Alice Springs. Does the minister accept the latest science that the NT is an existential risk of extreme compounding and cascading impacts, such as species extinction, increased drought, increased fire severity, increased flooding and significant sea-level rise?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As the minister responsible for the department of Environment I am working through how our government can respond to climate change and how we can ensure that we are doing our bit to offset this. I think it is important when we have these discussions that we talk about these things—every single one of us in our daily lives can work on how we all impact on the environment and how we can reduce our overall carbon emissions. I have spoken at great length—and I love to talk about the fact that I love to run my electric bike and deliver all my mail personally. This reduced the number of stamps that I have to produce and the amount of emissions. It is so important.

**K McNAMARA:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Answers are to be concise and on the topic. I did not ask about his electric bike. Can I ask the question again just to get an answer?

**Mr CHAIR:** The minister was not speaking for very long. I will let you restate the question.

**K McNAMARA:** Minister, do you accept the latest science that the NT is at a risk of extremely compounding impacts such as, specifically, species extinction, increased drought, increased fire severity, increased flooding and significant sea-level rise?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is a leading question. What we are doing as a government is ensuring that we are doing our part in offsetting and working towards a day where we have less emissions than we do now. It is important to acknowledge that we are an emerging Territory in this space; we need to take advantage of the opportunities that the natural resources we have provide. That means taking advantage of things like the Beetaloo basin, which can provide cheap and affordable energy for people across the country. That is important.

What frustrates me when we have these conversations is that it is an either/or for some people. We will be continuing to ensure that anyone who comes to the Northern Territory and wants to operate here does so among the environmental frameworks and strong regulations that are in place. I look forward to answering any further questions.

**K McNAMARA:** I will rephrase because I believe this is a yes or no. I do not think ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Nightcliff, I have ruled multiple times that we cannot tell ministers yes or no or the way we want an answer.

**K McNAMARA:** All right. I will have to be satisfied with a complete lack of answer on that one.

**Mr CHAIR:** We will break for 10 minutes and reconvene at 10.32 am.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr CHAIR:** I remind everyone in the committee that we are here to scrutinise the appropriation of funds. I do not want to be getting into arguments. As per Standing Order 109, it is for the floor of parliament to be contesting that direction. Please keep it to figures and questions of government.

**Mr PAECH:** Following on from the questioning from the Member for Nightcliff regarding climate change, we have had multiple ministers this week, when asked this question, refer to you. Where in the Territory budget is the money that is being invested to respond to climate change? You have said already in your opening statement that you believe flooding and increased temperatures—we are seeing temperatures in Alice Springs of 100 days over 40 degrees. We have had extensive flooding in areas throughout the Top End. Where in the budget is there a budget allocation to respond to climate change and to address climate change?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the Office of Climate Change, which is responsible for this, there is \$2.674m.

**Mr PAECH:** What will that \$2m be spent on in response to climate change?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding the support the Office of Climate Change provides, there is a land-based emissions abatement program which supports land managers to reduce emissions from their activities and encourage engagement in carbon markets. In 2024–25 there was \$160,000 for the NT Cattlemen's Association to assist pastoralists to manage emissions and engage in the carbon market.

There is \$100,000 to the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network to support expansion of Indigenous engagement in the carbon market, and \$40,000 co-funding with the Queensland Government to the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network to implement a marketing and branding strategy for ICIN and its Indigenous carbon markets guide.

**Mr PAECH:** You just spoke about money to the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association to reduce emissions. What is their target to reduce their emissions by?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That would be a question for the NT Cattlemen's Association.

**Mr PAECH:** You have given money to a third party without having in the agreement what they are supposed to reduce their emissions by.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to swing to the chief executive to speak more about this money and where it goes.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** As the minister outlined, the Office of Climate Change has recurrent funding of \$2.6m per annum for six staff. It has a whole-of-government coordination role across the NTPS and government. It has some grant funding that it provides, one of which is to the NT Cattlemen's Association. That funding is in recognition that land abatement is a particularly difficult area to reduce emissions in, given we are a largely intact environment in the Territory, and it gives them some internal capability to coordinate and advise with their members on different options and strategies to reduce land-based emissions as a result of pastoralism.

They are not necessarily working to a target; they are working to advise and inform their members.

**Mr PAECH:** You give grant funding to organisations, and there is usually a measure of KPIs to respond to. Part of the funding provided to the NT Cattlemen's Association—how much is it and what are their KPIs to report to government in regard to this investment?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The KPIs are in the agreement, and we do not have the agreement in front of us here.

**Mr PAECH:** Are you able to provide what those KPIs are?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to take that question on notice.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.1

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

**Mr PAECH:** You spoke about providing funding to the NT Cattlemen's Association in relation to reducing emissions. Can you provide what those KPIs are and how much that grant funding is?

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I just want to confirm—\$160,000 to the NT Cattlemen's Association is to assist pastoralists to manage emissions and engage in the carbon market. That is what it is for.

**Mr PAECH:** And you will take the KPI question on notice?

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, do you accept the KPI question?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 9.1.

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**Mr PAECH:** Following on from the Member for Nightcliff's questions about climate change, the Housing minister and the Treasurer talked about natural disasters. What is the department doing to ensure that when we are further building new developments or seeing communities experience annual events as a result of climate change—looking at helping that community reduce the impacts of climate change, given that most people who feel climate change at the moment are in remote parts of the Northern Territory?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I argue everyone is impacted by it ...

**Mr PAECH:** Absolutely!

**Mr BURGOYNE:** What we speak about here is an adaption plan. Obviously, the Northern Territory, as I spoke about, emits 5% of Australia's emissions. Australia emits a reduced figure when we talk about global emissions.

In the Northern Territory we need to look at how we are adapting to climate change and how we can ensure that when we build a house it is above flood levels. When we look at all these things we can work with agencies to ensure that—you will never be able to mitigate all the risks—we are working to reduce the risks.

**Mr PAECH:** Will you, as the Environment and Planning minister, look to introduce caveats or legislation which puts restrictions on what people can build in particular areas of the Northern Territory as a way to respond to climate change?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We will be supporting other agencies to introduce risk assessments into their planning and delivery. Obviously, as the minister responsible for Lands, Planning and Environment, that is what we can do to support other agencies.

**Mr PAECH:** The Alice Springs Plan Review Water Advisory Committee, the Berry Springs Water Advisory Committee, the Beetaloo Regional Reference Group, the Beetaloo Sub-basin water advisory committee and Aboriginal reference group, the Drillers Qualification Advisory Committee, the Howard Water Advisory Committee, the Katherine Water Advisory Committee, the Ooloo Water Advisory Committee, the Rapid Creek Water Advisory Committee, the Mataranka Tindall Water Advisory Committee and the Western Davenport and Ti Tree Water Advisory Committee have all been dissolved by the government.

I am trying to understand what level of involvement traditional owners, community members, pastoralists and experts will now have in playing a role in the ongoing monitoring and advising of how government will deliver and work through this plan and be accountable.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** When I came to government there were many committees that were simply not meeting. There were many committees that had achieved their outcome regarding those water allocation plans. That is why they were disbanded.

In regard to the committees, there has been a review across government undertaken to review all committees. Any that were deemed to be not active are the ones we have disbanded. As I said, when a water allocation plan is put in place, then the work of that committee is done. I have thanked them. I have signed many letters to members of those to thank them for the important work they have done to ensure that the water allocation plan could be put forward.

**Mr PAECH:** I want to be clear. The Drillers Qualification Advisory Committee was the body in the Northern Territory established under the *Water Act* to advise the Water Controller resources on matters related to driller licensing. It also provided expertise on granting, renewing and varying drilling licences. The committee comprised of members with extremely diverse and high qualifications and experience in hydrology, groundwater engineering, drilling operations and drilling service users.

Why get rid of the Driller Qualification Advisory Committee just as Beetaloo is commencing?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to the Chief Executive, Joanne Townsend, to provide further information about these committees.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** The Drillers Qualification Advisory Committee was established under the *Water Act*—you are correct. It only met when some advice was required on the special parts of drilling licensing requirements. In actual fact, it had not met in the last three years at least, from my memory, probably longer, and that is because nationally there is a national driller qualification framework which has well and truly superseded the DQAC, which is why we felt we could disband it. There is a national framework for the accreditation of drillers in Australia that we would use as an alternative.

**Mr PAECH:** Was it not deemed or considered to keep this committee in place as the Beetaloo was coming on?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** If those committees were deemed not to be active that is the decision that has been made in review to those committees.

**Mr PAECH:** We are talking about the Western Davenport, Ti Tree and the Mataranka water advisory committees. These committees were unfortunately rescinded or abolished right before Christmas; I think it was seven days before Christmas. Was the Mataranka advisory committee involved in the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan and were they asked to approve it?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I want to be clear that the water advisory committees have done a huge amount of work in regard to these plans over a long period of time.

The plan was initially put forward, I believe it was with 87,000 megalitres in a draft format, before a previous minister—if I am allowed, Mr Chair—removed 20,000 megalitres out of that allocation. I want to be clear that was not based on science.

Since coming into government I have spoken with the department about the best available science to base my decisions, and that is important. When the reallocation of that plan went back up to the original amount—I thank the committee for their work over the period of that plan being put in place. However, once a plan is put in place that advisory committee's job is done.

**Mr PAECH:** Were the Mataranka water advisory committee members consulted? Did they see the final water allocation plan before you signed off on it?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** All the minutes of their meetings regarding the Mataranka plan are public. My information is that they are integral in putting forward and contributing to that plan. Once that is done the water allocation plan comes to me as minister and is signed off on.

**Mr PAECH:** In March this year you announced you had dropped the investigation into illegal land clearing at Claravale Station on the banks of the pristine Daly River and reached an out of court settlement with the owners. Was this the first ever prosecution for illegal land clearing in the Territory with the owners admitting to land clearing without a permit?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, under the *Planning Act*. I want to speak about Claravale Station because it is important for the committee to understand what has occurred here.

Since coming into government there has been a number of messes that we have been left with that we have had to work through and deal with. Regarding Claravale Station there was currently legal proceedings underway regarding a section of land that had been cleared well away from the Daly River. The land that had been cleared beside the Daly River, which featured on a number of news articles, was cleared lawfully. I want to be very clear on that.

Through being the Environment minister the direction to the department was to get the best outcome for the environment. Through those negotiations an outcome was able to be reached where 1.5 kilometres 250 metres wide was able to be put aside under a covenant in gross—this is land that was formerly owed by the proponent—so that it can be protected from now until all time.

We have been able to achieve this as a result of those discussions about that proponent. It was an outcome. I was briefed about if we had sought to take this all the way the outcome was highly likely to be a fine for the proponent. At the end of the day, as the minister for Environment, I am seeking to get the best outcome for the environment. I can say before the committee that ensuring that 1.5 kilometres, 250 metres wide, protected along the Daly River was the best outcome we could achieve for the environment. It will come at great cost to that proponent who will now have to go back and survey and revegetate that land.

It is really important. Some people in the media have claimed that the proponent got away scot-free. I absolutely dispute those claims. There is a huge amount of work now that they will have to undergo to ensure that area about the agreement is all met.

Legal proceedings took place. There was an agreement reached so that we could get the best outcome here.

**Mr PAECH:** It was found to be illegal activity that had occurred. How did you reach the view that it should be settled rather than prosecuted?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Just to be clear, the advice that I am getting is that this was all alleged. They have never admitted to unpermitted clearing. They were contesting that charge. It is important to get through here is that in any legal proceedings the lawyers are the ones who win in all this. We want to ensure that a strong message is sent—do not clear without a permit in the Northern Territory. I believe that message has been sent loudly and clearly. Through the negotiations regarding this an outcome was able to be reached so that a section along a river that was illegally cleared could be protected under a covenant in gross. I believe, from speaking with many people, that was the outcome that the community wanted to see.

**Mr PAECH:** Are you suggesting that they did not admit that they had cleared land without a permit?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** With regard to the advice I am receiving, no admission of guilt was ever given. The charges were for unpermitted clearing. An agreement was reached on that. That is really what I can say about this matter.

**Mr PAECH:** Did the department consider that they had cleared land without a permit?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For any legal proceedings to be undertaken by the previous minister, you would have to ask what they were going on. Those legal proceedings were on foot. I received a briefing on that, and the direction was given to the department what was happening.

**Mr PAECH:** I do not accept that because you are sitting there with your department officials who would have had to provide something to the minister at the time, which is within the reporting period, whether it was recommended to take action or not. Is it the department's view that land was cleared without a permit?

**Mr CHAIR:** I feel that we are stepping into Standing Order 233 a bit. Can you ask the question without any idea of an opinion?

**Mr PAECH:** Yes, 100%. Within the reporting period there have been legal proceedings taking place where the Northern Territory Government has lodged to go to court. That is incurring costs. The minister would have had to, within the reporting period, be of the view that something had been done illegally or had not been done with the appropriate approval to proceed. Did the department, within the reporting period, consider that land clearing had occurred without a permit at Claravale Station?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to go the department so that they can speak on why this has occurred. I will pass to Chief Executive Officer Joanne Townsend.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Yes, the department believes there had been unpermitted clearing on Claravale farm and proceeded to prosecution. It had its body of evidence; those charges were being contested. The matter was becoming protracted over two years and beyond, which is why the resolution was considered to be a more favourable one.

**Mr PAECH:** I am just wanting to understand minister—you talk about there being consequences for everyone who does the wrong thing. There was a consequence that should have been discovered by the court; why did you choose not to let the law determine the consequence for environmental vandalism rather than settling beforehand?

**Mr CHAIR:** We will not determine what the court may have determined or if vandalism occurred or not.

**Mr PAECH:** A point of order, Mr Chair! No-one has said what determination the judiciary would make, but I am suggesting that the minister who talks big on consequences chose to settle an environmental matter out of court rather than let the court—the judiciary—deal with the matter.

**Mr CHAIR:** That question is fine, shadow minister.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We are making a whole heap of assumptions now about what would have happened regarding this. As the minister for Environment, I wanted to ensure that we received the best outcome for the environment regarding this claim. I believe we have achieved that.

**Mr PAECH:** Before you made the decision to settle out of court, did you speak with the owners of Claravale Station, the Environment Centre or Wagiman traditional owners who first raised the alarm about the prosecution before it was dropped?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I thought this question would come up. I remember speaking to the owners of Claravale Station when I was the shadow minister for Agriculture prior to the previous election at an agribusiness forum in Katherine. That was face to face, but it was broader conversations that did not relate directly to the prosecution matter.

**Mr PAECH:** You did not meet with the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory or the traditional owners before making that decision?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have met with the Environment Centre. I have a long list of people I have met regarding this.

**Mr PAECH:** I am asking about this particular issue.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I cannot recall whether this was raised.

**Mr PAECH:** I think the Member for Nightcliff has questions on land clearing.

**Mr CHAIR:** I remind the committee about Standing Order 210 regarding any reflection that could adversely reflect on individuals or other separate organisations.

**K McNAMARA:** On the topic of land clearing, minister, how many hectares of native vegetation were cleared in the Territory in the past year, and what funding is allocated to collect the data?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Some parcels of land have been cleared in the reporting period, and I will speak on them. In Douglas Daly, 796 hectares; in Iliyarne, 0.35 hectares; in Tarwoo, 0.025 hectares; in Ali Curung, for horticultural purposes, 162 hectares; and in Glyde and Dundee downs, for improved pasture, eight hectares were cleared. There were also three land-clearing applications on zoned land, which were approved by the

DCA between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025. They were 158 hectares and 0.37 hectares at Howard Springs and another 1.5 hectares at Howard Springs. That is the information I have on hand.

**K McNAMARA:** Is that the total amount that has been cleared in this reporting period?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Across the Northern Territory, less than 1% of the land mass is cleared. It is very under-utilised and still heavily vegetated.

**K McNAMARA:** How do you collect that data, and what funding is put aside to collect that data on land clearing?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have been advised that we have people in the Flora and Fauna and Rangelands units who deals with land clearing across the Northern Territory.

**K McNAMARA:** What remote sensing and satellite monitoring systems does the Territory use to detect land clearing, and how much does that cost?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As that is a technical question, I pass to my Chief Executive, whom I believe has someone from one of those departments who can better explain some of the work the department does in this space.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Maria Wauchope is the Executive Director, Rangelands, and has the right sensing expertise in the department and the Northern Territory Government. The processing of land clearing occurs under the *Planning Act* and was formerly under the *Pastoral Land Act*.

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** We have the remote sensing unit within the Rangelands division. We work with the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation in Queensland, and they have a Sentinel satellite program. We use that information for an annual report of what land clearing has occurred across the Territory.

**K McNAMARA:** How much does that cost, or how much of the budget is set aside for monitoring land clearing through the Sentinel project?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The department works through their relevant agencies to ensure that this information, the member asked for, is collected. I do not have an exact figure today.

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### Question on Notice No 9.2

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

**K McNAMARA:** How much is spent on monitoring the clearing of vegetation through satellite monitoring and remote sensing?

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 9.2.

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**K McNAMARA:** How frequently are land-clearing permits inspected for compliance, and what is the budget for these compliance activities?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is a technical question, so I will pass to CE Joanne Townsend, whom I am sure will pass on to Maria for the answer.

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** We have a compliance unit within the division. Their role is to audit across the Territory. I need to be very clear; it is only land that is considered under the *Planning Act* that the division is responsible for. The compliance officer will formally look at and audit any complaints sent to us and has a program where they are starting to audit. We have only set up the compliance unit in the last couple of years, so they are still in the process.

**K McNAMARA:** Just to clarify, you said the compliance unit only considers land that is under the *Planning Act*, so does that mean someone could clear land on a privately owned station that is not under the Act that could be cleared, but you would not be able to monitor it? Is that right?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to land-clearing on pastoral properties, they are administered by the Pastoral Land Board.

**K McNAMARA:** They monitor the compliance for that, the Pastoral Land Board?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, it would be a question for them.

**K McNAMARA:** In the reporting period, were there any cases of illegal land-clearing that were prosecuted in the past year?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Maria Wauchope.

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** In the reporting period there has not been a property prosecuted. There are a number of properties under investigation.

**K McNAMARA:** Are you able to tell me how many?

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** There are two properties currently being investigated.

**K McNAMARA:** I am guessing we are not allowed to know who they are? Just a question—how many staff are dedicated specifically to investigating illegal land-clearing across the Territory?

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** Under the *Planning Act*, there is one officer dedicated to the compliance role. Then we have officers in the remote sensing unit that assist the compliance officer.

**K McNAMARA:** That is one officer to cover the whole Northern Territory?

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** To be clear, it is only on planning land, zoned or unzoned.

**Mr PAECH:** I wanted to ask a question which I know the minister is involved in. When you talk about land clearing, it is often seen as heavy machinery coming in and clearing a site, but there is also a form of land clearing through invasive species like buffel grass which clear out the natural vegetation and create grasslands and savannas, which erodes the environmental area and the quality of the land.

What is the cost of declining land quality and the increasing expenses for Parks to prevent buffel grass invasion?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I believe that would be a question for Parks.

**Mr PAECH:** This is an environmental weed that has been declared a weed by the previous government, and it is still declared a weed in this government. What money in the budget is being invested to respond to the declaration of buffel grass being a weed and to minimise its spread?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You are right; the previous government declared buffel grass a weed and did not do any of the necessary work before declaring it. Our government is working with the Weeds Advisory Committee in regard to buffel grass to do that important work, which involves mapping the spread of buffel grass. We have also put in place an officer—I believe I met him earlier this year—named Max. There is \$750,000, from memory, in the budget to deal with buffel grass. Our government is getting on with doing the hard work that previously had not been done in this space, and working with that weeds advisory committee which is now formulating a management plan.

**Mr PAECH:** Will you make the mapping of buffel grass public?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The advice I have is yes, that will be made public.

**Mr PAECH:** Has the department done any work with Bushfires NT to assess the impact of burning buffel grass for fuel reduction, particularly whether it furthers the spread of buffel?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Maria Wauchope who can talk about those details about what the department has been doing.

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** As the minister said, we have a new team of staff in Alice Springs. The minister had met Max; another staff member, Amber; and there is one who is about to come on board any day soon. There will be a team of three people solely dedicated to buffel. They are working with Bushfires NT and Transport to look at reducing the impact of fire from a buffel perspective. They are also talking to Transport about reducing the spread of buffel through transport corridors.

**Mr PAECH:** What is the assessed risk of a catastrophic buffel grass fire impacting Alice Springs' rural areas, remote communities and homelands?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** This is the important work the Weeds Advisory Committee is looking at. They are looking at the impacts and how that can form the basis for their management plan into the future.

**Mr PAECH:** Has the Northern Territory department conducted modelling to understand this risk? If not, why? For example, South Australia has done modelling which demonstrated the significant risks to Port Augusta.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** When we are talking about fuel loads we are getting towards the work that Bushfires NT does. Our department is working through the Weeds Advisory Committee and the management plan in regard to taking all these things into consideration.

**Mr PAECH:** How many environmental approvals were granted in the last 12 months? How many of those included greenhouse gas conditions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am advised that there was one environmental approval. No, there were not any conditions in regard to greenhouse gas emissions.

**Mr PAECH:** Can you provide what that approval was?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That was Equatorial Launch. Happy to speak about that more if you would like.

**Mr PAECH:** I am sure you would.

How many environmental compliance audits have been carried out in the last reporting period?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We will retrieve that information for you. Can you confirm under which legislation and exactly what you are looking for?

**Mr PAECH:** Sure. I want to understand how many environmental compliance audits have been carried out for gas and mining projects in the last year.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Environmental compliance audits—is that what you are after, not inspections?

**Mr PAECH:** You can give me both if you want, making a bit more work for yourself. I am happy for the minister to take that on notice if that is easier.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No. We will get the information. We are just working through some of those particulars.

In the reporting period, 1 July 2024 to 30 March 2025, the petroleum regulation team within the department undertook the following range of actions. They involved 24 site inspections across nine active petroleum sites. There were 42 annual environmental performance and monitoring reports. That is under petroleum; we are just getting mining. Was there anything further you would like to ask?

**Mr PAECH:** Certainly. Of those audits, were there identified breaches or remedy notices issued?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to pass along to Sally Strohmayer to explain some of the actions undertaken.

**Ms STROHMAYER:** Our compliance team and the petroleum regulation team conduct site inspections. During those site inspections they check to ensure that the controls that are in the environment management plan are in place or whether there is any noncompliance in that plan. If they pick up any issues during those site inspections they notify the interest holder and get them to rectify any noncompliance or if those controls are not being effective.

**Mr PAECH:** Have there been breaches recorded? If so, how many? The department would record them.

**Ms STROHMAYR:** We record issues that we see onsite inspections. We do not have the specific number of those observations made on site when there are issues that need to be rectified. We can get those numbers.

**Mr PAECH:** Could you provide those numbers, please?

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

**Mr PAECH:** Do you want me to repeat the whole question or just that particular part?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You were after the number of inspections that had taken place.

**Mr PAECH:** Just to confirm that we are still on petroleum because we have not been given the numbers for mining yet. I will pre-empt that there might be a second question on notice.

Could you provide the number of recorded breaches or, as the department has said, cause notices that have been recorded in relation to the petroleum approvals and audits?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** In response to specific noncompliance in this reporting period we have issued six warning letters, and one penalty infringement notice for an unauthorised clearing on a petroleum site.

**Mr PAECH:** How much was the penalty infringement?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** It was approximately \$3,200.

**Mr PAECH:** Will we also get the numbers for the mining? That was part of the original question.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have been told there were 95 inspections regarding mines, and four sites are under investigation following compliance inspections.

**Mr PAECH:** Four sites currently under investigation, and no breaches or penalties to date.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Correct.

**K McNAMARA:** As reported by the NT Independent in May 2025 the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment recently disclosed that it had resolved three incidents relating to activities of Imperial Oil & Gas, a subsidiary of Empire Energy, at its well pads on EP187. While the details of two of these incidents were set out in a regulatory statement and published on DLPE's website, the details of the third incident have not been provided to the public. I am looking for information on that third incident. Can you confirm if there was an issue with the casing of the well on EP187?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the historical breaches which you have spoken about I am aware that the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment resolved two historical breaches. These related to the location of a well pad and the location of a gravel pit.

I am happy to go to the chief executive, Ms Joanne Townsend, in relation to any of the other matters that I have not been made aware of.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** You are correct; there were three matters raised, two of which have been resolved by this department, identified as a noncompliance with the EMP on the Carpentaria site. Two matters related to clearing outside of their footprint and were resolved through both remediation action and an infringement notice, which Ms Strohmayr has referred to already. There is a regulatory statement published about that and what was done.

The third matter related to noncompliance with the EMP for well construction. In the absence of a determination on prosecution, compliance action was discussed with DME, which actually regulate well construction. It was determined that they have that regulatory responsibility. As a result, it was not in the public interest to continue to pursue that matter for noncompliance, given that the well construction was deemed to be in accordance with their well operations management plan.

**K McNAMARA:** Who determined that it was not in the public interest?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** That is done at the branch level.

**K McNAMARA:** This is new information for me. It was with the casing of the well; is that what the issue was?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Our matter was around compliance with an EMP, not around casing. There was no incident with casing.

**K McNAMARA:** Will the department now release a detailed report to reassure the public that water resources are being adequately protected from the impacts of fracking in this case?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** The matters that we regulated have been released and publicly disclosed, yes.

**K McNAMARA:** I understand that on this third incident there was nothing publicly released; is that right?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** That is right.

**K McNAMARA:** Can any more information about this third incident be released to the public?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** It is our practice where there is a reportable incident and an investigation undertaken by us that is completed that we would release that to the public. This is a matter that was regulated by another agency.

**Mr PAECH:** In the budget there appears to be a reduction of \$9.1m from the early-stage planning and environmental assessment for the Middle Arm precinct that has been removed. Can you confirm whether any components of that project remain funded? Is the Northern Territory Government still committed to that project?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can you confirm what you are referring to in the budget papers?

**Mr PAECH:** The last budget that we are exiting now had funding around the early-stage planning and environmental assessment for the Middle Arm project. I will rephrase it. Can you confirm the position that the Northern Territory Government has on the Middle Arm project? Given that we are moving into the new budget cycle, is there any funding in this budget to support that environmental assessment work?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The advice that I am being provided by the department is that funding has gone into the DLI, Minister Yan's responsibility, and that is where that funding has ended up.

**Mr PAECH:** Can you confirm if the environmental assessment work is ongoing on the Middle Arm proposal?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes, that work continues to be ongoing.

**Mr PAECH:** Can you also confirm that it is a requirement that federal government funding to this project to the Northern Territory Government would have to have emissions targets embedded into the agreements in order to accept that funding?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is a matter for the federal government about what restrictions they put in regard to that funding. The information I have is that the environmental studies and impacts are being assessed regarding Middle Arm.

**Mr PAECH:** Are they being done internally or through an external body? Is the NTEPA doing that environmental work or it is being outsourced to a third party?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to the department to explain what is happening.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** I think the reduction you are referring to is a reduction in assessment staff that we received some one-off funding for under a previous government to assist with impact assessment work. That time-limited funding has come to an end, but we have continued to have a good solid team of environmental assessment officers.

With respect to Middle Arm the proponent for the Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct is the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure. They are undergoing a strategic environmental assessment right

now, and that is under the *Environment Protection Act*. The terms of reference for that impact assessment have been released and DLI are working to provide all that information.

The NTEPA has the role to undertake that assessment under the *Environment Protection Act* and to conduct the consultation with the community. It will then collate that information against its terms of reference and provide advice to the minister on whether there should be an environmental approval granted and under what conditions. We are very much at the beginning of that process.

**Mr PAECH:** To the department's knowledge, obviously that is with the NTEPA, we are not privy to whether they have engaged a third party to do any work there.

**Mr PURDON:** I support the EPA, so I am quite involved in their assessment of Middle Arm. They are not doing the work to engage experts to prepare the EIS. That is what the proponent does so that is what DLI is doing. When that work is complete to the point where DLI wants to submit that to the NTEPA that is when the NTEPA and our staff would be assessing that work, and that is when it would go out for public consultation et cetera.

**Mr PAECH:** Can I confirm that the reduction in the budget has been about overall assessment staffing not particular to this project?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** If you are referring to a \$653,000 reduction in the environment assessment policy area, yes.

**K McNAMARA:** I did not quite understand what you said, and I want to make sure I have the answer right. With those three breaches, in the third breach, do you mean that what happened was not a reportable offence or that the department had not yet investigated?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to the third incident you are talking about, our department is not responsible. From the advice I received, the Department of Mining and Energy is responsible.

**K McNAMARA:** Okay, but I asked him about it and was told it was you. This was before the legislation change and split. Previously, the *Petroleum Act* was under the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. I asked the minister for Energy, and he said I should ask you.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Joanne Townsend to confirm.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** The Petroleum (Environment) Regulations are the responsibility of Minister Burgoyne. The Petroleum Regulations, without the brackets saying 'environment', are the responsibility of Minister Maley.

**K McNAMARA:** Okay, but those previous breaches were resolved, as I understand it, by the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. Is that correct?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** The two matters that were resolved by us were resolved under the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations.

**K McNAMARA:** But they were resolved by you under the Petroleum Regulations?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** The Petroleum (Environment) Regulations, yes.

**K McNAMARA:** But this third one—okay. It was quite frustrating asking this of the minister for Mining, not getting an answer and being directed this way, and now I do not have another chance to get answers. Is there anything else that you can make public about this third incident? It is a matter that is important to the public. They are concerned about the integrity of fracking, particularly people living in that area, and the public wants answers about why it is being held back.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We can speak to what we are responsible for in those historical breaches. How the department—in many cases, these have been self-reported incidents. They have been dealt with under the regulation, so I want to assure the community that the department is working to ensure that everyone is meeting their requirements and responsibilities in regard to the regulation and everything is in place to ensure the safe operation of these proponents.

**K McNAMARA:** Previously, though, before it was changed, the fracking code of practice changed, but that was previously under the Environment minister; correct? Have I got that wrong?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Sally, who has further information.

**Ms STROHMAYR:** The code of practice for onshore petroleum activities in the NT has recently been split. There is now the well integrity code of practice, and we are working on an environmental code of practice to make those responsibilities between the two regulators really clear on which regulator is regulating what matter. Previously, the code of practice covered the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment and the DME regulator.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I note that I have just been advised that there are questions on notice you have raised in regard to this, and those written questions will be answered.

**Mr PAECH:** The glory of being the last minister to appear is that everything usually gets handballed to you.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Don't I know it, Member for Gwoja.

**Mr PAECH:** When we asked questions about subdivisions of the Housing minister and Infrastructure minister, they referred the questions to you. Could you provide us with the number of subdivisions that have been approved in the last reporting period and what Budget 2025–26 will allow to be approved—or, I do not want to pre-empt, but what is your anticipated subdivision approvals for the next financial year?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is all about that enabling infrastructure that the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment is responsible for. We have been working through what funding the Northern Territory Government puts forward—and I want to make this clear—for that enabling infrastructure. Quite often we want a private proponent to develop this land, but the enabling infrastructure—electricity, water and sewerage—the government pays for that, in some instances, to ensure that we can make these developments occur. Otherwise, they simply would not happen. This gives a benefit back to the government through electricity, sewerage and the rest of the fees. Everyone is working madly to try to see exactly how much money has been set aside in regard to this.

**Mr PAECH:** How much has been spent, or will be spent, and how many subdivisions have been approved over the last reporting period, and what the government is anticipating for the next financial period?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Money has been set aside in the 2025–26 program. I spoke in my opening statement about the Sienna Village subdivision and the three government-owned lots have been put aside as we could not do anything with, and it is to get them ready to be developed. There were headworks and subdivision works to support the development of Kilgariff residential land of \$11m—I wish to state that I have a conflict regarding the Kilgariff Estate as that is where I live, and I am always aware when decisions are made.

Infrastructure to mitigate flooding in Alice Springs—one that the member and I are passionate about—is more than \$9m. There are subdivision works to support the release of industrial land in Tennant Creek and headworks to support the development of Holtze. Money has been set aside for the headworks to support the development of the Berrimah North Area Plan and to mitigate flooding in Kulaluk. There is remediation work which is happening and Crown land remediation.

**Mr PAECH:** How many lots are being projected to be turned over for building in the coming financial year? We heard from Ministers Yan and Edgington that your agency was working in the subdivision space. How many lots can Territorians expect, urban and remote, to be approved in the next 12-month period?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have a titled lot forecast, and I state it is a forecast. We believe there are 47 lots at Zuccoli due to be titled and 23 at Holtze; they are the figures I have to date. I know you are chasing more remote figures as well.

**Mr PAECH:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will see if I can get those numbers as well for you.

The advice I received is we are not the agency responsible for developing the remote subdivisions, I guess. I have spoken of our responsibilities and the money that is set aside through our department. Whilst I understand it might not be the answer you want, that is the answer I have.

**Mr PAECH:** Can you confirm in this budget that there is funding and the projects for the Tennant Creek residential land subdivision and the Borroloola subdivision works will proceed?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I want to confirm the department monitors the take-up of land and land supply modelling for greater Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek. I spoke about some of those budget commitments for capital works over the next year.

I spoke earlier about subdivision works to support the release of industrial land in Tennant Creek. Can you ...

**Mr PAECH:** I understand that there was money in the last budget of \$5m committed to headworks and subdivision infrastructure for residential land development in Tennant Creek.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding Tennant Creek there were a number of issues that were raised with ILUA negotiations. I am currently working with my other agencies to see how we can best bring land to market in a quick as possible time for Tennant Creek, noting that there has been a lot of activity around Tennant Creek and the Barkly in mining. We want to ensure we bring as much land to market as quickly as possible. That is something that I, as minister, am passionate about—getting that land supply to those rural towns like Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. Some issues have been raised about that money and getting it out the door. I am now working, as the minister, on how I can get titled lots in a timely manner for Tennant Creek.

**Mr PAECH:** You have already declared a possible perceived or potential conflict on this. Can you provide me with the number of current vacant lots of land in Alice Springs that are available for development? What will be turned over in the next 12 months?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In Alice Springs there are 30 titled lots at Kilgariff, with another 36 to be issued in the short to medium term.

**Mr PAECH:** Are there 30 currently, with 36 coming online shortly?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mr PAECH:** Of the land being made available, has land been set aside yet for the multicultural centre that your government had committed to?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For the multicultural centre we are looking for land and working with Multicultural Services of Central Australia. We have land available, and we are looking at where that will end up.

**Mr PAECH:** Does government have a preferred location?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I certainly do. This is one of these things. I met with Multicultural Services of Central Australia recently to speak with them about our government's announcement. It is more than \$5m now. The Infrastructure minister spoke about how we will deliver them a multicultural centre. They are excited about that. We will continue to work with them so that all parties can move forward with a site.

We are working with Multicultural Services Central Australia to design a building that will cater for what they wish. Then we will put it somewhere.

**Mr GUYULA:** Early this year the Sacred Sites Act was changed during the reporting period. What was spent on the consultation process for those changes? Which elders and leaders were consulted during the consultation processes?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The AAPA statutory authority will be coming up later today. We will be able to speak to a lot of these things. Right now, the Department for Lands, Planning and Environment does not have carriage of the Sacred Sites Act.

**Mr GUYULA:** Can you confirm that Darwin Waterfront Corporation is interested in a certificate that will allow them to build a hotel in the Waterfront precinct? Are you aware that this hotel, if built over a certain height, will desecrate the sacred sites at Stokes Hill, according to Larrakia elders? Will you ensure that the sacred sites are not desecrated?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding the responsibilities linked to the Department for Lands, Planning and Environment, we have gone through a public exhibition relating to that development. I ran past it when it was happening down at the Waterfront. That has gone through all its Lands and Planning requirements.

I believe that you are right. I met with the Waterfront Corporation at the end of last year. It is working through with the proponent on how it wants to progress that.

Again, if there is anything for AAPA in there, I am happy to discuss it later with the authority. In terms of the Lands and Planning side of things, they have met all the requirements as far as we are concerned. Regarding AAPA and any sacred sites, we will have to enter that later with the authority.

**Mr GUYULA:** Sacred sites laws should not be changed by government or any other sacred site authority in another area without significant consultation because these are our sacred sites, not governments' sacred sites. I could not walk into that site because I belong somewhere else, in another area in my sacred site area. I only have authority for my own sacred site. I do not walk up and make decisions on somebody else's sacred site. That is the law of the land and how we have done that. That is why I am not happy about this. I disagree. The government should not be controlling and making decisions on behalf of the TOs.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to discuss it further when the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority comes before the committee. It would not be appropriate for me to make comment now.

**J DAVIS:** Just noting the way these days have sometimes gone it is possible that we will not get to that output. I am wondering whether those questions can be put on notice. Is that possible?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** When we get to the output, I am happy to have the questions asked.

**J DAVIS:** Understood.

**Mr CHAIR:** I have sought advice, Member for Johnston. We either wait for the output, or a written question can be put through.

**K McNAMARA:** I go back to some other things that you said in your opening statement about climate risk and climate change in general. Has this government stepped away from or scrapped the Northern Territory Climate Change Response: Towards 2050?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We spoke about it this morning. The first steps in responding to the climate risks are to identify what they are, so they can be prioritised for a response. I have said this a few times, but I will say it again. The department has undertaken a first-pass assessment of climate risks to the Northern Territory for this purpose. I am yet to see this work, but I understand that its findings will be considered against the outcomes of the National Climate Risk Assessment and national adaptation plan once they are finalised to inform government's response to adapting to the impact of climate change.

**K McNAMARA:** When did the assessment that is happening start?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The first-pass assessment of climate risk began in the 2023–24 financial year.

**K McNAMARA:** When are you due to see the findings? Can you tell me that?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to the department lead on this, Mr Paul Purdon.

**Mr PURDON:** We have a report which is a first-pass risk assessment report. The department has that and we are working through that with agencies to finalise it. We are also looking at the report in the context of some national work being done on a national risk assessment and the development of a national adaptation plan. We want to finalise our risk assessment to see how it aligns with that national risk assessment before we use that first-pass risk assessment to then determine what are our priorities going forward and how we propose to government to respond to those climate risks.

**K McNAMARA:** Does that mean the process was started in the previous government?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Correct.

**K McNAMARA:** What does the term 'first-pass' mean?

**Mr PURDON:** It just means a high-level, or first, look at climate risk. It will often involve second or further stages of more detailed risk assessments.

**K McNAMARA:** Great. Can you tell me what roughly is in this assessment, what areas you are looking at?

**Mr PURDON:** The risk assessment is trying to identify and prioritise climate risks to the Northern Territory with the lens of liveability in the Northern Territory. The themes of what we mean by liveability that we used were community health and wellbeing; economic sustainability; natural disaster readiness; resource security, including water, energy and food; safe and stable built environment; and safe and stable natural environment.

**K McNAMARA:** I am glad to see that this risk assessment is being done and it is coming finally in 2025, but I cannot see in this budget any of the following: comprehensive climate adaptation funding; specific emissions reduction targets or programs; dedicated climate resilience infrastructure investment; community-based climate adaptation programs; and specific funding for vulnerable communities facing climate impacts. Why not? Where are the climate mitigation measures in this budget?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We need to first assess those risks, deal with the issues we face in the Northern Territory and ensure our government, through the departments, is dealing with them in the best way possible.

**K McNAMARA:** The climate science is very established. Mitigation and adaptation happens across Australia. There are things you could be doing now to help the community adapt to the risk of climate change, correct? Why is there still nothing in this budget?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I do not believe there is nothing in this budget. We have the Office of Climate Change, which is working with the departments, as we spoke about earlier, on a range of mitigating issues. We will continue to work to ensure that we are adapting. Climate change is something we are looking at as we develop the Northern Territory.

**K McNAMARA:** I have seen the \$2.6m, I think, for the Office of Climate Change, which is an unbelievably small amount of money for the enormity of the issue. Are you able to share your department's definition of climate risk adaptation and mitigation?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will seek some advice on this. We are assessing those risks and setting out the framework for which each department will mitigate these risks or otherwise. This is the work we are doing through the Office of Climate Change. We have spoken about the assessments and reports that have been done. We look forward to putting this information out there, having consultation for feedback. I am yet to receive the report, so I will look over it to ensure that, as a government, all the agencies can best show how they are dealing with the challenges we face in regard to climate change.

**K McNAMARA:** Just to clarify, I am not being sassy with these questions. There are people out there who see this government and wonder what—we hear, 'Climate change is embedding in our thinking; it is at the forefront of our minds.' People want to know what the tangible things are. When the Environment cannot tell me his definition of climate change and what causes it or mitigation and adaptation, it is concerning.

Can you please tell me what budget provisions have been made for monitoring and protecting threatened ecosystems that are vulnerable to climate impacts?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding the comments just made, it is not about me. We are a government, and I am working with the department to ensure these outcomes. We spoke climate change, and there is a climate due to human generation of greenhouse gas emissions. Regarding what you are asking, about our department, which is before the committee today, it is important to ensure the definition we have is given by the department because these people are dealing with these things on a daily basis.

We form the policies which drive that direction, but at the end of the day, we are ensuring the department works with the minister to achieve these outcomes.

**K McNAMARA:** I will clarify the last bit of my question again. What budget provisions have been made for monitoring and protecting threatened ecosystems that are vulnerable to climate change? Is that part of the \$2.6m for the Climate Change office?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** As we look towards all the things that are changing, whether that is feral animal populations and whether they are impacted negatively or breeding more due to the increased rain in the Northern Territory, there are so many things that the Environment department does. I have been taken aback by the length and breadth—there is so much being done.

**K McNAMARA:** I am hearing it.

**Mr CHAIR:** No interjections.

**K McNAMARA:** It was a specific question.

**Mr CHAIR:** I will allow you to restate the question. The minister can then answer, and then we will go to a break.

**K McNAMARA:** What budget provision has been made for monitoring and protecting ecosystems that are vulnerable to climate change impacts?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Anyone from the department would make a strong argument that whether they work in environmental regulation, flora and fauna, water resources or water security, they are looking at the risk of climate change. That is something I spoke about earlier in regard to the water plans and flora and fauna. We have spoken today about the weeds management and all the rest of it. All these people who work across departments ensure that when they are making decisions they have climate change as one of the risk factors that they consider.

**Mr CHAIR:** We will now break for 30 minutes.

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The committee suspended.

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#### **Answer to Question on Notice No 9.2**

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The total budget for 2024–25 is as follows: vegetation compliance unit, \$165,000; and expenditure in 2024–25 current year to May 2025, Territory vegetation extent analysis (the TVEA program) is \$243,000.

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**Mr KERLE:** In your opening statement, you talked about land release, and you mentioned Holtze. We have a lot of pressures in Palmerston regarding getting to land to build on. Zuccoli is filling up. Can you tell us about land release that is coming up around Palmerston where our young families can look to build a house and set down roots?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There has been Holtze, which has been widely spoken about. One other item that has been less spoken about is Farrar West. We have been working with the Larrakia Development Corporation to ensure that 290 lots can be developed there as well. Regarding land release around Palmerston, there will certainly be a number of additional land lots available.

The development yield of that entire subdivision is 543 residential lots over a seven-year period. There will be large community-purpose lot. Twenty-eight public housing are also set to be returned. There is 10% of residential lots which will also be offered for sale to Defence Housing families. There are a lot of families that come up here and end up in Defence housing.

The developer commenced civil construction works in May 2025 and title lots in the first stage are expected to be available by September 2025.

**Mr CHAIR:** My follow-on question relates to Palmerston, yes, but also the wider NT. When planning these subdivisions, is urban greenery taken into account? Is there more opportunity or are there things that you think the department could do to ensure that we are getting urban greenery with new subdivisions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There is a range of requirements regarding greenfields sites, which means parks or green space. Holtze development, I know, from having seen the plans has a large open area that will incorporate not only parks but also areas for people to ride their pushbikes, something that everyone on the committee knows I am passionate about.

Whilst these green open spaces are areas the developer cannot make money out of from selling lots, it is the reason why a lot of people choose to move to these areas. There has been a number of developments across the Northern Territory where parks have been an integral part of the land planning process. As we look to develop future land, parks and green spaces will certainly be at front of mind.

**Mr CHAIR:** When the department engages with the developer we have guidelines to stipulate block size. My concern goes back to urban greenery, and it is ensuring, even between the open spaces, that we can have mature greenery in time. How does the relationship work between the department and a developer to ensure we are getting that urban greenery?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Urban greenery is an integral part of land use planning overall. In the design of any urban development and the design of a subdivision it is something that is considered at every stage as people progress through. There are green spaces stipulated as part of any new development.

**J DAVIS:** Can you confirm whether the CEO of Lands, Planning and Environment currently serves as a member of the NT Land Corporation board?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The answer I have received is yes.

**J DAVIS:** Has the CEO submitted a conflict-of-interest declaration in relation to her position on the NT Land Corporation board?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**J DAVIS:** In situations involving land owned by the NT Land Corporation, does the CEO recuse herself from related departmental decisions or advice?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**J DAVIS:** In relation to your recent declaration of the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan, are you aware that this plan also includes a water allocation to support development at Larrimah on land owned by the NT Land Corporation?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**J DAVIS:** Was the CEO involved at any stage in briefing you, as the minister, about the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding the water allocation plans, it was people from the department. I do not want to name any names, but it was the person responsible for water resources who briefed me about that water allocation plan.

I pass to the chief executive, Ms Joanne Townsend, for further points on that.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Yes, I am a member of the board of the NT Land Corporation. It is a government appointment.

The Mataranka Water Allocation Plan is not determining individual licence decisions; it is establishing the sustainable yield of a resource and making and apportioning water to different beneficial uses as required under the *Water Act*. The minister makes the decision about the declaration of that plan. Individual decisions around water licences that might be allocated in accordance with that plan and in accordance with other government policy, and the legislation is undertaken by the independent Water Controller, Andrew Johnson.

**J DAVIS:** Did the CEO provide any advice or recommendations that were taken on board about what you just said in relation to the declaration of the Mataranka water plan, specifically relating to the allocation of Larrimah?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** No. I would not have been involved in the water licence decision either, for the same reason.

**K McNAMARA:** I believe this department oversees the *Nuclear Waste Transport, Storage and Disposal (Prohibition) Act*. Why was this Act included in the original Territory Coordinator legislation and then removed?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Mr Paul Purdon who can explain.

**Mr PURDON:** Why it was included initially is probably a question for the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Why it was then removed was through some further consideration of whether that legislation

should be listed in that schedule, and the realisation that there was nothing in that Act—which is basically a prohibition of importing nuclear waste into the Northern Territory—that the Territory Coordinator could use his powers on.

The Territory Coordinator can apply his step-in powers to statutory processes and decision. The Act is just a basic prohibition so there is no processes and decisions made under it that the Territory Coordinator could apply his powers to.

**K McNAMARA:** Does the government support the storage of low, medium or high-level radioactive waste in the NT?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I believe I feel like I know where this question is going. Any medical waste that is produce throughout—we get X-rays when we go to hospital and all the rest of it—it all has to be stored somewhere. If there was any proponent that was to come to the Northern Territory in the future and work on developing a storage site, they would have to meet every regulation we have for that.

Also, I believe, if it was to be transported from interstate there are national guidelines about the transportation of that sort of waste across territory and state lines. It is important that when we talk about these sorts of things, there is a huge amount of regulation that oversees it. Obviously anyone who wanted to do that would have to comply with those regulations.

**K McNAMARA:** To clarify that, that includes all three levels of waste could be potentially, if they abided by regulation, stored in the NT?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Currently, it is prohibited to be imported under the previous legislation you spoke of.

**K McNAMARA:** Sorry, imported from interstate? Does that include international?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**K McNAMARA:** From your previous answer you would still support the storage, in general, of, as you mentioned, medical waste? You would support some level of radioactive waste here?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is important that any change to legislation that would have to occur to allow that to happen would have to be a decision of government. It has not yet been made. I am trying to confirm if that is what you are trying to get at.

**Mr PAECH:** What you are saying is that right now the only waste that is stored in the Territory is generated by the Territory?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The advice I have just been given is that any of that waste that we store in the Territory is generated in the Northern Territory.

**K McNAMARA:** Does the government support any potential waste from the AUKUS commitment to be stored in the NT?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That has not been a discussion point.

**K McNAMARA:** That is all right. Is the government supportive of the Chandler facility and its plans to store low-level radioactive waste near the community of Titjikala?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We are supportive of the Tellus salt mine which has been proposed for low-level waste storage afterwards. The advice I have been given is about importation of any waste that would have to occur. There are many approvals it would have to receive before it got to that stage, but it is not currently being considered. It is about whether that project stacks up financially for that proponent in its current form.

**K McNAMARA:** There is no way you can give a general—whether your government supports the idea?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Our government wants development in the Northern Territory, and if that can occur in a safe regulated way, we will support that. I would love the salt mine developed near Alice Springs, as I know it will benefit the Central Australian economy.

**Mr PAECH:** Could I confirm that if that were to proceed to a waste storage facility, Territory legislation would need to be amended to allow waste into the Territory?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is correct. It is rare that this occurs. A long time ago I saved an article that the ABC wrote on Friday 3 November 2023 about native title holders voting to support vast underground toxic waste storage facilities south of Alice Springs. That was just something that caught my eye. It is not something that our government has discussed importation but any imputation of radioactive waste would require legislative change.

**K McNAMARA:** Is the government planning to scrap the Act that prohibits the storage, transport and disposal of it, or change it?

**Mr CHAIR:** Our questions cannot ask the minister to announce—we cannot ask for announcement of policy.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You may ask if I have had any conversations.

**K McNAMARA:** Have you had any conversations?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No.

**Mr PAECH:** But you have had conversations?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Not regarding nuclear waste.

**K McNAMARA:** How much has been budgeted for cleaning up legacy contamination sites across the Territory?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There are a number of legacy sites across the Northern Territory. Was that about mines?

**K McNAMARA:** Yes.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Department of Mining and Energy is responsible for legacy mines.

**K McNAMARA:** Would there be other contamination sites that would fall outside mining?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**K McNAMARA:** Do you have the budget for that?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is incumbent upon the proponent or landowner to clear up that mess or site. It would be hard to speak about what the department spends.

**K McNAMARA:** There is nothing in the budget?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to the Chief Executive, Joanne Townsend, who can extrapolate on what our department does.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** The question has a lot of layers. The Northern Territory has large land mass. It has legacy sites, and it has issues with illegal dumping. The minister referred to the program that is targeting in Alice Springs. Legacy sites from mines are the responsibility of the legacy unit in the Department of Mines and Energy. There are other areas where there are legacy issues, and that becomes the responsibility of the landowner. In the case of Crown land there is a significant investment across Crown land to manage land, including illegal dumping. If we were releasing land, there would be some remediation responsibilities on us. It is not a set budget; it aligns to the projects that we are developing, all the things that we are targeting. Likewise, any other government landowner parks, transport would be responsible for remediation of sites.

**Mr PAECH:** I understand that there was consultancy expenditure for the NT solid waste levy discussion paper, and that is the identification for the case of potential waste levy in the Northern Territory. Can you advise where that work is at?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Conversations have been had, but I cannot remember the name of the organisation. It will probably be in my long list of people I have met with. Regarding the waste and the levy, WRINT, they came to speak to me as minister for the Environment about whether this waste levy is what this government wants

to look at. To date, I do not believe any briefing has been put to me regarding a waste levy in the Northern Territory.

**Mr PAECH:** What is the Northern Territory Government's involvement in the future planning for a Darwin or a Top End waste management facility, understanding that Shoal Bay is reaching the end of its life?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have just been told there is roughly about another 30 years for the Shoal Bay facility, but I have not been briefed about that. The department will be working with relevant stakeholders about it.

**Mr PAECH:** When Cyclone Marcus came through, the Darwin City Council, in conjunction with Palmerston that use the facility raised that with natural disasters occurring the land fill's capacity will dramatically change given the waste or the debris that is taken there. Is there money being allocated towards the planning or support for Palmerston, Darwin, Litchfield and the surrounding councils to have a waste management facility fast tracked?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** You are right; since that incident there has been a lot of people in department's as well as in other departments that have been looking at how they can better coordinate and with other sites where they could store trees that have fallen over, because a lot of that material ended up at the Shoal Bay facility. Whilst I do not have any sites that have been earmarked yet, it is being looked at so that in the event of another cyclone where there is a large amount of green waste that is required to be quickly moved there can be alternative sites other than the Shoal Bay facility, so we are not filling that site up with green waste.

**Mr PAECH:** No site has been identified yet?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No.

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

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

No questions.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – LANDS AND PLANNING Output 1.1 – Land Development**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Lands and Planning, Output 1.1, Land Development. Are there any questions?

**K McNAMARA:** I believe this is the right place to ask this. The agency recently reported that 11 fuel tanks built for the US military that contain 300 million litres of flammable liquid on Darwin Harbour were built illegally without a building permit and are not designed to withstand a Category 3 cyclone. Was the minister's office aware of the construction of these fuel tanks prior to them being built?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** These fuel tanks were developed in conjunction with the previous government. I have not had any pictures taken there, but I think there are a couple of nice pictures of former Chief Minister Michael Gunner there.

I want to relay to the committee, because there has been a lot of conversation in regard to these fuel tanks, before they can store any fuel they need independent verification and agreement that construction of the tanks is appropriate. They need to meet fire and safety requirements for Fire and Emergency Services and a licence to operate a hazardous facility for work health and safety requirements. At the same time, they must be compliant with their current environmental approval.

There are currently no environmental concerns and will be no fuel stored until all those requirements are met.

**K McNAMARA:** At what stage did your department become aware that there was no building permit?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Mr Mark Meldrum is joining us. He is the Executive Director of Land Services and Building Advisory Services.

**Mr MELDRUM:** We first became aware of the fuel tanks and their building certification in September 2023. My team had been working with the proponents and their consultants on certification issues.

**K McNAMARA:** It was reported that the departments Director of Building Control sent a letter to Crowley in February 2024 saying that enforcement measures may need to be applied if the permit building was not addressed in a timely manner. Well over a year later, have any enforcement measures been applied? If not, why not?

**Mr MELDRUM:** When we were aware that they had constructed without a building permit, we had a series of meetings and discussions with them. It breaches the *Building Act* in that section 55 states that you cannot commence building works without a building permit. When we started having further discussions with them, they were open to the idea of getting certification. Unfortunately, the legislation did not permit them to do that because of a requirement that if the building is built after 2016 you cannot get retrospective approval.

We then gave them advice on how they might get approval. They are the requirements the minister outlined. No enforcement action has been taken to date, mainly because they have been cooperating with our inquiries and advice. The other reason is that there is no fuel in the tanks, and the risk to anyone operating—it is still a construction site, I might add.

**K McNAMARA:** I hear you say that no enforcement measures have been applied because they have been cooperating so far, but they have still done something illegal. They still built them. They are completed, right?

**Mr MELDRUM:** They are not completed; they are under construction.

**K McNAMARA:** Just to clarify, in September 2023, when the department became aware, how far through construction were they then?

**Mr MELDRUM:** I am not sure what percentage of construction, but the tanks were under construction at that time.

**K McNAMARA:** Were there structures there, at least? It was not like no shovels had hit ground.

**Mr MELDRUM:** The tanks were under construction. They were rising out of the ground, yes.

**K McNAMARA:** I am speaking for many Territorians here. How is it possible that construction of these giant tanks began and continued without a permit and that no enforceable action has happened so far?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There have been a number of things which, absolutely, you are left asking yourself, 'How are we left in this situation?'. These operations which occurred under the previous government are something that we are now trying to deal with to ensure that should these tanks be utilised into the future for their purpose, that they meet the necessary standards.

There have been a number of contractors that have been aggrieved throughout this process and who have made comment to various news agencies regarding this because there have been a number of changes regarding project managers and people who have been working on the site.

We are now in a position where the mess has been left to us. We will ensure that before those tanks are filled with fuel that we are happy that they have been independently verified as structurally safe to contain the hazardous fuel. We acknowledge that this needs to be done properly from here on out.

**K McNAMARA:** It was reported that the engineering report showed the tanks had been built to the wrong structural importance level for a hazardous facility, which means they are not built for a category 3 cyclone. How has this come about? How is it possible for someone in the Northern Territory to build something that is not cyclone rated?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** My understanding is that they have been built to code. We are working with the proponent to ensure that these tanks are built and can be certified by a structural engineer. That is what is really important.

We have had one report that has allegedly been reported on by the ABC. Before the tanks can be commissioned, the department needs to be satisfied that they are built to withstand the significant strains that will be put on them throughout their life.

**K McNAMARA:** What must Crowley do now structurally to ensure the tanks can be filled with fuel?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** They must do whatever an independent verifier or certifier deems is necessary to bring that up to that standard. Whoever signs off on these tanks independently needs to be satisfied that they will meet the necessary regulations.

**Mr CHAIR:** The Member for Nightcliff has the floor. I will state for the record the committee will not assess and does not put forward if anything illegal had occurred. The line of questioning holds.

**K McNAMARA:** What do you say to Territorians who are furious that they cannot build a shed without a building permit or without being cyclone rated but the department has allowed the US military to do so and has not given any repercussions so far?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding how we have got here, I can only comment on what I have been made aware of since coming to government. Through the department, this proponent came into the Northern Territory and began construction. The department is now working to ensure these fuel tanks meet certification before they are put into use. That is where we are at now.

It is frustrating that we are in this position. I was not the minister at the time when these were put under construction. I now have what is in front of me and we are dealing with it.

**K McNAMARA:** Is Crowley compliant with the project's current environmental approval?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** For those specific details, I will pass to Joanne Townsend, Chief Executive.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Yes, they are.

**K McNAMARA:** The EPA received complaints that water containing high levels of zinc had been released from the site into the mangroves of Darwin Harbour. What action was taken to investigate this?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** That was investigated, and it was found to be potable water with no evidence of contamination.

**K McNAMARA:** What action or process was used to obtain that outcome?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** I imagine we sent in investigation officers, and they took water sampling tests. I will ask the Executive Director of Environmental Regulations to confirm that.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We are just getting Sally Strohmayer to the desk.

**Ms STROHMAYR:** It was reported through our pollution response line, and it was determined that the water in the tanks being released was potable water. They were testing the tanks system as part of the testing system.

**K McNAMARA:** Did the EPA or whoever investigated take their own samples, or did it rely on samples taken by Crowley?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** I have not got the results in front of me of the samples that were taken, but there was a large amount of potable water that was billed to—it was known that it was potable water because there was a huge bill that was attributed to the water which was put into the tanks.

**K McNAMARA:** I think it is important to ascertain where the water testing came from and whether it was investigators from the department who did the water test or, as I have been told, it was Crowley who took the water tests and provided the water to be tested?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** When the department receives a pollution response line, they look at their triage guidelines and determine the appropriate action and what is needed in terms of the approaches taken for the incident. In this instance the department looked at the evidence that was put before them in terms of the potable water that was used and determined that they rely on the information that was in front of them.

**K McNAMARA:** By that do you mean that the water samples were provided by Crowley?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** I do not know. I am not across that detail.

**K McNAMARA:** Could I have that question taken on notice, please? The question is, did the investigators take their own water samples or were the water samples provided by Crowley? It is a procedural matter that I would like an answer on.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** We cannot answer the question right now, but I am happy to take it on notice and see if there is a better response.

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**Question on Notice No 9.3**

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

**K McNAMARA:** Did the investigators take their own water samples, or were the water samples provided by Crowley?

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 9.3.

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**K McNAMARA:** You mentioned before that filling the tanks will not happen until there is an independent certifier to tick everything off. Has the department had any discussions with Crowley about filling the fuel tanks?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Not that I am aware of.

**K McNAMARA:** As you said it is an active construction site with a lot of recent activity reported onsite. Is that work related to leaking and/or corroding bases of the tanks?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Crowley is an active construction site. A lot of the questions would best be directed to Crowley. If you want to know about the certification, which is what we are responsible for, I am happy to answer the question. Until we have an independent verification about the structural integrity this is a private proponent building tanks. Our department has been assisting it to ensure it has the necessary certification so we can or cannot approve those tanks.

**K McNAMARA:** On that independent verifier, how are they chosen? Is that someone allocated by the department or does Crowley choose them?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am happy to pass to Mr Mark Meldrum.

**Mr MELDRUM:** A structural engineer registered to operate in the Northern Territory. It can be an interstate or overseas engineer that is registered through automatic mutual recognition, or through mutual recognition from another state.

**K McNAMARA:** Does the department then get the certifier to do it, or does Crowley contract them to do it? How does it work?

**Mr MELDRUM:** That is something Crowley, the proponent, takes on. We have no involvement in that or the selection of that individual or company providing that service.

**K McNAMARA:** You mentioned earlier fire safety. I want to clarify if a fire safety review or fire engineering review has been completed for the project?

**Mr MELDRUM:** I am aware of the Fire and Rescue Service being involved in it. It is the process that it has to review the documentation that would normally come as part of building approval. That is something it is obviously working through. I have no further updates on that.

**K McNAMARA:** Do you know at what point of the construction for hazardous facilities like this are these reviews usually required? Should it be required by now?

**Mr MELDRUM:** The fire service gets involved in reviewing a building permit. When a building permit is issued it gets involved as an approval authority under the *Building Act*. On certain aspects of the development it can provide feedback to the building certifier and the certifier can take that on board as part of that process.

**K McNAMARA:** Am I to understand that because it has never had a building permit that is why this has not been done yet?

**Mr MELDRUM:** No, as far as I understand, it is still underway.

**J DAVIS:** This is in relation to the questions about the potential conflict of interest. I believe this is relevant to Estimates as it is about decision-making in terms of issues that have significant budget implications.

You confirmed that the CEO of the department is a member of the NT Land Corporation board and has submitted a conflict of interest in relation to that role and recused herself from departmental processes involving NT Land Corporation land. Was she involved in briefing or advising you on the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan? Is that correct?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There is a vast array of things that are discussed at CE briefings in regard to this. As the chief executive outlined, where the chief executive has had any conflict of interest, it has been raised.

**J DAVIS:** I have a copy of a briefing obtained under FOI provided to you recommending the declaration of the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan, which I am happy to table. The briefing appears to be signed by the CEO on 2 December 2024, and the memorandum references at paragraph 3, the inclusion of the Larrimah Agricultural Development Precinct. To your understanding, does the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan provide water that supports the development of the Larrimah Agricultural Precinct?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The water allocation plans put forward an estimated sustainable yield of the water that is available for development in those areas. The person who agrees or approves any use of that water is the Independent Water Controller.

**J DAVIS:** This document has a series of recommendations signed by your CEO in relation to what will happen with that plan. Can you assure the public that any conflict-of-interest risks in land and water planning are being transparently and rigorously managed?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Are you asking that a water allocation plan that has been allocated, which anyone can apply for—absolutely. If you could restate the question as I am unsure about what you are trying to get at?

**J DAVIS:** You have said—not to put words in your mouth—that with this issue conflicts of interest have been managed and that no-one who may have a specific interest in land where water allocations being funded has not been involved in that. This document is signed by your CEO and makes recommendations in relation to that plan, which include the Larrimah Agricultural Precinct.

Can you reassure the public that any potential conflict of interest risks, including perceived ones, are being transparently and rigorously managed?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There is an insinuation here, and I want to be clear. A water allocation plan states and puts out the water that is available for use. It is the independent Water Controller who deems whether a licence is granted. Does that answer your question? The water allocation plan does not grant water to Larrimah; the independent Water Controller is the person who licences water, which was then granted.

I am happy to pass to Joanne Townsend, but it is important to clearly delineate between the two actions.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Johnston, it is your time and you have the floor, but I will ask, as we go into this line of questioning, that before you table the document you consider Standing Order 210—doing anything to adversely reflects on an individual, and Standing Order 233, that we have sound reasoning behind everything we are doing.

**J DAVIS:** I am interested in systems and processes in general to ensure the public has confidence that any conflicts of interest are being managed. I am not targeting an individual. Thank you, Mr Chair, for helping me to articulate that.

**Mr PAECH:** Can I confirm what you are asking the minister? The minister is saying it is about water allocation, but it is the volume of water which the Water Controller can take from?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The water allocation plan outlines the estimated sustainable yield that is available for that area.

**Mr PAECH:** Member for Johnston, are you asking who signed off on the water allocation—how much water there is to give away?

**J DAVIS:** Yes.

**Mr PAECH:** He said the Water Controller determines who gets it. But who makes the decision about how much there is to give?

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Gwoja, thank you for the clarification. Member for Johnston, are you tabling the paper?

**J DAVIS:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The Member for Johnston has tabled paper number 9.3.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Yes, I would have signed the brief advising the minister on the processes that had been followed and the recommendations of both the committee and the department on the drafting of the Water Allocation Plan for Mataranka.

That plan establishes the estimated sustainable yield and apportions the amount of water that must be retained for environmental uses and the water that can be applied for under a licence. The minister makes a decision on the plan. The department will advise him based on science and that community consultation process.

The determination regarding whether Larrimah Agricultural Precinct or the proponent or anyone who applies for that water is on them. The decision on that is independently made by the water controller.

There are also processes that are managed in the department from a conflict perspective, but they are also managed in the NT Land Corporation. There would have been decisions and discussions in the NT Land Corp Board process which I also would have recused myself from—that one in particular.

**J DAVIS:** I am glad to hear there are processes on something that I have raised consistently throughout Estimates and other things.

Are those processes publicly available? What are the processes for declaring conflict of interest, as you just said, Ms Townsend?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** I am obligated as the Chief Executive Officer to declare my conflicts to the minister as well as to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment where they are recorded. Within the department, we also have a conflicts register which is put to me also with management actions. We will commence discussions with a discussion of conflict and record those conflicts, and we will excuse ourselves from decisions where there is either a perception or an actual conflict.

In the event of water allocation planning, the bulk of that work is undertaken by the Water Resources Division in accordance with policies and procedures regarding plans and using a water allocation advisory committee. There is not a lot of direction of those committees that can happen because they are often very difficult processes. That collated and put to the minister for a decision. He is also governed by the legislation we have in the Territory, our water allocation planning policies and our commitment to retaining as much water for environment as it needs.

**J DAVIS:** Is the conflict of interest register publicly available?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Which one are you after?

**J DAVIS:** Are any of the conflict-of-interest registers related to your department publicly available?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No.

**J DAVIS:** This may be a hypothetical question. It is a question that comes up all the time. How can the community feel reassured that there is no conflict of interest when we hear over and over again there is a conflict-of-interest register but you cannot see it?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will speak to this more broadly. Regarding all the conflicts of interest in terms of which ministers hold, they are held and are substantial.

We fill these forms out at the beginning of every year. We list every organisation we have an affiliation with. It has been raised by members. You could just about work out our weekly schedule by looking at those, as to where our children do swimming classes relating to the groups, we are members of.

It is being stringently protected because there are people, unfortunately, who are sick individuals in the community and might use that information to then target members of parliament. We have seen terrible things across the world recently where elected officials have been targeted.

We ensure that when a conflict of interest is raised it is articulated, and we then follow the proper process regarding that. Unless there is any evidence that someone has acted inappropriately, we must acknowledge that there are processes in place to ensure that we are all following the conflict-of-interest declaration process.

**J DAVIS:** To be clear, I am not asking about senior public servants at children's swimming lessons; I am asking about issues of conflict of interest in relation to decision-making that affects Territorians. I have no further questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

### **Output 1.2 – Crown land estate**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Crown land estate. Are there any questions?

**Mr KERLE:** We have some Crown land around Palmerston and, from time to time, people use it to camp when they are here from out of town. Sometimes they leave a large amount of rubbish around their campsites.

**Mr PAECH:** Are these tourists?

**Mr CHAIR:** Gentlemen! Member for Blain, put your question to the minister.

**Mr PAECH:** I just want to know who you are talking about.

**Mr KERLE:** What actions does the department take to maintain the amenity of Crown land in the immediate vicinity of the suburbs?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In any reported illegal dumping throughout the Territory—Crown Lands is responsible for Crown lands. Anything that is reported is worked through regarding whether there is sufficient allocation of budget to clean the area. There has been a huge amount of work in restricting access to some Crown land to ensure that illegal dumping is not occurring, but also with the relevant stakeholders—whoever they might be—to support people.

If there are people, as you mentioned, sleeping rough then any available options that provide short-term accommodation are offered as well. That is an important consideration in this. The department works with a range of stakeholders to ensure that occurs.

In Alice Springs, where illegal dumping has been happening, considerable funds have been spent to clean up Crown land.

**Mr CHAIR:** A follow-up question—I know Housing is not your portfolio, but if there becomes a rat infestation in the suburbs, does that come into your realm or does it stay in housing?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No, that does not come under our department.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

### Output 1.3 – Planning

No questions.

### Output 1.4 – Building Advisory Services

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move onto Output 1.4, Building Advisory Services. Are there any questions?

**J DAVIS:** It is not a question on this; I may have missed the output. I am just wondering what output the Fidelity Fund would come under.

**A member:** This one.

**Mr CHAIR:** There you go, perfect timing.

**J DAVIS:** We have discussed the Fidelity Fund before, briefly. I know you are aware of it; you said the issues have been raised with you. I have reports which say that since 2013 Master Builders received over \$10m in administration fees from the Fidelity Fund, which is six times more than the amount paid out to consumers. Are you aware of that, and can you explain that administrative expense?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The NT Fidelity Fund was established in 2013 as a result of the residential building cover package reforms and covers new homes and unit complexes up to three storeys in height. The fund provides cover for completion and rectification of defects if the builder dies, disappears, becomes insolvent or is no longer registered. Effective from 6 May 2025 the scheme changed its name to the Fidelity Fund NT. A fidelity certificate provides completion cover for consumers by providing up to 20% of the contract price to a maximum of \$200,000. Your question goes to the administration expenses.

**J DAVIS:** Yes, to the value of the money. If the administration expenses, the fees—Master Builders NT has received over \$10m in fees from the Fidelity Fund, which is six times more than the amount that has been paid out. How can that level of administrative expenditure relative to consumer payouts be justified?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is a good question. The financial reports are provided to Treasury about this. I am happy to answer any other questions.

**J DAVIS:** They are provided to you. In terms of my question about that disparity between the administrative expense and the actual consumer payouts ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding consumer payouts, they only pay out when an issue is taken up. I covered it a bit—whenever a builder dies, disappears, becomes insolvent or is no longer registered. They are only able to pay out in the instance that one of those things occurs and then someone lodges a claim in the relevant time period.

**J DAVIS:** I understand that you have commissioned a report into the Fidelity Fund; is that right?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No, I have not commissioned a report.

It has been raised with me, as I spoke about in Question Time with you. A number of builders have come to me very concerned and raising issues with me about the timeliness of receiving their fidelity funds and the level of cover they can receive. I am working through these things to ensure that we have—people who are utilising this fund every single week. Rolling cover has been raised with me.

To try to explain to you how this works for builders, every year they apply for a level of cover. They must put forward all their financials and then they are given a level of cover. Let us say they want to build six homes at \$500,000 each, they will need \$3m in cover to cover those homes. Whilst they are building those six homes, if you or I were to go to the builder and say, 'Can you build me a new home?', they would say, 'I am sorry; I have expended by cover for this year.'

It is a difficult process because, as you can imagine, we are trying to get as many homes built as we can, so the builder will then have to complete a home, go back to the Fidelity Fund and say, 'Can I get more cover?' We would like to see rolling cover, so as soon as they have finished their first home—they have cover for six homes, they have finished their first of six, they are then able to move on and build another home. That

is like rolling cover. Currently, if you are covered to build six homes for a year at a value of \$3m that is what builders are being told and if you want any more you must then go back.

A number of concerns have raised by builders which we are working through.

**J DAVIS:** Is that limited number of certificates that are issued—are they called certificates—insurance coverage, is that due to a lack of capital reserves?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** That is what is often highlighted by the Fidelity Fund as the reason for any limit on coverage, yes.

**J DAVIS:** I understand the fund has a capital management plan and it has not provided it, despite being requested. What is the government's position on that?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** This was an issue that was raised with me since coming to government. It is something which I have been seeking to rectify. The capital management plans have been requested, and I believe they will be uploaded to the interweb and made public.

**Mr PAECH:** The internet.

**J DAVIS:** Do you know what the time frame for that is?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I do not.

**Mr KERLE:** Which output does the Land Titles Office? Is that 1.1? Have I missed it?

**Mr PAECH:** You missed it.

**Mr CHAIR:** It will be for the minister ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is a different agency.

**Mr CHAIR:** Has he missed his output?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** My advice is it is in a different agency.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.4.

#### **Output 1.5 – Land Information and Spatial Analytics**

No questions.

#### **Output 1.6 – Northern Territory Planning Commission**

No questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Output 2.1 – Environment Assessment and Policy**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move on to Output Group 2.0, Environment, Output 2.1, Environment Assessment and Policy. Are there any questions?

**Mr PAECH:** No.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

#### **Output 2.2 – Environment Regulation**

**Mr CHAIR:** We will now consider Output 2.2, Environment Regulation. Are there any questions?

**Mr PAECH:** Ours have been asked.

**K McNAMARA:** I want to go back to something I mentioned earlier because this is my last opportunity to get some actual answers. The issue is with Imperial Oil & Gas at EP187. I understand you said it is under the other department because it is the *Petroleum Act*. Nonetheless, does your department know what possible compliance—not just compliance, whatever the issue is—you have knowledge of what I am talking about?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I can honestly say that I do not. It is not a responsibility for me or my department.

**K McNAMARA:** Even though the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment recently disclosed that it had resolved all three incidents? It was from your department, no?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Again, there have been a lot of questions regarding previous briefings that have been provided to previous ministers.

**K McNAMARA:** That briefing was never handed off. I know the previous minister was briefed. Were you when you came into office briefed on what had happened?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No. I want to reassure you that there is a written question which I believe you asked that to which an answer will be provided to you.

**K McNAMARA:** I will move on. This question relates to one of the recommendations from the Pepper inquiry. I believe at the start you said you would take some of those and dismiss other ones. Recommendation 5.5 of the Pepper inquiry recommends that the absence of any treatment and disposal facilities in the NT for wastewater and brines produced by the gas industry be addressed as a matter of priority.

Can you please confirm where the wastewater from hydraulic fracturing operations is currently being sent?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is a technical question. I am just seeking whether we have an answer for you. Are you able to repeat the question for the department?

**K McNAMARA:** Could you please confirm whether the wastewater from hydraulic fracking operations is currently being sent?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** When there is a need for wastewater to be removed from sites and they have a reason to do that, it is removed off site by licenced waste transporters to a licenced facility.

**K McNAMARA:** Is there any plan for long-term disposal of fracking wastewater that is currently sitting in the holding tanks at the Hydrera facility north of Tennant Creek?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I do not believe we regulate that facility which may be storing.

**K McNAMARA:** Do you know who does? So I can direct my question to the right place.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Whilst they are licensed to hold the water, we do not have anything to do with their day-to-day operations.

**K McNAMARA:** Are you able to tell me who oversees their operations?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Are you asking about the operations of a private company or a private entity?

**K McNAMARA:** I am asking about the environmental regulations that oversee the wastewater that is being held in a facility like this.

**Mr PURDON:** That wastewater you are referring to is a listed waste under the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*; it is a different Act to the Petroleum Regulations and Act. As Ms Strohmayr pointed out, that wastewater was removed from a petroleum site by a transporter who is licensed to do so under the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*. That wastewater is taken to the premises you are talking about. They are licensed to hold and store that wastewater under the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*. What their plans are for future transport, management or control of that wastewater is something that they would be aware of and we are not aware of.

**Mr PAECH:** Does that not raise concerns that, essentially, we have wastewater that is being held here but then we do not know where it is going or what is happening with it and to it?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** All these organisations have to comply with the regulations set out and stipulated as part of their licensing. If anyone does the wrong thing, please report it, and we will ensure that we rectify any issues that are raised. To date, I am unaware of any reports that have been raised with the department or myself about any mishandling of this waste.

**K McNAMARA:** Would you or the department commit to a tracking system for fracking wastewater? It was recommended in the Pepper Inquiry to make it public into the future so people know where the wastewater is going and how it is being managed? It is a serious concern of the community.

**Ms STROHMAYR:** The tracking system is not currently publicly available.

**K McNAMARA:** Will it be at some point? Are there any plans for that?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There are no plans to change that process that I am aware of currently.

**K McNAMARA:** To clarify, because now you have not committed to all the Pepper recommendations, 5.5—the one that I just talked about—says:

*... the absence of any treatment and disposal facilities in the NT for wastewater and brines produced by the gas industry be addressed as a matter of priority.*

Is that one of the recommendations that you will or have cut?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The advice I am receiving is that there have been a number of studies that have been done regarding wastewater infrastructure so we can manage it into the future.

**K McNAMARA:** Does the NT Government have any plans to investigate the potential reinjection of fracking wastewater into old and abandoned wells?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Not in our department, and I have been advised that any of these questions relate to the Department of Mining and Energy.

**K McNAMARA:** There has been talk—it has been floated—that one way you can rid of the wastewater is to reinject it into the wells. Would wastewater fall under your department?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The advice I am receiving is that it is currently prohibited under the *Water Act*.

**Mr CHAIR:** We will break for 10 minutes.

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The committee suspended.

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**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any further questions on Output 2.2?

**K McNAMARA:** The Environment Compliance Plan for 2024–25 on the DLPE website, states that the division will conduct at least one inspection of each petroleum company that is authorised to undertake drilling and hydraulic fracturing activities.

In the last 12 months how many monitoring and compliance inspections of fracking sites in the NT have been undertaken by staff from the Environmental Regulation Division?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I am informed that have been 24 inspections.

**K McNAMARA:** Do you have an amount of time for when these inspections take place as to how long the inspectors spend at each site? I am just trying to get an idea of the process and what they do there.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Ms Sally Strohmayr can further articulate how the department goes about the inspections that are undertaken.

**Ms STROHMAYR:** Our compliance team prepares for site inspections well in advance of those inspections. They go through the environment management plan and determine what areas they want to focus on for that

inspection. They usually look at the high-risk activities of their petroleum site that they are inspecting. Then they go to site and are usually there for at least one day where they go through with the staff on site to check whether those commitments in the EMP are being implemented by the interest holder.

**Mr PAECH:** Therefore, they know that they will have an inspection. It is not like it is ad hoc. You know that someone is rocking up for an inspection.

**Ms STROHMAYR:** We plan in advance but there are occasions, if we need to go on site unannounced, we can do that.

**K McNAMARA:** In the reporting period, how many of these visits were proactive unannounced inspections versus organised response visits, perhaps responding to an incident or something like that?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** All the inspections were proactive, and the interest holder was informed prior.

**K McNAMARA:** When he says the inspection of each petroleum company, does that mean all the company's operations and wells will be visited each year? Or does this requirement mean just by visiting one site of each company? Does that make sense? It says that you will inspect each petroleum company per year. Does it mean that, in each company, all the operations and wells will be visited? Or is simply they can go to one of the sites from one of the companies and that ticks that off?

**Ms STROHMAYR:** We have nine active sites. We ensure that we go to those nine active sites. We also cover all active interest holders.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

### Output 2.3 – Heritage

**Mr CHAIR:** I now call for questions on Output 2.3, Heritage. Are there any questions?

**J DAVIS:** Can you confirm how many filled positions are currently on the Heritage Council?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The Act sets out that the Heritage Council has a maximum membership of 11. We currently have seven people sitting on the Heritage Council.

**Mr KERLE:** We have a large number of World War II heritage sites around the Coomalie area. Is your department working with the Tourism department to grow our tourism sector around World War II and military tourism, and opening up some of those sites to tourism?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Our department obviously assesses any site for its heritage value, then will make a determination as to whether that will become a heritage site.

Regarding working with Tourism, I cannot report on active work that has been done with them, other than to say that departments are always working with one another for the betterment of the Territory. I cannot point to anything directly today about those works.

**K McNAMARA:** Did you say earlier that the Office for Climate Change sits under Heritage?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** No, I do not believe I said that.

**Mr PURDON:** The Office of Climate Change sits within the Environment and Heritage branch, as does the Heritage Unit. They do not intermingle much—but they are within the same branch—other than at morning teas.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

### Output 2.4 – Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority

**Mr CHAIR:** We will now consider Output 2.4, Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority. Are there any questions?

**K McNAMARA:** How many full-time equivalent staff does the NTEPA employ for compliance and enforcement activities, with a budget that I think is less than \$1m?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The \$1m refers to the cost of running the Northern Territory environment protection board. It works closely with the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment on any enforcement undertakings or actions.

I am happy to pass to CEO Joanne Townsend to extrapolate on that.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** I may need to be assisted by Executive Director Paul Purdon.

The way that the NTEPA operates is it is an independent statutory board established under its own legislation and independent of government. Its support staff and services are provided by the agency. That means there are operational staff in the division led by Sally Strohmayr, who will be undertaking enforcement work for it.

There will be assessment support in the division that Paul leads that will be provided with assessment assistance.

It can commission its own independent advice if it chooses to; they rarely do. It gets corporate support from the organisation in the form of media advice and booking travel and all those kinds of things. They are all provided by the department, but it cannot be directed; it directs those staff individually.

**K McNAMARA:** The NTEPA does not have any of its own, for example, environmental inspectors, so are the departmental staff used?

**Ms TOWNSEND:** Yes.

**K McNAMARA:** How many formal enforcement actions has the NTEPA taken out in the reporting period?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Can I confirm what you were seeking regarding the Environment Protection Authority?

**K McNAMARA:** How many formal enforcement actions have been taken, including notices, penalties or prosecutions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The information I have before me is that there has been one prosecution and one contaminated land audit.

**K McNAMARA:** Given the minimal budget allocation, how does the NTEPA maintain independence from the department in its regulatory decisions?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Paul Purdon, Executive Director of Environment and Heritage.

**Mr PURDON:** There are two parts to that. One is the comment on the minimal budget. The budget that is allocated to the EPA, as the minister and the CEO have outlined, is for the EPA themselves. That is paying them for their time and effort as being members of that authority; some operations to support their need at work, including travel; and then the executive support the department provides to them in terms of secretariat-type support falls within that budget.

The budget that the Environment and Heritage branch has in terms of its environmental impact assessment work and the environment regulation division has, in terms of their compliance enforcement capacity and the support they provide to the EPA in terms of assessing and providing recommendations to the EPA on issuing licences under the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*, that is departmental budget, but it is all budget that is supporting the EPA in meeting their statutory responsibilities.

**K McNAMARA:** Can you tell me how many incidents or breaches were reported to the NTEPA in the reporting period?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The information I have in front of me is 391 pollution reports were recorded for this financial year up to 31 March.

**K McNAMARA:** How many of those resulted in an enforcement? Is that what you said about the two ...

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes. I want to highlight some of the most common pollution reports that are captured as part of that 391. There were 103, or 25%, in regard to noise, of which 20% related to construction activities. There were 59 that related to water, primarily relating to sewerage leaks and stormwater pollution. There

were 43 recorded illegal dumping, which makes up about 11%. There were 36 regarding air which can relate to dust, smoke or odour, and there were 32, or 8%, spills.

The chief executive would like to add to what I have just said.

**Ms TOWNSEND:** All of what the minister has said is correct. The NTEPA has responsibility for compliance enforcement under the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act* and for issuing licences and approvals under that legislation. The environmental regulation of other matters such as petroleum, mining, land clearing and water happens through other authorised officers in the department.

The NTEPA has an important role in impact assessment and to regulate that legislation, which is waste in a general sense. There is also a lot of other environmental regulation happening across the department under different legislation.

**Mr CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank the public servants, who are currently course members from the Foundations of Public Sector Governance, who have joined us today. This course is run by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment. Thank you for coming and watching and your ongoing service to the Northern Territory.

**J DAVIS:** How does the NTEPA assess cumulative environmental impacts of large-scale water extraction projects, such as the Singleton Station development or other major agricultural proposals?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Singleton Station has been required to produce an environmental impact statement (EIS) and the NTEPA will be working with them. This will look at the accumulative impact over a period of that water licence and what they may need to do to ensure that they are meeting those requirements as set out. They have the ability to put conditions on a licence. Mr Purdon may wish to add further information.

**Mr PURDON:** The requirements to look at cumulative impacts for a particular proposal will be set out in the terms of reference for the assessment of that proposal. Even within the *Environment Protection Act* itself, it defines impacts to include cumulative impact, and it is not something anyone can avoid. In relation to water in particular, the EPA is assessing a proposal that is proposing to extract water within a region that has a water allocation plan. The EPA will be mindful that a water allocation plan has been issued and one of the purposes of that plan is to look at what the cumulative impacts of extraction from that region actually are, and to then allow for the licencing of, specific projects. The EPA would be looking closely and be guided by water allocation plan.

**J DAVIS:** When the EPA does consultation, are there are standard requirements for consultation in first languages and with interpreters, when consulting with people on country or traditional owners?

**Mr PURDON:** The EPA in running the impact assessment process does not do much consultation itself. It imposes requirements on a proponent to undertake consultation on their project and to report to the EPA on that consultation process. The EPA has guidance published on what its expectations are for public consultation and stakeholder engagement, which includes a fairly developed section on what is expected for engagement with First Nations people.

**J DAVIS:** Does it include reference to interpreters?

**Mr PURDON:** Off the top of my head, I cannot be sure whether it specifically calls out the need for interpreters. It certainly talks of engagement in a way that the people you are engaging with can understand and be active participants in, which may involve interpreters.

**J DAVIS:** Does the NTEPA publish all environmental impact assessment data, groundwater modelling and project compliance updates?

**Mr PURDON:** All the documentation that is provided to the EPA as part of an impact assessment is published, whether a scientific report supporting an EIS the EPA will only agree to not publish something if it is confidential. A proponent can apply to have some of the information removed from publication if it is confidential, but that is a determination of the EPA not the proponent. Otherwise, everything is on the EPA's website.

**J DAVIS:** On what basis would something be determined confidential?

**Mr PURDON:** Two main bases for that, one is it might be cultural information that is not desirable to have that published or it might be commercial in confidence.

**Mr KERLE:** Under the EPA, does the EPA manage waste tyre disposal?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It regulates it.

**Mr KERLE:** I have been approached by some tyre shops around my electorate, and they have reported some changes in regulation over the last two years—which may be just outside the reporting period—which have severely increased their prices that they need to pass on to consumers. They have had some changes, and they must now send their tyres to Shoal Bay as part of rubbish, and they get charged about \$1,000 a thousand dollars a tonne. Are you aware of the changes to used tyre recycling or disposal?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Regarding the additional fees that are being charged to tyre retailers, to sellers, there are new guidelines that have been put in place, and this is to ensure people are disposing of their used tyres in an appropriate manner. In the past there have been schemes been put in place for which people have then stockpiled tyres thinking they would be worth somethings someday. We want to ensure that any used tyres that are utilised are disposed of in an appropriate manner. Whilst there may be additional costs, it is important that we are dealing with our waste in an appropriate matter. Some of the waste tyres are then put back into things like road surfaces and other issues. The costs are set by the disposal facility. We might say that you must do this and then the cost is incurred when they dispose of it at the facility.

**Mr KERLE:** Are there any avenues available to recycle the tyres or facilitate the private sector to engage in tyre recycling rather than taking them to Shoal Bay, taking up space and passing the cost on to consumers?

**Mr PURDON:** The short answer is yes. Taking tyres at the moment for some sort of processing and reuse, I would need to take on notice, but there has been a lot of interest in what can be done with tyres other than taking them to disposable landfill. I believe that the government might have provided some support through grant funding to various companies to support the infrastructure for tyre shredders and that sort of thing. I am a bit hazy on the details, but government has been trying to support it and there has been some active interest in.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Blain, would you like to put that question on notice?

**Mr KERLE:** I was just about to ask if I could, because I am interested in this, and I would like to get some ...

**Mr PAECH:** You can ask your minister any other time, stop wasting time.

**Mr KERLE:** We have spent a lot of time on ...

**Mr CHAIR:** Gentlemen!

**Mr PAECH:** He is supposed to be your colleague; you can ask him any time.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Gwoja. The Member for Blain has it. The government has used 2.6% of today's question time.

**Mr PAECH:** You could walk in any time to your minister's office.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Gwoja, it would be less time if I need to call a break so everyone can cool down.

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#### Question on Notice No 9.4

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

**Mr KERLE:** Can the minister advise options for tyre recycling in the private sector and any initiatives being developed.

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 9.4.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 2.4 and Output Group 2.0.

**OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**Output 3.1 – Flora and Fauna**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Natural Resources, and Output 3.1, Flora and Fauna. Are there any questions?

**K McNAMARA:** I note there is no specific budget line for threatened species recovery programs. How many Territory species are currently listed as threatened, and what concrete funding has been allocated for their protection?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have been out to witness the good work the department has been doing in some of its threatened animal programs. The central rock rat—which, unfortunately, people think ‘rat’—is a wonderful little creature that lives on very high mountains in the West MacDonnell Ranges. It was wonderful to see the work the department is doing there as I spoke about dealing with feral animals, and it was incredible to see that artificial intelligence is being utilised on this. It is very high up. It takes a long time to get up there. The department has been doing a wonderful amount of work.

I will pass to Alaric Fisher, who knows this topic intimately, for an explanation of how many animals were threatened and the funding allocated to the work.

**Mr FISHER:** Depending on how you account for threatened species, there are 186 threatened species listed under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*. There is a slightly different list of threatened species maintained by the Commonwealth. If you combined both lists together, there are 220 species in the Territory that are listed as threatened.

The Territory does not have legislation that provides for recovery plans in the same way that the Commonwealth legislation does. In that sense, we participate in Commonwealth recovery plans or groups rather than instituting our own, but in some cases we are either active or driving members of recovery plans for species which are important or generally ones which are restricted to the Territory, like the central rock rat.

We do not have a line item for threatened species recovery per se, but a lot of the activities of my division are directed towards either managing individual threatened species or managing the threats to multiple species collectively. For example, the minister spoke about the West Macs program. We have done a lot of work on managing the threats to the central rock rat, which at one point was considered to be the most threatened mammal species in Australia. Its status is still delicate, but the threats from feral cats have been alleviated by the work we have done on developing mechanisms to control cats in the MacDonnell Ranges.

At the same time, we are working on an integrated program that looks at a range of threats, including fire and feral animals, in that whole ecosystem, and that would benefit a range of threatened species.

Because of the way the funding works and the species that we focus on, we are strategic in the sense of working on the most threatened species, but also opportunistic about where we can get money from.

**K McNAMARA:** The Commonwealth is funding most of the recovery programs?

**Mr FISHER:** Yes.

**K McNAMARA:** There would be threatened species, I assume—because the Commonwealth cannot cover everything—which the Commonwealth is not funding but are still threatened. Does that mean we do not have any funding to support recovery programs for them?

**Mr FISHER:** We do not have specific funding in the same sense that the Commonwealth puts out. The Commonwealth, with the involvement of all the states, has put together a national Threatened Species Strategy, and it has nominated its 100 most threatened priority species in each of the bird, mammal, reptile et cetera groups. We work with the Commonwealth to focus programs where those species occur such as the central rock rat or the bilby, or some other species in the Top End.

We do other work that is particularly directed towards investigating the status of species and the occurrence and distribution of threatened species; therefore, how those species are best managed in managing and developing pressure on them

**K McNAMARA:** Would it be possible to get a list of threatened species that are not covered by the Commonwealth species recovery program? Are there threatened species in the Territory that are not covered by any Commonwealth funding and therefore are not covered by the Territory?

**Mr FISHER:** Yes, we could do it.

**K McNAMARA:** Can I put that on notice please?

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**Question on Notice No 9.5**

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

**K McNAMARA:** Could I please have a list of threatened species in the Territory that are not covered or supported by any Commonwealth funding in the Commonwealth recovery program?

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

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIR:** The question has been allocated the number 9.5.

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**K McNAMARA:** The Flora and Fauna budget has decreased down to \$16m, a cut of about \$2.7m. How can you justify cutting biodiversity funding when we are facing an extinction crisis?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There have been a number of things that have changed. There has been a decrease because the work on the Darwin Harbour wastewater framework has been completed. There have been externally funded programs that also make up that figure. There is a decrease in non-cash depreciation.

There have been changes to that output. While I acknowledge you say there has been a decrease, the information I have is that none of that relates to looking after our threatened species.

**K McNAMARA:** No funding has been cut from any of the programs that relate to threatened species?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The only reprioritisation of funding relates to Aboriginal ranger grants program for which there has been no money reallocated in the budget.

**K McNAMARA:** In the interests of time, I am happy to move on.

**Mr MACKAY:** In this budget there is a line item—I am pretty sure it is under this output—of a \$367,000 increase for enhanced crocodile management. What is that money for?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Under this line item—you are right—there is an increase of \$333,000 for enhanced crocodile management. This is due to a revised management program for the saltwater crocodile for the Northern Territory of Australia, which was approved in 2024.

The new management program strengthens the existing approach of complete exclusion of crocodiles from some areas—managing them from areas where we do not want them—and strategic population reduction within designated management zones. This is also working with my colleague in Parks, minister Boothby.

Research and development of new detection methods and improve surveillance monitoring is under way to assist in reducing risk in key management locations. This is something that is important; we do not people being attacked by crocodiles.

This includes the use of environmental DNA, drones and artificial intelligence. These are key things the department can now utilise to ensure the best use of all our resources.

Dedicated frontline staff have been recruited to increase the department's capacity to process permits for problem crocodile removal and a harvest of crocodile eggs for commercial use.

Annual spotlight surveys were conducted in seven of the eight regularly monitored rivers. The results of the surveys were consistent with recent trends that most of the populations are approaching a maximum level in both numbers and biomass, although there are a few rivers that can still have an increase in biomass.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

### **Output 3.2 – Water Resources**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Water Resources. Are there any questions?

**K McNAMARA:** The water resources budget has been slashed from \$19.3m to \$13.1m. How will this impact monitoring of ground water systems, particularly given increased extraction pressures?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** There is a \$4.33m decrease in the National Water Grid Authority, which is externally funded programs. Of note is the completion of the Western Davenport salinity study, LiDAR phase one and the Upper King River Management Aquifer Recharge Project as well as reduction in funding associated with the water allocation plan for the Adelaide River.

There are key milestones that have been met along the way which accounts for that reduction. This has been something that I have been coming to learn since coming to government. In relation to a lot of these federally funded programs, they come to an end. We then apply for additional funding and then that funding will come in when those programs start up.

There is a number of things relating to AROWS which have been applied for. There is a number of both monitoring and other programs which we have put in for. I hope that we get the green light to go ahead with those.

**K McNAMARA:** The guideline called Limits of Acceptable Change to Groundwater Dependent Vegetation in the Western Davenport Water Controlled District outlined that, for example, the destruction of 30% of groundwater dependent trees was acceptable. Does the government support those guidelines?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I note that it is all about being able to monitor what is happening. Many of these studies and the science go to how these projects may or may not impact. It is important that the \$2m in water monitoring continues into water resources. As those projects, if they are able to meet all their environmental impact statement conditions which are put to them—which will include them working with remote communities to explain what they are doing—if they can then get to a point where they are utilising that water, there will be further monitoring to view how they are impacting on the environment around them.

**K McNAMARA:** Why was Fortune Agribusiness the only stakeholder consulted in the development of the guideline I just mentioned, Limits of Acceptable Change to Groundwater Dependent Vegetation in the Western Davenport Water Controlled District? Is that not a conflict? Does that not reflect a perceived or real conflict of interest for the department to prioritise that corporation's insights over everyone else's?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Alaric Fisher who has plenty to add on this question.

**Mr FISHER:** My staff, staff from the Water Resources Division and I were responsible for writing that guideline. We did not consult with Fortune in development.

**Mr KERLE:** Are AROWS and the Manton Dam return to service in this output or the next one?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Those water projects are the responsibility of Power and Water.

**Mr KERLE:** I will ask that tomorrow.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

### **Output 3.3 – Water Security**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 3.3, Water Security. Are there any questions?

**K McNAMARA:** I note some water security funding, but what comprehensive assessment has been done on the climate impacts on the Territory's water resources? Is the current funding adequate to address projected changes in rainfall patterns and drought frequency?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In regard to that technical question I will cross to Nerida Beard, the Executive Director of Water Security.

**Ms BEARD:** We are participating in a climate risk assessment that is being led by the national climate authority which includes the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO. We have been providing information on the Territory's water resources as part of that assessment. We expect that it will be released later this year. We look forward to that information which will then guide any future assessments we do at a more local level.

**K McNAMARA:** I am concerned that the amount allocated is such a tiny amount. There is a reduction from \$3.5m to \$2.3m when water security is possibly the biggest challenge coming up for the Territory. Why the reduction, and how will that impact how we manage water security?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** In the water security budget line there was \$1.2m that relates to the usual annual allocation for the Territory Water Plan. This was higher as it included a rollover underspend which was the first year of implementation and additional time was required to scale up the new initiative. I believe I touched on it earlier, it was money that was rolled over from a previous financial year to complete that work. That work has now been completed and that is the reason for the variation.

**K McNAMARA:** The climate assessment that is ongoing will include water security. There is still a glaring hole in this budget in terms of climate adaptation and mitigation, which I keep speaking about. Is the Territory coordinating with other federal climate initiatives, apart from the one you mentioned, to go some way to pursuing to fill this large and glaring hole in the budget?

**Ms BEARD:** Yes, we are. I would like to direct you to the water resource assessments that are made in the various parts of the Territory. They often involve collaboration from federal science agencies, including CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and Bureau of Meteorology. They are also informed routinely by climate projections and assessments for our region.

In terms of the funding, I think it has already been explained. I note that the funding for the Territory Water Plan is being retained from its original budget forecast.

**K McNAMARA:** What is the plan for water security ongoing for remote communities that depend on groundwater and will be most impacted by climate change?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** It is important to acknowledge that water is life in the Northern Territory. Regarding our groundwater ecosystems, it is a more climate-independent resource. Whilst it obviously requires rainfall to recharge, we are fortunate to have underground storage of water which is why the department so carefully manages any allocation as it relates to these areas and that is why we have the water allocation plans. A huge amount of work goes into this, collaborating with local stakeholders and scientists before an estimated sustainable yield is agreed to and any water can be taken for commercial use. A majority of that water will always be staying in the ground.

In remote communities there is a vast amount of work going on. I am aware of some which I think is an important question to put to Power and Water tomorrow about areas where there have been issues and what they are now doing to ensure that they are able to rectify that issue so that remote communities have clean, potable drinking water in the future.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

### Output 3.4 – Rangelands

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now consider Output 3.4, Rangelands. Are there any questions?

**Mr MACKAY:** Does gamba grass come under this output?

**A member:** Yes.

**Mr MACKAY:** People report people for having gamba grass, and they get an infringement notice. With the management of issuing the infringement notices and following up on landowners who are not doing the right

thing with managing gamba grass, is it reactive to reports or is there proactive monitoring as well? What happens when people are issued a fine, they have to tidy up and people just pay the fines? Is there any point where the government goes in and slashes the block and charges the person?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Ms Maria Wauchope is intimately aware of the issues we face with gamba grass and is best placed to answer that question.

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** We have a compliance program. It starts with inspections and, as the minister said earlier, we did 969 inspections this year. We have a weeds management branch and the gamba fire mitigation unit, and they look at the northern fire protection zone and we look at the Darwin emergency area zone.

After we have done inspections, we also look at complaints and this year, I think, we had 51 complaints from the public. Following the complaints and inspections, we have issued 373 orders. After we issue an order, in a month we go back and reinspect, and if they have not done the work, we will issue a notice of intention to infringe and we issued 208 of those this year. We then wait another two weeks, go back and see if the work has been done and if not, we will infringe. It looks like this year we will be issuing 38 PINs. If the fines are paid, we go back to those properties next year and start the process again. However, I guess it escalates, so it may start with an order as opposed to an advice letter.

**Mr MACKAY:** Someone who owns a parcel of land and goes through the process where someone has complained that they have gamba grass and chose not to action it, make their block safe and look after their neighbours—they get a fine. They pay that fine, and their neighbours are still living next door to gamba grass for the next year. Is that what happens?

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** Not always. It depends on the risk and the time of year. We work with Bushfires NT, so it might be that the department, through the *Bushfires Management Act*, we will get the work done and charge the people for that work.

**Mr MACKAY:** It is able to be done through the *Bushfires Management Act*?

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** It is able to be done under both Acts.

**Mr KERLE:** That is the stick, if you want to call it that, but what are we doing on the carrot side of things to encourage landowners to responsibly manage gamba on their property?

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I will pass to Maria Wauchope.

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** We have the Gamba Action Program which has been running since about 2010. It is a free herbicide program. The department spends \$100,000 a year for the public to get five litres of herbicide. This year we have allowed people, if they own two properties, can get five litres per property. We also loan out spray equipment as well and provide advice on how best to manage weeds on property.

**Mr KERLE:** My understanding with the infringements, it is a boundary from the edge of the property, about 15 metres, they have to eradicate gamba ...

**J DAVIS:** A point of order, Mr Chair! These are questions you could get a briefing from your minister. We have 15 minutes left.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Blain, ask your question to the minister. I note the interjection, and I will watch the next 15 minutes closely.

**Mr KERLE:** My understanding is that property owners can only clear an amount less than that. If they have gamba within the tree line that is outside the amount—are there reasonable adjustments for property owners that have gamba within the tree line that cannot be easily slashed?

**Ms WAUCHOPE:** Properties that are over three hectares are required to have a 15-metre gamba-free break. If there are trees within that they are still required to manage the gamba within the trees. Bushfires have a four-metre firebreak, which they are required to have, and that can be slashed completely. We have 15 metres must be gamba free, and our advice would be that the rest of the property should be gamba free as well.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of Output 3.4 and Output Group 3.0.

**OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – MINING**  
**Output 4.1 – Mining**

No questions.

**OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES**  
**Output 5.1 – Corporate and Governance**  
**Output 5.2 – Shared Services Received**

No questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** That concludes consideration of outputs related to the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. On behalf of the committee, I thank the agency officers who assisted the minister.

The committee will now proceed to the Land Development Corporation business line.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I too thank all the people who have come before us from the department today for their insights and for their assistance whilst we worked through that output group.

**Mr CHAIR:** We will rest in place while the officials swap over.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** While the change is occurring, I have an answer to Question on Notice 9.3.

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**Answer to Question on Notice No 9.3**

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The answer I have been provided is that officers attended the Crowley site as a result of the incident, but there was no discharge occurring and no sample could be collected. There was no reason to suspect harm; the tanks were clean; potable water was used; and Crowley sampled prior to discharge. The sample provided by Crowley showed that zinc was below the ANZG guideline levels. The incident was considered low risk in accordance with the triage guidelines and did not necessitate additional sampling by the department.

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**LAND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

**Mr CHAIR:** Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Land Development Corporation.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** I have Hannah Barraza and Carly Beh with me today. In the interests of time, I will make a quick opening statement.

The Land Development Corporation is a Northern Territory Government strategic land developer. It fulfils a vital role in developing industrial and residential land to support the Northern Territory Government's trade, investment and economic objectives. As a government business division, the Land Development Corporation must act commercially whilst also delivering developments that are of strategic importance to growing the Northern Territory.

With me today representing the Land Development Corporation are Hannah Barraza and Carly Beh.

In summary, the Land Development Corporation works to meet Northern Territory strategic industrial and residential land needs and to respond to the short and long-term needs of the industry. Over the coming period the Land Development Corporation will deliver 11 serviced lots and headworks for the Marine Industry Park Precinct 1 to support the adjoining ship lift project. This construction tender is currently out to market to construct six serviced lots.

There are also other projects—there is a great length here, but in the interest of time I will skip through. The Land Development Corporation is estimated to pay a dividend to the government while the net operating deficit before tax of \$1.18m is budgeted in 2025–26. This is expected to be reforecast at the mid-year budget following the expected sale of a number of industrial premises over the coming months. These were not previously forecast.

I look forward to any questions the committee may have regarding the Land Development Corporation for this year.

**Mr CHAIR:** Are there any questions on the statement or on the Land Development Corporation?

This concludes consideration of the Land Development Corporation business line. On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who provided advice to the ministers. It would have been a lot of work.

### **ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY**

**Mr CHAIR:** The committee will now move on to consider the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Mr Chair, I have with me today Dr Benedict Scambary and Mr Cameron McInerney. I invite Dr Scambary to make an opening statement.

**Dr SCAMBARY:** Mr Chair, I thank the minister and the committee for the opportunity to make an opening statement. Also with me today from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, I have Director of Policy and Governance, Mr Cameron McInerney.

AAPA is a statutory body established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*. The Sacred Sites Act aims to strike a balance between the need to protect sacred sites and development in the Northern Territory. This involves preservation and enhancement of Aboriginal cultural tradition in the context of economic, cultural and social advancement of the Territory as a whole.

Through its administration of the Sacred Sites Act, AAPA is involved in the planning stages of most major projects. In May this year, the government passed a Bill to amend the Sacred Sites Act. The three key amendments of this Bill are:

- formalising the existing composition of the members of the authority
- allowing for certificates to be transferred and a recorded party to be added to a certificate where the land and work or use of the land are the same
- establishing a framework for the authority to enter into enforceable undertakings with individuals alleged to have contravened the Act.

The Bill received assent from the Administrator on 29 May 2025.

Anyone proposing to use or work on land can apply for an authority certificate. The purpose of an authority certificate is twofold. First, it ensures the protection of sacred sites in accordance with the wishes of custodians. Second, it operates to indemnify authority certificate holders from prosecution for damage or interference to sacred sites in respect of any work or use undertaken in accordance with the terms of the certificate.

In recognition of the importance of sacred sites, the Northern Territory Government obtains authority certificates for many of its public works. Key agencies such as the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure use authority certificates to guide their many projects. Through the authority certificate process, AAPA has delivered certainty to custodians of sacred sites and proponents alike in respect of thousands of projects across the Northern Territory. This certainty operates to support the economic growth priorities of the Northern Territory Government and traditional owners.

In the reporting period AAPA has issued 70 authority certificates for a range of infrastructure, tourism, roadworks, mining and oil and gas projects across the NT. These projects include Imperial Oil & Gas exploration and appraisal, emergency tree works in Alice Springs, the Paul Fitzsimons Oval redevelopment in Alice Springs and the Adelaide River gauging station, just to name a few.

Under the Sacred Sites Act, a person aggrieved by a decision of AAPA about an authority certificate application can apply to the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment for a review of that decision. In the reporting period there have been no requests for statutory reviews.

In 2020 the authority laid charges against the Director of National Parks for constructing a walking path through a sacred site at Gunlom Falls. The matter proceeded to the High Court of Australia which made an unanimous decision in the authority's favour. The matter culminated with a two-day hearing before the Local Court held at Gunlom Falls on 22 and 23 October 2024. The Director of National Parks pleaded guilty to the offence of working on a sacred site in contravention of section 34 of the Sacred Sites Act. The Local Court imposed a penalty of \$200,000 ...

**K McNAMARA:** A point of order, Mr Chair! I am sorry to do this, Dr Scambary. I am aware of time and that there are questions. I know this is important, but is it possible perhaps to table the rest of this so that we can still read what is in your opening statement? We will run out of time.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Mr Chair, we have been invited to make an opening statement. It has been the committee's managing of the time, I guess. I would like Dr Scambary to continue this.

**Mr PAECH:** It is typical for you to say that.

**Mr CHAIR:** I know it is a sincere point. It is up to the minister and the chief executive if they wish to use it.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Please continue, Dr Scambary.

**Dr SCAMBARY:** Gunlom Falls will be reopened shortly for the enjoyment of Territorians and visitors.

Looking forward in 2025–26 the authority will focus on ways to provide more efficient services to stakeholders to support government's efforts to stimulate the Territory economy while continuing to protect sacred sites.

AAPA will continue to conduct a thorough analysis and comment on major projects in the Northern Territory to the EPA, Development Assessment Services, Pastoral Land Board and other government forums.

In partnership with the Department of Corporate and Digital Development the authority is in a procurement process to replace legacy technology used to manage the registration and protection of sacred sites. The projected contract is expected to be issued in the first quarter of 2025–26 and will continue to uphold the principles of the Sacred Sites Act.

In closing, I note the importance of the work we do at AAPA in supporting Indigenous cultural values and the economic aspirations of all Territorians. I also thank the board, in particular the Chair, Mr Bobby Nunggumajbarr and the Deputy Chair, Ms Lorraine Jones. I acknowledge and thank the staff of the authority for their efforts this year.

**Mr PAECH:** I am picking up on earlier comments. The minister made a commitment to have the Member for Mulka take his questions on notice if they could not be answered. I am willing to give back to the Member for Mulka to ask them.

**Mr GUYULA:** The sacred sites laws should not be changed by government or any other Aboriginal organisations without significant consultation because these are our sacred sites, not the government's or other people's. The only people who make an agreement is those people who own the site.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** The consultation has been spoken about at great length regarding the changes that were made to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and, more specifically, the sacred sites legislation that oversees it. There was an extensive review in 2016 which outlined a number of recommendations about that. That was essentially put on the shelf.

Since coming to government, we have been working with the authority. One of the largest things that I constantly get from people when they come to my office is wanting to ensure that they can have their AAPA certificate and be covered by the protections it gives but also ensure that they are not infringing on any protected sacred sites.

I met with the board earlier this year in January. Since meeting with the board, I met with representatives from all the land councils and then I received a letter from the Central Land Council to further speak at their full council hearing in Yulara. I travelled from Alice Springs to Yulara. I spoke for about five or 10 minutes and answered questions for an hour from Central Land Council delegates from a range of regions about the concerns they had.

I understand the concerns that were raised regarding consultation. I attempted to get out there and speak with as many people as I could and inform the land councils of what we were trying to achieve so they could then speak to their members.

**Mr PAECH:** A point of order, Mr Chair! Minister, you said earlier that if we got to this output you would take the Member for Mulka's questions on notice. He still has further questions.

**Mr CHAIR:** Member for Gwoja, if you were to let me finish. I will allow follow-up questions from the Member for Mulka.

Member for Mulka, in the interest of time, I will give you an additional question.

**Mr GUYULA:** I would like to make it clear, as a Yolngu senior elder of the law of the land, I have a law, power and authority with my clan groups. We are talking about clan group down in the centre, clan groups somewhere else and around here. There were land councils being used. It is not about the authority of the land council and the people who work in the office, the CEOs. It must be the *djirikay*, the *dalkarra*, who are the government of the land of that particular site. They are the ones who actually give approval, not the people who work in the offices or in ceremonial grounds in Yolngu areas.

It has to be the senior elders. Have you approached the senior elders, the *dalkarra djirikay*, who are the prime ministers, chief ministers and the leaders of their land? Do not forget this is not an empty land; there is a government system in Yolngu land.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** To wrap up and finish on this question, the AAPA board comprises members of the relevant land councils from across the Northern Territory to give representation to many of those people you have spoken about. They are representatives on the AAPA board and meet about four times a year to learn anything that the chief executive officer wishes to go to that board and discuss with them. Again, I completely understand there were a number of people's concerns ...

**Mr Guyula** interjecting.

**Mr CHAIR:** Committee! Member for Mulka, silence.

We will conclude there. I thank you, gentlemen, for coming in. Thank you, minister. I particularly thank the agencies we did not get to today: Corporate and Digital Development; Data Centre Services; and NT Fleet. The committee knows there is a huge volume of work that goes into this. Unfortunately, we did not get to you today, but thank you.

**Mr BURGOYNE:** Mr Chair, I also thank Dr Benedict Scambary and Mr Cameron McInerney for coming in today. There has been a lot of preparation as well for these outputs.

**Mr CHAIR:** As always, I have my stats for the day. We had 315 minutes of question time. Government members accounted for 20 minutes of that, which is 6.3%.

It will be the Deputy Chair in the Chair position tomorrow. I sincerely thank all the supporting staff from the Legislative Assembly for everything they have done. For those who are watching, a huge amount of work goes on in the background to support the committee and a lot of late hours for Hansard. We thank you.

The Member for Johnston and I have some little gifts for all the staff who have supported Estimates. Thank you to Kim at the back. These are some goodies from the committee for all your hard work.

**J DAVIS:** Just for context, I said to Clinton to get them in a nice big box, and he said that Palmerston did not extend to that.

**Mr CHAIR:** The Member for Johnston asked for tinned chocolates, which we have not got yet at the Coles in Palmerston. I got the best that was on offer.

That concludes Estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence at 8.30 am tomorrow, Thursday 19 June 2025, with questions for Power and Water Corporation.

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The committee concluded.

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