

The committee convened at 8.30 am.

Mr CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's Estimates Committee hearings. This is estimates 2022. I acknowledge that we gather this morning on land of the Larrakia people and pay my respects to the elders, past, present and emerging.

MINISTER MANISON'S PORTFOLIOS

TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

MINING AND INDUSTRY

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA AND TRADE

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, TOURISM AND TRADE

Mr CHAIR: Minister Manison, I welcome you to today's hearings. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement regarding your portfolios, which are Mining and Industry, Tourism and Hospitality, and Northern Australia and Trade.

Mrs MANISON: This Territory government is building a \$40bn economy by 2030. It is an ambitious goal but one that is achievable. We are investing in industries that grow and diversify our economy.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today as the minister for jobs, jobs and more jobs, to talk about the great things happening within the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade to create jobs for Territorians and more opportunities for local business to grow our existing world-class industries and create new industry and diversify our economy.

The mining industry is the Northern Territory's largest industry and single largest generator of export revenue worth over \$4bn annually in production and directly employing over 4,000 people. It creates jobs, helps build our regions, grows wealth for Territorians and contributes to improving essential services like roads, schools and hospitals.

The good news is there is room for the Territory's mining sector to substantially grow and diversify over the coming decade, driving more mining development and creating more jobs across the Northern Territory.

Exploration is crucial in unlocking new mining projects. That is why this Territory government increased annual funding for the Resourcing the Territory initiative from \$6.5m to \$9.5m a year from 1 July this year. This funding is also now ongoing. The department does not have to come back to us for time-limited funding. We see the value in this program so we have kept it going.

Touching on that note, I was delighted that yesterday the ABS released mineral exploration expenditure for March 2022 and the March quarter for the Northern Territory was at \$34.4bn. This is the second-highest figure for a March quarter on record, just behind the \$34.7m recorded in 2011. The year-on-year increase of 28% is higher than the national average of 16%.

Part of the Resourcing the Territory initiative are geophysics, drilling collaborations and grants programs. Yesterday I was pleased to announce that this Territory government has awarded support to 29 projects from 23 companies under the latest round of the program. This is record-breaking. It means we will see more work in exploration happening across our regions.

We are working hard to ensure that the Territory is an attractive place to invest; to provide certainty for industry; and to bring on the development of new mines. This increased funding delivers confidence and certainty to the mining industry.

We have 21 mining projects working towards final investment decision, at different stages of approval, with the combined value of over \$7bn and potential to create over 5,000 construction jobs and 3,500 ongoing jobs. Many of these projects represent the opportunity for the Territory to become a major supplier of commodities needed for the future of high technology and low-emissions industries such as lithium, rare earths, vanadium and copper.

The Territory government proudly delivered six significant mining approvals over the last two years, which combine to create over 2,000 ongoing jobs: Core; Nathan River; Vista Gold; KGL; MRM; and TM Gold at Spring Hill. These approvals are positive and exciting for the Northern Territory.

There is much more to be excited about. Core Lithium commenced construction of the Territory's first lithium mine. The Finnis project is looking towards production at the end of the year. This project is creating 250 jobs during construction and operation. In May, Core Lithium received environmental approval for the next stage of the project, the proposed BP33 underground mine, which will extend the life of the mine by up to seven years.

Arafura Resources is targeting final investment decision in August 2022 with construction targeted to commence later this year. This project will create over 600 construction jobs and over 250 jobs during production. As the Chief Minister was speaking about earlier this week, in May, Arafura announced it had signed a non-binding MOU to negotiate an offtake agreement with one of the world's most progressive automotive groups, South Korean-based Hyundai. This is major milestone for Arafura and the Territory as it puts the Nolans project on the global map. It is a key step towards final investment decision this year.

Newmont is going full steam ahead with its billion-dollar Tanami Expansion 2, creating another 350 jobs and extending mine life to beyond 2040. This is a massive investment by Newmont and great news for Central Australia.

The opportunity for the Territory does not stop there. We have exciting gas prospects, onshore and offshore. We have been working our way through the 135 recommendations from the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory. I am confident we will have those recommendations completed by the end of the year, with production aiming to occur over the next few years.

Onshore activity continues to ramp up, particularly in the Beetaloo Sub-basin. It has the potential to transform the Territory's economy and create thousands of jobs. This is another important step in diversification of the Territory economy.

There is more to be excited about. Gas and mining are not the only industries with exciting things happening in the Territory. I recently had the honour of becoming the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, an industry that, pre-COVID, contributed \$2.6bn into the Northern Territory economy. I do not underestimate the impact tourism and hospitality businesses have faced around the country under COVID-19.

I acknowledge Alex Bruce from Hospitality NT; Danial Rochford, the CEO from Tourism Central Australia; and Glen Hingley, the General Manager from Tourism Top End, for their feedback and support. Working with our industry partners, this government took the initiative to introduce a sweep of schemes and initiatives to stimulate the economy internally, including everyone's favourite, the tourism vouchers. We introduced the Roadhouse to Recovery Grant program; the Aboriginal Tourism Grant program; the Book Now program for Aboriginal tourism businesses; and, earlier this year, training courses to assist businesses with attracting and training new tour guides.

Support for our tourism and hospitality businesses through the tough times has been vital to make sure that they got through the difficult COVID-19 years. Our fast and agile response meant that the Northern Territory has been open for business longer than other jurisdictions—and look where we are now. The feedback I am getting from industry is that they are booked out. We have strong bookings across the Top End and Central Australia throughout their high seasons and they are seeing it creep into their shoulder seasons, which is good news.

However, the number one issue for the tourism sector remains workers and having the workforce to support them to do this. This government is clearly focused on this.

We welcome the new Albanese federal government. I have had the good fortune to meet with the new Tourism minister, Don Farrell, to talk about the Northern Territory Government's priorities in tourism, which include Kakadu, sealing the Mereenie, making sure we have workers for the Northern Territory, upgrading Uluru and, of course, the national Aboriginal art gallery.

I look forward to working with the committee and taking their questions. I will introduce the team from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade accompanying me today: Mr Shaun Drabsch, Chief Executive Officer; Ms Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer; and Ms Anne Tan, Deputy Chief Executive Officer. Later on we will potentially have Mr Armando Padovan, Senior Executive Director Mines; Mr Ian Scrimgeour, Senior Executive Director Northern Territory Geological Survey; Mr James Pratt, Senior Executive Director

Energy Development; Mr Luis Da Rocha, General Manager Strategy and Policy; and Mr Scott Lovett, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Tourism, Services and Hospitality.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you for your opening statement. We will call for questions on the opening statement from the shadow minister first, followed by the committee and including visiting members. As always, there is the opportunity to go *in camera* if you see fit, if there is a question in confidence. We all know Standing Order 109 which is the manner of—and the most important thing is to turn your microphone on.

Ms BOOTHBY: Thank you for your opening statement and to the department for joining us. In relation to your opening statement and the portfolios you hold, in particular northern Australia development, in estimates last year the Minister for Veterans' Affairs said the veterans' affairs output or budget was under northern Australia development. Is this the portfolio for you where I can ask you questions about Veterans' Affairs?

Mrs MANISON: No.

Ms BOOTHBY: Where can I ask those questions?

Mrs MANISON: With Minister Kirby next week.

Ms BOOTHBY: Do you have the output it would fall under?

Mrs MANISON: We will get back to you on that.

Ms BOOTHBY: Can I put that question on notice?

Mrs MANISON: Of course.

Question on Notice No 3.1

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

Ms BOOTHBY: In which output can I ask questions about Veterans' Affairs?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated the number 3.1.

Mr EDGINGTON: Thank you for the opening address, covering quite a few issues. I welcome the staff here today. I would like to start with the Core Lithium project you mentioned. I can see how excited you are about it.

Mrs MANISON: If you had been on-site, you would be excited too.

Mr EDGINGTON: The CLP opposition absolutely agrees and has backed the Core Lithium project. Was the Finnis project ever granted major project status?

Mrs MANISON: No. Core Lithium is a fantastic example of what you can get done in the Northern Territory. Core Lithium has done an outstanding job working with the Northern Territory Government and traditional owners. We have not mucked around but no due process has not been followed with that mine. The fact we got this mine done in four years has been a strong message to send across the world about what you can do in the Northern Territory when it comes to investment.

I had the good fortune to go on-site there about six weeks ago. The amount of progress that has been made on-site is fantastic. They have done a huge amount of work on the construction of the mine and the different aspects that will support it. There is a huge administration block as well. They have charged ahead and it has been wonderful to see that journey.

It is also exciting that they will do more exploration on-site. There is a significant amount of work through Core Lithium to look at further leases for exploration, including the BP33 I spoke about in the opening statement, to do underground and open-cut mining.

Mr EDGINGTON: Did Core Lithium apply for major project status?

Mrs MANISON: I do not believe so. I will have to get clarity on that. Would you like to put that on notice?

Mr EDGINGTON: No. The Coalition government backed that project and gave it major project status. Why are you taking credit for it now given that the Coalition government gave it major project status and the CLP approved the exploration drilling at Finniss?

Mrs MANISON: You are drawing a very long bow here. You are bagging out what has been a fantastic achievement by all involved. The Northern Territory Government has worked side by side with Core Lithium throughout this process through exploration, working up their mine management plans through the Environment department and getting the clearances they required.

This has been a fantastic project for the Northern Territory. It shows you what you can get done. It sends a strong message globally about the significance of the Northern Territory as a place for mining. I keep saying that we are entering into a new era of modern mining which is about mining for the materials we need to support technology and a low emissions future. Core Lithium is a prime example of that. They are in discussion with Tesla about an Octet Agreement. We have seen significant investment going into Core Lithium. This is some that should be celebrated. As the shadow minister I would expect you to be celebrating it as well.

Mr EDGINGTON: We are celebrating it. You also indicated in your opening address that 21 mining projects working towards final investment decision. Looking on your web page, is it possible to include some indicative time lines on when the expected final investment decision dates will be made?

Mrs MANISON: I do not think that is required. It is important to note that these are companies, many of them with shareholders. It is also important to recognise that these projects can be impacted by a range of different factors, primarily commodity prices, access to finance and markets and so forth. I assure you, as the shadow minister, that we work closely with these projects. I would like to see as many of them get out of the ground as quickly as possible because it will be good for the Northern Territory as it will mean more jobs. When they work with this agency they receive a strong level of service from our professional public servants.

They know my expectations as minister, that I expect to see efficient processing, good time lines when they work with us and strong communication. I want it to be even better in the Northern Territory and that is why we have the minerals industry development task force. Mr Drabsch is the Chair. This was a recommendation of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission.

You just have to go over to Western Australia to see what mining and gas achieves for everybody. They have a strong economy that has been developed off the back of the resources sector. You can see the superb infrastructure that they have; that is what you can do with mining and gas. We want to make the Northern Territory a more attractive place for investment.

Core Lithium sends a great, strong message but I want to see more. That is why we are having a look at our mining system and how we can make it better and make sure we have more eyes on the Northern Territory when it comes to investment. That task force, with Mr Drabsch, is an important part of that.

Since I have been minister, we have seen changes and made clearer time lines, working with industry, about how we process their applications through this end of the department to make it quicker and more efficient—not to be wasting reams of paper on unnecessary paperwork and making sure it is done with integrity and meets important environmental and operational considerations.

We always want to make sure that we are seen as a good destination for investment and I think we should be. There is a lot to be excited about. We have another few mines close to getting investment decision, which will be huge new for the Northern Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: On page 93 of the agency papers, Budget Paper 3, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, why does mining services fall by \$10m across the next budget year?

Mrs MANISON: That goes to Rum Jungle; the work and federal arrangement we had there. We have signed off an agreement with the federal government with Rum Jungle. We will see a significant investment over the next 10 years in rehabilitation work. There has been a huge amount of work done on the ground, a superb body of work within our agency. The public servant leading that charge won a Chief Minister's award for it recently for her outstanding leadership with traditional owners to get better environment rehabilitation. This has also secured significant funding from the federal government.

We are about to commence the tendering process for Rum Jungle, which will create a significant amount of work near Batchelor—very big civil works; about 10 years' worth. We are talking tens of millions of dollars each year into the region regarding the rehabilitation work.

Importantly, there has been a lot of engagement with the TOs. It is about making sure the work is done to protect the areas that are culturally significant to them. We also have an outstanding ranger program and work has been done to ensure people have jobs on country.

There will be a significant economic injection into Batchelor and for the Rum Jungle rehabilitation over the next 10 years to the tune of tens of millions of dollars every year.

Mr EDGINGTON: The full \$10m relates to Rum Jungle does it? The drop in \$10m?

Mrs MANISON: That is about \$8.5m of it.

Mr EDGINGTON: You mentioned the agreement with the federal government. How much funding has come from the federal government for that?

Mrs MANISON: It is fully funded by the federal government. It is in its budget papers. We are about to go to tendering processes. I will hand over to the department to talk about it. I would like to talk about the numbers a bit more but the federal government, in the former agreement, had issues. I will say is tens of millions of dollars going into the region every year.

Mr DRABSCH: That is correct; tens of millions every year; a total in the hundreds of millions for stage 3 of the Rum Jungle project. There has been good work by our project team in the department, working up a project plan which was accepted by the federal government and funded in its recent budget. It is a 10-year program which will continue throughout the decade. There is substantial construction work and quite an innovative environmental management solution.

Mr EDGINGTON: You said tens or hundreds of million—what is the exact figure?

Mr DRABSCH: It is not for publication, as we are about to go into tendering processes and there is a common practice of not revealing what you are willing to spend.

Mr EDGINGTON: You know the figure, do you?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes.

Mrs MANISON: Do you want me to go further into that?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, I will keep moving.

Mrs MANISON: We are expecting about 50 FTE to be on-site and working there, from late 2023; and that it will be a five year construction period. It will be a great economic injection for that region, as well as tourism.

Mr EDGINGTON: Also on page 93 of the agency papers, I refer to the 2022–23 staffing of 728 FTEs. What are the staffing numbers for mining regulation at the moment?

Mrs MANISON: We have a magnificent team that works across our mining division and who are very passionate about getting these projects off the ground and making sure that people get top level service. I often get feedback from the mining proponents of how pleased they are with the quality of service they get when they deal with the department.

Mr DRABSCH: In the mine services area, which deals with the *Mining Management Act*, mining titles areas and the project we just mentioned with Rum Jungle—64 FTE. It is important to know that does not include the energy development area, which looks after the petroleum legislation.

Mr EDGINGTON: Out of those 64 FTEs how many positions are vacant?

Mrs MANISON: We recruit, and the NT Government is a quality employer. Across the Northern Territory in every industry we are experiencing what it is being experienced nationally, which is that we need more people to come to Australia. We need to get more workers into this country. We can talk about that a bit later, too.

Mr DRABSCH: We have 12 vacancies. Recruitment is not a simple process right now. These are skilled jobs, which require technical proficiency and understanding of the mining and titles regulation process.

Mr EDGINGTON: All 12 vacancies are advertised?

Mrs MANISON: It is important to recognise that at any given time there will be vacancies. People move around; that is normal part of the public service.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are those 12 vacancies advertised?

Mr DRABSCH: We are in a constant process of recruitment.

Mr EDGINGTON: They are advertised?

Mr DRABSCH: They are at various stages of recruitment.

Mr EDGINGTON: On page 93, how many staff are moving to the new DPSW area? Which sections of DITT are moving?

Mrs MANISON: It is too early to speak about that; the details are still being worked through. At this point we will have an exposure draft that will go out with the legislative changes but the positions have not been determined yet.

Mr EDGINGTON: How will you determine that? Is there a review or something internal?

Mrs MANISON: Yes. A lot of work is happening between the agencies. I assure people that this is about giving the public confidence that environmental issues are managed through an environment department, and mining issues and the operation of a mine are managed by the mining department. That is what people expect; it is modern mining practice and how things go.

I want to be clear. The department has no misunderstanding about my views on the reforms we go about implementing whilst I am the minister. It is about making sure that processes are clearer and easier for industry; that we have good regulation and practices within the department; and that we cut unnecessary red tape whilst maintaining important environmental integrity and conditions.

This is about having more streamlined processes and making sure the public has confidence. If the public has confidence I—and you as the shadow minister—get to be able to promote these mines even harder because the public has more confidence in the environmental processes and the importance of these mines. This is about having a modernised and efficient system.

We are not ready for the exposure draft to go back out to industry yet. I assure people that this is about having a more efficient, clear and transparent system regarding who has responsibilities for environment and mining, and sending a message to industry that we have better processes.

Mr EDGINGTON: How long has this review been going on for?

Mrs MANISON: It has not been a quick process because we need to get it right. It has been years. Under this government we have done a significant body of work, since 2016, for reform work for the environment to have a modernised environmental system and legislation—that includes water.

There has been significant reform and policy work in that regard. This is another element of it, but it is one we must get right. Industry—as with any change—has concerns. For the sake of ramming it through at a fast pace—I am more concerned about making sure that we get it right. We are coming closer to that exposure draft.

Mr EDGINGTON: Who is doing this review?

Mrs MANISON: This is happening between the environmental department and this department.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is an internal review?

Mrs MANISON: It is what departments are paid to do. They are paid to go out and implement the policies of government; do their job; work through legislation and requirements; and consult with industry.

Mr DRABSCH: We have been working on an ongoing process with the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security for a considerable period—since the establishment of this department early last year. We are at an advanced stage of developing the policy and translating it into draft legislation. Shortly we will be at the stage of consulting with industry and other relevant stakeholders about the draft, before we seek to introduce it.

Mr EDGINGTON: Who is part of the review team?

Mrs MANISON: I have just told you; the two agencies.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is it the chief executives or was a committee appointed? How does it work?

Mr DRABSCH: We have officers dedicated to the task, overseen by Ms Tan as the deputy CEO. I take an interest in this process as well, and work closely with the standing committee of COORD; Jo Townsend, in particular, the CE of the department; and her offices. There is an ongoing dialogue happening across a range of levels.

Mr EDGINGTON: Have you set a time frame for the review to be completed?

Mrs MANISON: We are expecting to have the exposure draft done soon. I want to make sure that it is as close to right as possible before we go out there and have further consultation. I want to send the strongest message that this is also about driving efficiencies and making the process of developing mines easier.

Mr EDGINGTON: You say 'soon'. To me, that means this year. Are you talking about this year, next year or three years' time?

Mrs MANISON: This year.

Mr EDGINGTON: On page 93, note 3 says:

The variation in the mines services output in 2021-22 is primarily due to the mining remediation program.

What does that mean?

Mrs MANISON: It is the same answer from before—Rum Jungle. Would you like the department to go into any further detail for you?

Mr EDGINGTON: Are there any other locations happening under that remediation program?

Ms TAN: The Rum Jungle project is reasonably standalone. There is a legacy mines program that is part of the mines services group as well, but that is not part of the Rum Jungle process.

Mr EDGINGTON: All that funding in BP3 relates to Rum Jungle?

Ms TAN: The difference in funding relates to Rum Jungle, yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much money is in the MRF and how much interest was earned?

Mrs MANISON: The balance of the mine remediation fund as of 31 March 2022 is \$61.2m.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much interest was earned on that \$61.2m?

Mrs MANISON: Can I take it on notice so we can get you an accurate response?

Mr EDGINGTON: I was to follow that up with where did the interest go. Can I include that in question?

Mrs MANISON: Please do.

Question on Notice No 3.2

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How much interest was earned on the \$61.2m in the MRF and where did the interest go?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 3.2.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has there been any variation in the number of staff working on the MRF?

Mrs MANISON: No.

Mr EDGINGTON: I go to the KPIs on page 97. What is the NT's baseline this year against the KPIs? For example, how many mine sites were visited? How many mine sites are there in the NT?

Mr DRABSCH: As part of our ongoing strategic planning process, we have consistently been reviewing, as the board of management, the key performance indicators we set for ourselves and seek to measure our performance against. There is a series of new KPIs which we are seeking to introduce. We are not in a position yet to have measured what happened across the past year because we had not set it as a KPI at the start of the year. We are setting a KPI at the start of the 2022–23 budget year and will be able to report against our performance in subsequent budgets.

Mr EDGINGTON: The KPI at the moment sits at 100 for mines visited. Is that how many mines we have in the NT?

Mr DRABSCH: There are multiple. There are six operating mines but there are legacy mine sites where there are regular visits to—I think there are seven actually, including Core Lithium. Some of the mine sites are visited regularly, as you would imagine.

Mr EDGINGTON: Does the KPI of 100 mean there are 100 mine sites, or is that 100 visits? Does it include gravel pits?

Mr DRABSCH: One hundred visits.

Mr EDGINGTON: Does that include gravel pits?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes, it does include extractive pits, which are the gravel and extractor industry.

Mr EDGINGTON: To confirm, it is 100 visits, not 100 mine sites?

Mr DRABSCH: Correct.

Mr EDGINGTON: The Fraser Institute is an entirely perception-based survey; it is not objective. Why have you picked 15th for the Fraser Institute survey as a KPI?

Mrs MANISON: It is interesting what you opened with in regard to perception with the survey. Before I hand over to the agency to speak about those numbers, I point out that the Fraser Institute survey contains rankings of 84 jurisdictions globally based on industry perception. In 2021 the survey was sent to 2,200 individuals and they received 290 responses globally. We do not know how many numbers of those were from Australia; that is how the survey works.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: The 15th figure was developed because, at the time of putting together the KPI our ranking for the investment attractiveness index was 19th. We were looking to make sure we had an

improvement. Since then we have had the most recent results come through in which we have risen to 14th for investment attractiveness. We have already outdone that target. I hope that in the future our target will move to being in the top 10 in the world.

Mrs MANISON: Of all the Australian jurisdictions it is ranked third. One thing I would like to note—and something that Mr Scrimgeour is very passionate about; we all share that driving passion for making sure we keep pushing it forward—is the geological database and access to information, which is a huge selling point for exploration and getting mining companies to look to the Northern Territory.

For the last two years we have been ranked first in the nation—fifth globally in the most recent data. We are seeing the result of us sending out a clear message globally that the Resourcing the Territory initiative—to go from \$6.5m to \$9.5m a year; working with companies in collaboration regarding geophysics and drilling; having a quality database of information that we work with, with Geoscience Australia, is important; and accessing quality data.

We have opened it up from just greenfield sites to brownfield sites. We have seen, in that record round of grants that we announced yesterday, that half of them were for greenfields, brownfields, geophysics and drilling.

I know that you will be delighted, Member for Barkly that we continue to see strong interest in Tennant Creek and the Barkly. We all want to see Tennant Creek return to its glory days of strong mining activity. It is a priority for me.

That Resourcing the Territory initiative, recognised by the Fraser Institute, goes a long to helping get more people into the Territory.

Mr YOUNG: As you just mentioned the Barkly, can you update us on the exploration and mining activities in Tennant Creek and the Barkly region?

Mrs MANISON: There is a huge amount of work happening there. We have multiple companies there at the moment. We have small operators but we also have large miners working in partnership when it comes to exploration and activity. I will ask Mr Scrimgeour to talk about because he can tell you about what they are looking for, who is looking for it and where they are looking for it.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: It is an exciting time around Tennant Creek. Under the Resourcing the Territory initiative we have had a focus on trying to stimulate exploration activity in the Barkly. We have had fantastic collaboration with Geoscience Australia that has highlighted the potential of the whole Barkly Tableland region between Tennant Creek and the Queensland border, for a range of commodities.

Around Tennant Creek we have seen a lot of activity in terms of getting the mining industry back up and running. Tennant Consolidated Mining Group, with its strategic alliance with Emmerson Resources, is looking at establishing a mill at the Nobles Nob site in the short term.

Emmerson Resources are doing exciting drilling in the northern part of the Tennant Creek field and have this week announced exciting visible copper and gold in that region. That area has potential for cobalt as well, which is exciting. As an aside, as part of the grants program we are giving three different grants to some of the innovative work that Emmerson Resources are doing in the Tennant Creek area.

The tailings in Tennant Creek are the focus of a lot of activity. Elmore Ltd at the Peko site and Northern Iron at the Warrego site are looking at processing tailings for magnetite; both in construction or commissioning. At Peko there is also the potential to extract copper, cobalt and gold from the tailings.

Down to the south-west of Tennant Creek, in the Rover field where there are copper and gold deposits buried under a few hundred metres of overlying rock, Castile Resources has defined a resource. It is doing a feasibility; we hope they will be commencing the approvals process towards development in the coming year.

We have all the activity going on east and north-east of Tennant Creek, which has been on the back of the new geoscience from us and Geoscience Australia.

In the area around the Barkly Homestead in particular, companies are looking for buried copper/gold deposits. A company called Inca Minerals is there and will be drilling all year. They have recently released encouraging results from their early drilling campaigns. A couple of other companies—Greenvale Mining and Middle Island Resources—are exploring in the area.

As we get further to the east, towards the Queensland border, there is potential for zinc and copper. Teck Resources, a large Canadian major, has picked up a lot of ground in that area and is commencing exploration for zinc. Encounter Resources is exploring for copper, hosted in sediments in the area.

The area out towards the Queensland border is exciting. There was a drill hole that was drilled in late 2020, through a joint venture between Geoscience Australia, the Northern Territory Geological Survey and the MinEx collaborative research centre, to test what sits beneath the Barkly Tableland in that area. We found, from that work, that the rocks are identical to what you find at the Century zinc mine in Queensland. The prospectivity of that area is very high and we expect a lot of new exploration.

I can keep talking about Tennant Creek for ever. I must stop in a moment, but there is one other thing that I will mention. In the Elliott region, again on the back of the new government geoscience that has been released in the area, Encounter Resources and BHP are commencing a major exploration program. BHP has an agreement to spend up to \$25m to earn into the project in an area that has never been explored before, looking for giant copper deposits. We are excited with the work that is happening around Tennant Creek.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much mining production is going on in Tennant Creek?

Mr DRABSCH: The Peko Tailings project is in production, there are imminent projects at Warrego Tailings and a number of other projects are at an advanced stage of seeking approvals and finance.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Just one mine in production?

Mr DRABSCH: Which is one more than we had last year.

Mrs MANISON: There is a huge amount of interest in Tennant Creek and the regions. We have multiple companies in town looking at some of the older mines. The exploration work happening just outside of Tennant Creek and then going deep into the west and the east is exciting. Without a doubt, it is where we have seen the most take-up of new leases. The most exploration activity has also been coming into the Barkly over the last few years. It has been wonderful to see that interest.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have been the Deputy Chief Minister since 2016 and the minister for Police for the last two or three years. You know as well as I do that these mines may eventually get up or may not, but you have left the Barkly in a state of lawlessness, like in Alice Springs and throughout Central Australia. How do you expect to sustain workers in the parts of the Northern Territory that you have neglected so badly? You talk about 'jobs, jobs, jobs' but in all reality will people live in Tennant Creek? You have created a situation where most Australia know about our social problems in Central Australia, including the Barkly. How can you entice people to work in places like that? You have set yourself an interesting set of challenges by sheer neglect. What do you have to ...

Mrs MANISON: I dispute what you are saying about sheer neglect.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is the reality.

Mrs MANISON: There has been a huge amount of work. There will always be a huge amount of work regarding Tennant Creek because it is a complex region. It is a service hub and a place where many people live in disadvantaged situations, which drives some terrible outcomes for people there. We are working hard every day to deal with that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Motherhood statements just do not cut it when you are talking about economic development; expanding mining; stimulating the economy; jobs, jobs, jobs; and you leave a complete state of lawlessness in a place like Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. The things are just not compatible.

Mrs MANISON: You are not even letting me answer the question. This is exactly what I expect from the typical gameplay book of the Member for Araluen.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, I live down there. The Member for Barkly lives down there.

Mrs MANISON: We are talking about Tennant here.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We experience this every day. You live in la-la land.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, the minister has the call and is answering the question. Give her the opportunity to answer your question, which had a long preamble.

Mrs MANISON: One of the best ways we will tackle the social issues in Tennant Creek is by having a strong economy; more services and population in Tennant Creek; and the opportunity for kids to look forward to and aspire to having a world-class job there.

I was born in Tennant Creek at a time when there was strong mining activity and a lot of great things happening in the town. It was a vibrant time in the history of Tennant Creek.

We will see stronger social outcomes by making sure there is economic opportunity for people. We have reformed the system of royalties in the Northern Territory to make sure there is more emphasis on reducing FIFO workforce; investing into towns and regions; and supporting locals to have jobs. When we speak to the companies looking to invest in Tennant Creek and the Barkly, they want to employ people locally. They want people living within their communities. There will always be positions that will be difficult to fill and have people live in remote parts. This is not a unique challenge to Northern Territory. You just need to go across the border to WA to see what their workforce looks like.

Some of the positions are highly sought after. It is a competitive market when it comes to getting workers in mining, across the board. Nationally, we are dealing with a major worker shortage across the nation. We need to get more people into this country and we need to do it soon.

A great way in which we will help move Tennant Creek forward and help more kids realise a good future is by having a stronger economy, strong jobs and more mining and agriculture activity. That will help make a big difference.

Mr EDGINGTON: We just spoke about the Barkly but one of the projects which Mr Scrimgeour did not mention and which I am interested in is KGL Resources, the Jervois copper. It sits close to the boundary of my electorate.

Mrs MANISON: A wonderful project.

Mr EDGINGTON: About three months ago the Investment Commissioner said that it was on the investment pipeline to be delivered in the next 12 to 18 months. Is that still the case?

Mrs MANISON: I had the good fortune to catch up with the wonderful Denis Wood from KGL Resources and Steve Rooney, their chief operations officer, in Alice Springs two days ago—two outstanding, well-known people in the mining industry in the Northern Territory. KGL is in Darwin meeting with our agencies, this department and our Major Projects Commissioner. What is exciting about KGL is that they have an ILUA—they have access to the site—environmental approvals are all done; some of their work on the site will help deal with legacy issues left by mining 50 years ago, which you know too well; and their mine management plans are approved. Effectively, they are ready to go. They have been trying to secure finance, which has held them up from being able to progress forward.

We are hoping they will be in a position next year to start construction. The Northern Territory Government will continue working closely with them to do everything we can to get this project off the ground. COVID presented challenges for them. There have been changes to their structure—I think Mr Wood retired for a while but he is back and is determined to get this mine off the ground. This is at the top of my list for delivery. They are in Darwin meeting with our public servants and agencies, working closely to get this project going.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: The company is at the advanced stages of finalising its feasibility study, which is a precursor to getting finance in place. The exciting thing about that project is the upside with the amount of copper still to be discovered. If it gets up and running it could well be a 20-plus years mine site.

Mr EDGINGTON: On page 97 of BP3 there is a target of exploration expenditure spent in the Territory of 4.3%. How did you arrive at that percentage of Australian mineral exploration?

Mrs MANISON: We continue to see strong growth in the exploration sector—not record levels but getting towards the mining boom era we saw in this nation. Resourcing the Territory and the changes will have an even stronger result next year, and the fact people can now travel with some confidence post COVID—with a challenging few years of border closures and limited access to land. Because of the important work we were doing with land councils to keep communities safe, even despite the challenges the explorers kept

coming to do work. When they had a window to do work they did so because they know the resource potential here. Their companies want them exploring the Northern Territory.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: That figure was derived from the fact that last year the Northern Territory had 4% of Australian mineral exploration expenditure, which is, to be quite honest, not as high as we would like it to be. About 60% of the expenditure is in Western Australia. We are keen to increase that figure which is why we—it has increased up to 4.3% but we want to keep increasing the share of Australian expenditure and ultimately get it up to 5, 6 or 7% where it probably should be. We are at 4.3% and our target is to increase it.

Mr EDGINGTON: If it is 4.3%, why is the KPI not higher? I can hear that there is an aim to increase it, but why is the KPI not higher?

Mrs MANISON: It is important to set KPIs that we think we can step towards ...

Mr EDGINGTON: You are at 4.3%. The KPI is 4.3% for the next 12 months. It should be aiming higher than that.

Mrs MANISON: Putting an extra \$3m ongoing into the budget will go some way.

Mr DRABSCH: The target is to be greater than 4.3%. If it comes in at 6% or 7% we would be happy with that. I refer you to the KPI just above that, which is mineral exploration expenditure. It is set to greater than or equal to \$150m. That is about the current rate of exploration expenditure that is occurring at the moment. That is equivalent to record levels. We want to go even higher next year. We are saying there that we do not want to go backwards; we want to improve and go as hard as we can.

Mr EDGINGTON: On page 97 there is the estimate of 85% of mine management plans determined within 90 days. What has been the longest time that a company has waited for approval?

Ms LAWLER: This department is involved in approvals of mine management plans, exploration licences and so forth for mineral leases. They work efficiently. We tend to have our end of this work done within 90 days—for approvals with our department. We have worked to make this process even more streamlined and easier for those who work with our agency.

When I started in this role, we were working with the civil construction and extractive industries on more streamlined processes for them. We have made an easier mine management plan template, which we released last year. For exploration we have done the same. We released their templates last year as well.

We spoke last year at estimates about the work we have done on mine management plans and with companies. We had already seen significant reductions for companies in some of their approvals. We have worked further on their templates to make it more efficient and streamlined and to reduce unnecessary paperwork. We want to have a streamlined system.

Make no mistake, when the approvals come into this department, they do not muck around. They get cracking and work diligently to get them processed as quickly as possible. The bulk of them are done within three months.

Further delays to mining are most often caused by access to land and working through land issues, often with the land councils and TOs—that tends to be the longest part of the process—and working with our environment department.

Ms TAN: There is a range of reasons why there could be delays in the land titling processes. Generally the time frames that are within the control of the department take about three months overall.

The longest delay we have on record is about 27 months. That was for a range of reasons, including related to native title objections that had been lodged. There is a legislated process to deal with those issues. Whether processes lead us to the National Native Title Tribunal making a decision, those time frames are outside control of the agency. That is what generally causes the delays we experience.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many others took longer than 90 days?

Ms TAN: The 90 days is the target the agency aims for. I can give you an average of how we have compared. In the quarter from 1 July to 30 September 2021 the average was 11.3 months. The reasons for that were the native title and land tenure processes we had to go through. From 1 October to 31 December 2021 it

took 8.8 months; and 1 January to 31 March 2022 it took 7.6 months. Out of each of those the agency's period was 90 days.

Mrs MANISON: The minerals industry development taskforce has land council representation on it because it is critical to work closely with them. Without a doubt where this department is involved in processing it is done efficiently, it follows due process and is done well. They understand the importance of timeliness and giving companies certainty.

The complexity of operating in the Northern Territory's remote areas is often making sure it is done with the permission of traditional owners, because we are in their country. That process can take time and be complex. The last two years of COVID made it difficult to hold meetings and so forth. You understand the issue better than most, Member for Barkly, regarding the complexities of getting the work done, whether it is on Aboriginal land or native title land. When you do business in the Northern Territory you must do it with the permission of traditional owners.

Mr DRABSCH: I will just clarify that the comparisons Ms Tan was making were in relation to nil-title applications. In terms of mining management plans the department is achieving 90 days or less turnaround with 79% of the applications. Our target was 85%. We estimate that by the end of the year we will reach that. We will confirm the actuals once we have final data.

The native title process is fundamentally applied to the mineral title application process. That is where those delays are.

The comparison is often made with Western Australia. From 1 July to 30 September 2021 it was 11.3 months; from October to December it went down to 8.8 months; and 1 January to 31 March it was 7.6 months—that is compared to Western Australia, which runs at about 8.8 months. We are running equal to or under Western Australian time frames for mineral title applications.

Regarding the mineral development taskforce, I am pleased to chair a robust and active process with representatives of the Northern Land Council, Joe Martin-Jard, and some of his officers who attend the discussions; the Minerals Council of Australia Chief Executive, Tania Constable, and her deputy, who participates in working groups; and a number of mining executives with extensive experience in the mineral development industry, most of which have direct experience in operations in the Territory.

Mrs MANISON: We also have a senior bureaucrat from Western Australia.

Mr DRABSCH: That is Phil Gorey, the deputy CE in Western Australia. He has extensive experience in resources and environment management. That is instructive because Western Australia is the benchmark, as the survey would indicate. We are working collaboratively with them on developing our innovations with respect to regulation and policy on mineral development. We also have participation by the federal department of Resources and a senior executive from there.

We have been meeting monthly since just before Christmas last year. In the intervening fortnights, three subcommittees are working on three separate streams of work. We are on track to deliver final output and report to the minister by the end of the calendar year.

Mrs MANISON: I am looking forward to it.

Mr EDGINGTON: What are those three streams of work?

Mrs MANISON: It is important work and part of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission. We are looking at three different work streams, which Mr Drabsch is chairing.

There is a work stream about finding options to increase investment attractiveness. Another work stream is identifying options to accelerate project investment decisions, including project financing options—I cannot stress the importance of locking in finance enough, because that tends to be one of the biggest hurdles for companies to cross. The last important report work stream is about how we create sustainable downstream manufacturing opportunities, adding to the mining industry by creating even more jobs and further diversifying the Northern Territory economy.

That is why we have pursued the Middle Arm development so aggressively—to create opportunities. We need to value-add industries to mining to get the most out of this. We are going for the biggest bang for buck for the Territory by looking at this work, as opposed to just ripping the resource out of the ground and sending

it south or overseas. It is about making sure that we add the biggest value-add proposition for the Northern Territory to create a bigger economy, more jobs and to diversify this place. That is important.

Tom Seymour is also sitting on this. He comes with an extensive finance background, as well as being from PwC. He has a good understanding, globally and nationally, of the different elements of the economy. He brings great expertise about finance. I am determined to push forward with reforms that—I am going after WA; that is my aim.

Mr DRABSCH: Tom Seymour is the managing director of PwC Australia. He is from Queensland and has extensive experience, not only in finance, but in resource development—given the focus in that jurisdiction.

It was a good summary of the streams of work. The important thing to note is that there is active engagement by all the members of the task force in the discussions. It has been informative, an open discussion and nothing is off the table. We are looking seriously at all the things we can do to make sure we are the easiest place to do business.

Mr EDGINGTON: Earlier on you said that 21 mining projects were working toward final investment decision. What is the involvement of the task force in helping to secure that final investment decision?

Mr DRABSCH: In terms of individual projects, that is the responsibility of the Major Projects Commissioner. He is actively working with those proponents. Our job, as the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, is to shape the foundations and conditions for investments; research policy, strategy, regulation and engagement; and work with the commissioners as individual projects and proponents come forward. They shepherd or case-manage them through the process to a final investment decision and get things across the line. That model that has evolved out of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission process. The Major Projects Commissioner works on the individual projects and the Investment Commissioner is out there, hunting for prospects.

Mrs MANISON: Ian Scrimgeour's team is also hunting for prospects and talking about the place, when it comes to getting people in from exploration—where it all starts.

Mr DRABSCH: We engage with industry—shaping conditions and so forth—at the early stage, the exploration stage, as we go through the mining approval processes. The commissioner works collaboratively with us. The role of the task force it is about shaping conditions for investment rather than necessarily advocating for any particular project. It is about making sure we are in the best competitive position to work in the global market for capital in these sectors.

Mr EDGINGTON: In shaping those conditions how do you measure achievements? Have you been able to secure any new investment? Are there new companies coming on board because of the work you are doing? How do you measure your performance?

Mr DRABSCH: We measure our performance by the KPIs we have indicated in terms of the number of projects coming through to final investment decision. It is an ongoing process. The value of exploration expenditure is an early indicator of that, but also translating those projects into investment. Ultimately our KPI is that we reach a \$40bn economy by 2030.

Mr EDGINGTON: Out of those 21 projects have you had any direct involvement in progressing them?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many of them? All of them?

Mrs MANISON: All of them. We have worked with them on a range of different issues. For any proponent who comes to mine in the Northern Territory this agency is front and centre working with them to help progress it.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is it the minerals task force or is it someone else in the organisation?

Mr DRABSCH: That is our job as the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, to work collaboratively with industry to ensure they pursue their opportunities for investment and do so in a responsible and sustainable way. The task force is about looking at the processes involved for companies going through that task and making sure that they are streamlined, efficient, effective, sustainable and competitive. That is what the task force is focussing upon; it is giving broad advice.

Mr EDGINGTON: I think you said that you meet every month or so and you started just before Christmas. How many meetings have you had yourself? How many meetings of minerals task force have there been?

Mrs MANISON: I have been pleased with the quality of the membership we secured for the task force, particularly knowing that we have Tania Constable on board, who does not have much time. She has a passion for seeing mining grow in the Northern Territory and it was great to see her sign up, as well as Tom Seymour. There are significant people.

We have had great participation and Mr Drabsch, as the Chair, regularly provides feedback about the progress of the task force. These are all people who believe in the work they are doing and the impact it can have on helping transform our mining industry for the better and attracting more investment to get more projects over the line. It has been productive. It has been great to see the level of commitment.

Mr DRABSCH: The task force has been meeting fortnightly since Christmas either as subcommittees or as a full group. In terms of the task force as a whole, it had six meetings since Christmas.

Mr EDGINGTON: The sub-groups meet every fortnight?

Mr DRABSCH: In between, yes.

Mrs MANISON: They have different work streams and the work that is happening in them. They are all busy people with a great depth of experience who have put their hand up; we are grateful for their time.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has the task force identified any new strategies to attract investment in the Northern Territory?

Mrs MANISON: Clearly we have time to go. We are aiming to have the report done by the end of the year but the work streams I went through before outline the areas of priority and what we have tasked people to do where we know there are challenges. I want to see us do better because that will secure more investment and mines.

Mr DRABSCH: I would not want to pre-empt the deliberations of the task force. We are in the middle of the process, exploring the issues and thinking about the possible solutions and strategies we might seek to recommend to government. That will be contained in the report we produce at the end of the year.

Mr EDGINGTON: Will that report or reports be made public?

Mrs MANISON: Yes, it is important that the public sees it because it will be a significant level of work.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will go back to page 97 of the BP3. How many regulatory inspections occurred for mining and mineral explorations, or is that the mine sites visited? Is that part of the process of visiting mines? Does it include the regulatory inspections or is it just a visit to see how things are going?

Ms TAN: Those visits are generally regulatory inspections for the mine sites.

Mr EDGINGTON: That was the target of 100 for this year?

Ms TAN: Correct.

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

No questions.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back to estimates 2022. Output Group 1.0 is the responsibility of another minister.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – MINING AND ENERGY **Output 2.1 – Resources Industry Development Services**

Mr EDGINGTON: The government recently promoted that there were six significant mines in the last couple of years, including Spring Hill mine; Core Lithium; Nathan River Resources; McArthur River Mine Overburden; and KGL Resources. How many of these mines are up and going? Have any commenced mining operations?

Mrs MANISON: MRM is operational. It is one of the most significant mines in the Northern Territory and an important provider of zinc globally. We have spoken about Core Lithium this morning at great length. As someone who has had the opportunity to go on-site—they are aiming for production at the end of the year, which is wonderful.

Our part in making sure we get the approvals through—we work closely with the companies—is a significant step for them in helping them get operational and, in some cases, to the next step of securing finance. Core Lithium is a beautiful example of what we can get done in a short amount of time.

Ms TAN: You asked about the status of the six operating mines. The minister has spoken about McArthur River mine. Newmont Tanami is another one in operation, with stage two expansion under way. They are constructing a 1,460-metre shaft to increase processor capacity. The expansion is expected to increase gold production by up to 200,000 ounces per year.

Mrs MANISON: They are also active in their exploration of Oberon. That is a huge shaft; it is a huge investment. It is an impressive mine site with more than \$1bn going in. That included another new workers' village a bit closer to the Callie site where they are building the big shaft for that underground resource. They are doing a great job; it is a huge amount of work.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many jobs are attributable to that project?

Mrs MANISON: I went to the airport to go to Alice Springs the other morning. It was a flurry of high-vis. All of Darwin airport was covered in Newmont workers. There are hundreds of jobs at Newmont Tanami. It is an impressive mine site to say the least. They are investing well into the future. The shaft is all about making sure they keep going. They are also looking at having unmanned autonomous dump trucks running on new electric technology, they are working with Cat on that. That is an impressive project. There are huge amounts of active work happening at Oberon in exploration. They see this mine going for many years, beyond the expansion project they are doing with the Callie resource.

Mr DRABSCH: Direct employment at Newmont Tanami is 757 employees. During their COVID outbreak, that was the number of employees who had to be kept on-site for two weeks. I acknowledge the work Newmont did managing the COVID situation with, working collaboratively with the Chief Health Officer and other health officials.

It is an exciting mineral development. Anne Tan and I went down the pit at Dead Bullock Sook which was one kilometre underground. It was fascinating. They are a professional and capable outfit.

In terms of employment, partly as a result of COVID and the border closures that occurred, Newmont introduced an incentive scheme to have workers move from Perth to Darwin to minimise the risks—most come from Perth and Queensland. A number have taken it up. In fact, I played golf on the weekend with the fellow who took us down the shaft. He has worked for seven years in the mine and in the last 12 months has moved to Darwin.

Mrs MANISON: They offer people significant dollars, which makes a good deposit on a house.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many employees are now based in Darwin?

Mrs MANISON: We would have to put that on notice. They have made a substantial effort to get workers to locate to the Northern Territory, driven off their level of social licence and responsibility. They would rather have a locally based workforce living in Darwin or Palmerston than flying in from Western Australia. Their incentives are not small change; they pay these workers big incentives—I think they start at \$20,000—to make the move to the Northern Territory. You see the Newmont crew at Darwin Airport loading on to Alliance planes; there are a lot of them. When I have gone out on-site, I was on the second load to go to the mine that day. I was happy to see so many people from Darwin when I walked around the site. It was nice to run into old friends.

Mr EDGINGTON: It would be interesting to get a sense of how many have relocated to Darwin. Perhaps we could put that notice?

Mrs MANISON: This is going beyond mining, but it is great to see the level of commitment from board level and management of mines, INPEX and Santos, for localised workforce. MRM has made a huge commitment in that space. It is pleasing to see the incentives these companies are putting on; they are serious that they want local workers benefiting from these jobs. We will get you more figures from Newmont. Well done to Newmont, they are outstanding.

Question on Notice No 3.3

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

Mr EDGINGTON: How many Newmont employees are now based in Darwin and what incentives are being offered to relocate people to Darwin?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated number 3.3.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the status of the Nathan River Resources project?

Ms TAN: It commenced operations in 2020, but entered care and maintenance in 2021. We are considering a mine management plan, which was lodged in relation to reprocessing of stockpile material.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the status of the Spring Hill mine in Pine Creek?

Mrs MANISON: Pleasingly, yesterday we were looking at more exploration grants given out in the Pine Creek region. There is exciting work happening. I have let the department know that I want a stronger focus on Pine Creek as well as Tennant Creek, which we have already spoken about in great detail.

Ms TAN: The Spring Hill project is a new gold mine located about 200 kilometres south of Darwin. The environmental approvals have been granted. In April this year the mine management plan was approved. That project has received all approvals to proceed.

Mr EDGINGTON: When can we expect that mine to be operational?

Ms TAN: The information from the project is that they are expecting construction to commence in 2022–23 and production in 2023. An issue for the mine is the processing of the gold. Finance will be dependent on having capacity and access to a gold processing facility.

Mr DRABSCH: Which may be available from other projects which have been developed such as Mount Todd.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am seeking an update on the TNG project. What is the status of the applications the company has made for environmental approval and water extraction licences? What is being done to assist it with timely decisions for the project?

Mrs MANISON: It is an exciting project and not one that is insignificant when it comes to size and the prospective number of jobs that could come from it. We are talking about a project where there is an estimated construction with 1,600 people and in operations 1,000 people; and an almost 40 years of mine life. This is not insignificant; it is a huge project. There is a lot of work happening to get it off the ground. They are working with the major projects team. They have had major project status for some time. A mine of this size is complex and requires a significant amount of work to get them up and over the line. That work is diligently happening.

Ms TAN: In September 2021, TNG announced a change to its project. It initially was considering processing in Middle Arm. Following that change, it is looking at processing on-site. The company is working through design details for an integrated mine and processing plant. The expectation is that once it is complete it will then lodge applications for environmental approvals and, following that, the mine management plan authorisations.

Mr EDGINGTON: What happened with the change from Middle Arm to processing on-site at Mount Peake? What happened to the Middle Arm proposal?

Mrs MANISON: This is the best outcome overall for the processing to be happening in Central Australia; it will be a great benefit. It will create more jobs out that way and mean a bigger net gain for the Northern Territory because we will be able to further diversify and accommodate more projects at Middle Arm. It will also free up more valuable space at Middle Arm so we can get even more business in.

They made the decision; they looked at it at their board level and determined that they will be moving to on-site.

Mr EDGINGTON: What support are you giving TNG to get this project up and going?

Mrs MANISON: There is a huge amount through major projects. The Major Projects Commissioner works with TNG. Where our department is required for processing, we are doing that work diligently. We will continue to do so because this is a significant mining project. Forty years of work in Central Australia is a great thing. We want to see this get off the ground.

Mr DRABSCH: That is correct. The Major Projects Commissioner is facilitating the project. In the process of lodging MMPs and environmental approvals, we do not just sit back as a department and wait for the application to hit our desk. We work actively with the proponents to talk through the development of the MMP and applications to ensure when the final application is lodged that the assessment can happen as efficiently as possible. Not only is the Major Projects Commissioner coordinating it but officers of our agency are actively working with TNG.

Mrs MANISON: It is an exciting mine because it has titanium, vanadium and iron. It is further diversifying the offerings in the Northern Territory and showing what commodities are here.

Mr EDGINGTON: Where are we at with the Ammaroo phosphate project?

Mrs MANISON: That is another exciting one for Central Australia, to say the least. There has been a huge amount of work in regard to it. The department keeps working closely with them. This is another project where there are serious dollars of capital being expended. We expect about 1,000 jobs over the construction period, about 250 ongoing jobs and a mine life of 25-plus years. This is another big, significant mine in Central Australia that will be of huge benefit, particularly to Alice Springs. This is an exciting project. We continue working through this mine; it still has approvals to go.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: As you probably remember, the company was initially looking at a rock phosphate mining operation and it was quite advanced with the approvals processes. Since Verdant Minerals was taken over by CD Capital and became a private company, it has put those approval processes on hold and has been looking at a revised project with more value-adding in the Territory. It is investigating various development options that are likely to include a phosphoric acid plant and potentially then downstream fertiliser production, which is why it is now potentially a very high CAPEX project. The department and the government now just awaits it finalising those studies before recommencing the approvals process.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has there been any discussion about where that plant might be located? Will it be on-site?

Mr DRABSCH: It is exploring the development of the plant on-site.

Mr EDGINGTON: Where is the Thor Molyhil project up to?

Mrs MANISON: We are looking at pending mining approvals and finance. At this point, we see this as being a seven-plus years life to mine tungsten and molybdenum. Apparently, it is intending to extend the ore reserve to 10-plus years mine life, which we welcome. Often our Resourcing the Territory grants help accelerate further exploration to prolong the mine life because ideally we would rather have longer term mines than shorter term ones.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: The Molyhil project has effectively been on hold for a while because the company has struggled to get the project finance they need because of the relatively small size of the deposit and the operation. Last year they applied for a grant under the Resourcing the Territory program, under our new brownfields grants, and drilled three deep holes testing new targets close to the ore body. These holes intersected significant widths of tungsten and molybdenum. We are hopeful that will be material to the

company and they will be able to increase the size of the resource and bring the project on. They do not have any active approvals but are still looking to increase the resource and bring the project on.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is being done to support them in getting to the final investment decision?

Mrs MANISON: We work closely with companies, no matter how big or small they are because we have a variety of sized operators in the Northern Territory. Mines are expensive to get up and running and if they have a shorter mine life it often makes it that much more challenging to secure the finance they need to get them going.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: I do not have the figure in front of me but they were awarded a grant which was instrumental in bringing forward their drilling and the potential to increase that resource. We have been working with them to assist them in increasing their resource base. Geological Survey has been working on understanding the mineralisation in that area and trying to help them identify further resources.

For the record, the grant that they were given and total expended funding was \$105,000. They have also recently been awarded major project status by the Territory government.

Mrs MANISON: They will get service through the team and the support of working with the Northern Territory Government.

Mr EDGINGTON: A few weeks ago—and this was a good announcement—Arafura signed an offtake agreement with Hyundai Motor Company. It is a huge step forward for the \$90m Nolans project and has been long in the making. What government assistance is being provided for the development of the separation plant that is planned for Aileron? Can we expect to see a bill developed similar to the Sun Cable project?

Mrs MANISON: I will speak more broadly about Arafura and the importance of this project on the national stage, talking about rare earths and the opportunities in the Northern Territory—and phosphate, as you mentioned. We need to put our case more on a national scale regarding the significance of the Northern Territory as a supplier of rare earths and materials that have a global Defence overlay. I intend to do a bit more in terms of promoting the opportunities in the Northern Territory in that space.

This is a significant mine. We are talking about 620 construction jobs and 280 ongoing jobs in operation. What makes this site so attractive is that it is a short drive from Alice Springs—Aileron is just up the road when you look at the context of distance in the Northern Territory. You would think it is pretty close.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is not that far from Tennant Creek either.

Mrs MANISON: Yes. I know that you drive that road more than anybody else in the Northern Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: I certainly do.

Mrs MANISON: It is an exciting project. We have their mine management plan under assessment. We are working closely with them from a major project perspective. We are anticipating 40 years of life.

You were with me at the Resourcing the Territory conference in Alice Springs. What shirts were the Arafura staff wearing?

Mr EDGINGTON: I cannot remember, I have been to so many places

Mrs MANISON: I am testing your memory. They said 'FID 22'. That is where Arafura is at. We are getting consistent feedback on how they are tracking. Securing federal support for parts of this project has been important. We have their mine management plan under assessment. The \$30m federal grant under the Modern Manufacturing Initiative which was granted in March. There is a huge amount of work happening.

It was wonderful to see that we have a letters of support from Export Finance Australia for \$200m and North Australia Infrastructure Fund for \$100m. There is work happening at level to get more support to Arafura. They are feeling confident and are made more confident by the joint statement of corporation they have with the Korean market and the important work that has happened with Hyundai Motor Company. This is an exciting mine. It is a big one on a national and global scale. Rare earths are important.

Mr DRABSCH: The assessment process is well advanced. We are doing it in consultation with the operator. A number of sections have already been submitted, assessed and our advice issued; minor sections are still

awaiting submission. We are well down the track of assessing the MMP. The company is progressing its project finance discussions and agreements, and is planning FID and construction in the second half of this calendar year.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is happening with the development of the separation plant and what assistance is being provided?

Mr DRABSCH: The \$30m mining grant is a contributor; and discussions with equitable finance. The Critical Minerals office in the federal agency is working actively with Arafura as are a number of other agencies of the federal government, given the strategic significance of this resource.

Mr EDGINGTON: Would there be any need to develop a bill similar to what was recently passed for Sun Cable?

Mrs MANISON: I have not had any advice to this point in time that a bill would be required.

Mr EDGINGTON: There are a few NT projects that have federal government major project status, such as Ammaroo, Nolans and TNG. Will the NT Government be working with the new Labor government to ensure full support continues for these projects? How will you ensure this happens?

Mrs MANISON: I will not be backwards in going forward on this.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has there been any conversations yet?

Mrs MANISON: I have already reached out to the new Resources minister, Madeleine King, and had a great conversation, especially regarding her new portfolio responsibility of Northern Australia. We are looking forward to seeing her in the Northern Territory soon.

The message I sent to her in that first conversation—would you believe—was ‘full steam ahead’. I have no doubt this federal government will continue to back the work of the Northern Territory Government when it comes to the development of the resources sector.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is no guarantee at the moment though, is there?

Mrs MANISON: I say there is. We have a great Albanese Labor government in Canberra. Madeleine King comes with a wealth of experience in resources and a passion for northern Australian development. All the conversations we had with the federal government when they were in opposition were about their support for us developing our resources sector in the Northern Territory. I have no doubt we will have strong support because they want to see the Northern Territory economy diversify, and more jobs. They know mining is critical to that.

Mr EDGINGTON: One other project that I am not sure fully fits in here is the Aqua Aerem Desert Bloom project. Can we discuss the progress?

Mrs MANISON: That is not a project that falls into my portfolio responsibilities.

Mr EDGINGTON: Where does it sit?

Mrs MANISON: Minister Uibo will be here next week. Can you please ask those questions then?

Mr EDGINGTON: Recent changes to the Administrative Arrangements Order have seen the following areas of responsibility moved from Renewables and Energy to Mining and Industry: energy, oil, gas and geothermal titles administration; energy, oil and gas pipeline operation regulation and pipeline title administration; and environmental management of geothermal energy operations. Can you please advise why these responsibilities have moved and what improvements will be achieved by doing so? Is there any budget impact from these changes?

Mr DRABSCH: Our agency has had responsibility for those issues throughout. I also serve the Minister for Renewables and Energy. Those responsibilities did not fall under her prior to the recent ministry changes. It is my understanding that the responsibilities you listed have been the responsibility of the Minister for Mining and Industry throughout.

Mr EDGINGTON: No changes?

Mr DRABSCH: No.

Mrs MANISON: We are happy to double check for you. Traditionally, the Mining minister has always had pipelines and those areas. I have signed off paperwork in that regard. We can check.

Mr DRABSCH: The general reference to energy often relates to petroleum and gas, as opposed to renewable energy. There is a distinction.

Mr EDGINGTON: You mentioned the federal Resources minister. Is she the same for Northern Australia?

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has she been here yet?

Mrs MANISON: She plans to get here soon. She is in Gladstone with community Cabinet at the moment. I had a great conversation with her a few days after she was sworn in. The new minister was looking forward to getting to the Territory soon. I have met in the Territory before. I have no doubt she will do a great job.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is it true that she lives in Perth?

Mrs MANISON: She lives south of Perth in one of the most pro-mining, pro-development parts of the universe. Anybody who has lived in Perth and sees what happens south of Fremantle knows that people who live there are dead serious about economic development and the benefits it brings. I do not think that you could find a better example of the passion for development.

Mr EDGINGTON: She has no connection with northern Australia then?

Mrs MANISON: She has great experience working with resources. She previously worked with Gary Gray, who has been a great friend to the Northern Territory for a long time. She has a great depth of knowledge of the Northern Territory and the needs of northern Australia.

The northern Australia conference is coming up in a few weeks in Queensland. I will be making it clear that the northern Australian development agenda must continue to be driven by Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia with full federal support and passion, because we still have the issue with federal representation in the parliament. I am passionate about making sure that we continue that northern Australian development agenda.

Mr GUYULA: During the 2021–22 financial year how much funding through the NT grants program, or otherwise, has been provided by the NT Government for mining projects that involve fracking? What financial support is budgeted for fracking in 2022–23?

Mrs MANISON: We can split that into two parts, because Resourcing the Territory does look for elements of gas. Would that be correct to say? We can talk about some of the exploration work and the grants that we do through Resourcing the Territory, but the other half of the question will be 2.3.

Mr SCRIMGEOUR: In the past financial year there were 18 exploration projects that received co-funding through the grants program. Of those 18, seventeen were for mineral explorers—typically for gold, nickel, copper or other minerals.

There was one petroleum company that applied for and was successful in getting a grant. That was Central Petroleum in Central Australia. That was for a test seismic line—for testing new technology that we thought was useful for better understanding the geology of that part of the world. Unfortunately, Central Petroleum withdrew that project because of other issues, so they did not receive that funding.

There was no funding directly given to any petroleum companies through the grants program.

Mr GUYULA: How many traditional owners for the Beetaloo Sub-basin have voiced their outrage about fracking their country? Their submission to the Senate inquiry in 2021 stated:

At present, Origin Energy is fracking our country under exploration permits granted some 15 years ago to other companies, and later assigned to Origin Energy. Our people did not understand what

fracking was at the time they were advised to enter into agreements consenting to the grant of those exploration permits.

Your government continued to promote fracking in the Beetaloo Sub-basin as a way to bring more money to the NT. This is incredibly inconsiderate of the traditional owners and their loss of country. How does the government reconcile the celebration and promotion of this industry with the knowledge that land owners and the traditional owners did not give free prior informed consent?

Mrs MANISON: An important question but it is one for Output 2.3. I will say that mining and gas development will not proceed, unless it has sign off from traditional owners.

Output 2.2 – Mines Services

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the appropriation this year for legacy mines and how does this compare to the actual spend for last year?

Mrs MANISON: I spoke about the remediation fund earlier today; it is \$61m. I took those questions on notice. We have a Legacy Mines Unit Strategic Plan 2021–2025, which will help frame important investment going forward. Where we have been left with legacy issues from past companies, governments and practices that were not ideal, we are committed to working through and making improvements.

Ms TAN: In the current financial year, there has been \$1.4m of contracts awarded under the Mining Remediation Fund.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much sits in the legacy Mining Remediation Fund?

Mrs MANISON: There is \$61m.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is \$61m and only \$1.4m in contracts were issued last year.

Mrs MANISON: I appreciate your frustrations with that. There has been a painstaking body of work to make sure we have the Legacy Mines Unit Strategic Plan done so we can get the best value for dollar out the door—last year, about half as much was out the door.

We have a legacy mines advisory panel that are providing industry perspective and advice on activities to support decision-making. It is a primary vehicle for industry consultation on legacy mines and remediation issues. We also consult with the peak industry groups including MCA; the Association of Mining and Exploration Company, AMEC; and the Extractive Industries Association.

That expenditure will increase over future years. I would like to see more of that work out the door to tackle remediation issues but it is important that we get the planning right in order to get the best value for money.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is the plan complete?

Mrs MANISON: We do have it and a huge amount of work out there; this is the strategic plan we have. We will continue to work with the advisory groups about where we best make investment and get the best bang for buck.

The department knows this has been an issue. I have spoken to them about it in the past, wanting to see more of this money get out the door. It will be support jobs, deal with legacy issues and help us get more confidence about backing mining projects across the Northern Territory.

We have been doing the important planning work to make sure we get the best value for dollar. We prioritise the work because \$61m will not cover all legacy issues.

Mr EDGINGTON: The \$1.4m is a measly sum. What was it spent on?

Mr PADOVAN: The \$1.4m, year to date, included \$664,000 on the Sandy Flat mine site, which is the Red Bank Mine site. That is an area where we have been active for the last two or three years. It is one of our main legacy sites. We are continuing the work we started developing a long-term, sustainable remediation plan. A lot of the work around the Sandy Flat site was regarding waste drop, characterisation and understanding the hydrogeology of the area. We have done work to identify remediation options, which we presented to the Redbank working group and traditional owners at our meeting last year.

A lot of work is going into the preparation and planning of how we will eventually remediate the site. Whilst we have \$61m sitting there, just a 'back-of-envelope' to remediate that site—we think it would be north of \$20m. The \$61m suddenly does not look as great as it did before.

Nearer to Tennant Creek there was a smaller project at the Whippet mine site; that was \$51,227. Again, it was backfilling a historical mine shaft and putting the waste drop back into the mine shaft.

The Legacy Mines unit is doing exciting work around Tennant Creek. We have spent \$149,000 on an audit of small mines.

What we are doing not only to accelerate expenditure of the MRF but also make it more efficient for us as a team and for the private sector when they bid for these works, is instead of taking a small project-by-project approach, we are taking a regional approach. We let out a tender to do an audit of 71 small legacy mine sites or mine areas around Tennant Creek. Instead of doing two or three at a time, which is historically what we have done, we have tackled 71 in one hit. We are using this as a trial to see whether we can expand the same approach to other legacy clusters around the Territory.

The tender awarded to do that audit was \$149,000. From the information we got from that audit we are in a position to let out a much bigger contract to remediate those sites in one hit. That contract will be more than \$1m. This is something we are trialling.

One of the challenges we have with spending money is that we have strict procurement requirements, and rightly so given that it is government money. We are trying to make it more efficient for our team and let out bigger parcels of work. The other advantage of this approach is that we are more likely to get a greater range of companies applying to undertake this work—private and medium-sized companies. That will maximise opportunities for them to employ more people and do more training.

We are trialling this in the Tennant Creek area but can apply this approach to legacy clusters around Alice Springs, Pine Creek and Adelaide River.

In the coming year we are expecting completion of about \$1m worth of work at the Sandy Flat mine site. There is a lot of complexity with that site. One of the options we are considering is getting the waste rock—which is reactive and causing contaminants on the surface—treating it and putting it back in the pit. We need to be sure when we do it that the remediation plan will work. We do not want to come back in 10 years' time and have to treat it again. We have to move forward with caution, which is why we are taking a lot of care.

Mr DRABSCH: I emphasise that the Legacy Mines unit is focusing on abandoned mines. The work they are undertaking, which is important, does not add up to the sum total of remediation work happening across the Territory. For example, there is the ERA project at Ranger, which is a \$2bn project.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is federal money; we spoke about that.

Mrs MANISON: It is boosting the Territory economy.

Mr DRABSCH: It is ERA money.

Mr EDGINGTON: We are talking about the \$61m in the remediation fund. There is \$2m being spent in the next financial year. What other plans are there?

Mr DRABSCH: A lot of the work being undertaken is on the planning and design of large bodies of remediation works going forward. This investment will inform a substantial program of investment that follows on, drawing down from the fund.

Mr EDGINGTON: You are spending \$2m this year. What is planned for remediation in 2022–23?

Mrs MANISON: Mr Padovan just spoke about some of the planning work. The emphasis was on Redbank and your neck of the woods.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is \$1m, and a further \$1m.

Mrs MANISON: A further work program will go out the door. I expect to see this ramp up over time. At the moment the department is making sure it gets the best value for every dollar in the remediation fund, in tackling legacy mine issues and getting money out the door.

Mr EDGINGTON: You spent \$1.4m last year and you have \$2m worth of works planned for this year. Is that the best we can do when it comes to mind remediation?

Mrs MANISON: No. I agree with you. I think we can get far more money out the door.

Mr EDGINGTON: There is \$61m in the fund. Can you tell me what plans there are to spend more money? You are increasing it by \$0.6m for this year compared to last year. Are other works planned for 2022–23? What will be delivered in the plan?

Mrs MANISON: The strategic plan and advisory committee guide the work we do. We are trying to get the best value for every dollar in the remediation fund to get the best bang for buck. We are looking forward to more work happening in Tennant Creek but the planning work is being done.

Mr EDGINGTON: What will be delivered this year, apart from the \$2m we just spoke about?

Mrs MANISON: I will hand over to Mr Padovan to talk about how we put together work programs in forward years. At the moment we are looking ahead at the next few years and some of the priorities. That planning work is being done, which will help piece together what that program looks like.

Mr PADOVAN: We are trialling the small mines auditing work in Tennant Creek. There is applicability of that approach to the other areas around the Northern Territory. We have already started work on expanding it around Central Australia. There is work we expect to put out to do remediation work around Tennant Creek.

We are also actively involved in a project at Koongarra, which is an NT responsibility legacy mine site. We are working with the Commonwealth on it. That title was resumed back into Kakadu National Park but we have responsibility for it. We have just started the process with our Commonwealth counterparts to come up with a remediation plan.

More broadly, it is important to note that with the mining remediation fund there are extensive costs involved in remediating sites. We expect the Sandy Flat site, for example, to be well in excess of \$20m. There is a lot of lead-in time in developing the remediation plan, which we think will be successful, cost effective and agreeable to stakeholders. Although it does not form a part of the legacy mines program, a good example is the Rum Jungle site. Planning for that started in 2009 and the final plan was not developed until last year. That is a 12-year process. It is a long journey to do the studies required to develop a long-term, sustainable, effective plan but once we have them that is when the expenditure is accelerated, as you would have heard earlier regarding Rum Jungle.

Coming up in the next year, we are ramping up expenditure on the MRF. A legacy mines advisory panel is in the process of being formed; we expect it to be appointed and meet shortly. That way, we are leveraging the expertise of industry in terms of how we can move forward with the legacy mines program around the NT.

Mrs MANISON: No doubt there is a lot more work to be done.

Mr EDGINGTON: There was \$1.4m last year and \$2m for 2022–23 out of a fund of \$61m.

There is over \$5.5bn in mining projects in play, representing thousands of jobs and millions in royalties to the Territory. There was a tax grab introduced by legislation in May last year to overturn a Supreme Court decision and further tax the industry. How much revenue did you raise last year as a result of your new mining tax? Will this go back into general revenue?

Mrs MANISON: The management of royalties is in the Treasury portfolio.

Output 2.3 – Energy Development

Mr EDGINGTON: How many onshore gas exploration permit applications have there been in the past 12 months?

Mrs MANISON: We are entering into exciting times in the Northern Territory when it comes to our energy sector, whether that be offshore gas with the work we have foreseen with INPEX releasing its vision moving forward and working towards a third train or Santos locking in the \$5bn Barossa project, which will extend the Darwin LNG plant and be wonderful for the Northern Territory. I always say that the people who work for INPEX and Santos are in highly paid, world-class jobs where they can drive to work every day and do not have to fly to the middle of the most remote parts or offshore to big rigs. Local families who are well supported are working at these world-class projects in Darwin, which is magnificent.

We are developing the onshore industry, too. I have no doubt we will spend a bit of time talking about that. I thank INPEX and Santos for their commitment to a 100% localised workforce, which is important in the Northern Territory.

The other thing we need to recognise in this section—if you choose to ask questions on it, Member for Barkly and other members of the Estimates Committee—is that there is work happening in carbon capture and storage, which we should be excited about. We all want to tackle the issue of climate change. It is important that we reduce emissions; carbon capture and storage will play an important role in that going forward.

Mr PRATT: There were no exploration permits awarded in the last financial year. There are 37 exploration permits awarded under the *Petroleum Act* across the Northern Territory, covering areas in the Beetaloo and McArthur basins, down to Alice Springs. There are 125 exploration permit applications in train, which is where companies have been awarded the right to negotiate native title agreements or agreements with traditional owners. Once agreements through the prescribed body corporate—the NLC or the CLC—are made the government can then consider those exploration permit applications and make a decision towards granting them.

Mr EDGINGTON: Were any applications denied?

Mr PRATT: The short answer is no. The long answer is there is a range of requirements for an exploration permit application to be met. It then requires the minister to consider these before granting. Key to that is the native title agreements or agreements with traditional owners under ALRA or the *Native Title Act*.

There is also a range of other mechanisms the minister will need to consider when those applications are nearing completion, including a fit and proper person test, which looks at economic, environmental and other legislative requirements for that company to operate in the Northern Territory.

In short, we have not refused any in the last financial year.

Mr EDGINGTON: Based on the long answer, has anyone withdrawn an application based on not being able to meet that criteria?

Mrs MANISON: Clearly we have processes in place that make sure traditional owners have their say about what activity and projects happen on their country, which is critical. We expect people with a proven track record not to have any history of not doing the right thing in order to develop in the Northern Territory.

Mr PRATT: No companies have withdrawn their exploration permit applications. It is fair to say that since 2018–19 there has been renewed vigour from industry to try to get applications granted. I am sure you and everyone in the room is well aware of the excitement about gas in the Northern Territory and the opportunity it provides. Since the recommencement of exploration in 2019, many companies have been liaising with the land councils to orchestrate on-country meetings to help generate the processes required to see an exploration permit granted.

The Northern Territory Government awarded an exploration permit application to Santos in the Beetaloo Sub-basin almost two years ago. They are going through that process.

There was an acreage release done last year for expressions of interest for companies to apply for acreage in the Northern Territory as well.

No-one has been withdrawing; there has been a renewed vigour. We are eagerly working with companies to get applications granted.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the average processing time for the approval of a gas exploration permit?

Mr PRATT: There is no set time or legislative time frame to complete applications. The *Petroleum Act* has a different process to the *Mining Act*, which has an expedited process for granting native title or similar approvals. In the *Petroleum Act*, the processes followed through the *Native Title Act* and our act, once an application is awarded it is up to a company and land council to have on-country meetings and get agreement or understanding of the activity involved. There is no prescribed time frame for that.

Aboriginal people, through a prescribed body corporate, can seek a moratorium on the discussions and not continue them from five years onwards. Generally, it is at the behest of companies and land councils to meet on country with traditional owners, talk about the issues and get an understanding and agreement from it. I cannot give you a prescribed time frame.

Mr EDGINGTON: Internally, are you measuring or monitoring how long it takes for the approval of a gas exploration permit?

Mrs MANISON: Where we have areas of responsibility for approvals within this agency, they are done efficiently. I expect a high level of service in working with industry to process applications. I have full confidence that is what they get when they work with our department. I get glowing feedback from the industry proponents who have worked with this agency.

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you tell me the average time to process the gas exploration permits?

Mr PRATT: There are requirements to advertise land for acreage release to seek company interest in granting an application, which is in legislation—advertising periods of 30 days. Once we award an application, it is the responsibility of a land council and a gas company to come to an agreement.

We meet quarterly with the land councils to understand their progress with companies and ability to meet on country. That has been severely hampered in the last two years due to COVID, biosecurity zones and the like. We are all familiar with the impact that has had on Territorians and regional people. We meet regularly with the land councils and gas companies to understand their appetite and endeavour to get an application progressed to us. Once we receive applications, I can assure you they are not sat on; we move them swiftly.

In the last four years there have not been any new applications awarded because we have been severely hampered by not having on-country meetings, COVID impacts and the like.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the average processing time for the approval of a gas exploration permit? I have heard that you have not processed any in four years. Do you measure the approval time and, if so, what is the average approval time?

Mrs MANISON: If you are not satisfied with the details we always happy to take questions on notice.

Mr EDGINGTON: A simple answer would be fine.

Mr PRATT: There were 37 permits awarded. We would have to take that question on notice and map the time frame from when they were first applied through to when they were granted, understanding when there were breaks in play—if I can call it that—awaiting gas companies and land councils to reach agreement. I cannot answer you now but we can take that on notice for the 37 permits applied for.

Question on Notice No 3.4

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

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the average processing time for the approval of a gas exploration permit?

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

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Barkly has been allocated the number 3.4.

Mr EDGINGTON: The government has committed to a gas industry. How far are we away from having a producing gas industry in the Territory?

Mrs MANISON: Are we talking about onshore gas?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, onshore gas.

Mrs MANISON: There is a lot to be excited about. You have to remember that we already have a producing onshore gas industry in Central Australia. That has been producing gas for a very long time. We have a proven track record at Mereenie and Palm Valley.

With regard to the Beetaloo, we have gone through an extensive process developing its resources. We went through the hydraulic fracturing inquiry, which was chaired by Justice Pepper. That body of work that came through with 135 recommendations, which we are in the process of implementing in line with our commitments. That needs to be done before any production licences will be granted.

There is a lot to be excited about with the activity in the Beetaloo. I will hand over to Mr Pratt to talk about the process to get to a production licence. I am happy to provide you with an update after that about where some of that activity is going, if that is a question that you choose to ask.

Mr PRATT: There is quite a lot of activity happening now and this year in the Beetaloo. We expect companies to be drilling six wells in the Beetaloo this year, which is a large step forward from recent years.

Origin are planning to drill two horizontal wells; Tamboran are doing one horizontal well; and Empire Energy are drilling an additional two wells on their EP187 site. Their work program also has them drilling another horizontal well on EP167 and 168. That is activity planned for this year in the Beetaloo.

Empire Energy are, in the near future—probably three weeks—stimulating an existing horizontal well they drilled last year on EP187. They had positive results in their earlier drilling on EP187. The activity this year to stimulate the well, followed by the drilling of another two wells this year on EP187, will tremendously advance their prospects of seeking production tenure next year—noting that they need successful results from that exploration to progress.

Santos continues to flow test two wells this year. They drilled and horizontally fractured those wells late last year. That testing is ongoing.

Tamboran are looking to do a seismic survey and drill the Maverick 1 well in the Beetaloo this year.

All going to plan for the gas industry and subject to positive results, it is likely that companies may seek production tenure next year. That is not approvals to produce, but seek production tenure. Depending on their results and planning for future activity, they may seek production approvals late next year or the year after.

Mr EDGINGTON: With regard to the Pepper inquiry, how many of the 138 recommendations have been implemented?

Mrs MANISON: I will speak to this agency's responsibility of what we have to do in regard to implementing the Pepper inquiry recommendations. Overall, across government—because different agencies that have different roles of delivery—the progress of implementing the recommendations of the HFI inquiry is centrally monitored through Chief Minister and Cabinet. We are working toward having them all completed by the end of this year.

Mr PRATT: This agency was presented with 64 to complete from the 138 recommendations, noting that three were split into parts. Thus far this agency has completed 42 of those recommendations and has 22 to go. Of that 22, 11 are to be completed through regulatory reform and another 12 are related to onshore service and supply recommendations and local benefit for the Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the time frame to complete the 22 further recommendations?

Mr PRATT: This agency is on track. We are confident the recommendations will be completed this year. There will be an amendment bill presented in the house later this year with the remaining regulatory reform recommendations put to the House for debate.

Mr EDGINGTON: What stage are the other 74 recommendations at?

Mrs MANISON: We anticipate full implementation will be done by the end of this calendar year.

Mr EDGINGTON: All 138 will be in place, completed and implemented?

Mrs MANISON: Of the 135, yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: What threats does the Territory onshore gas industry face and how are they being tackled at the moment?

Mrs MANISON: I would say misinformation.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is that?

Mrs MANISON: People do not like to believe the scientific evidence the inquiry went through and are actively, constantly trying to protest against the development of onshore and gas resources. We had an extensive public process. There was rigorous scientific work and that is why we will have a world-class industry with world-class regulations. We are continuing the work. We are doing what we said we would do. We are implementing the recommendations and working closely with the companies involved.

Mr EDGINGTON: What proposals have been made for pipelines in the Territory and at what stage in the planning process are these proposals?

Mrs MANISON: We have a few different companies that operate in the Northern Territory but are big players on the Australian market. APA has been here for a long time; and the Northern Gas Pipeline—or the NGP—from Tennant Creek to the east coast. That was a significant and important development, adding connectivity to produce more options to get to market and further impress upon the development of gas resources in the Northern Territory. Jemena has exciting plans for expansion when it comes to gas pipelines. There has been work with regard to expanding to Moomba, but that is a bit further off.

The main expansion we expect to see, sooner rather than later, is the NGP. It will all be done in the right way with the right consultation. If the Beetaloo proves up the way we think it will, you can expect to see a lot more investment flowing through when it comes to gas pipeline infrastructure in the Northern Territory.

Mr DRABSCH: Our department is working closely with the gas task force led by Alistair Trier, of which I am a member. We are doing advanced planning on a corridor for common user infrastructure from the Beetaloo to Darwin so that if we get the volumes of gas that we are hoping for out of the Beetaloo, we will be able to put in pipeline infrastructure that minimises the transport costs and maximises the competitiveness of that resource in the future development.

There are also a number of companies in the pipeline construction and operation area exploring options for connection to the east coast market, mainly through connecting to the Northern Gas Pipeline and then from Mount Isa—not necessarily following Valero but reaching directly across towards Longreach and ultimately Gladstone and Wallumbilla. There are active discussion, studies, analysis of those options and corridor studies so that we are well prepared for the development of that infrastructure should the prospectivity of the region be confirmed.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are you aware of any discussions going on in Western Australia about the desirability of building a pipeline from Western Australia to the east coast?

Mrs MANISON: We have all seen it and their plans, but I am focused on what we are doing in the Northern Territory to prove up the industry and create opportunities here.

Mr EDGINGTON: Do you see that as a risk to the Beetaloo project if a pipeline went from Western Australia to the east coast to the market first? What impact do you think it would have here?

Mrs MANISON: I do not see the risk. I get that on face value it looks like a potentially daunting prospect for some, but the feedback we are getting directly from industry and the companies involved in gas pipelines—and also as Mr Drabsch said, from Mr Trier who runs our gas task force—is that it is full steam ahead with interest when it comes to Beetaloo because the resource is shaping up so well with the early exploration work. It is seen as an attractive, viable option and, it would be fair to say, one of the most significant basin developments in the nation when it comes to gas.

Mr EDGINGTON: Looking at Have Your Say website, there is a draft re-write of the petroleum royalty act. How much feedback have you received so far?

Mrs MANISON: This is a Treasury-led body of work; it handles royalties.

What makes the onshore gas industry so attractive in the Northern Territory is that unlike the offshore gas industry, where we collect no royalties as they go all directly to the federal government's coffers, is that we get royalties. It will be another direct revenue stream coming into the Northern Territory, as opposed to other developments where royalties are paid straight to Canberra. I was asked by a journalist yesterday—and I had a bit of a giggle, but I completely agree—'Would we like a slice of those offshore gas royalties?' Absolutely.

When I was Treasurer I put it to the federal government, because if it is being produced here and all the work is happening here then we should see the royalties flowing back to the Northern Territory; it is important.

We are developing the royalties system for onshore gas. We have a complex, antiquated system that needs to change; industry agrees. There have been varying views from the industry; it has been deeply consulted about what is required. Treasury is doing this at the right pace that takes industry along. Not everyone will be happy. Who is ever happy with the end outcomes of how royalties are collected? They are doing the diligent work required.

The companies choosing to make this investment will have certainty about what the onshore gas royalties will be. Most importantly, as Territorians we want to make sure there is an appropriate royalty going back into the Northern Territory to help fund all the services and infrastructure we would like to see.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the issue under the current scheme? Is it the one-off agreements with producers? What is the area of concern?

Mrs MANISON: There is a raft of issues. It is more of a question for Treasury because they are driving that process. Mr Butler, the Deputy Under Treasurer, is our tax man and he knows all about these things. There is a level of complexity to it. All companies are in agreement that it has to change, which is why this work has been happening at a considered pace to ensure all feedback from industry has been taken on board. I was having these conversations at APEA last year. We are still going through this process because it is important to get it right.

Mr EDGINGTON: With any proposed changes or any changes to the draft bill, will that apply to current petroleum producers or only future entrants?

Mr PRATT: It is a responsibility of Treasury; I preface my answer with that.

The new royalty provisions under the royalty act will be applicable to Central Petroleum, being the only onshore producer in the Territory, when they come in. It is not for future use only, it is for the current operator as well.

Mr EDGINGTON: When can we expect to see the legislation introduced?

Mrs MANISON: It is a Treasury question. I do not have the exact time lines. I am happy to follow this up.

Mr EDGINGTON: Treasury is managing the Have Your Say process?

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr EDGINGTON: So you are aware, there is a broken link. It is very hard to get to the draft.

Mrs MANISON: We will pass that on.

Mr EDGINGTON: What stakeholders are engaged in the onshore gas working group? How many Territory businesses are part of that group?

Mr DRABSCH: Are you referring to the onshore gas service and supply working group?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr DRABSCH: That working group has been established, building on the success of the offshore gas supply and service working group, which involved the major producers: Santos; INPEX; and Shell. That was about maximising benefit for Territory businesses out of the procurement that they undertake. Currently it is about 23% of the procurement. About \$400m a year goes to Territory businesses and about 57% goes to Western Australian businesses.

We are applying the methodology we have worked up with the offshore producers to the onshore industry. The members of that group are prospective producers in the onshore, Beetaloo and Central Petroleum. Particularly in the development of Beetaloo, we are working with them to ensure they are planning to maximise the benefit for Territory businesses and workers, particularly local communities and Aboriginal people who live in the area.

There is a range of targets identified in the Pepper inquiry report. I am responsible for something like 11 recommendations about business enterprise participation, training, workforce development and jobs for Aboriginal communities. In pursuit of those recommendations, we are working with industry to plan mechanisms by which we can maximise the benefit for participation of those businesses and workers from the Territory.

As a result of the work of that group I have been consulting outside of it with Territory businesses about the work we are undertaking and keeping them informed of those processes. I addressed a meeting of about 80 such companies in a briefing at Development House a couple of months ago. We will keep them informed of the work happening.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many Territory businesses are represented on that working group?

Mr DRABSCH: There were 80 that participated in the consultation. The working group is working with the potential producers about how they will maximise their procurement outcomes which benefit Territory businesses and workers.

Mrs MANISON: We have all heard arguments over the years from Territorians about their frustration when they see companies leap over the border and benefit from projects in the Northern Territory. We have learned a lot over the years from mining and the offshore gas industry about maximising that benefit because ultimately we want to see those businesses in your electorate and up and down the track of the Northern Territory—to directly benefit from industry.

These companies have an obligation and social responsibility to make sure there is a maximum economic flow-on benefit to Territorians. That is why the body of work Mr Drabsch does is important in order to get this right. We want to keep as much business here as possible. Supplying these projects, the offshore logistics bases we have here and the local jobs they support are important. These are often industry jobs that you do not see all the time because they are tucked away at East Arm. That is the extra value-add we need to keep pushing for the Northern Territory and the development of new industry.

Mr EDGINGTON: When it comes to petroleum policy and regulation activities, how many departmental staff are employed and working in that area?

Mrs MANISON: We have a great group of public servants who work hard every day. That is not to say there are no other public servants across government working in this space with their various agency responsibilities.

Mr PRATT: As at 31 March, there were 23 people working in the energy development group of the department—which is relative to this output—looking at policy and regulation for petroleum matters.

There are other agencies which also have responsibilities, noting DEPWS is on later today. It has environmental regulatory responsibilities for the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority also provides regulatory clearances for petroleum activities.

Mr EDGINGTON: Are those positions all filled?

Mr PRATT: Off the top of my head, I can confirm there are three vacancies. They are all being advertised or under way at the moment for recruitment.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is good to hear. How many onshore gas production permits are in place in the Territory?

Mrs MANISON: We recognise that we have had an onshore gas industry in the Northern Territory for a long time.

Mr PRATT: There are two production licences and three petroleum leases. Petroleum leases are from historic legislation but, essentially, they are production licences. The answer is five.

Mr EDGINGTON: How long have those production licences been in place now?

Mr PRATT: The aggregate that Central Petroleum has is that it has been producing gas since 1982; that was also the first well that commenced production. Not all commenced in 1982. The Northern Territory has been producing onshore gas in Central Australia in Amadeus Basin since approximately 1982.

Mr EDGINGTON: The Pepper inquiry recommended that CO₂ emissions be offset from onshore gas over the life cycle in Australia. If onshore gas was produced in the Territory and sold overseas, perhaps in the form of liquefied natural gas, would the Territory still be responsible for offsetting all of the life cycle emissions, even though that gas is going overseas?

Mrs MANISON: Firstly, I get that there are a lot of people who have views about the gas industry. One thing that people need to fully appreciate is that the gas industry, through its shareholders and company directors, understands its obligation when it comes to reducing emissions. That is why they work at the forefront regarding emissions, carbon capture and storage, doing that important work.

The other thing I would also argue that gas is the fuel of transition to the renewable energy future. We all want to see a future that is fully powered by renewables, cleaner and greener. We have exciting prospects in the Northern Territory. We are seeing the example in Western Australia now, where it is able to shut down factories that have coal-fired power—which has far greater emissions than gas—and look at the transition to a renewable energy future. This is because it has gas supply and is making sure it keeps a secure and stable delivery of power to people at an affordable price across Western Australia.

These companies take their environmental obligations seriously. At government levels across the nation we are all setting more ambitious climate change targets by the day. It is important to tackle the issue of climate change. Gas companies take their obligations seriously and work towards important emissions targets.

We have worked with Commonwealth Government on a bilateral energy and emissions reduction agreement, and we have our own settings as well.

Mr DRABSCH: With respect to the Pepper inquiry recommendations they go to the emissions that come from the development and utilisation of the gas within the Australian continental boundaries. We have been working actively with the federal government, previous and current, through the bilateral energy and emissions agreements to work on processes by which those emissions might be managed.

The emissions that come from gas development are essentially fugitive emissions that might leak out from wells and pipelines. Generally gas producers are seeking to produce the gas to retain the gas, not release it. That is not a major contributor. But when with LNG it is used to burn the gas, as INPEX does—it burns about 11% of its gas to produce its LNG through its gas turbines. There are emissions that relate to that. Those LNG producers are actively seeking a means of reducing emissions through access to solar power, for example, or carbon capture and storage. It is important to recognise that in Australia 50% of the gas we utilise is not used for burning for energy purposes, it is used as industrial inputs and support of industrial activity.

It is a process that will be undertaken. The Major Projects Commissioner, Jason Schoolmeester, helped negotiate mechanisms with the federal government by which we work to ensure there is a net zero outcome from the development of this important industry.

Mr EDGINGTON: What is the current estimate of CO₂ emissions over the life cycle in Australia for onshore gas?

Mrs MANISON: They are still proving up what the resource is and what production would look like. You are asking the big hypothetical.

Mr EDGINGTON: Perhaps if I go back to the original point. If gas is sent overseas in a liquefied form, is the Territory still responsible for offsetting all of the life cycle emissions?

Mr DRABSCH: The recommendation relates to life cycle emissions within the Australian continental boundaries, not LNG that goes overseas. That is a matter for the countries that receive it.

Mr EDGINGTON: The Territory will not be responsible?

Mr DRABSCH: That is correct. It is the responsibility of the countries that receive the gas as they seek to comply with their Paris and other agreements.

Mrs MANISON: Exciting work is happening with the CSIRO and INPEX on the carbon capture and storage hub at Middle Arm. Santos is also doing exciting work with carbon capture and storage. There is a great deal of work happening to look at ways to reduce emissions for those companies. You would not find any gas developer which is not in some way or form looking at its obligations for carbon capture and storage.

Mr EDGINGTON: Many jurisdictions have some form of sovereign wealth fund to sequester royalty revenues from commodity production, such as onshore gas. Has the Territory considered such funds to share its revenues from eventual gas production throughout the Territory?

Mrs MANISON: All the revenue that comes in will be managed by Treasury. I would expect that the greatest beneficiaries of that revenue will be people living in remote parts of the Northern Territory—about 50% of the infrastructure budget already goes there. It is important because that is where we have the need for more infrastructure than any other part of Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: Have you consulted with industry over whether a reservation policy would be a deal breaker for onshore gas in the Territory?

Mrs MANISON: We are constantly having discussions with the gas industry. Without a doubt there is a topical conversation on the east coast. We have different situations in the Northern Territory. I said yesterday when I was asked by media that it is too early for those conversations here. We have to prove up to see what the resource is looking like. We also have a new Australian Government we are also working with.

These companies are serious about their obligation when it comes to the social licence to operate in the Northern Territory. An important part of this, and where we want to head, is gas as feed stock and opportunities first and foremost for people who do projects in the Northern Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: The Pepper review did not recommend a reservation policy?

Mrs MANISON: We are waiting to see what the gas proves up to be onshore. At this point we have many companies that are operating and recognise the early opportunities in providing gas for the Northern Territory. They are the conversations I am having with them. Many of them do see early opportunities for supply here. There will be others supplying to other parts of the nation and possibly globally.

Mr GUYULA: Funding for the regulation and assessment of hydraulic fracking has been significantly reduced in the 2022–23. Are you able to advise if this means that there will be fewer major projects used in fracking or if there is less oversight of the major projects using fracking?

Mrs MANISON: We are serious about having world-class regulation and making sure the further development of the onshore gas industry in the Beetaloo is done in a way that gives people confidence that it is sustainable and it is done in a safe manner. We invest in people not just in this agency but across other agencies as well—our Environment department; and Chief Minister and Cabinet. We have obligations within our agency but other agencies that have a role to play, too.

Mr PRATT: Budget 2022–23 has a decrease of about \$869,000 from Budget 2021–22. That that was a one-off carry forward from a previous year to implement hydraulic fracking inquiry recommendations; that is why there has been a reduction. We carried some money forward from a previous budget into the 2021–22 year, spent that and now it is not there. I can assure you there has been no reduction in regulatory staff or numbers to assess and monitor compliance for hydraulic fracturing activities.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3. Output 2.4 is the responsibility of another minister. That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0. Output Group 3.0 is the responsibility of another minister.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – INDUSTRY STRATEGY
Output 4.1 – Industry Development and Economic Analysis

Mrs MANISON: This is the opportunity to ask me questions about the screen industry, which is a wonderful, dynamic industry; the work we do on the space strategy; and northern development and trade.

Mr EDGINGTON: This appears to be a new output created by combining economic reform and industry development, which you were responsible for. However, Minister Kirby was responsible for procurement related to industry development. Can you explain the exact breakdown between ministers and agencies? Why the split?

Mrs MANISON: Minister Kirby still has procurement; that still sits there.

Ms FRANKENFELD: The procurement that was previously sitting in this output was moved to the business output, but it sits under Minister Kirby still.

Mr EDGINGTON: The 2022–23 budget has approximately \$18m allocated to this output. What projects or significant new initiatives will receive funding from the allocation? How will the rest be spent?

Mrs MANISON: It cuts across other delivery items.

Mr Da ROCHA: Primarily, it is about the AROWS project—Adelaide River Off-stream Water Storage. There is also a commitment of \$1.9m for a circular economy project, which is a 50:50 joint partnership with the Australian Government to provide the opportunity for the sector to invest in new infrastructure to support recycling—whether that be recycled plastics, glass crushers and the like.

Mr EDGINGTON: That is covered under what appears to be an \$8m increase in that budget?

Mr Da ROCHA: Correct. Primarily, that relates to the AROWS and the circular economy strategy.

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you briefly explain what the industry development division does?

Mrs MANISON: I thank our hard-working public servants. They have a diverse job across multiple areas across government. We have exciting industries pushing forward that we try to give extra support to. It is all about economic diversification and making sure we broaden the economic base in the Northern Territory so we are less reliant on major project phases; and when the major projects end that we do not see a downturn. It cushions and smooths out the economic movements a bit more—the ones we have loudly and clearly had in the Northern Territory for a long time.

Mr Da ROCHA: The strategy and policy branch is one of three branches within the strategy and policy division within our department. The main functions of the branch are to coordinate legislative and regulatory reform; economic analysis; economic development policy; north Australian development policy; scoping and identification on facilitating investment projects; and project facilitation for economic water infrastructure projects.

It is primarily comprised of four units: economic analysis and advice; facilitated project and infrastructure; regulatory reform; and strategy and policy. The economic analysis advice unit undertakes detailed economic research investigation analysis of complex economics, statistical and demographic issues relevant to the Northern Territory. The unit advises the department on economic development and analysis, monitors business performance and conducts economic modelling and impact analysis.

The facilitated projects and infrastructure unit provides advice on infrastructure policies and strategies and undertakes preliminary planning for major water infrastructure projects and commercial opportunities to support private investment. The unit leads engagement with the National Water Grid Authority and delivery of the Darwin Region Water Supply Infrastructure Program in partnership with Power and Water, which includes the Manton Dam Return to Service and the Adelaide River Off-stream Water Storage.

Our regulatory reform unit leads implementation of the Territory Economic Reconstruction committee recommendations on regulating for growth. The objective is to streamline regulatory processes to make it easier to do business and attract private investment in the Territory. The unit's priorities are to contemporise Territory regulatory-making framework and make regulatory processes in the mining, agriculture and construction sectors.

My strategic policy unit provides analysis and advice on economic development policy and the north Australian development agenda.

Mr DRABSCH: There are a range of projects and activities that these teams undertake, including the space industry strategy, drone sector strategy, maritime industry development plan, circular economy strategy and crocodile farming strategy. A regional accommodation analysis was undertaken, and international trade and engagement. We recently renewed and reviewed our international engagement strategy and released it.

Contained within the unit is a communications team that liaises closely with the business community. We have a mailing list of some 8,500 businesses we inform regarding policy issues and things they need to be aware of. That unit was particularly active in informing businesses and industry about developments in the management of COVID over the last two years—and won significant praise from industry associations and individual businesses for the information support it provided.

Mr EDGINGTON: Where does the Defence industry fit into this? How is the department collaborating with the Australian Industry & Defence Network NT to maximise opportunities for Territory businesses to capture work on major Defence projects?

Mrs MANISON: That team moved over to Chief Minister and Cabinet earlier this year. Defence is a major industry group; we still do work and engage with them.

Mr EDGINGTON: What does that engagement consist of?

Mrs MANISON: This is led by the Chief Minister and Cabinet team. The Chief Minister is Minister for Defence, which captures the Defence industry's body of work. We have an active interest as a department because of the maritime industry strategy and the work to support development of the ship lift. Defence and capability are important. We have a highly capable team in Chief Minister and Cabinet, which specialises in making sure we have the Defence strategy right and that the industry is capable of supporting Defence investment in the Territory.

Mr DRABSCH: A lot of that relates to supply and service. That is what the Maritime Industry Development Plan is about. It dovetails with the gas—a lot of the skills and services that are provided here relate to a number of industry sectors. We work collaboratively with the Defence NT team.

Ms BOOTHBY: You said that the screen sector question can come under this output, Industry Strategy, but it is also clearly written under output 5.3, Tourism and Hospitality. Can you clarify why that would be?

Mrs MANISON: It is there, my apologies.

Ms BOOTHBY: Would you like us to ask the questions here, or in Tourism and Hospitality?

Mrs MANISON: It would be Tourism and Hospitality. That was my error and oversight.

Mr EDGINGTON: Do we know how many people employed by Territory businesses are Defence contractors and suppliers?

Mrs MANISON: That would be a question I would refer to the Minister for Defence, because they have the teams that works with Defence industries.

Mr EDGINGTON: Would that also relate to businesses securing contracts with the Larrakeyah Defence Precinct redevelopment? Do we have any information on that?

Mrs MANISON: Yes, that would also sit with the Minister for Defence.

Mr EDGINGTON: What about opportunities? What opportunities will there be for local businesses to secure contracts for the US bulk fuel storage facility to be developed at East Arm?

Mrs MANISON: It has been contracted. Again, that would be the Defence industries team in Chief Minister and Cabinet department.

Output 4.2 – Northern Australia Development and Strategic Engagement

Mr EDGINGTON: The International Engagement Strategy was released in March. What key initiatives will be driven through the strategy in support of the Territory's aim of becoming a \$40bn economy by 2030?

Mrs MANISON: We recently released our International Engagement Strategy 2022–2026. It highlights that we want the Northern Territory to be seen as a world-class destination for investment and that we continue to support our traditionally strong exporters, industry and services. We want to diversify and create more opportunities by strengthening our international partnerships and collaboration.

The six priority markets identified in the International Engagement Strategy were Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia and North America. When you look at where many of our projects, trade ties and the opportunities are—for example, Sun Cable—you can see the natural flow-on to be outlining Singapore as one of those priority markets.

In South Korea we have a strong relationship with them with regard to trade, particularly in gas. In Japan, it is obviously gas. In Vietnam it is a range of goods, and cattle and buffalo. Indonesia are our close friends and longest trading partner; it is a relationship we you must nurture carefully.

I acknowledge the new Prime Minister; the Foreign minister and minister for Trade; and the minister for Industry and Science, who recently travelled to Indonesia within weeks of getting into government. It was important to send a strong message about our partnership with Indonesia—and also North America; we trade several goods there but have started to form an even greater relationship in Defence, technology, data and those important areas.

This is an important body of work that guides our engagement overseas, building even bigger trade partnerships and getting more investment into the Northern Territory. A great deal of work was done in planning and consulting this, making sure we were at the right point post COVID to release it. It is a different world out there; we had to put those factors in place in putting this together.

Mr EDGINGTON: Those markets that you identified—Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam. What are the specific industry sector opportunities identified in those markets?

Mrs MANISON: If you have a look at it there is Indonesia—cattle. We have existing Defence and maritime industries. We have education markets there but we are also looking at things like ICT connections, health services and important products like cotton—we have an emerging cotton industry here.

For our dear friends in Japan—gas. INPEX will be here on next weekend; it will be exciting to have the chief executive there. There is mining. Traditionally, if you go to Uluru, Japan has always been a strong market for that experience. We see more potential in the areas of seafood; critical minerals; continuing our Defence work; forestry; ICT; and hydrogen, just to name a few.

With North America we have a strong relationship when it comes to Defence. Americans love to come here from a tourism perspective. We have existing markets with Aboriginal art, which we can be proud of in the Northern Territory. There is further work emerging with ICT and data. Big cables are being built to the Northern Territory, connecting us with the US and Asian nations, because we are seen as a safe data port.

There is:

- critical minerals
- the screen industry, which we will talk about later—American productions and companies come to the Northern Territory as well
- NASA—how could I forget that? We are about to start launching rockets in Arnhem Land. ELA has sent the invites and we are looking forward to seeing NASA launch the first sounding rocket soon, which is a huge thing to be excited about.

Mr EDGINGTON: It might be an opportunity to promote 'Boundless possible' on the rocket.

Mrs MANISON: It is a wonderful thing to see sounding rockets going out of there.

With regards to Singapore there is:

- Defence and maritime services

- a relationship with exports around produce, horticulture and seafood
- direct flights, which help with regards to tourism opportunities
- further room for movement when it comes to hydrogen.
- solar and renewable energy—everybody is looking at Sun Cable as one of the most exciting projects in this nation; it is getting a lot of attention.

We have had a strong relationship with Vietnam in terms of trade, with cattle; education and training, which we are looking to further expand; and they have received buffalo. There is a market there. We see further room for movement when it comes to horticulture, cotton and mining products. Several Vietnamese investors come to Northern Territory, who are working in resource projects. There is great interest from Vietnam in the Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: Do we have Northern Territory representatives based in those countries?

Mrs MANISON: Not all of them.

Mr EDGINGTON: Do we have representatives?

Mrs MANISON: We are nearing announcement of a representative in Indonesia. We have been in a recruitment process; COVID presented troubles. We will soon be in a position to announce who our representative working in Indonesia is.

It would be fair to say we get regular visits from investors from all these nations and plenty of activities from embassies.

Mr EDGINGTON: How many representatives do we have based in other countries?

Mrs MANISON: We have a representative in Singapore. We are close to finishing the work with our Indonesian representative, which we will be announcing soon. We are looking to appoint someone in Japan, given that close relationship. The Chief Minister will be making Japan a priority place to visit.

Mr EDGINGTON: Singapore is the only place we have a representative?

Mrs MANISON: Indonesia is close.

Mr EDGINGTON: Who is based in Singapore?

Ms CASSIMATIS: Mr Michael Png is our locally embedded representative in Singapore. He is co-located with the Austrade office in Singapore.

Mr EDGINGTON: Beyond those identified three—Indonesia, Singapore and Japan—is there an intention to expand further into other countries?

Mrs MANISON: Not at this stage. Those as the priority countries for that level of engagement. That does not stop us, day to day, from having strong working relationships. We have embassies, consular officials and Austrade. A huge amount of work happens with these nations in building relationships and keeping them going every day.

From time to time, when members of the government and public servants travelling to these countries, it can attract attention—sometimes adversely—but these are important trips because it is about continuing to build trade ties and making sure there is regular, strong, proactive engagement—like when you lobby in Canberra, if you are not down there putting your story on the table, you are not in the front of their minds.

We have all changed the way we do business in the last few years. We are all familiar with Teams, Zoom and all the applications we never thought we would be using so much. Face-to-face engagement is important for good, strong business and cultural, long-established reasons.

There are trips from time to time, with strong agendas and purpose, not just to go and see stuff. These trips have outcomes tied to them. I would even encourage opposition members, if they have the opportunity to keep building on the good messages of the Northern Territory, to do so.

Mr EDGINGTON: Has there been any planning, preparation and consultation with the federal government on how to prevent and deal with any breakouts of lumpy skin disease that might occur?

Mrs MANISON: Mr Kirby has the output on biosecurity and animal welfare. Sue Fitzpatrick, the Chief Veterinary Officer, will be able to extensively brief you on this issue.

As a former minister and someone with a big interest as the Minister for Northern Australia and Trade, we have put this in as a big risk to our cattle industry. It is transferred through vectors, through mosquitoes and the like. As soon as this was recognised in Indonesia, a huge amount of work happened and Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer went to Indonesia. They had to bring the live disease back to the laboratory in Geelong to work on developing a vaccination for our herd in Australia.

It is not a matter of if, but when. This has caused great concern and alarm. I thank former Chief Minister Michael Gunner and the capable Chair of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association, Mr David Connolly, as they had lumpy skin disease put on the National Cabinet agenda. It was elevated to that level. The then minister for Agriculture, Minister Littleproud, put more northern Australia biosecurity money on the agenda; we also increased our biosecurity money in the last budget. We needed to see the breakdown from the federal government as it was light on detail.

We have the best molecular diagnostics laboratory in northern Australia at Berrimah Farm. It is part of this agency; our Chief Vet Officer works from there.

Cattle trade is an important part of the Northern Territory economy. We are proud of it. We always fight to protect it and ensure we back the hard-working men and women on cattle stations who do a great job—and provide the protein our neighbours need.

Lumpy skin is a big risk and issue. I thank the Indonesian government for allowing the Chief Vet Office for Australia to get that sample and therefore develop a vaccine. Any engagement with the NTCA is a top issue.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is Project Sea Dragon still on the major projects list?

Mrs MANISON: Minister Lawler spoke about that yesterday.

Mr EDGINGTON: I did not hear it.

Mrs MANISON: I see great potential for that project but they are restructuring the design and layout of how they go forward.

Mr EDGINGTON: The CEO stated that it is unviable.

Mrs MANISON: That was the former CEO. We had the same briefing at that time. He felt the structure needed to be smaller and built. It was large at the start and that made sense, hence why I believe it is an achievable project.

Mr EDGINGTON: How much has Bespoke Territory been paid for its consultancy on the prawn farm?

Mrs MANISON: That is not a question for me. You would need to ask Project Sea Dragon.

Mr EDGINGTON: The 2022–23 budget has \$1.5m allocated to this output, a decrease of \$800,000. Why is the budget being cut by \$800,000? What significant new initiatives will receive funding from this allocation and how will the rest be spent?

Mr DRABSCH: The change in the budget estimate relates to the fact that in the previous year, 2021–22, there was a one-off transfer from other outputs into that area. That did not continue into this forthcoming budget year.

Mr EDGINGTON: What do you see as the top three key areas of strategic growth for the Territory and northern Australia? What are the three issues the NT should be squarely focused on?

Mrs MANISON: What I always say:

- backing our traditionally strong industry sectors and making sure they keep surviving and thriving—for instance the cattle industry and tourism
- working to diversify our economy and create new opportunities in our resources sector, in gas
- I see great opportunities in the ways we have worked together in horticulture to get more farming in the Northern Territory
- we are looking towards becoming a maritime service destination with the ship lift
- something else that is exciting and cannot be understated is the data and Defence areas as well
- renewable energy is another that should be at the front of my mind, and would be at the front of yours.

I have not given you just three, but these are the areas where it has to be all shoulders to the wheel to keep pushing forward for international trade and opportunities.

Ms BOOTHBY: You mentioned Sea Dragon and the meeting you had with the former CEO, saying it was unviable and was undergoing a restructure. You also mentioned that the same CEO said the project should be smaller. If they decide that it should be smaller, will that mean it will come off the major projects list for the Territory?

Mrs MANISON: You would have to put that question to the Major Projects team within Chief Minister and Cabinet. They are going through a review of how they deliver the project. What I was presented with looked viable, it just needed to be restaged.

Ms BOOTHBY: Would you consider that if it was smaller it would go off the major projects list?

Mrs MANISON: I cannot talk in hypotheticals. I appreciate what you are trying to ask, but there is work happening and it would be too early to say.

Ms BOOTHBY: Has the new CEO given a time line for the restructure?

Mrs MANISON: I have not had that conversation in recent times. I cannot give you an answer.

Ms BOOTHBY: Do you still think that Sea Dragon is one of the priorities we have for the Northern Australia Development Fund?

Mrs MANISON: We should be having a crack at aquaculture. The Richards family were awarded Queen's Birthday Honours on Monday for the amazing work they have done with Humpty Doo barra. You cannot go to a restaurant down south in this country without having barramundi from Humpty Doo barra. That is an amazing story of success that we must celebrate.

The Paspaley family did a huge amount of work developing the pearling industry; it involved lots of science and technology. Look at where Paspaley pearls is globally—it is fabulous.

There is more work happening on the aquaculture front. That is why this government has backed it. I am proud, with my previous Aquaculture hat on, that we put more money into the Darwin aquaculture centre. We will be hosting the world aquaculture conference next year. We have a proven record in developing pearls and work on prawns. We are looking at oysters, which will be great for remote Aboriginal communities. You can expect to see more happening in the trepang space soon. There is innovative work happening with jewfish—the first aquaculture-bred jewfish is happening here.

There is a lot to be excited about on the aquaculture front. We should be making sure we create new businesses and industry because the Northern Territory can be highly successful on the national and international stage.

Mr EDGINGTON: Looking through some of these projects, an exciting one is the Albatross project. There has been \$10m of co-investment from the Northern Territory Government. What stage is the project at?

Mrs MANISON: AAI and the work they will be doing to manufacture planes in the Northern Territory is the biggest thing to happen in aviation manufacturing in this country for a long time. There has been great work at Darwin Airport and many globally renowned companies have backed the work of AAI—Pratt & Whitney, to name another company.

It is exciting that aircraft will be manufactured in Darwin. There is a huge amount of work happening to get AAI off the ground and prepared for the manufacture of their first planes. I need to get a time line for you—it sits with Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr EDGINGTON: Does the \$10m co-investment mean we will have a seat on the board? How does it work?

Mrs MANISON: That is a Local Jobs Fund question, which is with the Chief Minister and Cabinet. I suggest you put those questions in after estimates to get a written question response.

Mr EDGINGTON: Your department has nothing to do with this project?

Mr DRABSCH: It is probably one of the first demonstrations of the value of the Investment Commissioner model. This proposal has been floating about for a couple of years. Mr Cowan, the Investment Commissioner, raced out, chased it down and explored ways of making it happen.

We will see a cluster of aviation industries in the Darwin Airport precinct. We are actively working in collaboration with the Investment Territory team, particularly in the context of skills development. We are supporting an aviation skills academy at the old Darwin Airport headquarters site, which is already operating and training 70 people who would otherwise have to fly to Cairns. We have been working in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce. Ultimately, the plan is to have the training academy located on-site at the AAI precinct. That cluster has a number of supporting and supply industries that are proposing to invest in the development of their facilities for the construction of the planes.

It is a great opportunity for advancing our aviation skills capability, building on the success we have had with Asia Pacific Aviation Services based in Alice Springs—which is also a maintenance section.

Mr EDGINGTON: Was there a business plan submitted to government prior to the co-investment decision?

Mr DRABSCH: That matter was managed through the Local Jobs Fund and the investment solutions area of Investment Territory.

Mr EDGINGTON: Recent changes to the Administrative Arrangements Order, has removed the responsibility for investment promotion and market engagement from the Northern Australia and Trade portfolio. Where has it moved to and why has it been moved?

Mr DRABSCH: When Investment Territory, which used to be a part of the old DTBI, moved across to the Chief Minister's department there was a separation of responsibilities: some of which were retained within DITT; and some went to Investment Territory. The broader investment promotion and international engagement continues to sit with my Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade; and the investment attraction work sits within Investment Territory, led by the Investment Commissioner.

The investment attraction work deals with engaging with particular proponents and prospects. By nature, there is a level of investment promotion activity, which happens with the collateral and material they produce. They develop that in collaboration with us, as we collaborate with them in terms of developing our international engagement strategy and tactics.

Mr EDGINGTON: Why have they been moved when Northern Australia and Trade still retains responsibility for international engagement?

Mr DRABSCH: We are all part of one government; that is how we work—closely together.

Mr EDGINGTON: Will it have any impact on that?

Mr DRABSCH: Not to my observation. The collaborative arrangement—given that these people used to work in my agency and are now working over there, there is strong collaboration and engagement between the agencies. We are the one government with, presumably, the one target of \$40bn by 2030.

Ms BOOTHBY: The people who used to work in that department who now work in the Chief Minister's department are not new positions? The same people have basically lifted their desks and moved over? Is that how it works?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes, it is a machinery of government process. Investment Territory was previously a division of the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation. It moved across. There has since been some subsequent changes and integration with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet but they still have their discrete identity.

Ms BOOTHBY: That change was the one that happened at the end of 2020, or was it after that?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes, that was the change that happened after the last election, which was bedded down by January of last year.

Ms BOOTHBY: Was the change to the new position title of 'Investment Commissioner' part of that as well? You just touted the success of the Investment Commissioner. I am just curious if it was the same move or transition over a period of time, or separately?

Mrs MANISON: At the time, the Chief Minister had outlined why we were moving to the commissioner model. It was important following the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission. We have found they have been highly effective. We have capable, passionate people doing an outstanding job.

Mr EDGINGTON: Is the ship lift part of your area?

Mr DRABSCH: The ship lift falls under the responsibilities of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. There is a team that used to sit within DTBI, which went across there after the last election. The responsibility for the management of the construction project will progressively fall to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, under Louise McCormick. It has been involved collaboratively in the project since the beginning of last year. The procurement process is well advanced; we are hoping to see outcomes over the next few months.

As CEO of the department of Industry, I continue to sit on the steering committee for the ship lift project. There is also the Maritime Industry Development Plan, which is what the ship lift is all about: putting in enabling infrastructure that can support a full service maritime supply and service industry, which could have the potential for creating 400 jobs in East Arm and other precincts.

Mr EDGINGTON: Do either the Territory Investment Commissioner or Major Projects Commissioners fall within your area?

Mr DRABSCH: Investment Territory sits within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. Those two commissioners report directly to the Chief Minister.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We will break for lunch.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: We shall recommence, it being 1 o'clock. We concluded estimates pre-lunch with Output Group 4.0. We finished, so we are up to Output Group 5.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – TOURISM, SERVICES AND HOSPITALITY

Output 5.1 – Tourism

Ms BOOTHBY: The Budget 2022 tourism media release spruiks an extra \$14.2m for direct tourism marketing. What will the KPIs be for that \$14.2m and how will you measure the success of that important investment?

Mrs MANISON: A huge amount of data collections and research happen with every marketing dollar spent in the tourism world. It is a sophisticated system to say the least, and it has been an interesting last few years—knowing when was the right time to pull different levers when it came to marketing spend because of the pandemic.

In this new world post COVID there has been a fundamental change regarding how consumers make their decisions which it comes to tourism spend. Lead times are not as long, markets have changed in this COVID world and we are not sure if they will settle back to the way they used to be in traditional market structures.

I will hand over to Mr Lovett and his team to talk about that marketing spend and some of the KPIs that we put in place to track how we go to get the best value for the dollars that we spend.

Mr LOVETT: Typically, for tourism marketing output we measure on the basis of holiday visitation and expenditure. For budget year/financial year 2022, the budget was set for 453,000 domestic holiday visitors. There was a target of zero international holiday visitors owing to the fact that when the budget was set international borders were closed and we did not have visibility on when they would be open. The expenditure total for domestic holiday visitation was set at \$397m.

Pleasingly, we think that will finish at about 669,000 domestic holiday visitors and about \$1.1bn in holiday visitor expenditure. There was a renaissance, for want of a better term, of domestic visitation—Australians getting out and visiting their own back yard. Through the Tourism Voucher program there were intra-Territory visitors—Territorians getting out and about and exploring their own back yard.

After an uncertain period, whilst the numbers are not pre-pandemic level, they were better than we expected.

Ms BOOTHBY: Is that holiday visitation and expenditure measured and tracked against KPIs annually or do you do it year to date or every month?

Mr LOVETT: The tourism statistics are on a quarterly basis through Tourism Research Australia, which is a division of Austrade through the federal government. They have two surveys: the national visitor survey; and the international visitor survey. They collate all sorts of data on total visitation, expenditure, type of visit and length of stay. That is what we typically see.

Over the period of COVID the NVS—national visitor survey—was collected on a monthly basis to give destinations much more specific information closer to real time. Typically, that will move to a quarterly basis as reporting sequences and the travel world, hopefully, comes back to normality.

Ms BOOTHBY: For specific spends or initiatives you undertake do you measure the visitation and expenditure for that investment? For example, the \$90,000 spent on the Instagram influencers for BASSINTHEGRASS. Would you measure that specifically and have that tracked, ready for whether it is successful or not?

Mr LOVETT: The \$90,000 spent on BASSINTHEGRASS was a combined campaign. That was a partnership between Virgin Australia, Northern Territory Major Events Company and Tourism NT. There was a public relations exercise; we had some influencers on that. It is hard to measure in dollars what the value of that was. We measure when we go in market with Virgin Australia, for example. We can measure through Virgin Australia the value of air fare expenditure and people who travel as a result of it. It is a little hard in all cases, when you have integrated campaigns that have a public relations or media component to them, but when you have direct trade involvement, such as with Virgin Australia, you can.

Mr DRABSCH: For example, the BASSINTHEGRASS success.

Mr LOVETT: Yes, that is right. This is not the first time an activation like this has been done. We do a range of influencer campaigns. The continued success of BASSINTHEGRASS is due to the great work of the team on the ground delivering it but also from the background—getting our influencers and media buy right. Our ticket sales will follow.

Mrs MANISON: Looking at the world of influencers—reels, TikTok and Instagram—it is unavoidable. We have to be in the space. The way my kids operate a phone—and they are very young—compared to how I operate things, and what they are looking at, it is all live action and movement. Influencers seem to be stealing and absorbing so much of our spare time. As time progresses we will have better ways of measuring it because everybody in marketing is doing the same thing, because they have to.

Ms BOOTHBY: With the \$90,000 and Virgin example you talked about, do we know if Virgin asks its passengers when they book whether they are going to BASSINTHEGRASS? Is that how you measure success?

Mr LOVETT: For a specific campaign, the way we normally work with airline partners and other trade partners is that we will have a landing page set up. We will have a BASSINTHEGRASS landing page that sits with Virgin. We do similar activity with Qantas holidays, Webjet and Flight Centre. They have a search engine functionality that sits at the front end. It has a tracker and we can see what they are buying and the length of stay. We can get quite sophisticated customer data.

Ms BOOTHBY: The Tourism Central Australia Information Centre is a \$5m investment. Is that part of the art gallery or is this a new building and new funding altogether?

Mrs MANISON: I applaud Tourism Central Australia. It is a stakeholder group I have had a fair bit to do with over time. The leadership of Danial and Patrick does not go unnoticed. They helped their industry survive the most difficult circumstances over the last two years throughout COVID. We are now in the middle of a completely booked out season in Alice Springs, with problems getting hotel rooms and cars. There are lots of people heading to the Centre for a holiday.

When I caught up with them on Tuesday they told me they have strong bookings on the shoulder season, which season will be extended because there is a lot happening. One of their concerns was worker fatigue because the challenges people have in getting staff, after a rough couple of years of having to minimise staff just to keep their businesses surviving to now being flat out—they cannot see when they will get a break because the season is continuing its bookings.

The visitor centre is an important commitment for Alice Springs and for Tourism Central Australia for when their lease expires and to have a more accessible place for campervans and those types of vehicles. It will have a lovely proximity to the gallery, but it will be separate to the gallery.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is separate funding, but is it part of the \$14.2m for tourism in the budget? Is that where the \$5m is coming from, if it will not be part of the art gallery?

Mrs MANISON: No, it is not.

Ms BOOTHBY: Would that mean that it is under Infrastructure in the budget?

Mrs MANISON: I am happy to take that on notice so we can get you which agency has it. I do not know off the top of my head if it is DIPL or CMC. It is a separate capital item.

Question on Notice No 3.5

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

Ms BOOTHBY: Is the \$5m Tourism Central Australia Information Centre investment part of the \$14.2m for tourism, or is under department of Infrastructure or Chief Minister and Cabinet?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Brennan has been allocated the number 3.5.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I remember the wording when that was announced was '\$5m towards a new visitor centre'. Is there a thought that it might cost more than \$5m? Is that what that meant or was I being too political?

Mrs MANISON: No, the \$5m was towards the delivery of the centre.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It could go over?

Mrs MANISON: We could go under.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I wonder. The problem with that site is that it was a former field depot.

Mrs MANISON: I get that; that is the work DIPL will undertake.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It could cost a lot of money to sort out.

Mrs MANISON: They are having a look at it from all angles regarding the build and making sure the site is prepared.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When are you planning to start work?

Mrs MANISON: The most important thing is to have it open in time for the expiry of the Tourism Central Australia lease at their current facility in the mall, in two years' time. That is what we are working towards.

Ms BOOTHBY: About three years ago a total sum of \$2.95m was committed to the Tennant Creek streetscape project. How much has been spent on this project so far and on what? Given the people of Tennant Creek have been waiting nearly three years now, can you please advise the reasons for this delay and the date when this project will be completed? Finally, has there been any public consultation?

Mrs MANISON: We want more people to spend more nights in Tennant Creek when travelling through, as it is a long stretch between Alice Springs and Katherine and it is important that we capitalise on getting as many people to stop over as possible. A range of different projects have been committed to in Tennant Creek through work—which no doubt we will talk about—to Battery Hill, streetscapes and entry statements. Some areas have been delayed, but the work is all progressing. Nobody would argue that the streetscape work has to happen in Tennant Creek. We need shade to make it more appealing for stopovers; it is looking tired.

Ms SMITH: The streetscape work is an important project for Tennant Creek. They are interested in improving their visitor experience in the town and looking at things like signage; shading; beautification in general; lighting; and seating along Patterson and Peko roads, which is the area up to the Battery Hill Mining Centre. The NT Government committed \$1.5m, plus money from the Barkly Regional Council makes up the \$2.9m you mentioned.

We went back to the community and undertook a comprehensive community consultation regarding that particular project. It took four to five months to do that piece of work. We thought it was important to have community engagement that, produced at the end, reflected community views on what was required. That took time but we were committed to making sure that what we got at the end of the project was useful from a consumer and community perspective.

We are at the stage where the design has been largely finished. To complete everything the community would like will take more than the budget available. We are going through a prioritisation process with the working group with a view that the tender for work will be out in the next couple of months.

Ms BOOTHBY: How much of that money has been spent on the project?

Ms SMITH: We still have the bulk of the \$2.9m.

Ms BOOTHBY: You said the consultation took four or five months. What did the rest of the three years involve and why did it take so long to get this to this point?

Mrs MANISON: This will be a good project for the community. It is important that you work with all the stakeholders on the ground and you get it rolling out with community feedback, including working with the local council. The main thing is that it is proceeding and tenders will be going out in the next few months. We look forward to the construction work beginning because it will be a good project for Tennant Creek.

Ms BOOTHBY: Three years is a long time if only four or five months was spent in consultation. I am curious about the community feedback, considering their ideas were over and above the budget. Can you share that?

Mr LOVETT: It is probably fair to say that the feedback, from what was initially intended and scoped to where it is today—there has been a growth in the scope, which is not necessarily a bad thing. There has been additional lighting and landscaping treatments; signage requirements; and thinking to integrate Peko Road into this to make sure there is a thoroughfare coming north and south up and down the Stuart Highway through town, Patterson Street and then out to Peko Road.

Some of the delay has been making sure the Barkly Regional Council is thoroughly engaged and supportive. The technical feasibility of what we are aiming to do can be done. We are confident that between our delivery partners, DIPL and the Barkly Regional Council that we have a strong way forward.

Ms BOOTHBY: You mentioned the design had been finalised. Are there drawings of what the final product might look like once it is completed, even if it is in stages?

Mr DRABSCH: Yes, they will go out as part of the tender package. I am not aware of any sensitivity around those at the moment but I am sure that will go out in the coming weeks.

Ms BOOTHBY: Does the Territory government recognise the tourism value of the cruising yacht market to the Territory, in particular large luxury yachts seeking new experiences in our prestigious and secluded cruising grounds? How many large luxury yachts have visited Darwin over the last two years and how long did they remain in Darwin Harbour? Are there any industry estimates on the dollar spend of each visitation, including the use of marine services?

Mrs MANISON: One of the first things I did as the new Tourism minister was go on board one of these vessels. It was the *Silver Explorer*; it was a beautiful ship, which gives a boutique experience of going to Antarctica or magnificent places such as the Kimberley. It would be a first-rate experience for someone who wanted a nature-based experience, spectacular sights and to have the right type of ship that can navigate into places within the Kimberley—probably not for people like me who want a place where the kids can run around and go crazy in a pool.

It was its first time in Darwin. It intends to berth here six times this season and will be travelling between the Kimberly, Darwin and across the Top End—it has had strong bookings. It was wonderful to see.

It is important to recognise that in October we look forward to when our big cruise ships venture back into Australian waters again—everyone enjoys the sight of a big cruise liner.

The smaller luxury yacht liners are a growing market. More people, particularly after COVID, are seeking domestic experiences within Australia and magnificent places in the Top End. The captain of the ship explained to me that the only way to get to some remote places is by one of these ships or a helicopter.

Mr LOVETT: The expeditionary cruise ships is a growth market for us, as are the super yachts. We do not have statistics on super yachts coming through here because they are privately owned and operated; we do not have any visibility. From a Darwin Port perspective on the expeditionary cruise and large cruise liners, we expect 93 to berth in Darwin to 30 June 2023. We anticipate that expenditure from those vessels will be somewhere in the order of \$60 to \$70m.

Ms BOOTHBY: You are referring to cruise ships?

Mr LOVETT: All of them, cruising and expedition. We expect food provisioning; fuel; tourism experiences; accommodation pre and post the tour and ship departure; and all the ancillary expenditure. It gets captured. It is a lucrative market.

The super yachts travel across the Top End. It was a growing phenomenon during COVID times, as rich celebrities were buying super yachts and moving through the Indo-Pacific. It has a supply and service component with them in running repairs and maintenance required as they pass from Europe through Asia. The marine industry park development, which should be progressing, is considering what maritime services could be available for super yachts.

Ms BOOTHBY: You mentioned that you cannot obtain the data about how many super yachts—you call them luxury yachts—come into Darwin because they are private. I am assuming you would also not know how long they stayed in Darwin Harbour, or the estimated dollar spend? Is there a way we can look at measuring that, allowing us to market to those people so they come to the Territory?

Mrs MANISON: We always look at the different opportunities we have and market appropriately. We are focused on working with cruise liners, first and foremost, because we have a successful track record there. They are tourists coming in good numbers and hopefully staying more nights to have experience the Northern Territory.

Where we can think about value-adding, particularly with the types of vessels you are talking about, is the ship lift, our marine industry park that will be near it and its servicing capabilities. When we went for the ship lift project and further worked on developing it, it was beyond Defence, pearling and commercial fishing fleets; it has also been about tourism vessels and how we can help them.

Mr LOVETT: Companies like North Australia Yacht Support—NAYS—does specific work in the super yachts market. There is a range of activity around it.

Ms BOOTHBY: Do we have a Harbourmaster who can track yachts coming in?

Mrs MANISON: We have a Harbourmaster, he was on the vessel with us the other day. They know exactly who is coming and going, what they have on their ships and what activity they are pursuing.

Ms BOOTHBY: Could we tap into that for the tourism marketing?

Mrs MANISON: I will get Mr Lovett to speak further about our engagement with the Port of Darwin and how that generally works.

Mr LOVETT: Yes, we can capture ship visits. We get economic modelling done. We are a member of the Australian Cruise Association and the Cruise Line International Association, which combine to produce a piece of work with AEC, looking at the expenditure of the industry in total. That is done with every jurisdiction around the country.

Ms BOOTHBY: Is that value specified for the Territory?

Mr LOVETT: Yes.

Ms BOOTHBY: Can we get access to that data? Could that tell us how many luxury yachts come in and how much they spend?

Mrs MANISON: From my view looking at the harbour, you do not see them all the time. It would be nice to see more of them because when they are there you certainly notice them.

Ms BOOTHBY: I agree, which is why I am asking.

Mr LOVETT: That research piece has not been conducted for a couple of years because of COVID, but it will be restarting. Super yachts are different to the expeditionary and cruise-type activities. It is much more granular and more difficult to measure—but as tourism will people tell you, we love measuring things. I am sure we could find something.

Ms BOOTHBY: When you get the data for the luxury yachts, you will be able to do two things at once and marketed to cruise ships as well as the super yachts to increase the spend?

Mrs MANISON: The more tourist the better. I take guidance from the expert marketers I have been briefed by, who know their business when it comes to where the target markets are. They do it better than me, based on data, research and decades of experience in industry. I will be guided by the department and our tourism peak bodies about where that best value for dollar goes.

Ms BOOTHBY: What have you done for tourism to ensure tourists feel safe when visiting Alice Springs? What impact has crime in Alice Springs had on tourism operators and their bottom line?

Mrs MANISON: Without a doubt, the biggest issue you will speak about in Alice Springs are crime and antisocial behaviour, and the challenges they present in the community. We work closely with Tourism Central Australia in that space. I have had a lot to do with it, the Chamber and other organisations and businesses over the last few years. Community safety is a priority for all ministers across government because we want to make sure that when people go to Alice Springs they have an amazing experience, see its beautiful country, go home and tell everybody else about it.

Ms BOOTHBY: What are you doing about it then? That was my question.

Mrs MANISON: As part of this government—it is about police numbers and budget, legislative frameworks that back them up and tackling the issues of antisocial behaviour. The Chief Minister and the new Police minister have been down there having conversations with the council and non-government organisations about more work in that space. It is also about working across other portfolios, like Territory Families and Housing.

Ms BOOTHBY: What impact has crime had on tourism operators and their bottom line, in Alice Springs specifically?

Mrs MANISON: I heard stories where they have had vehicle entries; Tour guides have experienced that. There is a range of different stories that you hear, from time to time. I want to assure people that we take the issue seriously and a lot of effort goes into that space.

Ms BOOTHBY: There is a lot of effort but the stats keep going up. How many tourism businesses have shut down or closed permanently as a result of repeated impact of crime?

Mrs MANISON: I have not had direct feedback in that regard. The biggest impact on businesses over the last few years has been the challenges of COVID. One thing about the Central Australian market—which is a bit different to the northern market—is that we get domestic tourists but there is a far bigger impact from international tourists. People are looking for the authentic experience of ancient landscapes and magnificent parks; and seeing Uluru, the West Macs and the East Macs. We have had the international pull in Central Australia.

Ms BOOTHBY: You do not know the information about how many tourism businesses shut down because of the impact of crime?

Mrs MANISON: The biggest impact on tourism businesses over the last years has been COVID.

Ms BOOTHBY: You do not know the number of businesses that closed down due to the impact of crime?

Mrs MANISON: The briefings that I have had have been about COVID-19 being the biggest pressure point on businesses for the last two years. They lost their customer base overnight in 2020. In the Northern Territory we had tough stances on borders. There were points where people could get into the Northern Territory, when there were not waves of the pandemic hitting Victoria and New South Wales. Then we would have to close off to certain jurisdictions again.

That was rough for businesses to plan and operate around; have cash come in; and be able to pay their staff—who they dearly wanted to take care of because they are the most critical element of their business being successful; the people they have around them.

That is why we have pulled out all stops when it came to support packages to get tourism operators through the last two years—the tourism vouchers, just to name one of the packages. We had a raft of other packages, such as the Tourism Survival Fund, to support them because COVID was the biggest impact.

Mrs LAMBLEY: (inaudible) duty of care to look out for the safety of tourists when they come to town. This has been an ongoing issue for many years but, over the last couple of years, from most people's perspective in Alice Springs, things have gotten worse. Last week, two backpackers were brutally attacked at a service station in Alice Springs. Over the weekend, Finke competitors' bikes and vehicles were stolen. This list goes on and on.

As the minister for Tourism, have you had any briefings or thoughts regarding how to keep people safe, warning them or giving them notice of what they should be doing to protect themselves and their belongings?

Mrs MANISON: I have not had that feedback in the time since I have been the Tourism minister. In my time as Police minister I met different business operators who would chat to people who came in to make sure they kept things locked and had the right measures in place.

The things you just mentioned are inexcusable; they should not happen. I just came back from Alice Springs on Tuesday. The place was pumping; it was great to see. The airport was the busiest I have seen it in a long time.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is the busiest weekend of the year in Alice Springs.

Mrs MANISON: It is the most fabulous thing to see. We want to make sure the people who come to Finke go home having had a great experiences. We continue to do more work on crime and antisocial behaviour because the best promoters of the Northern Territory are people who have been here. If they had a great experience they will tell somebody else; and they might come back to the Northern Territory, too. We want them to have a fabulous time.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The issue is more whether we have a duty of care to do more to protect these people because they are vulnerable. I even hear of tourists staying in the middle of town who intend to walk across

the river in the middle of the night to go to the casino. We have all heard stories about that. People who live in Alice Springs hear these stories and know these people are vulnerable and their lives are in danger.

Mrs MANISON: Talking about life and traveling—I know you travelled a lot in your younger years, Member for Araluen. I have heard you speak about your love of backpacking. You probably went to rougher, more adventurous countries than I did. When I think about my travels to different places, there were places I went where I did not think about the environment I was going into. I went to different parts: Spain and so forth; and parts of the Eiffel Tower, which is notorious for pickpockets. There are different parts of the world where you generally get told what type of environment it is that you are walking into. For most people the basic fundamentals of safety are applicable wherever you go in the world—locking things up, having your wits about you and so forth.

In the Territory we must always do more to prevent crime and tackle those issues.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When you say, ‘do more’, you have the power to do more. What will you do more of? You are the one who has the control, influence and levers. We are at your mercy, minister. Our town is suffering. Tourists suffered on the weekend from crime. They came to our town in Alice Springs with an open heart and an open mind; they go away damaged. It is a problem. I do not get the sense that you are taking much responsibility, apart from choosing good words to respond. What will you do more of to protect the tourism industry?

Mrs MANISON: I just outlined that for the Member for Brennan.

Ms BOOTHBY: You compared Alice Springs to other countries in the world you visited. It is almost like you are desensitising the problem that crime is creating in Alice Springs. What was the impact of the *A Current Affair* story on tourism businesses when it aired? There were hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of cancellations in Alice Springs. You were the Police minister at the time; now you are the Tourism minister. What will you do to make tourism businesses feel like they have certainty; that tourist wills come back; and that they will be safe to leave their businesses locked up, come back the next day and it will be okay?

Mrs MANISON: We will keep doing the important community safety work but we need to take a bit of hope and optimism from is that we have a booked out peak season.

Ms BOOTHBY: Hope does not pay the bills.

Mrs MANISON: Bookings do. It is fully booked for peak season and there are strong bookings in the shoulder season. That is what is happening for the tourism operators in Central Australia. We need to keep telling the great stories about the experiences people have, because most people have a brilliant experience in Central Australia.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am dumbfounded. You are the former Police minister. You have all these nice words but I do not know what you are doing for tourism businesses.

April’s accommodation report for Alice Springs shows occupancy rates are down 71%. The cost of rooms has jumped 31% to \$188 and demand is down compared to previous COVID years. Is this because of the Alice Springs crime crisis, which is affecting people’s perception?

Mrs MANISON: I will hand over to Mr Lovett to speak about the numbers. He knows Alice Springs and the hotel industry well. We have had strong demand in Alice Springs to the point where we had to use the Pacific labour scheme to have enough workers to keep the hotels running. Looking at the trends over the last few years, depending on border closures—it has been difficult.

I will never forget when I went to the DoubleTree in May 2020 and there were no cars in the car park. It pretty much had the lights switched off except for the bare minimum needed to get to your room. The only other people in there at that time might have been in a quarantine situation. It was quite a sight to see the hotel like that as it is generally busy.

Mr LOVETT: There has been a contracted accommodation environment with the Mercure coming offline as a quarantine hotel. Hotels have been making commercial decisions about their rates; that is why less volume is going through. They are driving the rates and therefore RevPAR reviewing their available rooms. Without making any comment on competition, driving RevPAR is a good thing for the industry to do because it pushes the return on investment for hotel investors, who are starting to re-engage strongly in Alice Springs.

Mrs MANISON: Very strongly. The Lasseters development is exciting to say the least.

Mr LOVETT: With the drop in demand—the numbers come out of STR global. All hotels subscribe to STR global. It does not compare. Some accommodation types, like campgrounds and places where tourists and visitors might stay, are not captured in the numbers. Sometimes the numbers will bounce around. Historically, pre-COVID the numbers bounced around depending on the mode of travel people were using.

Ms BOOTHBY: Did the NT Government track how many workers in the NT tourism and hospitality sector could not work due to the third mandated job? If they could have worked would it have helped struggling tourism and hospitality businesses with their worker shortages?

Mrs MANISON: There still would have been worker shortages. The feedback from industry is that it would have meant some more workers, but with the level of work needed it is not the be all and end all or the magic fix. It will mean there are more workers going into industry, particularly in the hospitality industry where we traditionally have younger, more transient workers.

More broadly, we know where we are at today. More people will be going back to work but we still need to do a lot more. Minister Kirby has charge of the worker-attraction work with DITT, which has charge of the body of work. As Tourism minister and Northern Australia minister, in the representations I have made with the new federal Tourism minister, Minister Farrell, I have been clear about the need to continue the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme. It is proving to be important, particularly in Central Australia at Voyages, Kings Canyon and the DoubleTree in Alice Springs. It is also a significant part of our agricultural workforce for the melon and mango harvest season.

We need to get more people in. The feedback is that global backpackers have not jumped on planes yet. We have not seen a return of the great dynamic of backpackers working on their holidays. We are expecting it to pick up throughout the year, which will be great for tourism and hospitality, which are reliant on them.

A special thank you to Charles Darwin University. We have been working directly with them, connecting tour guides with training courses through CDU in Alice Springs and up north, which has been important. The biggest issue the industry speaks with me about, since I took on this role, is workers and having the numbers to make the most of the flat-out bookings they have this year.

Ms BOOTHBY: Do you know the impact of workers who could not work in those industries after the third job mandate?

Mrs MANISON: We do not have exact numbers. I have not been confronted with a huge number of stories. It has been, 'We would like this to end because we need to grab every worker we can find'.

Ms BOOTHBY: What was the advice given to you by the CHO to implement the third job mandate, given that we could eat or drink at a pub for hours on end but not work there?

Mrs MANISON: These discussions should be with the Health minister. Throughout the pandemic we have been well served by the Chief Health Officers. We had to make tough and difficult decisions to keep people safe. I was worried at the start regarding what would happen in the Northern Territory, given our highly vulnerable population and the underlying health conditions. Some decisions were tough. Ultimately, we are at a point today where we should be celebrating because the Public Health Emergency has ended and we are moving forward. In tourism and hospitality, we have full bookings to the end of the season and our biggest struggle is getting workers to fill jobs.

Ms BOOTHBY: You are now the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality. Why did the government go after the hospitality industry regarding restrictions on things like floorplans, QR codes, check-ins and refusal to the unvaccinated? Why were they the last restrictions to be lifted? Will you compensate businesses?

Mrs MANISON: Throughout the pandemic we had a fantastic program that saved hospitality businesses. I had thorough conversations with Paul Palmer, President of Hospitality NT—a constituent of mine and the owner of a fantastic pub in my electorate—at the start of the pandemic, with the Chief Minister and then minister for business, about how we were going to save businesses that had fixed overheads and costs.

We backed small and medium businesses in the Northern Territory to help them get through shutdowns and uncertainty, and pay the bills and staff. It was important to note that many wanted to pay their staff who were international students, an important part of our hospitality industry who were left behind by the federal

government. We backed the hospitality sector and helped them survive. Had we not done what we did, especially in 2020, many of those businesses would not be standing today.

Ms BOOTHBY: Why were the hospitality business restrictions the last type to be lifted?

Mrs MANISON: My feedback from hospitality is that they are doing well. There were times when there were different restrictions and conditions that the CHO implemented but at the end of the day there is great activity and we have a cranking high season ahead. The biggest issue is finding workers.

Ms BOOTHBY: You cannot tell me why they were the last industry to have restrictions lifted?

Mrs MANISON: It was because we had advice from the CHO; we followed that advice.

Ms BOOTHBY: Why were you sluggish to introduce Northern Territory Government support to help tourism businesses during COVID? Why did you not reinstate the Small Business Survival Fund and the Business Hardship Package in its entirety as businesses continued to struggle in January 2022 under your emergency declaration?

Mrs MANISON: Reflecting upon the last two years, I do not think there has been a government in this country that has done more when it comes to business support and packages, coupled with pretty good, big decisions by the federal government at the time. If you have a look at everything this government put on the table when it came to supporting business—particularly the tourism and hospitality sector—I do not think you would have seen any government do more.

I say a big thank you to our small business champions, who were on the front line of the pandemic and did an amazing job riding the roller coaster of emotions and stress with businesses in getting them the support they needed; and staff within our department.

Mr DRABSCH: We started off working with the survival fund, which was available to hospitality businesses and a range of other small businesses; 1,400 business were supported under that scheme. The details were worked out with a consultative group which included Hospitality NT, Paul Palmer and Alex Bruce; and the Chamber of Commerce and Karen Sheldon. It was whipped up within a matter of weeks and operating within 25 days of initiation.

Furthermore, we rolled out the Business Improvement Grant program, which a lot of hospitality businesses such as Moorish, for example, took advantage of to upgrade their facilities, use the downtime to keep tradies employed and enhance the value of our tourism products. A lot of the place you go to in Darwin and other parts of the Territory have a better look about them as a result of programs such as this.

We continued to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the industry—Tourism Central Australia, Tourism Top End, the industry associations and directly with businesses through our small business champions and contacts—about the nature of the circumstances they were confronting as the matter evolved and then re-emerged again last year.

There was a particular problem for Tourism Central Australia with the loss of international trade, which was a key part of their business, particularly for tour providers and operators. That is why we introduced the Tourism Survival Fund late last year, which was particularly targeted at tour operators, to help them deal with their cashflow crisis and hopefully get them to a position where they had capability to respond to the opportunities emerging this year.

Furthermore, we instigated the Work Stay Play arrangement, which was a program to attract workers from other states to fill the void. Workforce shortages were an issue we were talking about at the beginning of last year. While the other states were grappling with COVID, we had the initial lockdown, a fairly clear 2020 and a good surge and Dry Season last year. The idea quickly flipped from a concern about how we would keep people employed to how we would get more people to employ. The Work Stay Play program, which continues to this day, was initiated in response to those issues.

Mrs MANISON: There were two rounds of the Tourism Survival Fund and the Visitation Reliant Support Program. It was important to back those businesses.

The Visitor Experience Enhancement Program is an infrastructure program that rolls on. It was an important opportunity for businesses to prepare to rebound whilst times were quiet and do important infrastructure work when the numbers were not coming through.

The Roadhouse to Recovery Grants helped our roadhouses, which had been pretty tired for a long time. It was a great economic stimulus because our market has changed. Australian domestic tourism will continue to be changed for some time. We have traditionally been a nation of net exporters for tourism, which means that more of us spend our money outside of the country than we get international visitors coming in. The splurge on caravans, Land Cruisers, Prados and campervans around this nation has changed. We can still expect to see a lot more grow traffic, beyond grey nomads, in the domestic market for years to come.

People are waiting for those who purchased assets to start selling up in a few years' time. There will be another surge of second-hand buyers living the Australian dream in a caravan before we know it.

Mr DRABSCH: There were four rounds of the tourism vouchers, too, which directly targeted local Territorians to support local tourism businesses. They could not travel interstate anyway. That was strongly responded to.

Mr LOVETT: From a return perspective—I cannot tell you the exact expenditure off the top of my head—a number of tourism businesses said that it saved their business, which was one of the most humbling experiences of my professional life.

There was a range of other demand initiatives. The agency took the approach that it had to support businesses to get through the critical time period, from a cashflow perspective and the other government supports, but we also recognised that we needed to turn visitation back on as soon as possible.

That was through tourism vouchers; working with Danial Rochford and the team at Tourism Central Australia; and the federal government, which is heavily reliant on international visitation in places like Yulara, which was flummoxed with no visitation. We worked hard with a range of our trade partners. The Summer on Sale campaign and the various trade campaigns recognised that we needed to move hard and fast. The team did an amazing job delivering that. We are starting to see visitation outcomes.

Mr DRABSCH: To reinforce Scott's point about the anecdotes that he has received from business, Jason Hanna, who owns a number of businesses around Darwin, said that many of them would not be in business if it was not for the Survival Fund and the voucher programs that were established.

Mrs LAMBLEY: News came through recently that from 24 June Qantas will cut its two direct flights between Perth and Alice Springs. You probably realise—you are a new Tourism minister but you have been around—that Qantas controls us as a community to some extent because they have a monopoly over passenger airlines coming in and out of the town. What will you do to advocate for our town regarding these flights? They are important to tourism, the wellbeing of residents and every part of our economy.

Mrs MANISON: I completely agree with you. I have made personal representations to Qantas regarding the Perth flights. I explained the importance of people being able to access the west coast. In my last output groups, I put the case to them about mining and economic development opportunities. Plenty of people fly in from Western Australia.

I was disappointed, but we are continuing work with Qantas to look at it. Ultimately, the cost of airfares and the reliability of services is one of the biggest issues for people—knowing that if they need to get out, they can go somewhere and do it at an affordable price. We continue advocating with Qantas. The work we have done to work toward the E190 aircraft has added greater flexibility to their fleet to service the Northern Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: They are smaller aircraft.

Mrs MANISON: They are smaller, but the point put to me by Qantas regarding the E190s is that they want to put more services into the Northern Territory but because of COVID they have a lag in pilot training, which has held things back. There have also been issues with crews, COVID and that type of thing—many of the things businesses are facing.

We will continue working with Qantas, Virgin and other airlines to advocate for Alice Springs. The greatest driver for getting more people to Alice Springs will be more tourism products and projects in other areas, such as mining.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are at their mercy.

Mrs MANISON: We were having a good conversation about it. I was disappointed about the Perth route.

Mr LOVETT: I share your sentiment regarding the frustration to do with air services. We work constantly with all our aviation partners. We signed an E190 hub agreement with Qantas this year to make sure the right size aircraft are servicing the Northern Territory. Qantas has signed a purchase agreement for the Airbus A220, which is the same size aircraft. It is part of their fleet strategy.

The Perth flight was a corporate service running predominantly over the weekends. They were not seeing a leisure base coming through.

We have network meetings with Qantas constantly. Valerie and I will be in Sydney in a few weeks to talk through their fleet strategy for the upcoming northern winter schedule. We are also looking at northern routes out of Darwin because we see that as an ideal opportunity. Central Australia and air services into it is critical for us as the international market starts to return, getting the feed off the east coast for the US markets.

Perth has a strong future for us, not only with the corporate market but from the leisure perspective. London Heathrow flights are going back over Perth now. We believe UK services into Uluru and Alice Springs are critical for us. It occupies a lot of our time in tourism from a network perspective.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The people of Alice Springs need to know what you are doing because this always shakes the community. It is devastating news. If you can get what you are doing out there, that you are advocating for us, it might ease some of the pain.

Mr LOVETT: One of the challenges is that Qantas is a commercial entity and it makes commercial decisions. It has a lot of red on its balance sheet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: They also have a social responsibility, to some extent.

Mr LOVETT: They do; they are mindful of that. Our chairman, Michael Bridge, is extraordinarily well connected in a number of different areas. Qantas are well aware of their social contract, but they are trying to address a bloodbath on their balance sheet.

Mrs MANISON: We will continue to try to get those services back.

I have caught air services from Perth to Alice a fair few times, particularly in my university days when there used to be regular flights. It has completely transformed. Part of the appeal of living in a place like Alice Springs is knowing that you can get to all the capitals pretty easily but the lack of services ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: To Broome years ago, too. That was nice.

Mrs MANISON: Yes—direct to Cairns and off you would go. See how much it has changed in the last 20 years. There should be a service between Perth and Alice Springs; we will keep working to advocate for it.

Mr YAN: I agree without a doubt that without the voucher scheme a number of operators would have been up against the wall due to our tourism numbers falling away. The internal travel and use of our tourism sector was key to keeping our operators afloat. However, we found after the first round that the spend on the tourism voucher scheme was probably less than 14% outside of the Top End. Operators outside of the Top End—Central Australia, the Barkly and Katherine—asked that consideration be given to quarantining or pushing an amount of vouchers to those regions because they were not seeing the value. Are you able to explain why that did not occur in subsequent voucher schemes when industry was calling for it?

Mrs MANISON: Territory Tourism Vouchers were warmly received across the Northern Territory. Territorians got out and saw their own backyard and will share their experiences with other people who come to visit them in the future. They had firsthand experience of the tourism offerings across the Northern Territory. For all the bad things that came out of COVID, it was nice to reset, spend a bit more time appreciating what we have here and support our local tour operators.

We had several rounds of the tourism vouchers. We have all seen the stories of what happened when they were get released, including the waitlists in each round. It was not perfect at the start and at the end—nothing is ever 100% perfect. We got better every time at making sure that the right dispersal of vouchers happened.

The previous Tourism minister—now the Chief Minister—worked closely with Tourism Central Australia and Top End Tourism to understand where the money was flowing to ensure that, where we needed to make adjustments, we put in extra support packages for operators.

Mr LOVETT: This is a topic Danial Rochford and I spoke about regularly throughout the pandemic and the voucher scheme. If you look at the expenditure split of the vouchers, it roughly followed population. We put in a further travel incentive—basically a bonus on top of it—for if you travelled more than 500 kilometres, to encourage people from Darwin and major population centres to travel to Central Australia. We did packaging. We worked with Voyages, trade partners and Tourism Central Australia to get packages for people to come out of Darwin on a charter flight down to Alice Springs and Uluru.

The other challenge we had with vouchers was the touring sector. Not a lot of Darwin people would get on a three-day Kakadu tour, for example; that was filled mostly with interstate visitors. We came up with dedicated touring supports and a program; that is in the market now. We also worked with Tourism Central Australia and Austrade and dedicated additional money as part of the Get Out There campaign Tourism Central Australia has in the market now.

Danial reminds me weekly about the disparity there was with the tourism vouchers, advocating on behalf of industry. In simple terms, it was a function of population and where the spend was.

Mrs MANISON: We also did extra work with Tourism Central Australia.

Mr YAN: With all the measures that were put in place to increase voucher use in Central Australia, did the percentage of use bear out from the first lot of vouchers, which was 14% out of the Top End?

Mrs MANISON: We did extra marketing activity with Tourism Central Australia to urge people to go to the Centre and use vouchers. I met constituents on a work trip to Alice Springs who were using their tourism voucher to go to the Centre and enjoy a holiday.

We refined the vouchers a bit more each round to deal with expenditure patterns and where the need was. The 500-kilometre incentive was to get people past Katherine, legging it further down the track. I applaud the innovation of flights going direct from Darwin to Uluru. How many people from Darwin do you know who have never been to Uluru? There are plenty of them; they took advantage of it.

Mr LOVETT: Over the four rounds of the voucher scheme the percentage splits; it did not change a huge amount in terms of the voucher expenditure. There was a big, unintended, positive outcome out of the tourism voucher scheme, which will have a legacy benefit: it drove our tourism operators to get products online and bookable through the visitor information centres. I remember seeing the lines coming out of Tourism Top End's Information Centre on day one of the voucher scheme because there was little bookable product online. Through the Visitor Information Centre we dedicated an enormous amount of resourcing to get it online. To this day it is having legacy impacts. Almost 80% of our products are bookable online, which was not there previously.

Regarding the direct percentage split over the journey, it did not change much. The additional was about getting interstate visitation back to the Centre. The last domestic season was good. The anecdotal information and forwards for this season show that Central Australia and the Top End are well and truly full.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Red Centre mountain bike way had \$12m allocated around 2016–17 and is due to start construction by the end of the year. Will we see that?

Mrs MANISON: It will not start by the end of the year. The issue has been negotiating with 16 different landholders. To be frank, I want it to happen sooner. I am keen to see development in our parks because it will enhance tourism. I think about the experiences in other parks around the world, including places like the United States and the fabulous offerings in its parks. We have magnificent parks but if we do not open them up for more accommodation, tracks and trails we will miss opportunities. We have to do it with traditional owners. The discussions I am having with the department are that it has been slow. It is being done with the complexity of working with traditional owner groups to get their permission.

When this one gets off the ground it will complement the Larapinta Trail beautifully as a walking or biking experience. As incoming minister, I asked if we can stage this to at least get parts moving. I want them to prioritise which sections can be done sooner so we get some of the product on the market.

It comes back to developing the Northern Territory with traditional owners—it must be done with their permission and to their benefit. It is no different in our parks in this state but this one is particularly complex. At the outset it is a beautiful vision but we need to break it off in bite-sized pieces to get it done and get more product out the door as soon as possible.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I remember when Minister Moss launched it. It was done with such fanfare and excitement and the fact that nothing has been delivered ...

Mrs MANISON: It will be an exciting product. As incoming minister it was one of the first things I put my shoulder to. It is saying, 'Right, it has been a few years now. How can we break this up so we actually get some of the cycling path done?' It is a great product for the Centre; I want to see it done—and I think everybody wants to see it done. But how do we do it so we can get parts of this project out the door, sooner rather than later?

Output 5.3 – Screen Sector

Ms BOOTHBY: Funding has increased significantly this year. Are there any specific projects that need more money? What are those projects?

Mrs MANISON: We have exciting opportunities when it comes to the screen industry. When we first came to government we made strong representations and commitments to increasing the amount of money the Northern Territory Government puts into the screen industry. Initially, I was probably a bit cynical of that investment but further work was done to look at return of investment outcomes and the amount of screen productions that we attracted to the Northern Territory. Now I am a massive fan. You get value for dollar here. It also gets people out to regional parts of the Northern Territory and promotes it in a different way. A great example of that is *Maverix* being broadcast around Australia and in over 200 Netflix countries, showing the magnificent landscapes. When I went on set to *Maverix* it was a sight. There were trailers, caravans, cooks, costume people and camera people everywhere.

I saw *True Colours* being filmed at Amoonguna. Just looking at the beautiful backdrop of the East MacDonnell Ranges, you have a film set. People were everywhere. All I could hear when I saw those people everywhere was cash registers because they were all spending money in Alice Springs to the point where, between *Maverix* and *True Colours*, offices were filled in Alice Springs. They efficiently decided to move in, one after the other, to make sure they got the best value for money.

The screen industry is delivering a great return when they are in production and through what they bring into the Northern Territory. It is a bit harder to measure tourism outputs we receive. These screen productions go around the world. We work with great product at the moment: *Outback Ringer*, which is Matt Wright and his crew and the product they produce on the doorstep of Darwin and in pretty remote places; and *Barrumbi Kids* has been filming again, telling a wonderful story of young kids in the Territory growing up around Beswick, Barunga and Katherine.

There is a lot to be excited about regarding what is happening. Jenny and her team do a great job working to get productions to the Northern Territory and working with local producers and writers to work up possible screen productions. These things do not happen overnight. If someone gets a brilliant idea and writes it down, it takes a fair amount of time and effort. We give out a range of grants to people in the Northern Territory when we know they will be telling Territory stories, to help them get productions to a point where they can get money to produce them.

We have put in more money since our initial term of government because we can see the return that is coming in. The Territory spend on screen production was \$8.7m between 2011–12 and 2017–18. In the four-year period between 2018–19 and 2021–22, it has increased to \$21.4m. We get a significant, direct economic impact from what these productions spend whilst they are in the Northern Territory.

Ms BOOTHBY: Earlier you mentioned an American blockbuster that may form part of the screen sector. Can you elaborate on that? Is there something exclusive you want to share with us?

Mrs MANISON: Are you talking about *The Lost Flowers of Alice Hart*?

Ms BOOTHBY: I am not sure. You mentioned it.

Mrs MANISON: Sigourney Weaver running around the outback is a pretty cool thing, in my eyes.

Ms BOOTHBY: Is that happening?

Mr ANGBORN: *The Lost Flowers of Alice Hart* has wrapped production. They undertook 23 days of filming in Central Australia. It is an Amazon Prime Studios production. During those 23 days they spent approximately \$1.54m in Central Australia. It stars Sigourney Weaver and will be distributed globally on Amazon.

Ms BOOTHBY: That was in the budget last year because that is already finished. What about the extra \$1m in this coming budget? What is that for?

Mrs MANISON: We continued to invest and rejig. We asked Screen NT to hunt down productions. We want to get more to the Northern Territory. I will get our team to speak about what we do proactively to get more productions to the Northern Territory and what it takes, and the commitments we make as a Territory government to attract them. It is a highly competitive industry.

You can see the size of the industry in a place like Queensland; it is kicking big goals. Other jurisdictions are investing heavily in it as well. We need to do our part. We do not invest as much as those jurisdictions, clearly. We are chipping away at it and are starting to get good runs on the board and building sustainable growth. We will continue with that. If we were to invest more, we would get more productions here. We are building a base and the capacity of local industry.

Mr LOVETT: Most of the expenditure for Screen NT sits within grant programs. That comes down to a timing issue, as the team will work with various productions through their various phases. The team is extremely proud about—and I can see it blossoming—the development work it is doing, particularly with NIDA—the National Institute for Dramatic Arts—running training programs for local Territorians to build screen development capacity.

We also run partnerships with the Darwin International Film Festival, for example, and work with the academies in New South Wales. We are working closely with the newly established Screen Industry Advisory Council and looking at post-production opportunities.

You will hear the Investment Commissioner, Mr Cowan, talk a lot about data centres and cabling coming from overseas. Post-production can take advantage of and be an early user of this, particularly for big opportunities and digitisation.

The team amazes me. They are a small team but they produce an amazing amount of output.

Mr ANGBORN: One of our most recently launched initiatives is a training partnership with the National Institute of Dramatic Arts. Arts NT from the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities is also involved, but Screen Territory is the lead agency. The aim is to run 11 in-person workshops in Darwin with NIDA staff delivering quality training for Territorians so they can have employment opportunities as the screen output continues to grow.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.3. Outputs 5.4 and 5.5 are the responsibility of other ministers. Output Group 6.0 is the responsibility of another minister.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Relation Questions

No questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Therefore, this concludes the consideration of outputs relating to Mining and Industry, Tourism and Hospitality, and Northern Australia and Trade. On behalf of the committee, I thank the staff who assisted the minister.

The committee suspended.

PARKS AND RANGERS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, PARKS AND WATER SECURITY

Mr CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement.

Mrs MANISON: I welcome the opportunity to make an opening statement about my portfolio as the Minister for Parks and Rangers.

As Minister for Parks and Rangers, I am responsible for the management of 85 parks, reserves and other conservation areas, with a total land area of 49,329 square kilometres, which is the equivalent to three-quarters the size of Tasmania. This includes the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens; two marine parks in the Limmen Bight and Cobourg Peninsula; and two wildlife parks, one based in Alice and the other fabulous one in Berry Springs.

I am pleased to advise that despite the COVID-19 restrictions, over 3.3 million people have visited our parks and reserves this year to date. This demonstrates how important our parks and reserves are, not only for tourists but for every Territorian.

I will now turn to some of the wonderful achievements of the Parks and Rangers portfolio over the past 12 months. The future of our parks and reserves is still being shaped through the development of the 30-year master plan. The plan will provide a 10-year activation plan for parks and will set the 30-year agenda for managing parks, opening up opportunities for more investment, development and tourism experiences; visitor enjoyment; providing certainty to traditional owners, business and investors on future development options; and preserving the natural biodiversity and cultural heritage so that Territory parks estates can be passed on to future generations. The final master plan is expected to be released in November this year. I am looking forward to working with the agency on that.

The department approved and announced a package of measures that will improve access to parks management and the states in future years. These include a staged increase in the camping reservations pass, and the introduction of a multi-day walking pass and parks passes for domestic and international visitors to Territory parks.

On 1 March this year we launched the NT Parks online booking system. The new system will ensure that the Northern Territory meets the contemporary levels of service offered by other jurisdictions. It also provides modern tools for visitors to manage their holiday and recreation bookings. The system enables visitor data, numbers and satisfaction to be captured, which will improve the department's capacity to refine the parks and reserves offering to meet future visitor and tourism needs.

This is important because it gives us data to make evidence-based decisions on future investments in our parks, driven off the opportunities for more tourism and what Territorians want to see. People want to know that if they go camping for the night they can rock up to the location, get a spot and have a wonderful time. The revenue generated through this supports the expansion of future facilities within our parks. It will increase the level of services and visitor experience, such as those recently opened in Central Valley and Litchfield National Park, and improve the outcomes for the management of fire, weed and feral animal programs.

It is modernising how we manage our parks. It was overdue, needed, will ensure that people can book with certainty but, most importantly, we will know how many people are going and we can make the right investment decisions in our parks. It is good news. This government is focused on maintaining our reputation for offering world-class nature experiences and improving the visitor experience.

The Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program continues to be one of the most successful grant programs delivered by this government. The government has committed over \$23m in capital and project funding over eight years. To date capital grants have assisted 32 ranger groups through the provision of essential equipment and facilities to support the work done by rangers including four-wheel drives, all-terrain vehicles, trailers, fire and weed spray management units, outboards, work sheds and other infrastructure.

Land management grants have assisted 28 Aboriginal ranger groups in the monitoring and management of feral animals, fire and weeds; protection of rock art and cultural sites; development of plans of management and healthy country plans; and training and capacity building for rangers and land managers.

The benefits of the grants programs has been overwhelmingly endorsed by the independent review of the program, which found that it has made considerable and profound contributions to land management across the Northern Territory and that it is increasing the capacity of ranger groups in an enduring way. We also know this is great for jobs, jobs, jobs in remote parts of the Northern Territory. This is great news for jobs for Aboriginal Territorians working on country and for the economy, supporting stronger communities across the Northern Territory.

Over the coming years, the Parks and Rangers portfolio will continue to deliver. Investing in our parks improves liveability for Territorians and attracts more visitors to the Territory. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this important portfolio in detail at Estimates Committee.

I introduce the team from the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security accompanying me today: Ms Jo Townsend, the Chief Executive Officer; Ms Rikki Lee Goldfinch, the Chief Financial Officer; Ms Sally Egan, the Executive Director Parks and Wildlife; and Dr Alaric Fisher, the Executive Director Flora and Fauna.

Mr YAN: Thank you, minister, for your opening statement. I also thank all the public servants who are here today for the work that has been done in prepping for these estimates. I am glad to have Parks and Rangers up before estimates. We have been trying for a couple of years and we finally got you into the hot seat.

In your opening statement in relation to the budget, the number one question I have straight up is: there has been an increase in budget from 2020–21 to 2021–22 of over \$10m. Can you explain to me what those changes are?

Mrs MANISON: It is important to recognise that with the booking system we are finally getting an understanding of how many people are camping and utilising our parks, so we can reinvest that revenue back into our parks.

Ms EGAN: The revenue increase in Parks and Wildlife is made up of a couple of things. The biggest block of it is \$7.44m, which is the projected revenue for the parks pass. Whether we get that in time and whether it will all be realised in the next financial year is a question; we will attempt to. The increase in funding for the Territory Wildlife Park also goes through our books. It comes to the Parks and Wildlife Commission org and is transferred on as a grant, as the CSO funds for the Territory Wildlife Park.

There is an allocation, which is just the increase in camping fees because we have managed to reduce the amount of leakage occurring by people not paying. The revenue we get from our ordinary camping is a lot more than it used to be. There is also the addition of the multi-day walking fee.

Mrs MANISON: This government has made a commitment to our Alice Springs Desert Park and the Wildlife Park in the Top End. These parks are reliant on community service obligations. For decades now government has wanted to see if the community service obligations would reduce—that enough tourists were coming through that they could stand on their own two feet and effectively be self-sustaining and paying for themselves.

Over time, we have recognised that we value these parks. They are important places of research and conservation for flora and fauna; wonderful tourism assets; and, incredibly, lifestyle assets for people—places where people like to take their family and friends. There is a high value on them.

We have decided to back those parks. We commit to ongoing community service obligations for the Desert Park and the Territory Wildlife Park because it is important that they have certainty in their operations. Time and time again, governments have wanted to see that reduce. It is pretty clear that base will not reduce. We will always manage these parks efficiently.

With the changes made to the parks booking systems, I thank Territorians for their patience. People expect to have modern, dynamic parks; that includes using IT services. If you are going to drive hundreds of kilometres to get somewhere, you want to be guaranteed the experience you are seeking. It is bringing more revenue into our parks. I am excited about what that will mean with investment back into our parks because they are proving to be in demand. People are willing to pay for the quality experience. We have to keep quality facilities and have rangers in place to service them.

It is important for me to know that, if the demand is there, we do not have places overrun with people. As an incoming minister, the department briefed me about resting country. In order to do that, we need to open up more and different experiences. That is something we can drive a bit harder now that we can see the evidence of the numbers going through and what Territorians and tourists are seeking in our parks.

Mr YAN: The reason for the question is that, sadly, BP3 does not specifically list a lot of breakdowns in expenditure or revenue. One of my questions was ‘What was the projected revenue from the Parks Pass?’ You have already answered, which is great. What is the revenue to date from the Parks Pass system?

Mrs MANISON: There are things we should be excited about regarding fees that have come in for camping and walking experiences. Predicted budgets have already been well and truly surpassed in the actuals. The demand is higher than we anticipated for this product and people are using it in droves.

Ms TOWNSEND: The Northern Territory Government is committed to the introduction of a Parks Pass, which will not come into effect until potentially the latter part of the next financial year. This is why Sally spoke about uncertainty regarding the full revenue potential we will gain.

The reason we pushed the Parks Pass out is because the priority has been to work on the online booking system for the new camping fee increases, which are staged over three years, and the new walking fee. The minister outlined the significant increases in revenue we have already had from the introduction of the camping fees.

The Parks Pass will only apply to interstate and international visitors; it is not applicable to Territorians. It was important for us to work with the tourism sector on the construction of the Parks Pass in a way that would be workable for them. They need an 18-month lead time so that they can advertise and design their packages.

With discussion with the tourism sector, the Parks Pass will have a day pass, a two-week pass and an open pass. It is the most constructive way to design the pass. You might have a visitor coming for two weeks but going to multiple parks in the Territory, not just to one.

The other complication with the Parks Pass that is important for us to settle is the distribution of any revenue back to traditional owners, because visitors are going to multiple parks. We are working closely with both land councils on how any revenue generated will be split. It is likely to be a 50% split. The land councils might work through the distribution to different TO groups.

Mrs MANISON: Regarding early trends, as of mid-May 2022 the total number of confirmed camping and overnight walk bookings processed through the system for the 2022 season was approximately 10,000, equating to revenue of \$828,000. This compares to 2020–21 camping revenue for the full year of \$360,000.

That was a unique year with COVID and so forth, but more people were paying. We also suspect that perhaps not all people were paying for their camping experience when they should have been in the past.

Mr YAN: It might have been my mistake as well. When I was referring to projected revenue I meant the online booking system, where we are at to date; you may have answered. That is \$828,000 since the implementation of that system in March this year?

Ms TOWNSEND: The online booking system came into effect on 1 March. The figures the minister reported are at mid-May this year. That is a short window. People have booked not just for this year but into the next financial year. There has been a significant increase in people who are paying for their camping experience who possibly did not before.

Mr YAN: That money is for people who have booked into the future, not who currently use our parks?

Ms TOWNSEND: It will be both: people who booked from 1 March for the following two weeks; and people who have booked for the August school holiday period, for example.

Mr YAN: When you do your booking you pay upfront for your site and that is recorded in these figures?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

Mrs MANISON: It will be interesting to sit here next year and talk about how we went, a full year into it, and see what the data looks like.

Mr YAN: I am interested in those figures, because whilst we had a lot of bookings when the system was first implemented and we have taken a lot of revenue in the first, short period, will that revenue drop or increase? That is probably the pertinent question. People have booked upfront, paid to secure their position and now the parks and sites are full. Will we see a drop in the revenue in the shorter term? Maybe it has plateaued and we will then see a steady line?

Mrs MANISON: We have worked through the planning and putting the new system in place. It will take time to understand the trends and how it will go but the early trends show there is high demand. People want to go camping and walk through our parks; that is a good thing. We are monitoring it.

Ms EGAN: You are right. The bookings have come in in a big lump because we started the system on a particular date, and that \$850,000-odd—some will be attributed to this financial year and a lot of it will be attributed to next financial year, because the money comes into our budget at the date of the booking.

We will not know what that means for this financial year until the end because we are running blind; we had no data whatsoever when we started. We modelled a whole financial year's work and it came out at just over \$600,000. We are already well ahead of that; we are expecting it to be favourable. We will have to wait and see and it will land in a particular year as it comes in.

Ms TOWNSEND: There is interest further afield than we might normally see. You can imagine that everyone goes to the popular spots and they are all booked out. There is more interest in camping sites and areas that we predicted would have had less interest. The online booking system is giving us good information regarding analytics about where they are going and why. It is also showing the community the broader range of options available and generating interest in those options where we might not have seen it before.

Mrs MANISON: There are not too many surprises as local hotspots have had strong booking demand. It shows, with confidence, what Territorians and visitors love; and the areas we need to keep looking at for further investment because the demand is strong.

Ms EGAN: For example, Wangi Falls and Central Valley are fully booked for most weekends for the rest of the Dry. Jatbula Trail is fully subscribed, as expected. Those places cannot earn us any more revenue until the next season opens. Other places have completely different booking patterns, for example Larapinta Trail is booking at a steady trickle and Leliyn—Edith Falls—almost books on a day-to-day basis. You can hop on the system and it looks like nothing is booked, but it fills up every day on a more immediate basis.

That is why we say we do not really know. They are all booking in a different pattern than how people have traditionally used them. We do not know what it will look like until it lands. We do know that some cannot earn us any more money because they are fully subscribed. That is a message about needing more product.

Mrs MANISON: Hence why the master plan is important to show that we have a structure and how will do it, working with TOs to open up different parts of parks because of the demand.

That was one of the first questions I asked about the Jatbula trail. 'Can you actually get more people on it? Why is it always fully booked?' There are only so many you can take at one time; and there are only so many people the traditional owners want there at one time, too, to ensure the country is taken care of for future generations. We need to look at where the new parks experiences, walks, camping grounds and developments are. This system is helping us get more data so this agency and I, as minister, can go into budget Cabinet processes and show that the demand is there. It is no mistake that the Chief Minister has given me this as well as being the Tourism minister because we can see the important overlay.

Mr YAN: What was the budget for the initial implementation of the online booking system?

Mrs MANISON: There has been a significant body of work and, like all things, when new systems come into place sometimes there are a few teething problems. We have worked through that. I thank everybody for their patience because this is an important system.

Ms EGAN: I do not have the actual figure in front of me but it was about \$1.6m.

Mr YAN: That was the initial budget?

Ms EGAN: That was over two years. The initial round of building, going live for camping and multi-day walking fees; and a second round build, which was about creating the Parks Pass.

Mr YAN: If we budgeted \$1.6m, what was the overall cost to go live in March?

Ms EGAN: The build of the online booking system has been handled by the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. I will have to take that on notice.

Mr YAN: Sadly, DCDD manage it for you, and you have to pay them?

Ms EGAN: The money was set aside for the system. It initially came into our budget but most of that money, apart from the things I needed to do in the Parks and Wildlife Commission itself, were managed by DCDD.

Mr YAN: I am happy to do that on notice.

Mrs MANISON: I am happy to take it on notice from this portfolio and save you the hassle of having to ask Minister Ah Kit next week.

Question on Notice No 3.6

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

Mr YAN: What was the budget for the implementation of the online booking system? What was the overall cost of implementing the system when it went live in March 2022?

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

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 3.6.

Mr YAN: What are the ongoing costs for maintenance of the online booking system?

Ms EGAN: The costs that are borne by the Parks and Wildlife Commission are customer service—any in-house upgrades we have to do to the system to keep the inventory current and make sure the text, information and any fee changes being implemented through the system are correct. We purchased an online system which already existed; we did not build it. It has an ongoing transaction cost. The question about what it was and what it covers needs to go to DCDD.

Mr YAN: Do you have a complaints mechanism built in as part of the online booking system?

Ms EGAN: Yes, it does. We also have a separate complaints email group for people to either make a comment in the system or direct it to us. They can also ring the customer service team anytime between 8.30 am and 4.00 pm, seven days per week.

Mr YAN: How many complaints have we received to date and what are the majority of complaints about?

Mrs MANISON: It is a new system and a big change. We acknowledge there were teething problems but they were worked through quickly. Generally, my incoming briefs from this agency were that we have been pleasantly surprised we have not had a huge number of complaints with regard to conflict at camp sites, people not realising they had to use the system and so forth. It has gone more smoothly than we anticipated.

Ms EGAN: I do not have the complaints figure. I can take it on notice. We have to compile it from a couple of sources. Initially, most of the complaints were about missing out on the Jatbula Trail, which is not a new complaint for us. We get a lot of those.

Mr YAN: I understand that one; I keep trying to get on it.

Ms EGAN: At the start-up of the system there was a problem with the way the servers that run the system were releasing their memory back to new bookings. In that process, during the first long hour where we all watched it get slower and slower and panicked, people were creating their login and were caught in an endless loop by the way the system was behaving at the time. It took us time to find all those people and fix their passwords. We had a number of complaints about the fact people were creating passwords and they were not working. We have resolved all of that. They were the majority of what we dealt with.

Other complaints have been about people thinking they are booking one thing when they are booking something else. When they get there it is not what they thought. We are constantly refining the narrative about how things are represented on the system and making sure it is clear. If it gets too confusing for people, we are prepared to take it off the system completely until we can work out the best way to present the product so people do not get mixed up. Daly River campgrounds is a good example as a lot of things get called 'Douglas Daly'. There was a bit of confusion about that.

A fair number of people do not want to book at all. It is not something they feel they need to do on the public estate. We expected this when we went into it. There is not a great deal we can do to change people's minds.

We are not so much getting complaints but lots of helpful suggestions about how we might improve connectivity. Going into it we knew we had to deal with an online booking system and connectivity issues in the Northern Territory. We are working with people on the ground in whatever way we can when they get to a park, have not made a booking and feel like they cannot stay. We are trying to support people so they cannot say they missed an opportunity to camp with us because they could not make a booking.

Mr YAN: I will take the number of complaints on notice.

Question on Notice No 3.7

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

Mr YAN: How many complaints have you received regarding the online booking system? What are the majority of complaints about? What mechanisms are in place to action complaints and visitor feedback?

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

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 3.7.

Mr YAN: In your opening statement you spoke a lot about certainty for people booking a site. Unfortunately, I have had numerous feedback on issues where people have booked a campsite, arrived there and somebody else is in it; there are no rangers; and the person who is in their campsite is not moving. This is causing conflict in our parks. This is in areas where access to rangers is difficult because they are remote. What is the agency considering to rectify these conflicts?

Mrs MANISON: It is a new system. It is fundamentally changing the way we have dealt with camping in parks for a long time. Change will take time. The benefits of this change is that people can go to remote parts of the Northern Territory with the certainty that they will get the spot they were after. It will not happen overnight. Generally we have had positive feedback, but there will be issues from time to time.

When you are in a remote place telecommunications are not there and sometimes you cannot find the ranger. We are working through these matters. In time people will be far better informed and it will become part of the great Territory, 'I'm going out, going camping and I know I need to go book my spot'.

Ms EGAN: I have had few examples related to me. I would be interested if you can forward that information to us about where it is happening. It usually happens in places where campgrounds are laid out a configuration where you book an exact site.

Mr YAN: This is where it is taking place. 'I booked site 20, I got there and someone is in my spot because site 20 is better than site 22'.

Ms EGAN: That has happened a few times at Litchfield. I ask for that information all the time because that is the particular issue we were going to address. In those circumstances we are asking people to see whether they can sort it out and then see whether they can find a ranger. I do accept that at the moment it can be hard to find a ranger. They are busy opening things up and getting parks running, and are not as present in campgrounds as they will be later in the season.

If they can take photos and collect whatever evidence there is, with the booking system we know who booked campsites 22 and 20. We have some degree to follow it up.

If there is antisocial behaviour, for example there is supposed to be two people in a campground but there is 10 with loud music and they are all completely and utterly rotten, we can also follow that up as a complaint.

We are asking people to take a photo, as long as they keep themselves safe; get as much information as they can; and we will follow that up after the event. There is not a fantastic solution I can offer to every circumstance except that we will get better connectivity and be more present over time.

Mr YAN: Connectivity is an issue. The feedback I get is that people who get to the parks and find somebody is in their spot or there are no spots available and want to go somewhere else—most of our parks are outside mobile phone range. While they are out in the bush, unless they have satellite comms—and a lot of people do not—they are unable to do the right thing and book into a new campsite. What strategies do you have to deal with that?

Mrs MANISON: As a bush member—and I have no doubt the other bush members here do—you appreciate that an area of frustration for me for some time has been that Territorians do not enjoy the same level of service that people on the east coast get when it comes to telecommunications. Just like general infrastructure, we still do not get the same level of services as other Australians. That is not fair; it is appalling. We have often seen federal buckets of money—because telecommunications is a federal responsibility—distributed to east coast seats, down south and places where there is more federal representation.

The whole time we have been in government we have tried to put further funding into telecommunications. I am looking forward to this government working with the new Albanese government to get more money out bush and to remote locations so Territorians can enjoy a better level of telecommunication service. It is important in the modern world and to make sure we have equity in this nation. With our parks it is important we have connectivity but it will not happen overnight. We are chipping away at it.

Ms EGAN: There is a bit of hopeful movement in connectivity. Optus is getting busy and putting extra connectivity across the parks. We are doing a lot with mini cells. It is getting better all the time and improving quickly. A few people say, 'That's great, but who is an Optus customer?' We are constantly working with Telstra, as another provider, to see if they can piggyback on the infrastructure that is going in. The trajectory is in the right direction. I am feeling more comfortable about it.

Mr YAN: There have been issues raised, mostly in the Top End, including Limmen National Park and, recently, Edith Falls. In one instance the campsite was open in the Edith Falls campgrounds but the bottom pool was not open. That information was not on the booking system. They booked the campground expecting to go to the bottom pool but it was closed and they had to hike up to the top pool.

A second instance in the Limmen region was that a campsite was stated as open and people booked but when they arrived the site was closed for other reasons and had not yet been open. That suggests communications have gone awry. What has been done to remedy those issues?

Mrs MANISON: There are operational issues with the day-to-day conditions of our parks and what could be happening on any given day. I will hand to the department to speak about how we manage those issues and get communications out. It is important to recognise that our rangers are incredibly busy; they go above and beyond in their jobs across the Territory. We always endeavour to get the information out but sometimes it does not work out in locations for various reasons.

Ms TOWNSEND: The online booking system does not establish or create those issues. Over time it should make it easier and more straightforward to communicate with people about a change in a booking. 'You have booked for this weekend but there is now an event, whether a crocodile, unseasonal conditions or some other reason.'

Ms EGAN: In relation to Edith Falls and swimming holes being open, it will be the same anywhere, for example Wangi Falls or all of Litchfield. There is not necessarily a connection between whether we have a campground open and the swimming offering in that location is open. If people need to know whether the swimming hole is open, they go to the Parks website where everything is listed as open or closed. That information is not on the online booking system because it is focused on the camping and multi-day walking fee offerings.

As we get better at using the system, it has amazing functions such as the ability to post notices or send an SMS to everyone who has a booking in a particular location to say, 'The swimming hole is not open at Leliyn'. We still have our training shoes on but we will get better at communication as time goes on. It is a powerful tool, able to send an SMS to say, 'You booked at Limmen. There is a wildfire. We have to close everything. We will refund your money. Please do not come.'

Mr YAN: Sadly, the rangers are left holding the bag with irate tourists who booked and paid to attend a site that was not open. It was never opened but it was on the booking system and people booked.

Mrs MANISON: These things are not perfect. This is a massive step forward for this agency in parks management and information, and modernising the agency and what is on offer. This is a start. The further

refined the system is, the more information we will be able to get through it and online information through our websites. It will be a process of people getting used to the system.

This is a good start on the modernisation of how we went about doing things for a long time. People will have more information so they can turn up to sites with more certainty. There will be issues from time to time, but it will be a hell of a lot more certain than it used to be without the system in place.

Mr YAN: I will go back to more administrative things about parks. The current FTE count in Budget Paper No 3 is 474. In 2021–22 it was 459. Are these additional positions or just vacancies that have been filled?

Ms EGAN: There has been no appreciable change in the base staffing for Parks and Wildlife. Any variation you see is the ins and outs.

Mr YAN: If every position and vacancy was filled, what is the total FTE count for Parks and Rangers? I am happy to take that one on notice if that helps.

Mrs MANISON: We have it; we have to find it.

Mr YAN: I will switch across to Limmen Bight Marine Park. There has been discussion about expanding the marine park to match the boundaries of the Commonwealth marine park. I still cannot understand why, when the park was ratified, that it did not match the Commonwealth boundaries and we put in our own boundaries.

A Limmen Bight Marine Park values mapping exercise was done by Charles Darwin University to the tune of \$66,000. Is there a reason why the report has not been tabled?

Mrs MANISON: I have never been to but hope to go to Limmen Bight Marine Park one day, because I understand it is breathtaking and spectacular.

Mr YAN: You definitely need to go; it is the best place in the Territory.

Mrs MANISON: It is another amazing area of conservation we could open up to get more Territorians and international and interstate visitors to see it.

Ms EGAN: The proposed expansion of Limmen Bight is news to me.

Mr YAN: It is only the marine park.

Ms EGAN: That is not something the commission is proceeding with. The consultancy you referred to was when the management plan was written. It acknowledged the fact that we needed to do a healthy country plan and that we could not zone what uses were most appropriate in the marine park until we knew about the natural system we were working with. That partnership extends outside our marine park, incorporating values of the Parks Australia park because it is not a disconnected system. It makes a sense to have a look at it as one big block.

We have not tabled because I am not sure it is finalised or that anybody but us would be particularly interested. If people are interested then we should make news of the results.

Mr YAN: A number of groups are interested.

Dr FISHER: I can help a bit because I was around when the marine park was originally conceived. As it is a Territory park it could only extend to Northern Territory waters, which is where the boundary of the Territory park is.

Mr YAN: The boundary of the Commonwealth park only extends down to the border of Lorella Springs Station and does not proceed any further down towards Bing Bong. That is only along the coastline.

Dr FISHER: I agree that it does not make good sense that the Territory park and the Commonwealth park do not match up. The Territory park came first and its boundary, its seaward limit, was limited by only being declared to the extent of Territory waters, which is three nautical miles out to sea, or some amount. The Commonwealth came up the boundaries for its marine park through a complex and obscure process. It chose not to match the Territory one.

Mr YAN: Did we get our FTE numbers?

Ms EGAN: This is the Parks and Wildlife Commission staffing. The full-time equivalent at pay 2020–21 was 170.63 and the head count was 178.

Mr YAN: If you had every position filled, taking into account all of your vacancies?

Ms EGAN: This year's pay number 20 was 168.88 full-time equivalent. Total paid head count is 177. My understanding is we are about 20 under our FTE.

Mrs MANISON: We are recruiting to vacancies.

Mr YAN: Your total FTE count, including vacancies, would be 208?

Ms EGAN: I will take it on notice and give you the exact figure.

In regard to the gap, we recently engaged in a heavily advertised bulk recruitment project for rangers across the Northern Territory. You may have seen on Facebook that we did a series of videos—'A day in the life of the ranger' and 'Why it is the best job in the world' kind of work. We have been pushing those ads out, creating standalone websites and doing work that other agencies across the Territory do to attract people. We are pressing on with getting as many Aboriginal Territorians engaged at entry levels in the ranger stream as well.

Question on Notice No 3.8

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

Mr YAN: Could you please provide the total FTE count, including vacancies and if every position was filled, for Parks and Rangers, and the current FTE count as at today?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs MANISON: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 3.8.

Mr YAN: It would be remiss of me if I did not ask some questions for the Member for Nelson. Are there plans to reduce the size of any of the NT hunting reserves within the next 20 years or is that being considered as part of the 30-year master plan?

Mrs MANISON: I do not hunt but I appreciate that a lot of people do. There are no plans to do that. It is a great part of the Territory lifestyle for many people.

Mr YAN: In previous estimates and parliaments there were discussions about new planned hunting reserves. Are there any new planned hunting reserves?

Mr CHAIR: I will remind you the manner and form of questions is not to ask for a new policy of the government.

Mr YAN: I do not think I was asking for a policy.

Mr CHAIR: You are asking about 'planned new hunting reserves'.

Mr YAN: It was announced by a previous minister in March 2021.

Mrs MANISON: As a new incoming minister to Parks and Reserves, these are issues I am familiarising myself with. These are issues we are looking at as part of the master plan. It is important that we always strike the right balance in the Northern Territory of making sure people have a great lifestyle and that there is land where people can pursue their interests in hunting. It is done in a sustainable way in the Northern Territory. It helps with feral animal management, which can be destructive to country across the Territory. It is good to have active recreational hunters and professional ones who occasionally need to be employed to deal with feral animals. These matters will all be considered but I stress that we are not looking to reduce.

Mr YAN: Is there any planned expansion to hunting reserves?

Ms TOWNSEND: The challenge with hunting reserves is finding a suitable location that meets the needs of hunters and is agreeable to the people who own the land. We have worked with various hunting groups on options. It is not to say that there is an immediate opportunity to expand hunting areas, but we will continue to work on where suitable locations might be sought in the future. It is not a policy position for or against, it is the constraint of available land.

Mr YAN: The Larapinta mountain bike trail has been spoken about for a great length of time. You touched on some of the difficulties. Has the budget line changed? There was a reduction from DIPL. When are we likely to see something on the ground, even if it is going to be staged? When are we likely to see a first stage? This is a major project for mountain bikers and tourism for Central Australia.

Mrs MANISON: I understand the demand. The 16 different landholder interests are complicated. There have been many shoulders to the wheel on this for some time. As incoming minister, I will be having further discussions about the process because of the demand for more tourism product, as we have spoken about. It is a magnificent place to do it.

We do not have answers for you on construction time lines, but there is a lot of goodwill and hard work happening at the agency level with the different landholders to get a result. I will be doing more work in this space to progress this project, in a staged manner and so forth. Construction will not be starting at the end of this year. We have a lot of work to do. This is one of the first projects I will be unpacking to understand how we move forward.

The budget has not changed. We cash it up if we have a design project ready to go. We are still working with landholders to get their permission to do that.

Mr CHAIR: Perfect timing—it is right on 3.30 pm. That concludes our questions for you and your departments. On behalf of the committee I thank you for appearing and your staff. Thank you told agency staff.

Mrs MANISON: I thank the staff who appeared today from the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security; the Major Projects Commissioner; the Chief Minister and Cabinet team, which did not get a go for advanced manufacturing, which would have been great to speak about; and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. I thank all the public servants who prepared for estimates and have done a wonderful job, as they do every day.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back to Estimates Committee 2022. For the record, Mr Yan has been subbed out, replaced by Mrs Hersey, the Member for Katherine. This also helps us with quorum; we need a quorum of three.

MINISTER MOSS' PORTFOLIOS

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND WATER SECURITY

ENVIRONMENT, PARKS AND WATER SECURITY

Mr CHAIR: Welcome, Minister Moss. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you. If you would like to make an opening statement we 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 onto outputs-specific and non-output specific budget-related questions.

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

Ms MOSS: It is a pleasure to highlight the important work of the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security. I am accompanied by Jo Townsend, Chief Executive of the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security; Rikki Lee Goldfinch, Chief Financial Officer; and Dr Alaric Fisher, Executive Director for Flora and Fauna. Also here from the department are Amy Dysart, Executive Director Water Resources; Collene Bremner, Executive Director Bushfires NT; Maria Wauchope, Executive Director Rangelands; Amy Dennison, Executive Director Environment Regulation; and Paul Purdon, Executive Director Environmental Assessment and Policy.

This government has long recognised and advocated that a strong economy relies on a healthy environment. The Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security has undertaken a significant level of resource assessment and regulation activity to ensure the sustainable management of the Territory's natural resources. I acknowledge the important role it has in facilitating this government's goal of creating a \$40bn economy by 2030.

Over the next few months the department will complete the Mapping the Future program, which the Northern Territory Government invested almost \$10 million in over four years to map and integrate land capability, water availability and significant environmental assets in strategic locations with immediate development potential. This will support development decisions in places like Gunn Point Peninsula, Wadeye, Larrimah, Western Davenport, Katherine and Deep Well. The department has undertaken regional environmental studies to support the sustainable development of the Middle Arm precinct.

The first Darwin Harbour integrated report card was released in October 2021 based on a new stakeholder-driven framework that establishes a more holistic public report mechanism for environmental, social, economic and cultural values of the harbour. The Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee is advising on a number of other projects being progressed to support the Darwin Harbour Strategy released in July 2020, including a dredge management strategy and a mangrove retention plan, both anticipated to be released later this year. The development of a wastewater strategy for the harbour is also progressing.

The department is responsible for delivering the Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessment—SREBA—to support one of the key recommendations of the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory. All environmental aspects of the SREBA are on track to be completed by the end of 2022, in line with the industry's projected time frames for moving into production phase.

The department has direct responsibility for delivering 34 of the hydraulic fracturing inquiry recommendations, and a further 12 in partnership with other agencies. A majority of these have been implemented or are well advanced and expected to be finalised within the required time frames.

Our government understands the importance of safeguarding the Territory's water and ensuring a secure water supply for Territorians. Water is crucial for agriculture and a key enabler for economic development. One of the key initiatives within my portfolio is the development of the Territory's first strategic water plan, which will set the agenda for water management and policy to 2050 and help government, business and the community plan for a water-secure future. This work is being led by the Office of Water Security, established to provide the necessary coordination across government on water security outcomes.

Key issues identified by the community that will inform the development of the strategic water plan include safe drinking water; Aboriginal water rights and interests; trust and accountability; legislative and policy reform in water resource management and utilities; climate change; and sustainable economic development. A draft of the strategic water plan is expected to be released for consultation over the coming months.

Climate change and its impacts are a key concern for Territorians. It is real and already impacting the Northern Territory. We recognise that the community wants action on climate change, which is why we have established the Office of Climate Change, overseeing development and implementation of our climate change response toward 2050; and a three-year action plan, which we released in July 2020.

Managing emissions and their impact is a key focus of the climate change response. The department and the Office of Climate Change released Greenhouse Gas Emissions Management for New and Expanding Large Emitters Policy in September last year. We are finalising the Territory's greenhouse gas emissions offset policy. A draft biodiversity offsets policy will be released for consultation shortly, and a Territory-wide emissions reduction strategy will be progressed over the next 12 months. This work will inform our approach to becoming net zero by 2050.

In April 2022 the Territory and Commonwealth governments finalised an energy and emissions reduction agreement to support investments in key emissions reductions projects and secure, reliable, low-emissions

energy. The governments are committed to transitioning energy industries to lower emission outcomes, which includes addressing emissions from traditional energy and investing heavily in renewables, such as solar and hydrogen.

The NT Circular Economy Strategy 2022–2027 released in April 2022 is the Territory’s roadmap to increasing resource recovery, recycling and reuse, encouraging investment by business and industry in associated initiatives with the goal of keeping waste inside the economy and outside landfill, therefore supporting our \$40bn by 2030 goal.

The department bears responsibility for weed management, a fundamental part of protecting biodiversity, managing fire risk and, ultimately, protecting properties and lives. The department has continued to work broadly across the Northern Territory to reduce the impact of weeds throughout the year, with two incident management teams dealing with weed incursions at present.

We continue to invest in the prevention and eradication of gamba across the Top End through an overarching gamba management framework and a range of management responses. That includes working closely with Aboriginal ranger groups to prevent gamba outbreaks and eradicate gamba on country.

Our impressive Bushfires NT unit actively works with landholders to prepare their property fire management plans to manage the emerging fire risk. I acknowledge and thank the tireless efforts of our volunteer bushfire brigades, who are valued and respected for the crucial role they play in ensuring the safety of rural communities.

A focus of this government has been restoring trust. That has been achieved through the implementation of a robust, clear and transparent set of rules and guidelines for how the environment must be protected, delivered under a comprehensive environmental regulatory reform program that included the introduction of the new *Environment Protection Act 2019* and regulations, which established a new environmental approval and assessment process, and a number of improvements to other legislation under my responsibility.

More recently, the department introduced a number of legislative amendments through the Statute Law Amendment (Territory Economic Reconstruction Bill) 2021 to support a range of efficiencies in the administration of the *Water Act 1992*, the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act 1998*, *Pastoral Land Act 1992* and the beverage containers and plastic bags legislation. Similar amendments to the *Weeds Management Act 2001* recently passed in the April 2022 sittings of the Legislative Assembly.

There is more reform to come. Over the next six months, improvements to the regulatory frameworks for managing environmental impacts of mining activities will be introduced. The responsibility for regulating the environmental impacts of mining will be transferred to the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security. This will be followed by a focus on improving the regulatory frameworks for managing the environmental impacts of waste and pollution.

Over the past 18 months the department has undertaken an assessment of its administration of regulatory approvals for matters such as water licencing and permits; land clearing; waste licencing; and environment management plans for petroleum and non-pastoral use permits. It set new performance measures and time lines for these decisions.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters in more detail this afternoon.

Mrs HERSEY: In your opening statement you were talking about shifting mining regulations to the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security. How will this be funded, considering there is a \$5m drop in the natural resources funding in the budget?

Ms MOSS: Overall the budget for the department is up. I am sure we will get into the ins and outs of that throughout the afternoon. As we move functions relegating to mining from other departments into the department of Environment there will potentially be an exchange of positions and budget lines associated with the machinery of government change arrangements.

Mrs HERSEY: On page 131 in BP3 there is a \$5m drop in the natural resources funding in the budget. Is that because of machinery government changes?

Ms MOSS: I would suggest that we are getting into the flora and fauna budget line, which was not in the opening statement. I am happy to talk to it later, or now if you want to talk about the variation. We will manage

the change of responsibilities that have sat in mining coming into the department of Environment between the agencies.

Ms TOWNSEND: Transferring the regulation of the environmental impacts of mining was an election commitment we have been working through. We went out publically with the proposed model for how that would work, which will lead to drafted legislation that will go out as an exposure draft. In order to deliver it there will need to be machinery of government changes across our agency and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. What is resourced will depend on the final model that is passed through parliament.

The reduction in resourcing in BP3 does not relate to the mining reforms. It primarily relates to the changes in funding to support the SREBA program. It is a large, complex program with six different research domains. It has programs that are starting up and slowing down; you are seeing the ins and outs of that program. As a department that does a lot of research we have a lot of programs that stop and start because projects come to a conclusion. There is movement in our budget as a result. As we move through the output groups we can outline each of those in more detail.

Mrs HERSEY: When will that draft be ready?

Ms MOSS: That is being worked through at the moment. A process needs to happen for that to go to Cabinet. It is still at the agency level. That will occur over the course of this year.

Mrs HERSEY: The draft will be out by the end of the year or next year?

Ms TOWNSEND: We are hoping to look at introduction before the end of this calendar year, which means we will need to seek comment on the exposure draft much sooner than that.

Mrs HERSEY: With the plan to shift mining regulation out of the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security, where will it sit?

Ms TOWNSEND: We will be taking on the environmental impacts of mining. There will still be mining regulatory responsibilities that sit with our sister agency in DITT. At this stage, we are making decisions about whether we have a new division that looks at mining, because the mining sector is clear that we should retain special focus on it because it has technical and engineering aspects. We could consider having it as part of our environment operations branch.

Mrs HERSEY: You were talking about the hydraulic fracturing environment. There is still a final tranche of environmental amendments to come? You spoke about 34 of the hydraulic fracturing recommendations of the Pepper inquiry having been implemented already. Is that correct?

Ms MOSS: We have direct responsibility for about 34 of those. We are the lead agency on some of the 135 recommendations from the inquiry; CMC are the lead agency on some; and, DITT are the lead agency on a number. We work in partnership with other agencies. They are all at varying levels of completion. Some of them were staged and recommendations for others kick in at different stages of the hydraulic fracturing development process.

We have the exploration, pre-production stage recommendations and others. The government is on track with all 135 recommendations. The department is on track to have the ones it is directly responsible for finished by the end of the year.

Ms TOWNSEND: The next lot of amendments that relate to hydraulic fracturing inquiry recommendations will be to incorporate chain of responsibility obligations for the petroleum sector into the *Environment Protection Act*. That is likely to be before the end of this calendar year.

Ms MOSS: The implementation of the recommendations is regularly reported on the hydraulic fracturing website. CMC regularly updates it. Dr David Richie, who was originally on the hydraulic fracturing inquiry panel, had been providing oversight on how they were implemented. Some of that advice is also available on the website.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you please outline what changes will be made in the final tranche of reforms? When do you expect those to be brought to parliament? You said potentially by the end of the year?

Ms MOSS: They are not all legislative changes. There are a range of recommendations relating to different elements of the practice of hydraulic fracturing, including wells, water monitoring or emissions. We provide

regular updates on the website about where those are up to. Chain of responsibility legislation is being worked on. We expect that to be completed and introduced in this calendar year.

Mrs HERSEY: What consultation on the expected changes has taken place to date? Will you be putting out a consultation paper or draft of the bill for stakeholder consideration?

Ms MOSS: Which legislation and changes are you talking about? There was a big process of community consultation as part of the initial Pepper inquiry, including public hearings and various other mechanisms that Justice Pepper and her panel went through. A significant amount of consultation went into the development of that inquiry report. There are various mechanisms for consultation within the different recommendations.

It would be good to clarify what piece of legislation or recommendation you are talking about, because it is fair to say there are different consultation and advisory mechanisms for the water element or the SREBA element than there might be for the legislation. We cannot give one time frame because there are lots of different pieces.

Mrs HERSEY: It was about the environmental amendments.

Ms MOSS: Regarding moving functions currently being regulated within DITT to DEPWS?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Ms TOWNSEND: We went out for consultation on the proposed model last year. That involved making it clear which functions would sit in each area and department. We also went out with our proposed approach to a tiered licensing scheme. We consulted on a model we would operate under and the distribution of responsibilities.

We will go out to consultation. When we do legislation in the environment sector people are keen to see, 'Yes, but what does that actually mean?' We received good feedback on the proposed approach and we have made a commitment—which is unusual—to release an exposure draft of the bill prior to introduction. That will happen, maybe late July, subject to approval. We are finalising the bill. It is not just our bill that needs to be finalised, DITT also needs to make amendments to the legislation it manages because it will have reduced functions. The two bills will go out together.

Ms MOSS: Regarding consultation, there were 13 written submissions and meetings with 11 stakeholder groups. Not only on that, the department has regular meetings with stakeholders and there is an element of ongoing consultation on this area. It is of great interest to a number of stakeholder groups.

Mrs HERSEY: Who are the 11 stakeholder groups are?

Ms MOSS: I might have to take that on notice. I do not have that level of detail. I could have a pretty good guess at some of them; I am sure you could as well. I do not have the exact list in front of me. If I can take that on notice we will endeavour to get it before the end of the session. I am sure it is easily accessible.

Question on Notice No 4.1

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

Mrs HERSEY: Can the minister please outline the 11 stakeholder groups?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.1.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In your opening statement you mentioned how you intend to be transparent regarding your policies on renewable energy. Your government has not been particularly transparent regarding renewable policies in recent years. I draw you back to a report your government commissioned in 2020, a piece of work undertaken by Sydney economists HoustonKemp at a cost of \$218,000. They were asked to prepare a report on achieving the Northern Territory renewable energy target.

When this report was FOI'd by the *NT News*—you will remember this, no doubt; it was a stunning revelation at the time. All but the front and back page of the report, which consisted of 118 pages, had been redacted, which sent a strong message to everyone who was interested in the space that your government was not being at all transparent about what it contained. The report was essentially about how your government would achieve your target of reaching 50% renewables by 2030.

Are you ready to be transparent and let the public—the taxpayers—of the Northern Territory, who paid for this report, see it or at least give us an idea of what it contains and how you intend to reach this target?

Ms MOSS: That report is not under the purview of the department of Environment. It is a question you will need to ask the minister for Renewables; she is up next week. Regarding the transparency of the department of Environment there are many decision that are published; we have legislated time frames for decision-making; the NT EPA report is up there; we put up our reasons for decisions; and a water portal was established by this government to make sure decisions regarding water allocation, for example; and our water advisory committees are accessible to the public.

Ms LAMBLEY: As the minister for Environment you have nothing to do with the renewables policy of your government?

Ms MOSS: In the process we are going through today, at the outputs before us, I am not the responsible minister.

Ms LAMBLEY: Who is?

Ms MOSS: The minister for Renewables, Minister Uibo.

Ms LAMBLEY: I look forward to asking her that question.

Mrs HERSEY: How many FTEs are there in the Office of Water Security? What are the KPIs for the office?

Ms TOWNSEND: The Office of Water Security has six FTEs. As the minister outlined in her opening statement the office is charged with establishing the NT's first long-term strategic water plan. It operates across government. It is not responsible for delivering all the outcomes under the strategic water plan but it is responsible for coordinating them across the Northern Territory Government.

Mrs HERSEY: Are there KPIs?

Ms TOWNSEND: There are no KPIs as such, but their primary responsibility will be to develop the strategic water plan. From that there will be agreed responsibilities for the office, just as there will for other agencies that fall under the plan across the NTG.

Mrs HERSEY: Are there any vacant positions in the environment section in the Office of Water Security?

Ms MOSS: No.

Mrs HERSEY: In the environment section?

Ms MOSS: Are you asking about the whole department—the environment division?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Ms MOSS: If we going into general conversation about FTEs more broadly, I need to make sure we have the right information in front of us.

Mrs HERSEY: I will move on and go back to that.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.1

Ms MOSS: Submissions on the consultation paper were received from the Arid Lands Environment Centre; the Association of Mining and Exploration Company; a joint submission from the Central and Northern land councils; the Environment Centre NT; the Environmental Defenders Office; the Extractive Industries

Association Northern Territory; the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand; Geological Exploration and Mining Services Association of the NT; Minerals Council of Australia NT; Ward Keller; the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association; and individuals, Mr Norm Cleary, and someone whose details were withheld.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Regarding transparency and offsetting carbon emissions, fracking the Beetaloo Basin is predicted to set off a 'carbon bomb and increase Australia's total emissions by up to 22%, creating a possible fuel climate disaster'. This is off the Arid Lands Environment Centre website. How do you intend to offset the enormous amounts of carbon predicted to be generated from the Beetaloo Basin? What is your plan?

Ms MOSS: This is an important question. It is particularly pertinent to recommendation 9.8 from the hydraulic fracturing inquiry. The report from Justice Pepper recognised that the Northern Territory Government would be able to do or should be expected to offset the emissions from fracking alone. It is important that we are working in partnership. It is imperative that gas companies look at how they are managing their emissions; it is what their stakeholders expect of them.

A bilateral agreement was signed between the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister prior to the federal election regarding how we work in partnership on recommendation 9.8, acknowledging that the Northern Territory can do a range of things to offset emissions within the life-cycle in the Northern Territory. There are a range of emissions that we will have to work in partnership to offset.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Several years ago—I am reading off an old ALEC piece from the internet that explains concerns about the carbon emissions that may be generated the Beetaloo Basin. What is the plan? What is your plan to offset those enormous amounts of carbon?

Mr PURDON: That recommendation and the requirement to deal with life-cycle emissions from the onshore Shell gas and Beetaloo relates to production; we have not reached production yet. The government is still working through its plan but the government has already put a lot of things in place to address greenhouse gas emissions, not just from the petroleum industry but from industry more broadly. That includes setting out the legislative capacity to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, which we have in the *Environment Protection Act*, and under our Petroleum (Environment) Regulations.

The emissions from production in the Beetaloo can be regulated by the Northern Territory Government, which is a good start. The Large Emitters Policy released by government in September last year adds guidance and sets out the government's expectations for managing greenhouse gas emissions. It requires that where industry—whether petroleum or any other industry—exceeds the emissions thresholds they provide a greenhouse gas abatement plan to demonstrate how they will meet specified targets for their greenhouse gas emissions.

That was implemented recently: an Origin EMP was approved by the former Environment minister in May. Origin provided a greenhouse gas abatement plan and outlined their commitments to reducing emissions and offsetting a share of those emissions. That policy is in place and working.

We are developing a greenhouse gas emissions offset policy that we are hoping will be finalised in the next month. That will set out the government's rules regarding what sort of offsets, whether national or international, can be used to offset emissions from industry, including emissions generated from production in the Beetaloo.

It is important to note that the ability to deal with emissions, from a Northern Territory point of view, is limited in that we can only regulate or manage emissions that occur in the Territory. If emissions occur from gas being sold to New South Wales or somewhere else in the country, and that gas is used to produce electricity, for example, the emissions from the use of that gas are not within the Northern Territory's control.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How much will it cost the Northern Territory once we go into production? What sort of modelling have you done around the cost to Territorians of offsetting carbon emission from the Beetaloo?

Mr PURDON: We have not done any modelling on the cost to Territorians, primarily because the government will not pay for the cost of offsetting emissions. That would be an industry cost.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Have you done any projections on that?

Mr PURDON: There is work in the hydraulic fracturing inquiry with projections regarding what different production scenarios might mean for the life cycle of emissions, in Australia and internationally. We are only talking about Australian emissions in relation to recommendation 9.8. Those emissions range from about five million tonnes to 36 million tonnes per year. The variability is in the production rate; timing of production; what regulation and policy in place; and what technology is available to reduce emissions before you have to offset them. You could do costings against those scenarios, but they are pretty rough and the big variability is the cost of carbon credits on a market, which changes over time.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The cost of offsetting carbon emissions from the Beetaloo will be 100% carried by industry? There will be nil cost to the Territory taxpayer?

Mr PURDON: I will say it differently. The cost of managing greenhouse gas emissions from the industry in the production of gas is the responsibility of the industry, not the Northern Territory Government. The Northern Territory Government's role is to set a policy and regulatory framework to facilitate and provide the regulatory framework to ensure that those greenhouse gas emissions are managed appropriately.

Mr BURGOYNE: Once the gas leaves the Northern Territory, if it is to be burnt interstate or overseas, it will not be the responsibility of the Northern Territory?

Mr PURDON: Yes, gas that goes to another jurisdiction in Australia is outside the Northern Territory's regulatory control, therefore it is the responsibility of another government, the company or the Australian Government to manage those emissions. Gas going internationally is even further outside of our control. We cannot do much about gas exported from the Northern Territory.

Ms MOSS: That is why recommendations 9.8 was explicit about the need to address that in partnership with the Australian Government, which we are doing.

Mr BURGOYNE: What I am trying to get at is once that gas is sold overseas and it leaves our shores, the legislative responsibility under what the NT Government is trying to achieve with their 50% renewables and our carbon emission reduction by 2030—our obligation will not be affected by the gas that is shipped overseas?

Mr PURDON: That is correct. There is nothing the Northern Territory Government can do about the emissions from overseas; it becomes the responsibility of the country generating the emissions.

Mrs HERSEY: What statistics are collected on the amount of time required to process applications across the department?

Ms TOWNSEND: We collect information against meeting time frames for the majority of our most common approval and permit decisions. Some approvals are subject to statutory time frames; they are tracked and reported on. Across the department we have undertaken a project to set, where there is no legislative time frame, an internal metric to improve our efficiency. That is part of our regulatory efficiency program. You can find that publicly on our website.

It tries to set minimum standards for approvals like bore work permits—we have an agreement that we will try to do those within 10 days; in fact, we are doing them within three—and performance benchmarks for water extraction licence decisions, for example. We are not doing broad-scale measurement of individual processes, but we are setting targets to meet approval decision time frames. We will start to report on those.

Mrs HERSEY: How does the department measure compliance with the statutory time frames? You have a number of stop-the-clock provisions in the act. Does the department also measure the time it takes to process an application, including any amendments or requests for supplemental information, for example?

Ms MOSS: Yes, the department does in many ways. We have a lot of legislated time frames and particular reasons why we might stop the clock. It is important that we know where each of those things is up to.

Mr PURDON: As one example, the *Environment Protection Act*, our new legislation for the environmental impact assessment and approvals process, has been in place for two years so I have statistics to talk about. Every decision of either the NT EPA or the minister involved in that environmental impact assessment process has a statutory time frame. We record how we go in meeting those time frames. Every time we brief the EPA and they are about to make a decision we advise them whether or not their decision will meet a time frame. There is a KPI in the EPA's and the department's annual reports of achieving 80% of statutory time frames for that act.

We are at 90% in achieving statutory time frames. We track those time frames and are publicly reporting on our achievement. The time frames relate to a range of decision points throughout the environmental impact assessment process, from receiving the referral, the EPA agreeing to assess the referral, all the way through to providing a draft approval to the minister and then the minister making a decision.

Mrs HERSEY: In those time frames, when the stop the clock happens and it starts again, does it go back to the start of the time frame or does it carry on?

Mr PURDON: Stop the clock is usually because the EPA has stopped the clock because it is seeking more information from the proponent. The time frame does not go back to the start. If there is a 20-day time frame and you ask for further information and stop the clock at day 10, the time frame starts again at day 10.

Mrs HERSEY: Are there examples where that does not happen and the time frame blows out?

Mr PURDON: Not that I am aware of in how the process of stopping the clock works. It has an impact on the overall time frame. If you want to reduce the time frame from a proponent's point of view, my advice would be to provide the right information up front, not require a stop the clock and further information request.

Ms MOSS: There is a range of approval processes within the department: NT EPA; mining management plans; environmental management plans; and water allocation decisions. While there are lots of consistencies between those processes, they are different matters.

Are there specific areas you are interested in? We are talking generally about processes across the department, but there are distinct areas of approval for different matters. For example, a water allocation decision would be made differently to other decisions through the department.

Mrs HERSEY: You mentioned the climate change act in your opening statement. What work is being done?

Ms MOSS: It is not an act, it is the government's response to climate change and includes the actions that will be taken. A plan was released some time ago. There are a range of whole-of-government things happening in relation to emissions and climate change. In the last few weeks there have been responses on electric vehicles and other policies that would tie into what we are trying to achieve. We need to take action and have adaption strategies in place. Climate change is a reality for us in Australia and around the world. We need to make sure we are mitigating it.

Mr BURGOYNE: In practice, how does the department validate whether a project represents an ecologically sustainable development under the *Environment Protection Act*?

Ms MOSS: Many of these projects go to the NT EPA, an independent body, to provide advice to government.

Mr PURDON: The easy answer would be to say it is the EPA's role and not the department's, but that is dodging the question. A number of ecologically sustainable development principles are set out in the *Environment Protection Act*. They are principles we are reasonably familiar with, intent on working with and use to provide advice to the EPA, which then provides advice to the minister on whether proposals are consistent with the principles or not.

Throughout the process we ask that proponents provide their own views on how the ESD principles are being met in their proposal so that we get direct information. We apply our minds to the questions as well, and are informed by scientists within and outside the agency about whether what is proposed meets the principle for conservation and biodiversity. In the assessment process the EPA is required to report against the principles in its report to the minister. Each report will set out how it has taken ESD into account.

Mr BURGOYNE: You receive advice from the EPA, an independent body. Is there a stage at which you make the final decision in relation to these things? For example, it has to represent ecologically sustainable development and the EPA gives you their determination. At the end of the day does the decision rest with you on whether a project goes ahead?

Ms MOSS: The decision ultimately rests with me regarding whether environmental approval is given. They will make their decision on whether the project goes ahead based on whether environmental approval is given. I give that based on a rigorous and robust process, which is significantly more robust now than when came to government; and independent advice from the NT EPA, which takes its role seriously.

Mrs HERSEY: About eight months ago legislation was passed to streamline land clearing applications. However, stakeholders have found the new application process more confusing than before. Can you outline what extension work is being done by the department to assist with land clearing applications?

Ms MOSS: We have undertaken a range of legislative amendments to streamline processes, while making sure they are still robust. I am happy to hear feedback in relation to different changes that are made. We made a number of important changes; this was one of them.

Ms TOWNSEND: I believe you are referring to the simplified land clearing policy, which was launched in March last year. The policy sits under the *Pastoral Land Act*. The amendments you are referring to may be more recent ones to introduce improvements to our enforcement compliance regime around land clearing.

The simplified land clearing policy is about allowing smaller sized applications on land that is not environmentally constrained to progress through the system in a six-week period rather than the normal six-month period. The issue you are referring to is that in order for us to meet the time frame and do it in a truncated way, the proponent is required to meet a few conditions as part of applying for their policy. For example, they need:

- to get confirmation from the Heritage branch that they are not operating in a way that will affect any sort of heritage features
- to provide an abstract or other sort of demonstration that they have considered sacred sites
- confirmation from DITT and agriculture agencies that what they are doing is viable
- flora and fauna advice about threatened species.

Normally, that is part of the process undertaken once the application is received by the department. We circulate them to other agencies and get advice. What we said was, 'If you can provide that advice to us up-front, we will take that step out of our process'. Once it is received—we also reduced the public notification period from four weeks to two weeks, which reduces time. If you meet the conditions we set we can do a fairly straightforward assessment process. It is quicker, but there are earlier responsibilities on proponents that they must meet.

We have had five applications through the simplified land clearing process.

The other time saver is that for the majority of the applications, the Pastoral Land Board has delegated the decision-making responsibility to me, which means that the Pastoral Land Board does not need to convene to make their decisions. That is often a delay in getting a clearing.

Proponents would argue that they still have to argue that they still have to do work, but they are getting a decision in a much faster time frame with less of a notification period. We have had interest in using that policy; a number of people have processed through it.

Mrs HERSEY: Those five applications have been approved?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: You mentioned small-scale land clearing. What would you consider small scale?

Ms TOWNSEND: It has to be less than 1,000 hectares; it is small from a pastoral perspective but it is not small. Activity needs not to be reliant on irrigation. The majority of approved applications have been for improved pasture on the pastoral estate. It does not limit you from applying to clear land for cotton, but it cannot be for cotton that is reliant on any kind of irrigation. It has to be dryland or rain-fed.

Mr BURGoyNE: Of the five that were approved, were they all under 1,000 hectares?

Ms TOWNSEND: That would be a condition of the simplified process.

Mrs HERSEY: What was the average time, in the past year, for a decision on a land clearing application?

Ms WAUCHOPE: A pastoral land clearing application generally takes six months; however, we have taken them down to about four months for a standard application. It is reliant on when the Pastoral Land Board meets but we aim to do it within six months.

Mrs HERSEY: How many land clearing applications have there been in the last year?

Ms WAUCHOPE: There were 10 pastoral land clearing applications issued; five simplified and five standard.

Mrs HERSEY: When a land clearing application is accompanied by, for example, a non-pastoral use application to plant crops, is the potentially beneficial aspect of crop planting considered, such as reduced erosion, CO₂ reduction and increases compared with native vegetation?

Ms WAUCHOPE: Crops are considered as part of the application in relation to land management techniques used. CO₂ emissions would depend on whether it triggers the Large Emitters Policy.

Mrs HERSEY: What triggers the Large Emitters Policy?

Ms WAUCHOPE: It would be triggered for land clearing if the application to clear the land would emit over 500,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas equivalent.

Ms MOSS: We have not had any that have triggered that policy, as yet.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are you sure there have been no applications that have triggered it regarding land clearing?

Ms MOSS: A project triggered the Large Emitters Policy but that was not in relation to land clearing.

Ms TOWNSEND: A recent one will likely trigger it. There are discussions with the proponent on the project and what they might do about it. The 500,000 tonnes largely depends on where the proponent is, to see whether they will trigger the threshold number. We need to work through what the proposed response might be from the proponent because of the Large Emitters Policy.

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding the 500,000 tonnes of CO₂, was it not originally envisioned that you would have to clear 5,000 hectares or more to trigger it?

Ms TOWNSEND: Five thousand hectares is a broad figure. You are referring to the 5,000-hectare trigger the Pastoral Land Board uses as a guide when it makes a referral to the NT EPA. The measurement of rate of land clearing to emissions will depend on where you are in the landscape. Areas further south can probably clear a bit more than 5,000 hectares, but in more wooded areas it will be less. That might be a rough guide.

Mr BURGOYNE: What process do you work through to decide whether someone has to provide a greenhouse gas abatement plan? At what point is that triggered in regard to the Large Emitters Policy?

Ms TOWNSEND: We invested in a calculator to help us and proponents determine if what they are doing on their site will result in emissions of that scale.

Mr PURDON: Initially a proponent should be determining whether or not their proposal exceeds the 500,000-tonne threshold. The tool will be available to pastoralists and others who are clearing land to get an indication of whether or not they exceed that threshold. The onus is initially on an applicant. When the department receives applications and reviews them it runs its own assessment on whether that amount of clearing in that region would exceed the threshold in the Large Emitters Policy.

Mr BURGOYNE: What does the calculator look at in relation to land clearing vegetation on a property? Landowners are trying to comply with all the legislation and rules in place. Their understanding was that it is 5,000 hectares, which is a broad-brush approach. They try to be under that so the land board does not refer them to the EPA but the department looks at it, calculates it and decides that it triggers the need for this policy. It is difficult for landowners to understand whether they will come under that or not.

Is any work being done so that when landholders apply for permits they know in the beginning whether or not they will be able to clear the land they want or if they will have to do a huge body of work when they trigger the policy? Will they be able to reapply with a slightly smaller land clearing amount?

Ms MOSS: A number of resources exist on the DEPWS website regarding guidelines, vegetation and clearing different types of vegetation. They are in different languages. The department has done an enormous amount

of work to simplify processes for people who may be clearing land for a range of functions. The department has worked hard to get the fact sheets up, make sure people understand the processes and that there are people in the department they can reach out to if there is any confusion.

Ms WAUCHOPE: We have a tool online that proponents can use. They can do a rough calculation of their footprint. They are welcome to come to us at any time to do a footprint calculation and refine it.

We did have an application earlier this year which triggered the Large Emitters Policy. We wrote to the proponent and advised them that the footprint would trigger the Large Emitters Policy. They were able to reduce the footprint and were under the trigger. The application was approved this year.

The tool we use in-house and which we have made available to the public was developed with CSIRO. It looks at the Territory context of vegetation for each area. It is accurate. CSIRO say it is more accurate than FullCAM. That is what we are using and what we have provided to proponents.

Ms MOSS: Importantly, our knowledge and the tools we can use to calculate these things are getting better. Our processes will change as we can simplify them, in a way that is responsible and maintains the environmental protections we and the community expect to see.

Mr BURGOYNE: That is what I am trying to get at. How is the landowner, under the current legislation, meant to show they are reducing their carbon footprint by clearing land and then reducing the carbon released through burning? If they are clearing woodland and they are going to put pasture in for cattle, how are they going to show you and the department under the legislation what they would do? I am interested in whether the calculator takes that into consideration.

Ms WAUCHOPE: The calculator only looks at what vegetation is on-site at the time. It then calculates emissions from land clearing and burning of vegetation. If a proponent triggers the Large Emitters Policy, as part of developing a greenhouse gas abatement plan they would consider what they are planting. In some instances what they are planting will be a carbon sink as opposed to what has been cleared. They do not need to consider emissions from livestock or a permanent clearing area they regularly maintain. The whole point is regarding what they clear and what they bring in. They come up with an abatement plan that would suit their needs and that can be put to the department, Pastoral Land Board or EPA.

In relation to assisting proponents we have a director of development coordination position in our department, which acts as the front door. At any time a proponent can contact the department and we will assist them as best we can with what they are trying to do.

Mr BURGOYNE: What I am trying to get at is that by triggering the greenhouse gas abatement plan—which is a huge body of work—a landowner then has to show the department what they are going to do in the future. I am glad the department is there to help them but from my experience in talking to people out in the real world it is a huge amount of work to undertake the plan should you trigger it through land clearing. It should be looked at. I appreciate you outlining the processes in place and how they are triggered through your calculators.

Ms MOSS: There are many hardworking people in the department who are out in the real world talking to people who are trying to achieve different things and need to use our processes in order to get the relevant approvals to do it. The department is reasonable and there to provide good advice. Small areas in the Northern Territory have been cleared in the grand scheme of things.

It is an important topic. We have worked hard to streamline the process. The department will continue to put up relevant information and be there to provide advice on the changes. It should be a much more streamlined process for them, with decisions made quicker.

Mrs HERSEY: Are you confident that the federal Labor government will support existing commitments to the onshore gas industry? What additional hurdles do you expect before production can commence in the Beetaloo?

Ms MOSS: I am confident the federal Labor government is committed to things like the water trigger; we saw a commitment. We will have good conversations with them about recommendation 9.8 and how we are dealing with the issue of emissions and climate change from hydraulic fracturing. There were comments from federal Labor government ministers regarding how good our hydraulic fracturing inquiry process was. We will be able to work with them to get the relevant things in place at a federal level to make sure there are strong environmental regulations for the development of industry in the Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: If there are any additional hurdles, when would you expect production to commence?

Ms MOSS: We have direct carriage of a number of recommendations. The recommendations are all on track; Minister Manison answered this question earlier regarding the recommendations of the Pepper inquiry. They will be completed by the end of this year, which will mean proponents can go through the relevant processes. There will still be environmental management plans and mining management plans et cetera that they will need over the next few years.

I do not know if there are particular hurdles you are anticipating or wanting to ask about. We will work well in partnership with a federal government that acknowledges the importance of the north and protecting our environment. It is good for us, as a Territory, to work with them and make sure we uphold the good standards people expect.

Mrs HERSEY: When will the Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessments be completed?

Ms MOSS: We would expect they will be completed by the end of this year. It is on track.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the current estimated impact on greenhouse emissions in the Territory from onshore gas production? What are the assumptions underlying that estimate?

Ms MOSS: We answered that question. A number of scenarios are outlined within the Pepper inquiry, including the background on the assumptions made to reach the projections.

Mr PURDON: In a previous response I referred to the inquiry and its presentations of a number of production scenarios and what the emissions might be from those scenarios. The assumptions used relate to production rate—how much is being produced—over what time period, the different types of technology used to reduce emissions or generate the gas, and the types of policies that might be in place to regulate it. The inquiry looked at three or four different production scenarios and came out with a range of emissions that varied depending on each scenario. The range was roughly five million tonnes per year for the low-production scenario, up to about 36 million tonnes per year.

(inaudible) is doing work and is close to reporting on the same issue of emissions from production in the Beetaloo, which will help us better understand how to respond to recommendation 9.8. It will have further work on emissions from production and what the capacity is to offset them.

Mrs HERSEY: How does this compare to the amount of greenhouse gas released from wildfires each year?

Mr PURDON: As a comparison, from figures released in the last couple of weeks the Northern Territory's total emissions in 2020, which is the most recent inventory, was 17.3 million tonnes. That is across all sources in the Northern Territory, whether it is gas or wildfires. Emissions from the land use change sector, which includes wildfires in the Territory, was about three million tonnes in 2020.

Those two comparisons to scenarios in the hydraulic fracturing inquiry, which ranged from five million tonnes up to 36, gives you a feel for the scale of emissions that could be generated from the Beetaloo, compared to current emissions in the Northern Territory. The largest contributor of emissions in the Territory is the energy sector, largely through the production of LNG.

Mrs HERSEY: There is a \$0.5m increase in funding for the Office of Climate Change. What will the money be used for and what are the current priorities for the office?

Ms MOSS: The Office of Climate Change is an important addition to our department. It is responsible for our response to climate change and what is involved there. Over the last couple of years the department has changed and grown in many ways to address the challenges we are talking about.

Mr PURDON: Roughly 60% will be used for a grants program we will develop and implement in the next financial year; the remainder is an increase in operational funding for the team. The grants funding will support the land-based abatement program we are developing. There has been a few questions regarding how we will support pastoralists and other land managers in managing their emissions. That grants program dedicated to providing money to land managers to help them.

The operational funding—our priority is developing and implementing the land-based abatement program. We are keen not just to help land managers who are clearing land for whatever reason to comply with policy

and regulation but to develop and further expand a carbon industry in the Northern Territory. We have been successful in the Territory with savannah burning, generating carbon credits nationally. We want to look at what other opportunities there are in the Territory to generate carbon credits and be part of carbon markets. We will be looking at how we can support the carbon industry in the Territory, for example the support we already provide to the Indigenous carbon network.

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

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES

Output 1.1 – Flora and Fauna

Mrs HERSEY: What was the outcome of the annual aerial survey of the magpie geese population? How will it likely impact bag limits this year?

Ms MOSS: I am very familiar with the history of magpie goose hunting in the Territory. The aerial survey was done in May. It is an important part of determining bag limits. We have an updated plan of management regarding water fowl hunting that provides certainty regarding the length of season. We have not yet determined the bag limits for the season.

Dr FISHER: This is hot off the press as we completed the analysis of the aerial survey data in the last few days. The survey was done across the Top End wetlands in May using the standard techniques used each year. It counts both the number of geese and the amount of geese nesting. The analysis shows that the estimated population is 1.86 million geese, which is a significant increase on the population size from last year.

The magpie goose population is closely tied to the quality of current and preceding Wet Season. The increase this year is due to the good quality of the 2021 Wet Season, which saw a significant amount of nesting and provided enough food for good survival throughout last year. The nesting numbers were also up. The total number of estimated magpie goose nests was 64,090, also a significant increase from last year.

We will make a recommendation to the minister based on those numbers for the bag limit. The management program introduced a couple of years ago is a science-based approach and sets thresholds for bag limits depending on population size.

Ms MOSS: I am excited about that. We did not have those numbers yet; that is great news. For those that do know the history around this, there was bad year for magpie geese populations in 2017. We had to go back and double check as the figures were concerning. I am pleased that the population numbers are up. That is good, environment-wise and for the longevity of popular recreational pursuits in the Territory. I cannot pre-empt what the bag limit will be, that will be announced in time.

Mr CHAIR: The survey results are being announced here at estimates. It is only 5.05 pm so we should make the 6 pm news.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that the bag limits have potentially been 9 we could see an increase? You have not had the conversation yet but, given that the aerial survey of 1.86 million geese is considerable, which is good news; and the amount of nests, you would be thinking about raising the bag limit?

Ms MOSS: I will not make a decision on the floor of the Estimates Committee regarding bag limits for magpie geese. The Member for Katherine is trying to get another scoop. It is reasonable to suggest advice will reflect the change in population. It will be done in a considered manner based on science and the advice I receive.

It is a good reminder of why it is important for us to make decisions about bag limits based on data and science, and how important the aerial survey work is. It is another area the department puts in an enormous amount of work into every year.

Stakeholders wanted to see an updated version of the wildlife management program for magpie geese, while working strongly with the department. I am looking forward to getting the advice. It is always good to hear good news.

Mrs HERSEY: I feel like there are potentially going to be excited hunters. That is good news.

Ms MOSS: Plus excited people who love magpie geese and the fact that the populations are recovering, which is great news on its own.

Dr FISHER: Just to add more context, that number is what we consider a moderately good population size. The population is variable but the highest numbers recorded were 2.5 million and above.

Mrs HERSEY: When have the numbers been that high?

Dr FISHER: They were close to 3 million three times. The population has been monitored fairly consistently since 1983, so there is a lot of information. There have been three peaks in population: one was in the early 1980s; the next was in 1996–97; and then in about 2012. The population crashed to low levels in 2017 following a series of poor Wet Seasons.

It is in a gradual recovery phase and the stated goal of the management plan is to make sure the population stays above 1.5 million geese. We are at that level, but it is a moderately sized population with an upward trajectory, which is great.

Mrs HERSEY: Are there any changes forecast for the saltwater crocodile management program? If so, can you please describe what those might be?

Dr FISHER: No. The crocodile management program has been going for decades. The key job of the management program, apart from aspects regarding public safety, is to support the crocodile industry, which is based on the harvest of eggs from the wild. It is important that is a sustainable process.

It is also a requirement of the Commonwealth Government because the species is listed under international treaties. Most of Australia's crocodile products are exported internationally and have to meet international obligations. The Commonwealth also has to endorse our management program.

It has reached a point where it is extremely stable in terms of its operation. The crocodile industry is operating efficiently and the number of eggs it collects each year is consistent. They are not looking for more eggs from the wild, just improving their profitability by increasing the quality of the product they produce.

The crocodile industry is interested in changes to the way their crocodile farms are regulated, moving to a licensing system rather than a permit system. We are interested in achieving it but it will require amendments to the legislation. That is the only significant change I can foresee in the management program. There will be a meeting of industry and regulators from across northern Australia later in the year; a lot of those issues will be discussed before we embark on a review of the program.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that we will be moving to licensing as opposed to ...

Dr FISHER: A permit under the Parks and Wildlife Act.

Mrs HERSEY: Would that be at a cost?

Dr FISHER: Those details are not worked out. The permit allows them to collect eggs from the wild, because it is interfering with wildlife. It does not give them the degree of financial security for their farms that they would get from a licence. The permit, for example, cannot be transferred from one owner to another if they were to sell the farms.

Mrs HERSEY: What would the security be for them by having a licence? They could potentially sell it?

Dr FISHER: They would be able to go to the bank. It would make it easier for them to get investment into their properties because the licence is more valuable and secure than a permit from a financing point of view. It would give them greater ability to sell their farms to others.

Mr CHAIR: Can you outline how eggs are collected from the wild?

Dr FISHER: It is probably one of the more exciting jobs in the Territory. Crocodiles nest on the floodplains. The females pile up a big mound of vegetation in which they lay their eggs and then guard the nest. There is usually a large crocodile nearby. As the eggs are on the floodplains and they are collected in the Wet Season, access is also difficult. Typically, collectors will land in a helicopter and someone, usually with an oar as a weapon of choice, collects the eggs, digging them out by hand. There would be someone standing guard to fend off the enraged mother.

Mr CHAIR: That is the extent people will go to for this industry?

Dr FISHER: That is right. The eggs are a valuable commodity for the industry.

Mrs HERSEY: What is an egg worth?

Dr FISHER: It is commercial arrangement between the crocodile farmers—about \$25 or so. That is approximately what the egg collectors or farmers would pay the landowner. They have a commercial arrangement with the landowners. Most of the nests and the permits for collection are from Aboriginal land. They have a land use agreement and a commercial arrangement with traditional owners that allow them to collect a certain number of eggs from their land, which they pay for.

Mrs HERSEY: Regarding crocodile management, like you have bag limits for geese, is there any talk of rangers, crocodiles and safari hunting? I think that was spoken about years ago.

Ms MOSS: It is raised periodically. I have held this portfolio before and safari hunting has come up over the years. It is a complex area; sometimes it can be confused with the management of crocodile populations. There is a broader, more complex conversation about whether it is an effective population management tool and the potential economic side.

Mrs HERSEY: I am thinking of economic benefits to communities and Aboriginal rangers—another income stream.

Dr FISHER: It has been raised quite a few times. There has been a fair bit of work done on analysing what a safari hunting industry might look like. There are two key issues that have probably prevented it occurring.

One is that the Commonwealth has to provide approval under its legislation for a wildlife trade program. That is necessary to allow international export of crocodile products. Up until now, the Commonwealth Government has never countenanced a safari hunting program. Because of public opposition, particularly elsewhere, it has always seen it as being undesirable or not something it would consider.

The second issue is that although it superficially sounds good, once you drill down into the cost-benefit analysis and considering the small number of crocodiles that could be taken sustainably is quite small. Safari hunters want the largest animals and there are not many. The amount of controls that would need to be in place to manage that industry would be significant. The cost-benefit is marginal. Although the idea comes up periodically, serious interest or pressure to put it into place has fallen away.

Mrs HERSEY: When will the biodiversity offsets policy be completed? Will it be put out for public consultation?

Ms MOSS: Yes, it will be put out for public consultation. As with the other pieces of legislation we talked about earlier, there is significant interest in all these areas. I have been talking to stakeholders just this week about biodiversity and making sure we are better recognising it.

Dr FISHER: The department has been working on two areas of offset policy: one is biodiversity; and the other is emissions. Together they form part of an overall offsets framework. We went out for public consultation on the framework generally, so there has already been a round of public consultation on offsets. During that process we described our intention for the biodiversity offsets policy and got feedback on it.

We have a great opportunity with the development of the biodiversity offsets policy to make sure it is fit for purpose for the Territory. We are doing it a bit differently to how it has been done elsewhere in Australia. There have been offset policies in other states and the Commonwealth. They have come under sustained criticism in the last few years, including through the Samuel review of the EPBC Act.

We are trying to design a biodiversity offsets approach that works in the Territory and avoids a lot of those criticisms. Rather than just concentrating on setting aside small areas of land to compensate for impacts elsewhere, we are looking at offsets being an investment in or supporting investment in landscape scale management of threats such as fire, weeds and feral animals, particularly being suitable for offset provision by remote communities and Aboriginal ranger groups.

It is a technically complex policy development process because there is a lot of work regarding how we value biodiversity and calculate what the offset requirements should be, and how they could be implemented. We

have done most of that work. We are working it into a detailed draft policy, which we would expect to go up for approval internally later this calendar year and then out for public consultation hopefully by the end of the calendar year.

Mrs HERSEY: Under the legislation how does a landowner show they are increasing the soil carbon absorption rate?

Dr FISHER: This relates to previous discussion about accounting for greenhouse gas emissions from clearing of vegetation and the tools and the calculator we use. I was involved in the process with CSIRO. They did work for us regarding how we calculate emissions from land clearing. They looked at various scenarios of the carbon emissions produced from clearing vegetation, considerations of what influence the preceding or subsequent fire regime might have and what the impacts of different crops on soil carbon might have on the calculations.

Its clear advice was that the sequestration of carbon into soil through different crop management regimes is poorly understood and it was impossible to account for it. There was a lot of uncertainty and even disagreement about the extent to which different cropping regimes sequestered or produced carbon. In terms of accounting for carbon emissions, the accounting focuses entirely on the effects of removing the native vegetation.

Mr BURGOYNE: In Australia tests are done on soil to get a base point of its carbon absorption, the idea being that you can improve it. In the Northern Territory, do we have the ability to test someone's soil and then retest it in six months to see whether there is an improvement in the carbon absorption over time, should someone try to improve it?

Dr FISHER: Our accounting for emissions, reductions or carbon sequestration is reliant on established methodologies approved through the Commonwealth process. There are no methodologies to do that, partly because of the difficulty of measuring of modelling and predicting changes in soil carbon over time. It is an extremely technically difficult thing to do.

For example, if we wanted to do that we would have to measure thousands of soil samples from a property to get a reliable figure. We cannot just go measure one point and say that is the value because the soil carbon is variable across the landscape. In the past couple of decades there has been a lot of interest in trying to account for changes in soil carbon but it has proven to be technically complex.

Mrs HERSEY: Could an educational process happen?

Dr FISHER: We need to wait until there are methodologies approved that mean the accounting the changes in soil carbon can be done within the Commonwealth's accounting framework.

Mr BURGOYNE: Are people not doing this in Australia and, as a result of improving their carbon absorption rates, receiving carbon credits that they are then selling on the open market?

Dr FISHER: We can check and see whether that is happening but it is not a methodology used in the Territory.

Output 1.2 – Rangelands

Mrs HERSEY: Under the current legislation, how is a landowner meant to show they are reducing their carbon print by clearing land and reducing carbon released through burning?

Ms WAUCHOPE: For a proponent who clears land to show they are reducing carbon emissions it would come down to what they are planting. If they are required to do a greenhouse gas abatement plan, which only those people who trigger the Large Emitters Policy are, there may be other mechanisms they could look at to reduce their emissions. In this instance they could look at changing their generator from diesel to solar. There are a lot of different methodologies or proposals they could put forward. We are happy to work with them to develop it.

We are working with the NTCA to come up with a greenhouse gas abatement plan.

In relation to burning, savannah projects occur and pastoralists can look at whether they can do one of them. We have not addressed any of them yet.

Mrs HERSEY: What crops would they be putting in?

Ms WAUCHOPE: It depends on what land is being cleared. In the Barkly a lot of the time you are just clearing grassland. If you were to put in crops, whether that was cotton or other things that are denser, you may find you are a carbon sink as opposed to what you are clearing. Further north, depending on the vegetation you clear, the crop might be slightly different. If you are clearing in grassland and then putting horticulture in your emissions would be very different.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: We might have a five-minute break so people can get a tea or coffee.

The committee suspended.

Mrs HERSEY: How many weeds compliance inspections were conducted in the past 12 months? How many infringement notices were issued in the same period?

Ms MOSS: We take weeds management seriously, proven with the recent legislation that went through. There is high recognition across government that weeds threaten biodiversity and the environmental values of the Northern Territory, and increase fire risks. We have an education-first approach, with compliance activities when needed.

Ms WAUCHOPE: In relation to gamba compliance inspections, the Gamba Fire Mitigation Unit has, to 31 March 2022, undertaken 780 roadside inspections and issued more than 200 orders.

Mrs HERSEY: Is that 'orders' as in 'infringements'?

Ms WAUCHOPE: Orders are the first stage; they provide people an opportunity to improve or make a change. Often it does not go any further than that.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there a time frame in which they have to change or make improvements?

Ms MOSS: It is always good that people have the opportunity to rectify the situation. The majority of people do.

Ms WAUCHOPE: I am not aware of a specific time frame that is issued, but the first stage is for compliance officers to identify the issue with the landholder and provide them all opportunities to make changes. No infringements have been issued to date. Generally, everyone is doing the right thing and what is required.

Mrs HERSEY: In the instance of someone having gamba—we have seen gamba action programs over the last couple of years. With the free herbicide and spray equipment the gamba army has loaned to people, is there a time frame in which people need to get their gamba under control? For example, would they be spraying every year? What is the ongoing action?

Ms WAUCHOPE: The Gamba Fire Mitigation Unit has an action plan to identify hotspot properties that are inspected every year. If a property has an issue an order may be sent. Properties with an order are revisited and, to date, all of those properties are compliant. For example, they may have needed to clear a fire break. To date, we have not needed to issue any infringement notices.

Ms MOSS: More than 2,000 individual landowners have been a part of the herbicide program for 2021-22, which is a good take-up. Staff will be providing education on gamba and weeds on the Show circuit in the Territory, too. Staff will let people know how they can be part of the program and manage gamba and other weeds on their properties.

Ms TOWNSEND: This financial year we launched the Fire Ready program, which is a small assistance program for those in the rural area who are vulnerable and may have difficulty managing gamba. It provides practical assistance to people to get on top of their gamba, because we know there are residents who are affected by gamba who physically cannot get out and do it because they are older, frail or have a disability. Twelve people have accessed that program. We have space for up to 50.

Mrs HERSEY: Would people who could not afford to look after their gamba access that program as well? I heard a woman on the radio talking about how potentially expensive it was to poison.

Ms TOWNSEND: There are two ways the Northern Territory Government assists landholders. One is with the provision of free herbicide and spray equipment, on loan, throughout certain times of the year. The other part is this program, which is for people who may not be able to physically do the work themselves and residents who are vulnerable.

Mrs HERSEY: There was \$500,000 for the gamba army in the last two years. Is that going to be automatic and done ahead of time so you do not run out, as has happened the last couple of years? The funding program.

Ms MOSS: It has been fantastic to see the continued commitment to the gamba army. I see the impact of that work in my electorate in Casuarina because it and the reserve have a fair bit of gamba. The question was asked of Minister Lawler last year in estimates; we spoke of the ongoing evaluation of that work.

Importantly, there was a commitment at a federal government level of \$9.8m towards gamba management in the Northern Territory. We will be working with them on how that rolls out, what it looks like and how we can leverage on the work that has been done so far.

We have the gamba army; the gamba grass weed advisory group, across government; and the weed management plan for gamba. There are a range of components to gamba management and what happens across our parks and Crown estates as well, which highlights the importance of the interagency working group.

Ms TOWNSEND: We have a budget of about \$100,000 per annum to provide the free herbicide. It is capped at 10 litres per property. When we run out of herbicide, we run out. The limitation on herbicide is also related to the right time to spray gamba. It is not provided year around, not for financial reasons but because there are times of the year when you should not be spraying gamba.

Mrs HERSEY: With the commitment from the federal government, will the NT Government spend it on the eradication of gamba on Crown land? There is quite a bit of it on Crown land.

Ms MOSS: We will have conversations about how they intend to roll the program out. They have already highlighted focus areas. There are many different places that could be concentrated on with that investment; we will work through it with them. We are keen to help in any way we can to roll it out. I know Jo is keen.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you know where the highlighted areas are?

Ms MOSS: I would have to double check, but there are areas where there are greater concentrations of gamba across the Territory. The gamba army, Territory Natural Resource Management and a lot of volunteers have been involved in significant mapping work in parts of the Territory about where the higher concentrations of gamba are. We will work with them to roll it out based on need.

It is equally important that weeds on Crown land are managed, which is why we have the Gamba Grass Weed Advisory Committee to make sure that we, as landholders, are looking at that and taking action.

Mr BURGOYNE: What occurs if an order is made against land that is Commonwealth or Territory owned?

Ms MOSS: If the division was to issue an order on the Crown land division?

Mr BURGOYNE: If gamba grass is found on Territory or Crown land, what is the process for dealing with that issue?

Ms TOWNSEND: Given that weeds also occur on the parks estate, which is an area in our department, our preference would be not to issue an order against ourselves. Our preference would be to take the approach of not getting to an order. That is a challenge when there is a large estate. Crown Land Estate has commitments and investments. We work with them on how they can apply those investments strategically for weed management. Likewise, Parks has an annual program of weed management.

I do not want to say that we would not issue an order, but we would do what we could to prevent an order against ourselves.

Ms MOSS: There is better coordination across all our agencies in dealing with issues like gamba.

Ms WAUCHOPE: We work with agencies and there is an NTG fire and weed working group, which meets once a month. They rotate who organises the meetings. The intention of the meetings is to ensure agencies are working together. Where an agency has identified as an issue, there is an opportunity to discuss what will be done.

I will just go back to the orders from before, because I can provide an update. Of those 200 orders, 48 notices of intention to infringe have been issued. Over the next 30 days as we move out of gamba and weed season and into bushfire season, the firebreaks and notices of intent to infringe will be checked. We may issue two or three final infringement notices at the end of the weed season. Generally, for last five or so years, we have only ever issued two to three infringement notices. Most people do the right thing.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many complaints has the department received from landowners about gamba grass on Territory or Crown land? Is there a statistic kept?

Ms WAUCHOPE: There is a Have Your Say gamba opportunity, which enables the public to comment on where they see gamba as an issue. That could be in national parks or down the road. It will help with gamba planning and may inform any future gamba armies or the like.

Ms MOSS: If you want us to take that on notice, we can.

Question on Notice No 4.2

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

Mr BURGOYNE: Minister, how many complaints have been received by the department from landowners about gamba grass on Territory government owned land?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Brainting has been allocated the number 4.2.

Mr YOUNG: The government put almost \$10m into the Mapping the Future initiative. Where is that program at? What have some of the outcomes been?

Ms MOSS: Mapping the Future is an important program we have invested almost \$10m in over four years. It is about mapping and looking at land capability, water availability and significant environmental assets in strategic locations in the Northern Territory. It is focused on areas that have immediate development potential. It is important to ensure that if we start to get interest in developing certain areas, whether it be residential or industry, that we have as much information as we can to make decisions based on evidence and science, and understand where there may be constraints in place.

A comprehensive land, water and biodiversity assessment of:

- Gunn Point Peninsula identified 33,000 hectares of land with high to moderate potential for general development, including dry land, rain-fed agriculture, forestry, rural residential living or other industrial purposes
- the Wadeye area identified over 5,000 hectares of versatile land suited to a range of irrigated agricultural cropping options. There is sufficient ground water to sustainably support a horticultural precinct. Traditional owners been briefed on the outcomes of the study and are looking at the opportunities.
- the Larrimah area identified significant areas of land that are suitable for irrigated horticulture on government, pastoral and Aboriginal land.

Those are just examples of what has come out of the program. We all recognise there is a significant amount of care for our environment, as it underpins our lifestyle, and is important culturally and to our economy. It is key we understand areas that are attractive for development and whether or not we can develop sustainably. It has been a valuable program.

We will move on to the REALM program, which will allow us to have a micro-look at the areas we are talking about in the Northern Territory to understand in-depth what we are dealing with regarding water, land and the ability to undertake a range of activities.

Output 1.3 – Water Resources

Mrs HERSEY: Has an application for an environmental assessment been filed for the Manton Dam Return to Service? Will one be required?

Ms MOSS: I do not believe so because it is existing infrastructure—there is not construction of a dam. We will need to go through various processes for the AROWS project.

Ms TOWNSEND: A referral has not been made. It is unlikely, but we would encourage any proponents, including a government proponent, to do the pre-referral assessment to make sure they do not require a referral.

Mr BURGoyNE: When Manton Dam was being used for water supply, it was not also used for recreational purposes. As it has been said that it will continue to be used for recreational purposes does that affect the need for approvals?

Ms MOSS: From an environmental perspective I am not sure we would need to. It is being considered heavily by Power and Water.

Ms DYSART: We have a working group across Power and Water and government to go through the process for such a big project. That group is considering what the requirements are for the management of the project. For the first stage of Manton Dam it is considering operational requirements. The decision about keeping it open for recreation was only made earlier in the year. Those elements are being considered through the group. It will make recommendations to government about what the requirements may be. It will primarily remain with Power and Water as the service delivery agency, which owns the land and operates the infrastructure.

Mrs HERSEY: Will an environmental assessment be required for the AROWS project?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: What preparatory processes are under way in relation to the AROWS project? When do you expect land agreements to be completed, prep work to be done and construction to begin?

Ms MOSS: We have distinct interest in and are involved in the AROWS project across government but we are not the lead agency. Minister Lawler is the appropriate minister to direct questions to from a land agreement perspective. A lot of the work is well under way and a detailed business case is available online that people can look at. They are having conversations with people in the local area about what it might mean.

Mrs HERSEY: The preparatory processes are nothing to do with this department?

Ms MOSS: From a water security and water policy point of view, we are involved in discussions with other departments but the Infrastructure Commissioner is leading this work. It is a major project that will take place over a number of years. There is already a lot of information on the preparatory work, which is underway on this.

Ms TOWNSEND: Our department will undertake the water allocation plan for the Adelaide River. We have secured resourcing through the Australian Government to do that. That work will establish the science so that decisions on sustainable allocation can occur; and will include engagement with the community and Aboriginal people regarding cultural values. We will be leading that work. The other area will be the work regarding the decision on the extraction licencing.

Mrs HERSEY: How many water management plans are there? What new ones have been added in the past year? How are they prioritised?

Ms MOSS: There are six water allocation plans across the Northern Territory: Alice Springs, Berry Springs, Katherine, Ooloo, Ti Tree and Western Davenport. There are three under development: Beetaloo sub basin,

including southern Daly; Georgina Basin; and the Wiso Basin. A fourth is under development for the McArthur Basin.

Mrs HERSEY: How do you prioritise the new ones?

Ms MOSS: Some will be refreshes of existing water allocation plans based on the time frames of the previous plans. For example, the next iteration of the Katherine water allocation plan and the five-yearly review of the Ooloo water allocation plan are due in 2024. There is another iteration coming for the Western Davenport water allocation plan at the end of this year. For some there are review points and then the development of the next water allocation plan kicks in.

Mr BURGOYNE: How will the Western Davenport review affect existing licences issued by the department?

Ms MOSS: The second iteration of the Western Davenport water allocation plan is on track and there is a water advisory committee in place. It will all be taken into account as part of the development.

Ms DYSART: We are in the process of review; it is part of our statutory requirements. Western Davenport is the establishment of a new plan. We had established a plan for a shorter period of time and it needs to be replaced with a new plan for the next 10 years. That process is under way; it is about due for completion. The current plan expires on 6 December and we are on track to have it in place to replace the existing plan.

This is the start of the normal processes. There is consideration in them about the information we have on the effectiveness of the resource; what the current allocations are; what information we have from the science-based aspect about how the resource is responding to allocations; and all the things considered as part of regular reviews. These inform the development of the next plan.

Mr BURGOYNE: Can it affect existing water licences once the review has been undertaken? Can they be reduced as a result of the review?

Ms TOWNSEND: The process Amy described applies to all water allocation plans. Water allocation plans exist in areas where there are competing interests for water and a volume of applications. Any plan that is declared needs to take into account existing licences granted—not just Western Davenport, all of them. If in the course of that plan it is determined that the estimated sustainable yield is less than what has been allocated, then the plan will take that into account. It may do so by recommending for the minister's declaration that there be no more licences granted in an area; or limitations or controls on extraction to deal with dry years. We do not have a lot of plans in that situation, but the planning would potentially set out management actions. Licences can be reduced at any time or annually in the Top End.

Mrs HERSEY: What are the obligations for landholders wishing to capture surface water on their properties? Does that depend on whether they are in water management areas or not?

Ms DYSART: In order for people to access water they need to be the landholder of that land and, for surface water, they need to be adjacent to the surface water resource to take it.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there a cap on the amount they can take?

Ms DYSART: It depends. If they are in a water allocation plan area, there are competitive uses and an amount of water has been allocated to each of the beneficial use categories. Depending on what that water was going to be used for, they could be eligible for the water available through that process. Where there are not plans in place—where we do not have as many people accessing the water—we refer to a science-based assessment of the resource to make an assessment about the estimated sustainable yield, how much of the water is available and how much could be extracted sustainably. We have the capacity in the department to do that. We also use policy across government to inform the decision-making process where plans do not provide the detail.

Mrs HERSEY: Are there benefits to gathering and using surface water, for example for irrigation, including reducing runoff and erosion? Should we be encouraging that?

Ms MOSS: The department is not looking at that. We need to be sure we have robust regulatory frameworks in place to address all these questions and make sure any allocation of water is done in a way that is sustainable and prioritises the environmental and cultural floors within our aquifers and rivers. These are policy issues we are looking at.

Mrs HERSEY: What was the average wait time for a decision on a water licence application over the past 12 months?

Ms MOSS: A quarter of the applications for new water entitlements or increases to existing entitlements in the 2021–22 year were processed in less than 90 business days and half were processed within 200 business days. There were 84 water extraction licences processed within that time, broken down into whether they were new, trading water or increases to existing licences. There are varying levels of complexity within the 84 and some will be more straightforward than others.

Mrs HERSEY: Of the 84 licences, how many were new?

Ms MOSS: There were 18 new licences; four for water trades; four increases to existing licences; 12 renewed licences; 45 for administrative variations; and one was declined.

Mrs HERSEY: What was the reason for declining the water licence?

Ms DYSART: It was due to consideration of water availability.

Ms MOSS: The water allocation plans and making sure we are not over allocating water is important. It demonstrates where the system is working exceptionally well.

Mrs HERSEY: How many of the 84 licences were processed within 60 days in the past 12 months?

Ms MOSS: A quarter of them were processed in less than 90 business days. That is the level of detail I have.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there any mechanism for investors who wish to purchase or transfer a property to get a provisional indication of whether a water licence is likely to be granted prior to making a final investment decision? For example, transferring land that has an existing water licence from cattle to agriculture?

Ms MOSS: Where there is an existing licence in the sale of a property there is a provisional licence under the act.

Ms TOWNSEND: The *Water Act* has a deeming provision, which means if you purchase a property that already has an existing water license it is transferred with the sale of the property. You would then seek an admin variation and, providing you are generally compliant with the uses the licence applies for, it will be re-granted in your name.

Mrs HERSEY: How long do the variations take?

Ms TOWNSEND: They are generally straightforward. The time frames for new and increased licences are partly dictated by the public notification period required, which adds 30 days to the process. Transfers do not require the notification period so they are somewhat straightforward. You have already done the assessment about whether the water is available and is being used appropriately.

Mrs HERSEY: How many licences have been cancelled or not approved in the past 12 months? How does that compare to the previous year?

Ms MOSS: It was one, so that we were not over-allocating a system. That is why we have much more robust systems in place. There have been over-allocated systems before.

Ms TOWNSEND: There was one water licence declined for water availability. In the previous year there were eight declined, and the year before there were 10. Generally they are declined on the basis of water availability. The department advises proponents that a licence is unlikely to be granted. People often withdraw their application rather than proceed all the way through the approval process. That is a decision for the applicant to make, we do not make it for them.

Mrs HERSEY: Where were those water licences?

Ms TOWNSEND: We can take that on notice, but I can say from signing them that the majority will be based on decisions from the Darwin rural area.

Question on Notice No 4.3

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

Mrs HERSEY: Of the eight water licences declined in 2021 and the 10 declined in 2020, what regions were they in?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.3.

Mrs HERSEY: How many water licences have been varied in the past 12 months? What is the aggregate amount that water allocations are decreased by?

Ms MOSS: There were 45 administrative variations. There will be a range of reasons for those variations. You are asking if there was a commensurate decrease in the allocations?

Mrs HERSEY: What was the aggregate amount of water allocation amounts decreased? Before you go to that, what would some of the variations be for?

Ms MOSS: For some situations were talking about before, there might be a transfer of property which has a water licence. There might be changes that are not significant, for example business names, transfer of property or development plans. We probably need to take the second part on notice. You are asking for the total amount of water allocated to the 45 administrative variations and is there a resultant decrease from the variations?

Question on Notice No 4.4

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

Ms HERSEY: If water was taken off people, what was the aggregate amount of water allocation decrease?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.4.

Mrs HERSEY: The 2022–23 budget has more than \$18m allocated to this output. What projects or significant new initiatives will receive funding and how will the rest be spent?

Ms MOSS: Big items are the development of water allocation plans, the water advisory groups and the processing of water extraction licences. It is important that we continue the resources to maintain a robust regulatory environment for water allocation. Over time it is an area that has been beefed up because it is an important resource—also for the development of our economy.

Ms DYSART: There is an upward investment this year from a combination of two things. Additional funding came through from Cabinet this year for the enhanced water assessment and planning program, which is a significant contribution towards maintaining science-based understanding, keeping in front of developments that are happening and having a good understanding of the baseline assessment. Importantly, that also integrates with the establishment of Aboriginal reference groups, working closely to ensure we understand environmental and cultural values in setting the allocation amounts.

The other aspect of funding, which will continue for the next couple of years, is from six successful bids for Australian Government funding under the National Water Grid Authority. We leveraged off the national funding investment in Western Davenport to look at managed aquifer recharge options and models in the Katherine region, and across the Daly. There is opportunity in our predictions about how our water resources are responding to change. When we look back at the data they are more conservative than what is happening. We will invest more to understand the systems so we can recalibrate those models to improve accuracy. We

will be sending out LIDAR, which is fancy technology that shows what water resources are underground in different arrangements, so we can fully understand them.

Mrs HERSEY: Is that how you measure the recharge rates?

Ms DYSART: Some of that information will contribute to a better understanding of it. We have certain ways to do that. In some systems we have a better understanding of how the recharge occurs than in others. We have focused this research on utilising new technology to improve understanding of recharge, discharge, evapotranspiration and a few other factors in the water cycle.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: It is now 6.31 pm. We will break for tea. We will resume in half-an-hour with the Member for Katherine's question.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back from the dinner interval. We took a break with my learned colleague, who I have been sharing the chairing duties with. Thank you, Member for Arafura.

Mrs HERSEY: Is there a project plan that will ensure the Manton Dam Return to Service can be delivered within the promised three to four-year time frame?

Ms MOSS: That question would be better directed to Power and Water, who have the lead on the project.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.3

Ms MOSS: In the instance of the one application declined in the 2021–22 year, it was Darwin rural. Those declined in 2021 were Darwin rural; and in 2020 it was Katherine and Darwin rural regions.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.4

Ms MOSS: There was no decrease in the allocation of water associated with the 45 administrative variations in the 2021–22 year.

Mrs HERSEY: How will Manton Dam remain as a recreational facility for boating, water sports and fishing while being used for town water consumption? What filtration will be implemented to enable it? How much additional cost will the filtration requirements add to the project?

Ms MOSS: That would be a question for Power and Water, which is leading the Return to Service project.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you provide details on which agencies are on the cross-agency working group looking at Manton Dam?

Ms DYSART: The working group has members across DIPL; DITT; Treasury and Finance; DEPWS; and Power and Water. There might be someone else, but they are the key members.

Mrs HERSEY: How often has the group met?

Ms DYSART: It is probably holding six or eight-weekly meetings at this stage. It was established late last year.

Mrs HERSEY: They have met six times?

Ms DYSART: It has been in place since late last year, I would have to recall exactly when it was established.

Ms MOSS: It would be worth checking with the relevant agency for the exact numbers.

Mrs HERSEY: Has the issue of the continued use as a recreational facility been included as a discussion point?

Ms MOSS: I would imagine so. Those questions are best placed with the relevant agency and minister.

Mrs HERSEY: Will the recommendations from the working group be provided to the government?

Ms MOSS: How that process works within Power and Water and with the relevant minister is a question for the relevant agency and minister.

Mrs HERSEY: Will the group continue, post this report?

Ms MOSS: That question is more suited to the project lead, which is Power and Water, and the relevant minister.

Mrs HERSEY: Given that we had conversation about the working group, is it unreasonable to ask if they will continue post this report?

Ms MOSS: I do not think it is unreasonable to ask. A range of cross-agency work happens in government; we refer to that work and often have conversations about it. However, specific questions about the continuation of that group and how many times it has met are better placed with the agency and minister responsible. The Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade chair that group. Power and Water are leading the project. We can talk generally about our input into that project but that output does not sit with me.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the process for water trading? How does the department assist with water trading applications?

Ms TOWNSEND: Water trading is provided for in the *Water Act* where there is a declared water allocation plan in effect. That means trades can occur where a plan exists. The other matter that effects whether trade are sought or not is whether water is fully allocated. The area where we have had the most interest in trades has been in Katherine, which is where water is fully allocated.

We invite applicants or anyone interested in applying for water, trading water, returning water or seeking a variation or permit under the *Water Act* to get advice from us. We assist trade applicants to understand what is possible, as there are physical and legislative restraints. We endeavour to effect trades as effectively as possible. We recognise that if you are seeking to trade water it is generally because you have a fairly imminent need for it. We support that as best we can.

Ms DYSART: In the last 12 months two trades were completed within 10 business days, against a target of 25 business days. We are exceeding the target.

We are also consistent with the National Water Initiative requirements. We have a register of all trades available on the website. Twelve trades were recorded. You can imagine that some are for a period of time, such as 12 months or a few months.

Mrs HERSEY: How many water trades have been denied in the last 12 months?

Ms DYSART: I would have to seek that information.

Mrs HERSEY: Can we take that on notice, minister?

Question on Notice No 4.5

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

Mrs HERSEY: How many water trades were denied over the last 12 months?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.5.

Mrs HERSEY: How many of the water trading applications were completed within the two-week guidelines set out by the department?

Ms MOSS: Both were completed within 10 business days.

Mrs HERSEY: The Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve was set up in 2019 and provides a process for Aboriginal economic development. How many applications or EOIs have been made by Aboriginal people to access a strategic reserve to date?

Ms MOSS: It is an important policy. I remember it well as I was minister for Environment at the time.

We first committed to reinstate them in our 2016 Sustainable Water Use Policy. They were established in October 2017. Work on the consent regulations is happening at the moment. It is a big body of work. The policy is set and arrangements of things are happening underneath it.

Ms DYSART: We are working closely with land councils across all four regions on the consent process. The water allocation planning process enables us to set aside water as part of it for an Aboriginal water reserve for eligible landholders in a water allocation plan area. We then work closely with the land councils to determine the way in which the water is apportioned across the eligible Aboriginal land in the area and allocated to each of the properties based on size and contribution in the area. We need to work closely with the land councils to ensure that access to water requires consent process from eligible landholders for them to utilise their own water if they are the eligible landholder or to trade it with someone else. That is the detail we are working through now with the land councils. It is advanced and we expect it to be resolved in the coming months.

Mrs HERSEY: Have there been any expressions of interest or are you still working through it?

Ms DYSART: We have not received an application to access the Aboriginal water reserve directly; however, there would be developments eligible in plan areas to access that part of the water. At this stage they have not done it under the allocation for the Aboriginal water reserve. Instead, they have gone to the rest of the consumptive pool.

Mrs HERSEY: Over the past few years, reforms to the water trading process have been suggested, including possible interaction with the strategic Aboriginal water reserves. Has any progress been made on that front? When can we expect to see updated guidelines or legislative regulations?

Ms MOSS: Third parties will be able to negotiate access with Aboriginal people; that is part of that existing Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve policy. These conversations require a lot of work and a lot of different policy work is going on within the department. The future water use policy is under way, with a discussion paper being consulted on.

Ms TOWNSEND: The Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve Policy Framework requires that water be set aside in a plan area from the consumptive pool for the economic use by eligible landowners for their own enterprises. It also allows them to enter into agreements with others to access it. It is a form of trade rather than a formal trade in the sense of the other trades we just spoke about. It is clear that the water allocated through the strategic Aboriginal water reserve can be used by people who are eligible in their own right or by a third party with whom they reach an agreement, as a form of trade.

Mrs HERSEY: The TERC final report stated that a bankable investment environment requires clarity of water available for economic use. In 2020, an expression of interest for a 5,700 hectare agricultural precinct at Larrimah was advertised and attracted interest from several parties looking to invest in the Territory. However, the water allocation for the precinct was cancelled by the now Chief Minister. Why was that licence cancelled? How are we to attract agricultural investment when the rug is basically pulled out from underneath investors?

Ms MOSS: We are focused on a system to provide certainty to everyone involved, including the community, which is robust and protects our water for future use. Making sure there is certainty for industry is an important part of that.

Ms DYSART: That was a water allocation decision made late in 2020. There are mechanisms within the *Water Act* where licence decisions can be reviewed, which were enacted. The minister put the water resources review panel in place, which is another mechanism from the act, to assess that decision-making

process. The outcome was the decision to have the water licence overturned. That was the first and only time it has occurred.

The basis of the decision was the science regarding the allocation methodology, which was one of the elements questioned through the review process. The department stands by the decision being science-based. Our evidence from scientists within the Larrimah zone and our monitoring, which has been going on since the 1960s in that area, clearly shows that the Larrimah region does not experience frequent recharging, unlike a bit further north. Across the Larrimah planning area and up there is about 165 kilometres we are looking at developing a water allocation plan for. There is a lot of variability in the interactions between the water resources in that area. Further to the north they experience recharging of aquifer systems but it does not do that in the Larrimah zone.

We made the decision about the allocation methodology based on that science, which indicated that we would be utilising water from the resource without recharge. That was the basis of our decision that was overturned. We stand by that science. We continue to develop the plan in that area and finalise the water allocation plan. We are working with the water advisory committee, which is also progressing through the science and information, and agreeing with the methodology for the allocations.

We expect the water allocation plan to be completed in 2023, which is getting close. There will be a draft plan out by the end of the year, which would support the science and decision-making process undertaken in the decision.

Mrs HERSEY: What other scientific data was collected and analysed in conjunction with the cancellation of the Larrimah water licence?

Ms DYSART: The department conducts its own monitoring and assessment in the region. We have an extensive monitoring program that focuses on the water allocation plan areas because that is where we have the most competition for use. We continue to build the science, make the assessments and decide the plan. Formalising the plan with allocations will provide more certainty to proponents and demonstrate how we are integrating protections for the environment and cultural values in the area to have the balance right between maintaining water resource values and making water available for use.

Mrs HERSEY: The department supported or approved, in the first instance. Who was wrong?

Ms MOSS: Mr Chair, maybe there is an opportunity to talk further about this, but we are talking about a decision that was made in 2020.

Mrs HERSEY: The now Chief Minister made that decision. Why was it not the Environment minister?

Ms MOSS: We are talking about the budget, a certain period of time and things specific to the budget. Is this 2020 decision is relevant to what we are here to talk about today?

Mrs HERSEY: The investment no longer went ahead in the Larrimah area and it continues to impact. This will deter investors. Repercussions of that decision are still being felt across the region. We are talking about water allocations. Can we have clarification that it will not happen again? Why was the Environment minister not the minister making that decision?

Mr CHAIR: You are asking for an expression of opinion about what might happen in the future. Although you are asking about who made the decision and why, I pick up on the minister's point.

Mr BURGOYNE: Can I try to clarify? Does the science show that there was sufficient water available in the aquifer for the Larrimah agricultural development precinct? That is important when we are talking about water allocation.

Ms MOSS: In 2020.

Mr BURGOYNE: It affects the decisions being made now, if previous decisions from the department said, 'Yes, there is sufficient water' and the minister overrode it. It affects present-day decisions. That is why the Member for Katherine is asking these questions.

Ms MOSS: There is an enshrined right within the water decision-making framework to review a decision.

Mr BURGOYNE: Does the science the department gave to the minister show there is sufficient water available under your current rules and regulations that would allow the Larrimah agriculture development to proceed?

Ms DYSART: All decisions are put up on the department's website. Throughout the process we have two periods for public comment when we put up a notice of decision: we put up a notice of intent to make a decision so people have an early indication and get involved in decisions that are coming up; and then we put one up for the notice of decision. It was that process that triggered the review.

The department, based on the science and decision-making, had assessed that the water was available. We are continuing to work through the process and science, and expect it will be resolved through the water allocation planning process under way.

Mrs HERSEY: What was the advice given to the now Chief Minister in her decision to overturn the Larrimah water licence?

Ms MOSS: I do not have that in front of me. I also do not think that relates to the current budget. We are talking about something that happened in 2020.

Mrs HERSEY: It could potentially impact decisions moving forward. I am trying to ascertain what happened then, so hopefully it does not happen again. What could be different from then to now?

Ms TOWNSEND: I cannot speak too specifically about that decision—one, I did not make it, because I am a member of the land corp board; and two, it was made by my colleague, Dr Alaric Fisher.

In general terms, when a request for a review of a decision of the water controller is made, that request goes to the minister and she has the option to decide if she seeks a review panel. Generally the review panel, if it is formed, will look at the individual grounds made in the request for review and respond to each of those in turn. In this instance, the majority of the concerns raised in the review request were about climate change; whether the correct part of the Northern Territory Water Allocation Planning Framework had been made; and whether there would still be provision for the strategic Aboriginal water reserve—for example.

They will respond to each of those in turn. The department provides its own evidence. We defended the decision that was put to my colleague at the time. The review panel accepted some of our views and not others, and made its own recommendation to the minister.

Mrs HERSEY: Could that same thing happen today in making a decision? If so, how are we meant to attract investors?

Ms TOWNSEND: Any decision made by the water controller can have a request for review. Yes, it could happen again. The department takes the challenge of being reviewed seriously but also uses it to make sure it improves decision-making. If there is a point of clarification that we need to make in our decisions or an area of further sites we need to make this decision more certain for the future, we use the learnings from reviews to do it.

Ms MOSS: That process, regarding the ability to review and the water review panel, has been in place for a long time.

Mrs HERSEY: According to the TERC final report, agricultural precincts are essential to growing the economy by, I will quote:

... targeting anchor investors to provide the commercial investment base to support smaller investors, supply and service businesses, and value add processing opportunities.

Will cancelling water licences help attract investors to support industry—when they are provided with no certainty?

Ms MOSS: We talked broadly about water extraction licences at length before the break. One was not permitted in the period we are talking about, so that we did not over-allocate water. Allocating water where we do not have it is a huge risk to investment in the Territory; our way of life and culture; and to the future development of any industry. We have a more robust system in place that provides certainty to everyone who wants to use it for living, cultural reasons or to make and produce things here; and protects our water for future use. It makes sure the environment remains well protected in the Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: It was a fairly significant licence.

Ms MOSS: Not in 2021–22. I do not think you know what that licence is, because you are conflating two separate issues.

Mrs HERSEY: How many times has a minister stepped in to cancel a water licence in the past?

Ms MOSS: They have not. I get that you are just asking general questions but I am focused on what we are here to talk about tonight.

Mrs HERSEY: What do you say to investors who might be considering coming to the Territory to conduct commercial farming or horticultural activities, but feel the sovereign risk is too high given recent uncertainty concerning evidence-based water allocations and decisions?

Ms MOSS: As some of us remember, I allocated systems under the CLP government. We have a system in place that is robust and where we publish water allocation plans and reasons for the allocation of water. People know we have a strong system in place based on science and evidence that means we are not over-allocating in water allocation plan zones.

There is lot of interest in the Northern Territory, which is why we are investing in the Mapping the Future program to look at where the Territory can support development sustainably. We are doing that work and gathering the science and data so we can make informed decisions.

The review process as part of water allocation has been in place for a long time.

Ms TOWNSEND: The Northern Territory is still in an enviable position in that we have not allocated our water resources. There are still decisions being made by the Crown about where water can be allocated. Where there is a lot of competition for water resources, we have water allocation plans which clearly outline the rules.

The department assists people who want to come to the Territory to invest through being great data sharers. Every bit of work we do, all the water research and drilling, and everyone's bore work permit results are public. That is information can help you make your decision.

We also have a development coordinator position whose job is to help people understand the opportunities that exist in the Northern Territory from land, water and biodiversity perspectives, and the risks. We say, 'Do your due diligence and come and talk to our department. We will help you understand the regulatory system you need to work through. We will share whatever information we have on hand and make it available to you or your consultants, and we will give you guidance about how to step through the different regulatory requirements we have.'

Mrs HERSEY: Given that water is equally critical to the mineral mining sector, does the government intend to start charging mineral miners for water? If so, what consultation has taken place to date concerning this intended change?

Ms MOSS: The strategic water plan is out at the moment and a lot of consultation has been occurring. The matter has been canvassed through that process. I am not going to pre-empt what is in that document; I will wait to see it finalised and take it to my colleagues in anticipation of releasing it. These matters are being discussed through the strategic water policy for the Territory, which will be the first of its kind. It is important for all the reasons we are discussing tonight.

Mrs HERSEY: In relation to the action that was filed in the Supreme Court challenging the decision on the Singleton Station water licence, will the government be defending it to the full extent of the law?

Ms MOSS: We are in court defending that matter currently.

Mrs HERSEY: The CLC has publically alleged that the government does not have the scientific data sufficient to evaluate aquifers. How would you respond to its allegations?

Mr CHAIR: Member for Katherine, I will bring you back to the manner and form of questions. You are asking for an opinion on a hypothetical.

Mrs HERSEY: Public consultation on the direction's paper for the NT strategic water plan has closed. Will the submissions be made public?

Ms MOSS: I do not think they will be, but the feedback will be entwined throughout the plan as we have done in other examples. The process was robust and there were lots of different sessions around the Territory.

Ms TOWNSEND: Many of the people who put in submissions have made them public themselves. We have prepared and released a consultation summary report that outlines the key issues and matters raised. That does not mean the consultation has finished. We will use what we have heard in direct conversations and written submissions from people, interest groups and industry to prepare a draft plan that will then go out for public consultation.

Particular policy matters, like a decision of whether we will proceed with a pricing regime in the Territory, changing the water management legislation or introducing safe drinking water, for example—I am not pre-empting any of those—will need more direct consultation on the approach or model used. It is a plan for 30 years. It will not all be determined by the draft plan. We will make commitments to progress it with the stakeholders involved to work out a model that is the most suitable for the Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: The CLC has demanded a freeze on water licences in the Western Davenport region. Will you be instituting that freeze?

Ms TOWNSEND: I have written to the Central Land Council and agreed not to grant water extraction licences while the plan is under review, on the understanding that it participates fully in the review process and that the department will complete the review in a timely manner. That review will be completed in December this year.

Mr BURGOYNE: If the CLC had not demanded a freeze, would you be implementing the same policy?

Ms TOWNSEND: Probably not, but because the plan is at a close stage of development, I took the action knowing it could be challenged by applicants.

Mrs HERSEY: When will the department undertake impact surveys, including a topographical study, of the AROWS project land requirements?

Ms MOSS: The AROWS project primarily sits with the Investment Commissioner. Questions on specific time frames for different elements would best be directed to him. You and the Member for Nelson recently had a briefing on the project from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. They would be the best people to give you the specific time frames.

Mrs HERSEY: It has been stated that it will take 7 to 10 years to build the new AROWS. Does that include how long it will take to fill up and when we are able to take water from it?

Ms MOSS: We can talk broadly about the involvement of our department in the AROWS project but we are not the lead agency. It sits with the Investment Commissioner. I imagine that includes some of the other processes they are anticipating they will need to go through.

Ms DYSART: We have complementary action that will support the development of the AROWS project through the Adelaide River catchment water allocation planning process. We recently received funding for it through the Australian Government. That project will kick off in the next couple of months. It runs for approximately three-and-a-half years, with a budget of \$7.8m. It is a significant investment we are making in the broader catchment planning to support that project component. We will look at the whole catchment of Adelaide River, and allocations for beneficial uses following our water allocation planning process.

The specific considerations the AROWS project has is utilising—you were asking about the water being pumped into it. The intention for the project is that it will extract water out of the Adelaide River during the Wet Season when we have high flows and pump it a short distance across to the basin that AROWS forms. That will be the consideration when they put in their water licence application, after we have completed the water allocation plan and they have completed their environmental impact assessment. We will consider the licence application at that part of the process.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you estimate how long it will take to fill up and when we will be able to take water from the AROWS?

Ms MOSS: There is a detailed business case online. We are not the lead agency for this project. That should be asked of the relevant minister and agency. I believe it is the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, and the Infrastructure Commissioner.

Mr BURGOYNE: In relation to the freeze on water licences in the western Davenport region, how many water licences has this affected? How many applications are before you?

Ms TOWNSEND: It affected two. That was a consideration in the decision; it was discussed prior to making the decision. There is an abundance of water in the Western Davenport region but there is large landholding. It is not broken up into lots of little parcels. Only a certain number of people can apply for water. There were two, and they were for horticulture.

Mr BURGOYNE: They will not have their licences granted until the freeze ends, once the review into the Western Davenport area has been concluded?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, not until December, noting that any decision made in the Western Davenport would almost certainly be subject to a review.

Output 1.4 – Bushfires

Mrs HERSEY: How many fire management plans are in place? How many are currently under review?

Ms BREMNER: We have four regional bushfire management plans, which are overseen by the regional committees. They are up for review. The Barkly has a new regional committee this year. It does not yet have a plan.

Mrs HERSEY: Where are the four regional ones?

Ms BREMNER: Vernon Arafura, Arnhem Land, Alice Springs and the Savannah bushfire plan for the Katherine/Savannah region.

Mrs HERSEY: Are you waiting to receive the Barkly one from them?

Ms BREMNER: No. We met the committee in May and went through a number of the regional risks. That will be drafted in the coming months.

Mrs HERSEY: What support is provided for educational upskilling of bushfire volunteers and fire wardens?

Ms MOSS: A significant amount of work has gone into this area over the last few years. It is fantastic to see new volunteers in our bushfires teams across the Top End.

Ms BREMNER: Since 2018 we been working towards accredited firefighter training for our volunteers. Prior to that, for about eight years, the FF1 base-level training was modelled on accredited training but we did not have RTO status. We worked with CDU to get that in place. We have about eight Bushfires operational staff who have undertaken their TAE qualifications and can provide the training across the Territory.

We did training three weeks ago in Katherine and about eight volunteers attended. My staff in Alice Springs have been providing training to the local brigades in Yulara and Alice Springs. We held training in Katherine in May. We were expecting 28 people and we ended up with about 20. We continue to do it but as we get closer to the fire season there is less of it. We brought in high-level training such as Suppress Wildfire, another level up from the base FF1 training, and put our staff through 'plan and conduct complex burns' to provide high-level leadership.

Mrs HERSEY: Are any of those staff in the Barkly region?

Ms BREMNER: No, we do not have any staff in the Barkly region.

Mrs HERSEY: Will you look at that in the future?

Ms MOSS: That will be dealt with operationally. We have a number of volunteer brigades; there are a significant amount of volunteers—staff members and volunteers. Staff members are deployed from Alice Springs and will go to where the need is at the time, dependent on what is happening with the fire season.

Mrs HERSEY: How many properties have been inspected in the past 12 months?

Ms MOSS: That is an important part of what Bushfires NT is doing.

Ms BREMNER: In the Top End, Katherine and Vernon Arafura we undertake close to 8,000 property fire break inspections. It is a big and onerous task. We have a combination with weed staff who have been working with fire management officers. They have been doing fire break inspections since we started on 6 June.

Mrs HERSEY: Were any infringements given out?

Ms MOSS: Regarding compliance, it is a similar story to what we were talking with gamba where the vast majority of people are doing or trying hard to do the right thing. In 2021, 90% of the properties in Darwin and Katherine were found to be compliant. That is a high rate of compliance. There were 206 warning letters issued to landowners and 42 were issued with infringement notices. There was an enforced fire break installation on three other properties.

The compliance rate will get better over the course of this year. A lot of education is happening. The preferred approach is to take an educational view to help people understand their obligations and how they can minimise fire risk. The vast majority of people are compliant.

Mrs HERSEY: Out of the 206 warning letters, will you have to follow up with those people? How many times would you follow someone up?

Ms MOSS: They will follow up again, as many times as they feel is needed to before they issue an infringement notice. It went from 206 warning letters to 42 issued infringements. If you finish it with a warning letter and still have not made the changes you need to make, then you might get an infringement notice.

Mr BURGOYNE: The Alice Springs Bushfire department was broken into recently. Are you able to give a dollar amount of damages incurred during that break-in?

Ms MOSS: That was not Bushfires, but NTES. It would be a question for Minister Worden next week.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0. Output Group 2.0 is the responsibility of another minister.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – ENVIRONMENT **Output 3.1 – Environment Management and Policy**

Mrs HERSEY: What is the increase in funding to environment management for? Will that primarily be to implement the remaining Pepper recommendations?

Ms MOSS: There are a number of changes to different divisions within the department. There can be movement between divisions, for example. Can we clarify the increase you are referring to?

Mr BURGOYNE: It Budget Paper No 3, page 131. The budget in 2021–22 was \$10.958m. It is revised to \$12.493m.

Ms MOSS: That is in relation to the interim cost recovery model in place for those particular recommendations.

Mrs HERSEY: The POINT onshore gas information portal has valuable information concerning the industry regulation environmental framework. How many visitors have there been to the website since it was brought online?

Ms MOSS: Can we take that question on notice We will endeavour to get that information. We do not have the visitors to the page in front of us.

Question on Notice No 4.6

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

Mrs HERSEY: The POINT onshore gas information portal has valuable information concerning the industry regulation and environmental framework. How many visitors have there been to the website since it was brought online?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated the number 4.6.

Mrs HERSEY: The storage and proper disposal of tyres has been in the news lately. What compliance and remediation work is being done to identify, clean up and potentially recycle tyres in the Territory?

Ms MOSS: The Circular Economy Strategy released earlier this year addresses issues like this, how we keep different streams of waste out of landfill and look at the economic opportunities associated with them. It is an exciting opportunity for the Territory.

Ms DENNISON: There are three pillars to the strategy, one of which is to increase the legislative power we have to take action in relation to environmental harm. The second is to increase the extent to which we have a circular economy in the Northern Territory. We are looking at procurement rules and working across government to ensure there are systems and mechanisms in place so that, for example, shredded tyres might form part of the road base. That is from a departmental perspective.

The EPA is looking at strategies to address the tyre issue. It has a pollution response line. We often get calls through it in relation to illegal dumping of end-of-life tyres. We respond with compliance and enforcement action as needed. We take action that ranges from environmental audits to pollution abatement notices and penalty infringement notices. There are a wide range of tools for compliance action in relation to tyres. The EPA is about to release a guideline in the next few months to help facilitate the reuse and recycling of tyres.

Mrs HERSEY: On the recycling of tyres, does any of that happen at the moment? Not in Katherine?

Ms DENNISON: It has been on the cards for some time, but there is not an active tyre shredding and recycling industry in the Northern Territory. I will double check but I do not believe so.

Mrs HERSEY: I was speaking to someone the other day and he said he got his EPA licence through. It took two-and-a-half years. I will follow that up.

Has a tyre deposit scheme been considered to incentivise the recycling of tyres in the Territory, in line with the Circular Economy Strategy and similar to the Container Deposit Scheme?

Ms MOSS: A massive part of the Circular Economy Strategy is building off the success of the Container Deposit Scheme and similar schemes where the Northern Territory has been a leader—we have been way up there as one of the jurisdictions first out the gate to do those sorts of things.

We have goals within the circular economy plan. Key initiatives include implementing achievable cost-effective targets for the use of recycled content in building and civil construction and those sorts of things, which will start to make an impact. We are considering strengthening the procurement framework so we can incentivise the use of recycled materials in government-funded projects. As these things come into effect at a structural level, people in the Territory will want to have businesses around the initiatives.

Ms DENNISON: We are working with other jurisdictions on this Australia-wide issue. There is an organisation called Tyre Stewardship Australia which has done work for us looking for opportunities to address it. We are working closely with our colleagues across Australia to address a common wicked problem.

Mrs HERSEY: Will some of that work on shredding and recycling of tyres potentially be for council and road maintenance people to use in road base?

Ms MOSS: Yes. We will be looking at ways we can incentivise people, government and local government in the use of shredded tyres. It is a good place to start because we put out a lot of roads work.

To your earlier point, there is work to be done regarding the materials recovery facility in Katherine, which might be what you were referring to earlier. It is under development.

Mrs HERSEY: Where is the \$7.2m from the federal government for the recovery centre in Katherine?

Ms DENNISON: The facility, which will service the Big Rivers region, will be funded 50:50 between the Northern Territory Government and the Commonwealth. It is a three-stage project. We are in the first stage, which is a needs analysis so we can be confident we are building the right thing in the right place. Then there will be a feasibility analysis, the development of specifications for the facility and, assuming everything is in order, it will be built before 2024.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the risk of an oil spill in the Territory? What emergency contingency plans are in place to deal with it?

Ms MOSS: The likelihood is hard to answer, it is more what we would do if one happened.

Ms DENNISON: I assume you are asking about marine and onshore oil spills. In the case of an offshore oil spill that occurs within the three nautical miles of Territory waters, the department has a draft oil spill contingency plan ready for consideration by SEMSC. In relation to onshore spills, in the Beetaloo, an oil pad or on a road, all environment management plans under the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations and the *Petroleum Act* are required to cover emergency situations. Prior to recommending a plan for approval, the department looks to see that all controls are in place. These will be different depending on the location of the well pad, the company and what mitigation measures and controls are in place. You can look at all 29 emergency plans for spills for all companies on the department's website. It is all publicly available.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many reports of illegal dumping have there been in the Northern Territory? Are you able to break that down by region? It is a big issue in my home town of Alice Springs.

Ms MOSS: It was one of the more common land pollution reports. There were 30 illegal dumping reports in the financial year. In terms of the regions, I am not sure I have that level of data in front of me. We might need to take regions on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.7

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

Mr BURGOYNE: Of the reports made with regard to illegal dumping in the Northern Territory, can you please provide the number of reports by region?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Braiiting has been allocated number 4.7.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.5

Ms MOSS: I have the answer to question 4.5. The question was about how many applications for water trade were denied within the period. It was zero. No applications for water trade were denied during in the last 12 months.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – STATUTORY BODY

Output 4.1 – Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority

Mrs HERSEY: In the past year, how many proponent-initiated EIS applications have there been? What were the outcomes?

Ms MOSS: The outcomes would be on the EPA's website. They considered two in that period of time.

Mr PURDON: There were two proponent-initiated EIS presented to the EPA. The EPA agreed with both and they are now being assessed as EIS.

Mrs HERSEY: How many proposals are still being considered under the old act?

Ms MOSS: Five are being considered under the old act.

Mrs HERSEY: How many environmental management plans for onshore petroleum activities were submitted in the past year? What were the outcomes? How many are pending?

Ms MOSS: There were seven EMPs in that period¹. They were all approved and are available on the department's website. Whether there are more to come forward, there are three under assessment.

Mrs HERSEY: There was a recommendation that onshore petroleum proponents submit whole-of-scope exploration EMPs, rather than individual EMPs, for each regulated activity. Has that been progressed or implemented?

Ms MOSS: Yes, it has.

Ms DENNISON: The environmental regulator in the department and the EPA have strongly encouraged that whole-of-scope EMPs be submitted. It gives the department, the EPA, the minister and the community a sense of the vision the relevant company has for what exploration looks like, as opposed to considering a water monitoring bore, a well pad, a road, a drill and then a frack. While the minister has approved 29 EMPs in the past few years there were dozens of activities approved in relation to many of those EMPs.

Mrs HERSEY: How many unlicensed landfills and dumping sites have been identified in the Territory? What has been done to crack down on these?

Ms DENNISON: The environment division in the department supports the EPA, which administers the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*. We are aware of the issues the Northern Territory has with landfills. Only certain landfills that service a community of over 1,000 people have a licence, which means a lot of landfills are unregulated or unlicensed. There is work in the regulation branch to explore and fully understand the full nature of the problem. We are at the embryonic stages of that analysis but are cognisant of the fact that landfills in the Territory is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Mrs HERSEY: What are you putting in place to crack down on those?

Ms MOSS: A range of mechanisms are used in enforcement and compliance, whether it is pollution abatement notices; audits and those sorts of things; and the pollution hotline, where members of the community make reports. I dare say it is a well-used hotline because this is something people care deeply about and we see it in our communities from time to time. There have been prosecutions related to non-compliance on different matters. The department and the NT EPA take these matters seriously when they need to progress to that level of action.

Mrs HERSEY: Do you have stats of how many people over a 12-month period have called the hotline?

Ms MOSS: Yes, there were 1,000 reports made for a range of matters, whether it was noise pollution or someone in their neighbourhood doing something they were not supposed to be that had potential environmental impacts.

Ms DENNISON: We received just over 1,000 calls over the last financial year and are on track to receive a similar amount this year. There were lots of calls in relation to noise, illegal dumping and erosion sediment control. The team processes them and we look at enforcement tools ranging from low-level penalty infringement notices to taking action as and when required.

Mrs HERSEY: How much in fines and penalties has the EPA been responsible for in the last 12 months?

Ms MOSS: If you want a dollar figure on infringement notices we might have to take that on notice. We issued two pollution abatement notices and there were seven prosecutions.

¹ Correction received from the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security on 20 June 2022:

7 EMPs submitted during the reporting period.

7 EMPs were approved during the reporting period, 4 of which were submitted prior to the reporting time frame.

EMPs that are currently under assessment are listed on the department's website.

Question on Notice No 4.8

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

Mrs HERSEY: How much in fines and penalties has the EPA been responsible for in the past 12 months?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated number 4.8.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 5.1 – Corporate and Governance

Output 5.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

No questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of output groups relating to Environment, Climate Change and Water Security. On behalf of the committee I thank the officers who provided assistance to the minister.

The committee suspended.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Welcome back. Minister, I invite you to introduce officials accompanying you.

Ms MOSS: I introduce the Department of Health officials joining me: Dr Frank Daly, the Chief Executive; Deputy Chief Executive, Adjunct Professor Joanne Norton; and Cecelia Gore, Executive Director Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs. I will introduce other relevant executives if they are required to answer any technical questions.

The Northern Territory Labor government has demonstrated a strong commitment to mental health and suicide prevention over the last six years. There is no stronger evidence of this than the creation of a specific role of Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, which I am privileged to undertake.

Budget 2022–23 continues the work of delivering on the priorities outlined in Territory Labor's *Building Resilience in Future Generations and Investing in Mental Health* policy position paper, which includes infrastructure enhancements and investment in community-based solutions for the mental health service system. Highlights include:

- working with Neami National and Larrakia Nation to improve access to whole-of-life community mental health services through the new Darwin Head to Health Centre
- continuing the successful co-responder model in Darwin of the 000 mental health-related call-outs to better assess patient needs prior to emergency department presentation
- expanding the range of subacute residential supported places in Katherine and Alice Springs
- focus on partnerships with other providers of mental health services, including the Darwin Private Hospital mental health unit and the veteran wellbeing centre, when operational

- implementing an after-hours mental health response in Katherine Hospital emergency department to prevent unnecessary transfers to Royal Darwin Hospital
- providing training and skills development for frontline primary healthcare staff in regional and remote centres to be more confident in responding to people with mental health concerns
- investing in models of care to support people to live in their own homes, including expanding the housing accommodation support initiative to Katherine and Alice Springs.

The year 2022–23 will also be the first year of implementation of key initiatives arising from the bilateral agreement on mental health and suicide prevention. This is a five-year agreement with a total investment of \$43.9m, with the Commonwealth investing \$30.65m and the Territory investing \$13.25m to expand mental healthcare services in the community. Key funded initiatives are as follows:

- \$14.4m for two new Head to Health adult mental health satellite clinics, and ongoing funding for the Territory's first Head to Health centre that opened in January 2022
- \$9.1m for a new Head to Health kids hub to improve access to multidisciplinary team care to children
- \$5.7m to enhance two headspace centres to increase access to multidisciplinary youth mental health services, which translates to an increase in staff and more resources to reduce wait times and support more young people
- \$3m to support perinatal mental health screening.

All these initiatives will be commissioned in partnership with the NTPHN to ensure no duplication and the best use of available funding.

Supporting community-based mental healthcare services is critical to ensuring Territorians are able to access the support they need. In 2016, the Northern Territory Government committed to halve the rate of suicide over 10 years; this continues as a key commitment in the 2022–23 budget.

Funding provided by the Department of Health to non-government service providers for suicide prevention specific activities is \$1.925m. The mental health and suicide prevention bilateral agreement provides additional investments aligned with the NT Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework Implementation Plan 2018–2023, including \$9.3m to establish universal after-care services, meaning all Territorians who are discharged from hospital following a suicide attempt will receive immediate follow-up care; and \$1.3m to ensure all people in the Territory who are bereaved or impacted by suicide can access postvention support services.

The suicide prevention community grants have continued throughout 2018 to 2022, aimed at supporting locally-led activities and projects that progress action in one or more of the following three priority areas:

- building inclusive communities and strengthening community resilience
- addressing stigma and discrimination
- raising awareness of effective suicide prevention practices.

To date the program has awarded \$10,000 grants to total of \$1m to over 130 projects across four grants rounds. All previous grants awarded are listed on the NT Health website.

NT Health chairs the whole-of-government suicide prevention coordination committee, which requires all frontline agencies report on their responsibilities and actions outlined in the Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework 2018–2023.

Other areas of focus include infrastructure that helps communities and creates jobs. The capital works program for NT Mental Health is \$36.4m in 2022–23, which includes \$29m for the mental health inpatient unit expansion at the Royal Darwin Hospital; \$6.5m to establish the stabilisation, assessment and referral area on the Royal Darwin Hospital campus to provide appropriate care for people presenting with a mental health emergency; and \$1m for mental health inpatient upgrades.

We will continue to invest in more effective models of care to manage patient flow and growth in our activity with expanded virtual care and care closer to home. I acknowledge the efforts of mental health staff at all levels of the health system who have collectively worked not only to keep Territorians safe during the pandemic but to diligently and proudly provide core services to those in need.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you to the staff and department for all the hard work you do.

The footnote for this output states that the 2021-22 budget has been back-cast to reflect the transfer of the secure care unit from community services to mental health. Was this part of the implementation of the recommendations of the Review of Forensic Mental Health and Disability Services?

Ms GORE: The transfer of secure care was the result of a machinery of government initiative; however, it took us one step towards progressing one of the recommendations of the forensic review, which was to combine the forensic disability service with the forensic mental health service. That work is ongoing.

Mrs HERSEY: Does the entire budget for forensic mental health services fall under this output? What is that budget? What was it last year?

Ms MOSS: Yes, it would. We can take on notice a year-on-year comparison.

Question on Notice No 4.9

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

Mrs HERSEY: Does the entire budget for forensic mental health services fall under this output? What is that budget? What was it last year?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated number 4.9.

Mrs HERSEY: Have the entirety of the recommendations of the Review of Forensic Mental Health and Disability Services been implemented?

Ms MOSS: That important review took place in 2019. It was supported in-principle. The implementation is an ongoing process, it was never going to happen in a year or two years. There are complex recommendations, it is a complex area of policy and some will require more changes than others. They are in various stages of completion. The government continues to focus on it.

Some recommendations sit across different agencies. We have an important role in coordinating and following the responsible and lead agencies on the recommendations. For example, there will be crossovers with NDIS.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you clarify what has been implemented and what has not?

Ms GORE: The recommendations of the McGrath review can be characterised into three areas. The first one was the extent to which the government is able to meet its commitment to hold people in as least restrictive settings as possible, which to the complexity regarding partnerships with NDIS providers and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to spread the footprint where people can be safely supported, therapeutically, to live in community. All those recommendations have been progressed; we are on track.

The second part of the review looked at the use of resources in the Territory, particularly the interaction between forensic disability services and forensic mental health services. The integration is under way and the work provides greater strength to both sides of the service system. The forensic disability team are particularly skilled at transitioning into the community and accessing resources through the NDIS, which is an enhancement of the forensic mental health team, which has predominantly had a medical focus because of court-ordering. That is shifting substantially. One of the other recommendations in the review was to provide education to judges and courts through a bench book, which has been done.

The forensic review also set forward some parameters regarding the recruitment of a chief psychiatrist. That process is under way.

The area we are working through is the commissioning of the complex behaviour unit at the gaol to make it a forensic hospital, rather than being run by Corrections. Complicated work is occurring around the need for that facility. The complex behavioural unit provides respite and a therapeutic environment for people in the prison. It is not clear that the entire facility would be needed for forensic mental health clients alone. In partnership with Corrections, we are running a pilot for four beds, which we hope to start in August, to assess the practical reality of implementing that recommendation. We are taking it slowly because it is and expensive, resource-intensive service and we do not want use to resources in ways that are wasteful.

Mrs HERSEY: How long will that trial run for?

Ms GORE: We have not set a definitive end date. Generally, we expect to need 6 to 12 months to get a sense of what is occurring across seasonal variations. We are hoping to get the data and make a decision as quickly as we can.

Mrs HERSEY: What kind of outcomes are you looking for?

Ms GORE: The purpose of better managing prisoners with mental health and forensic mental health concerns is not to require transfer. There is evidence that suggests moving people can escalate what might be going on for them. It also means the environment at the complex behaviour unit can be made much more therapeutic for the benefit of all prisoners, which we hope would have a knock-on effect for their mental health outcomes.

Another outcome we would be seeking would be to reduce pressures on the RDH secure unit by increasing the number of secure beds. There would still be transfers, depending on acuity, but we would look to make sure patient outcomes are improved, resources are used well and clinical staff are working in ways that optimise their scope of practice.

Mrs HERSEY: How many forensic psychologist positions are there in the Territory?

Ms MOSS: There are forensics psychologists who exist in the public and private sectors. If you are asking specifically about the public health system we could get that figure, but how many across the Territory would be a different question entirely.

Mrs HERSEY: Can I have that on notice?

Question on Notice No 4.10

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

Mrs HERSEY: How many government forensic psychologist positions are there in the Territory? How many are filled and how does that compare to 2019?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated number 4.10.

Mrs HERSEY: How many forensic mental health workers are Aboriginal?

Ms MOSS: I will have to take that on notice as well.

Question on Notice No 4.11

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

Mrs HERSEY: How many forensic mental health workers are Aboriginal?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated number 4.11.

Mrs HERSEY: Has further consideration and research been undertaken to establish relevant legislative provisions to allow the Mental Health Review Tribunal to make decisions about the detention, treatment and release of forensic clients? What was the outcome?

Ms MOSS: The McGrath legislative review under way. Review of the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* is a commitment under the Mental Health Strategic Plan 2019–2025. That review will look to make mental health legislation contemporary and ensure we are providing high-quality care for Territorians. The discussion paper was released in December 2020 and community consultation has been finalised. We will continue to work through the legislative processes in government and aim for introduction in 2024.

Mrs HERSEY: Of the Territorians who died by suicide in the reporting period, what is the average number of contacts they had with mental health services?

Ms MOSS: That is a difficult area of policy, which requires a whole-of-government approach. That is why we have a suicide prevention plan in the Territory, which reiterates the importance of community-led solutions and action. It is a difficult one to answer because it is a complex issue where mental illness might not be the only factor for a person—it could be contact with AOD services, a situational crisis or range of other things. The issue can be multi-factorial in that way. While there would be data available that gets reported to the health and welfare national body about the use of mental health services, this would be difficult to ascertain.

Ms GORE: The minister is correct about the complexity. The more problematic issue is that, of the people who have committed suicide in the reporting period, only three were known to NT mental health services. To provide data about the numbers of contacts with those services would be identifiable. Many of the people who find themselves in the situation where they take their own life are doing so for reasons that are not necessarily related to mental illness. They may not have reached out to mental health services.

Mrs HERSEY: Without sounding insensitive, you mentioned in your opening statement that in 2016 the government wanted to halve the rate of suicide. Do we know what the rate was in 2016 as opposed to what it has been in the last year?

Ms MOSS: I would have to double-check the number for 2016. In 2020, which would have been the last reporting period, 51 Territorians took their own lives. It remains a very sad statistic. That is 51 people who were family members and loved ones in the Territory.

We will continue to do everything we can at a whole-of-government and a whole-of-community level to support initiatives that build more inclusive communities and increase help-seeking, where we can. Sometimes people have not thought about reaching out. They may not have a history in terms of mental illness or substance issues et cetera.

Awareness-raising within communities, promotion of the assistance available and creating greater community cohesion is an important part of what we need to do through the community grants. It remains a big priority for us.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you take on notice the rate from 2016, to get a comparison?

Ms MOSS: It would be publicly available. It would be in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's statistics, which would be where the 2020 figure has come from.

Mrs HERSEY: Can you please explain the variations in the KPIs of individuals receiving non-admitted public mental health services, and individuals under 18 receiving non-admitted public mental health services? The footnote simply states, 'the impact of COVID-19 restrictions'. Does that mean people had decreased access to mental health services during COVID?

Ms MOSS: COVID had an impact. An important part of the conversation we need to be having about this is to do with the investment in community supports. Where we can keep people out of hospital setting has been a big focus for the department.

Dr DALY: For individuals under-18 receiving non-admitted public mental health services there was a 17% reduction in the reporting period, compared to the same period of the year before. COVID restrictions significantly decreased mobility and access and there was a reduction in presentations and presentations to hospital. There was a similar effect for individuals receiving non-admitted public mental health services, with a 9% reduction with 8,057 episodes compared to 8,850 in the previous reporting period. Having said that, preliminary data shows there has been an increase in acuity and complexity of the patients we have been managing in our services.

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.9

Ms MOSS: I have an answer to question 4.9 that we took on notice about the secure care unit, which was: in 2020–21, \$7.7m; and in 2021–22, \$9m.

Mrs HERSEY: How many people have accessed the Darwin Head to Health service since it opened this year? What has been the total expenditure?

Ms MOSS: That is not our expenditure. We are happy it exists and I am looking forward to visiting again. It is important that we have community supports. It has national funding administered through the PHN. Neami National is the organisation that runs the centre in Darwin.

Mrs HERSEY: Where will the Head to Health adult mental health satellite clinics be located? When will they be operational? How many staff will they have? What will their patient capacity be?

Ms MOSS: I would not be able to give an answer about staffing for those centres. The locations are being worked through with the PHN and will be decided based on need. One will be operational in 2023 and one in 2024–25. They will work through the process of who is running them and other questions over that period.

Mrs HERSEY: They will be across the Territory?

Ms MOSS: We have one in Darwin. The decision will be made based on need for where the others are located. Yes, I imagine they will be in other areas of the Northern Territory. They will take into account how they are servicing other regions.

Mr BURGOYNE: How many mental health beds are available in the Alice Springs Hospital?

Ms MOSS: In the Mental Health Inpatient Unit in the Alice Springs Hospital there are 12 beds. The average occupancy rate during the reporting period was 65.3%, which is down from the previous reporting period.

Mr BURGOYNE: Has that increased in capacity over the last four years?

Ms MOSS: It is important for us to be focused on keeping people out of inpatient units and getting care in the community and in their homes. We see positive outcomes from people not being admitted into inpatient units, which is a favourable outcome.

Ms GORE: The inpatient unit has been 12 beds for quite some time. The other facility operated through Alice Springs health service is the eight-bed subacute unit.

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding youths with mental health issues, are there beds provided at the Alice Springs Hospital for people who are not over the age of 18?

Ms GORE: No, there is not a specific youth inpatient unit in Alice Springs. If there was a need for a young person to be admitted to hospital they would normally go onto the paediatric ward and be supported by mental health staff in that setting.

Mrs HERSEY: I was going to ask how many mental health beds are in the Katherine Hospital and then you mentioned housing accommodation in your opening statement. Can you explain that please?

Ms MOSS: The housing initiative I was talking about in my opening statement was about an initiative for people who might be in public housing tenancies, as opposed to being a reference to housing for health staff.

Mrs HERSEY: I was not thinking of staff.

Ms MOSS: A mental health liaison team started in Katherine in February 2022. It is a different model of providing greater care for people who might ordinarily come to the ED with exceptionally high levels of mental distress, and appropriate care for them in their community to prevent the need for them to be transferred to Darwin. That is still what happens if there is a requirement for someone to be in an inpatient unit, but the mental health liaison team was established to improve the response to people who are appearing at the hospital for mental health related reasons.

Mrs HERSEY: If people present with mental health issues at the Katherine Hospital there are not similar beds to those in Alice Springs? They go on to Darwin?

Ms MOSS: If there was a requirement for them to. The specific support team was established in Katherine to make sure there are increased community supports and we are keeping people out of inpatient units.

Ms GORE: When people present to emergency departments, particularly in Katherine Hospital, they are not necessarily presenting with mental illness; they are often presenting in mental distress. The number of people who present to ED and do not go on to get admitted shows in our statistics. Less than 30% of people who come to hospital after-hours in crisis need mental health support. They do not necessarily need mental health treatment.

We are trying to make it so that emergency departments are not the only place people can go to, which is why the health centre is so important. It is an after-hours service and most people know that an emergency department is not a therapeutic environment and does not make people safe. Often they are the only service that is open at night and that is why people end up there. If we can intervene earlier and get after-hours teams functioning we do not need to admit people to hospital. We need to keep being clear about mental health clinical intervention as opposed to crisis intervention services in terms of what we are trying to build capacity in our community to respond to.

Mrs HERSEY: Were there any times when people had presented to hospital or tried to access mental health services over a holiday period, for example, and not had access? I am thinking of a particular issue relating to someone I knew who presented and needed mental health help but there was nobody there as they were on holidays. It resulted in that person passing away.

Ms MOSS: It is sad to hear when that happens. A lot of investment is going into community-based support, whether it is Head to Health centres, headspace et cetera, to make sure we are bolstering it. TeamHEALTH are acutely aware of wanting to make sure that if someone turns up to their service or any service they get the support required, whether it is something they can provide or a referral them on.

I do not know of any individual circumstances. There will be services with waitlists and individual circumstance happen. Everybody is working hard to make sure those sorts of things do not happen. We have a well-coordinated community mental health support system that allows people to get the help they need when they need it. There are challenges from time to time, particularly the more regional and remote you get.

There are huge investments going into this area—the bilateral agreement and other infrastructure investments—that will make a difference. The number of people turning up to hospital and being admitted indicates that the investment is well placed and where we need to focus our energy.

Mrs HERSEY: In your opening statement, you spoke of after-care services. It was recently announced that \$9.3m would be invested into after-care services so that all Territorians who are discharged from hospital following a suicide attempt will receive immediate follow-up care. How many Territorians who were discharged from hospital following a suicide attempt received immediate follow-up care?

Ms GORE: It is not a question that can be answered definitively. We have a specific program in Darwin called the Way Back Support Service, which is co-funded between the NT PHN, NTG and Beyond Blue. The service is run by TeamHEALTH and provides follow-up support for up to six months for people who present to hospital with a suicide attempt or significant self-harm incident.

What we are planning to do with the universal after-care project is make sure that all NT hospitals have systems which flag when someone presents in significant crisis, so they are followed up. With the after-care

program in all of our hospital regions we will be looking for an appropriate community provider who can provide that link. For Tennant Creek it might be the Aboriginal community-controlled health service as a point of care. In Katherine Hospital it may be one of the other NGOs. We have not made those decisions; we will work through that over the next two years.

The intention is to catch everybody. The extent to which we can do that is about our health staff having an awareness of the importance of an incident as a potential future sign and making sure people are as connected as they can be.

One of the new things we did this year was put a system in all NT hospitals where if a young person presents we have a way of talking to the school counselling team at the Department of Education. Upon that young person's discharge the school counselling service is notified to put supports in place. That has been used on a few occasions with good success in terms of people feeling like the systems are working together, that we are not in silos and that it is for the benefit of those young people and families. We would like to see the same thing for this universal program.

Mrs HERSEY: Not every school has a school counsellor, do they?

Ms GORE: We work with the school social and emotional wellbeing team in the Department of Education. It will be a counsellor or a wellbeing officer. We have not had a situation where a young person has been from of a school that did not have a counsellor. It will continue to cover what the linkage is and what the networks are as we look at after-care.

Mrs HERSEY: Out of the \$9.3m announced, how many staff will there be to provide after-care?

Ms GORE: We do not know yet. We will be trying to ensure that all emergency department staff are trained to follow a set of referral pathways. The TeamHEALTH project staffing is three FTEs to the Greater Darwin region. When we lay it out we will need to see how many presentations each hospital gets and what that means in terms of connecting. The positions are designed to be connectors to bring people back to sporting clubs, cultural opportunities and other things to make them feel they are part of communities. It is not designed to create a service that they become attached to. The TeamHEALTH service also connects people to the other services in the community that are already providing drop-ins, outreach and those kinds of things.

Mrs HERSEY: Where will the trial sites for after-care services be and when will they be established?

Ms MOSS: There will need to be a Territory-wide approach. We want to provide after-care to everyone. We will be looking at how that team can support the needs across the Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: Last year the minister spoke about a co-response model trial in Darwin where a medical health practitioner accompanied police or paramedics on crisis calls. How many callouts had a mental health practitioner present during the trial?

Ms MOSS: Between April to December 2021, there were 364 calls to 000 attended by the co-response. The outcome was about 74% diverted from the emergency department, which demonstrates a high level of success. A number of different professionals are part of that multidisciplinary team. It is a coordinated response that involves police, ambulance and mental health clinicians. Mental health clinicians would be at all those callouts.

Dr DALY: This trial started in October 2020. The data we have spoken of tonight is a subset from April to December 2021; it is not the complete reporting period. An average of 45 calls per month were tasked by the call centre if they had a mental health theme, and responded to by the co-responders.

There was a total of 364 calls and for 74%—or 269—of those calls the responding team were able to engage, find another way to manage a patient and prevent them from attending the emergency department.

Mrs HERSEY: Has the evaluation of the trial concluded?

Dr DALY: It has concluded and we have moved into a business as usual posture in the Greater Darwin area. It is our intension to continue. It is based on successful models in two or three other jurisdictions in Australia. Darwin and Palmerston have the appropriate scale of number of calls and staffing to enable it for the foreseeable future.

Mrs HERSEY: How many presentations at Territory emergency departments were mental health-related in the reporting period? What is the daily average number of presentations?

Ms MOSS: There were 3,912 mental health presentations at emergency departments in the Territory. There were 702 admissions—just under an 18% admission rate. There are a variety of reasons and complexities.

Dr DALY: That data is the number of mental health presentations at each of the hospitals in the Territory over the reporting period of 1 July to 31 March. Dividing 3,912 in total by the 274 days of the reporting period gives an average of just under 14 patients per day presenting to EDs in the Territory with mental health complaints.

Mrs HERSEY: How many mental health professionals are based in emergency departments?

Ms MOSS: There is a psychologist in the emergency department in Royal Darwin Hospital.

Dr DALY: Psychiatry is generally a consulting service to the emergency department, rather than embedded. There are three personnel involved in the mental health response in the Katherine ED, and there has been a successful trial of embedding a consultant psychiatrist—the most senior psychiatrist—in the emergency department during daylight hours, seven days a week at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Until recently the mental health assessment teams—MHAT—have been located near the emergency departments of Royal Darwin and Alice Springs hospitals. They have been engaged by the emergency department in the assessment and acute management of patients. I cannot give you the exact number of FTE in those teams at this time.

Ms MOSS: it is another reason why the investment in the stabilisation assessment and referral area will be important at Royal Darwin Hospital—allowing people who present to ED and require treatment or further assessment to be in a less distressing environment and then hopefully discharged. The \$6.5m stabilisation assessment and referral area will significantly improve patient journey for those turning up to ED in various levels of mental distress or illness.

Mrs HERSEY: What is the average daily number of people waiting for a bed in the mental health inpatient unit at RDH?

Ms MOSS: I have a version, but it is not exactly how you have asked for it. I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.12

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

Ms HERSEY: What is the average daily number of people waiting for a bed in the mental health inpatient unit at RDH?

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

Ms MOSS: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Katherine has been allocated number 4.12.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: It being 9.30 pm we will end the meeting. I thank Minister Moss and her amazing team for presenting today, and the opposition and Independents for their contribution.

The committee concluded.
