# Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

15th Assembly



# Parliamentary Record
# Debates and Questions



Wednesday 19 March 2025

# CONTENTS

ATTORNEY-GENERAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL ..... 1161
Serial 19 ..... 1161
LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL ..... 1162
Serial 20 ..... 1162
PORTABLE LONG SERVICE LEAVE (COMMUNITY SERVICES SECTOR) REPEAL BILL ..... 1164
Serial 18 ..... 1164
MINISTERIAL REPORT ..... 1170
Asian Relations ..... 1170
VISITORS ..... 1173
YouthWorX NT ..... 1173
QUESTION TIME ..... 1180
Katherine High School – Violent Incidents ..... 1180
Declan's Law – Making Territorians Safe ..... 1181
Katherine High School – Violent Incidents ..... 1182
Gas Industry – Benefits ..... 1182
Ministers' Social Media Posts ..... 1183
Residential Development – Alice Springs ..... 1184
Mining – Profits ..... 1185
Secondary Schools Reform ..... 1186
Ministers' Social Media Posts ..... 1187
Ministers' Social Media Posts – Supplementary Question ..... 1187
Migration ..... 1188
Imperial Oil & Gas – Reportable Incident ..... 1188
Major Events and Tourism NT ..... 1189
Portable Long Service Leave – Community Services Sector ..... 1190
Critical Mineral and Strategic Material Supply Chains MOU ..... 1191
Screen Industry ..... 1191
Housing Reform – Tenancy ..... 1192
MOTION ..... 1193
Objectives of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement ..... 1193
MOTION ..... 1221
Water Security in the Northern Territory ..... 1221
ADJOURNMENT ..... 1225

Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

**ATTORNEY-GENERAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**
**Serial 19**

**Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General):** Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled Attorney-General Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 19, and table the explanatory statement.

I move that the Bill be now read a first time.

The purpose of this Bill is to make a number of minor amendments to various pieces of legislation within my portfolio. Individually, these amendments are not extensive enough to warrant their own amendment Bill, but are nevertheless required to ensure the legislation is up to date and correct.

The purpose of the Bill is to enhance efficiencies across a range of legislation and the legal landscape. An omnibus Bill of this nature promotes efficiencies because it allows for a lot of amendments to be made at the same time, quickly and effectively.

The first amendment is to the *Health Care Decision Making Act 2023* to allow for the senior practitioner to delegate their functions and powers to a public sector employee who has the necessary qualifications and experience to carry out those functions. The senior practitioner is a statutory appointment of a single person, and it is physically impractical for that single person to attend to all requests for the use of restrictive practices.

This amendment will enable the senior practitioner to delegate their powers and functions to appropriate staff to ensure timely and appropriate care of persons with impaired decision-making capacity.

Secondly, the Bill amends both the *Justices of the Peace Act 1991* and *Oaths, Affidavits and Declarations Act 2010.* These amendments will ensure current practices of obtaining a national police check for persons appointed as a justice of the peace or commissioner for oaths in the Northern Territory. The current practice ensures that only people who are fit and proper are appointed following a criminal history check, and these amendments enshrine that high standard in the legislation.

Thirdly, the Bill amends the *Land Title Act 2000* to accommodate the transition to e-conveyancing practices in the Northern Territory. The amendment will allow for the Registrar-General to exercise discretion around issuing paper certificates of titles in certain circumstances, noting that e-conveyancing will modernise the process and dispense with the need for the Registrar-General to issue paper titles.

Fourthly, the Bill amends the *Legal Profession Act 2006* to exclude the application of section 57 of the *Interpretation Act 1978*, removing the requirement for numbered subordinate legislation to apply to the Australian Solicitors' Conduct Rules. This means it will allow for the Law Society of the Northern Territory to adopt, with approval from the Attorney-General, the Australian Solicitors' Conduct Rules which would bring the NT in line with other Australian jurisdictions and without the need for the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to draft the rules.

The Bill also amends the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1990* to prescribe fentanyl and its analogues, and nitazenes and its derivatives, as Schedule 1 dangerous drugs. Fentanyl and its analogues, and nitazenes and its derivatives, have a higher risk of overdose compared to heroin, which is a Schedule 1 dangerous drug, and the illegal sale of fentanyl has been increasing internationally within the heroin market, with NT police also encountering more illicit substances where fentanyl is present.

The Bill further amends the *Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 2014* to further clarify that the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NTCAT) may make cost orders for recovery of any fee required by the Act or for serving documents or conducting a search by a successful party. The intent of this amendment is to make it abundantly clear that a successful party is entitled to recover its costs associated with filing and serving documents required under the Act and other costs associated with those processes, such as name or address search. This reflects the base position that a successful party should not be penalised for exerting their basic legal rights. However, in keeping with the otherwise general position that the NTCAT is a no-cost forum, other costs, such as lawyer fees, will remain subject to formal consideration and decision-making by the NTCAT.

The Bill also amends the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal Regulations 2014 to provide that there is no fee associated with an application under the *Health Care Decision Making Act 2023*. The regulations currently provide that there is no fee associated with an application under the *Guardianship of*

*Adults Act 2016* or the *Advance Personal Planning Act 2013*. This amendment will ensure consistency across decision-making applications for vulnerable people.

The Bill then amends the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999* to include sections 18A, Applying for a tenancy, and section 18B, Keeping of tenant information, as exemptions for tenancies under the *Housing Act* pursuant to section 7(5). The amendment also clarifies that payments from the Agents Licensing Fidelity Guarantee Fund for administration of the Act and educational purposes can be made to the Commissioner of Tenancies, landlord representative bodies and tenant representative bodies or any combination of these.

Lastly, the Bill amends the *Sentencing Act 1995* to expressly allow for a home detention condition to apply to part of the period of an intensive community correction order. While home detention conditions were intended to be an option for courts to impose as part of an intensive community correction order, the ability to do so has been interpreted as an all-or-nothing option.

The proposed amendment will make it clear that a community correction order can contain a home detention condition that only applies for a portion of the duration of the community correction order, and it clarifies when fixed non-parole periods apply to correct limitations on the setting of minimum non-parole periods unintentionally established by the *Sentencing and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2022*.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

**Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General):** I move that the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by Wednesday 30 April 2025.

Motion agreed to.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**
**Serial 20**

**Mr EDGINGTON (Housing, Local Government and Community Development):** Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled Local Government Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 20, and I table the explanatory statement.

I move that the Bill be now read a first time.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the *Local Government Act 2019* and make consequential changes to the Local Government (General) Regulations 2021. It is important to emphasise that the amendments in this Bill are the first tranche of reforms that will be implemented in stages. By tackling some of the most pressing issues first, the amendments lay the groundwork for comprehensive changes that are currently underway.

The proposed changes in this Bill are designed to modernise and improve the efficiency, transparency and overall effectiveness of the local government sector. This first phase seeks to align local government systems and processes with the best practices seen in local governments nationwide, ensuring the sector becomes more responsive and better suited to the needs of our communities. The changes will focus on provisions related to prospective councils; elections and casual vacancies; publishing requirements for local government notices; and miscellaneous amendments.

Prospective councils are created during periods of transition, such as when local government areas are merged, abolished or have their boundaries altered. Currently the Act is not clear on what responsibilities and powers a prospective council has at any point in time. This is especially confusing when a single individual was appointed to oversee the functions of a prospective council before a general election.

The proposed amendments clarify the rights, responsibilities and obligations of prospective councils by specifying the operational functions of the council and establishing clear guidelines for managing land, assets and the transition of by-laws. Recognising that each local government area and council may have unique circumstances requiring tailored transitional arrangements, the Bill grants the Administrator the authority to make a transitional order to facilitate a smooth transition. This Bill mandates that a council, or prospective council, complies with the order and for the council's chief executive officer, and the person constituting the prospective council, to take all reasonable steps to facilitate compliance with the order. These changes will provide greater certainty and ensure that the establishment of prospective councils happen smoothly and without disruption to services in the community.

The Bill also makes it clear that during a transitional period the default position is that a newly elected local government council does not take over responsibilities and obligations until the day after the election results are declared. The Bill furthermore provides clarification that a prospective council is afforded the same liability protections as a local council when performing its functions.

This Bill also introduces important changes aimed at simplifying and streamlining local government electoral processes. It confirms that the Northern Territory Electoral Commission has the authority to conduct by-elections for casual vacancies that occur between six and 18 months before a general election, ensuring a clear and consistent process.

Additionally, the Bill provides elected members with the flexibility to determine the most appropriate method for filling vacancies within their council. This change not only offers greater autonomy in decision-making but also ensures that the process for filling vacancies is transparent and adaptable to the council's specific needs.

Furthermore, within electoral provisions, this Bill provides clarity on casual vacancies and the reinstatement of members who resign to contest elections for the Legislative Assembly, the Commonwealth House of Representatives or the Senate. These eliminate any ambiguities on timelines, providing certainty for both members and their constituents.

The Bill also introduces several amendments to the publishing requirements for local government notices that modernise communication practices and make local government notices more accessible to the public through digital platforms. These amendments include:

- the removal of the outdated requirement for councils to publish certain notices in newspapers, including budget-related information. Councils will now be permitted to publish notices on their websites, improving efficiency and ensuring alignment with current communication practices.

- the removal of legislative references to posting notices on notice boards at council offices, as this method has become less commonly used. While councils may continue using this method if it suits their constituents, the change provides greater flexibility in how they communicate with the public.

- the removal of the requirement to publish newspaper notifications for a council's draft plan and annual report and instead ensure that these documents are published on a council's website and are available at council offices. Amendments have also been made to clarify that the 21-day period for written submissions on a draft plan begins from the date the notice is published, providing clearer timelines for public participation.

- similar updates apply to notices regarding meeting postponements and the calling of meetings of electors, with the focus shifting to publishing these notices on the council's website, rather than in newspapers or on notice boards.

I now turn to miscellaneous amendments in the Bill which cover a range of issues.

In relation to offences concerning the publication of campaign material in newspapers, this amendment ensures consistency with other changes in the Bill that remove the requirement for publishing notifications in a newspaper. It reflects the ongoing effort to transition to more accessible digital alternatives.

The Bill introduces changes that consider the preparatory work involved in advertising a council CEO vacancy, while also encouraging councils to prioritise filling the position. In response to feedback from the local government sector, the required advertising period for a CEO vacancy has been extended from six weeks to eight weeks. Furthermore, the Bill includes provisions allowing the CEO of the department to extend the advertising period in exceptional circumstances. These amendments strike a balance between allowing sufficient preparation time to fill the vacancy and ensuring that the vacancy is filled in a timely manner.

Under current provisions in the Act, there has been confusion regarding whether councils must pass a resolution to declare general rates or, if adopting the budget, which includes the rates, is sufficient. The Bill addresses this ambiguity by clearly stating that councils must first pass a resolution on the general rates before proceeding to pass a separate resolution on the proposed budget, which will include the agreed rates. This amendment ensures that councils are fully aware of the proposed rates before considering the broader budget, resolving issues that have often arisen when councils encounter the rates for the first time when reviewing the context of the proposed budget.

Additionally, the reporting process for compliance reviews has been clarified. Previously, there was ambiguity regarding the delivery of compliance reports, especially when those reports contained adverse findings. This amendment resolves that uncertainty by ensuring that compliance reports are provided directly to both the CEO and the principal member of the council. This change ensures that councils are promptly informed of any compliance issues, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability.

Lastly, the current Act does not clearly specify whether suspended elected members are entitled to any form of remuneration, leading to ambiguity. This has been addressed through amendments that explicitly state that elected members are not entitled to any remuneration, allowances or other benefits during their suspension while the council is under official management. This change aligns with best practices in the sector.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

**Mr EDGINGTON (Housing, Local Government and Community Development):** Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by Wednesday 30 April 2025.

Motion agreed to.

**PORTABLE LONG SERVICE LEAVE (COMMUNITY SERVICES SECTOR) REPEAL BILL**
**Serial 18**

**Mrs HERSEY (Public Service):** Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled Portable Long Service Leave (Community Services Sector) Repeal Bill 2025, Serial 18, and table the explanatory statement.

I move that the Bill be now read a first time.

The purpose of this Bill is to repeal the *Portable Long Service Leave (Community Services Sector) Act 2024*, herein referred to as the Act. The Act, which was introduced by the former Labor government in their dying days, was nothing more than a desperate attempt to woo voters and, in typical Labor fashion, their portable long service leave scheme was not properly budgeted for. It would have relied on a Treasury loan to cover its set-up costs, which was estimated to blow out between $4m and 12m, with no ongoing funding assigned for its operation once active.

The Opposition Leader and her government had eight years to make these changes while they were in government, but made them three months before an election. Now they are acting like saints trying to claim the moral high ground. If only they did it properly in their time in government. With minimal consultation with industry and business, our CLP team strongly opposed the scheme in opposition, noting the community services sector consistently requested more detailed consultation about the proposed scheme, but this did not occur.

The Act, which has not yet commenced, would have provided portability of long service leave entitlements to employees based on tenure within the community services sector, rather than relying on continuous employment with one single employer.

Our government recognises the incredible and valuable contribution that our frontline workers provide to the Northern Territory. Repealing the Act does not mean the Territory government does not value the services provided by employees within the community services sector. Its repeal will not affect employees' existing long service leave entitlements under enterprise agreement awards or the *Long Service Leave Act* NT. As has always been the case, employees who remain with their employer will continue to be eligible for long service leave.

The repeal will remove the additional financial, regulatory and administrative burdens on community service providers. Without the obligation to implement portability of long service leave, these employers can better focus on delivering essential frontline services. Businesses will instead be able to invest in growth, job creation, workforce development and service delivery to Territorians.

We want to make the Territory a place where businesses want to come and operate, creating more job opportunities for people. We want people to move to the Territory knowing there are employment opportunities here for them. We want people to stay and invest in the Territory.

The scheme would have increased the cost for community services sector businesses operating in the Territory, including those delivering childcare, aged care, disability services, community mental health services, family and domestic violence services and community legal services. Many of these services are not-for-profit.

If the Labor–Greens–unions coalition had their way Territorians would have been forced to pay more for childcare at a time when they are already struggling to pay their bills.

I will quickly explain business 101 for the opposition to take note of, and I hope they are listening. When the government forces cost increases on businesses, businesses pass those costs on to consumers; it really is as simple as that. Territorians would have the cost burden of this scheme on their shoulders. That is what we heard from businesses and service providers through consultation, and that is what we heard loud and clear from local employers like Sarah Lloyd from Territory Child Care Group, who operates several day cares across Darwin. She said:

> *… the additional financial burden would have ultimately been passed on to families, which in the current economic climate would have placed even more pressures on families …*

On this side of the House we would know that, of course, because we have members with real-world experience and experience in business, so we understand and see the rationale behind repealing ill-thought-out schemes like these. But I am not here to lecture the opposition, not that they would understand basic economics. As a previous business owner of 25 years I know very well the cost and processes of doing business. Childcare centres all across the Territory told us the scheme would cost them $50,000 extra a year—a cost that would be passed directly on to parents in the form of increased fees.

Our government's priorities are clear: we are on the side of families raising their children here in the Territory, taking practical action to reduce the cost-of-living burden. The opposition on the other hand is not on the side of young Territory families, and they showed this in their ill-thought-out scheme.

In addition to the direct financial costs to employers, the scheme would have required employers to maintain detailed records for each employee and submit forms at the end of each quarter to an industry board. The scheme was to be funded by a wage-based levy imposed on sector employers, which actuarial estimates suggested would be in the order of $2,000 per employee each year. As such, the levy is similar to a payroll tax, but without any minimum wage threshold. Based on the estimate on 10,000 impacted employees, this would increase community services sector costs by around $20m per annum.

There is limited capacity within the sector to absorb these additional costs or pass them on in the form of higher charges. As such, they would either pass the cost onto the funders of service providers, mainly the Territory government, or increase the cost of living for Territorians. For service providers unable to recover costs through increased charges or government funding, there is the potential that the levy will result in them curtailing services or withdrawing from the Territory market.

Repealing the Act means the initial cost to government to establish and administer the scheme prior to its commencement will be removed, enabling our government to focus on our three key priorities to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle, and will ensure our businesses are not burdened with this additional financial, regulatory and administrative responsibility.

I now turn to the Bill clauses.

Clause 1 of the Bill sets out its short title: Portable Long Service Leave (Community Services Sector) Repeal Act 2025.

Clause 2 provides for the Act to commence on the day after the day on which the Administrator's assent to this Act is declared.

Clause 3 repeals the *Portable Long Service Leave (Community Services Sector) Act 2024*.

Clause 4 is a formal clause that provides for the Act to be repealed the day after it commences, having done its job of repealing the *Portable Long Service Leave (Community Services Sector) Act 2024*.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

**Mrs HERSEY (Public Service):** Madam Speaker, I move that the second reading of the Bill be made an order of the day for the first Assembly meeting after 28 days have elapsed.

**Mr PAECH (Gwoja):** Madam Speaker, I move the following amendment to omit all words after 'that' and insert the following words, 'the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by 20 May 2025'.

We heard from the minister about the importance of talking and consulting. The minister spoke about business and economics, but she did not speak about Territorians, families or people who will be greatly affected by this legislation that she introduced.

She is unwilling to send it to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee to enable the committee to have its deliberations and to invite people to give testimony about this legislation and the changes. Not only that, she dismissed the opportunity for Territorians to provide options to consider, which may result in better legislation.

We heard the minister, who does not care about working families and hardworking Territorians. The portable long service leave for people in this sector is incredibly important because they work in industries where there is not often continuity of service and funding, so they are often pushed to different organisations due to funding arrangements, wages and looking to grow and develop to get a better wage for them and their family.

That was ignored by the minister, who is interested in protecting only the big end of the Territory—big business—not the hardworking families who were excitedly talking about finally being recognised in the portable long service leave provisions.

The Territory is no stranger to portable long service leave; we have it in the construction industry. We have seen it work; it can work. Are there areas for improvement? There probably are, but that is when you take it to a committee to go through its process, deliberate, organise whether it will call for submissions and whether there will be a public hearing to hear from community services organisations and Territorians who work in childcare or have family members who work in childcare, the disability sector or a DV organisation.

This scheme afforded those people the opportunity to have portable long service leave for the first time, but the minister has ignored that. She is out of touch with working families and their aspirations to have portable long service leave.

I moved the amendment that this be referred to the committee for it to discuss the options and allow Territorians to have a say on this important legislation that will affect thousands of Territorians.

**K McNAMARA (Nightcliff):** Madam Speaker, I support this amendment. I will explain my thinking to the Assembly. It is easy to say that I think the opposite side of the House is just working for big business and does not care about struggling workers, but I will step back and come at this from the side of acting in good faith.

I know that we in this House genuinely want to make things better for people in the Territory. The issue we keep hearing is that it will cost childcare centres more, but do not punish the workers because you say childcare will cost more. If it will cost more, fix the issue with childcare; do not punish the workers for the issue of expensive childcare. Obviously it is not just childcare; it is also aged-care workers and disability care workers.

I ask the backbenchers and everyone else in this Chamber to think about their electorates. When the media release came out I sat down at my local day care centre and spoke to the workers whom I had been dropping off my kids to every day for six years. They were devastated. They are mostly women, and lots are migrant workers.

Many of those opposite might not realise, if they have not thought much about this issue, that a migrant worker in the community services sector often will not have a choice about where they work. They might work somewhere for four or five years, but if that centre does not offer to sponsor their visa, all of a sudden they have to move to a new childcare centre. That is out of their control. The migrant worker has to move somewhere new, but by doing so they lose the ability to keep their long service leave. In a cost-of-living crisis some of the lowest-paid workers—mostly women and many are migrant women—through no fault of their own are in an insecure workforce and have to move from place to place. The portable long service leave recognises that.

Portable long service leave exists in other jurisdictions. Queensland has it. We have it in the building industry. If we can afford it for builders we should be able to afford it for our lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers.

We have it for nurses and midwives. When they move from interstate they get to carry their long service leave to the Territory; therefore, we can do this. It is frankly not good enough to throw up our hands and say, 'The businesses in the sector told us it will cost too much'. You know what? We are a government for a reason. Let us ask why it will cost businesses too much. What can we do to enable cheaper childcare and support for our lowest-paid workers? We can do both.

I want this legislation to go to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee because I feel as though there are a lot of issues that have not been fleshed out and examined. If it goes before the scrutiny committee we can say that we are doing our best to look at all possible options to ensure that we are not shafting some of our most essential workers.

People in the sector have told me that we are stopping us from being able to recruit people from interstate. If someone is looking to move interstate they will see that if they move to Queensland they will keep their long service leave, and if they move to the Territory they will not. If they move to Alice Springs, and after a few years want to move to Darwin, Tennant Creek or wherever, they will not get to keep their long service leave. It is a massive disincentive for people moving around and coming to the Territory.

This is why I implore you in an act of good faith to put this before the scrutiny committee for it to rethink this poorly-thought-out Bill and speak to the workers in the sector. They are also suffering a cost-of-living crisis. We should not be shafting them because business owners have told us that it will cost them more. Great! Let us figure out a way to support childcare. If the issue is that it will cost us more, what can we do to solve that issue while not throwing these workers under the bus?

We have such an issue in the Territory with retaining and attracting workers. We talk all the time about retaining and growing our population. Disability care workers, aged-care workers and childcare workers are some of the most essential workers for our functioning society.

My kids are there every day. I talk to the childcare workers when I drop off my kids. Please do not throw them under the bus. Please think about their quality of life and their ability to have the best job. This exists in other places. There is no reason why we cannot have it here.

This is the reason people get frustrated with the two-party system. One party gets in and says, 'We want to throw out everything the other party did'. It is not thought through. Please think of the workers. Please send this to the scrutiny committee.

**Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader):** Madam Speaker, I support this amendment by the Member for Gwoja. The CLP government celebrated the return of the scrutiny committee. We heard late last night/early this morning that it does not support its own committee members when it comes to amendments and committee reports.

I should not be surprised. This morning, two of the three Bills introduced by the CLP government have been referred to the scrutiny committee. I find it concerning that the Member for Katherine, as the minister responsible for this legislation, is not looking at the open, transparent and fair process of the scrutiny committee to allow Territorians and affected people—workers, business owners, industry—to have their say on this legislation that will affect 10,000-plus Territory workers.

I find it outstanding—and not outstanding in a good way—that the minister refuses to send the repeal Bill to the scrutiny committee. It is an important process that the CLP celebrated in returning to government in the 15th Assembly. The CLP picks and chooses what should be scrutinised.

We heard the Attorney-General say this morning that these are minor amendments and that it is an omnibus Bill. I have never seen an omnibus Bill referred to a scrutiny committee in the eight years I have been a member of parliament—nearly nine years …

**Mr Burgoyne:** You did not have scrutiny committees.

**Members** interjecting.

**Ms UIBO:** We had scrutiny committees at the start. Obviously, none of them over there were a part of the 13th Legislative Assembly. They are now barking up the wrong tree. We had scrutiny committees, and omnibus Bills were never sent to the scrutiny committee. They try to be genuine and say, 'Look at us. We are open and transparent, but we will put the big Bills that affect thousands to one side and wait six weeks until the next sittings; then we will pass them.

I find it concerning that the CLP government members sit in this House of the people of the Northern Territory, being two-faced in their approach to scrutiny, picking and choosing how they want to be scrutinised. I am flabbergasted by this move. It is a process that the CLP government has reinstalled. We welcomed that from the start. We continue to celebrate the importance of the scrutiny of government. It does not matter who is in government, the scrutiny of government by all factions of our communities is important. It is part of the democratic process.

We are under the Westminster system; we all know that. Why are CLP members picking and choosing, at their convenience, what should be scrutinised and what affects thousands of Territorians? Remember, we are lawmakers in this place; yes, we have politics and we go back and forth, but ultimately the legislation passed in the Northern Territory parliament is how the Territory is governed. That is a huge responsibility which deserves the respect of the Westminster system processes, particularly the sessional orders and processes that have been installed by the CLP government for the 15th Legislative Assembly to reflect the needs, wants and aspirations of the Territorians we represent.

I support this amendment. It is a Bill that needs public input feedback and scrutiny through the committee process. Once again CLP members are sitting back thinking that it is okay to blindside Territorians—the reason they are in government—and march on without any care whatsoever about what decisions they make and how they affect Territorians.

**Mr EDGINGTON (Health):** Madam Speaker, I will respond to this proposed amendment by the Member for Gwoja regarding the Portable Long Service Leave (Community Services Sector) Repeal Bill 2025, Serial 18.

Talking about scrutiny committees is a bit rich coming from Labor. The Leader of the Opposition said that she has never seen omnibus legislation sent to scrutiny. I remind the Assembly why. In 2020 the Labor government, which the Leader of the Opposition was part of, scrapped scrutiny committees. The reason she has never seen omnibus Bills taken to a scrutiny committee is that there was no scrutiny committee between 2020 and 2024.

**Ms UIBO:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 38; the Member for Barkly is misleading the parliament. I said that I have been a member for nine years. We had scrutiny committees for four years before you entered parliament with your five-vote win, Member for Barkly.

**Madam SPEAKER:** I will reflect, from my own curiosity. The relevance or tedious repetition is Standing Order 38. I am not sure you have that number right, Leader of the Opposition, but I take your point.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I was talking about the period between 2020 and 2024. This is what the Leader of the Opposition does not want us to talk about. She was part of the government that scrapped the scrutiny committee in 2020, and there were no scrutiny committees between 2020 and 2024.

This legislation was introduced by the former Labor government in its dying days. That is the reality of this legislation; Labor introduced it to try to woo voters. There was no plan to introduce the legislation. I suspect Labor members probably had the same information we have, which is that they would have had to rely on a Treasury loan to cover its set-up costs; we estimated that amount to be between $4m and $12m. I suspect Labor was in possession of that same information, which is why it did nothing with the legislation. The Labor government introduced it, but it sat on the table and Labor failed to implement it, simply because of the costs involved. We have been told by childcare centres across the Territory that the scheme will cost an extra $50,000 extra a year. That cost would be directly passed on to parents in the form of increased fees. These are the issues.

This is a repeal Bill, and those opposite can carry on about this. It will be on the table for 28 days, and it will be debated at the next sitting of parliament. They are asking for this to go to the scrutiny committee so that someone else can do the work they should be doing. This is an opportunity for every member in the House …

**Ms Uibo:** To have scrutiny in the committee process.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Silence.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** … to talk to their constituents. Stop abrogating your responsibility. Stop arguing that it should go to the scrutiny committee because you do not want to do your job. Get out there and find out for yourselves. You will be told exactly what we have been told …

**Ms Uibo:** You are the government. Why don't you go and consult?

**Madam SPEAKER:** Silence.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The cost of implementing this will be $50,000 for childcare, which will be passed on to consumers. You knew that it would have cost between $4m and $12m to implement this legislation.

**Ms Uibo:** Your minister does not know what she is doing, that is why.

**Mr MACKAY:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! I have the correct number; it is Standing Order 20: No Interruption of Debate. I want to hear what the Member for Barkly is saying. It would be lovely if we could have some respect in this Chamber.

**Madam SPEAKER:** After the experience we all had last night of leaving here about 1.30 am, it is a bit early in the day for me to warn people.

Opposition Leader, I know you are passionate about it, but please listen to the minister in silence.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I noticed that the clock continued.

**Madam SPEAKER:** I will give you another minute or so.

**Ms Uibo:** It was not a minute.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I remind the Assembly that Labor did nothing. It introduced the legislation and did nothing to implement it because Labor knew, as well as we do, that this would have cost somewhere between $4m and $12m to implement and that it would be an impost of $20m on the sector.

There will be 28 days. It is an opportunity for each member to talk to people in the sector and find out what they are saying about it. There will be a debate about this legislation in the next sittings. That is your opportunity to have a say about it.

A scrutiny committee will not deliver what you expect because this is a repeal Bill; it is not about suggesting changes. This is a straight-out repeal of legislation in the next sittings.

Speak to your constituents and bring their feedback …

**Ms Uibo:** Talk to yours as well and see what they reckon. What does the Barkly say?

**Mr EDGINGTON:** We will discuss it then.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Silence.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** Madam Speaker, you can tell that those opposite are upset about this. They know they have been caught out. They brought in this legislation three months before an election without any funding to support it. They are angry because they know that they have been caught out.

We do not support the legislation. We will not be supporting the amendment.

**Ms Uibo:** Shame.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Opposition Leader!

**Mr EDGINGTON:** All I am hearing is the Leader of the Opposition constantly interjecting.

In closing, we do not support the amendment.

**J DAVIS (Johnston):** Madam Speaker, I support this amendment. I understand that the purpose of the scrutiny committee is to look at whether Bills have sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals. I think this Bill has a lot of community interest and concern, so it is the job of the scrutiny committee to look at it.

That does not take away from us as elected representatives talking to our constituents. That is our job; I agree, Member for Barkly. However, the job of the scrutiny committee goes further than that. I strongly

support this legislation going to the scrutiny committee so that we can do our job of trying to make the best law we can for the Northern Territory and all the people here.

The Assembly divided:

| Ayes 7 | Noes 17 |
|---|---|
| Mr Brown | Ms Boothby |
| J Davis | Mr Burgoyne |
| Mr Guyula | Ms Cahill |
| K McNamara | Mrs Carlson |
| Mr Paech | Mr Charls |
| Ms Uibo | Mr Edgington |
| Mr Young | Mrs Finocchiaro |
| | Mrs Hersey |
| | Mr Howe |
| | Mr Kerle |
| | Mr Mackay |
| | Mr Maley |
| | Mr O'Gallagher |
| | Mr Patel |
| | Dr Rahman |
| | Mr Yan |
| | Mrs Zio |

Amendment not agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

## MINISTERIAL REPORT
## Asian Relations

**Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations):** Madam Speaker, I will deliver the ministerial report on Asian relations, as notified yesterday, to report on the work being undertaken by this CLP government in our journey to reconnect with our Asian neighbours. As the minister responsible for Trade, Business and Asian Relations I am proud to be leading our government's engagement with Asia, with the portfolio already playing a crucial role in rebuilding and growing the Territory's economy and restoring our lifestyle.

International trade and investment are essential to rebuilding and growing the Territory's economy, which has faced numerous challenges in recent years, not the least of which was those on the other side dropping the ball on building relationships with our Asian neighbours.

The establishment of a portfolio for Asian Relations was of great significance; not only did it reaffirm our CLP government's commitment to the role the Northern Territory plays as Australia's gateway to Asia, it also sent a clear message to our Asian neighbours that our CLP government recognises the importance of those relationships and how critical they are as we work to rebuild and grow our Territory's economy.

In working to elevate and consolidate our relationships across the region we are taking critical steps to rebuild our reputation as the gateway to Asia. We are also working to advance our people-to-people connections, increase the two-way flow of our products and enhance enduring partnerships that will help us work together to overcome any future challenges.

The rapid growth of Southeast Asia and its 687 million residents presents an unparalleled opportunity for our economy. In today's world Southeast Asia stands at the centre of global economic growth, presenting significant opportunity for Australian businesses. In 2022 the combined nominal GDP of Southeast Asia was about USD3.6 trillion, larger than that of the United Kingdom, France or Canada. This economic dynamism is projected to continue, with compound annual GDP growth expected at around 4% until 2040, outpacing developed economies which are likely to average a growth of 1% to 2%.

The region's demographic trends are equally promising. With over half its population under the age of 35, Southeast Asia is home to a large, productive working-age population that is expected to drive economic growth for decades to come. The expansion of the middle class, already numbering at least 190 million people, will create demand for higher-value products and services, including healthcare, education and premium food and beverages.

Recognising the importance of strong, independent partnerships with neighbouring nations as Asia's influence grows, our CLP government will ensure that the Territory is prepared to navigate the geopolitical currents that define the region. We will foster relationships that protect Australian sovereignty and the national interest as that is what a responsible government must do, but we will not stop prioritising our economic interests, allowing us to compete and thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

By focusing on people, products and partnerships we will enable the Territory to achieve increased investment, a more diversified trade portfolio, a stronger more capable workforce and an even more vibrant and multicultural community. This will ensure we are contributing to not only our own but also Australia's resilience and success.

With a rich history of trade and cultural links that date back centuries the Territory's economic vitality is deeply intertwined with our Asian neighbours, with strong investment relationships established with key economies such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Singapore. Japan's investments in the Northern Territory's energy and mining sectors have laid a strong foundation for economic growth with emerging opportunities in low-carbon technologies as Japan focuses on renewable energy. Similarly, South Korean investments play a crucial role in advancing the Territory's mining, energy and infrastructure sectors as South Korea seeks reliable and secure energy and sources for minerals vital to its high-tech industries.

While we build upon and grow existing relationships we will look to expand beyond our established partnerships, exploring new opportunities to build relationships with other Asian neighbours, such as China, Timor-Leste, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam, where economic growth and demand align with the Territory's capability in resources, agriculture and tourism. Strengthening existing and building new relationships will diversify our trade partnerships and position us as a strategic location for investors seeking access to Asia's fastest-growing markets and advancing shared goals for sustainability and innovation.

As Australia's only capital city in northern Australia, Darwin stands closer to major Asian cities than those in the southern states. The significance of this geographical advantage cannot be underestimated and will play a critical role in re-establishing Darwin as the gateway to Asia. With recent announcements on international aviation connections between Darwin and Bali; Darwin and Kuala Lumpur by AirAsia; and Darwin and Singapore by Qantas, we have demonstrated that we are a destination of significance to the Asian region.

Advocacy is critical in our efforts to enhance the Northern Territory's economic prospects. Engagement with the Australian Government is essential for securing funding, influencing policy and leveraging the extensive networks available in northern Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

Our Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations is playing a pivotal role in this engagement, supporting our agenda and championing key issues on behalf of our businesses and industries.

Our CLP government is committed to making the Northern Territory's voice heard on the national and international stages.

Various Australian Governments have often been fickle in their support for the Territory, sometimes taking a lackadaisical approach to resourcing their own offices here, far from Canberra but close to Asia. In creating a clear focus on our proximity to Asia we are sending a clear message to the Australian Government of the role the Territory has to play in this space—advocating for policies, trade settings and investments that support our economic agenda and the needs of our community.

When the Territory wins, Australian wins. That is why the Australian Government must do more and take the Territory's position seriously. I will continue to call for more resources in the Territory to support our whole-of-nation-building industries. In the Territory we punch well above our weight.

I will advocate for an uplift from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as the Australian Trade and Investment Commission which will help to reinforce our agenda to grow trade and investment partnerships with Asia.

Just seven months into government we have already made significant progress. That progress commenced by saying yes to engaging with our friends and neighbours in the region and by ensuring our door is clearly open.

The next step was to reach out and engage with the region's representatives in Australia. We have welcomed inbound engagement visits to the Territory by a number of key partners, including the Ambassador of Japan

and the Consul-General of Japan from New South Wales, the United States Consul-General from Victoria and the President of the Timor-Leste Civil Service Commission.

I have held high-level meetings with representatives from the governments of Indonesia, Timor-Leste, China, Taiwan and Vietnam, reinforcing the Territory's proactive approach to regional integration. I regularly engage with the Indonesian and Timor-Leste Consuls based in Darwin. Each of these engagements have provided opportunities to identify mutual interests and drive initiatives that benefit the Territory, laying a solid foundation for economic and cultural exchange.

Our CLP government's ongoing collaboration with the Australia Indonesia Business Council (AIBC) underscores a commitment to supporting bilateral trade, investment and partnerships with Indonesia. The AIBC has been instrumental in bringing Australian and Indonesian businesses together, helping Territory enterprises tap into Indonesia's dynamic markets.

That is why, at the AIBC conference in Sydney last year, I chose to sign a memorandum of understanding with Indonesia on critical minerals and strategic supply chains. The MOU marks a significant milestone and is the first of its kind between Indonesia and any sub-national Australian jurisdiction.

As Indonesia realises its potential as Asia's electric vehicle manufacturing powerhouse, the Territory stands ready to supply the much-needed critical minerals and rare earths to make this a reality through our potential to supply those resources at the required levels. This MOU paves the way for future investments and partnerships, solidifying the Territory's role as a vital partner in regional economic integration.

Whilst meeting with foreign dignitaries and officials locally in Darwin and within the Northern Territory enables the Territory to showcase its unique strength and opportunities directly to key stakeholders, it is vital we visit our partners abroad to consolidate our relationships in the region. We understand the importance of active engagements with foreign diplomats and their governments in maintaining strong diplomatic ties as the Northern Territory strengthens its position as a key partner in the region and demonstrates its commitment to collaboration on trade, business and community initiatives.

In November last year I undertook our government's first overseas delegation to Timor-Leste where I met with the Deputy Prime Minister; the Secretary of State; various ministers, including the ministers for Health and Tourism; a range of businesses; non-government sector representatives; and training providers—about 180 people in total—to discuss the opportunities for growing the relationship between Timor-Leste and the Northern Territory.

It was no accident that the first international delegation undertaken by our government was to Timor-Leste, our nearest neighbour and friend, a place that is close to many Territorians' hearts. The visit to Dili was instrumental in strengthening ties with Timor-Leste and providing a foundation for our two governments to work together to explore collaborative opportunities in trade and development.

More recently I returned from an official visit to Indonesia, where I met with the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and the head of the Indonesian mining ministry to discuss fully implementing our memorandum of understanding on critical minerals and strategic supply chains. I was honoured to be invited to speak at the Indonesia Economic Summit, which was attended by over 1,000 participants, including titans of industry and key decision-makers.

I used this opportunity to emphasise the importance of strengthening economic ties between the Territory and Indonesia, highlighting that Australian sub-national governments can add value to our relationships beyond the Australian Government. I was also able to use this platform to remind our friends of the Territory's strategic role as Australia's gateway to Asia, promoting trade and investment opportunities, such as advanced critical minerals and energy projects, which are vital for the region's economic growth. Engaging with Indonesian businesses and government officials was crucial for fostering long-term relationships and unlocking new economic opportunities for the Territory.

While in Indonesia I also met with a number of Indonesia's largest corporations and conglomerates to sell the Territory story. We have developed great partnerships with Indonesian mining companies and look forward to doing more business with them.

I also had the pleasure of meeting with the Territory training provider GTNT to see and learn about its work in Indonesia. In what can only be described as a truly remarkable partnership, GTNT is providing vocational education and training in school courses in Indonesian international schools. I am informed that some of those students have now come to the Territory to work.

Every aspect of these engagements is critical in building relationships and fostering a cooperative spirit so that we can expand market access for Territory businesses and attract investors to our shores. These meetings have proven to me that we can better integrate with our neighbours in areas such as regional migration, skills exchange and international education, and address challenges such as biosecurity threats.

Re-establishment of the Trade, Business and Asian Relations portfolio by our CLP government marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the Northern Territory. Our road map for the future is clear: we will build on the foundations we have laid, expand our networks and pursue opportunities with tenacity and vision.

The Northern Territory's unique assets, strategic location, rich cultural heritage and innovative spirit position us to lead in a global economy that values connectivity, inclusivity and sustainability. In the year ahead we will deliver an ambitious program of in-market activities across priority Asian markets. In all my meetings with business and industry to date people told me that they want the government to do this—something that helps their industries and businesses have relevance and recognition in their markets.

I have already visited our nearest friends and neighbours, Timor-Leste and Indonesia. In addition to that, over the next 12 months I will be leading or supporting delegations to Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan and Japan. Each of these missions will focus on developing connections through our people, products and partnerships.

There are many Territory businesses actively engaged in international trade with Asia, and many more aspire to be involved in trading globally. We will invest in capacity-building initiatives that enable them to do this. Building our Asian business literacy will enable more meaningful and productive engagement and enhance two-way learning and trade.

Trade and investment opportunities will be secured through leveraging our natural strengths in tourism, agriculture, Defence, mining and energy. At the same time we will continue to pursue forward-looking investments that position the Territory for the future, such as digital technologies through subsea cables and data centres and securing private sector support for enabling infrastructure. Our government's role is to remove obstacles, create opportunities and allow businesses to drive our economy.

This year my focus is on action, certainty and security. As we build on our geographic and historical strengths, our goal is to empower Territorians to succeed and prosper. We will advocate tirelessly for policies that enable economic growth, attract investment and support our people. Ripe opportunities will no longer wither on the vine.

By capturing this moment the Northern Territory can build a resilient diversified economy that leverages our regional strengths and connects with international markets in sustainable and innovative ways. This will not only reclaim our status as Australia's gateway to Asia but also demonstrate that we can drive our own success. Through tireless advocacy, strategic partnerships and a clear focus on our priorities we will ensure that the Northern Territory remains a vital and dynamic player with our key partners.

Let us continue to look north, build our economy and strengthen our bonds with our neighbours. In doing so we will create a future where the Northern Territory is not only an economic powerhouse once again but also a beacon of prosperity, innovation and opportunity in our region.

I move that the report be noted.

---

**VISITORS**
**YouthWorX NT**

**Madam SPEAKER:** Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of the young adults from YouthWorX NT accompanied by their leaders. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome.

**Members:** Hear, hear!

---

**Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader):** Madam Speaker, I acknowledge YouthWorX. I know that the program you do is fantastic. I hope you enjoy your time here at Parliament House.

The Northern Territory has always maintained strong ties with our nearest neighbours, although listening to the minister you would think that she recently discovered Asia. We have a longstanding history of

relationships with Southeast Asia. In the Northern Territory, particularly in the Top End, we like to think we are the gateway to Asia when it comes to the Australian ties, relationships and foreign trade. Those relationships date back many hundreds of years, building on generations of mutual respect, trade, knowledge exchange and cultural understanding. The Territory's identity, economy and future prosperity are deeply ingrained in these important relationships.

Our Labor opposition is delighted that the CLP continues the robust productive Asian relationships forged by our former Labor government. Such relationships are not built overnight; they are carefully developed through consistent efforts, strategic engagement and genuine collaboration. It is gratifying to witness the continuity of these critical relationships, regardless of the change of government in the Northern Territory. This will ensure the Territory remains well positioned in a rapidly changing international economic landscape.

In the Territory, sharing knowledge and trade with international partners has been a longstanding tradition, actively nurtured and strengthened during the tenure of our former Labor government. We recognised early that our proximity to Asia presented unique opportunities, unlike anywhere else in the country, to expand trade and investment, attract tourism, enhance education and strengthen diplomatic ties across the region. Our approach was proactive, strategic and inclusive, resulting in a positive and enduring impact on our economy and community, and we are now seeing the CLP government take up that opportunity.

These relationships underpin the Territory's economic growth and opportunity, and they remain critical to the Territory's future. Our Labor team always understood this, actively promoting and strengthening these strong and important connections throughout the terms of government we were honoured to serve.

When talking about the Territory's relationship with Asia it is crucial to acknowledge the historical ties of First Nations Australians—particularly Territorians in the East Arnhem region—with one of our closest neighbours, the Makassans. The Yolngu, Anindilyakwa and Numburindi people traded with the Makassans from Indonesia long before European settlement, dating back to at least the early 1700s. It is more likely earlier than that, but that is what is documented in history books. These important relationships were built upon friendship, mutual respect, trade and cultural exchange. Makassan traders from Indonesia visited our northern Australian shores annually, primarily to collect and trade trepang (sea cucumber), a highly valued and sought-after commodity in neighbouring Chinese markets.

One could say that perhaps the first international trade missions set out from Northern Territory. We know that was undertaken annually, with the close relationship between Aboriginal Territorians and Makassan traders. The Makassans sailed from Sulawesi in Indonesia, using the monsoon winds to reach Australia's northern coastline. Their activities encompassed trading trepang (sea cucumber) and harvesting pearl shells, turtle shells, clam meat and shark fins. This regular and structured engagement provided economic and social benefits to the Yolngu, Anindilyakwa and Numburindi people and the Makassans.

The presence of Makassan trade had a profound and lasting influence on our First Nations culture in the Northern Territory regarding language, social practices and material and cultural exchanges. Makassan traders introduced metal tools, materials and tobacco, and they significantly influenced local, economic and social practices in the Northern Territory. On that seasonal trade route they also established temporary camps for processing trepang, leaving archaeological evidence, such as pottery fragments and the tamarind trees we see on the coastline, originally brought in from the seeds from Indonesia. Some historical sites are now recognised through national heritage listings.

Some of our Aboriginal words are Bahasa Indonesian language terms. The cultural integration is evident in the adoption of those words, artistic expressions, oral histories, songlines and dance exchanges. They have all provided compelling evidence of longstanding, rich interactions that are a testament to these relationships and the enduring mutually beneficial trading with our nearest neighbours. Understanding and appreciating this longstanding historical partnership is crucial when looking at insights into how relationships between Aboriginal Territorians and Indonesians can continue to thrive in the contemporary world. Acknowledging these routes also solidifies our contemporary diplomatic and economic relationships with our Indonesian neighbours, underscoring the importance of mutual respect, cultural exchange and strategic collaboration within those international relationships.

Asian relations remain one of the foundations of the Northern Territory's economic growth; it is critical to understand and recognise this. We have always known that, and it is great to see the CLP catch up. The previous CLP government significantly damaged our international reputation. Madam Speaker, it was a time when you were in the parliament, well before me. Unfortunately, it left a legacy of mistrust, instability and, dare I say, a few broken hearts. It required substantial sustained efforts by our former Labor government to restore confidence among our international partners. It is pleasing to hear the new CLP government

acknowledge this and the essential role of international relationships, seemingly learning from past mistakes. Let us hope for all our sakes that the CLP does not repeat the damaging mistakes of the past.

The Northern Territory has a unique strategic advantage over the rest of Australia. We are incredibly attractive to investors, with our wide range of natural resources, stability in the region, stringent and strict biosecurity regime and physical proximity to Southeast Asia. Our distinct geographic position makes us a natural hub for trade, investment and cultural exchange, allowing us to capitalise effectively on these attributes.

The former Labor government used these strengths as the basis for the Territory's most ambitious International Engagement Strategy, which will expire in 2026. This comprehensive strategy set a clear vision for expanding our global footprint and deepening our existing business and international relationships for the Territory's economy, while benefiting culturally and socially. Developed in close consultation with business and industry leaders, this strategy sought to maximise economic, social and cultural benefits for all Territorians.

No doubt the CLP has already ripped up that strategy, despite the extensive consultation with industry and business leaders. However, it remains a quality piece of work put together by our wonderful public service. The CLP may have pulped the strategy, but I am glad that key elements of it feature in the CLP's economic plan and its rhetoric. It is critical that the CLP does not attempt to reinvent the wheel, but builds on the important relationships forged under the former Labor government and carefully continues to foster these relationships to benefit all Territorians.

We were pleased to hear recent announcements, such as the new direct service from Kuala Lumpur to Darwin, with the minister enjoying the limelight. We are happy to celebrate that, as we know it was built from the work of our former Labor government. We will happily continue to support and celebrate any new aviation connection to the Territory because it is great news for locals and for the Territory economy.

That connection has been two years in the making. The CLP government likes to pick and choose what it celebrates and what it rubbishes. You would think it had done all this work in the last six months, but it was two years in the making to forge those relationships and work with businesses and industry for that positive outcome from which Territorians will benefit. We are delighted to see that two years of work come to fruition.

This new route was made possible because of the former Labor government's Territory Aviation Attraction Scheme, which was launched in 2023. The $10m scheme allows Darwin, Alice Springs and Yulara airports to tap into government funding to support the development of essential aviation services. Under the scheme the applicant matches the funding dollar for dollar, so the full value of the scheme is $20m.

Territorians love to travel, particularly to our nearest Asian neighbours. At a time when affordability and the cost of living are at crisis level, the accessibility of flights is a real issue for Territorians and Territory businesses. This scheme has supported new Asian and domestic routes to help stimulate the Territory economy and improve and support liveability. We acknowledge that the CLP government has continued this scheme and encourage it to consider ways to extend it, given the high-yielding success we expect to see.

We are happy to support these initiatives and schemes because this is what Territorians want to see, and we know that the work we did under the Labor government should be built upon. The CLP often picks and chooses what it wants its narrative to be. With all the work the CLP has done over the last six months of taking credit it never once acknowledged that this started years ago under Labor. The CLP likes to blame Labor for eight years of government, but it never commends us for anything. I will commend the CLP government if it continues to support this important scheme.

We are more than happy for the minister to claim credit for the important Northern Territory-Indonesia critical minerals memorandum of understanding that was signed last year. This is another great deal for the Territory. That hard work commenced under the former Labor government. The abundance of critical minerals in the Territory—the precious metals necessary for the manufacturing of batteries, semiconductors and renewable energy technologies—is a great selling point for the Territory. The opposition will continue to support it.

Mineral production drove more than $4.8bn in value in the Territory in 2023, with some 4,400 people employed in this industry. Demand for these critical minerals is projected to rapidly grow as the transition to renewable energy and battery storage increases.

Along with the crucial role that minerals play in the Territory economy, there are other areas that people do not always connect with minerals, such as medicine and Defence. The Territory needs to continue to prepare the building blocks for current and future technology. We have tremendous opportunity in the NT to maximise the benefits we receive from strategic and critical minerals.

The MOU with Indonesia will promote opportunities for critical mineral investment. It will encourage joint exploration and the development of processing, refining and collaboration on sustainable mining practices and skill development.

This is an exciting MOU, one of a number that have been signed or were negotiated under the former Labor government, including a five-year implementation plan with the Vietnamese province of Khanh Hoa, an MOU with West Nusa Tenggara in Indonesia and a four-year strategic partnership with Timor-Leste.

In April last year 60 key industry leaders and representatives from Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the United States gathered in Darwin to discuss critical mineral production, supply chain resilience and economic security. That was a huge achievement for the Northern Territory, and Darwin in particular, with global recognition of our role in the critical mineral supply chain. That is all part of the work the former Labor government delivered to build and nurture meaningful relationships with our important close neighbours.

In 2023 a delegation from the Northern Territory travelled to India for important trade and investment meetings with government officials and tourism, aviation and energy and manufacturing companies. India was identified as a primary market for the Northern Territory and has been a highlight in the Northern Territory's International Engagement Strategy 2022–26. It is one of the Northern Territory's 10 key trading partners. The delegation sought new opportunities for the Territory in one of the world's fastest-growing major economies to forge new relationships and investments in our critical minerals sector to grow two-way trade opportunities.

The trip also included the signing of the MOU with the Kerala state government. It was the first MOU the Northern Territory entered into with an Indian state. The MOU highlighted key areas of focus for our two jurisdictions, including two-way trade and workforce training and development, with a big focus on healthcare, higher education, vocational education and training.

I had the honour of being the Workforce Training minister in the first term of the Labor government from 2016, and Kerala was one of the states I visited on a trade mission to India. It was an eye-opening experience. To see the MOU signed a few years later was an accomplishment of which the Northern Territory can be proud.

We have a strong and vibrant Indian community in the Northern Territory that contributes to our social, cultural and economic strengths. The MOU was an important step towards making sure those stronger trade ties with India remain.

Similarly, the former Labor government led trade missions to other key markets, including Japan and Korea, speaking to businesses and potential financiers with interests in gas, hydrogen, renewables, critical minerals, carbon capture and storage, decarbonisation and emerging technologies. INPEX was part of those conversations and remains one of our longstanding investment partners in the Northern Territory.

SunCable is the project that continues to shine—excuse the pun—and will move us closer to renewable energy. It will supply world-class sun-driven renewable resources to customers in Darwin and Singapore, and it will create thousands of jobs in the industry, particularly for Territorians. SunCable has signed a non-binding agreement with Singapore's Energy Market Authority to supply 1.75 gigawatts of low-carbon electricity from Australia; the Territory is at the heart of this.

SunCable's AAPowerLink is proposed to include the world's largest solar farm, which will operate in the Northern Territory for 70 years. This program of works comprises two unique projects, DarwinLink and SingaporeLink. DarwinLink will deliver onshore generation from the Barkly—the Member for Barkly is supportive of this—with 800 kilometres of overhead transmission being planned for and a connection to support Darwin's new green industry. SingaporeLink seeks to deliver offshore transmission and connection to Singapore via a 4,300-kilometre subsea cable. It will be the longest in the world. This project will play an important role in regional trade security by developing a new export industry for renewable electricity.

Our focus on international education is a significant part of what can continue to grow the Territory's economy.

**Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama):** Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for an excellent report.

I have strong professional experience and a passion for growing our trade and investment opportunities across the dynamic Asian region. I commend the initiatives taken to date by our CLP government to restore—I emphasise 'restore'—our relationships in this region. These relationships build on the Territory's strengths, including close proximity, complementary business and trade opportunities and, importantly, our local multicultural society with strong links into the region.

Building these strong and productive relationships requires a genuine long-term commitment by the Territory government; it requires growing our relationships at the political, business and community levels. Having supported, and at times led, many Territory trade investment missions to Asia—including but not limited to Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Malaysia, Singapore, China, Vietnam, Japan, Thailand, South Korea and Taiwan—I can tell you that successful business is achieved, as many of our Asian neighbours will confirm, by becoming trusted friends first. The restoration of a dedicated minister for Asian Relations sends a strong signal to our regional partners that this government is genuinely committed to supporting the growth of the Asian region, of which I believe the Northern Territory is truly a part.

The CLP first established this ministry, under former Chief Minister Marshall Perron, with some of our early ministers, Barry Coulter and my good friend and mentor Daryl Manzie. Subsequent Labor and CLP governments recognised the importance of this initiative with the strong support of their various Chief Ministers, including Clare Martin, Paul Henderson, Terry Mills and Adam Giles. Having supported all these Chief Ministers and other ministers on many overseas missions, I can honestly say that they all genuinely promoted the Territory's interests when abroad. Some of these missions included bipartisan participation, jointly involving the Leader of the Opposition or their representative. I think that is commendable.

The composition of these missions often included many Territory businesses that were actively developing export and import opportunities in the region, as well as local community leaders who facilitated connection with their existing networks in the region. A clear example of this was the strong support of the Jape family in introducing other local businesses to their business networks in Timor-Leste.

Let me also remind the Assembly that this is a two-way relationship. That is why we need to explore export and import opportunities. We often hear the phrase, 'The Territory is our gateway to Asia'. I prefer to say 'gateway with Asia'. On that note, while we often hear about the Territory participating in overseas missions, the flipside is just as important; that is, facilitating overseas missions to come to the Territory to see and hear firsthand about the business and investment opportunities that exist here. That includes our five critical industry sectors, which are tourism, Defence, agriculture, gas and mining.

Past highlights of my career in government and with the Chamber of Commerce included hosting of the joint Australia Japan Co-operation Committee, with 200-plus high-level businesspeople in Darwin in 2014, and the hosting of the Regional Australia–Asia Chambers forum twice in Darwin. The last one had 230 delegates, including more than 120 business delegates from 10 countries in Asia and the Indian subcontinent. They are coming here to look at our opportunities.

I continue my passion to build our relationships in the region and share these opportunities and networks with local businesses and our government. These opportunities include meeting with a major Vietnamese business visiting Darwin this week, with a view to establishing a mango processing facility in Darwin to process mango products from our waste mangoes for export across the region. I am holding up an example of the products it already produces, and I will give people a sample, including the chocolate chip ones. I connected these investors with the minister for Agriculture's office.

I am helping John Rivas, Honorary Consul to the Philippines in Darwin, to support a trade delegation from the province of Negros Occidental in the Philippines, led by Governor Lacson, to Darwin in May. I know that Minister Cahill is looking forward to meeting the delegation when they visit.

I have visited that province many times. We have a unique situation whereby they fund their students to come here to study, particularly in hospitality and childcare, and the students pay back the government. I know the governor is looking to expand that when he comes here. It is a great initiative. He and his delegation are looking at agriculture and tourism opportunities.

As you can see, we have many opportunities. Unfortunately, I believe the Gunner–Fyles–Lawler government dropped the ball on this exercise, and it is a shame. I heard the Leader of the Opposition talking about lots of MOUs—I have seen so many MOUs you would not believe it. They sound great. Yes, we have signed an agreement, great! Then they get thrown away or collect dust on the wall, and sometimes our Asian neighbours comment that they are all talk and no action.

This government is serious about recommitting to Asia; we are following up with action. You heard the minister in her report talk about aviation coming up. I know there was work done beforehand, but one of the drivers for companies to develop new aviation links is that they now have confidence in the Northern Territory economy to support such developments. Under Labor they were saying, 'Thank you very much, but I am not so sure about that'.

I believe this is important for the region; it is important for our economy and our social fabric. Let us use the talents we already have here. That is what we build on. A lot of our diaspora have connections throughout Asia and the Indian subcontinent; we must use those networks. We do not have to reinvent it all. We can use what we have, and we will get the benefit. We must be there for the long term; we have to be committed, and we cannot say that we will have a minister for Asian Relations and then say we will not, as these countries will become confused and not understand what we are doing.

This government is committed. We have been there for a long time, and we stay committed. I believe that the minister's report highlighted a range of future opportunities, and I commend her for doing it. I urge her to push hard. Go for it; you have the support of everyone here, the wider business community and the multicultural societies. You can do this for the benefit—but we need to work together and tap into everyone's knowledge. Importantly, I want the opposition to give its bipartisan support.

**Mr HOWE (Drysdale):** Madam Speaker, first and foremost I thank the minister for her hard work in the last seven months. The minister has done more for trade and relations with our Asian neighbours in the last seven months than the previous government did in eight years. The return of flights is evidence of the hard work she is putting in. She has visited Timor-Leste and Indonesia. She spoke at the Indonesia Economic Summit in Jakarta. In Indonesia she met with more than 80 people from business and government; in Timor-Leste she met with more than 180 people from the business community.

She has received inbound engagements from the Ambassador of Japan and Consul-General of Japan from New South Wales, the US Consul-General from Victoria and the President of the Timor-Leste Civil Service Commission. She has also held high-level meetings with representatives from the governments of Japan, China, Taiwan and Vietnam. This minister is dedicated to opening pathways with Asia, which is exactly what we need in the Northern Territory.

Why are Asian relations so important? Throughout this century we will see humungous growth from our Asian neighbours. They are experiencing mass population growth coupled with a huge consumption demand. They are looking for trade and investment throughout the world. We are perfectly placed to share the benefits of the Asian economy in this century.

To give an idea of just how big that economy is, 40% of global GDP will come from Asia by 2030; by 2050 that number will reach 52%. By the middle of this century over half the product of the entire world will move through Asia. To put that rapid growth in perspective, in 1980 that figure was only 18% of global GDP.

In the Southeast Asia region growth will be approximately four times that of ours. We are positioned to assist it in some of the unique challenges it will face. Its growth alone indicates a significant challenge. Southeast Asia will have large demands in areas of entrepreneurship, innovation and technological development, all of which we can assist and economically benefit from.

Southeast Asia will have massive urbanisation, which opens up huge opportunities for multiple industries and professions in the Northern Territory. It is undergoing a financial transformation. As its markets mature, a developed nation like ours with the skills and expertise we have in the Territory can aid and maximise the mutual benefit. Southeast Asia will have an intense need for energy and natural resources. That demand will only grow. It will need governance and institutions. As a conservative I love our institutions. They are paramount to ensuring the success of our neighbours as they rapidly grow.

In research and technological breakthroughs our universities and research institutions are perfectly situated to assist with this.

Looking at the five pillars we have, how can we assist and the NT benefit?

Our agriculture industry can be the food bowl of Asia. Through the NT Cattlemen's Association I want to see beef throughout Asia. It is the best beef in the world. We have large open plains. The Asian markets will want our beef; I want to see beef selling in supermarkets and stores all over the Asian world.

In mining, the simple fact is that Asia has a huge demand for resources, and we have those resources. That speaks to Bills we have recently passed, ensuring the NT can deliver resources for the rest of the world.

Asia's need for energy is exponentially growing. We sit on a large natural gas reserve that can supply a far more ethical and climate-friendly option than a lot of markets are using. I argue that we have an ethical demand to meet. Getting our gas out of the ground and exporting it to the Asian market will create cleaner energy in Asia and benefit the Northern Territory significantly.

For the tourism industry there are 700 million people in Southeast Asia, within four hours' travel. With the region's economic growth there will be a massive increase to its middle class who will want to travel, and we can offer a unique experience.

Finally, with Defence, be left in no doubt that we are in one of the most strategic places that the world cares about this century. With the increase of 52% global GDP by 2050, the security of the Southeast Asian seas and the Indo-Pacific will become paramount. Free democracies such as ours will want to ensure a safe and secure trading environment for all our neighbours. Often not discussed is that with the rapid growth and wealth-building that will occur in Asia a natural increase in Defence spending will come. We want to make strong partnerships with our neighbours to ensure that the environment, maritime trade and geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific stay stable and peaceful and that we are looked to as a leader. No doubt the Northern Territory should be a leader in the Indo-Pacific region, and we see that with our investment with the US Marines. Many countries in the area will look to us as the nearest Western nation to ensure there is leadership in providing security to those maritime routes.

We have a natural advantage with our large multicultural community—this can be seen in the parliament—and our government will wish to leverage those relationships. With one in five Territorians born overseas we can leverage their communities to open trade routes for the benefit of all.

Our government will deliver action, certainty and security for the NT. We will also lead in the Indo-Pacific region and ensure that security goes to all our neighbours and trading partners. We are open for business. To every leader and business in the Asian world: the Northern Territory is open for business, and we are looking to do business with you. To Timor-Leste: *Mai ita haburas ita-nia rikusoin hamatuk*; to Indonesia: *Mari kita membangun kekayaan bersama*. To all our Asian neighbours I send the same message: let us grow our wealth together.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Member for Drysdale, using a different language in parliament poses a range of problems, mainly that we do not know what you have said. Could you provide an interpretation?

**Mr HOWE:** I did at the end, 'to all our Asian neighbours, I say the same thing: let us grow our wealth together.'

**Madam SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri):** Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Drysdale. I can reiterate his translation, as the Indonesian-speaking member of this parliament.

**Mr Howe:** She helped me.

**Mrs CARLSON:** I had to check it.

I thank the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations for her report. How wonderful it is to hear that in her short time with this portfolio she has been working hard to look at investment opportunities for the Territory with its neighbouring countries.

The CLP government sends a clear message to our Asian neighbours that we value our relationships with them, and we are open and ready for business. There are more than 687 million people in Southeast Asia within a four-hour flight of Darwin. Because of this close proximity it has been an integral part of the Territory's population growth and trade in the past.

Darwin, as Australia's only capital city in northern Australia, is closer to major Asian cities than those in our southern states. I can fly to Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, in one hour and 25 minutes. I remember in the 1980s flying regularly to Kupang, Indonesia, to visit my family, and it was only a short flight of one-and-a-half hours.

The Territory has a multicultural society, with one in five Territorians born overseas. Connectivity to other countries is important to see family and friends. For several years, Territorians had little choice under Labor. Connectivity brings tourists, families and friends to the Territory, which brings dollars that are spent here.

It was great to see the minister announce a new route with AirAsia to Bali. The minister also announced a direct route to Kuala Lumpur. This allows for choice of connectivity for tourists, family and friends by air both ways. Increased direct flights to Singapore with Qantas, to supplement the current Singapore Airlines route, will also see connectivity to key markets, such as the United Kingdom and Europe. These new routes will increase trade and business for the Territory, which means our tourism industry can thrive, grow and provide job opportunities for Territorians new and old.

The Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations continues to rebuild our relationship with our neighbouring countries. The Territory has a rich history of trade and cultural links with our Asian neighbours that dates back two centuries, including with the Makassans. The Makassans came on the north winds that bring monsoonal rains. They went in search of trepang (sea cucumber), which is an item valued for food and medicinal purposes. In exchange for the fishing rights, the Yolngu were given goods such as cloth, tobacco, rice and knives. For more than 200 years the Makassan fishermen arrived each December and camped along the Arnhem coast. Trade worked well between the Makassans and the Yolngu back then, and these trade relations are being re-established after years of Labor eroding those relationships.

We may no longer be able to trade trepang, but the Territory's trade investment opportunities will be secured through leveraging our natural strengths in tourism, agriculture, Defence, mining and energy, as mentioned by the Member for Drysdale. Half of Southeast Asia's population is under the age of 35, providing the working population that drives economic growth. Demand for our products and services, including healthcare, education and premium food and beverages, has increased, with over 190 million middle-class people throughout Southeast Asia. Re-establishing our trade relationships will strengthen and stimulate inbound and outbound trade, attract foreign investment, increase tourism, welcome international students and address the actual work demand we need in the Territory.

The CLP government has inherited Labor's excessive $11bn debt, and the minister continues to re-establish relationships with our neighbouring countries to attract private and foreign investment to rebuild our economy. Rebuilding the Territory's economy includes tourism activities, the connectivity through travel and international students who study and may stay on to work, later setting down roots to become contributing Territorians.

I congratulate the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations for her work in rebuilding our relationships to rebuild our economy so that all Territorians benefit. The minister has the support of the multicultural members of the community. As the member of this Assembly born in the Territory of both parents from the nearest neighbouring country, Indonesia, I commend the great work undertaken in such a short time. I have spoken to the Indonesian Consul at a number of events; he and his country are excited about the MOU signed. I congratulate the minister on her tireless work and dedication to rebuilding our Territory economy with our Asian partners.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

## QUESTION TIME

### Katherine High School – Violent Incidents

**Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER**

Your Education minister described a number of recent serious violent incidents at Katherine High School as 'little issues'. Will you tell parents and carers of Katherine schoolchildren and young people that you also think these are just 'little issues'?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, law and order, public safety and the support and wellbeing of our police is our number one priority, and it remains that.

Opposition Leader, unfortunately, Katherine High School has been in the media for weeks for all the wrong reasons. It is unfortunate because we want safe streets and schools. Parents need peace of mind that when they are sending their child to school they will be safe and getting a great education.

Whenever there are incidents it causes great concern amongst the student community, the teachers and the parents.

We have seen a number of responses from our police and public housing safety officers on the back of the operation we ran over the summer period.

I thank the department staff in particular, who brought in strong leadership to make sure we are supporting that school with everything it needs. Our attendance officers are doing an incredible job. This is something we pulled together straightaway after the election to make sure we get kids to school.

NT police are doing an amazing job. I believe there have been wanding and other activities at that school to send a clear message to kids who are doing the wrong thing that it is not okay and to give comfort to parents that we are sending a strong signal.

Our Aboriginal liaison officers are the most incredible people; they are providing on-the-ground support in our communities.

We will continue that work. It continues to be a disappointing period, but what the minister for Education is getting to the core of—being the Member for Katherine as well—is that we cannot detract from the good things happening at Katherine High School with incredible kids and teachers and learning.

When you are a town with only one high school it is important that people have confidence and certainty in that product …

**Ms UIBO:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question specifically asked whether the Chief Minister will also trivialise these issues, like her Education minister, and call them 'little issues'.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** If the Opposition Leader wants to cherrypick quotes she can fill her boots. I am talking about making sure that we have a safe community. We just sent another 10 police from the recruit squad to Katherine. We have a school community supported by strong school leadership. Parents have the confidence to send their kids to school. We have school-based constables, Aboriginal liaison officers and school attendance officers—an entire team—working with that school to support our kids.

## Declan's Law – Making Territorians Safe

**Mrs ZIO to CHIEF MINISTER**

Two years ago Territorians awoke to the terrible news of the senseless and tragic loss of life of a young man killed at his place of work by a perpetrator on bail. That led to an outpouring of community anger and frustration at the failure of the former Labor government to act on violent crime and keep Territorians safe. This started Declan's law. Our CLP government implemented Declan's law in the first sittings of parliament in October 2024. Samara Laverty was here for that.

How has the senseless death of Declan Laverty been honoured through these changes to our bail laws and knife-crime laws? How are these making Territorians safe?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, like the Member for Fannie Bay, I awoke to that news two years ago. We send our sincerest and most heartfelt condolences to Samara and Bridget Laverty; for them today is an unimaginable, unspeakable day. I spoke to Samara this morning and conveyed our sympathies to her. I placed some flowers at Declan's memorial at the BWS where his life was taken from him all too soon.

The killing of Declan sparked a wave of movement across the Territory. There were rallies with thousands of people on the steps of Parliament House. People across the Territory were concerned, angered and standing up to the government to say, 'Enough is enough. We cannot take this anymore.'

Declan became a symbol, a rally point for change, and we are so proud to have delivered that change. During the first sitting of parliament in October last year, we put through Declan's law on urgency. It was our reducing-crime package. We worked with Samara Laverty on Declan's law to make sure that Declan's legacy is remembered. His death sparked change for the better for a community crying out for a government to do something about it. We are proud to have worked closely with Samara on that and to have had her here during the passage of that Bill.

Today, two years on, we remember him in the work ahead of us, and we reflect on how powerful a legacy he leaves in what we have been able to achieve so far.

Through the reducing-crime package we took to parliament in October, 10 individuals have been charged under post-and-boast laws; all of those are before the courts. Under the wanding laws, which was a key part of Declan's law—Samara wanted action on knife crime—3,162 people have been scanned, with 35 separate scanning activities. Fifty weapons were seized, of which 41 were edged weapons. They are 50 weapons that did not make it into our community to possibly perpetrate violence on others. Fifteen people were arrested. We are proud that the wanding reforms are making a difference. We will never know the lives that has saved.

Fifteen youths have been charged with the new ramraid offences. There have been 136 infringement notices for public nuisance drinking issued.

We are seeing strong results from our strengthened bail laws because we know that people who do the wrong thing should have only limited chances, and we are putting the rights of people to be safe above the rights of offenders.

**Katherine High School – Violent Incidents**

**Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING**

You described the string of recent serious violent incidents at Katherine High School as 'little issues'. The Chief Minister said that 2025 is your government's year of action, so why have you downplayed and not acted on these serious violent incidents other than to seek a briefing from your department? Do Katherine parents agree that these serious violent incidents are 'little issues'?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I am happy to speak about Katherine High School, which has amazing things happening in it. It has the student Learning Commission; I met with those students the other week. There are great leaders in that school.

As the Chief Minister said, you are cherrypicking a little quote from the media that came out of Katherine High School. As the minister and the Member for Katherine I have been 100% championing—whether it be a school in Katherine or any school across the Territory—to make sure that staff and students feel safe and are supported in their learning environment. That is the most important thing.

We have put student attendance officers and engagement officers in to support the school while it has been going through troubling times. I will not back away from that. Each week, and sometimes daily, they have had concerns in the school environment. As the minister I will acknowledge that, and I will not back away from it because I want schools in my electorate and across the Territory to be safe environments for staff and students.

We have school-based policing there. One of the school-based police who had retired has gone back to help support the school because the relationships she has with those students and the community are of the utmost importance for the school to come together and move forward.

The student leaders met recently with the Learning Commission. We can either focus on the negatives or talk about the amazing things happening at the school. We have great Teach for Australia teachers—fantastic leadership. In fact, the whole of the leadership team, apart from the principal, turned over this year.

**Mr YOUNG:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. My question was whether Katherine parents agree with you that these serious violent incidents are 'little issues'?

**Mrs HERSEY:** I am answering the question, and I am happy to talk about Katherine High School. I meet with parents regularly or see them at the shopping centre. I have spoken this morning with parents who had concerns about the school.

**Ms Uibo** interjecting.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I pick up on the constant interjections by the Leader of the Opposition. Her member has asked me the question; she should have the decency to listen and not waste time.

As the Education minister I will not shy away from addressing the issues in my community. I am doing more than the previous government did; it had three Education ministers in its terms. I am talking to families and listening to the students and teachers. I am making sure that all schools are safe environments.

**Gas Industry – Benefits**

**Mr PATEL to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY**

We repeatedly hear from local opponents of resource development that our onshore gas industry provides no royalties to the NT Government and that the industry does not provide employment for Territorians. Your

recent second trip to the Beetaloo Sub-basin shows that the CLP's strong commitment to driving forward Territory gas developments brings significant economic investment and royalties for Territorians. This investment represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Territorians. Could you outline to the Assembly the current and developing benefits of our onshore gas industry to Territorians?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I recognise the excellent work the Member for Casuarina does in his electorate, especially his volunteer work with the seniors. Well done.

Before I answer this question, I will say that I love the gas industry, and I support it wholeheartedly, as does our government. As the Chief Minister recently said to the activists, 'Get on a plane; go back to Melbourne or wherever you are from. You are not welcome here.'

The gas industry is important to the Northern Territory. As a powerful person recently said, 'Drill, baby, drill'. The Mereenie, Palm Valley and Dingo gas fields in Central Australia have been operating for 40 years and are now managed under a commercial joint venture arrangement operated by Central Petroleum. The NT receives royalties from the onshore gas production by Central Petroleum and its partners. Last year we received approximately $8m, which pays for police, education and the health system. Those industries are vital to the Northern Territory, and they have been let down by the previous Labor government. The health and education systems are in chaos.

Central Petroleum supplies approximately 30 terajoules of gas, which is approximately half our gas demand each day. It has been keeping the lights on in the Northern Territory. This is critical, given the gas supply shortages from Blacktip. The NT Government has a gas sales agreement with Central until 2030, which provides energy security for the Northern Territory.

To put it simply and bluntly, without our gas industry the Territory would grind to a halt. Currently about 88% of electricity generated in the NT is sourced from the gas industry. That is despite Labor's perceived 50% renewables by 2030 target—at a massive cost to the Northern Territory and a complete failure. We need gas to keep the lights on for Territorians today and to build the economy for tomorrow, for our children and grandchildren.

The gas industry is super important. It pays for education. I support the gas industry.

**Ministers' Social Media Posts**

**Mr PAECH to ATTORNEY-GENERAL**

The Auditor-General's report tabled last night has found that social media posts made by several CLP ministers breached the *Public Information Act* by publishing misleading information and promoting CLP interests. You were one of three ministers who failed to acknowledge the Auditor-General when you were asked to respond. As the Territory's first law officer can you explain why you have ignored this statutory process; why you have still not taken down the misleading posts; and how you consider this conduct aligns with your responsibilities to uphold compliance with the law?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, as a former Attorney-General the Member for Gwoja knows all too well how the Auditor-General does his job.

The Auditor-General's report was tabled in parliament last night. It outlined that he looked into reports of posts by me on my social media page. He also suggested it was found that the data was not misleading.

He said that I posted a post about the Acacia budget blowout of $61m—our hospital IT system—which was under the former Labor government. The Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health and for Corporate and Digital Development; both ministries are responsible for that $61m budget blowout. Whilst the report is accurate that there was a social media post on my Facebook page, the accurate part was that it was misleading, and he quotes that in his report.

It is interesting that you try to discredit the new CLP government for actions. That budget blowout was ginormous. Imagine what that $61m could have been spent on. People at one of our major hospitals—our emergency departments have so much demand and were crippled under a Labor government—told the

Labor government that the new system would make things even worse and that lives were at risk, yet Labor continued down that path. The system is not even finished yet; it will to cost more money to finish.

**Mr PAECH:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. With less than a minute remaining, Attorney-General, you were one of three ministers who was clearly highlighted to have failed the *Public Information Act*. Why did you ignore the request to meet the Auditor-General?

**Ms BOOTHBY:** He does not like listening to the answer. Member for Gwoja, thank you for asking the same question again. I am answering the question.

The Auditor-General came to me wanting to find out what I had posted, how I posted it and how I found out the information. I met with the Auditor-General and told him where I got the information from—which was the government, from the Health minister—to say that there was a $61m budget blowout. It says that in the report. Everything was aboveboard. He put out the report, and it was tabled last night in parliament. That post remains there because it is not misleading. The Auditor-General said that it is not misleading. It says that there was a $61m budget blowout, and it was under your watch.

**Members** interjecting.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** The Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health and for Corporate and Digital Development. It was her budget blowout, which we highlighted. Those opposite do not like us highlighting their failures.

## Residential Development – Alice Springs

**Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT**

It is no secret that Alice Springs' reputation struggled under the neglect of the disastrous former Labor government. When we came into government we promised to make Alice Springs once again a great place to live, work and invest. There has been a number of positive infrastructure announcements for Alice Springs since the CLP returned to government last year. These include projects such as a new public library, a new multicultural centre, a skate park and upgrades to some of Alice Springs' most-loved sporting facilities. Can you update the Assembly on upcoming residential developments in Alice Springs that will enhance liveability and contribute to economic development?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, this is a great question because I am excited to get this project off the ground in the heart of Alice Springs. The project I am talking about is the one I recently approved as the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment. It is an exceptional development permit for 94 Todd Street, in the centre of town, commonly referred to by locals as the old Melanka site.

This exciting new development will include 144 dwellings across four six-storey buildings, one five-storey building, an office space in a single-storey building, ample car parking and designated bicycle parking. Everyone in this Chamber knows how much I love getting on my bike and out into the community.

This development represents a significant milestone in the Alice Springs CBD. It has been over 15 years since the old Melanka site was torn down. I remember bootscooting in the old Melanka bar when I was a young fella. It is a shame that for 15 years that site in our CBD has been a flat bit of land since it was bulldozed. Since then several regulatory frameworks have been introduced to ensure these developments meet the needs of the community while fostering sustainable growth.

This project has been through a comprehensive review process and will undoubtedly contribute positively to the growth of Alice Springs. Not only will this development provide much-needed housing options for the local community, but it will respect the natural environment by safeguarding three sacred trees and preserving other significant trees on the site.

There will be green space in the middle of the development, which is a positive and welcome output of the revised development plans. We hear so often, 'Where is the public's ability to have their say?' There was a public submission process whereby people put in their submissions and, as a result, the proposed plans were changed, which is leading to one less building and more green space.

Its proximity to the CBD, schools, hospitals and recreational facilities will promote greater pedestrian movement. Additionally, the thoughtfully designed office building on Hartley Street will maintain a heritage-inspired theme, ensuring design consistently across the street frontage. That is because it is part of the heritage precinct along Hartley Street.

The views from Anzac Hill of Heavitree Gap and the MacDonnell Ranges will continue to shine and promote the Red Centre's natural beauty; that is what we love.

It is time for us to get projects off the ground, put Alice Springs back on the map and show the industry that the Territory is worth investing in.

**Mining – Profits**

**J DAVIS to TREASURER**

You have claimed that if large extractive industries are allowed to develop in the Territory, benefits will flow to Territorians. Can you be clear with the Assembly what the Northern Territory Government will receive from these industries, specifically how the Territory's budget will benefit? It is important to clarify that the Territory's budget, the money the government uses for services like health, education and infrastructure—which you have discussed—does not increase simply because companies make profits. GSP may rise, but that does not mean you get more money.

Despite claims from the Member for Sanderson and the Deputy Chief Minister that mining and gas contribute significantly to GSP, this talks about all money flowing into the NT, not what Territorians receive. We get money only if companies pay taxes, royalties or employ locals.

Can you let us know how much money we can expect to get from the gas industry and what your government will do to ensure we get it?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, this feeds into the late night we spent here yesterday, working through the Territory Coordinator Bill, which is part of the larger picture for developing our economic framework for the future. Part of that economic framework will be our resource and minerals sector. I was proud to stand with the Chief Minister yesterday on a panel with the Minerals Council, promoting our economic framework for the future.

I will talk about what those minerals and resource sectors, including gas, do for the Territory. Look at the Beetaloo, for example. If memory serves me correctly, early stages of production out of the Beetaloo will start to produce $8m to $10m in royalties. That goes into the Territory's coffers. As the Beetaloo grows, those revenues will increase. Some of the future projections of royalties are into the hundreds of millions of dollars per annum.

It is not just the royalties the Territory gets from the gas; it is also the other benefits for the Territory from the construction phase and the development. As part of the Beetaloo we need to do the infrastructure corridor that will link Tennant Creek to Darwin. That will benefit the Beetaloo as well as other industries along that corridor.

That corridor will take quite a bit of work. We will need people and businesses to develop it. In conjunction with the Beetaloo money we will receive from royalties and the income tax we may get from those companies, the other infrastructure projects which support that industry will be generating revenue for the Territory and creating employment.

As those businesses construct and develop those corridors, including Middle Arm, more people will be employed, which means more people in the Territory spending more money. The development of the economy from the spends by people moving and living here—particularly if we can increase our population—will drive increased revenue from the federal government by way of GST revenue.

Everything we do in the minerals and resource sector starts to drive different parts of our economy and increases revenue across a number of spaces within the Territory. Mining royalties start to pay the bills, as the Member for Nelson spoke about earlier.

The mantra is ‘a strong economy in the Northern Territory creates a great Northern Territory’. That will be key to the future. We welcome these industries and businesses spending money in the Territory because they will increase our revenue, whether it be in royalties or in income tax.

**Secondary Schools Reform**

**Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING**

Secondary education in the Northern Territory is being reformed to support students to complete school and transition into post-school pathways and careers in the Territory. Consultation with school councils has kicked off this month with parents and families invited to attend throughout the Territory. The Member for Casuarina and I attended the forum at Dripstone Middle School last Thursday.

How is the CLP government supporting school staff and students with the transition? How will this transformation ensure that education for our children is enhanced with these changes, in particular Dripstone Middle School which students from my electorate attend?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, the Member for Wanguri is passionate about education. I was with her recently at a childcare centre. She is doing work with the secondary school reform program as well.

I am pleased to see that the Member for Wanguri has engaged with our extensive secondary reform program, which is being rolled out across the Territory. As the Member for Wanguri mentioned, school council meetings are an important part of this consultation program.

A series of school council meetings have been held this month across Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs. These meetings have had significant engagement with school representative bodies, parents, teachers, school staff, student representatives and learning commissioners.

This important reform program relates to the move away from middle school in the Territory. This was a key recommendation of the former Labor government’s Review of Secondary Education in the Northern Territory, released in 2023 and supported by the CLP prior to the election last year.

We need to get this transition right. Changing our decades-old secondary education structure will not happen overnight. The move away from middle schools will take time and careful planning. That is why we kicked off this comprehensive consultation program with planning to continue over the course of the year with no changes to our middle school model in 2025. The shift away from middle school is important and will be fully supported by the CLP government.

A shift away from middle schools will ensure our student pathways are more aligned to the Territory’s skills needs and, importantly, keep our students engaged throughout their secondary education, helping to boost our shocking attendance rates.

To update the Assembly on the next steps of the secondary reform I can advise that planning in March will focus on urban areas and what the future state of comprehensive high schools—Years 7 to 12—will look like in these areas, with remote engagement occurring next term. This engagement will help develop tailored delivery models bespoke to each region; there is not a one-size-fits-all model.

In some areas of the Territory the transition to comprehensive high schools will be relatively straightforward, but in other areas planning will be significantly more intensive. I thank the teachers and parents who attended our meetings and provided valuable input into the future planning of secondary schools in their local communities.

Following this important engagement, high-level plans for each impacted school will be developed over the course of the year. These plans will identify implementation priorities, such as changes to infrastructure, curriculum and pathways; staff and student transitions; and transportation. A phased transition to the new secondary education model will then commence from next year.

**Ministers' Social Media Posts**

**Mr BROWN to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING**

The Auditor-General, whom we hosted today at our PAC meeting, found that your social media posts breached the *Public Information Act* because they were misleading and politically biased. You have since agreed to remove these posts, being the only minister found in breach to do so. Can you explain to Territorians why you published this misleading information in the first place and what steps you have taken to ensure that this breach does not happen again?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, the Attorney-General summed it up nicely before, but I will reiterate that and explain my part in that.

Yes, the report was tabled last night. I met with the Auditor-General. I had to explain to him where the post was from. It was from our government, and I posted it on my social media page. The information came from the Health minister.

The Health minister under this cloud was in fact the Opposition Leader. The facts are that in January we revealed that the Acacia budget for the patient health record system blew out by $61m, from $259m to $320m. These are facts; this is stating the facts. The Health minister had a media release stating the facts of what happened under the previous government and the now Opposition Leader.

Although it is all factual information I explained to the Auditor-General that it was my post on my social media, and I am in charge of my social media. As the Attorney-General said, it was not misleading.

The Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health and for Corporate and Digital Development, so she was in charge of it at the time. The budget blowout was not told to Territorians until we came to government.

That is not the only landmine we uncovered. We went from a $1.8bn debt to $11bn, which is why we cannot roll out things across the Territory for education, health and police. Blowing out a budget by that amount, from $259m to $320m—words escape me. It is unfathomable how those opposite could let that go on. That was one of many things.

Yesterday I spoke about portable long service leave. We are repealing that because this was yet another uncosted scheme from the previous Labor government.

The Member for Arafura can ask me about my social media posts, but he was a part of the government that made this blowout and left us with a crisis.

**Ministers' Social Media Posts – Supplementary Question**

**Mr BROWN to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING**

If it was factual, why did the Auditor-General request that you take it down?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader had a post about our Health minister in one of the bathrooms here as well. The Auditor-General's role is to ask about posts we do on social media. That was one of the ones …

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mrs HERSEY:** As I said, I met with the Auditor-General. I explained to him where the information in the post came from. It was from a media release by the Health minister. I put the post on my social media account.

I cannot help it, but the facts are the facts. The Opposition Leader, who was the Health minister at the time, should be navel-gazing and having a look at herself.

## Migration

**Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, MIGRATION and POPULATION**

Although we have a small population which has, sadly, been in decline under the last government's leadership, Northern Territorians know that the Territory is a great place to live, work and raise a family. Can you update the Assembly on the work that is being done to encourage migration to the Northern Territory to grow our population and strengthen our economy? Moreover, can you update the Assembly on the benefits that come with growth in the Territory's population?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Fong Lim for the work he is doing in this space as the assistant minister for International Education, Migration and Population and the work he does in supporting the multicultural community.

Skilled migration is critical to our workforce. An analysis undertaken by Charles Darwin University found each additional skilled migrant contributes about $108,000 annually to the gross regional product, with migration forecast to contribute $1.4bn to the NT economy between 2021 and 2027.

We have established a dedicated Office of Workforce Development to drive workforce development and support businesses with the goal of attracting and retaining skilled workers, ensuring businesses have the workforce they need to grow.

Our General Skilled Migration program works to attract migrants with in-demand skills to fill workforce gaps. This year the program will deliver 1,600 skilled visa nominations; that is expected to bring in approximately 3,000 new Territorians when family members are included. To support our work in this area we have the Skilled Worker Engagement and Support Program to provide information—for example, a welcome guide with information about jobs, accommodation and health—and help migrants settle in the Territory.

Today I signed the NT DAMA III, an NT-specific employer-sponsored migration program with concessions from standard national visa criteria to make it easier for NT businesses to fill workforce shortages. The best in the country, DAMA III increases our visa allocation from 625 to 1,500 per year. We negotiated an additional 190 skills, giving employers access to 325 skill sets under this agreement, most critically in the construction industry.

Our Global Worker Attraction campaign targets domestic and overseas markets with upcoming campaigns, including online seminars in South Africa, the United Kingdom and Ireland in May and face-to-face NT Jobs expo and seminars in New Zealand in July 2025. A digital marketing campaign will launch in June and July 2025 to attract workers from Melbourne, Ipswich, Adelaide South, Perth and ACT.

Our WorkerConnect platform allows NT employers to post jobs for free, enabling jobseekers from across the globe to access and search our NT-based job program. Currently there are 13,379 registered jobs and 511 registered employers.

These initiatives demonstrate the CLP's commitment to growing our population and driving the economy forward.

## Imperial Oil & Gas – Reportable Incident

**K McNAMARA to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT**

A document obtained recently—through freedom of information—by Lock the Gate Alliance shows that on 29 July 2024 a briefing was provided to then Minister for Renewables and Energy, Kate Worden, in relation to a potential prosecution under the *Petroleum Act* of Imperial Oil & Gas (Empire Energy) for fracking and/or related activities on exploration permit 187, even though the brief document has been withheld under privilege.

The incident is not legally privileged, so what was the nature of the presumably serious environmental incident that was the subject of the brief? Why is it being kept secret by your government, given that traditional owners are being asked to agree to the sale of exploration gas from Imperial for EP187, and any agreement signed without full disclosure is likely to have been negotiated under false pretence?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, without having the specific details of what the member is talking about, I will speak directly to the reportable incident of which I am aware.

Imperial Oil & Gas had a reportable incident, which remains under investigation. Authorised inspectors are reviewing information provided by Imperial Oil & Gas, planning who attended the site. Sampling and information collected as part of the investigation will inform the regulatory response.

It is important to understand how these things come about. When a suspected spill is alleged to have occurred, the reportable incident is reported by Imperial Oil & Gas to the regulator, who then sends people to site to inspect what has occurred.

On 11 January 2025 Imperial Oil & Gas notified the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment of a reportable incident at an Imperial Oil & Gas onshore gas well site, the Beetaloo Sub-basin; I am assuming that is what we are talking about. The incident involved the release of fluid from a well site, initially thought to be rainwater, which was later found to be contaminated. It has been described to me as saline water.

Authorised inspectors attended the site on 15 January 2025; they took water and soil samples from the incident area. An inspector's direction under section 89L(1) of the *Petroleum Act 1984* was issued on 22 January 2025, directing Imperial to undertake actions to minimise environmental harm.

Whenever these incidents occur it is important to ensure there is a response from the necessary regulatory framework. I will continue to look into what the Member for Nightcliff has raised and ensure that anything I have not been able to properly address is addressed in future responses.

**K McNAMARA:** Supplementary question!

**Madam SPEAKER:** I am sorry; that has been used by the Member for Arafura.

**Major Events and Tourism NT**

**Mr KERLE to MINISTER for MAJOR EVENTS**

The Northern Territory is home to some of the most iconic events in the country, from the Darwin Festival to the Finke Desert Race. These events bring thousands of visitors to the Territory each year and are critical in supporting local businesses, creating jobs and boosting our economy.

I understand the government is exploring ways to strengthen the connection between Major Events and Tourism to maximise visitation and deliver better outcomes. Can you explain how this approach will help rebuild the Territory's economy and ensure we are making the most of our world-class events to drive tourism growth?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I recognise the critical role that major events play in the Territory's economy. The member is right; the CLP government is committed to rebuilding the economy; a key part of that is ensuring our tourism and events sectors are working together strategically to attract more visitors, drive investment and create jobs.

That is why we are exploring the integration of the Northern Territory Major Events Company and Tourism NT. We need to create a more targeted and effective approach to destination marketing and major event promotion.

For 25 years NTMEC has successfully delivered large-scale events. Over time its focus has shifted towards attracting visitors to the Territory, which aligns closely with Tourism NT's objectives. By better aligning these efforts, we can strengthen our brand, increase national and international visitation and deliver stronger economic outcomes for Territorians.

A more coordinated strategy will allow us to maximise the impact of iconic events, such as BASSINTHEGRASS and the V8 Supercars, by ensuring they are marketed effectively to the key tourism markets, leveraging combined expertise in event management and destination marketing to reach the broader audience.

We need to do more with what we have. We need to create efficiencies and reinvest resources into growing visitation and supporting our tourism operators. We must rebuild our economy by driving spending in our accommodation and hospitality sectors and local businesses. Over time NTMEC's role has evolved beyond event management. We are looking towards a more mature model; this integration is the first step in making that happen.

This is similar to other destinations. This is not new; it has been done before. It will enhance the Territory's ability to promote major events as a powerful tourism tool. By integrating the two we are ensuring a smarter, more cohesive approach to tourism and marketing. This approach will deliver real economic benefits to the Territory.

Under Labor, visitation had declined and the industry lacked direction. The mismanagement—for example, a particular major event in the MXGP was a budget blowout. We are now having to find the money to deliver on time and on budget.

**Portable Long Service Leave – Community Services Sector**

**Mr BROWN to MINISTER for PUBLIC SERVICE**

Northern Territory public servants, including teachers and health workers, have the portable long service leave entitlements they deserve. Will you tell Territorians working in childcare, aged care, disability services, social services and community legal services why they are not worthy of the same entitlements?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, we have spoken a bit about portable long service leave. We spoke about it yesterday, and I answered questions in Question Time. This is another scheme that was not costed; it was thrown at Territorians three months before the election.

I spoke about it in my speech this morning.

**Mr Edgington:** Another failed stunt.

**Mrs HERSEY:** Yes, as the Minister for Health said, it was another failed stunt. There are many of these schemes. The Attorney-General spoke about motocross. We do not have enough time in one day—unless we do an all-night session like we did last night—to go on about all the failings and uncosted projects that were left to us with these landmines from the previous Labor government.

That would have forced the cost onto families or parents with children in childcare. It would have cost those organisations an extra $50,000; that is not a cost those businesses can bear. They would have to pass it on to the parents and families using the childcare service. If it was such a great scheme and an amazing thing to support, why did Labor bring it out three months before the election?

There are all these people who we 100% think are great workers in the aged-care and childcare industries. They had eight years of Labor, which decided to roll out this scheme three months before the election.

**Mr YOUNG:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I ask that the minister brings it back to the question: will you tell Territorians working in childcare, aged care, disability services, social services, youth services and community legal services why they are not worthy of the same entitlements?

**Mrs HERSEY:** I thought I was answering the question quite well. The opposition, having been in government for the last eight years, does not like the fact that three months before the election it tricked Territorians into a scheme that was uncosted with no funding for the future …

**Ms Uibo:** Listen to yourself.

**Mrs HERSEY:** I pick up on the interjection from the Leader of the Opposition. I am listening to myself because I am answering the question. It was not costed. Labor was tricking Territorians three months before the election. It is eight years of Labor's failure.

## Critical Mineral and Strategic Material Supply Chains MOU

**Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for TRADE, BUSINESS and ASIAN RELATIONS**

The Northern Territory's economy was going backwards under the last eight years of a Labor government. As highlighted here today the CLP restored the Asian Relations portfolio to emphasise the importance we place on increasing trade and investment activity across the region. As part of the CLP government's plan to rebuild the economy could you inform the Assembly of the importance of re-engaging with our Asian neighbours and, in particular, the importance of progressing the historic memorandum of understanding signed with Indonesia about critical mineral and strategic material supply chains?

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations, you will be heard in silence.

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, much appreciated. I know how important growing our economy is to the Member for Goyder and his electorate.

Critical to growing our economy is engagement with Asia. That is why this is such a priority for our CLP government. As a close neighbour, Indonesia is a natural partner for the Territory. It was for this reason I signed a critical mineral and strategic material supply chains memorandum of understanding at the Australia Indonesia Business Council National Conference in Sydney last year. This was the first of its kind between Indonesia and any sub-national Australian jurisdiction.

Last month I led a delegation to Indonesia to progress the MOU. I met with Indonesia's Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and the head of the Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. These are big players, not junior staffers wheeled out as a courtesy. In a time of geopolitical uncertainty our friends and neighbours are looking for trusted partners, and we are Indonesia's trusted partner. This MOU matters to Indonesia. We have agreed with the Indonesian Government that we will establish a bilateral working group to take the MOU forward and make sure it is actioned and not relegated to a box in a cupboard in some government department.

The Northern Territory has known deposits of most of the critical minerals that are essential for electric vehicle batteries—lithium, nickel, cobalt, manganese and graphite—which will support Indonesia's goal of becoming an EV production hub. Its plan is for 600,000 vehicles by 2030. Indonesia wants our MOU on critical minerals and supply chains to work because we can supply the inputs upon which its economic development relies.

In Jakarta I met with companies and stakeholders from some of the largest companies in Asia that are already investing in Australia. We need them to invest in the Territory as well. We expect many of those companies to visit us sometime in the next few months as part of a delegation.

The rapid growth of the Indonesian economy presents opportunities for mutual benefit in both regions. The team at the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations and our CLP government are committed to working on partnerships with Indonesia and our Asian neighbours. This is a critical part of rebuilding the Territory's economy.

Some have come before in the business sector, and some are new to the Territory. Every businessperson we meet wants more information to better understand what our government can offer and how good our business environment is for them to invest in.

## Screen Industry

**J DAVIS to MINISTER for TOURISM and HOSPITALITY**

The screen industry in the Northern Territory has rapidly expanded in the last five years, with major productions from Netflix, Stan and Amazon Prime coming to the Northern Territory, spending millions and employing local crew. How do you plan to keep the momentum of this positive and culturally influential sector going?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I am excited to answer this one. It is the first question I have had on Screen Territory. To give you a bit of background, for those who do not know, it was the CLP who first advocated for a Screen Territory and first supported the idea for Screen to come to our wonderful Northern Territory. Not long after that there was an election and a new Labor government. Luckily the Labor government put some money into it, not as much as the CLP would have put into it, but nonetheless some money.

We have done the numbers for Screen Territory because we are going through budgets looking at what works and what does not. We are doing that across government because over the last eight years some things have worked and some have not; we need to know what they are. For every $1 invested in local screen production our economy sees at least $4 in return. That is thanks to increased employment and spending on local goods and services and tourism.

Our reputation as a go-to filming destination continues to build, which is exciting. We had the Netflix series called *Territory* late last year; it employed 292 Territorians. It engaged more than 100 Territory businesses and reached number one globally after three days of release. The spin-offs from the Netflix series *Territory* were phenomenal. Around the globe people were talking about the Territory. Whether or not you have seen it please know that it is being talked about, especially with our United States friends, and we have more visitors coming from the States who are talking about having seen *Territory*.

**J DAVIS:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I am interested in knowing what the minister is doing to support the ongoing growth of this.

**Ms BOOTHBY:** I feel like I am answering the question. We will be looking at Screen Territory to ensure that we continue to invest in it. There is another new film coming up soon, a high-end family feature film called *Kangaroo*. It will be in cinemas on 18 September. It was filmed in and around Alice Springs last year, putting Central Australia on the global stage, which is fantastic. I look forward to seeing *Kangaroo*. If that is not support for Screen Territory's future, I am not sure what is, but I am excited about this and will continue to support the industry.

**Housing Reform – Tenancy**

**Mr HOWE to MINISTER for HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

As I have said previously, in the suburbs of Gray, Driver and Gunn in the electorate of Drysdale, my constituents have had enough of their lives being torn apart by too many cases, day-in and day-out, of tenants and associated visitors who demonstrate zero respect for our community. They have had enough of seeing the housing and services that are paid for by the Territory taxpayer treated with contempt and trashed.

Can you update the Assembly on the work you are undertaking with your department to make the few, who drastically affect the lives of many, accountable?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I know how important this is, and it is close to the Member for Drysdale's heart. The inaction of the Labor government to address problematic tenancies within social housing over the last eight years has resulted in the mess the CLP is now required to untangle and clean up. Law-abiding Territorians have been forced to endure neighbours from hell whilst hardworking Housing staff have tried to deal with these issues.

Member for Drysdale, I know you work tirelessly for the good folk in your electorate. They are fed up with the state of play across the Territory, just like residents across the many other electorates I have visited. They are fed up with crime being rampant and community expectations being grossly neglected.

It is obvious that over the last eight years Labor bent over backwards to accommodate those who have repeatedly broken the law, the rules and their basic tenancy agreements at the expense of those who do the right thing. In fact, in the last four years, the number of antisocial behaviour complaints has remained unchanged, remaining between 8,000 and 10,000 per annum. However, action taken by Labor to hold tenants accountable dropped by at least 50%.

What does that mean? Were reports of antisocial behaviour in public tenancies swept under the rug? Or is it that the threshold for repeated breaches was raised so high that it became practically unreachable? You will be pleased to note that our housing reform empowers staff to refine processes for tenancy termination,

ensuring that matters referred for tenancy termination—or evictions, as they are well known—are prepared and supported by strong evidence and align with legislative requirements. We back our hardworking housing staff.

Public housing tenants who cause repeated disturbances, threaten their neighbours and blatantly disregard community standards will be called to account. The days of second chances are over, with Labor setting a benchmark for inaction on seeking termination despite the number of Red Card demerit points.

The days of no support for department staff are over. We get behind our staff and give them the encouragement and support they need to get on with the job. The days of no respite for the community are over. We are determined to work with Territorians to strengthen policy, fast-track evictions and take a serious stance against antisocial behaviour in social housing.

We are determined to challenge the status quo and change the narrative. If you cannot follow the rules there are plenty of people on our extensive waiting list who should and will have the opportunity to take up public housing.

**Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business):** Madam Speaker, while I am on my feet I ask that further questions be placed on the Written Question Paper.

## MOTION
## Objectives of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement

**Mr GUYULA (Mulka):** Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly recommits and affirms the objectives of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement so that by 2027 the NT Government will:

1. reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians

2. engage and support Aboriginal leadership

3. improve justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement is not perfect. It is not a true agreement in the sense that there are no consequences if the agreement is not kept. I see this as problematic because when dealing with governments the writing is always written in the sand; we never know when it may disappear. We have no way to hold the government to account on this agreement.

Despite these problems I strongly support what is outlined in the agreement. I see it as a commitment by the former Labor government and this CLP government to try to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians because we are grossly over-represented in the justice system.

On 8 January 89% of adults in correctional facilities were Aboriginal. Often 100% of children in correctional facilities are Aboriginal. With laws that target marginalised people, the percentage of Aboriginal people in our jails will increase. Aboriginal people only make up approximately 30% of the Northern Territory population.

The ABC reported on the weekend:

> *When ranked among the world's countries, the NT's incarceration rate of 1,238 per 100,000 people is second only to El Salvador where the rate is 1,659.*

The ABC article goes on to say:

> *The data cements the Northern Territory as Australia's most imprisoned jurisdiction, with an incarceration rate three times greater than next-placed Western Australia.*
>
> *It also has the highest reoffending rate in the country, according to the Productivity Commission, with six out of ten prisoners returning to jail two years after being released.*

This is not something for the government to be proud of. We should not be proud of the 500-person increase in our jails. This government should see that as a big problem which requires significant bipartisan support and must have strong partnerships with community that include shared decision-making in order for us all to solve this problem together.

We are not seeing the government working in partnership to solve these problems. This government has decided that locking up people is the only solution.

The watch house jail conditions have been horrific. We do not live in an area where we have dungeons, but that is what is happening in the NT. Watch houses have become the modern-day version of dungeons.

The *NT News* quoted the Minister for Corrections' brother, Peter Maley, asking whether his German client could please attend his next court hearing in person because it was the only break he would have from his cell in two weeks. Mr Maley said:

> *There are 19 people in the cell, there is no space to move, the TV doesn't work … there's literally mattresses on the floor.*
>
> *The only break he has got for the last 14 days is coming into the court.*

At the same time, Ms Ormiston, a United Kingdom citizen, told the court that she had been assaulted while in the women's section of Holtze prison and subjected to almost constant lockdowns.

The *NT News* reported about Hussein Chamas from New South Wales, who was allegedly being assisted by others to leave the country while on serious drug trafficking charges. He pleaded with the NT court to be sent to New South Wales immediately because he could not stand to go back to the overcrowded Palmerston watch house where he had not had a shower for days and had been unable to make any phone calls.

What about our people of the NT? Northern Territorians are having to endure these conditions every day.

Mr Maley had his client and friend bailed to a hotel, and the New South Wales man is back in a New South Wales jail with access to showers, phone calls and his own bed.

The *NT News* reported the story of two Aboriginal women who were bailed from the Alice Springs watch house after many weeks in one room with up to 20 others. They said that they had two Weet-Bix and six sugars, to be mixed with water from the sink above the toilet cistern, for breakfast each day for approximately five weeks, and they had to share beds on the floor. I thank these women for speaking out about the poor prison conditions.

Yolngu have spoken to me as well. People are worried for the old people not receiving medical care who have boils and were stuck in the cold cells of the Palmerston watch house with air conditioning pumping all day and night with no opportunities to go outside for exercise, fresh air or sunshine. They could not even leave their cell.

The answer to Written Question 50 states that a detainee was held for 34 days at the Palmerston watch house with no access outside the cell, and the lights were on 24/7. I am told that when detainees are transferred to the Darwin correctional facility there is the opposite problem, with people being held in the sport-and-rec area all day like cattle in a cattle yard with no relief from the heat.

These stories show us that nothing is happening that will help people to rehabilitate. They will come out much more hardened. They will come out angry that they have been treated worse than animals. They will have trauma, maybe lifelong trauma.

Ms Ormiston from the UK was assaulted. How many other people have been assaulted? These are huge concerns about how prisoners are being treated. As a Yolngu leader I have to stand up for my people, and everyone else who is being assaulted and traumatised in these prisons and watch houses.

I have brought on this motion because I am struggling to understand how the actions in this Chamber and of this government are meeting the commitments made in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. If we are not working on rehabilitation through addressing the underlying issues we will not reduce offending. If people are coming out of jail with further trauma they will keep reoffending.

This government is ruining people's lives by pushing people past the point of rehabilitation. I am aware that the previous Labor government did not do enough to put in place the programs that would help people. I have called and called for peacekeepers, *raypirri* camps and genuine local decision-making by our leaders and elders, but these things did not happen, and now we have a new government.

I have spoken endlessly about the importance of our homeland towns; we need to see our children on country. I have talked about the children of the intervention; these are the young adults having so much trouble now. We can reverse that problem. If we invest in our homelands we will see a future generation that is strong, healthy and happy.

We must do the preventive work to build strong generations. This is where every government has failed. It is time to see new housing in our homelands as part of the $4.4bn rollout of housing. I will talk to the Housing minister about that.

I do not believe that the Bills that have passed through this parliament since the CLP government came to power in 2024 have been about looking after all the people of the NT. Sadly, this is an enormous mistake because when you do not look after everyone you end up looking after no-one.

We do not need a government that is tough on crime; we need a government that can be smart on crime. We need to look at the underlying causes and remove the problems that are causing crime. Poverty, trauma and addiction-based crime will continue and will harm people if this government does not address these issues that lie beneath crime. Gangs and racial hatred will grow if this government does not address the inequality that exists across our communities. Suicide rates and rebellion will grow if Aboriginal people continue to be discriminated against in every setting.

Has anyone else in this Chamber been refused service because of their race? Twice this year I have been told to pay for my fuel before I pump it into my car. While every white person around me was pumping their fuel I was standing at a bowser that was locked because I am Aboriginal.

When the Chief Minister says, 'I will not acknowledge Larrakia country' at a ceremony regarding the bombing of Larrakia country, she is saying, 'Who cares about the First Nations people of this country?' This is an invitation for others to show no care.

Acknowledging country is something we do in this Chamber every day. As a Yolngu person standing on Larrakia country I want to acknowledge the people of this land. It is acknowledging that this country has its stories, songlines and ancestors running through it. It is respectful to acknowledge where you are; it is not disrespectful of everyone else. It is about saying hello to this country. It is a cultural practice for the First People of this country, and it is an act of kindness and respect.

Acts of kindness and respect are needed most in the NT right now. This government must be part of creating a community that builds kindness and respect across the community. I understand there are many victims of crime. We must do our best to create a better community so that we break the cycle of harm caused by crime. However, the high rates of imprisonment under this government will not break the cycle of crime.

The other day a family worked together to steal a loaf of bread. Somebody watched this happen. This is a crime.

Today the *NT News* said that the ABS data from 2023–24 shows that the NT leads Australia in crime. We need to look at what crime is being committed. In that year 28% of the crime in the NT was for public order offences. In no other jurisdiction in Australia are the percentages for public order offences so high. For example, in NSW it was 4%. We must look at the underlying issues and find a solution.

Yolngu law is restorative. Balanda people called a spear in the thigh barbaric, but it was a carefully measured approach by elders for the most extreme lawlessness. Today we do not do this. We can symbolically throw a spear in the sand and order the perpetrator to pay compensation, banish someone from their community if they have done something terrible or send someone into ceremony to give them knowledge and teaching that helps them to rehabilitate. The judgement comes out of a ceremony where the clans come together, and the judgement is given with consensus from all clans. The offender, victim and mediator clans work together to restore peace.

**Ms UIBO:** A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I seek an extension of time for the Member for Mulka.

Motion agreed to.

**Mr GUYULA:** There are no criminal records; the issue is resolved, the slate is wiped clean, the people are reunited and there is harmony.

What is happening in the NT justice system does not bring harmony or rehabilitation.

I hope the government will support this motion. We need to see significant changes to the justice system from what is happening now. We need community peacekeepers in our remote communities, elders who are resourced to do mediation and work with police.

We need local decision-making, investment in homelands on country, resources for *raypirri* camps and alternatives to prison. This will require a significant investment now so that we can achieve the goals set out by the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Before I conclude, I thank everyone who speaks to this motion.

**Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General):** Mr Deputy Speaker, the Member for Mulka has raised the Aboriginal Justice Agreement in his General Business motion, which includes a request for a recommitment by the NT Government to reduce offending and imprisonment amongst Aboriginal Territorians, engage and support Aboriginal leadership and improve justice responses and services.

Our government went to the election with three commitments: reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle. All three commitments heavily rely upon by our ability to reduce crime with the reform we have already brought about and the actions we will undertake this year and into the future.

The Territory cannot have a strong economy or a vibrant lifestyle unless there is a reduction in crime. Ensuring there are consequences and addressing the root causes of crime are our commitments. That is why we are looking at what works. We need to be realistic in our approach. It is why we were voted in by Territorians.

I remind the parliament that the previous Labor government failed to make the necessary investments and prioritisation to achieve the outcomes of the agreement, despite the aspirational targets in the agreement.

We have heard from the Treasurer that Labor did not budget funding for programs and projects. This is another example of that. Labor members say that they will do things, but in reality they allocated no money to deliver on their commitment.

The agreement became another Labor example of applying lip-service to an issue without doing what is necessary to ensure a plan works. Here we are because Labor members focused on what felt and sounded good to them, and they ignored what was clearly happening around them to the Territory.

We are now dealing with the justice crisis while cleaning up the crime crisis Labor left us. Approximately 88% of adults in prison and 95% of youths in detention in the Territory identify as Aboriginal. These are alarming statistics that highlight the need for urgent change.

If we reduce Aboriginal offending, fewer Aboriginal people will end up in prison. It is that simple.

We will not do things just because that is how it was previously done. We are not interested in the status quo; we are interested in only what works. We do that by confronting the issues as they are, not as we want them to be.

It is important to remember that while everyone, including the CLP government, wants to reduce incarceration rates there must be accountability. The rights of victims must be above the rights of offenders. If someone assaults another person, steals or damages property or spreads drugs in our community there must be consequences. The laws apply equally to everyone, regardless of race, religion, gender or community status.

Although Aboriginal Territorians are the most over-represented group in our justice system this does not mean that the laws are not applied equally. It means that as a group Aboriginal Territorians have been ignored. The real issues they face have been ignored and the root causes that have led to their over-representation in our justice system have not been addressed. Let us not forget that Aboriginal Territorians are also victims of crime. The CLP wholeheartedly believes that addressing the root causes of crime is essential to preventing assaults, thefts and other law-breaking actions.

Labor's failure to address the root causes of crime extends beyond justice. It starts with education. The previous Labor government abolished truancy officers, which saw school attendance rates decline dramatically across the Territory. In the Barkly region attendance dropped from 62% to 46%, in the Big Rivers region it dropped from 71% to 58%, and in East Arnhem it went down to 54%.

Labor also failed to properly report absentee students, shifting those absent for more than 20 days onto a separate list to hide the true figures. There was one list that Labor gave to the public for the last four years and a secret list it siphoned off and hid, which would make the figures demonstrate a far worse outcome. The blame sits squarely at the feet of Labor, which failed generations of children who missed out on an education and opportunities to live a life beyond crime.

We are fixing this with the introduction of school attendance officers who ensure compliance and hold parents accountable. No parent has the right to deprive their child of an education, and our officers have the power to issue compliance and infringement notices to enforce attendance. These actions create real change.

Additionally, our Circuit Breaker Program is providing targeted intervention for at-risk youths, equipping families with the tools they need to make positive changes and break the cycle of offending. In its first month this program already had success with 40 active cases receiving intensive support, 27 family responsibility agreements being put in place and six young people referred to safe places.

The CLP will focus on rehabilitation and create real pathways out of crime. Labor talks the talk, but let us not forget it gutted the Sentenced to a Job program, which was an initiative that gave prisoners the chance to work in the community instead of sitting idle in a cell.

We understand that the key to solving issues also lies in working closely with Aboriginal leadership and communities. Aboriginal Territorians must play a key role in shaping the justice system and solutions that directly affect their lives and their communities by providing essential rehabilitation programs directed at Aboriginal men.

Programs run by Drug & Alcohol Services Australia at the Groote Eylandt centre are an example, accepting self-referrals and referrals by NT Government agencies and non-government organisations. It provides rehabilitation to men who are on bail, parole or are subject to a Community Corrections order. This is done through structured programs that focus on early intervention and post-incarceration reintegration. This Groote Eylandt initiative is new. As the Attorney-General I will closely monitor the outcomes of these centres to ensure their success and assess them for future generations.

I conclude by saying that everything we are doing is for all Territorians. Our government is focused on ensuring safer communities, better education and real opportunities for everyone, regardless of background or where you live in the Territory.

Crime and disadvantage affect us all, and our solutions must work for every Territorian. By tackling the root causes and holding people accountable we can make the Territory the best place to live, visit, work and invest.

**Mr PAECH (Gwoja):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Mulka for his custodianship of country and his community and for his fearless advocacy and leadership in this area.

I have had the opportunity to travel with the member to visit communities across his vast electorate of Mulka, to sit down and listen and to see firsthand the amazing projects driven by the local communities. I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the incredible change-makers who live in the electorate of Mulka. The work they have done with *raypirri*, peacekeeping and mediation is incredible. To sit down and talk with them about how we can continue to embed those practices into the Northern Territory justice system was an incredible opportunity that I am privileged to have shared with the Member for Mulka.

I find it ironic that the Attorney-General, a non-Indigenous woman, stood here lecturing the Member for Mulka about what is needed to tackle the high rates of Aboriginal incarceration and the number of Aboriginal people experiencing difficulty in the justice system. The Member for Mulka knows what is needed; he has spent his entire career advocating and being a change-maker. This is an important motion; we are yet to hear whether the motion is supported.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement (NTAJA) is not just an agreement, policy document or a statement of intent. It represents a commitment to justice, equality, equity and, at its core, self-determination for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

I will share with you why the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement is important and why it deserves everyone's full support in this Chamber. I will not get into gutter politics today, because we are all as bad as one another when it comes to working to overcome Aboriginal justice targets; we all must do better.

The Northern Territory is home to some of the most vibrant and resilient communities in Australia, yet these communities have long faced systemic inequalities in the justice system. Aboriginal people make up 30% of the Northern Territory's population but account for over 80% of its prisoner population. This stark statistic is not merely a number; it is a reflection of the deep-seated challenges of discrimination, disconnection and disadvantage, and it must be addressed.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement is a road map to tackle the injustices head-on. It recognises that the current system has and will continue to fail to deliver equitable outcomes. What is required is meaningful change that requires more than tweaks at the margins; it requires a shift in how we think about and deliver justice for all.

We need a new-age justice system that reflects modern values, understanding and best-practice standards to respond to the issues affecting all our communities. This new-age justice system must be designed in consultation with all Territorians and be driven by data and evidence. We must recognise that people need a system they can see themselves in, not just behind a courtroom dock or in cells, but in the administration of justice as jurors, lawyers, judges, interpreters and support staff.

As the Northern Territory's former Attorney-General and as an Aboriginal man, I understand the need and the calls for change. I did what I could in the limited time I had as the Northern Territory Attorney-General. The only regret I have is that I never had enough time.

I make no apologies for standing up and delivering alternative-to-custody programs and Law and Justice Groups with our government in Maningrida, Kintore, Yuendumu, Barunga and Ramingining, to name a few. I make no apologies for making the important reform of raising the age of criminal responsibility, tackling racism and commissioning reviews into government departments.

We heard the Member for Mulka talking about the discrimination that he and that many of our family members experience every day, whether it is going to the petrol station and being denied entry or walking into a supermarket and, as a person whose skin colour is not as dark as my family's, being asked, 'Are they with you?' This is the experience of many Territorians and why we must continue to tackle racism. We introduced important vilification provisions into anti-discrimination laws so that people are not discriminated against and do not experience these levels of bigotry and hate because of the colour of their skin, their nationality or their race.

We repealed mandatory sentencing provisions because we know from the Law Reform Committee and the experts that mandatory sentencing was not working. It was not a deterrent in the criminal justice system. We increased the number of Local Court judges and appointed the Northern Territory's first Aboriginal judge to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory.

We invested in the Community Justice Centre and delivered the Northern Territory's first-ever adult bail-supported accommodation facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs. We expanded the support for men's behaviour change programs and domestic and family violence programs.

These measures are important. They are tangible examples of how we can support our justice system to deliver better outcomes for our people in the Northern Territory and of how the Aboriginal Justice Agreement can work and should work.

Sadly, a number of these key reforms have not been in long enough to see the fruits of their labour and the hard work that went into delivering that transformational reform. However, we have shown that with courageous leadership and passionate people we can transform the Territory's justice system. Territory Labor commits to re-establishing every measure that the CLP repeals, when it come to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

At the heart of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement is the principle of self-determination. This agreement prioritises Aboriginal leadership and decision-making in justice processes. By empowering communities to take the lead we are not only honouring the intrinsic rights of Aboriginal Territorians but also drawing upon our families' deep cultural knowledge and experiences to create solutions that work.

Community-led initiatives such as Law and Justice Groups, alternative sentencing models and culturally appropriate programs are at the core of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement. These initiatives are designed to reduce reoffending, strengthen community safety and restore cultural practices that have been eroded by colonisation and a legal system that has willingly ignored them.

We have seen firsthand the direct improvements from these initiatives, which rolled out across the Territory. Law and Justice Groups have commenced, changing the landscape, improving the responses for community members and victim–survivors and assisting perpetrators to identify rehabilitation and sentencing options. I have experienced firsthand the important groups doing this hard work. I was heavily involved in driving these initiatives because I know that community solutions are an important piece of the puzzle to solve our social issues.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement does not view justice in isolation; it acknowledges the intersection of social determinants such as health, education, housing and employment. By addressing the root causes the agreement takes an holistic approach to reducing crime and incarceration rates. This is not just a justice issue; it is a human rights issue. Moreover, the agreement emphasises the importance of healing.

For too long the justice system focused solely on punishment without addressing the trauma that often underpins offending behaviour. By integrating therapeutic and restorative justice approaches the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement seeks to break the cycles of harm and create pathways for rehabilitation and reintegration. We know that if we want to change the trajectory of our people we need to help them in all areas of their life.

Crime and antisocial behaviour are addressed not just through enforcement but also by building more homes, providing education, offering treatment and lifting people out of poverty. These actions tackle the social determinants of crime head on.

I will share a compelling example that highlights this connection. During the COVID pandemic when the Commonwealth Government temporarily increased welfare payments we witnessed a remarkable outcome. Crime and antisocial behaviour decreased significantly across communities in the Northern Territory. I am not saying that it was every community, but it was a significant portion.

People used the additional support to purchase essential household items, like washing machines, fridges and air conditioners from community stores. There was an increase in the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, improving overall wellbeing. These statistics can be found through our local community stores.

This case demonstrates how addressing poverty and inequality through targeted support can have far-reaching positive impacts on individuals and communities alike. This is how you overcome crime and antisocial behaviour.

Justice reinvestment presents a powerful opportunity to address social challenges effectively. It is not about allocating new funds; it is about being smarter with existing government budgets by allocating and reallocating resources strategically. We can invest in initiatives that deliver long-term solutions and meaningful outcomes for communities.

Yes, this will be a challenge. The greatest challenge will be if we do nothing at all and ignore the evidence and the advice which says that if we do not invest in these areas we will continue on the highway to mass incarceration with no programs, pathways or future for people who need a chance to change.

For many Aboriginal people trust in the justice system has been eroded by decades of overpolicing, racial bias, systemic neglect and poorly considered race-based policies.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement seeks to rebuild this trust by fostering partnerships between governments, Aboriginal organisations and local communities. This collaboration is essential for creating a system that is fair, inclusive and reflective of the diverse needs of the Northern Territory's population. The agreement also holds governments accountable by setting measurable goals and regularly reporting on progress. It ensures that commitments translate into actions and, if not, inaction is reported. This transparency is crucial for maintaining momentum and driving meaningful change.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement is not just an agreement; it is a call to action. It challenges us to confront the injustices of the past and build a future founded on respect, equity and partnership. It reminds us that true justice cannot be achieved without active participation and leadership of Aboriginal communities.

Supporting the Aboriginal Justice Agreement means supporting a vision whereby every person, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to live with dignity, safety and hope. It means standing with Aboriginal people in the pursuit of justice and self-determination. It means recognising that we all have a role to play in creating a fairer and more inclusive Northern Territory.

It is important to highlight and acknowledge the significance of this agreement and the work that needs to be done. The Deputy Chief Minister stated that jailing is failing, and I agree, yet he continues to increase mass incarceration rates. By his own admission jailing is failing. He is willingly perpetuating the problem by relying on the same broken system.

Community members have voiced their concerns about the lack of transparency regarding boot camps. They have not heard what is happening and where these boot camps will go.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement and its members talk of the need for healing and therapeutic rehabilitation programs. They are essential tools in addressing the root causes of offending, and they will create long-lasting change.

We have heard from many in our communities that we want programs, not more prisons; that is the way forward. We need initiatives that focus on changing behaviours and addressing the underlying social issues that lead to crime.

Critical reforms are overdue in key areas like the Northern Territory *Juries Act*. I have said before and will say again that you cannot have trust in a system that you cannot see yourself in. As an Aboriginal person before the court, if you look across at the jury and cannot see an Aboriginal person, you have to ask yourself whether they understand the cultural challenges, barriers, relationships and the complexities. That is an important question.

There are questions about Aboriginal members being on a jury and how conflicts of interest are managed so that there are no poison cousins on the juries and people can actively work together. This is a huge reform that has been needed in the Northern Territory. I acknowledge it was being undertaken …

**Ms UIBO:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Under Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted for the Member for Gwoja.

Motion agreed to.

**Mr PAECH:** Acknowledging what needed to be done, work had commenced on reviewing the Northern Territory *Juries Act*; I hope the Northern Territory Government will continue to honour that commitment to ensure our juries reflect the diversity of the Northern Territory.

Many areas continue to be overdue for reform, including the *Juries Act* and the *Parole Act*. The Northern Territory is still one of the only jurisdictions in the country that does not factor in street time; that is a significant gap in our system. I understand that the Parole Board was considering putting forward a number of recommendations to the previous government and most likely to this government.

I will touch on an important topic that the Member for Mulka raised tonight. The Member for Mulka spoke passionately and eloquently about this, but I note he did not claim credit for something that I acknowledge tonight. I want to make sure he understands the power of his voice and the voices of the Aboriginal members of this Assembly. I refer to talking about peacekeepers, mediators and *raypirri*. It is important to acknowledge the Members for Mulka, Arnhem, Daly and Arafura and me—as the Aboriginal Affairs minister at the time—and our level of advocacy and lobbying to the federal government for additional funding for peacekeepers, mediators, therapeutic responses and, as the Member for Mulka talks about, *raypirri*.

We were able to see a positive result not too long ago in the announcement from the federal government for the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment, where there is now an actual budget allocation for peacekeeping, community mediating, support of the community justice centre and support to establish *raypirri* in the Member for Mulka's electorate. That would not have happened without the strong voice of particular people. I acknowledge them tonight to make sure they take some credit for that important advocacy to the Commonwealth, to the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Linda Burney, and now the Northern Territory Senator Malarndirri McCarthy. We have seen that targeted investment for the mediation and peacekeeping processes because it is important.

I said that I had been out with the Member for Mulka. I have also been out in my own communities of Yuendumu, Nyirrpi and Lajamanu. I have seen firsthand the experience and the experts in action with the Southern Tanami Kurdiji Indigenous Corporation peacekeepers and mediators. I have seen them in the desert sitting down with families de-escalating my own family when my cousins, mothers, brothers, grandfathers, uncles and aunties get a bit hot with the temperature building and behaviour escalating. I have seen how beneficial Law and Justice Groups, community mediation groups and peacekeepers are at

de-escalating, keeping people calm and getting the community back to a harmonious place, talking it out with people.

We often talk in this place about therapeutic responses, and we get caught up in the language, but it is amazing when we are out bush and see the therapeutic response in action with de-escalating, calming, talking to people, stepping through things with the mediation and letting everyone talk. There are so many experts in remote Aboriginal communities—Aboriginal Territorians who do that work every day.

The Aboriginal liaison officers with the Northern Territory Police Force have been an incredible asset to the Territory. They have had to work through difficult and challenging times. I acknowledge their resilience when a number of accusations, claims and actual evidence of racism about them came out. They continued to do a great job in their communities.

This parliament passed legislation in relation to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). When the OPCAT team was in the Northern Territory we ensured it had access to the facilities. Transparency is key to meaningful change, and that change is important. We need bold action to create a justice system that heals, rehabilitates and prevents crime rather than one that simply perpetuates failures.

I urge every one of us to lend our voice, resources and influence to support the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Together we can transform the vision into a reality and build a justice system that reflects fairness, equality and humanity. We can all be signatories to the Northern Territory Justice Agreement and support the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that do a fantastic job each day to defend the pillars of justice and the rights of Aboriginal Territorians.

I extend my gratitude and thanks to the legal community, the women's legal services, the Aboriginal legal services, the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission and all the lawyers who do an incredible job every day, representing vulnerable Territorians seeking justice.

I acknowledge the members of this parliament who stood tall in supporting legislation over the years that has protected the vulnerable people in our community. I thank the Member for Mulka for bringing this important motion before the Assembly, enabling us to have a respectful and meaningful debate. This should serve as a reminder that none of us are exonerated from our responsibility and our commitment to improve the lives of and transform the outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians when it comes to our justice system.

You cannot be what you cannot see, and in everything we do we must improve the lives of Territorians. We must all work, whether it is on health, housing, education or economic development opportunities. Access to these pillars will help transform the justice system and address crime and antisocial behaviour. Continuing to call on the Commonwealth to assist in lifting people out of abject poverty must be a solid commitment, because when people are lifted out of poverty and given the opportunity to participate in the workforce and have economic prosperity, the Territory will be a better place.

Incredible work is happening with Senator McCarthy on the CDP reform and real jobs; that is well regarded.

A lot of work is happening with the joint select committee on housing, but I echo the Member for Mulka's call that we need more investment into our homelands so that people can be strong. When culture is strong our people are strong. When you see the fire in our young people's eyes when they are participating in language, law and culture, you want to harvest that energy and respect. You want to see them like that every day. That is why we should be investing in language, law and culture.

**Mr YOUNG (Daly):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Mulka for bringing on such an important motion. I stand with my colleagues in support of this motion calling on this CLP government to reaffirm the commitment to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

This agreement should not be taken lightly or bandied as a political football from one government to another. It is and always should be an agreement that receives ongoing bipartisan support from all sides of this Assembly. At the front of the agreement you can read the Leader of the Opposition's foreword, as the then Attorney-General, outlining:

> *As Territorians, and as a society, we have a responsibility to ensure that all Aboriginal Territorians have the ability to grow, thrive and live safely.*

That is what this agreement is all about. It should go without saying that we all want to ensure that any government can and should deliver on the objectives of this agreement to the best of its ability. They are:

1. *Reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians.*

2. *Engage and support Aboriginal leadership.*

3. *Improve justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians.*

This agreement is not just a political commitment; it is also a moral, social and economic imperative for the Northern Territory.

The initial signing of this agreement was a first step in showing the Territory Labor government's ability to acknowledge past failures, take corrective action and work to build a justice system that truly serves all Territorians equally. However, this is not a task that falls solely on government. It is a shared responsibility that requires a strong partnership between government agencies; urban, rural and remote communities; stakeholders; and, of course, local leadership.

There is strong local leadership across the Territory. Leaders not only actively participated in the consultation prior to the agreement being launched but also consistently engaged with the agreement along the way.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement was born from the severe disadvantage that many Aboriginal people experience in the Territory, especially individuals who have encounters with the justice system as victims and offenders. Aboriginal Territorians make up 83% of the adult prisoner population. Aboriginal men are 15 times more likely to be in prison than non-Aboriginal men, and Aboriginal women are 14 times more likely to be in prison. These are not just numbers; they are families, neighbours and future generations trapped in a cycle.

There are many complex reasons for over-representation, including factors within the criminal justice system, generations of failed policies and other underlying factors that lead to Aboriginal Territorians having contact with the justice system. This includes family and domestic violence, homelessness, substance abuse, poor mental and physical health and unemployment. These factors can lead to high offending rates in our society.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the countless reports and inquiries over the years all tell us the same thing: we must modify the system, not just punish the people, in order to truly break the cycle of reoffending.

When a government deploys such strict, reactionary, punitive measures as a standalone policy to reduce crime, we know it will not work; the same old ways will give us the same old results. Packing people into jails and watch houses like sardines in a can will not work. It can entrench disadvantage and, in the direst circumstances, can lead to someone losing their life.

We need to do things differently. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement is not just a government priority; it should also come as a personal priority of all members in this Chamber. We need to do things better and listen to communities to know what will work and what we can do to change lives for the better now and into the future.

Aboriginal Territorians are best placed to understand and tackle issues that impact justice in their own communities, and that collaboration between government agencies and Aboriginal leaders is essential to achieve change. That is woven through 13 commitments in the agreement—action proven to work for Aboriginal people. These include:

- offering strong alternatives to custody
- delivering effective therapeutic programs tailored to meet the needs of individual offenders
- setting up Law and Justice Groups to support local decision-making and leadership
- the re-establishment of community courts, with judges having access to all the circumstances around an individual's offending to enable sentencing options that genuinely reduce reoffending
- community-based sentencing options and non-financial options for the payment of fines
- increasing the number of Aboriginal justices of the peace and commissioners of oaths
- identifying and tackling systemic racism in government agencies and contracted service providers that are part of our justice approach.

When simplified, it comes down to more appropriate services, strong leadership and better systems. We know the justice system plays a critical role in maintaining law and order and community safety. We also need to acknowledge that solely locking up people does not reduce crime. The answer to helping reduce offending and imprisonment is through alternative sentencing, community-led justice initiatives and culturally safe rehabilitation programs. Diversion to appropriate health and wellbeing services is particularly important for offenders with substance abuse issues to help them get out of the cycle of harm and offending.

The former Territory Labor government oversaw the re-establishment of community courts in Groote Eylandt and Kintore. These community courts empowered and enabled elders and local leaders to work alongside the justice system, assist judges to determine the most appropriate sentence for an offender and to help shape culturally relevant sentencing options. Community courts, in conjunction with community Law and Justice Groups, will help and continue to enhance justice responses and overall community safety.

Consultations with community leaders also identified the importance of on-country alternative-to-custody facilities, which provide the courts and the community with an alternative option to a term of imprisonment for offenders. There are two facilities. One located in Alice Springs and one built on Groote Eylandt, which opened last year. These facilities offer rehabilitation rather than prison time and can deliver targeted programs to reduce reoffending and imprisonment.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Please pause. Honourable members, as you know we appointed three new Acting Deputy Speakers—the Members for Fannie Bay, Wanguri and Blain. I invite the Member for Fannie Bay to chair the session to 5.30 pm when the Speaker will return.

**Mr YOUNG:** I welcome the Acting Deputy Speaker. It is tricky to roll off the tongue. It is a privilege to sit in the Chair; I hope you enjoy your time and that we all go easy. I remember my first time being up there; some of you probably remember it. The Deputy Speaker said, 'I just need to go to the toilet. Can you come up?' The next minute it exploded, and I was out of there quickly. We will not do that to you this time. It was a good stunt by the opposition at the time. It was quite funny, looking back on it, but it taught me a lot.

It is a fantastic initiative which Territory Labor hopes to see expanded across all regions in the Territory. We should also see more justice reinvestment programs to shift funding from prisons into community-driven crime prevention alongside law reform efforts that review discriminatory laws that disproportionately impact Aboriginal Territorians, such as mandatory sentencing policies.

The actions we should see from this CLP government are clear. There should be:

- an expansion of community courts to at least 20 locations
- the establishment of more alternative-to-custody facilities which ensure that every region in the Northern Territory has access to culturally safe rehabilitation where possible
- the ability to implement stronger non-custodial sentencing options, including greater access to diversion programs and community service alternatives
- appropriate policing policies that do not criminalise poverty, homelessness or mental health issues, which disproportionately affect Aboriginal communities
- investment in preventive programs that address the root causes of offending, including mental health, addiction services and housing stability programs
- strengthened community engagement and youth justice programs to prevent early contact with the criminal justice system
- enhancement of Aboriginal-led crime prevention initiatives which ensure local leaders have the resources they need to support their communities.

Aboriginal leaders at all levels across the Territory, young and old, individuals with disabilities and individuals affected by intergenerational trauma have spoken about how to make the agreement work to benefit all Territorians.

A couple of weeks ago I was in Wadeye with Senator Malarndirri McCarthy and the Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour. It was wonderful to take them to the Men's Shed, where they do wonderful alternative programs for young people who have been in touch with the justice system.

The traditional owners of the Thamarrurr region help guide young people by taking them out on country to participate in culturally appropriate programs. It was heartening to hear the stories from the old people and the pride they take to ensure that our young people get out on country to learn their culture and their Dreaming. They also make certain artefacts, including spears, didgeridoos and boomerangs. Selling them through the Men's Shed was a big achievement.

It was heartening to hear the stories at the women's centre of how supportive they are of the program and to see the young people engaging in it. There are positive programs led from communities that we must continue to support to ensure our young people are supported if they come into contact with the justice system.

The work done by the Men's Shed before young people get in touch with the justice system is just as important because they engage with all young people in conjunction with the health centre, doing programs for men's health and wellbeing to help lead young people into the workforce.

It was heartening to see that and to show Senator Malarndirri McCarthy and Marion Scrymgour the programs being run in the community of Wadeye.

A lot of us would remember the unrest in Wadeye a few years ago. The mediation was driven by the community. We got funding for the Community Justice Centre to work with the family groups along with the elders and some young people. There were paid positions for people to help mediate with the family groups when the tensions were in Wadeye, and we saw a reduction in the tension between the families.

It brought a lot of people together to talk through the issues and concerns we had seen in the past. We know that when it is led by the community there will be a reduction in the number of our people being in the justice system. That program was successful and continues to this day.

I am looking forward to getting out there next week after sittings.

Engaging and supporting Aboriginal leadership is pivotal to the capacity of government agencies to improve justice responses and to reduce offending and imprisonment rates. Justice cannot be delivered to Aboriginal Territorians; it must be delivered by and alongside Aboriginal Territorians.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement recognises this by embedding leadership into decision-making. Law and Justice Groups have been established in some regions, allowing elders to guide justice policy and interventions. More Aboriginal people are being appointed as justices of the peace and commissioners for oaths, ensuring there is culturally appropriate decision-making in legal processes. Aboriginal advisory boards have been included in the development of regional justice strategies. Aboriginal-led crime prevention and mediation programs have been piloted in select communities, showing early success.

This positive work needs to continue because research indicates that there is a direct correlation between strong local Aboriginal leadership and positive community outcomes. Leaders in their communities understand the local concerns and priorities of residents and have a role to deliver initiatives in a culturally competent manner, increasing community participation in those programs.

It is important to stick to the actions of the agreement by establishing Law and Justice Groups in every major Aboriginal community, ensuring that at least 50% of justice advisory roles are held by Aboriginal leaders; providing greater resources and decision-making power to Aboriginal-led justice initiatives; expanding leadership training and employment programs within the justice system, including pathways for Aboriginal lawyers, magistrates and policy advisers; increasing funding for Aboriginal-controlled organisations to design and implement crime prevention and intervention strategies; and ensuring that rural and remote communities have an equal voice in shaping any justice policy that impacts them.

The justice system should serve and protect all Territorians equally and not be one of fear or discrimination towards Aboriginal people. We must ensure that our courts, police and support services are culturally competent and free from systemic racism.

There are great educational Aboriginal history and cultural competency courses being undertaken by new police; however, we should ensure that all frontline workers in the regions undertake these courses to ensure culturally competent services are being delivered and are in compliance with anti-racism policies across the government agencies which hold Aboriginal justice matters.

We have also seen strengthened language interpretation services in courts by improving language access and legal education for interpreters. Ensuring Aboriginal people understand their rights and can access the justice system without barriers ensures fair representation for the Aboriginal Territorians who need it.

I look forward to seeing more interpreters on board to ensure that any Aboriginal Territorian who needs access to an interpreter can have it.

**Mr PAECH:** A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

**Mr YOUNG:** We should ensure that all frontline workers in regions undertake these courses so that culturally competent services are delivered and are compliant with anti-racism policies across the government agencies which handle Aboriginal justice matters.

The Northern Territory cannot afford to fail on the overall objectives of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Justice delayed is justice denied, and every year that passes without action is another year that Aboriginal families suffer unnecessary trauma. We must remember that justice is not just about laws and policies; it is about dignity, respect and the right to a fair and equal life. It is about ensuring that an Aboriginal child in Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Wadeye or any remote community has the same opportunities, safety and hope as any child in this country. The time for action is now.

**K McNAMARA (Nightcliff):** Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I support the motion that the Member for Mulka has brought before us today. I thank him for bringing forward this motion and for his leadership in this space.

We are in desperate need of a real commitment to enacting the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. We have police watch houses overflowing with people waiting up to two months in the watch house without adequate health and safety standards. The Northern Territory's prisoner population has also reached a new high, with data from the ABS showing that the NT's prisoner population rose from 2,236 to 2,400 in the 2024 November quarter. That is a 7% increase.

Since then another 300 people have been incarcerated, bringing the total number to 2,704 in custody as of last Thursday. This puts the NT's incarceration rate at 1,238 per 100,000 people, or more than 1% of the Territory's population. That is a shameful indictment, and it is just not right. The President of the Northern Territory Police Association said that he is scared and it is a 'matter of time' until a death in custody occurs.

Peak bodies have called the conditions in the overcrowded stations inhumane and 'a shocking violation of human rights'. Even our Supreme Court justices recognise that these high rates of imprisonment are not okay or effective. Justice Blokland stated:

> *Imprisonment and a significant use of it in Australia and the NT is a wicked problem for many of us.*

She recently called upon the NT to think more creatively about how we can address this issue.

In the Northern Territory Aboriginal men are imprisoned at 15 times the rate of non-Aboriginal men, and Aboriginal women are imprisoned at 14 times the rate of non-Aboriginal women. In fact, First Nations people in the NT are the most incarcerated people in the world. This is a national shame. Have we learnt nothing from our past or from the many expert reports in the last few decades about what real justice looks like for Aboriginal community members?

The new CLP government has been boasting about the large numbers of people in prison, the majority of whom are Aboriginal. This is nothing to be proud of; it is a failure. Granted it is not a failure of the CLP alone; it is a failure of successive governments in the Northern Territory. Let me repeat—I cannot believe I have to say this in 2025—having overflowing prisons is nothing to be proud of.

It is an embarrassment. It means that we have failed collectively. We have failed each new generation of children being brought up in poverty and each new generation of First Nations children experiencing racism and discrimination. We have failed in our social safety nets, prevention and early intervention.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement draws from the key work of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which recommends that arrest and imprisonment should be a sanction of last resort. In

line with this, aim 1 of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement seeks to reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians.

A real commitment to reducing offending in the first place is good for everyone. That is what we want, right? Reducing offending and imprisonment benefits us all. It reduces the number of victims of crime as well as the associated costs. It reduces government spending on Corrections and would make the NT safer for everyone. Locking up people does not solve the problem.

Our current situation and crime statistics make this blatantly obvious. In fact, we have the highest rates of recidivism in the country, with almost 60% of offenders going back to prison.

Throwing people—often people with complex trauma and disabilities—into prison to further brutalise and traumatise them does not do anyone any good. Apart from the obvious implications of that, even if you just think about this from a purely pragmatic perspective, it should be so obvious that all this will do is continue the cycle for those people, making no-one in our community safer.

Prison clearly is not the solution. But luckily for us this report builds on years of consultation with Aboriginal community members; it draws upon their knowledge and experiences and offers tangible solutions.

We can establish and offer alternatives to custody, establish community courts, reduce domestic and family violence offending and review and reform legislative provisions within the justice system that are unfair, discriminatory or detrimental to Aboriginal people. We can expand community-based sentencing options and non-financial options for the payment of fines and increase opportunities for prisoners to participate in high-quality programs to reduce reoffending.

As we seek to reduce offending, we also need to invest in First Nations leadership. As this agreement asserts:

> *… there is a direct correlation between strong local Aboriginal leadership and positive community outcomes. Aboriginal leaders are more likely to understand local concerns and priorities, deliver initiatives in a culturally competent manner, and increase community participation in programs.*

As identified by one of the victim's families in the 2024 coronial inquest regarding the deaths of four Aboriginal women:

> *If the solutions are not made in our communities, they will not work in our communities.*

We need to invest in communities and provide them with the opportunities to determine their own futures. Let us trust in this wisdom and affirm the important leadership of First Nations leaders.

Finally, per recommendation 3, we need to improve justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians. As we know, many Aboriginal Territorians have extensive experiences of trauma, loss and grief, which impacts on their lives and brings them into contact with the justice system. We need to remove the barriers that prevent Aboriginal Territorians from accessing services or navigating government systems.

It is vital that we commit to the recommendations identified, which are:

- *Identify and eliminate systemic racism in government agencies and contracted service providers that directly or indirectly discriminate against Aboriginal Territorians engaged in the justice system.*

- *Improve the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that impacts on justice outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians.*

- *Increase Aboriginal Territorians knowledge and use of justice and other complaint mechanisms.*

- *Review and redesign key service models and any contracted services that impact on justice outcomes to ensure they are efficient, effective, and meet the needs of Aboriginal Territorians.*

I second one of the points that the Member for Mulka made: we do not need a government tough on crime; we need one that is smart on crime. 'Tough on crime' is throwing more people into prisons, including children, with no hope for rehabilitation or support, condemning them to a life of misery. 'Tough on crime' is this government's racist dog-whistling to the public, which increases discrimination and racism towards our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, just like the Member for Mulka spoke about—and his own awful experiences.

However, being smart on crime is prevention, social safety nets and early intervention. It is a fully funded domestic violence sector. I cannot outline that enough. The sector is still waiting and there is no certainty. Where is the money going?

It is acknowledgement and understanding of the reality of a violent colonial history on First Nations people and the ongoing ramifications of that. It is listening to First Nations' voices. 'Smart on crime' is accepting and acting on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

'Smart on crime' extends beyond this to other prevention factors, such as housing. I recently hosted a panel in my electorate, with federal Greens Senator and minister for justice in New South Wales, David Shoebridge; Natalie Hunter from Justice not Jails; and Rocket Bretherton from the Justice Reform Initiative, who is a previously incarcerated person.

Something that stood out from that panel was when Rocket shared her experience from prison. She said that when you ask female prisoners what one thing would change their life or stop them from ending up back in prison—or getting in there in the first place—they all said that it would be access to safe housing.

The failure of governments throughout the decades to upkeep and provide safe housing is a key point to this. I meet and speak with frontline DV sector organisations and Aboriginal-controlled organisations all the time. They all say that you cannot talk about domestic violence without talking about housing. Until our Territory and federal governments get on top of the housing crisis we will never see a change. We cannot have conversations about Aboriginal disempowerment without talking about housing.

When we discuss reports and recommendations it can be too easy to forget that we are talking about real people. These are our neighbours, our friends and the families our kids go to school with. These are the community members we have been elected to represent and to work hard for to improve their lives. We are letting down Aboriginal community members.

This is an opportunity for us to do better by making a genuine commitment and working to implement the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. It is encouraging that in 2021 this agreement received bipartisan support. The Chief Minister's signature is on this document. The government said that it is a government of action. I implore the government to support this motion and enact the recommendations now that you have the power to act.

As I still have time, and we are a government of action, let me read out the actions recommended in this report. We need to identify and eliminate systemic racism in government agencies and contracted service providers that directly or indirectly discriminate against Aboriginal Territorians. To do this we need to review Northern Territory Government agencies and their contracted service providers to identify systemic racism and options for reform, and develop and implement a Northern Territory-wide campaign against racism that impacts on Aboriginal people engaged in the justice system.

We need to improve the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that impacts on justice outcomes by identifying gaps in data and analysis to improve justice outcomes and provide statistical data and information to inform the preparation of Aboriginal impact statements for Cabinet submissions.

We need to increase Aboriginal Territorians' knowledge and use of justice and other complaint mechanisms. We need to work collaboratively to identify the barriers to Aboriginal Territorians' accessing complaint systems; increase the visibility, presence and accessibility of complaint systems, especially for Aboriginal Territorians in remote communities; provide reports to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement governance committee on the barriers to complaint systems for Aboriginal people and how they can be overcome; work to implement the recommendations in these reports; support agencies and statutory bodies to raise the awareness of complaint mechanisms to Aboriginal Territorians; and work with legal services and entities in the Northern Territory to assist Aboriginal people to access and use complaint systems.

I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**Mr BROWN (Arafura):** Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Mulka, my friend, for bringing this important motion before the Assembly today. He is a leader in the West Arnhem communities, and I know he has long advocated for better outcomes for Aboriginal people in the justice system.

I stand with my colleagues in full support of this motion calling on the CLP government to deliver on its commitment to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. We know the reality we face. Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory continue to be incarcerated at an unacceptably high rate. Too many families are torn apart

by the justice system that has long failed to listen, adapt and provide real alternatives. That is why this motion is so important.

By 2027 the AJA has committed to reducing the number of Aboriginal Territorians in prison, supporting Aboriginal leadership and ensuring that justice services are fair, culturally appropriate and effective. These are not just made-up goals; they are a way we build safer communities, stronger families and a better future for our Territory.

Progress is not achieved by words alone; it takes action, listening and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal communities. This agreement was built through consultations with more than 120 communities, with each one making it clear what it needed: local leadership; culturally responsive services; and an end to a cycle of disadvantage.

The signing of the AJA was a commitment made by Territory Labor and the CLP, signed by the now Chief Minister and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, to move away from outdated punitive approaches to reducing Aboriginal incarceration. It commits us to investing in collaborative, community-led and evidence-based solutions built on the foundations of honesty, integrity, transparency and accountability. However, we do not see these actions from this government.

In addressing the root causes in communities and townships we must remember when we come across a person committing crimes—we catch them at the time—it is about the socioeconomic situation that the individual is in. We need to look at the holistic issues affecting this individual's life. It could be poverty or growing up in domestic violence situations. That is where the root cause is and what we need to fund services for. I see this a lot in my communities. All our East Arnhem and West Arnhem kids are coming to the services in town and are starting to spill out onto the streets.

The AJA has three objectives. The first objective of the agreement is to reduce offending and imprisonment. We know that locking up people does not work or address the causes of crime. That is why the agreement prioritises alternatives to custody, including diversion programs, on-country rehabilitation and culturally appropriate sentencing options.

When a child or adult is sentenced in Darwin the family and the people responsible for him do not know about the situation because every Indigenous child lives under two laws. There is the lore, which is the traditional law. When they face the courts at home, these individuals have families, cultural leaders and tribal leaders attending. It has a more meaningful impact when they attend and contribute to straightening out that child.

Friends, I am not saying that people who commit crime should not have consequences, but we need to invest in ways to stop offending from becoming a cycle. Real successes, like these initiatives, have been implemented. The life skills camp for women in Alice Springs has helped women complete rehabilitation and rebuild their lives, as does developing culturally based alternatives to detention.

Groote Eylandt demonstrated that justice can be delivered in a way that strengthens rather than harms communities. In Maningrida, Nja-marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group delivers a justice approach rooted in care, culture and connection. Its work provides alternatives to custody and keeping people on the right path, making a big difference in their lives in the community. This is what works; locking up people without support does not.

The second objective of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement to engage and support Aboriginal leadership in recognises that Aboriginal people are best placed to lead the solutions for their own communities and people. This is why the agreement supports the establishment of Law and Justice Groups, where local leaders can work with police, courts and community services to prevent crime before it happens.

These groups ensure that justice responses are informed by those who know the communities best. They allow for real local leadership and tackling issues like family violence, youth crime and community safety. I spoke about the Nja-marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group; the programs are having huge benefits. Its model focuses on prevention, support and healing. The group built a system that engages young people with their culture and community, providing them with support and opportunity to turn away from crime before it takes over their lives.

Supporting Aboriginal leadership is not just a tick-the-box exercise; it is a recognition that real solutions come from those who have lived experience and cultural authority.

The third objective is to improve justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians. For too long the justice system has been something that happens to Aboriginal people rather than something that includes them. The AJA seeks to change that by:

- expanding community courts
- ensuring judges have access to cultural knowledge and local contacts before making sentencing decisions
- including a number of Aboriginal justices of the peace and commissioners for oaths so that more legal decisions can be made with an understanding of culture and community
- eliminating systemic racism in the delivery of justice services, ensuring Aboriginal Territorians are treated fairly and with respect at every stage of the system.

These are not radical ideas; they are commonsense reforms that will strengthen, improve and make our justice system more effective and just.

I call on the CLP to honour the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which it signed when in opposition. This is not just a document; it is a commitment made to the people of the Northern Territory and Aboriginal communities for a fairer, more effective justice system. When CLP members put their names to this agreement they acknowledged the urgent need to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates. Strengthening Aboriginal leadership delivers justice services that actually work.

Now that the CLP is in government the question is simple: will it stand by its commitment? This agreement was never about politics; it was about the people—Territorians. It was built on years of consultation with Aboriginal communities, legal experts and frontline workers who know that business as usual is failing. The CLP members knew this when they backed the AJA in opposition. To abandon it would be a betrayal to the agreement and the trust placed in them by the communities that need this change the most.

It is time to step up, show leadership and follow through with the commitment made. Anything less would be a failure in responsibility and leadership.

If any ministers want to come to my West Arnhem region I will roll out the red carpet for you. Just turn up and say g'day, please. I acknowledge the Member for Port Darwin for coming to Tiwi the other month.

**J DAVIS (Johnston):** Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank our fellow MLA, the Member for Mulka, for bringing this important motion to the House and for his steadfast, generous, gracious and wise leadership on this issue over the past eight years.

I am new to this Chamber, but I am not new to the issues this motion addresses. I come from almost three decades of working with justice and conflict across the Northern Territory. I have been incredibly privileged to learn from and work alongside on-country peacemakers and to see the work described by the Members for Mulka, Gwoja and Daly.

I have been lucky to study alongside Yolngu leaders to learn about Yolngu *rom* and peacemaking. I have worked alongside the Ponki peacemakers on the Tiwi Islands; the Watjarr group in Ngukurr; the southern Kurdiji mediators in Yuendumu; the Kurdiji mediators in Lajamanu; the Ali Curung mediators; those in Wadeye; the Groote Eylandt peacemakers; the Mawul Rom Project; and many more. Across the Northern Territory we have incredible peacemakers on country doing this work.

I pay tribute to all the incredible work done by men and women, often very old, peacemakers who work tirelessly every day and night on the ground.

I have seen this work supported by organisations across the Territory, including NAAJA, Legal Aid, NAAFLS, AADS, the Community Justice Centre and many other on-the-ground services.

I have seen this across the Northern Territory in Yolngu country, in the desert, on the Tiwi Islands and in Wadeye. I have seen Aboriginal-led peacemaking do exactly what the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is committed to and set up to do. However, we need to make sure the AJA gets the support that was committed to it.

I welcome the development of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the action plan. I remember the signing of the agreement with bipartisan support, with then Leader of the Opposition, who is now the Chief Minister, and then shadow Attorney-General, who is now Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, co-signing the document at Parliament House in 2022. I remember there was a lot of celebration of the bipartisan support, providing certainty for the agreement for the next seven years to enable the Aboriginal Justice Unit to implement its commitments.

I thank the Member for Mulka for giving us the opportunity to reflect on this in the Chamber and recommit to the goals of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. I have not yet heard from the government regarding the question from the Member for Mulka, and I echo it: will the government recommit and affirm its commitment to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement?

What I have heard, and what we have all witnessed since August 2024, is a government introducing law after law that disproportionately criminalises Aboriginal people. These are laws that criminalise public drinking while making cheap alcohol more accessible; remove judicial discretion for sentencing; lower the age of criminal responsibility to children aged 10; and reintroduce truancy officers and a punitive approach to children engaging in education—the list goes on.

The goals of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement are clear, and we have heard them from other members. I will repeat them: to reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians; to engage and support Aboriginal leadership; and to improve justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians.

The reality is that this government has chosen to double down on policies that criminalise Aboriginal people rather than support them. The policies prioritise punitive measures over prevention, fines over reconciliation and incarceration over community solutions.

We already heard the shameful statistics in this Chamber today. Aboriginal people make up about 30% of the Northern Territory's population, yet they represent over 90% of the adult prisoner population and often 100% of the youth prisoner population. This is not an injustice; it is a crisis.

Last week the Productivity Commission released a damning report on Indigenous disadvantage showing that life expectancy for First Nations women in the Northern Territory has gone backwards; and targets in unemployment are worsening, as are indicators for birthweight, early childhood education, child development, youth engagement, employment, adult incarceration and youth detention.

What has this government done to address these appalling statistics? Instead of addressing root causes—I am interested in hearing from the government how it would define root causes, but I will talk about poverty, trauma and lack of opportunity—the government has introduced more fines, enforcement and incarceration.

Let us not forget the horrific reality of children in detention. The Northern Territory has been internationally condemned for reintroducing laws that will lock up children as young as 10 years old. Is this the future that this government envisions? Is this the future that we want in the Northern Territory?

This government's approach is carceral, punitive and wrong. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement acknowledges that justice must be about prevention, rehabilitation and community engagement, not about punishment. As I have said, there are many proven models across the Northern Territory that work. We heard about Groote Eylandt's Peacemaker Program as one example. It is a community-led initiative that focuses on restorative justice, bringing victims and offenders together, fostering understanding, healing and real accountability. Programs like this show great success in reducing reoffending, improving community safety, being victim-centred and keeping people out of prison. They engage and support Aboriginal leadership.

We can also look at community justice reinvestment programs that have been successful elsewhere in Australia. These programs take money that would otherwise be spent on locking up people and invest it directly into community-led solutions. This government should support these kinds of programs. It should engage Aboriginal leaders meaningfully in justice policymaking rather than treating them as afterthoughts. It should expand community-led solutions like those I have spoken about, including the Groote Eylandt Peacemakers.

This government claims to be committed to reducing offending and imprisonment, supporting Aboriginal leadership and addressing the root causes of crime and to want better justice services, but policies that criminalise Aboriginal people, whether through fines for truancy, harsh public drinking laws or locking up children, reveal the truth. If the government is truly serious about justice reform it will move beyond these policies and invest in community-led programs.

The latest findings from the Productivity Commission make it clear that the gap is widening, life expectancy for Aboriginal people is declining, youth engagement is falling, employment and child development targets are worsening and that adult incarceration and youth detention rates continue to climb. If the government continues down this punitive path these statistics will only get worse.

In the words of Catherine Liddle, Chief Executive of SNAICC–National Voice For Our Children, the Productivity Commission report should be a wake-up call to all governments. We need a renewed commitment to the Closing the Gap Agreement, and we need it now. The findings from the Productivity Commission show just how much work is left to do, and without substantial change many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will be left behind.

It is clear that the business-as-usual approach is not hitting the mark, and the need for community-led early intervention programs and family support services is not being met. The Attorney-General said that we cannot keep doing business as usual; I think we all agree. Catherine Liddle said that if we continue down this path we will fail in our shared responsibility to protect and care for these children or to give them the opportunity to succeed.

The Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap report emphasises that Aboriginal-led solutions are the key to progress. Just like the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, it reminds us that we must listen to Aboriginal voices and Aboriginal leaders, including those in this Chamber.

We have been issued a clear invitation many times from the Member for Mulka to come to Yolngu country to listen, learn and work together to fix the problems we are all facing. There are Aboriginal leaders across the Northern Territory who have also extended that invitation. This is how we will make meaningful change and build real justice in the Northern Territory. This is what the government agreed to do when it committed to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

By recommitting to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement's objectives this Assembly has the opportunity to do something more than celebrating locking up 500 more people or fining parents. We have the opportunity to reverse the cycle of incarceration to build a justice system and a community that is fair, effective and safe for everybody.

I commend the motion to the Assembly and urge all members to support it both in words and actions.

**Mr EDGINGTON (Aboriginal Affairs):** Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Mulka for bringing this motion to General Business. The Member for Mulka's motion is that this Assembly recommits and affirms the objectives of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement—that by 2027 the NT Government will reduce offending and imprisonment of Aboriginal Territorians; engage and support Aboriginal leadership; and improve justice responses and services for Aboriginal Territorians.

They are the three aims of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which was signed by the CLP on 31 March 2023—over two years ago.

The Aboriginal Justice Agreement is informed by 11 principles, has three broad aims under which fall 13 commitments, backed by 48 actions. The specific deliverables of these are set out in the action plans.

There is a bit of history behind the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. While we signed it on 31 March 2023 it is important to remember that the Aboriginal Justice Agreement was brought in by the Labor government on 9 August 2021. It has now been in place for approaching four years.

Reflecting on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, the difficulty we had trying to be part of it was that Labor introduced it in August 2021 but did not go about it in a collaborative way with the CLP. It went off on its own and did not want to engage with us, talk to us or partner with us to ensure that the Aboriginal Justice Agreement …

**Ms Uibo** interjecting.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** They did not want to take an approach where we could work together. We constantly hounded the Labor government to be able to sign the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. After a significant amount of time …

**Ms Uibo** interjecting.

**Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Quiet, Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** I will go back because when the Aboriginal Justice Agreement was first put out, there was not even a signature block on the document for us to put our signatures on it …

**Ms Uibo:** Then how come the Member for Namatjira signed?

**Mr KERLE:** A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! I am trying to listen to the contribution from the Member for Barkly and those opposite continue to interrupt.

**Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I agree. Please be quiet, Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** The CLP wanted to take a genuine bipartisan approach to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. When it came out in August 2021 there was no engagement with the CLP and no signature block for us to sign it and work with the government. It took seven months of basically hounding the Labor government to get our signatures on it. It took seven months for Labor to put the signature block on the document. That was consistent with the red tape and slowness of anything happening through Labor. The slowness and inability to work with any other parties across the board to deliver on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement was incredible.

On 31 March we sat down with Labor, and the current Chief Minister and I signed the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Basically, we had to bring Labor kicking and screaming to the table to sign the agreement. That was the sad part about it—us wanting to commit to it but Labor not wanting us to be part of it.

Here we are nearly four years later and we find ourselves in a situation where, coming to government just over six months ago …

**Mr YOUNG:** A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 35; relevance. I remind the Member for Barkly that this is not about him or where his signature block is. It is about a bipartisan approach to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** You can hear the Member for Daly, because he is frustrated. He knows that Labor did not want to commit to the bipartisan approach for this. That is why we find ourselves in the situation we are in today. Coming to government just over six months ago—I will give you a picture of the situation we found ourselves in.

The Member for Mulka quoted some statistics. The article in the *NT News* today says:

> *The Northern Territory continues to stand as the epicentre of crime in Australia, with offender rates more than double those of any other jurisdiction, according to the latest data.*

The interesting thing is that the latest data it is quoting is for the financial year 2023–24. You only need to take a step back and realise who was in government during that period. Of course, that was Labor.

The offender rate in the NT was 3,954 offenders per 100,000 aged 10 years and older in 2023–24. That is what the Australia Bureau of Statistics recently produced, and it compared that with the same period in Queensland. By comparison, the second-highest rate during 2023–24 was Queensland, which had 1,645 offenders per 100,000, a whopping 2,309 fewer than the Territory.

That is the situation we found ourselves in upon coming to government in August last year. It was not just the statistics. When you look at the Territory-wide crime statistics we were presented with over an eight-year period under the Labor government between 2016 and 2024, you can see that domestic violence assaults had increased by 82%; house break-ins by 106%; and robbery, extortion and related offences by 343%.

Those are incredible statistics; they highlight Labor's inability to tackle the root causes of crime. That was the situation we found ourselves in when we came to government in 2024.

I go back to my electorate, which is of great concern to me. In the Barkly alone over that eight-year period, alcohol-related assaults increased by 57%; domestic violence in Tennant Creek increased under Labor's reign by 101%; total offences against the person increased by 80%; and house break-ins increased by 243%.

That gives a picture of what we faced when we came to government. People ask me why. You often hear Labor talk about bringing in this Aboriginal Justice Agreement in August 2021, but there is a lot more history

to Aboriginal law and justice than the agreement. You only have to read extensive reports, like the Little Children are Sacred report, which was published in 2007. There is some interesting information in the report.

I will quote some of the commentary in that report, because it gives an idea of how we got into the situation we find ourselves in today. This is what it said:

> *It became clear during the Inquiry's consultations (and based on what the Inquiry learnt about Law and Justice Committees) that some headway might be made in relation to reducing criminal behaviour in Aboriginal communities, including the sexual abuse of children and the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system, if there was:*
>
> - *increased Aboriginal participation in the operation of the criminal justice system*
> - *development of community owned justice processes*

The Little Children are Sacred report also spoke about a particularly well-liked and respected program in the Northern Territory. It says:

> *In 1995, the Northern Territory Government initiated a strategy called the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy (ALJS). This strategy was a response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The ALJS was run from the Office of Aboriginal Development.*

In 1995 there was a CLP government. It continues:

> *The ALJS was designed to achieve the following:*
>
> - *at a community level, the strategy would invest in Aboriginal social and community development and building of local strengths to address community concerns. The strategy would also formalise community justice plans*
> - *at a regional level, the strategy would establish a participatory decision-making arrangement*
> - *at a Territory level, the strategy would develop policies for priority and emerging issues affecting Aboriginal people.*
>
> *The ALJS commenced in practical terms in 1995 in the community of Ali Curung. The ALJS was introduced in Lajamanu in 2000 then in Yuendumu in 2002.*

There is a strong connection between Ali Curung, Lajamanu and Yuendumu, which is the Warlpiri language group. The report continues:

> *The Inquiry was told that the ALJS was instrumental in:*
>
> - *establishing men's and women's night patrols, safe houses, dispute resolution practices, role and peer modelling programs, diversionary programs and protocol agreements between the relevant communities and government and non-government agencies …*

There was a more holistic approach to tackling crime issues in the Territory in the 1990s. In fact, I remember being a part of establishing the first women's safe house in Ali Curung in 1997. Those were some of the things that came out of the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy.

The report says that in 2005, after operating for nearly 10 years, the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy was discontinued. It goes on to say:

> *This was still a sore point for many people at the relevant communities when the Inquiry visited.*
>
> *…*
>
> *The Inquiry found it difficult to ascertain precisely why the ALJS had ceased.*

The Labor government was in place from 2001 to 2005. After a short time in government it scrapped the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy without any consultation with the people working with the strategy. A Warlpiri male elder said:

*When the Law and Justice Committee fell over it broke people's spirits, disempowered them further and brought shame in the eyes of the community.*

That is a bit of history about Aboriginal law and justice in the Northern Territory. We can see that Labor scrapped the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy in 2005. On 1 July 2008 the Labor government scrapped Aboriginal community government councils. That was a significant turning point for Aboriginal people living in remote areas. I will get to that a bit later because the Aboriginal Justice Agreement mentions the impact that losing that leadership in communities had on people living in remote areas.

As I always say, when we hear the term 'scrapping community government councils' it means that the leadership structure in those councils, being the Aboriginal people in those communities, was lost. The councils were scrapped by the Labor government, and the leadership was lost in those communities. It affected and disempowered the people. That was the turning point.

I reinforce that as the Aboriginal Affairs minister I am committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal communities and organisations to take action that makes a tangible difference on the ground.

Consistent with our overall priorities of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle, our priority in Aboriginal Affairs is empowering bush communities. We want to bring back what the Labor government took away in 2008. We want to restore the leadership in communities and the ability for Aboriginal people to make decisions about what happens in their communities, not decisions being made from Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine or Tennant Creek but by the people living in those communities. That is what we are focused on.

We are focused on creating real jobs and economic development, yet as we were trying to put through the Territory Coordinator Bill last night we heard from Labor that it is opposed to it. Labor is opposed to empowering communities. It scrapped community government councils and the law and justice strategy in 2005, and it did not want to pass legislation that will help create real jobs and economic opportunities in those communities. This is what we are focused on delivering as a government; we are addressing the root causes.

We heard the Member for Arafura talking about the programs that are working and the focus on alternatives to custody. There are alternatives to custody operating on Groote Eylandt and in Alice Springs. Anyone would think that we are just locking up people. Let me confirm that we are tackling the root causes when it comes to dealing with crime.

Yes, there have been more people locked up, but as the crime statistics and the statistics presented by the ABS this morning show, the rot set in well before the CLP came into government. That is where the problem lies. There has been no focus on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Labor scrapped law and justice and remote community councils, and we wonder how we got into this position. Aboriginal people were disempowered in their communities by the former Labor government; that is how we got into this position.

We are focused on addressing root causes. We have introduced the Circuit Breaker Program, working with young people, and focused on early intervention and prevention. Remember the words 'early intervention and prevention'. Members on the other side do not believe we are focused on them; we are.

We have foundational investment in education, health and housing to address the root causes. We are partners in a $4bn agreement with the federal government to deliver 2,700 houses over the next 10 years. We are doing what we can to address the lack of housing in the Northern Territory. We intend to build 270 homes per year under that agreement.

We are partners to an extra $1bn in education. We are focused on getting kids to school so that they can get an education with literacy and numeracy skills so that they can participate in the workforce, go to university or take on apprenticeships. We want to ensure that every young person in the Northern Territory thrives. That is our focus.

We are focused on delivering better health outcomes. I have been to two or three graduations where we are getting more Aboriginal people into the health system. We want Aboriginal people involved in the health system, delivering health services and supporting their communities across the board. We are focused on delivering on the root causes, despite what the Labor opposition is telling everyone.

**Dr RAHMAN:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

**Mr EDGINGTON:** We are focused on reducing crime. It is not all about being tough on crime; it is about addressing the root causes.

We have already made legislative changes to address the crime crisis which was allowed to escalate under Labor. We have reduced the minimum age of criminal responsibility, in line with other states in Australia. We have introduced new offences for nuisance public drinking, tightened bail laws and introduced new mandatory sentencing for assaulting a frontline worker.

We do not make any apologies for that. It is worth remembering and considering that Aboriginal Territorians are disproportionately represented as victims of crime. There is no doubt about that. We want to ensure that we are protecting Aboriginal people like every other Territorian.

Our government is committed to restoring control of communities to Aboriginal people, strengthening service delivery and fostering self-determination, which I spoke about earlier. We will work with Aboriginal people to empower communities that want a greater say. We committed to that when we went to the election. It is in our plan, Member for Karama, to empower communities and bring back leadership for them so that people are making decisions in the best interests of their communities. This will create opportunities for local community members to lead and contribute, and it will enable them to have a more active role in community development and decision-making processes.

It will not be a one-size-fits-all approach, because communities want different things. We want to work with individual communities, across communities and with language groups. We want the best model that will deliver for Aboriginal Territorians living in remote areas.

On Saturday the first election in the Groote Archipelago occurred, and Groote has now separated from the East Arnhem Regional Council. Going to Groote to listen to the people was a rewarding experience. They were thrilled to be moving ahead and restoring their council that was lost in 2008.

The CLP will support communities with infrastructure and management of local assets. We will foster skills development and create job opportunities. We understand that governance must reflect cultural authority and provide transparency and accountability under legislative frameworks. That is why we made the changes in the Groote Archipelago.

The Country Liberal Party is supporting the work to establish the community-owned governance model in Maningrida, the place-based partnership. That is one example. I have spoken about the alternative to custody.

If you listen to Labor we are apparently not doing anything, but we are. The CLP is delivering. We will continue to invest in leadership development, including the flagship First Circles Leadership Program. We want young people who are emerging leaders to come through these programs and take leadership skills into their communities to use them to the best advantage of the people they represent.

We are diverting people from the justice system at all stages. There are investments in pre-court diversion and in boot camps. The key elements of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement are particularly relevant, and I will talk about the three aims in the agreement.

It says—which is consistent with our policy—that the justice system plays a critical role in maintaining law and order and community safety. Government agencies and contracted service providers must consider change at every stage of the justice system to make services more relevant and effective for Aboriginal people. These changes must be led from Aboriginal communities to strengthen families, reduce the likelihood of offending and improve community safety. This is consistent with our policy about empowering communities.

Aim 2 is all about engaging and supporting Aboriginal leadership, consistent with what we want to deliver in the bush and what Labor took away from the bush. I remind everyone that Labor scrapped the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy in 2005, the community government councils in 2008 and introduced an Aboriginal Justice Agreement in 2021. The reality is we are 16 to 19 years behind where we should be because of the incompetence of the Labor government and its failure to work with Aboriginal people in communities. This is the situation we find ourselves in today because of the failures of the Labor government.

When developing the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, during the consultation Aboriginal Territorians emphasised—as outlined in other reports—that past policies and practices have actively undermined Aboriginal Territorians' capacity to lead and make decisions. This has resulted in a breakdown of social

structures and kinship systems; a loss of languages; restriction of lands, waters and cultures; and the gradual erosion of Aboriginal rights and responsibilities.

That is what is in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. It is what I outlined as the failure of Labor to deliver on Aboriginal law and justice and scrapping community government councils. It is quoted in the report. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement says that replacing community councils with shires had an impact on Aboriginal people living in the bush. That is what it says, and we want to fix it.

The CLP wants to make changes to empower people in the bush. Law and Justice Groups and community courts also play a critical role at the local level. We are continuing to implement Law and Justice Groups in communities.

When it comes to improving the justice response the agreement recognises the importance of empowering Aboriginal communities to lead and collaborate with government and contracted service providers to ensure that everyone is held accountable for the delivery of services. That is in line with what we want to deliver. We want to empower communities and make sure services are being delivered. We want to hold the government and non-government services accountable for the services they are delivering in communities. They need to be delivered in partnership with Aboriginal people, not for Aboriginal people but together with Aboriginal people in the communities.

This is what has been missing for so long. This is our opportunity to move forward with big changes in the bush. That is all about restoring smaller councils. However, the biggest focus we must have is empowering communities and restoring the leadership that was taken away on 1 July 2008. That leadership is out there; they want an opportunity to do things in their communities.

We are bringing back smaller community government councils so that people living in those areas can contribute and make decisions about law and justice, community safety, alcohol management, working with young people, working with offenders, delivering programs, tackling root causes and dealing with the things that were dealt with for many years before we were here. It is an opportunity to restore and empower people in those communities.

Member for Mulka, thank you for bringing on this important motion. We support the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. We signed it, agreed to it and are working together to empower communities. We want to see some big changes in the bush.

**Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader):** Madam Speaker, I also support the motion on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement that has been brought before the House by the Member for Mulka.

We heard from many of our parliamentary colleagues about the importance of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Many have quoted the aims—I will not repeat any of that—but this is a substantial policy/program/initiative/concept that is ultimately bipartisan. This motion has been brought to the House by the Independent Member for Mulka to ensure there is the bipartisan support from the now CLP government and the Labor members now in opposition. We also heard our colleagues the Independent Member for Johnston and The Greens Member for Nightcliff supporting this motion.

We have now heard from all parties in this House, so we can show support as a whole parliament for this motion to support the continued work in the Northern Territory to improve justice; get better justice outcomes; support justice reinvestment; address the glaring rates of Aboriginal incarceration, and reduce those incarceration rates; ensure alternatives to custody are available and that existing programs are expanded; and work in a bipartisan way in the spirit of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement's development.

This has come from the people of the Northern Territory. The most consulted piece of work done by any government in the Northern Territory informed that very important document. I thank the Member for Mulka for bringing a motion on it to the House today. This document brought together different political parties, political views and values to ultimately put all differences aside and unite for common good, in good faith. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement needs to continue under the CLP government to guide the principles to address what we all know needs to change in the Northern Territory.

The Member for Barkly has contributed. He was the shadow Attorney-General in the previous term for the CLP opposition and was forthcoming about his interest in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. He likes to rewrite history, but it took the CLP opposition not seven months, but eight months, to agree to sign a new insertion in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

We talk about politics. That is one of the worst examples I have seen in my nine years in this place—to put an agreed signature panel in the front of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement to appease the ego of the then Opposition Leader Lia Finocchiaro, so that she could star with her signature. We heard it from the Member for Barkly, speaking about himself and how it took so long for Labor. We just wanted to get on with the job. We did not want to worry about stroking the egos of the CLP members or where their names sat on the signature panel.

We wanted them to show Territorians, particularly Aboriginal Territorians, that the Aboriginal Justice Agreement meant more than politics; it meant changing lives, making a difference, improving justice, recognising and focusing on the rates of incarceration of Aboriginal Territorians and that justice alone cannot solve the problem. Politics will not solve the problem—that investment into the social determinants of justice.

Abject poverty in the Northern Territory exists; no-one can claim otherwise. We are in the 21st century and are still seeing the horror of generational trauma with Aboriginal Territorians' and First Nations' challenges in this country. We see it on a daily basis and across the electorates; I see it in my electorate. I ran as a local member to make a difference to improve the Northern Territory.

We cannot close our eyes and ignore the reasons, not excuses, that cause the high rates of Aboriginal incarceration in the Northern Territory. Noel Pearson stated years ago on a national television program that he believed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia were the most incarcerated people in the world. There were statistics comparing Australia with other countries, showing that the statement by Mr Pearson was correct. Aboriginal people are the most incarcerated Indigenous people in the world. What that means for the Territory is that it is reflected in the numbers we can rattle off.

Thirty per cent of Territorians are Aboriginal—one-third of the population—and, as the Attorney-General stated in her contribution, Aboriginal Territorians are three times more likely to be incarcerated in our justice system. Ninety per cent of male prisoners and 80% of female prisoners in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal Territorians.

Those rates flipped on their heads—we talk about being a reflection of our community; we are just short of being representative of the Territory's population. There are five members of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly who are Aboriginal out of 25; that is 20%, so we are under by 10% in talking about reflecting our communities in parliament. We are under-represented at the leadership, decision-making and lawmaking level. When you think about the grassroots problems; the in-your-face challenges; the generational trauma; the domestic violence; low education attendance; people starving and not having the money to feed themselves and their families; low literacy and numeracy rates; high unemployment rates; and high incarceration rates this picture becomes clearer when looking at the pipeline into the justice system. When Labor was in government the statistics for youth justice were that nearly 100% of young people were Aboriginal—another over-representation in the justice system for Aboriginal youths, women and men.

The Member for Gwoja, who loves politicking in this place, made some excellent points in his speech that relate to the bigger picture and what the Member for Mulka's intention is through this motion.

In the previous CLP opposition there were people who got everything I just said—like the now Treasurer, the Member for Namatjira, who did not waste his time signing a signature block. He went online and signed up straightaway to support the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. He has a strong background in Corrections. He has seen and lived all of that throughout his professional life prior to becoming an elected member.

The Member for Barkly got it, but maybe he was told not to sign and then was part of the dance we had around the ridiculous signatory panel in the eight months it took to appease the then Opposition Leader about where her name physically sat on the agreement. Former Labor Chief Minister Michael Gunner tasked me with just getting it done. My chief of staff was talking to her chief of staff, and there was back and forth. She wanted her name higher than other people's names. It was ridiculous.

It was finally signed eight months after the conversation of 'can we make this bipartisan?' I did not hear the CLP opposition say, 'Yes, we want to support this. Sign it. Let us do it tomorrow.' There were eight months of this ridiculous song and dance when we could have been working together—as the Member for Mulka suggested—to focus on programs like alternatives to custody and growing those programs; supporting behaviour change programs; making sure we are all advocates in reducing domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory; supporting programs that are specific but have huge impact, like the visiting elders program in our Corrections centres and work camps in the Northern Territory; and expanding work camps as another opportunity for stepping out of the justice system.

I remember the now Attorney-General, the Member for Brennan, saying famously in the last Assembly, 'Does the Labor government know that it will take a generation to solve generational trauma?' Yes, that is why you have to invest now because we are catching up on many generations of trauma.

**Mr Mackay:** Why did you not invest?

**Ms UIBO:** We did invest. The Member for Goyder has only been in this place for about seven months; maybe he will learn something in the next couple of years. But more than learn—he is part of government. Let us hope that he creates action, represents his electorate and that he learns from the people in his team about how to make the Territory a better place for everyone, not just the people who support the political parties or donate the big money to them.

Let us make sure he continues to advocate for the investment of $1bn for education that the former Labor government secured. Let us hope that the Member for Goyder supports the investment of the $4bn 10-year deal into remote housing. Let us see if someone like the Member for Goyder advocates in his team for social and affordable housing to try to reduce the 12-times the rate of homelessness in the Northern Territory. Let us hope he learns, but more so let us hope he acts in his position of power and decision-making as a member of government. It is pretty weak to hope, is it not? But sometimes that is all we can do.

Regarding the work of empowerment for Aboriginal Territorians, the former Labor government undertook the eight-year journey for local decision-making. That is about empowerment. That policy took years to see the changes within the government system—that is coming from someone who was a government member, then honoured to be a minister at the time.

We hear people get offended and insist, 'I'm not racist, and the system is not racist'. No, we are talking about systemic processes and policies that have disproportionately affected one group of people in the Northern Territory more than others. Whether people choose to recognise that, resonate with it or have experienced it—we heard the Member for Mulka share his heartbreaking experience of racism in the last couple of months, and he is a member of parliament and a lawmaker.

Imagine if someone does not have a voice, the support or a position where they can access information, support, guidance and help. Where does that leave a person who is downtrodden and experiencing racism? We can see that by looking at our Corrections system and prisons, or the people who are crying for more help when it comes to domestic, family, and sexual violence. It is glaringly obvious. I hope I do not have to verbalise it in that sense.

One thing in this place—I have heard the Member for Mulka speak about it, and it hit me that it was a year ago. As the local member and the former Minister for Local Decision Making I was involved in a discussion in the community of Gapuwiyak. The Member for Mulka is connected there; a lot of his family live in that community and the surrounding homelands that I am fortunate to represent as the Member for Arnhem. The family groups from the region in East Arnhem had a week-long workshop to discuss the idea of local decision-making, and I was fortunate to be at one of the days. A simple message was articulated in the strongest way; it is a message that the Member for Mulka has articulated as well. It is that in the Western system leadership, decision-making and structures change over time.

We have already seen it happen. We changed government; it changed policies and values, and the Northern Territory changes laws. In the Yolngu system—the Aboriginal First Nations system, particularly in the East Arnhem region—the leadership, governance structure and decision-making processes stay the same regardless of who is in government or what balanda role they might have in the workplace. Aboriginal leadership does not change hats; it stays the same and is passed on to the next generation. The wisdom, knowledge and diplomacy employed, especially in East Arnhem, is the perfect example of strong decision-making that has learnt …

**Mr PAECH:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

**Ms UIBO:** The East Arnhem region is the perfect example of diplomacy where Aboriginal leadership has taken the time to adjust to the balanda way of law and decision-making while keeping traditional law, culture, language and decision-making and leadership the same.

Just think about that. It has not been the other way around; we have not seen the Western system change to the Yolngu system of leadership, governance and decision-making. The Yolngu system has adjusted to operate in the Westminster and Western system of governance, leadership and decision-making.

That is really where the Aboriginal Justice Agreement cuts through. I know particularly in the Yolngu region of the Northern Territory they walk in both worlds with two-way learning. Often government after government in Australia and the Northern Territory made changes without two-way learning; it was a one-way exercise.

The two-way learning for Yolngu people is the philosophy and the way of life, decision-making and leadership. They are always sharing that concept, philosophy and wisdom. However, it is often a take from Yolngu, rather than take and give. Yolngu people are constantly giving but not getting back or receiving two-way reciprocation. In times when it does happen, it is rare.

That is the work the former Labor government undertook on local decision-making. How could the structures of the Western system—the balanda way—meet Yolngu First Nations decision-making leadership and law and find a middle ground to work in and operate to get positive outcomes? That journey took many years.

The new CLP government's Aboriginal Affairs minister, Steve Edgington, gave us a big history lesson about local government being the be-all and save-all of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. He said that the CLP government—I have it in black and white—will not commit to any further processes on local decision-making. Once any agreement that exists for all of the Aboriginal groups, organisations and regions that have spent years developing their local decision-making agreements—supported by government, not led by government in the past—expires, that is it; it is done. The CLP government will no longer progress any new or expired local decision-making agreements.

To put it simply, every time First Nations people take one step—and if they are lucky enough, two—forward, progressing in a process where they are valued, listened to and supported, they go crashing back three or four steps, and in this case five steps. Ultimately, Aboriginal people remain the political football of every government we have ever seen in Australia.

Talking about justice, we know that despite the CLP being a bipartisan member and signatory to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement of the Northern Territory—the first of its kind—it is already planning to build a new jail, as opposed to a new alternative-to-custody site, instead of using its time as a decision-maker to readjust its thinking and meet First Nations people halfway when it comes to better justice outcomes.

As I said at the start of my contribution, yes, consequences are something everyone wants—black, white, brown, brindle or whatever colour you are. Everyone want to see that when people have done the wrong thing there is a consequence.

What happens after that? That is where we have seen lots of literature, research and Law Reform Committee reports on the topic about the Western and First Nations systems of justice and law, as well as lore.

The Member for Mulka has never wavered in his consistent messaging, wisdom and knowledge for the last nine years about the distinction between the two and the way the two can work together. He has never changed the strong message from his electorate and the people he represents, from his experience in careers before being in this place—before being a part of the law and decision-making processes of the Northern Territory parliament.

When we see outcomes in the Western system regarding punishment and consequences; they do not always work in synergy and harmony. If someone has done the wrong thing in the Yolngu way there is a consequence for it, but they also must have a consequence or punishment in the balanda way (Western way), or vice versa. The punishment or consequence may happen in the Western way, but it still needs to happen to make it culturally balanced in the First Nations or Yolngu way—the Aboriginal cultural way.

Those two things can be at loggerheads; it has happened over time. I am not saying that anyone here is the cause of it, but it has happened, and the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is the way. The Member for Mulka has brought the motion to the House to bring it all back. What are the outcomes and improvements? How can everyone in the lawmaking and decision-making roles in this parliament work together to create, forge and support those changes for better outcomes?

The parliament is an amazing place in which to work. Those outside this bubble do not even know what we do as members of parliament. It is not said to guilt anyone, but when big decisions for law and justice, groups of people who may be disproportionally affected by a decision or law made by the Northern Territory

parliament if we have not done our due diligence and our duty as elected local members or, in the government's case, as ministers and decision-makers, we are doing a disservice to the profession, the place that we are in and the people we serve.

We can politicise in this place and do tit for tat. I am definitely guilty of that; I am no angel. I know that the Member for Mulka has again called that out. Today's motion shows that even after nine years, the course of working together for better justice outcomes continues to be a priority for the Member for Mulka and the people he represents—the reason he is in this place.

It is a timely reminder at the beginning of the next four years of the new government to have a chance to reflect on the priorities and the legacy of the CLP government four years down the track. What efforts and decisions will the government have made? What processes, policies and regulations that the government has control of have been put through parliament? What has the CLP contributed to, and has it improved justice in the Northern Territory and made a difference?

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**Mr GUYULA (Mulka)(in reply):** [By leave, the member spoke in Yolngu Matha and self-interpreted in English.]

Madam Speaker, it is good—I am happy with what happened today; I am pleased to see it. This is what we want and need to do—work together on issues and support one another.

In 2007 the intervention arrived in Milingimbi, and the power was taken from parents for disciplining and having further control over our children. That was the disempowerment of our elders and leaders. The Little Children are Sacred report told the story that they used to take away our authority. I was there right in front, watching, and I helped to interpret what was happening. That was when they set up the table and said, 'Wherever you are, whoever you are, come here, and sign up for this'. That is how it worked; that is what they commanded us to do. I even took out my old aeroplane pilot licence to show what I do, and what I have done in other areas. They said, 'No, you will not be needing that anymore; you will have to sign up for new work-for-the dole activities.'

That was a big disempowerment—to look after our children.

After the intervention I went back to CDU, where I was working as a senior Yolngu lecturer teaching balanda about Yolngu *rom*. That is where I started, at CDU. I taught balanda who wanted to learn Yolngu Matha language and culture. They came from around Darwin and through Skype and things like Teams. People joined in.

Then I started to become known in Japan and America. They saw what was going on with the teaching about Yolngu *rom*, and other countries wanted to join in. TUFS (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) started to learn Yolngu law. I was teaching, sitting in the classroom at CDU, while people joined in to listen.

I had to go back to Milingimbi to attend a funeral. I looked around and I saw that there were kids talking back and throwing things back at their parents. They were running around wild. I said, 'Hey, these children were never like this; they always respected families. What is wrong here?' I had to drop everything at CDU. 'I'll send someone over there, then I will come over to fix this problem with the children'. That is how I started to realise that there was something wrong with the children. I had to resign from CDU, and I started working with senior elders. We had a problem on our hands.

These children, who were young kids from 2007 to 2009, are now big people. This is what is happening with crime. This is my experience; it is what we saw in the communities. These are the children of the intervention; Yolngu *rom* was never like that.

If we stand together here in the Chamber and out in the communities on issues like this, or what is happening in the communities—let us work together on these. When I stepped into the Chamber here—I won first go at having a go to fix this thing. I walked in and everybody deserted, 'What is he going to do now?' Now we are starting to get recognised, to be understood.

We will tell you there is something wrong with that intervention. I am always finding out that people are saying …

[Interruption.]

**Madam SPEAKER:** I am sorry.

**Mr GUYULA:** *Manymak*, they are all cheering for me.

**Mr Paech:** We have all been there.

**Mr GUYULA:** *Yow*, they have all been there.

**Madam SPEAKER:** It is very embarrassing.

**Mr GUYULA:** I lost what I was saying.

We made up a group of elders and leaders to try to talk to them. When Labor took over from the CLP, the intervention then became Stronger Futures. That is what it came up with. That is when we were having problems with people taking over the authority of the community.

They said, 'We will smash out these houses with four, five or even six rooms and make a good living house for you. It is better housing for safety and for children.' You know what? They only replaced them with three-bedroom houses. That is how it became overcrowded. That is what happened.

I kept coming. I came to the Chamber saying, 'There is something wrong. Listen to me.' Nobody wanted to listen to me. I always spoke to people on the other side—Labor then, but I am talking about both Labor and the CLP, here and federally—and they said, 'We have problems'. I said, 'I know what the problems are; I have been sent by my leaders and elders to come and tell the parliament.' They always said, 'Yes, but we think we know what is best for you; we have it under control', but I was the one sent by my elders to work with the government here.

This is what I am asking for further. If we work together we will fix things, create a pathway and make a better community. Now we have big crime that is out of our hands, and we are looking for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. In Ramingining, Maningrida, Kintore, Yuendumu and Barunga the Law and Justice Groups are already there. This is what is trying to control all the Yolngu who are committing crimes, breaking in and this and that. I keep saying, 'Let us look at the underlying issue'. These are the children of the intervention. When the federal government came to disempower families, Mal Brough and John Howard sent the forces over, I was there; there were Army and police coming to take over our community in Milingimbi. We felt we were being disempowered, so we called for help; then I came here.

Recently in regard to the crime, Yolngu wanted to create a pathway for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Chansey came and fixed all that and started an agreement working together, but it never got kicked off, what was going to go on there, and started. These communities are waiting.

There is a new CLP government. I am back here, and I will try to approach the new government about the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. This is what has happened today; it has started. There is an agreement that the Labor government was trying to get up and running, but time ran out.

This time I have come to approach you. I have been given support by the CLP, and we will be working on the Aboriginal Justice Agreement to try to fix the problems with crime, break-ins and everything that is going on in the communities and in Darwin. I thank you for that now.

I am asking this government that we get it started somehow. I have asked for it to be done by 2027. You have agreed for me and my people that we will start working on something like that—planning now and creating something by then. We want to see this up and running. *Manymak*.

We will stand together. We can work together. Let us work together. You ask me what you want and what you have to provide, and I will support you and show you the way.

Thank you for supporting my motion to the government. We want to see this running and working together and be a community.

Motion agreed to.

## MOTION
## Water Security in the Northern Territory

**Mr PAECH (Gwoja):** Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly calls on the Northern Territory Country Liberal Party government to:

- work in partnership with the Commonwealth Government to undertake an independent and comprehensive review of the Northern Territory *Water Act 1992* and, where required implement legislative reforms based on scientific evidence

- commit to the continued implementation of priority actions identified in the Territory Water Allocation Plan, recognising that it is the Northern Territory's first whole-of-government strategic plan for water security and the result of comprehensive community and industry consultation

- honour the previous Labor government's commitment and introduce a safe drinking water Act, which was being developed by NT Health to be introduced to the Legislative Assembly by the end of 2024—which will now be 2025

- introduce a moratorium on all new water licences and allocations in the Northern Territory until an independent review is carried out.

I cannot change the past, but I can change the future. I present this motion calling on the Northern Territory Country Liberal Party government to take decisive action to safeguard one of our most vital resources—water. This motion reflects the urgency and our responsibility to ensure the sustainability, quality and equitable management of water for current and future generations of Territorians.

Our water security is not just a matter of environmental importance; it is the cornerstone of public health, economic prosperity and the wellbeing of our communities, ecosystems and wildlife. The actions outlined in this motion are steps towards strengthening our water governance and protecting this invaluable resource.

The first point of this motion calls for a partnership with the Commonwealth Government to undertake an independent and comprehensive review of the Northern Territory *Water Act 1992*. This legislation must evolve to meet the challenges of today. It is vital that it be reviewed with scientific evidence that considers the perspectives of all stakeholders, including traditional owners, environmental experts, industry and community groups.

A modernised *Water Act* is necessary to address the mounting pressures on our water systems from population growth to climate change impacts. By conducting an independent review we can ensure our legislative framework aligns with best practice and serves the long-term interests of the Northern Territory.

Secondly, I urge this government to remain steadfast in its commitment to the implementation of the Territory Water Plan, which is a landmark achievement. This first whole-of-government strategic plan for water security in the Northern Territory is the product of consultation with our communities and industries, reflecting their insights, concerns and aspirations. Priority actions within the plan must be implemented with urgency and dedication. These actions are essential for building resilience in our communities, our water systems and safeguarding our water for agricultural and industry development.

It is important to ensure that safe and clean drinking water is accessible to all Territorians. Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental right, yet it remains an ongoing challenge for some parts of the Northern Territory. The previous Labor government committed to introducing a safe drinking water Act, which was critical legislation being developed by the Department of Health. This motion calls on the new government to honour that commitment and ensure the Act is introduced. This legislation is not just a promise; it is a necessity. It will set clear standards for drinking water, water quality and monitoring and compliance, particularly for remote and regional communities which have long faced inequities in access to safe drinking water.

The motion advocates for the introduction of a moratorium on all new water licences and allocations until an independent review of the *Water Act* is complete. This is a precautionary measure to prevent over-allocation and unsustainable usage of our water resources during this critical period of reform. Unchecked usage of water licences risks undermining the integrity of our water systems and the livelihoods that depend on them. A moratorium will provide the necessary breathing space to conduct thorough evaluations and implement evidence-based reforms without compromising the health of our water supplies and waterways.

Water is life. It is an irreplaceable resource that sustains our ecosystems, supports our industries and underpins the health and prosperity of Territorians. This motion is not about politics; it is about our collective responsibility to ensure that the Northern Territory's water resources are managed equitably, sustainably and transparently.

Every Member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly has a unique connection to water. We consume it every day. We often take our families and loved ones to water whether that is to the beach, one of the

Territory's mighty river systems, a waterhole or a swimming pool. Even with day-to-day accessing of water for hygiene purposes we all have a connection to this unique and finite resource.

It is crucial that the Northern Territory has thorough, comprehensive legislative arrangements and frameworks to safeguard and protect this resource so that the Territory of the future is sustainable, well managed and has an abundance of water.

I come from the beautiful lands of the Arrernte people of Central Australia in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) where we mine water. We do not have the abundance of a Wet Season. We gather our water from the ground, from ancient aquifers where the water is thousands of years old. It is a resource that is rarely recharged at a rate to make large-scale projects sustainable. It is crucial that we have plans and do an independent evaluation to make sure we have quality drinking water well into the future.

I share some of the concerns from the Arid Lands Environment Centre and the Environment Centre NT, which unfortunately had its funding cut by the Member for Braitling, the so-called minister responsible for protecting the environment. That minister scrapped the West Davenport Water Allocation Plan seven days before Christmas, along with the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan, and introduced revised plans that took millions—thousands of additional gigalitres of water, with no reason why that process was happening.

It is this minister who claims to care about the environment who destroyed the Water Advisory Committee. He sacked the members on that committee—the very people who were providing strategic expert advice to the government on the ongoing management of water allocations and sustainability. Gone—the committee destroyed.

In the Chamber yesterday we spoke about the importance of sacred sites. Many sacred sites are connected to waterways, soakages, billabongs, springs, rivers and gorges. Water is connected to sacred sites. First Nations Territorians are connected to the Territory waterways. We must ensure that any future projects are done in an environmentally ecologically sustainable way.

That is why I have brought forward this motion. I believe it is crucial for us to address these key factors. The Department of Health was developing a safe drinking water Act when the government went into caretaker mode. I urge the Northern Territory's Minister for Health, Steve Edgington—who is from a remote part of the Northern Territory—to bring that legislation to the parliament so we can debate it and introduce a safe drinking water Act to the Northern Territory.

I acknowledge the firm advocacy from many First Nations communities to have that piece of work developed. It was crucial. During my time as a minister I went to many communities, and I have spoken in this Chamber about projects to improve water quality. In my electorate of Gwoja we ensured that a water treatment plant was introduced in Laramba because the community had naturally occurring levels of uranium in the water. We had to address that issue.

We had to look at additional investments across the Northern Territory to address naturally occurring high levels of minerals to discuss the areas where we could guarantee water security for many remote communities. We urge the government to continue this work. It is important that all Territorians have access to safe drinking water regardless of whether you live in Darwin, Palmerston, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Alice Springs or in the bush. Good-quality drinking water is a fundamental right and is crucial.

Water allocation plans are important. Water will become a huge issue in the future. We hear about it now in National Cabinet meetings. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs would have no doubt heard about the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves in the Closing the Gap meetings and the need to continue to make a firm investment in that space to honour those commitments; it is crucial to the future of all Territorians to have access to this finite resource.

A moratorium on all new water licences and allocations is important. We need to understand how much water is available for Territorians. The Commonwealth must be involved in a review process because a large number of land parcels in the Northern Territory sit on Aboriginal land, which is under Commonwealth legislation. We must work with the Commonwealth to ensure access to good-quality drinking water for the many homelands across the Northern Territory. It is crucial for them to access those services.

There is work being undertaken by a number of Australian researchers regarding the levels and quality of water across Australian communities. Questions have been raised as to whether there is comparable research to link the number of the people who suffer from renal failure or are undergoing dialysis with poor access to water.

It is important to do this work to truly understand how good the quality of the water is and, if additional work needs to be stood up, we could continue that investment. Without that investment or those plans, we cannot see the growing investment.

Yuendumu is a fantastic community in my electorate. For many years we could not build a house in Yuendumu because we did not have a guarantee of a good, long-term supply of water.

Through the work of Power and Water, we were able to identify a stream of good-quality water to enable that investment. That work will continue—I am sure of it—under Minister Edgington, the minister responsible for Housing, power and water. That is a sound project being undertaken by Power and Water.

An area familiar to many members in this Chamber, and which we have spoken about over the last eight years, is recycling water—greywater, as it is called. There have been numerous projects and items discussed at length regarding how we can recycle water in remote communities.

I have been a champion of this for a number of years. We should be able to recycle water in remote communities so that we can irrigate and have green ovals and trees. It causes many problems when it is 45 degrees in a remote community, and there is not a single blade of grass or a shade tree. It increases health implications for our countrymen and sometimes forces them into larger towns.

That has often been held up by how it would interface with health regulations and what could be used, what level of water and what access could be given at times for irrigating with that water. This is an important step. When we look at water and the regulations we can have a comprehensive plan for well into the future when we can look at using greywater to irrigate remote communities.

When we have green spaces in remote communities, we can start to create precincts in those communities. These are places where families come together on lush green lawns and play footy, the ladies might come and play softball and the mums and bubs programs, Families as First Teachers or the schools will all use that space.

We have seen time and again in remote communities that people can use greywater to irrigate and grow orchards and crops to help support the community stores. When someone leaves it again comes to the issue of who will pay the water bill. Who is responsible? Can we use that water or not?

A comprehensive review is needed to look at water in the Northern Territory so that we can guarantee good-quality drinking water for every Territorian and address water security issues. I understand there is a series of plans in place in the Top End for water storage. There is a project spoken about what it looks like. It is different from the southern region of the Northern Territory. It is important to have conversations about this work.

The subject of water security and quality comes up at land council meetings across the Northern Territory. Whether it is the Central, Northern, Tiwi or Anindilyakwa council members, they speak strongly on behalf of their communities about having good-quality drinking water. We need to continue to put pressure on the government to address this.

This motion is important, and I urge the government to consider the key aspects of the independent review of the Northern Territory *Water Act 1992* and for members to look at the Territory Water Plan. It was a comprehensive plan built on consultation with communities and industries reflecting the insights, concerns and aspirations of all Territorians. It should not be set in stone; it should enable Territorians to continue to have their say. The Department of Health is hopefully continuing work on safe drinking water legislation so that we can see a Bill to guarantee that national minimal standards are agreed to and adopted and that a range of measures is introduced across communities to ensure every Territorian has access to quality drinking water.

The moratorium on new water licences and allocations is nothing to be afraid of; it is good governance. This process enables us a pause while an independent review looks at the allocations, licences and extraction rates to ensure we are not taking too much of this finite resource so that future Territorian generations can continue to live in and call this place home. I want to see a Northern Territory where people can continue to live in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) and be guaranteed good-quality drinking water.

I acknowledge the work done over the years on the water treatment plant in Alice Springs. That treats the water from the sewage ponds to the back of the Arid Zone Research Institute and is then filtered to help recharge another aquifer. This is an important project, as water is important.

It is important for the CLP government to be reminded of honouring the commitments to water quality, security and regulations as part of the inquiry by Justice Pepper. Working with the Commonwealth will also enable the Territory to have a comprehensive understanding of the Commonwealth water trigger and what it means, how it can be enacted and any consequential flow-on effects that has on the Territory.

It is important that we get this right. There are many pieces to the water puzzle. I have highlighted a number of areas that I believe are a step in the right direction. There will always need to be work done in this space because the landscape will change. As we try to respond and adapt to and address climate change, we will have to deal with the consequences of that; we will also have to deal with consequences of inaction on climate change.

I thank honourable members for indulging me in this motion tonight. I understand that there are several members who wish to speak. I am interested in hearing from members of the CLP government as to whether they will accept this motion and bring a safe drinking water Act before parliament in this term of government. I am interested in hearing whether they will agree to a moratorium on new water licences and whether they will support an independent review in partnership with the Commonwealth.

This is an opportunity for the CLP to demonstrate that it has learnt from the history of its party, when the CLP focused only on giving water allocations to their mates and political candidates. It is an opportunity to learn from that and move forward.

As I said at the start of my speech I cannot change the past, but I can be involved in shaping the future. As a parliament we can shape the future together and develop a series of comprehensive water security and water quality reforms because it is the right thing to do. Every one of us depends on access to water and to good-quality drinking water. Without it we do not exist, and our country and landscapes do not exist. Without it we are not healthy; we are deprived. We cannot survive without water. As many of our environmental groups rightly put it, water is life, and without it we are nothing.

I am mindful of the time, and I acknowledge that this will appear as an order of the day. I very much look forward to working with the parliament to bring back this motion. Many members should have a say on this because our constituents expect us to have a clear position on a number of elements that are in this motion.

I look forward to speaking about this further. I urge government members to consider the motion, as we will bring it back shortly. I am happy to meet with any member of parliament to talk about the motion and any additional amendments that may be required to get it over the line and have this comprehensive work undertaken.

Debate suspended.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business):** Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

**Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim):** Madam Speaker, I am privileged to report that I represented my colleague, Hon Jinson Charls, Minister for Arts, to launch the inaugural Darwin Comedy Festival recently. I thought we could all use a bit of levity and that it was worth reflecting on what a great event it was.

The minister and I are frequently confused for being one another, and it was nice for a change to go to an event and be confused for being Nazeem Hussain. I suspect that was the primary reason I got subbed in at the last minute for the event, but I was delighted to attend, nevertheless.

The festival was held over three days from 6 to 8 March at the Darwin Entertainment Centre. By all measures the event was a raging success and brought in large crowds with dozens of fantastic sold-out shows. Darwin and our visitors deserve the best live performance experiences that Australia has to offer, and this festival delivered some of that. Some of the best comedians in the country flew to the Top End for our audiences to enjoy. In total 57 comedians performed at the festival, bringing our community together and sharing some much-needed laughter and joy with all of us.

The stellar line-up of headline comedians included luminaries like Celeste Barber; Reuben Kaye; Sammy J; Luke McGregor; Geraldine Hickey; the Aboriginal Comedy Allstars; and, of course, Nazeem Hussain. These headliners were supported by a show for families, including Children are Stinky—which I can report was more pleasant to attend than it sounds—and, importantly, an amazing line-up of local comedians thanks to Sarah Reuben, Brent Watkinson and the team at Top Floor Comedy who coordinated the Laugh Lounge shows.

A shout-out goes to some of my constituents in that regard for supporting local comedy, notably Briant and Monica from The Last Supper Pizzeria, who regularly put on comedy outside of the festival to support people, and likewise Bardy and Stu at the One Mile Brewing Company who bring up comedians periodically as well. Those guys are providing the feeder for events like RAW Comedy for emerging comedians. For those of you who are uninitiated, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival's annual RAW Comedy event is Australia's largest and most celebrated open-mic competition.

It is super important we provide our constituents with the opportunity to be part of that. That is a segue to talking about opportunity, which is the serious part of the speech, if you like. The Darwin Entertainment Centre provides a pathway for artists of all types, not just professionals but also amateurs and community groups, with an opportunity and spaces for self-expression, which is just so important.

The Entertainment Centre is deeply committed to bringing vibrancy to our city year-round, and it is worth highlighting because the Darwin Entertainment Centre is yet another fixture of our landscape, but it is so easy to take for granted. Why? Because at its core, through art, culture, storytelling, theatre and music, the DEC plays its part to ensure that Darwin is indeed a great place to live, work and play.

DEC's programs are extremely diverse and inclusive and seek to bring in a plethora of options for our audiences to enjoy, ranging from music to circus and from dance to comedy. It is so much more than just a hall for hire; it is a place that boasts a music program, a family program, a creative learning program for schools to enrich the curriculum and inspire young people, plus a First Nations program featuring things like the Garrmalang Festival. Likewise, it supports our arts sector through partnerships with the Darwin Festival, Darwin Fringe Festival and artists in residence, including SLIDE Youth Dance Theatre, Gary Lang NT Dance Company and, of course, the Darwin Symphony Orchestra.

To quantify that contribution, just consider the following numbers. The Darwin Entertainment Centre welcomes over 78,000 attendees every year; employs over 9,000 artists and performers; educates more than 9,000 students and children through its programs; and supports some 23 community groups with access to stages and subsidies worth more than $250,000. What then of those numbers is the return on investment?

A recent Darwin Entertainment Centre impact and evaluation study will tell you that 94% of the attendees at shows feel welcome, which is a great thing; that 95% of those attendees report having a really positive experience when they go; and that 82% of those respondents—this is an important one—would not have visited the area if the event they attended had not been held.

Think about that as a little footnote. We all bemoan the state of the CBD and the fact that it and the numbers are not what they used to be and that it is tough for small businesses to stay afloat in this climate. The Entertainment Centre is one of the drawcards that bring people into the city. Take note of this statistic: 87% of attendees spend money in the CBD when they come to attend a Darwin Entertainment Centre production. Those visits are extremely important. Some 41% of respondents in that same evaluation study noted that they would like to see more cultural events in Darwin.

We often talk in this place about competitive and strategic advantages and leveraging our opportunities. I reckon two of the ones that we could really make a lot more use of in terms of bang for buck, return on investment and what they contribute to not just our economy but also our society—the rich tapestry of everything, art, and dare I say it, food. If you want bang for buck the greatest return on investment and economic endeavour that this town runs is the Laksa Festival. It costs nothing to put on, everyone attends it and we all enjoy it. Obviously, my tummy is grumbling a bit and that is probably a bit of bias, but I think that we could do more to leverage our competitive advantage by thinking about what we can do in the arts space as well as in the food space.

**A member:** Hear, hear!

**Dr RAHMAN:** Thank you.

The sum total of that recent impact and evaluation study pointed out that every dollar of funding we spend in the Entertainment Centre space has a return on investment of $9.83. That is a remarkable statistic. I freely admit that it is its own evaluation study, so it could be on the rosier side of things. Even so, the return on investment is undoubtedly high for what we do at the Entertainment Centre. It is an important institution to support to make sure it can continue to provide support to our wider community. Can you imagine what our city landscape would be like if we did not have an entertainment centre to host events?

I will be doing my part in my side hustle as a musician to make sure that we put on things at the Entertainment Centre when we can—and things that kids can access. The Entertainment Centre recently worked with community theatre groups that put on enormous productions like the *Mary Poppins* production, which I will come back to talk about at length because I have another 10 minutes to go on how excellent *Mary Poppins* was. I will hold off on that one for tonight. The point is that the Entertainment Centre is providing space and a suite of opportunities that are difficult to come by.

I thank the DEC board and the DEC team who worked incredibly hard to bring this festival to light and to activate our city in a new and exciting way. We talk about words like 'activation'. What does it take to activate a city? It takes the goodwill, hard work, cooperation and collaboration of people in our arts communities as well. They have been to some extent overlooked over a period of time. We have a thriving arts sector in the Northern Territory. It has always had a disproportionately high number of people involved for a place that has only 250,000 people across the entire Northern Territory.

I specifically thank Georgia Hendy, the recently appointed DEC CEO, who hails from Sydney and who has brought her family here to make a valuable contribution. She personally curated a lot of the Comedy Festival artists. I sat next to her at the Reuben Kaye show. The whole audience was clinging on desperately, waiting to see who would be offended and leave first. She had the right judgement to pick the right sort of comedian who would push the envelope and make it a spicy and entertaining event for everyone in every regard.

I also shout out to a special Fong Lim constituent, the DEC Chair, Hon Clare Martin AO, who graciously hosted and roasted me at a number of shows that I was able to attend.

I applaud the strategic planning of the CEO and the board. It is smart timing to put on a festival now as part of the festival circuit, allowing us to capitalise on the momentum elsewhere.

In closing, I wish the Darwin Comedy Festival and the Darwin Entertainment Centre every success. I look forward to this becoming a regular fixture in the Northern Territory arts calendar.

**Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama):** Madam Speaker, I will talk about a charity event that part of our CLP team is participating in at the moment: the March On Challenge. The dynamic team members who have gone in this event are the Members for Drysdale, Wanguri, Port Darwin and yours truly. We are doing a virtual walk of the Kokoda Track to raise money.

What is March On with Soldier On? I quote:

> *March On with Soldier On is a virtual walking challenge to raise funds to help prevent veteran suicide. It pays tribute to the sacrifices made by our brave soldiers in Kokoda in World War II, and highlighting the importance of needing to help our soldiers of today.*

It is a worthy cause. The way it works is you sign up, try to get donors and then log your steps. You can choose to do either the 96 kilometres to Kokoda or, for my sins, I have tried to do the return one, which is about 196 kilometres. That is done within the month.

We are doing it as a team; we set a goal. We all put in a goal of what we would raise which was $2,270. Collectively we have raised $1,733 so far. I am happy to approach any member who wants to donate. It is open to everyone. I can send you the link. I am more than happy for the opposition and the Independents to come and join us, as well as any of our colleagues.

It is a good cause. It is challenging, particularly being the F-grade athlete that I am. I have clocked up 101 of the 192 kilometres I am supposed to do by the end of March. How the hell have I done that? You have to ask yourself, 'How can Brian do that?' I will tell you how. I cheat because I log my steps when I deliver my newsletter. Over the last couple of weeks I have visited over 1,000 houses in the Karama electorate. That is a lot of kilometres.

One action serves many purposes. I get out and connect with my constituents and residents. At the same time I am clocking kilometres to raise money. The wonderful constituents of Karama have also volunteered to donate money. I will relay the case of when I walked out of the Karama Shopping Plaza the other day. A guy, Tony, came up and said, 'Brian, are you walking the Kokoda Track?' I said, 'I'm not quite walking it. It is a virtual walk. We just log it.' I explained it to him. He said, 'I want to give you $100'. I was about to go, and I said, 'The office is shut. I can send you a link and you can email it.' He said, 'No, I want to give it to you'.

He took me to the ATM, took out $100 and gave it to me, which I have logged on his behalf and donated. It is all done properly. I said, 'What is your motivation?' He said, 'My brother was a Vietnam veteran. This is a really good thing to do.' Other people have come up and said, 'Gee, can I help?', and they give me $10. It is not the amount; it is the thought and participation.

That is where I have been clocking up my kilometres. I admit that I have to stir up my colleagues. They have to pull their fingers out and get there, but we are getting there. In the end it does not really matter. Everyone does their best. It is a great cause, and I am happy to do this.

I acknowledge Clinton because he is a veteran. He was the one who initiated this idea. The Members for Wanguri, Port Darwin and I have embraced it. It is a wonderful thing we should collectively do; it is always better to give than to take.

**Mrs HERSEY (Katherine):** Madam Speaker, I put on the record the great work of the Learning Commission, which happened in Katherine a couple of weeks ago. It was an incredible experience to join students from across the Katherine region at Knotts Crossing Resort for the launch of the NT Learning Commission, coming together as a commission.

The morning was filled with excitement, optimism and inspiration as students from Casuarina Street Primary School, Katherine South Primary School, Katherine High School and Mataranka School came together for the first time in 2025. This year marks the 10th anniversary of this exceptional initiative; it is an achievement.

The Learning Commission began in 2016 in Katherine at Casuarina Street Primary School, thanks to the vision and passion of John Cleary and a group of dedicated schools. John Cleary was a fantastic principal, who has moved on to bigger and better things.

The goal was simple yet powerful: to empower students and make them partners in their own learning journey. I could not agree more; if you are part of a journey it is more interesting and exciting for the students.

What began as a small initiative has blossomed into something extraordinary. Today 53 schools from across the Territory, with about 800 students participating, carry that same passion forward, creating a ripple effect that is shaping the future of education.

What makes the Learning Commission special is how it brings student leaders together to engage in meaningful discussions and actively contribute to their learning journeys. Through the program students are given the opportunity to analyse information, identify challenges, design creative solutions and bring their ideas to life. It is an empowering process where they are encouraged to lead, collaborate and make a real impact.

Watching the students take charge of their learning was inspiring. They are not just developing academic skills; they are developing vital leadership and life skills that will serve them for years to come. The ideas and solutions brought forward by these student commissioners have the potential to create lasting positive change in their schools and communities. It is exciting to see them critically and creatively think about the world around them.

At the end of each year the work of the student commissioners culminates in a pitch to the minister, which I attended for the first time last year. They presented their ideas, solutions and initiatives. I look forward to November when I will see the results of their hard work and dedication. It is clear that these young leaders are already laying the groundwork for future success and positive change in the Territory.

I thank Summer Howarth, the event facilitator, and the Department of Education and Training for making this opportunity possible. With those young leaders at the forefront the future across education is bright.

I have the pleasure of supporting groups of young people in their journeys, whether it be representing sport or something else. I supported Wade Bryant, John Rice and Hunter, whose surname has escaped me, with a 100-club board and raffle to fundraise for their quest to Queensland between 14 and 17 April to compete in Australian junior golf. I wish them the best, and I know they will do their best to make our community proud. Wade and John represented the Territory last year; this year they are taking Hunter as well. It is fantastic to see these young boys play golf. I will be keeping an eye on them as they grow. Their parents hope they do amazing things.

The Katherine ambulance centre is supporting the Katherine youth team in heading to Darwin on 4 April to compete on 5 April in the NT Youth Competition. The competition has multiple facets, including first aid skills,

communication, team challenges and a practical scenario run over the course of the day. It is being held at Hidden Valley raceway. For anyone who is in Darwin on 5 April that might be something to have a look at.

They will be competing against other NT teams from Darwin, Palmerston, Farrar and Humpty Doo; hopefully, Alice Springs will make the journey as well. The winning team from the NT competition will compete in the national competition later this year in Sydney. This year's national competition will be a big event, as it is also the Centenary of Youth Celebration for St John. I thank Tamara Willcox, the Ambulance Support Coordinator; she helps coordinate that group. They came to my office get a donation to support them in their quest to get to Darwin for that competition.

**K McNAMARA (Nightcliff):** Madam Speaker, last Monday I had the honour of meeting with the Chair and the Director of the Nurrdalinji Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, Samuel Janama Sandy and Cain O'Keefe. Nurrdalinji is an Alawa word meaning 'mixed tribe'. The members of this Aboriginal corporation come from across the Barkly and Roper regions, which is the region on the front line of the struggle against fracking. They made the big trip up the track to Darwin last week.

The corporation formed in 2020, and its members include more than 60 native title holders from 11 native title determination areas throughout the Beetaloo basin. The Nurrdalinji corporation works to support members to be consulted about what happens on country and enable them to be heard so that together they can better protect their country and determine future aspirations for their lands.

Nurrdalinji wants fracking companies to properly consult with members, inform them of what development is planned and for them to act on members' concerns. Nurrdalinji wants the NT Government to respect its members' rights as traditional owners and custodians to exercise self-determination over their lands.

The focus of our meeting was to discuss the key concerns that the Nurrdalinji members have about mining and fracking on their lands in the Beetaloo region. They would like a re-examination of the way in which these exploration permits are granted and have been granted in the past.

Some people might not know that once an exploration permit is agreed to, traditional owners do not get another chance to say no if the companies want to move on to production or selling the gas, even though the impacts of this are much more significant than the initial exploration that was agreed upon.

This means that companies can downplay what a project involves when speaking to elders, to get their consent by speaking only of the exploration phase, then years later—often when those elders who gave the initial consent have passed away—the community has no way to make a different decision when the project transforms as it reaches production and is no longer a single well, but is a proposal for a gas field that could be thousands of fracking wells.

Samuel and Cain shared with me their deep concerns that the elders were not properly or wholly informed of what they were agreeing to more than 15 years ago. They now have no agency to seek changes to what is being done to their lands. They shared with me that their elders were told that the impacts from drilling would be the size of a billy can, but this could not be further from the truth.

With the 'megafracker' now being used in the Beetaloo, a Beetaloo operations update in December 2024 stated that the SS-2H well was successfully drilled to a total depth of 3,600 metres in 35 days, intersecting the Amungee B-Shale as prognosed. This included a 3,000-metre horizontal section that was successfully geosteered. Elders were told that the holes would be the size of billy cans, when they are now seeing on their lands holes with total depths of 6,300 metres.

This also speaks to the way in which the CLP government is preventing traditional owners from having the full picture before agreeing to the sale of appraisal gas to Imperial Oil & Gas for EP187. In Question Time I asked the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment about significant concerns that a major fracking breach has occurred, yet both the previous Labor government and the current CLP government have done nothing to ensure community members were aware, or anything to hold this fracking company to account. The answer I received from the minister pertained to an accident already in the public domain, not the incident I was referring to that has so far been hidden from the public. I will be seeking further information from the minister on this.

Samuel and Cain shared the concerns that their communities are deeply worried about their sacred sites and water. Fracking injects thousands of tonnes of carcinogenic chemicals and sand into underground aquifers. The industry has a terrible record of accidents and spills that contaminate our environment, including our drinking water, many of which have already happened at Beetaloo and were made public only due to whistleblowers.

It is simply not okay to put water resources at risk, especially not in arid Australia which relies on underground aquifers.

Nurrdalinji Native Title Aboriginal Corporation wants its members to be properly included in decision-making. It was something the Member for Mulka spoke of yesterday during his speech against the Territory Coordinator. He said:

> *Aboriginal people are not against economic development, but we don't want it steamrolled over the top of us … We want to be part of the decision-making …*

Not only is the CLP government not listening to the voices of the First Peoples of these lands, it is working hard to further erode their rights and the processes available to appeal decisions through its removal of merits reviews and the implementation of the Territory Coordinator. This is further entrenching a dangerous culture in our government which says that any kind of extractive development is worth steamrolling the rights of custodians, the broader community and the future of the land and water we all rely on.

It was inspiring to meet the strong leaders from Nurrdalinji Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, and I hope that the Chamber can reflect on the kind of place we could live in if we listened to local leaders who speak for country.

**J DAVIS (Johnston):** Madam Speaker, tonight during the last week of Ramadan, a holy time for Muslims the world over, I wish to recognise an important date that occurred over the weekend: 15 March, the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. This day marks the tragic anniversary of the Christchurch mosque attack in New Zealand in 2019, where 51 innocent people lost their lives.

As the then Prime Minister of New Zealand reflected:

> *That quiet Friday afternoon has become our darkest of days.*
>
> *But for the families, it was more than that. It was the day that the simple act of prayer—of practising their Muslim faith and religion—led to the loss of their loved ones lives.*
>
> *Those loved ones, were brothers, daughters, fathers and children.*
>
> *They were New Zealanders. They are us.*
>
> *And because they are us, we, as a nation, we mourn them.*

For many around the world 15 March 2019 was a horrifying wake-up call for our collective inaction against Islamophobia.

As a Jewish woman I know all too well the devastating impact of hatred and prejudice. My community has faced centuries of persecution, discrimination and violence simply because of our faith and identity. The pain of targeted violence and being dehumanised for our beliefs resonates deeply with me. This shared experience of marginalisation binds us together in our duty to combat all forms of hate, including Islamophobia.

Islamophobia, like anti-Semitism, is a form of racism. It targets Muslims, or those perceived to be connected to Islam, with prejudice and discrimination. It takes many forms, from overt acts of violence to subtle exclusion and harassment. It seeks to silence, marginalise and deny Muslims their rights, opportunities and freedom to live without fear.

In Australia Islamophobia is an ugly reality that has shaped the experiences of many Muslim and Arab Australians. This prejudice has enabled racial profiling, harassment and exclusion from public life; it is discrimination that tears at the fabric of our society.

Since 7 October 2023 this prejudice has only intensified. The rise in harassment and attacks on Muslims in Australia has been well documented, including a report by Monash University sociologist Dr Susan Carland. This is unacceptable, and it must be challenged. Those who blame all members of a faith for the actions of a few promote hate and violence.

What does it mean to combat Islamophobia? Combatting Islamophobia, like efforts to combat all forms of racial and religious discrimination, is not the responsibility of those who experience it alone. It is a collective

duty. We must call out prejudice when we see it, listen to and support those who have been targeted and, more importantly, actively work to make our society safer, more inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

This duty begins wherever we are. For us it begins in this House through the words we use and the policies we support. As representatives of our community we must lead with integrity and compassion, including in this parliament. We must all commit to doing better. This is not optional; it is our responsibility.

In our communities, allowing Islamic and racist language to go unchecked emboldens prejudice and hate. We cannot protect our communities if we fail to hold ourselves and others accountable for the words we use. This is a responsibility for all of society, and it includes friends, families, colleagues, members of this Assembly and the media.

Combatting hate is not just about opposition; it is also about celebration. We must celebrate and elevate the rich history of the contribution of Muslim communities in the Northern Territory and beyond. Muslims have been part of the Northern Territory's history for centuries. Over 300 years ago Makassan traders from Sulawesi travelled to the Arnhem Land coast. They traded with Aboriginal communities, and this respectful and mutually beneficial relationship with Aboriginal people is a very early example in our country of cross-cultural exchange built on trust and cooperation. Since the 1860s Afghan cameleers and their descendants have practised their Muslim faith in Central Australia.

Reflecting on this long history strengthens my commitment to inclusivity in the Territory today. We all know that the Northern Territory thrives because of its diversity. It is what draws people here, and it is what makes people stay—our vibrant culture, the art, music, comedy, food and a sense of community. Many Territorians, including the original inhabitants of this country, place a high value on this cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

I often hear people say that this is not like other places in Australia; we all live together. To truly live together well we must care for one another, not only in hard times but when times are good. We must work to ensure that everyone in the Northern Territory feels safe, welcomed and valued.

I commit to combatting Islamophobia in my work and my life just as I commit to fighting all forms of discrimination. Hatred in any form threatens us all.

To conclude and on this solemn anniversary, my thoughts are with the families of the Christchurch victims. May they be cared for, and may they find peace.

**Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri):** Madam Speaker, I will speak on a comment that was made when we were debating the Territory Coordinator Bill. The Member for Nightcliff made a comment that I did not speak at the actual hearing. I wanted to let the Member for Nightcliff know the situation that happened that week.

Unfortunately, I was extremely ill, to the point where I lost my voice, and I was unable to be in the same room as my committee members. I had to quarantine myself in my office. I was extremely ill, but because of my commitment to the community, the people of Wanguri and the Territory—because this Bill was important for the Territory, small businesses, families and the wider community—I sat through 41 witness hearings while quarantined in my office. When I was able to come back to committee members as the Chair, I could make the deliberations as part of that team.

I needed to rectify that on record. I am not silenced as part of this team; I am here first and foremost for the people of Wanguri, and if I am not at the hospital in the emergency ward I would still drag myself to the office and make sure I am doing my job as I have been elected to do. I wanted to place on the record the reason I could not speak.

**Mr HOWE (Drysdale):** Madam Speaker, I thought I would spice things up tonight and try this for the first time.

**Madam SPEAKER:** And we brace ourselves.

**Mr HOWE:** May the record show that conservative men can be pretty out there, you know.

**Madam SPEAKER:** No, we do not know. Sorry; you have the call.

**Mr HOWE:** Madam Speaker, I speak often of the issues in Drysdale, but tonight I wish to acknowledge and celebrate the remarkable people, schools, community groups and volunteers who make the Drysdale

electorate a strong, vibrant and resilient community. Our community is built on the hard work, dedication and generosity of individuals who go above and beyond to make Drysdale a better place to live.

This year the Country Liberal Party government will continue to take decisive action on community safety and economic stimulus. These priorities are at the forefront of delivering a stronger future for all Territorians.

I congratulate the graduating class of 2024 from Palmerston College and say well done to all students on reaching this milestone. Whether you choose to enter the workforce, begin a traineeship or apprenticeship or pursue higher education, you are stepping into a world full of opportunity. Thank you to Principal Maisie Floyd, the incredible team at Palmerston College and the Clontarf Foundation, led by Jack Reagan, alongside the Stars Foundation, for their ongoing support and guidance.

I also welcome back Emma Hansen as the incoming principal of Driver Primary School and recognise the outstanding contributions of Assistant Principal Simone Timms, Melissa Garnham and the dedicated educators who shape the minds of our future generations. I am proud to announce that the kiss-and-go and car park upgrades at Driver Primary School will commence this year. This is a win for parents, students and staff alike. I am proud to be part of a government that took swift and decisive action on the safety of our students and the wellbeing of the wider community.

At Gray Primary School I acknowledge the tireless leadership of Principal Donna Westaway; Business Manager Anne Griffiths; Assistant Principal Rachel Turton; the school council; and all the wonderful staff and educators. Gray Primary is home to the Palmerston Child and Family Centre, which runs the Families as First Teachers program and the Young Mums Strong Mums program. Both these initiatives are vital in supporting young families.

The school prides itself on its commitment to longevity, with two long-serving Aboriginal Islander education workers running a successful breakfast club program, supported by Foodbank and the Eat Up program through Rotary. These efforts ensure no child starts their school day hungry, and nor should they.

I also acknowledge the incredible young people in our community and the importance of keeping sport accessible for all families in Palmerston. Sport plays a huge role in shaping our kids. It teaches them teamwork, resilience, discipline and how to win and lose with grace. That is why I am proud to assist with sponsorship for some of our Palmerston sporting clubs, helping keep costs down so more kids can get involved, have fun and develop skills that will serve them well into the future.

I give a big congratulations to Benjamin King from the Palmerston Cricket Club, who has been selected to play for the SSENT U15 NT team in Adelaide. That is a fantastic achievement, and I have no doubt he will do Palmerston proud. To Damion King, I know how proud you must be. It is always great to see the hard work and dedication of our young people, particularly our sons, pay off. A special shout-out to Damion King with whom I had the honour to serve in the Army.

Palmerston is full of talented and hardworking kids. I will keep backing them every step of the way.

I also congratulate the 2025 school captains and vice captains. At Gray Primary School—captains Aljun Mendez and Leana McKenzie, and vice captains Lucas Taylor and Vidushi Sharma. At Driver Primary School I have met the captains. I do not know if I can release their names yet, but they are an incredible bunch of young people who hosted—at both Driver and Gray Primary Schools—Minister Hersey on her visit. I was impressed by how the school captains and leadership team ushered the minister, showing her the schools.

I congratulate the City of Palmerston Australia Day Award winners for 2025. Citizen of the Year is Rodney Greenwood, Young Citizen of the Year is Yolanda Kanyai and the Community Event of the Year is Palmerston NAIDOC Committee Elders Lunch.

I commend the outstanding nominees for their contributions: Citizen of the Year nominees Emma Cawood and Dian Dunn from Breatheasy NT S.T.A.A.R.S; Young Citizen of the Year nominees Elorah Ryan, Niesha Korman and Penny Ralph; and the Community Event or Group of the Year nominees Arafura Music Collective, Aunties Place and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day.

I extend a welcome to the Palmerston Rovers Football Club for the year ahead. Thank you to club President Byrne Haigh, and best of luck to the women and girls preseason football squad—my wife has joined. We will be looking to get the girls into the MiniRoos team, which will be very cute. They began training on 18 February in Gray. I acknowledge the Department of People, Sport and Culture for ensuring the club's front nature strip is now on a regular mowing cycle. It is a small but important improvement for the people who attend.

Thank you to Valerie Wilkie and the Rotary Club for their continuous efforts in running the Feed Up program, which delivers about 1,500 sandwiches per term to schools in Drysdale alone, including Driver Primary, Gray Primary and Palmerston College. Rotary recently celebrated 120 years of service with a gathering at Berry Springs Tavern, which my family and I were proud to attend.

I acknowledge the outstanding work of Glenn Lang from Young Diggers, with a special mention to Penny. Congratulations on being selected as the official charity partner for NT Defence Week 2025, which is to be held at the Darwin Convention Centre from 28 April to 2 May. This event will highlight the strategic importance of the Northern Territory in supporting Defence and national security.

A heartfelt thanks to Di Dunn, Chair of Breatheasy NT S.T.A.A.R.S, for her work supporting seniors with lung and respiratory conditions. Your nomination for Citizen of the Year is well deserved. To the Palmerston 50+ Tuesday Club at Gray Community Hall, thank you for your weekly gatherings, your famous ‘Oh Shit’ card games and the delicious homemade sweets prepared by Gerry and Glenda. Let the record show that is the name of their game. You foster a real sense of community that is invaluable; I thoroughly enjoy my time there.

I commend Serena Dalton and Kat Lee from GAPAC (Grassroots Action Palmerston Aboriginal Corporation) for their work at Aunties Place in Driver. Your nomination for Community Group of the Year is well earned.

To Mates4Mates, thank you for your continued support for veterans. I recently had the pleasure of catching up with you all at Jason Hanna’s Good Times Bar & Grill. Jason, your perseverance in running a local business is commendable; we will continue working hard to create a stronger local economy for businesses like yours.

Drysdale is not just a place; it is a community built on hard work, responsibility and people who give a damn. I am proud to represent the battlers, small business owners, tradies, seniors, veterans and the volunteers who make the electorate what it is. We have big challenges ahead, but I have no doubt that if we keep the same fighting spirit we will make Drysdale safer, stronger and better for future generations. To everyone out there making a difference, I thank you. I will not let you down.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.