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Debates and Questions



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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Mulka

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I move that the Member for Mulka be granted leave of absence from the Chamber today due to personal reasons.

Leave granted.

MINISTERIAL REPORT
Tropical Cyclone Fina

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, this ministerial report on Tropical Cyclone Fina was notified on 24 November 2025.

I make this report on the first sitting day after what has been a tough weekend for thousands of people living across the Top End.

This weekend has made me proud to be a Territorian. We were prepared, and people took the warning seriously. Although Cyclone Fina was the first cyclone for this Wet Season, and unusually early, people were prepared and heeded the warnings.

Our Northern Territory emergency services had been preparing since the low pressure system first established in the week prior. Our hardworking and courageous police and emergency services officers executed long-held, tried-and-tested plans to make sure we were prepared and to keep Territorians safe.

On Wednesday we stood up our emergency operations centre at the Peter McAulay Centre. The centre was led by Police Commissioner Martin Dole as the Territory Controller, and was complete with officials from the Bureau of Meteorology, the National Emergency Management Agency and the Army, along with our own emergency management experts who formed a lot of our key functional response group, including animal welfare, critical goods, digital and telecommunications, emergency shelters, engineering and industry groups, medical group, public health and public information—to name a few—all co-located in one room in one location.

Importantly, from last week when we were still preparing for what was to come, we embedded a team of recovery managers into the emergency operations centre. They were already planning forward for what this week would look like.

We stood up local emergency committees. They are the teams on the ground in affected locations. They were stood up early and given the right information. They connected with the emergency operations centre and were a direct feed for what was happening on the ground and, equally, provided important information to the community. It allowed the incident controller, Superintendent Kirsten Engels—who did an excellent job—and the regional controller, Acting Assistant Commissioner James Allen O'Brien, to have that intelligence on the ground and to make sure the communities were as prepared as possible.

As we led into Saturday the community of Minjilang, Warruwi and across to the Tiwi Islands were looking to be most impacted.

Secure NT became everyone's centralised go-to point of truth for information. At times of emergency it is important that Territorians have confidence in a point of truth and that there is one place in which people can get the right information that is updated at the right time.

A lot of work was done last week to make sure that people were preparing and getting ready their cyclone kit. A lot of Territorians are survivors of Cyclone Tracy who are vigilant and aware of the destruction that a cyclone can cause. A range of Territorians have been through many cyclones before and are not particularly concerned; they just get on with the job of being prepared. However, we have a lot of new Territorians for whom this would be their first cyclone, so for them there was, to a degree, a sense of uncertainty. That preparation was key and having the right messaging about what would be required of them. In the Territory people need to be able to look after their families, keeping them safe and fed with clean water and supplies, for 72 hours. That message was being pushed out through all the official channels so that people were prepared.

We also took the step to surge additional police and even firefighter resourcing into Wurrumiyanga, Minjilang and Warruwi to make sure we had extra hands on the ground. The feedback I received from those communities was that it was reassuring and well received. Straight after the cyclone, as dawn broke on the following day, it allowed for an immediate recovery impact assessment to be done in the various impacted areas—seeing the level of destruction, what was required and what impacts had been made. We could then provide the opportunity for response as soon as possible.

There was a lot of media to ensure that people were kept up to date. People tuned in closely to the ABC, for example, which continuously provided updates, and I thank everyone for that. It allowed people to be prepared and be comforted by the fact they had the most up-to-date information. They could anticipate and make the best decisions for them and their families, pets, businesses and staff.

Public servants across the Territory leapt into action. For example, at Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston hospital our incredible health teams were caring for people. We had to move to an operational level where visitors had to be restricted so that we could focus on patient care and staff care at the time, but services were largely uninterrupted. That is an incredible result, and I thank our Top End hospitals for that. Equally, Children and Families staff and public servants from a wide range of agencies stood up cyclone shelters and were the people manning those shelters, making sure people could seek access and had up-to-date information.

Education had nearly 200 people over the weekend working with schools, police and the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure regarding the safety of each individual school to make decisions about whether that school would be safe to reopen on Monday morning. I thank everyone who was involved for their extraordinary efforts to ensure that the best information was available so that the best decisions could be made at the right time for the benefit of Territorians.

The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure importantly did the road reports. With any cyclone we would expect flooding, and there was significant flooding in various parts of the Top End. The port was required to close and Nightcliff Jetty closed. We opened cyclone shelters early. On Friday we closed schools and opened shelters in Minjilang, Warruwi and across the Tiwi Islands. Darwin Airport flights were cancelled from midday on Saturday. We opened shelters early in Berry Springs and Wagait from 9 am on Saturday and the other Darwin region shelters followed that. In the end approximately 500 Territorians used the 20 shelters that were activated across the region.

Social media has an ever-increasing role in communications in people's lives, and it was no different for this emergency weather event. By 3 am on Sunday Secure NT's Facebook had 210,576 views of the livestream of incident controller Kirsten Engels. There were 62,972 views of the Bureau of Meteorology video, which was posted after that, and there were 2.4 million Secure NT Facebook views over the four days from Thursday through to Sunday. It was excellent to see Territorians highly engaged in what was going on and seeking out correct and accurate information which allowed them to make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

There has been a lot of talk about Cyclone Marcus, which was a Category 2 cyclone and a direct hit on Darwin. It has been reported that the damage is similar to Marcus, although the wind speeds were slightly less. At Darwin Airport the fastest speed was recorded at 109 kilometres per hour. Although Cyclone Fina was Category 3, we did not face the direct hit as we did with Marcus. I am grateful for that because it would have been a different story had that Category 3 cyclone been a direct hit. We were lucky.

Fina was the first cyclone for this cyclone season. It formed in the early hours of Wednesday 19 November in the western Arafura Sea, just north of Darwin. By 4.30 am on Friday she was a Category 2 cyclone, sustaining winds near the centre of 95 kilometres per hour with wind gusts of 130 kilometres per hour. It was about 270 kilometres northeast of Darwin and 60 kilometres north of Minjilang and was slowly moving southwest at that point. Highly destructive winds and rain were endured for 24 hours and about 285 millimetres was recorded at Minjilang—significant rain.

On Saturday it continued as Category 2, and by Saturday night it had been upgraded to Category 3, sustaining winds in the centre of 150 kilometres per hour with wind gusts of up to 205 kilometres per hour. At that point it was about 40 kilometres off the northeast coast of Darwin and 30 kilometres southeast of Wurrumiyanga.

Our concern was for the remote communities which would bear a bigger brunt of the cyclone than Darwin, so it was excellent to have our local emergency teams on the ground supporting communities and traditional owners to get the messages out to people. Everyone was excellent in their response, going to shelters early, heeding those warnings and making decisions to shelter in their homes. If people were not in a suitable

location our local teams of police encouraged them to go to safer places of shelter, which were found for them. It was an excellent result, and I thank our teams on the ground.

I spoke to a lady in Milikapiti—she likes to be called 'Big Croc'; I am sure my colleagues opposite know her—who had already taken shelter with her granddaughters. Again, this reinforces the fact that people were getting in early. Despite the threat that was looming and the fear, people were in good spirits because they were prepared, which was excellent.

Middle Point recorded the highest amount of rain with 430 millimetres in 24 hours, which is a huge amount of rain. It is no surprise that we have a number of trees down across the affected areas. Fortunately, we came out of this with no injuries or significant property damage. Of course, there are trees on people's roofs, but there has been no catastrophic level of infrastructure damage. Ultimately the fact that everyone is safe is our greatest priority. I am grateful for that.

The cyclone has now moved into WA, and we are glad to farewell her but also thinking about the Western Australian community as it now grapples with the storm.

Our Northern Territory Emergency Service volunteers were out the door at 7 am on Sunday; they were very keen. These are our volunteers in orange who have been clearing the roads and pathways to make sure we can get emergency vehicles in and out and get everyone back to business as soon as possible. They have done an incredible job.

As soon as it was deemed safe I visited some of the teams. We were at the house of a lady called Amanda; she had significant trees come down on her roof, and water had been leaking through her ceiling fan. A team of four NTES volunteers were securing and making it safe, getting rid of the trees and tarping her roof so that she would be safe, dry and able to stay at home. I thank them for that.

By about one o'clock on Sunday afternoon major roads had been cleared and so much work had already been done by the volunteers, plus all the Territorians who went out with their chainsaws and saws to help neighbours. People were trapped in their homes because there were large trees over driveways and various other situations, as you could imagine. Everyone just chipped in to get the job done. That job is ongoing, but it has been a speedy recovery phase to this point. I am incredibly grateful for that and for members in the Chamber who have been out supporting their communities as well.

There were significant power outages. There were 19,500 homes and businesses without power, which is enormous. That figure had reduced by half within the first 36 hours. It continues at a significant pace. I am expecting Power and Water to give greater updates on that today. There is a priority for Lee Point Road, Berrimah, Jingili, East Arm, Alawa and Ludmilla; they are Power and Water's focus for today. We have about 5,000 homes left without power. We want to give those people as much certainty as we can regarding the timelines in which they can expect to have power restored.

We have moved to the recovery phase. That transition happened yesterday afternoon. Commissioner Dole, as Territory Controller, steps back and Luccio Cercarelli, who is the recovery controller, steps in with his team to move through this next phase of cleanup.

As people know, we had concerns about local councils not playing their role in the cyclone cleanup by literally locking out their ratepayers from being able to dump their green waste and then threatening to fine ratepayers for leaving waste on verges. That is an extraordinary situation. As a government we stood up a green waste facility at Hidden Valley where Territorians can go to drop off their commercial and residential waste.

Yesterday morning I met with the federal Minister for Emergency Management, Kristy McBain. We travelled to the Tiwi Islands with the Member for Lingiari. The Member for Arafura and the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Malarndirri McCarthy, were also there.

We have now activated all the disaster relief payments. Minister Cahill and the Department of Children and Families have established a centre at Marrara for people to get welfare, support and information about the payments that people can access.

I am pleased to say that all the traffic lights are operational. That work by Power and Water has been completed. Today Northern Territory emergency services will make an announcement about bringing forward the ability to access burn permits. In the rural area people are allowed, if they have a permit, to burn their green waste. We have determined that the conditions are safe enough to bring that forward. That will also

ease pressure for people who have to access the public green waste dump points and allow people to manage their green waste at home. Keep up to date with the fire and emergency services on that.

We restored power to another 1,000 homes overnight, but, as I said, there are still 5,000 people who have been without power since Saturday. That is a long time. Patience is growing thin and rightly so. In this recovery phase our government has focused on getting back to business and back to usual for people as soon as possible and giving them all the information and support they need.

When I spoke to Power and Water staff at Wurrumiyanga yesterday they were doing an incredible job. I thank all the crews on the ground. We boosted the number of staff to approximately 200. They have been doing 24-hour shifts. They were up in the powerlines yesterday when I spoke to them at Wurrumiyanga, and 95% of that community is now back online which is great. I could go around and tell community members—who already had a lot of power restored—that the power was coming online. The Member for Arafura will agree that everyone was happy. People were keen to get back to work. I spoke to a lady who had a huge tree tangled in the powerlines in her suburb out at Forestry. The next-door neighbour said, 'I have to get to work. You guys have to sort this out.' The teams were out there yesterday afternoon. As I told the Member for Arafura, they will be there for a couple of days.

We had about 500 calls for assistance; 55 volunteers were dispatched, and they have completed more than 100 jobs so far. We had the 1800 TC Fina helpline between 7 am and 7 pm yesterday. Volunteers from across the Territory have flown up from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Nhulunbuy. People are coming to help, which is much appreciated.

We are pleased to see that as of yesterday the school buses and public buses are all back to normal, and the port and the airport are open. Ferry and barge services have reopened to transport resources to our communities and movement back to normal.

Schools are largely open—only one school is not open, which is excellent. The recovery work continues.

I thank Territorians, our emergency services, the public sector, all the volunteers and everyone who has come together to support this effort.

The lesson from this cyclone is that preparedness is everything. The largely good result we had and the ability to respond is because people did the right thing. I am grateful and proud of that. It was a good outcome. Now we must continue with laser focus to clean up everything and have people well supported. Getting the power back on is a priority and making life for people as easy as possible. We will make sure everything is cleaned up and back to how it should be.

It has been a huge weekend for a lot of people. I thank everyone for their patience and support. Thanks to our emergency operations centre team who were locked in the building for 24 hours; they slept there and lived and breathed this thing to make sure that Territorians had the right information. I thank the federal teams who were embedded in our EOC from the start. That collaboration and information sharing is incredibly powerful. To have the bureau, Ian and his team, in there was excellent. The coordination with the military and national emergency management all made it tick.

I thank the teams who were stood up and have been stood down. I hope they are getting some rest as the new teams who have been stood up move through the recovery phase. I ask Territorians to continue to be patient as we move to restore power to the final 5,000 homes.

I move that the report be noted.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I thank the Chief Minister for bringing forward this ministerial report and this important discussion for the Chamber on behalf of Territorians today.

I begin by acknowledging the extraordinary work done by the Northern Territory Police Force, our Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Children and Families. There were welfare teams out ahead of Cyclone Fina throughout the Territory to ensure that people had the most up-to-date information, particularly when shelters were being stood up on Saturday. When Territorians were at their most vulnerable our frontline responders were at their best.

I especially recognise Territory Controller Martin Dole for his steady leadership and the incident controller, Kirsten Engels, for the tireless work she undertook in coordinating this fast-moving and high-risk situation for the Northern Territory coast. Their professionalism, calmness and commitment to protecting life above all

else made a profound difference over the last few days for Top Enders. They were well-supported by all the staff, as mentioned by the Chief Minister, who were in the emergency operations centre and worked around the clock to support communities in myriad ways.

On behalf of the opposition team I thank Assistant Commissioner James O'Brien for providing a briefing to us last week regarding the government's emergency response plan. I thank the Chief Minister and her office for arranging this for us.

Across the Northern Territory hundreds of police, firies, government staff, council workers, volunteers and emergency responders stood up without hesitation. They worked through the intense weather across our coastline in unpredictable conditions and for long hours to keep our community safe. To every one of them, I say thank you.

In moments like this what stands out to us is not just the storm but the way Territorians respond. As the winds picked up and the trees came down, as powerlines fell and the roads became dangerous, Territorians did what Territorians always do—rolled up their sleeves and got to work to help others.

From our council workers and tree loppers clearing fallen trees before dawn to make our roads accessible on Sunday to the government staff coordinating evacuation and shelter operations, this was long work, hard work and probably very hot work at times. We thank them for their commitment to that role.

The Power and Water crews battled the elements to restore power and water as quickly as possible across the Top End. The speed at which this work has occurred is truly remarkable, and even more so when we consider it is likely that the workers themselves have been affected by the power outages in their homes. They continue their commitment to work as quickly as possible to make sure that friends, families, colleagues and strangers across the Top End could connect to power.

Neighbours checked in on one another in their streets, even new neighbours whom they may not know, and provided a helping hand. That is the true Territory spirit. To the people who were out with chainsaws on Sunday morning, working to make driveways, roads, streets, crescents and courts passable, thank you. To the people in small businesses and cafes who opened their doors straightaway in order to feed the community, thank you. We recognise the work of the people who reopened supermarkets as soon as it was safe to do so. Members of the media worked overtime—and camped in, like our local ABC radio Darwin mob—without hesitation to make sure Territorians had timely and accurate information, this is some of the best that the Territory has to offer.

To every Territorian who stood up a shelter, staffed a shelter or brought someone in, getting them out of danger and supporting them, we say thanks. You all embody the strength and decency of the Territory that we love. Helping those in need is a natural instinct of Territorians. It happens without prompting, fanfare and hesitation, and that should be a source of great pride for all of us, especially in this House.

A lot of public attention, rightly, focused on Darwin and the recovery underway here, and the images of downed powerlines and fallen trees were dramatic. We must not forget that Cyclone Fina not only impacted Darwin. Across the Tiwi Islands, as the Chief Minister mentioned, communities experienced destructive winds, flooding and prolonged outages. Across the water at Dundee Beach, residents and businesses are still assessing the damage. Along the coastline people in the first communities hit by Cyclone Fina, Warruwi and Minjilang, hunkered down tight and survived well. They will have some stories to tell. Over west in Wadeye and the surrounding homelands, the weather event continues to have ongoing consequences, so we think of those Territorians at this time. These places matter; their struggles matter and their recovery matters just as much as that of our capital city of Darwin and the satellite city of Palmerston.

Cyclone Fina is a reminder—a loud one—that the Wet Season has only just begun. We are only at the end of November. The seas are warm, the monsoon is active and meteorologists have been clear that this will be a volatile season. There may be many aftershocks from this weather system. Weak trees may fall later, so please stay alert. Damaged infrastructure may fail unexpectedly, so please take care. More systems in our weather cycle may develop, so I encourage every Territorian to keep your emergency kits stocked, keep your plans up to date and stay vigilant. This is not alarmist; this is responsible. If Cyclone Fina has shown us anything, as the Chief Minister said, preparation matters.

That brings me to something we must face honestly. Every time a cyclone comes through—Carlos, Marcus or Fina—we repeat the same cycle of commentary: power failures; massive outages; seniors and families struggling in the heat; businesses unable to operate; essential services straining under the load;

finger-pointing; and excuses about undergrounding power. We are well and truly past the point of debating whether underground power is necessary. It is necessary, objectively and unquestionably.

What is not necessary or useful is the Territory falling into the same old tired pattern every couple of years. One government begins undergrounding, the next scraps it; then comes the blame, the outages and the outrage before the politics of the day moves on until the Dry Season. When thousands of Territorians are sitting in homes without power, unable to refrigerate food, run medical equipment or sleep in our Wet Season heat, this is the kind of political back and forth that frustrates people. It is bitter, counterproductive and, quite frankly, beneath us as a mature and proud jurisdiction.

We must be honest that the cost of doing nothing is not zero. Every cyclone that hits aboveground lines brings millions of dollars in damage, loss of productivity, a risk to public safety, harm to businesses and avoidable hardship.

The conversation now must be responsible, mature and grown-up. What is the plan? What is the timeline? What is the funding strategy? How can we ensure that once we start that we do not stop? No matter who is in government Territorians deserve that certainty, security and action, not another round of he-said, she-said and all the crap that people are sick of politicians doing; otherwise, after the next cyclone tears apart another suburb, the same conversation will start again. Surely we are better than that.

Crises expose many things—weaknesses in infrastructure, gaps in policy and the way decisions compound over time—but they also reveal something greater, and that is our character. Cyclone Fina has shown us that the Territory's character is one of unity, grit and generosity. That must be matched by our political class, all of us in this place who act on behalf of our communities. We want to see the same clarity and purpose in a crisis as that shown by our fellow Territorians.

There is an opportunity to do better, plan better and prepare better. To build a more resilient Territory for the long term, our commitment as the opposition is simple: to stand with communities as they recover; scrutinise the government's decisions; push for real investment in frontline services, infrastructure and emergency preparedness; and advocate for long-term solutions rather than avoidance and short-term politics.

To every Territorian who has been affected by Cyclone Fina across the coastline, whether you have lost power, property or some peace of mind, you are not alone in the recovery journey. To every responder, volunteer, worker, neighbour and stranger who stepped up when it mattered, thank you. You reflect the best of the Northern Territory. To all Territorians, as we move deeper into the Wet Season I urge you to stay prepared, connected and safe. The Territory is strong, our people are stronger, and together we will get through whatever this season brings.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I thank our hardworking emergency services, first responders, volunteers and community members for their hard work and dedication in preparing for, during and in the recovery from Tropical Cyclone Fina.

Many schools became cyclone shelters and many principals, teachers and Department of Education and Training staff volunteered at those shelters. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for going above and beyond to support our fellow Territorians. A total of 196 department staff worked tirelessly over the weekend in school shelters and supporting emergency management and schools across Darwin and the Top End. Their dedication exemplifies—the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition spoke about that this morning—our values of commitment to service for our schools, communities and keeping Territorians safe. When times are tough we pull together and help each other—just ordinary people lending a hand because they can.

Thank you to the people who were behind the swift reopening of our Top End schools: Susan Bowden from the Department of Education and Training; our hardworking teachers and principals; Power and Water Corporation staff; Department of Logistics and Infrastructure staff; and the list goes on. Their efforts ensured that our schools are safe, prepared and ready to welcome students back to the classroom. I thank the principals who worked incredibly hard on the weekend, attending school grounds, assessing damage, coordinating with contractors and Power and Water, to get schools open.

I give a shout-out to the team at the NT Emergency Service. A small team from Katherine met the Alice Springs NT Emergency Service people halfway, then brought a heap of sandbags to Darwin and dropped them off in Palmerston. To Lisa, TJ, Spot, Tate and Ron, thank you very much. The NT Emergency Service does a fantastic job.

Over the weekend 66 government schools in the Top End were affected by Cyclone Fina, and on Sunday we had to close 17 of those schools due to loss of power and infrastructure damage.

First thing yesterday morning I visited Stuart Park Primary School with the Member for Fong Lim to check in on operations in the aftermath of Cyclone Fina. A big shout-out and thanks goes to Principal Maria Albion; Assistant Principals Leisha Crompton and Sylvia Siskamanis; and the wonderful school captains, Darcy, Noah, Chloe and Eve, for taking me and the Member for Fong Lim around and sharing insights of how things were going post-Cyclone Fina.

When the kids got to school that morning they went out with the grounds people and helped pick up leaf litter, small branches and things like that and put them behind the automated four-wheeler they had with the trailer. It was great that the kids went back to school, got back to normal and were involved in a bit of the cleanup at their school, creating pride.

I will give an update on the status of schools across the Territory. The latest information is that, as of today, we have only one school closed—that is, Middle Point School. A big shout-out goes to the Education and Training team and everyone who worked hard. Repairs to Middle Point School are being prioritised, and I expect it will open again as soon as practicable.

In the non-government school sector, the following schools are closed for operations today: Tiwi College on Melville Island; Marrara Christian College; Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic Primary School on Bathurst Island; and Xavier Catholic College on Bathurst Island.

The following early childhood education and care services are closed today: Milestones Early Learning in Wagaman; Dragonfly Play and Learn; Haileybury Rendall Early Learning Centre; Milkwood Steiner School After School Care; Milkwood Steiner Preschool; Goodstart Early Learning in Wulagi; Camp Australia Marrara Christian College; and Camp Australia Haileybury Rendall School After School Hours Care.

It is crucial that we get schools open so that parents can get back to work and continue to support the community during our recovery. Before we came into the Chamber I spoke with the Member for Fannie Bay who had spoken to someone in the court system who said that if the schools were not open and kids could not go back to school, parents would be unable to do their jobs and the courts would not be open. Schools opening is a sign that life is returning to normal, and it is good for not only students' emotional and psychological welfare but also parents to get back to business as usual as soon as possible.

Our hardworking public servants were back in the office on Monday, and small business owners were at it bright and early on Sunday. I thank our teachers for responding so swiftly and getting classrooms open for Monday.

Darwin High School had a couple of assessments done by two principals and the senior directors before it was deemed fit to be open yesterday.

Although I did not personally experience the cyclone, I drove up on Sunday from Katherine, and I ran into some friends in Adelaide River. There was quite a bit of rain along the way at Coomalie and Acacia. You could see where the rain had roared through in the creeks. Many people were leaving Darwin when I went home on Friday; the road was busy, with lots of caravans heading out. Fortunately, on Sunday it was a nice drive back and the road was clear. There were not many people on the road.

Driving through Palmerston and into Darwin I noticed the number of fallen trees and amount of debris on the road. There were a few signs knocked over.

I was surprised that the Darwin and Litchfield Councils—I heard it on the radio as I was coming up—did not allow residents to drop their green waste at the council dumps on Sunday. I heard on the radio this morning that the dump is still not open and that people would be fined $1,000 for leaving stuff on their verge. I find that incredible. Given that people were at home, it could have been an opportunity for them to dump their green rubbish on Sunday, their day off. As we know, Territorians pay rates for these facilities to open and they should be accessible after a cyclone. It is extraordinary.

In response our Northern Territory Government has stood up a publicly available green waste dump point at the Hidden Valley Raceway car park for residents and commercial operators. I understand that Litchfield Council has now opened its dump to residents. After a cyclone it makes no sense to close a dump on a weekend when everyone has the day off.

It was great to see many people helping each other. When I went for a walk yesterday morning I saw people helping their neighbours. When I went to the school in Stuart Park I saw people with chainsaws and saws helping neighbours with their fallen branches. The Members for Drysdale, Blain and Sanderson were out with their chainsaws, helping each other. As we all know, that is what Territorians do in times of hardship; we get out and help our mates, each other and our neighbours. It is great to see that across the Territory.

As we move back to normal I look forward to the parks being cleaned up in due time.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I am grateful that we survived Cyclone Fina. I know a lot of residents were worried about fallen trees and powerlines and the loss of power. They had to adapt their lives because their priority was to keep their families and friends safe, as it should be. However, I thank God we did not have loss of life, unlike those who had to deal with Cyclone Tracy just over 50 years ago. When I reflect on that I am grateful and take the opportunity to say a little prayer in thanks for that. It was a blessing for all Territorians. We need to put things into perspective sometimes.

What was one of the core characteristics that came out of this exercise? We did not want it, but it happened. May I say that sometimes shit does happen and you have to deal with it. It highlighted to me the resilience of Territorians to deal with these hardships and get on and recover. That, to me, is inspiring. The role of government is to tap into that resilience and help Territorians do what they know they can do best on the ground. We have seen a number of examples of that.

At a personal level, in my electorate I saw neighbours coming together to help each other. There were trees across the roads; people could not get out because they were blocking access to get onto the main arterial roads. Neighbours came together. Those with chainsaws, or whatever, cut those trees back. Guess what? A lot of those trees were the responsibility of council. Where did people put those leftover trees? On the verges. It is common sense. I will come back to that point later because it is important.

This is about how neighbourhoods get together, with people checking on the welfare of their friends and saying, 'There are a couple of elderly people here; we had better make sure they are okay.' That inspires me. This happened across the whole of the Territory, not just in Darwin. There was support from across the Territory to help people here.

I drove around Malak and Karama, and I went to my office. I went past the Malak shops. In Holzerland Park there were five or more large trees down in the park and two or three lying across Malak Crescent. This is where people came together.

I thank all the agencies and volunteer and community groups that pitched in. I highlight the NT Emergency Service staff who were out there from the start. Their communication with the community was wonderful. I shared a lot of their communication on my work Facebook page so that residents knew how to contact people for issues. We could see them out there working. I give full credit to all of them.

We just heard from the minister for Education about how the people involved with schools kept going; they did not stop early so that people in our emergency services did not have to worry about their kids and knew they would still be going to school while they were working. The Chief Minister said, 'It is business as usual; you have to keep going.' That is one of the learnings we had from this exercise. It was well done. Congratulations to all involved.

Our police and ambos were out there. Ambulances were still being called for code 1 emergencies during the cyclone. A code 1 is when a person has a heart attack or something like that. The ambulance staff had to triage it, and they were ready to go out and do it because they serve our community.

On that note, I understand that five babies were born during the cyclone. That number may have gone up, as I do not keep track of every birth. Talk about resilience—look at those young mothers going through labour and delivering children. I thank all the health professionals at RDH who helped with those deliveries. This is true resilience. I do not know how many of those babies will be called 'Fina' or 'Typhoon', or whatever, but good luck to them; it will be a memory. Those children were born into resilient families. They have a good start, and we should all be inspired by that. To all those young mothers who went through that, I am in admiration of you. You did a wonderful job in trying circumstances, and I congratulate you. You are doing the important thing you can do—bringing new life into the world. That is fantastic.

I thank all the volunteer groups and agencies. I mentioned the NT Emergency Service. I thank the church groups and local community groups.

I posted updates from Secure NT so that people in my electorate could keep up to date with what was happening. In my electorate midwife and nurse Lucy Rogers volunteered to do in-home help. She asked me to let her know about anyone who needed that as she was happy to visit them. Local resident Steve Allen said that he had a spare ute if anyone needed help. He told me if anyone rings my office to let him know. It is about connecting the community. The community has a lot of internal resources. Our job as MLAs is to help bring that together—that goes across the Chamber. It is an important role of MLAs to connect communities.

I congratulate the Northern Territory Government and its leadership, the Chief Minister and all the agencies. You did a tremendous job by getting on the front foot, keeping businesses alive, keeping everyone going and communicating with the communities.

We saw businesses making their choice; some shopping centres shut and others decided to stay open. They made their own risk assessment, as they should. A lot of sporting groups stopped playing games. Local shops did the same thing. The Karama shopping centre shut, but the Malak shops stayed open for part of the day on Friday, shut on Saturday and reopened halfway through Sunday so that people could still get milk or bread. That was good.

I come back to the issue about people cutting up trees and putting them on the verge. Darwin City Council staff do a magnificent job, and they will play a great role in the recovery. The staff on the ground are fantastic, but the leadership and communication from the Darwin City Council was poor. It needs to be called out, and the council needs to look at it. The council handled Cyclone Marcus much better than it handled this one. Shutting down the tip when people want to go there to get rid of their green waste is nonsensical, as far as I am concerned. Any council worth its salt would have said, 'We know there is a cyclone coming, and a lot of people will want to get their green waste away. We will open up for free for two days beforehand.' Sure, shut it during the cyclone, but then open it up for free two days afterwards.

If you have ever gone to Shoal Bay, you would know that the queues—priority is given to the commercial vehicles and weighing them—go back to Vanderlin Drive. This happens every year. The council needs to put in two-lane access and open it in times of emergency so that residents can go through one gate and the commercial vehicles can go through another. The council knows this happens every year, but it is not fixing this, and it needs to. The council told people that they could not dump their green waste on the verge when they were trying to clean up roads. Where did the council expect people to put it—in their own backyards? The answer is no. Let us have a bit of common sense.

For the leadership of the council, I say: the community is not here to serve you; you are here to serve the community, and you need to put the community first. If you incur an expense, seek recovery later from the federal government or the NT Government.

I congratulate everyone for surviving.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Steve Balch

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of a former Member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Steve Balch. He was the Member for Jingili before it became the electorate of Johnston. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, although Central Australia occasionally faces serious storms and a bit of a blow, and members of our community always pitch in and help each other, it is nothing like what the people of the Top End face during cyclone season. I echo everybody's sentiments about how members of the community come together and support each other across the Top End when these things happen. The people in Central Australia, I can tell you honestly, were thinking of their friends and colleagues in the Top End as they went through Cyclone Fina on Saturday night.

During the peak of Cyclone Fina's impact nearly 19,900 customers across the Darwin and Katherine network lost power. As of Monday evening, about 14,900 had already been reconnected, with approximately 5,000 customers still to have power restored as crews work through the remaining complex repairs. These are the facts, and our focus remains on completing this work as quickly and as safely as possible to restore power to those customers.

I acknowledge the thousands of Territorians who have faced significant disruption over the past few days. Many households have dealt with long outages, damaged yards and loss of food. I thank those who have checked on their neighbours and supported one another, as Territorians always do during severe weather events and other emergencies.

I acknowledge the outstanding efforts of Power and Water's staff and contractors. As the Chief Minister said, their preparation began well before the system crossed the coast.

The call centre, run remotely by the Alice Springs team, handled more than 3,300 calls, nearly 3,000 emails and 2,200 web messages. More than 120,000 website visits for updates were looked after by the team in Alice Springs.

On the ground 33 field crews assessed damage across the greater Darwin area, disconnected unsafe sections and then began safe re-energisation as soon as conditions allowed. Restoration work continued throughout the night, and most of the CBD, inner suburbs, Palmerston, the rural area and parts of the Tiwi Islands have now been reconnected. Many of these men and women had their own homes impacted, but they were out working to support their fellow Territorians.

As power continues to be restored it is natural for Territorians to ask how our network can be strengthened for the future. That is a sensible conversation and one that this government is already approaching through proper planning and evidence. What is not sensible is the position put forward by the opposition. Those opposite rushed out a call to immediately reinstate their old undergrounding program, presenting it as a simple and obvious fix. In the middle of cyclone recovery it has been offered as a plausible-sounding solution at a moment when people are understandably frustrated, but sounding plausible is not the same as being deliverable, affordable and grounded in fact.

This government is focused on reconnecting homes safely and steadily. Meanwhile, Labor has reached for the easiest headline available, with no updated costings, delivery plan or explanation of why it failed to implement the same program when it was in government for the last eight years.

Facts matter, so let us walk through them. In 2022 Labor announced that it would underground the high-voltage network in suburbs for $60m, leaving thousands of residential lines exposed to falling trees and debris. That was the headline. It was not backed by a deliverable program; the moment the former Labor government confronted the real requirements, it stepped back. Two years later Labor quietly conceded that $60m would not cover 13 suburbs; it would cover only three. That is not a plan; that is a retreat.

During our cyclone recovery Labor is attempting to rebrand this abandoned commitment as though it was fully costed and ready to begin. The updated reality, as advised by Power and Water, is stark; undergrounding the original 13 suburbs would cost up to $1bn in today's dollars. That would be $1bn borrowed and added to debt at approximately $50m in interest every year for decades. To cover that Territorians—including the small businesses that Labor claims to represent—would face about $450 extra per household per year just to service the interest bill. That is not resilience or affordability; it is a billion-dollar idea without a billion-dollar plan.

Labor members know this, which is why they did not deliver it during their eight long years in government. They saw the numbers and they walked away. Instead of explaining that to Territorians, they now recycle the same simplistic line as though nothing has changed. It is absurd and an affront to the people of the Territory.

To be clear: the CLP did not cancel a working underground program; Labor never delivered one. What it left behind were mismatched costings and a promise that it could not fund. Even the undergrounding work that Labor members pointed to, nine schools, cannot be used as evidence for suburb-wide works. Schools are contained precincts with single access points. They do not require replacing thousands of household connections or navigating easements across entire residential suburbs. Their unit costs cannot be extrapolated to a network serving 71,000 customers.

If undergrounding the entire network was financially viable and deliverable and provided the best value for Territorians, this government would do it. We will not pretend a nearly $1bn price tag can be absorbed without actual consequence or pretend that something is simple just because it sounds simple at a moment of frustration. We will not gaslight the people of the Territory.

Our responsibility is to restore power safely, strengthen the network where it delivers genuine value and be up-front with Territorians about what is and what is not realistic. Labor offered a line before, and it is now offering the same line. Territorians can see the difference between a government doing the hard work during a recovery and an opposition recycling a proposal it had abandoned the moment real costings arrived.

We will not gaslight the people of the Northern Territory. We will tell people the truth, be up-front about the realities and not throw out a press release in the hope of a cheap headline when people are understandably frustrated and vulnerable.

I give a shout-out to our emergency services volunteers across the Top End. These people also have their own homes and families to look after. Those volunteers were on the ground—they are still out there today—helping their fellow Territorians at their own expense. I know of people who are self-employed who have closed their businesses to help others across the Top End. That is a quality of the people in the Territory, particularly our emergency services volunteers. I give a big thank you to them. I hope they soon get some downtime to look after themselves and their families.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I will speak about the events of the last week with Cyclone Fina, like everyone across the Chamber, to acknowledge the extraordinary work happening across our community and thank the people who carried us through the past week. I express my thanks that we emerged from this cyclone with no serious injuries. We are lucky.

Over the past few days we have seen the best of the Northern Territory. Long before the official cleanup began, Territorians were doing what Territorians always do—checking on neighbours, sharing food, clearing trees, offering a spare room or a generator and making sure that no-one was left alone. I acknowledge every person who stepped up, whether by cooking meals to share, helping to clear debris, keeping an eye on elderly or vulnerable neighbours or simply being a steady voice of reassurance for those who were frightened.

To people like David who was picking up rough sleepers in his van to take them to a shelter when we could not find anyone else to help; Don and Vindi who opened their shop Flavours by Ceylon with free meals for people with no water or power or people who felt like they needed somewhere to sit or some support; and the many volunteers who came into my office to help us check in with vulnerable people in Johnston and who are still doing that today, I thank you all. You are making an enormous difference.

I thank our Northern Territory emergency services volunteers, firefighters, police, health workers, council staff, power crews, remote community leaders and the frontline workers, many of whom have barely rested since the cyclone warning was first issued. The speed with which roads have been cleared, allowing everyone to get back on them, is incredible.

I acknowledge the Larrakia Nation team, local service providers, Aboriginal organisations, the people in many community groups who worked around the clock and the ABC for doing an amazing job keeping everyone updated and calm. All these efforts saved lives, kept people calm and held the community together.

While we celebrate the strength and kindness, we must also acknowledge something else; that is, not everyone received the help they needed during Cyclone Fina. We must turn our attention to this.

Communication during Cyclone Fina was a major challenge for many people. I acknowledge the positive steps of messaging in Tiwi language and Auslan, which was important and helped many families feel safer and more informed, but we need more. Many other Aboriginal language groups had no clear information in their first language. That left people feeling confused and anxious. There was also confusion about which services were doing what, who to call, how to get advice and what support was available. Even community organisations that wanted to help did not always know where to direct people. In an emergency, clarity and time save lives.

Shelter access was one of the biggest issues raised with me during and after the cyclone. People were not told and were not clear on when shelters would open. That meant families, particularly those without cars or who were already in unstable housing, could not plan safe travel in the daylight hours before conditions worsened. The shelters opened far too late for people who needed transport. They should have opened on Friday afternoon when it was still safe for organisations like Larrakia Nation, community patrols and support workers to get people to shelters. Instead, people were told to stay inside at the moment that shelters opened, and that made things far worse for them.

If people have no access to transport and are being told to shelter in place and their place is not a safe shelter, what do they do? The contact numbers people were given to arrange transport did not work. I know this because people who were seeking shelter were outside my office on Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday morning. I tried to find them assistance from everywhere I could. The 1800 homelessness hotline which I was given by the services was not operating over the weekend. Urgent messages left asking them for help on Friday were answered on Monday morning, which is obviously far too late.

Larrakia patrols stopped answering calls on Saturday morning. The cyclone hotline told people needing urgent transport to a shelter to call for a taxi, but that does not work if they cannot afford a taxi or do not have a phone. It does not work for someone fleeing unsafe conditions or the vulnerable people who need us most.

In Tiwi buses were running to pick up people and take them safely to shelters. That is exactly what we could have done in Darwin and Palmerston. However, here we had no number to call, no way for services to coordinate and no safe transport for people who needed it.

When people finally arrived at shelters, there was nothing for those who had no food, dry clothes or supplies. The next morning, on Sunday, when shelters closed, people were told to leave without any coordinated assistance to help them get home. Many did not know whether buses were running, had nowhere else to go or were wet and hungry. People called my office to ask where they could send these people. I tried to find out; there was no answer. I made a lot of peanut butter sandwiches and cups of tea, though. These are not small administrative issues; they are system failures that deeply affect people.

Every person who worked through Cyclone Fina did their best. This is not about blaming individuals; it is about making sure we build systems that are strong enough to ensure that no-one falls through the cracks.

I have also received countless calls from constituents who are furious about the underground power plans which have been cancelled in their suburbs. I just heard the Treasurer say that they have not been cancelled. I heard it differently 18 months ago in this Chamber.

We know that Power and Water staff work tirelessly. It is incredible how fast and hard they have been working to restore power. Every person is grateful for this. Thank you so much to all those workers.

I am lucky enough to live in Millner where we have the underground power that was committed to by government in the past. However, residents in the other suburbs in my electorate—Alawa, Jingili and Moil—among many other people in Darwin were without power for days, and many are still without power. Some elderly and vulnerable people who need electricity for many things, including medical reasons, were lucky enough to have another place they could go for safety. Some went to hotels or an Airbnb. However, for many people this was not an option.

Reconnecting damaged powerlines is costly, time consuming and creates avoidable health risks to people suffering through intense heat and humidity with no fans or air conditioning—the mosquito plague we are all experiencing makes it even more difficult—and, in some cases, being without critical medical equipment dependent on power, often for days after a cyclone.

We live in a cyclone-prone area and investing in simple preparedness like underground power should be something we are committed to. These are the moments when communities should be able to rely on their government to have the infrastructure in place to keep the power on to support recovery. Underground power will not stop cyclones, but it can prevent the widespread weeklong outages that sometimes follow them.

We know that cyclones are becoming more intense. In 2018 after Cyclone Marcus nearly 29,000 homes were left without power, many for over a week. We will soon get data about the homes left without power after Cyclone Fina. I will be requesting information about the full cost of the cleanup and the proportion of the cleanup cost spent on fallen powerlines.

This is a failure of both governments. The CLP cancelled underground power plans and said that we could not afford it. However, we need to ask: how much will the cleanup cost be for 10 more cyclones if we do not underground power? The point is not that undergrounding power is cheap; it is that the damage caused by cyclones is far more expensive.

Every decision this government makes about money is a choice. We know that every dollar spent on preparedness saves several more dollars in recovery, so the choice is not whether we can afford it; it is whether we prioritise it. If we can afford to spend half-a-billion dollars on filling up and building new prisons, we can afford to spend less than 1% of that on at least beginning the underground power that was committed to.

Before the next cyclone we need a real commitment to undergrounding power with a costed plan and a roadmap for implementation.

We need better communication in more Aboriginal languages, clearer messaging and to communicate consistent information to everyone about which services are responsible for what.

We need earlier shelter openings. Shelters must be open while it is still safe for transport services to operate, not after conditions have deteriorated. We need a functioning transport plan, with a simple staff number people can call to request pick-up. Community organisations cannot help if they do not know where to direct people. We need shelters with basic supplies, including food, dry clothing and medical essentials so that people who arrive with nothing are not left stranded.

We need post-cyclone support. I acknowledge a centre has been set up at Marrara, which is great. We also need help for people to return safely home straight after cyclones, especially when public transport is disrupted and services are still reopening.

We need clarity about roles and responsibilities. Every government and non-government service must know exactly what they are responsible for, and the public must know how to reach them. I know this because I spent a lot of time this weekend trying to reach the number that I was given to call in an emergency on behalf of people who needed help, and it did not work. That is not good enough. No-one should ever call for help during a cyclone and be told that no help is available. That is not the Territory we are or believe in.

Cyclone Fina showed us the incredible strength of our community, but it also exposed the gaps, and this is what a responsible government must focus on now. We owe it to the people who cooked meals for strangers, cleared roads in the heat, went out with their chainsaws, opened their homes, comforted frightened kids and kept going even when they were exhausted. We especially owe it to those who did not get the help they needed and went through this cyclone feeling afraid and alone.

Let us celebrate the community. Let us thank everyone who has and continues to work so hard. Let us be grateful that we came through this and it was so much better than it could have been. Let us also learn the lessons, fix the systems and make sure that next time—because, of course, there will be a next time—no-one is left behind.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Madam Speaker, cyclones are part of life in the Territory, but so too is the resilience, grit and unbreakable spirit of Territorians. Every time a storm, an emergency or a disaster comes our way we see the same thing: people stepping up, looking out for one another and doing what needs to be done to keep their families, neighbours and community safe.

I was pleased to see that so many Territorians prepared early, acted responsibly and followed the advice of our emergency services. That preparation made an enormous difference. It meant we were ready, which made all the difference when it counted. It meant our communities were safer and that the path to recovery could begin sooner and with fewer setbacks. Reviewing our household plans, securing our homes, staying informed, helping neighbours and preparing early are the actions that save lives and protect our communities.

I acknowledge the tireless efforts of those who worked around the clock to help Territorians during Cyclone Fina, particularly the work that took place in my portfolio areas of Health, Housing and Local Government in Darwin, our rural and regional areas and, indeed, the remote communities. To the Power and Water linesmen doing the job that is needed to get power back on and to all the frontline workers, thank you for the work you have done and are doing.

Since I became the Health minister I have been briefed on many occasions about NT Health's strong cyclone and emergency management plans for Royal Darwin Hospital, Palmerston and our remote health communities. These were enacted in preparation for the cyclone.

I was advised that NT Health enacted what is known as a code brown at RDH on Saturday morning as is its practice in weather events such as Cyclone Fina. Once the immediate danger had passed and the conditions eased, the code brown was stood down on Sunday morning. As per code brown protocols, I understand that many staff at the hospital between shifts were sleeping in the auditorium; they spent the night at the hospital to ensure that they could be there to care for patients when their shifts commenced across the course of the cyclone impact. More than 800 staff worked or sheltered at Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston during the cyclone. Thank you to all those staff who not only did their job but also stayed there overnight to support every patient in our hospital. They did not go home; they took their bedding to the hospital and stayed there to ensure that support was available.

As has been reported, a small section of the ceiling collapsed on the first floor near the lifts of Royal Darwin Hospital during the cyclone on Saturday night. A portion of the external brick cladding on the main building of the hospital loosened and fell onto the roof of the first-floor theatre building. The bricks came through the side and ceiling of the first-floor corridor, but I am pleased to advise that, thankfully, no patients or staff were injured. It was incredible that no-one was injured because it is a well-travelled area at the hospital.

About 16 elective surgeries were postponed yesterday as a result of the cyclone issues, but the RDH incident management team has taken steps to ensure the safety of our patients and staff. All of that area has now been isolated while safety checks and repairs are being completed. Structural assessments commenced immediately and continue as we speak. Royal Darwin Hospital will be guided by Department of Logistics and Infrastructure engineers as to the repairs and timeframes required. Hospital operations continue with alternative routes in place for staff and patients.

A short-stay ward of 16 beds was disrupted due to the ceiling damage, which led to elective surgeries being transferred to Palmerston Regional Hospital on Monday, with a handful being rescheduled. I am advised by NT Health that elective surgery from today has resumed and is back to normal.

Engineers are continuing to inspect the areas of the external facade to review it and ensure that it is safe. I reassure staff and patients that they are safe at RDH during cyclone events and that the hospital was built to withstand Category 5 cyclones.

I understand that all visitors were allowed to resume their visits to patients yesterday, and normal visiting rules apply.

During Cyclone Fina there were five babies born on Saturday night—as the Member for Karama told us—they were all girls, but none were named Fina. Throughout the weekend there were nine babies born. I thank all the staff in the maternity ward for the incredible work that they have been doing. Well done to all the families and staff who were there to assist during those important times. New Territorians have already seen their first cyclone.

On Sunday I dropped into the hospital to speak personally to the members of the incident management team and thank them for the work that they did during Cyclone Fina. I did not get in the way of what they were doing, but I wanted to just thank them. The incident management team had been meeting regularly, dealing with the issues at hand. All credit to the incident management team and all staff involved in dealing with the emergency and the issues on a day-to-day basis at the hospital.

Turning to Essential Services, Power and Water crews conducting repairs have worked day and night since Sunday to restore power. As of today, I am told that 14,900 customers have had their power restored since Tropical Cyclone Fina. I am assured that Power and Water is working hard to restore power. Members who have been out and about will have seen the Power and Water frontline workers doing what is needed to restore power. Thank you for the work that you are doing. Team members have come from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek to help, so we have resources on the ground. Additional resources have been deployed to the Tiwi Islands and impacted communities to assist with power restoration. Darwin's water supply has been confirmed as operational, with no interruptions to the required supply.

I note that our remote communities have not been forgotten. Power and Water teams were dispatched to Wurrumiyanga to inspect and repair impacted assets and restore power systems, which the Chief Minister spoke about this morning. More resources and equipment were sent to Wurrumiyanga to assist with the effort. Damage assessment teams from Housing have been deployed to look at all the damage as a result of Tropical Cyclone Fina.

I am advised that on Friday our Housing teams, particularly the public housing safety officers, contacted more than 700 vulnerable residents across properties to check in on them, assist and provide information about preparation for the approaching cyclone. On Sunday Housing started conducting patrols of public housing complexes to review damage, and public housing safety officers have reactivated their daily patrols. There has been no reported damage to large public housing complexes, although there have been reports of minor damage in some of the suburbs. There are still a number of fallen trees in those areas. Housing maintenance received 54 calls relating to fallen trees, damaged fences, roof leaks or blocked access.

I have been delighted to see that the generosity and community spirit of Territorians has once again shone, and it makes me proud there have been offers of help from fellow Territorians from down the track. In events like this, whether it is your neighbour in your street or a fellow Territorian from the next town who comes to help, it shows how Territorians help each other when the going gets tough. I thank all Territorians who have been helping, working in their own time, volunteering their time, assisting not only vulnerable residents but also their neighbours and the community. It is work that they do not have to do, but they are doing it. I thank every Territorian for the work they have been doing to respond to Cyclone Fina.

Thank you to all the services and volunteers; you have done a great job.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I will also speak about Cyclone Fina and what we have all just been through over the weekend. Like the others in this Chamber I thank all the NTES volunteers, emergency services staff, council staff, firies, police, Power and Water staff and the public servants who worked together to protect people across the Top End and who continue to work in the recovery.

I give a shout-out and thanks to all the teachers and staff at the schools in my electorate. They worked hard to ensure that kids could return to school yesterday. Luckily, Nightcliff Primary School, Nightcliff Middle School and St Paul's Catholic Primary School students could return to school yesterday. Essington had to close for a day to assess the damage, which I understand is all okay now. My kids are at school today. I very much thank all the teachers, particularly those who still do not have power in their own homes.

Thanks to the people in organisations such as Larrakia Nation and St Vincent de Paul who were out there for as long as they could be in the lead-up, trying to ensure that vulnerable people in our community and our streets could find somewhere safe to shelter. As the Member for Johnston mentioned, there were many who fell through the gap.

I also acknowledge the fantastic communication from all the authorities and the ABC in the lead-up. I thank the ABC staff who stayed and bunkered down overnight and continued to give great up-to-date coverage to keep people in the loop. It was helpful.

In the lead-up I spoke to many Cyclone Tracy survivors in my electorate. There are many in Nightcliff and Rapid Creek who were feeling apprehensive and uneasy. As the Member for Karama said, I am thankful and grateful that there were no injuries or deaths and that we did not end up getting Category 3 winds. I am feeling a lot of relief today, especially as I wondered how we would fare a coastal electorate.

Well done to everyone in Nightcliff, Rapid Creek and Coconut Grove for coming together. I know everyone has a special electorate, but I feel that we have such a good community spirit in those areas. Everyone was checking on neighbours and clearing roads in the aftermath. One of the first constituents I checked on is a 100-year-old living alone in Nightcliff. She proudly says that she is 100 and two months. Dear Elspeth opened the door with her hair done, lipstick on and wearing a brooch as though nothing had happened. Well done, Elspeth. I do not know how you managed to do it.

My new chainsaw got a workout. I finally got a battery-powered chainsaw for all my Milwaukee tools, which was fun. Luckily I had no trees down. I lost a tail-light on my car, but nothing came down on the house. Nightcliff and the foreshore had trees down everywhere. The resilience tree, as people call it, is the one hanging on the edge. It had hung on for so many years, but it came down. A lot of people in my electorate were attached to that tree, but we will continue to be resilient despite that tree coming down.

I thank my volunteers who were out yesterday, checking on the seniors in the seniors' village on Dick Ward Drive. A lot of them live alone and there are a lot of older women living there. We are trying to get assistance to all seniors across my electorate who need help with fallen trees and debris. Thanks also to NTES especially, everyone out there in orange, who are in Nightcliff at the moment.

The experience of the cyclone and aftermath was different depending on where people are located. Those of us in Nightcliff and Rapid Creek reported mostly coping well, having uninterrupted power, unlike those in Coconut Grove, who mostly lost power from Saturday morning until Sunday evening. It came on last night, so that was over 24 hours without power, which is better than after Cyclone Marcus, when most of Coconut Grove did not have power—some for up to two weeks.

I have been contacted by people who are upset that they do not have underground power, whereas Nightcliff and Rapid Creek do. I underscore, despite what the Treasurer said, the importance of underground power. Yes, it is expensive, but it is a vital service needed for Territorians. It is not good enough for government members to throw up their hands and say that it is too expensive. Every budget decision is a choice, and the government can choose to spend money on vital life-saving services such as underground power or not.

The devastation that we witnessed from Cyclone Fina has exposed the failure of the CLP, which abandoned the previous government's underground power program. While families across the Top End and in my electorate sit in darkness with their food spoiling, their medical equipment unusable and their lives disrupted, the CLP continues to hide behind the excuse that protecting our power infrastructure is too expensive. Let us be clear about what is actually expensive—that is, emergency response. Every time we deploy emergency crews to restore downed powerlines, compensate businesses for lost income, support households through extended outages, we pay far more than we would have spent on prevention. This is well known and an

ongoing frustration in disaster management circles. Spend the money on prevention and we will save tenfold in response.

For the record, if Labor was still in power I would be having a go at it for the slow rollout of underground power, but at least it had a program and was working slowly on that.

I worry that the CLP's move to scrap it is not driven by budget realities or evidence, but is simply an ideological move aimed at obstructing or opposing anything Labor does. We see this all the time with the two major parties, which is why people are turning away from them; they are sick of it. One party gets into government and tears up everything that the previous government was working on, seemingly out of spite. This fails all Territorians.

We routinely spend millions on emergency response crews working around the clock to restore power. This is money that could have built permanent resilience into our network. If the CLP says that it cannot afford this, I will say that it is a choice and it should do what responsible governments do, which is approach the federal government for infrastructure funding. The Albanese government has money for natural disaster resilience. It appears, though, the CLP is not asking for it and that this government would rather leave Territorians vulnerable and repeatedly pay the price than invest in the protection that our community deserves.

Underground power is an integral part of the conversation in the recovery. I do not want it to be something that is flip-flopped between the major two. It is a real issue that impacts people, and people want underground power. I am continually contacted by people in Coconut Grove who are fed up and pissed off, quite frankly, that the rollout was canned.

I hope there will be time after everything is over with the cyclone for reflection and improvement. I hope that this government is robust enough to admit and learn from mistakes.

Just to be clear, I have no criticism whatsoever of people on the ground. As a previous NTES volunteer, I know that every person on the ground goes above and beyond to help and do the right thing, but there will undoubtedly be lessons for this government's leadership, council leadership and other management in the response to this cyclone.

Constituents brought up some things with me. One of them was the hotline opening hours. Many people needed help outside those hours, so, if possible, next time could it be a 24-hour service?

I thank everyone who worked and volunteered at Nightcliff Middle School, which was a shelter. In previous disasters, as I have been made aware, governments often worked with Red Cross volunteers as one organisation. Red Cross has trained volunteers for situations like this. They come into shelters, provide social support and do things like cooking meals. Many people are questioning why that was not done during this cyclone.

Many people reported concerns to me about incidents at some of the shelters, where vulnerable people who have been visiting Darwin from remote communities or who are homeless and had nowhere else to go were kicked out of the shelter early on Sunday, still soaking wet and with no food or connection to other supports. These concerns were brought to me by other residents who then cared for these people. I am not sure what happened in these instances, but obviously there has been some kind of failure of process or leadership. I hope that these concerns can be listened to and learned from for the next disaster.

I will address the elephant in the room. Scientists have been telling us for decades that global heating, specifically the heating of the oceans, creates more powerful tropical storms and cyclones. Of course, we live in the tropics and we have always had cyclones, but disaster specialists and scientists are concerned about what they call cascading disasters and our ability to continue to respond to and recover from these kinds of events when they grow more intense. Our government has its head in the sand about what climate change means for our community, and we are not building resilience with things like underground power. This is an ongoing frustration for many people in the Territory.

I cannot believe that nine babies were born over the weekend. Congratulations to all the mothers for labouring through a cyclone. That is truly incredible. If I could be so bold, my Rufus turned two on Sunday and had a little cyclone birthday, so happy birthday to Rufus.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, there are many people I want to thank, but I will start with the Member for Blain. I have been married seven years, and I can say that I never had the seven-year itch until this weekend when I saw the Member for Blain with a chainsaw. He would pull it first go every time, and he

went through a lot of wood on recovery day. It was great. I sincerely thank the Member for Blain. He got out early, and together we went around our electorates. We got through Gray, Driver, Gunn, Woodroffe, Moulden and Bellamack, clearing roads and driveways where people were stuck.

What was fantastic was the number of residents who pitched in and helped. I thank Clinton Rupe and Marcos Steinhardt, two Palmerston lads who jumped in to help. They had been out all day chainsawing trees over the roads and freeing up people's driveways. Thank you to those two guys, and I know there were plenty more.

I am a big believer in small government, and I like to think that in moments like that people in the community will step up for one another. In Palmerston it was fantastic to see that they did. To all the local heroes from all over Palmerston who hooked in straightaway in the morning, thank you. From the bottom of my heart, I give my sincere thanks. There was so much willingness by the volunteers. It was good to see.

On the government side of things, I thank our emergency services, particularly those emergency services personnel who also have families. There would have been workers at the hospital and police, firies and SES who had to leave their families in order to do their duty for the community. I thank everyone, particularly those who have families at home. I massively salute you because that is not easy, and you put the Territory and the community first. From the bottom of my heart, I give my sincere thanks.

I also thank everyone who volunteered at the cyclone shelters, particularly Peter Chandler in my electorate who manned the Palmerston Shopping Centre shelter. He volunteered there over the entire weekend, looking after the many vulnerable people we have. There is a number of them in Drysdale who needed to use that shelter. Again, my sincere thanks to all the volunteers who gave up their time with their families to look after everyone in our community.

I thank the City of Palmerston for having the tip open yesterday—a big thumbs up. It was busy. I did a few tip runs, just moving rubbish to there. It was great to see. I give a big thank you to the Palmerston Council for doing the right thing and keeping the tip open.

I also thank the businesses that opened the next day. A number of people contacted me to ask, 'Can we do this? Can we do that?' They were free to open and trade. I do not believe we are there to tell traders when they can open their doors. Good on those businesses that started trading and providing services and goods to people who needed them after the cyclone. I say to the business community and everyone in general that is a philosophical aspect you will get from this government; we are not here to control your movements, when you open and when you trade. The days of asking government what you can and cannot do are over. It is up to you. We believe in citizens having the responsibility, so crack on.

I thank the Chief Minister for visiting Bathurst Island yesterday and personally ensuring that the residents were getting the services they needed, particularly water and power. I have many residents …

Mr Young: What about the local member?

Mr HOWE: Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I am trying to give a speech to thank the community, so if you could please keep it down.

I have many residents who have friends and family in the Tiwi Islands, and those connections are very strong, so it was important for me to see that the Chief Minister went there. A lot of my residents want to see that we are looking after that area as well. I thank the Member for Arafura. He is very committed to that area. I hope he felt that he was tied into those conversations leading up to the cyclone and that the recovery is going well over there. It is important to me as not only a local member but also a member of the government that our government is for all communities in the Territory. It was great to see the Chief Minister go there yesterday to make sure that they are being looked after.

In my electorate we mainly had trees down, which blocked roads and driveways. We have extensive damage with trees down in parks. There was damage to Driver Primary School. I am glad that Driver Primary School is back open today, which is great news. I thank everyone for their work in getting the school open and getting life back to normal for our kids. It would have been a long weekend for some families, being locked inside and then school not being open on Monday. I am sure there are some relieved parents in Driver today.

It has been brought up, so it needs to be addressed; that is, Labor and the Greens discussed underground power. As the minister said, we would love to underground power—without a doubt—but the difference is that we are the only party telling the truth about what it costs. In 2017 Mr Vowles promised that the Labor Party would underground power. It was 2017; Labor had seven more years in government. It was not a slow

rollout; there was no rollout. There would never be a rollout. The two major parties are aware of the financial implications of this. The difference is that we are the only one being truthful. We would love to do it.

We have such a focus on the economy because we know we need to get the economy going so that we can do preventive things like underground power, which will have a huge benefit. We want to do that, but we have to put the horse before the cart—the horse is the economy—and we do not have the money now. We have essential services that we have to deliver. If we cut $1bn out of that budget, we would have to cut some extremely essential services.

The difference is we are telling the truth. Labor promised it, and for seven years, nothing was delivered. That is the facts.

I give my sincere thanks to everyone involved. It is part of life here. It was the first cyclone for my wife and children. The girls, to be honest, quite enjoyed it. I tried to make it an exciting thing for them. I did not have to drug my dog, Bloom; he was fine—thumbs up.

To all our workers and everyone who put in the hard yakka over the weekend, my sincere thanks. To all the service personnel, and those with families who put their duty first, I give my sincere thank you.

I genuinely hope recovery on the Tiwi Islands is speedy and that those communities can get back to normal as fast as possible as well.

I am thankful we walked away from this with no injuries or loss of life. At the end of the day, what more could we ask for? That is a blessing, and I will take it.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I speak alongside my parliamentary colleagues on the recent Tropical Cyclone Fina. Over the weekend Territorians across the Top End had their resilience tested. Again, Territorians not only proved their resilience but also showed their genuine character of looking after one another.

Before I get into thanking everyone, there were a lot of people who went through Cyclone Tracy who reached out to me. I acknowledge the PTSD that occurred for those survivors of Cyclone Tracy. I hope that all of us here reach out to people and check that they are okay. A couple of people came into my office yesterday, and we have reassured them that there are services for them to speak to a counsellor if they need to. Touch base with them, because it is triggering for a lot of people who went through that. As the Member for Drysdale touched on, although we have not seen any physical damage in the Territory, there are people affected psychologically, and we should be thinking of them at this time.

I thank all our first responders. They did an incredible, amazing job, as all who have spoken so far have acknowledged. I thank our police, emergency services, firefighters and the local governments. A lot of local government staff in the Daly electorate did incredible work keeping people up to date.

I thank our local Aboriginal organisations which ensured that people had the right information. They put out a lot of resources in Murrinh-Patha, which is the local language of the Kardu Diminin people for Wadeye, and a lot of the people of the 22 clan groups there speak that language.

I thank the Bureau of Meteorology for the incredible work it does to keep people up to date and the many journalists, particularly in our local outlets, who ensured that people had the right information. We cannot go past ABC radio news, which ran a 24-hour program throughout the period, keeping people up to date and comforting them through those times. People would ring up and tell their stories and inform others of what was going on. It was great to hear those stories through the radio, giving people real comfort.

For the Daly electorate it was not just the 24-hour period over Saturday evening and into the night. Cyclone Fina crossed from Darwin on Saturday evening to Mandorah on the Cox Peninsula and the communities of Wagait Beach and Belyuen. It hit hard at Wagait Beach; a lot of the trees have been stripped back and a lot have fallen. My property has a few fallen trees fallen hanging off the powerlines, so I am hoping that Power and Water will get out there, but I am not the priority because a lot of people are worse off than me.

There are many people to thank, but I will start by giving a shout-out to the Wagait Shire Council, which did an amazing job. It opened the cyclone shelter on Saturday evening, and I thank the volunteers who were there. Ian Crawshaw, Peter Clee and Lorna Manning, thank you for volunteering your time to keep the cyclone shelter open and ensure that people had a safe place to go.

Thank you to the Wagait Beach rapid response team and Shelby, who is a legend. You were giving out information; I was calling you through Saturday night into Sunday, keeping everyone up to date. Thank you, Shelby, for the work you have done for not only Wagait Beach but also Belyuen, where you checked on people and ensure that they were safe too. To Virginya, the CEO, and the president, Neil, thank you. These people are all part of the rapid response team. To Ken Courts, thank you; I look forward to getting back on the court to have a hit of tennis with you again soon, mate. To Dougie, the captain of our local volunteer firies. Not only was he sitting in the response team but also I saw him yesterday at Wagait Beach, helping families to cut down trees and getting the green waste out of their yards, especially for our seniors. To Barry Bamford, Cherie Nichols and Jodi Reyes, thank you.

In the Belyuen community, thank you to Councillor Angelina Lewis for the work you did to keep me updated with how the community was on Saturday night and Sunday. To Wayne Ledwidge and Dave Ferguson, thank you for your work. Thank you to Sylvia from the Belyuen aged-care service for all the work you did. The aged-care service remit goes across to Wagait Beach and into Dundee as well. I believe only one person stayed at the aged-care centre; the rest went back to family. To the Belyuen health clinic staff, Nick Barclay and Charlotte, thank you for your work. I also thank the people from the SES who came out yesterday to help families with the cleanup.

In the Thamarrurr region at Wadeye, thank you to Mark Tunmuck, the Chairperson of TDC; Tracey Leo, the acting CEO; our local police; and the Kardu Diminin Corporation, thank you for all your work in keeping people updated. In Palumpa, to Amy and TDC, thank you for helping. I spoke to a lot of people on Saturday evening, calling our homelands. To Terry and Louise Sams at Emu Point and Margaret and Camilla Parry in Woodycupaldiya, thank you for letting people know what was going on.

I touch on the homelands. It is a bit of a criticism, but criticism is good because it will improve our systems in the future. Just make sure that we do not forget our homelands; a lot of our homelands residents said that no-one had contacted them. Whoever is listening to this, make sure to touch base because the residents in homelands are usually our most isolated residents across the Northern Territory.

In Daly River I thank Wayne Buckley, Kieren from the art centre and Miriam-Rose. It did not quite hit there, but the community still had a lot of rain and wind. We never know which direction a cyclone could take.

A huge thank you to everyone who helped to ensure everyone stayed safe, had the right communications and knew the plans to enact. It is a huge commitment from all government agencies, local government, Aboriginal corporations and emergency services, which did a massive job. A lot of people did not sleep on Saturday night, especially our emergency services personnel, not knowing what they would wake up to the next morning. It is stressful. As local members we have the responsibility of looking after our constituents, which was stressful for all of us too, so I can only imagine what it is like for our frontline workers as first responders not being sure of what they will face. A huge thank you to everyone.

Some seniors from COTA came to my office at Berry Springs to ask that the government considers that a lot of seniors and other people in the rural area will usually shop in town. They do a huge shop; a lot of seniors will shop for a month. A lot of their power has been taken out, so they have lost a lot of food. Some told me that they had lost their Christmas food, but there is no assistance for them to get support from government. That is feedback for the government to consider. Look at the people in the rural area who were impacted by the cyclone. Some of the power is still out in the rural area, so we ask the government to touch base with them. A lot of the seniors are on pensions, so they cannot afford some food. It is the same for people in the Belyuen community with the power being out. A lot of people lost a lot of food. Maybe look at food packs or other support we can give. They were told to go to CatholicCare, but it is only a $20 or $30 voucher, which is about what it costs in fuel for people to get to their closest CatholicCare in Palmerston.

I thank everyone with the emergency services.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I will speak on this ministerial report on Cyclone Fina—the disaster, the endurance and the aftermath.

I thank the citizens of Palmerston for doing such an amazing job over the weekend. Everyone listened to the official sources of information, did the right thing and prepared. When the cyclone was happening, by and large, everyone hunkered down and looked after their loved ones. As soon as the cyclone passed and it was safe to get out, the citizens of Palmerston were clearing the roads. They were getting the job done. I thank the people of Palmerston.

While the cyclone was raging, I was watching our community groups and the reports of trees falling down around my electorate. I have the luck that, due to my background, I have a large chainsaw. At the block I have a lot of experience clearing felled trees that come down over the Wet Season. I am no stranger to dealing with downed trees, so I made sure that had the chainsaw ready to go.

As soon as it was safe to head out on Sunday morning, I was checking on my good citizens of Blain to see whether there was anything I could do to help. The people of Blain were already out there clearing the streets, checking on their neighbours and making sure that people were okay. A large milkwood had fallen over—there were a few trees that fell over—in Temple Terrace. By the time I got there to sort it out, it had already been cut up and cleared off the road and people could get past.

I went to Melastoma Drive in Moulden and people were already there working and cutting up a tree. Adam from one of the volunteer bushfire brigades was there with his chainsaw. One of the neighbours, Chad, was there clearing the tree. We got in there, and within short order we had that tree cleared. By the time the wonderful gentlemen from the NT Emergency Service came along surveying the roads, that road was pretty much already cleared. We went to Davoren Circuit, McGuire Circuit, Manson Court and Birkett Court and cleared roads. There was a fellow who was driving around in his lifted, awesome four-wheel drive Toyota LandCruiser. He did not have a chainsaw and may not have had the correct work health and safety approved footwear, but he got in there. We strapped some of the big logs to the back of his LandCruiser and he towed them out of the way so that the road was clear and people could get to the shops to get important things they needed for their families.

One I had checked on Moulden I met the Member for Drysdale, as he so eloquently said. We checked Woodroffe, which was pretty good. By the time I got there the citizens of Woodroffe had already cleared all the roads I saw. We then checked Gray and found some people who had large mahoganies fallen across their driveways. We were proud to help one gentlemen—who is a veteran—and his family clear the driveway so that they could get out if they needed to access services or go to the shops. The Member for Drysdale and I were out in the community all day Sunday.

I am so proud of the people of Palmerston. They did not wait to be given permission to do the right thing; they just did it because that is what is in their hearts. Good on them.

I point out that the clear messaging from the Chief Minister in the lead-up was that people needed to be ready for 72 hours of looking after themselves, their families and pets. I can only speak for Palmerston, and, by and large, the people of Palmerston did that.

This cyclone was a great example of the proper role of government in coordinating a public response to an issue that affects everyone then getting out of the way to allow citizens to look after themselves. Those citizens who have the ability, experience and expertise could give back, and the government allowed them to do their work and clear the roads. Every time a citizen cut a tree to clear a road and left the tree on the verge, it was another tree that our hardworking emergency services did not need to attend to, so they could focus on higher-priority issues where powerlines were involved, which only qualified people should work on. It was a great example of the proper role of government and the power of an engaged and active citizenry.

I thank all the Power and Water lines men and women who got out; our NT Emergency Service workers and volunteers, police and Corrections staff who turned up to work; doctors and nurses and all the public servants who worked through the cyclone delivering babies and keeping Territorians safe. I thank the City of Palmerston council staff, Mayor Athina Pascoe-Bell, the CEO and all the rangers who worked through the cyclone planning for the recovery.

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Madam Speaker, I place on the record what a wonderful community Sanderson is. I can see that there is probably only a minute for me to speak. It was good that people in the community came together to help each other. I saw that on Sunday.

Some concerns were raised by people, so I will touch on one thing before the time lapses. One media release by Selena Uibo, the Minister for Essential Services in 2023, clearly said:

- *2023 – Commence works Nakara*
- *2023–24 – Commence works Wagaman, Larrakeyah*

Wagaman is in my electorate, and no work was done, except the work that was completed at the school before 2023.

It is disappointing Labor is again saying that it had allocated funding for the undergrounding of power when this release says that it was allocated only $60m, which was not enough to do any of the initial work that was supposed to be done in 13 suburbs. The Treasurer made it clear that this would cost nearly $1bn, and you cannot do a $1bn of work with $60m.

I table this document, because a lot of things are being said time and again in parliament.

I think that the time is up.

Mr Kerle: You have another two minutes 40 seconds; you could keep going.

Mr CHARLS: Madam Speaker, I am happy to keep going if you are happy.

Madam SPEAKER: We will complete the universal time of two hours.

Mr CHARLS: I thank the NT Emergency Service workers who worked on the preparation phase for probably two to three days prior to the cyclone, during the cyclone and in the recovery phase.

During the recovery phase we have opened the welfare centre, coordinated by the Department of Children and Families and supported by the Department of People, Sport and Culture; Red Cross; the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory; and the Department of Health. We have made sure there are options available for people during the recovery phase so that they can be supported through this period. It is about being together and supporting each other after a crisis.

As Minister for Fire and Emergency Services the Chief Minister did wonderful work leading the charge. A lot of work was done by NTES and others.

In regard to my portfolios, I thank all the multicultural community leaders and the sports clubs for their wonderful work, reaching out and offering support. There is a lot of volunteer support, even during this next phase.

I am closely watching what the City of Darwin is doing about green waste, as that concern has been raised by many residents in my electorate. On Sunday there was no facility available for them to dump the green waste; they had to put it on the verge. Some information given to the public from the City of Darwin Mayor was that people would be fined for doing this. Recently, there was an update that it is not in the City of Darwin's plan, so people are concerned about the support available. I reiterate that people living in the City of Darwin area want support from the council and to see it working together with the government to make sure there are options for people, especially the elderly, who cannot take green waste to the tip.

Motion agreed to; report noted.

The Assembly suspended.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Hon Matthew Guy

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Hon Matthew Guy MP, Member for Bulleen from the Victorian Parliament. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR
Message No 11 – Assent to Bills Passed in October 2025

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received Message Number 11 from His Honour the Administrator notifying assent to the Bills passed in the October meetings of the Assembly. The message is dated 5 November 2025.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENTS
Order of Business

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, due to the precedence given to the ministerial report on Tropical Cyclone Fina, the reports from the Public Accounts Committee and the Legislative Scrutiny Committee will be tabled after Question Time.

After the reports have been tabled the Assembly will move to Government Business Order of the Day Number 1, which will be the second reading debate on the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Bill 2025.

Committee Membership

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I report that pursuant to Standing Order 181 on 30 October 2025 the following changes were made to committee memberships:

- House Committee—the Member for Blain replaced the Member for Fannie Bay
- Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee—the Member for Fannie Bay replaced the Member for Fong Lim
- Legislative Scrutiny Committee—the Member for Fannie Bay replaced the Member for Goyder
- Standing Committee on the ICAC—the Member for Karama replaced the Member for Drysdale and the Member for Fong Lim replaced the Member for Wanguri
- Standing Orders Committee—the Member for Karama replaced the Member for Blain.

Members' Satisfaction Survey

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, every year the Department of the Legislative Assembly conducts a survey of members' satisfaction with a range of its services as one of its key performance indicators and to gain insights on how to improve its services to members.

You will find a copy of the 2025 survey on your desks. When you have completed the survey form please press your attendant call button and one of our staff will collect it.

As advised every year, we expect 25 responses. A non-response is recorded as 100% satisfaction.

NOTICES

Ms CAHILL (Child Protection): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Worker Screening) Bill 2025, Serial 49.

QUESTION TIME

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Underground Power

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Your CLP government has no plan for the future power of Darwin. Will your CLP government stop politicking and reinstate the underground power plan for the Darwin suburbs?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this is the first day of parliament following a Category 3 cyclone, and the community in Darwin is doing an amazing job in dealing with the cleanup. Our emergency services officers are doing an incredible job. We are now down to 2,100 homes without power, from 19,500 a day ago. People have done the most incredible job. At a time when people are getting on with the job, when our teachers have worked in overdrive to get kids back in classrooms, our emergency services volunteers are clearing hundreds of tonnes of green waste, our police have been supporting our most far-flung remote communities to make sure they are protected, safe and aware of what is happening in their communities, the Opposition Leader's first question is about politicking.

Now would be a good time to point out the politicking that is going on because the Opposition Leader was the Essential Services minister who promised people living in the northern suburbs that by now their power would already be underground. Do you know what? It is not, and that is through no fault of our government.

I barely want to dignify the Opposition Leader's question with an answer, to be honest, because in her speech this morning she could not race through her comments about undergrounding power fast enough. She has no heart on this topic because she knows that for 19 of the last 23 years Labor has been in power and failed the people of the northern suburbs who do not have underground power.

We are focused on getting power returned to houses as fast as possible while the Opposition Leader is focused on trying to use a cyclone to politically pointscore against our government, despite the fact that just 15 months ago she was the Essential Services minister responsible for delivering the so-called rollout which she failed to do.

I have been clear that this is an important issue. We would love nothing more than to do that, but with a billion-dollar price tag and a $15bn debt left to us by Labor, it is difficult to see how in the foreseeable future we could possibly afford to do that. We will not be skyrocketing power prices for Territorians who are already hurting. We have done a lot of work to reform our power network systems already and the mess that Labor left with it.

Right now our focus is on making sure that 2,100 Territorians have power in the next couple of days so that they can get on with business as usual.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Relief Payments

Mr HOWE to CHIEF MINISTER

Our Top End residents are now assessing the impact and damage of Tropical Cyclone Fina last weekend, many with the assistance of our amazing NTES volunteers from across the Territory. Many people experienced damage to property and 19,500 homes lost power. People are now seeking clear information about the assistance available to help them get back on track. Could you outline what payments and supports may be available to those affected? How do residents access these payments? What steps are being taken to ensure this process is straightforward?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Drysdale for the support he gave his community in the aftermath on Sunday. I saw you out there with a chainsaw, helping people in your community along with the Member for Blain. I saw the Member for Sanderson as well. I thank them very much for that.

People getting on with normal life is what we want. We recognise that today marks the 72-hour period. There is a well-known expectation that Territorians are able to look after themselves, their families and pets within their own home or at a shelter for up to 72 hours—food, blankets, clothing, water and all those essentials.

We have now hit that point; we are 72 hours on. There are still 2,100 Territorians without power. There has been a huge amount of work from Power and Water teams who have been out 24 hours a day. We had 19,500 outages come Sunday and now we are down to 2,100, which is an incredible effort. However, if you are one of the 2,100 people, this is growing pretty old and you want this sorted; you want your power on, to have a hot shower and to refill your fridge.

In recognising that, today we have stood up an immediate relief payment. This will be a $250 one-off payment to people who have had their power out for 72 hours. We will make this available from tomorrow morning at the Marrara welfare centre, which we stood up at one o'clock yesterday afternoon. People can go there. They will need proof of ID and an address. Power and Water will then be able to check their outages. They will be given a debit bank-style card with $250 loaded on to it so that they can buy food for their families or replenish their dry goods—whatever they need to do with that money—to get through the next couple of days. That is an immediate relief payment that our government is doing. It is not what the federal government is doing. We have worked around the clock, but we still have just over 2,000 people who are without power, and this payment is in recognition of that.

Yesterday I met with the Minister for Emergency Management, Kristy McBain, who has activated and accepted all of our natural disaster relief funding which is to come. There are various ways and tiers of funding under those schemes which Territorians may or may not be eligible for.

I make it clear that this immediate relief payment from tomorrow morning is in recognition of the fact that people have been without power for more than 72 hours. We want them to get food and be supported with what they need to get through the next couple of days as our crews work around the clock to have everyone's power restored and back to normal.

Tropical Cyclone Fina –Underground Power

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

During parliament sittings in July this year you admitted that investing in renewables and underground power was the right thing to do. If you agree it is the right thing to do, can you tell the 19,500 households that lost power during Cyclone Fina why you are not investing in either?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, let us be clear: if we are going to do something we need to plan for it properly. We know that, because when we came into government we found the fallacy of Labor's underground power policy. There was $60m to underground power to all of the northern suburbs. We asked Power and Water what that would cost; it said that it would be close to $1bn. Yes, we support renewables and undergrounding power, but it has to be done in a responsible way.

Labor's press release yesterday was gaslighting Territorians yet again at a point in time when people are having difficulties and are scared and worried. To put that message out is deplorable.

Labor says that $60m will underground power. I will give some figures. What would $60m do? In the northern suburbs there is 68.1 kilometres of HV network and 131 kilometres of low-voltage network. That $60m would just about underground 26 kilometres of that high-voltage network, which still leaves at least another 40 kilometres to do, plus 131 kilometres of low-voltage network. They are the power poles outside everybody's houses; the ones that we see were affected throughout Cyclone Fina.

I shout out to the Power and Water crews who are restoring the power. They were on the ground as early as they possibly could, forgoing looking after their own families and own homes to get power back on for the people in the Darwin, Palmerston and rural areas. They have been working hard from early morning to late at night. Nearly 19,500 homes were without power from Saturday afternoon, and that number is down to 2,100 today. When we look at the scale of the destruction wreaked by Cyclone Fina we see that is a mammoth effort. They are still out there doing the work.

We will invest in that network to make sure that it is strong and resilient and …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I thank the minister for answering in regard to underground power, but the other part to the question was about renewables.

Mr YAN: I will happily touch on renewables. In our last sittings we stood up NTESMO and put in place RESIP because the previous Labor government had a haphazard approach to implementing renewables, which put our network and grid at risk. We finally got in and did the work to make sure that we can keep our system safe and stable for the people of the Territory into the future.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Essential Workers

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for HEALTH

Tropical Cyclone Fina had a big impact on many Top End residents. Territorians heeded the advice and bunkered down during the cyclone. I understand that there have been no reported injuries from the cyclone. As the cleanup continues the generosity and community spirit of Territorians has once again shone through.

Workers across many agencies have been working hard to help Territorians during the recovery from this cyclone, including many essential workers like the health staff at RDH, whom we value. Can you update Territorians on some of the hard work of our essential workers during the preparation for, emergency of and recovery from Cyclone Fina?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the tireless efforts of many who worked around the clock to help Territorians during Cyclone Fina, particularly the work that took place in my portfolio areas of Health, Housing and Essential Services in Darwin and remote communities.

Many staff stayed at the hospital between shifts, sleeping in the auditorium, just to ensure they could be there to care for patients who needed it when their shifts commenced across the course of the cyclone impact. More than 800 workers worked or sheltered at Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston Regional Hospital during the cyclone. That is the dedication of our frontline workers in the health system. They put people's lives before their own and made sure that they were available on the front line to provide care and support to Territorians at a time of need. Thank you to all those staff.

During the Saturday evening a portion of the external brick cladding on the main building of the hospital loosened and fell onto the roof of the first floor. This area of the hospital—it was well publicised in the media and social media—has been isolated while safety checks and repairs are being completed. Structural assessments commenced immediately and they continue. Engineers are inspecting all areas of the external cladding to review it and ensure the safety of all Territorians.

I reassure Territorians that patients and staff are safe at Royal Darwin Hospital during cyclone events. RDH was built a number of years ago, but it was built to withstand Category 5 cyclones.

Power and Water crews on the ground conducting repair and restoration works have worked day and night since Sunday to restore power as quickly as possible. As we heard from the Chief Minister, only 2,100 homes are without power as we speak. That work is continuing as we get on with the job today.

Importantly, I note that our regional and remote communities have not been forgotten. Power and Water teams were dispatched to Wurrumiyanga to inspect and repair impacted assets and restore power systems. Crews worked on repairs at Minjilang, and work was completed on Sunday. I understand that power has been restored at Belyuen.

The road to recovery is well underway. Together, as we always do, we will get through this, rebuild stronger and continue to show the nation what it means to be Territory tough.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Tiwi Islands

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for ESSENTIAL SERVICES

As we have seen with the impact of Cyclone Fina, when the power goes out for an extended time it becomes harder for Territorians to recover. Can you provide an update about communities on the Tiwi Islands, such as Pickertaramoor, impacted by Cyclone Fina? The cyclone passed within 20 kilometres of Pickertaramoor. At the moment it is inaccessible, and power and water services are still not running.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, from the word go our crews have been across to the Tiwi Islands to support people there and in Minjilang. The frontline workers working on power across the board have been doing incredible work. The information I have in front of me is that Tiwi College has its own power supply. That is all credit to the Power and Water frontline workers, linesmen and staff who have been doing the job from the word go. I thank them for their work.

The information I have is that other parts of the Territory have no power as we speak. We are down to 2,100 customers still without power, and that is of concern to our government and Power and Water. Power and Water staff are trying to fix that as quickly and efficiently as possible. There are areas in the northern suburbs still without power.

The damage is equivalent to Cyclone Marcus, and the assessment process is critical for helping us restore services as safely and quickly as possible. Power and Water has focused on that from the word go. Territorians are urged to keep away from fallen trees and where powerlines are down. We want to ensure all Territorians are safe and that the Power and Water staff are safe in doing their jobs.

Wurrumiyanga has had 95% of its power restored. The latest information is that there are 20 lots without power. Power and Water teams are continuing to work to repair the damage to infrastructure. Shops and clubs have power, and they are back online. Telstra services are also operating as normal in those areas.

The work happening, Member for Arafura, has been significant. The remote communities have not been forgotten. I reassure all Territorians that we are not just focused on Darwin; we are focused on ensuring all those affected by this cyclone, particularly in the remote areas—we are targeting all those areas to ensure that the response and recovery is taking place across the board. For homelands and communities, we have staff on the ground. We have had Housing staff assessing damage in remote areas and will continue to do so.

Thank you to all the staff on the frontline doing the work that is needed to support Territorians.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Schools

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

You told the Assembly this morning that 66 NT Government schools across the Top End were affected by Cyclone Fina, and initially on Sunday 17 schools had to be closed. It was great to see Leanyer Primary School in my electorate of Wanguri open today so that essential frontline service workers and small business owners could send their kids to school and continue to work and support our community. Can you update the Assembly on how our schools have recovered from Cyclone Fina and what actions were taken to get these schools open as quickly and safely as possible?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Wanguri for her follow-up behind the scenes to ensure schools in not only her electorate but also across the Top End were open as soon as practicable.

I thank the hardworking emergency services workers, the first responders, the volunteers, the CE of Education and Training, the department and everyone who made sure that schools were open to the public. Principals and people from DLI helped to assess schools to make sure that they were fit to open yesterday. As of this morning Middle Point School is the only government school that is still not open.

Over the weekend 196 Department of Education and Training staff volunteered in school shelters. It makes me proud to know that many people are volunteering and dedicating their time to help fellow Territorians.

A shout-out goes to Sandy Cartwright from Alawa Primary School. A lot of damage was done to that school. Whilst the school was not open yesterday the staff were on the blowers and cleaning up the school to make sure that it was ready for opening today.

In the aftermath of the cyclone, principals went straight to their schools on Sunday morning to undertake risk assessments and coordinate with contractors and Power and Water to get their schools open as soon as possible. It is crucial that our schools are open so that parents can get back to work and we can get back to business as usual, if it is appropriate and possible, to support the community through the recovery. An open school is a sign that life is returning to normal, and it is good for not only students' emotional and psychological welfare but also parents, who can get back to business as usual.

This morning I said that the Member for Fannie Bay had spoken to someone in the courts who expressed their gratitude for getting schools open because if the schools were not open they would be unable to go to the courts and get on with their important work for the day.

A big shout-out goes to everyone across the Territory who helped—from the department to the NT Emergency Service and Power and Water—to do the hard work to get everything up and running. The fact is that we have only one school closed today.

Climate Change Opportunities

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT

At Estimates you told us that climate change presents opportunities for the Territory. Could you spell out exactly what these supposed opportunities are? More importantly, what message do you think that sends to people in coastal communities who are watching the impacts of climate change damage their communities and homes? Do you understand how insulting that sounds to them, or is that the point?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we have spoken about how we can grow the Territory economy to support net zero and ensure that industries across the country wants to come to the Northern Territory.

Recently we saw this with Vopak. It was fantastic to be with the deputy leader, Minister Maley, to see Vopak sign a do-not-deal agreement in the Northern Territory to open a carbon capture storage facility in the Top End. We know this is positive. It is an opportunity that we are realising in the Northern Territory. Up to 1,000 jobs are expected to be created through Vopak's carbon dioxide import storage and handling terminal. This is positive news. It is exactly the sort of thing we are talking about when we speak about the opportunities.

As other ministers have, I acknowledge that we stand shoulder to shoulder with those who have been impacted by Cyclone Fina. We heard about the incredible work of the emergency services personnel and the Power and Water crews. We understand the need to get out there and support our communities.

The Member for Gwoja asked about opportunities. These are the sorts of things we are talking about. We want to ensure that as we move towards the future we are not only realising these opportunities to decarbonise but also supporting industry in the Territory.

When a natural disaster occurs we need to stand up and get on with doing the job, but as we look to rebuild the Territory economy we are ensuring that if businesses come here we have the regulatory environment so that they can set up and get on with delivering this decarbonisation for not only the Northern Territory but also the country. We on this side of the Chamber are all on team Territory; we want to see progress and jobs being created in the Northern Territory. We are proud to realise potential opportunities in the Northern Territory when we talk about some of those things.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Welfare Recovery Centre

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for CHILDREN and FAMILIES

As Territorians we know there is always a possibility of cyclones during the Wet Season between November and May. Cyclones can knock down trees and damage buildings but also leave scars that are not easy to see. The mental health and welfare of Territorians is just as important. In conjunction with multiple services, the Department of Children and Families, as the lead agency for the welfare functional group, stood up the welfare recovery centre at the indoor sports stadium in Marrara on Monday post-Cyclone Fina. Can you provide an update to the Assembly on the vital work being done at the welfare recovery centre to support Territorians and their mental health?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I have watched over the last couple of days the Member for Fannie Bay's efforts to support her community, keep people informed and make sure that they are being well cared for. I thank her for those efforts because we all have a role to play in this recovery period.

I am pleased to talk about the welfare recovery centre because not all the impacts of an event like Cyclone Fina are as easy to see as the damage to a home, tree or road. The emotional and mental impacts of this type of event can be devastating. That feeling of being helpless, watching events unfold around you and feeling like it is out of your control and the resultant damage to property have a devastating impact on people's mental health. We need to work hard to support Territorians through this period.

I am delighted with the work that the Department of Children and Families is doing in conjunction with the Department of Health; department of Housing; Services Australia; Power and Water; TIO; and a range of non-government organisations, including the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory, Mission Australia and the Red Cross. They have all come together to stand up the welfare recovery centre at the Marrara stadium. The services they are offering are extensive: psychosocial and wellbeing support; health, food and water safety information; help navigating services and linking with insurance; and information on relief grants, eligibility and how to apply. All these things can be overwhelming when you are in this recovery phase. In addition, there are staff assisting people to connect with Power and Water so that they can get information on the status of their homes, and also local council support.

I took the opportunity with my colleague the Minister for People, Sport and Culture today to visit the teams at the welfare centre, and I am pleased to report that everything is working well. They reported that a number of Territorians have come through the centre already today. Things are steady, people are calm, relaxed and

appreciative of what is being offered, and the teams are ready to stand up and do more as needed over the next 24 to 48 hours.

The power of the friendly face of someone ready to help with these issues faced by Territorians cannot be underestimated, and I am incredibly proud of this new initiative by the Department of Children and Families. I thank the hardworking people of the department and all the volunteers from the various NGOs in the sector who put up their hands to assist their fellow Territorians. Some of them are dealing with their own power outages and damage, but there they are standing out front in a time of crisis. They are to be commended for that work.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy

J DAVIS to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Today you launched the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy 2025–2028 and its one-page roadmap. Congratulations. I welcome this strategy, the final action plan under the Territory's 10-year Safe, Respected and Free from Violence framework. I acknowledge the work of the community sector partners and public servants who help bring it together.

However, there is one major omission. One year ago on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the NT Coroner released the landmark report into the deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood. When you released the draft framework in August, it clearly linked proposed actions to the Coroner's recommendations. The strategy is silent on those actions. Why is there no mention of the Coroner's report, and why does this strategy not link to the Coroner's recommendations?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I made clear my views and thoughts on the Coroner's recommendations from that coronial inquiry when we handed down our response to it. The strategy is detailing new initiatives, not repeating the same old, same old. It is looking at making sure we do things differently.

It is outcome focused because that is what we need. I do not need to know that 1,000 people have been through a men's behaviour program; I need to know how many of those men have changed their behaviour and the impact of those changes on their community. Quite frankly, the recommendations that came from the Coroner rehashed a whole bunch of programs that did not really do what they were meant to do.

This strategy and its associated roadmap are designed to show results. People who are working in this sector and the NGOs providing services and support will be required to show the outcomes and demonstrate that they are delivering what Territorians deserve and expect—that is, an absolute reduction in the harm caused by domestic, family and sexual violence in our community.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Logistics and Infrastructure Response

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

As you are aware, Territorians faced a challenging weekend as Cyclone Fina moved across the Top End. As we heard this morning from many members about their electorates, including my own electorate of Karama, despite the wild weather, our communities responded with incredible resilience. We saw many people on the ground from the early hours supporting the cleanup and restoring essential services.

Can you update the Assembly on how your department coordinated its response, what actions were taken to keep people safe and how the cleanup is progressing across our roads, infrastructure and community facilities?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Karama was out shoulder to shoulder with the people in his community over the weekend doing the hard work to start the cleanup. That is the great Territory spirit we see all the time.

Over the weekend communities across the Top End faced tough moments as Cyclone Fina moved through. I assure everybody in the Assembly that the cleanup effort is well underway and will continue over the coming days and weeks.

From as early as 4 am on Sunday, DLI staff, contractors and support crews were geared up and ready to roll into areas that needed help. Staff were out inspecting critical infrastructure, making sure that emergency controls were in place and responding quickly to issues as they appeared. Road crews moved immediately to keep our road network operating safely by clearing debris and restoring key connections. I am glad to say that most of our roads stayed open apart from flooding on a few which closed for only a little while. So far, we have not seen much in the way of damage.

The Hidden Valley green waste site was up and running early Monday morning, taking commercial and domestic waste. People were referred to use it early, rather than going after lunch, but they were not turned away and domestic customers could use that facility.

Traffic lights across the network are now fully operational. I believe that there are still four traffic light systems working off emergency generators, but as the Power and Water crews restore power in those areas, those traffic lights will return to mains power. We have identified no major road damage. It has been encouraging to see motorists being respectful and courteous, particularly with traffic light outages. I listened to radio coverage over the weekend and heard that people were urged by the controller to take care where traffics lights are out. I do not believe that there were any fender benders where the lights were out as people came back to work on Monday morning. That is a testament to the people of the Territory for taking care and doing what is right.

I had been advised that the seawall rock bund at the Darwin ship lift facility had some impact, and further assessment of that is underway. Darwin port reopened and was operational from 11 am yesterday. Pilotage, harbour control and vessel traffic services have been reinstated. Initial vessel access will prioritise NT essential supply chains and fuel security, with normal operations resuming shortly thereafter.

The railway, the airport, buses and ferries are all back online with minimal interruption. Barges are running again to our communities to ensure that they are serviced and get the supplies that they need.

It is a credit to all those operators and staff and the efficiency of their response to keep the Territory operating and return things back to normal.

Emergency Waste Management

Mr YOUNG to CHIEF MINISTER

Your emergency waste management plan makes clear that the NT Government is responsible for standing up these sites. Given that Commonwealth disaster funding flows primarily to the NT Government, why are you shifting this multimillion-dollar burden onto councils which are not even eligible for funding to manage emergency waste? Why did you claim that Hidden Valley was open because councils did not act when the government had already planned to open it before the cyclone? If the NT Government is serious about its emergency management role, why is it blaming councils instead of coordinating the proper whole-of-government response that the community expects?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, who would have thought that within 72 hours of a cyclone the only thing the opposition would seek to do in Question Time is nitpick the response which has been unbelievable? Do I need to take those opposite down memory lane to Cyclone Marcus which was a debacle? For two weeks people waited to have their power back on. People did not have clear communications. It was a mess. People have not forgotten it; they have been telling us thank goodness Cyclone Fina has been handled better than Marcus was. It was deplorable. That was on Labor's watch.

We have gone from 19,500 homes having no power a couple of days ago to 2,100 homes being without power. We have a plan from Power and Water, which put out information today, with each remaining suburb and a date and time by which their power will be back on. That is unprecedented.

I was personally in contact with the Member for Daly, just as I was with the Member for Arafura and the Opposition Leader over the weekend, giving them as much information as I could and responding to the concerns of their constituents. I was at Wurrumiyanga yesterday with the Member for Arafura, Malarndirri McCarthy, Marion Scrymgour and Minister McBain. There was no politics, just getting on with the job of doing what was required, yet those opposite want to walk into parliament and take the side of Darwin City Council? They want to be in the corner of the City of Darwin instead of the corner of Territorians who want to use the dump. That is a matter for the Member for Daly. I suspect he took the wrong temperature check on that one.

In any event, our response continues. Of course, there will be a review at the end of all this, as is required, and we will always endeavour to do things better, but we had schools open, power coming back online and emergency relief payments will be out the door from tomorrow morning for people who have had 72 hours without power. We are doing everything we can.

I do not think that nitpicking around the hundreds if not thousands of public servants who pulled 24-hour shifts and worked around the clock to ensure the public messaging was spot on and that people knew what they needed to do and when—it is hard to dignify your question with an answer, Member for Daly.

We are proud of the people who helped stand up our response. We are proud to have a service for people to deliver commercial and residential green waste to. The City of Palmerston did the right thing; it was back up and running with no worries at all, welcoming people in with open arms. That is a council I would get behind; I do not know what the Member for Daly is doing.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Multicultural Community Support

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

The community response to Cyclone Fina, particularly in the recovery phase, reminds us that our Territorian spirit is alive and well. We know that many sections of our community, including new arrivals with English as a second or third language, can find emergency situations challenging and traumatic. Can the minister inform the Assembly what support is available to the multicultural community in the Top End following Cyclone Fina?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know how committed the Member for Casuarina is. Even though he struggles with his back, he is committed to sitting there and bringing the voices of Casuarina to this Chamber. As a migrant who has gone through at least one or two cyclones before, he knows what it is like coming from a different place with no understanding of how things work in a challenging space.

At a time when information is communicated mainly through mainstream English channels—it does not matter whether it is through Secure NT or the BOM radar and tracking map—determining the difference between ‘watch’ and ‘warning’ can be a struggle. There are things that many people have been trying. We supported multicultural leaders to get information from Secure NT. I applaud the Chief Minister’s efforts to provide all the information through social media at the right time or to direct people to Secure NT. It meant that every person was getting information from one source, and they always had the opportunity to question fellow Territorians who have been here for a long time.

Cyclone Marcus was my first cyclone experience, so it helped me this time to be better prepared. As the Chief Minister said, I could get out and help my community in Sanderson to ensure people were supported. I was not much impacted and was prepared, so I could do that.

Marrara Indoor Stadium is managed by the Department of People, Sport and Culture. The shelter accommodated 13 people across the evening of 22 November, and by 11 am on Sunday all members of the public had left the facility in a safe manner. Minister Cahill mentioned that she and I visited the Welfare Recovery Centre, and it has a stall from the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory. That is providing supports to people from diverse communities and information on how they can access the different services available if they are impacted.

Along with that, Red Cross is supporting the migrant population. We are happy to announce that we are making sure that all the communities are supported. It does not matter; if you are a Territorian and you are impacted, this government will make sure that we will support you. We want to make sure it is accessible and that information is communicated to people so that they can understand it.

I thank MCNT President Edwin Joseph for coordinating the staff and volunteer rosters at the centre. That centre will be open until this Sunday, from 8.30 am to 4 pm. If anyone in Darwin or Palmerston needs help they can always access the centre.

Incarcerated Children – Neurodevelopmental Impairment

K McNAMARA to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS

At the Banksia Hill youth detention facility in WA 89% of the children incarcerated have a severe level of impairment in one area of brain function. We know that these are the same kinds of children who are imprisoned here. These are overwhelmingly children with disabilities that your government is imprisoning.

This means that there may be children, say 12, 11 or 10-year-olds, with a cognitive age of seven or eight years in prison.

Does every child taken into custody here receive a neurodevelopmental assessment? How many children in custody have neurodevelopmental impairments or disability? If you do not have those figures, is it because children incarcerated under your watch are not receiving adequate neurodevelopmental assessments or care?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am not sure where this question comes from. We are about keeping the community safe. I have said that many times. That is what we were elected for—to keep the community safe.

We had a major weather event and the community is safe. There are 2,100 homes out of 19,000 that are still without power. I know Power and Water staff are working hard and I thank them again. It is worth it to keep thanking them because they have done a great job.

Community safety is paramount for us. We know that under the previous Labor government Corrections was out of control. There were prisoners in watch houses and overcrowding. It underfunded infrastructure for a long time. We have been in power for about 14 months and we are getting on top of the problem. I reinforce that if people commit a crime in the Northern Territory—even though we are going through a major weather event—we will find a bed for them. Community safety is paramount for people on this side of the Chamber, unlike those on the other side.

To quickly answer the question, when people are in custody they go through a whole court process and are assessed through the court in relation to their health. That is already a process that is undertaken through the court system. When they come into Corrections at the youth detention centre they are subject to a health facility which is there to look after them. They get their medication and a health assessment done.

More importantly, they go to school. Many of these young offenders have not been to school for a long time or dropped out for whatever reason. We make sure those young offenders get an education. We also say that we allow them to go to a boot camp and put structure back into their lives to make these young people have a better …

K McNAMARA: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. He almost got there by mentioning health checks. I am specifically asking whether they have neurodevelopmental assessments when they enter custody and, if so, how many have neurodevelopmental impairments or disability.

Madam SPEAKER: You have the call, minister.

Mr MALEY: That assessment is done through the court. I will undertake to get that information to the member. We do not have that sort of information on hand.

We are about keeping the community safe. We are about protecting young offenders to give them a better opportunity to come out the other side better people so that they do not end up in the next jail at Holtze. We are trying to make sure that these young offenders go to school and get an education, health services and some structure with these boot camps where they can do a range of things. The program is working well. We know the previous Labor government spent about $35m on the Back on Track program for 35 offenders. We are making sure that these young offenders have an opportunity to come out a better person. We understand that it is a crucial time in a young offender's life. We are giving the young offenders an education and the health and medical support they need to make better decisions as they move forward.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Today marks a significant milestone in our commitment to building a safer Northern Territory with the launch of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy 2025–2028 supported by the DFSV safety roadmap. This is more than a policy document; it is a shared vision developed in partnership with communities, service providers and stakeholders across the Territory. The roadmap sets out clear priorities and actions to break the cycle of violence, strengthen prevention and improve support for victim–survivors. It focuses on accountability, collaboration and cultural safety, ensuring every Territorian has the right to live free from fear. Could you provide the Assembly with an overview of this important plan?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Blain is a fierce advocate for the constituents in his community who have been victims of domestic violence. I thank him on their behalf. It is important that we can show and talk about this progress that we are making, how important it is to be doing things differently and how the strategy that was launched today, along with the roadmap which is a resource for the community, focuses on outcomes.

Strategy 2025–2028 sets out a clear vision for the Territory and underpins the Finocchiaro CLP government's commitment that every Territorian has the right to live free from domestic violence. It reflects what Territorians told us they need—collaboration, respect and action.

This strategy reflects the extensive engagement that was undertaken with government agencies, NGOs, Aboriginal organisations and legal services, ensuring that reforms and funding priorities are set. It focuses clearly on prevention, early intervention, stronger support for victim–survivors, behaviour change programs across the board and alternatives to custody. Critically it is aimed at reducing reoffending and breaking the cycles of violence.

Backed by $36m in ongoing funding, the strategy provides certainty for service providers and communities with long-term reforms supported by strong governance, monitoring and evaluation.

Most importantly, it recognises that Aboriginal women are over-represented in this space and how important it is to prioritise Aboriginal-led community-controlled models and culturally safe service provision.

The safety roadmap that accompanies the strategy provides every Territorian access to resources to stop harm before it starts, see the warning signs, understand how they can support victims of domestic violence and help in their recovery and get them feeling safe again in their community.

The important thing about this strategy is that it is not just a document; it is a commitment, a promise, to deliver real change. It is a commitment to safer homes, stronger communities and a future where violence is not tolerated.

In short, the strategy is about prevention, protection and partnership with our non-government sector, making sure our agencies are working together and that we are all creating a Territory where everyone can live free from fear, supported by coordinated services, empowered communities and a shared responsibility to act together and make this vision a reality.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Underground Power

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

Your CLP colleague the Member for Fannie Bay said earlier this year:

Territorians understand why we have cut the underground power project.

She also said that only one of her constituents across the suburbs of The Gardens, Parap, Ludmilla, Fannie Bay and Coconut Grove has an issue with the CLP scrapping underground power. Do you agree that elderly residents of these suburbs suffering without power, air conditioning and a place to store their medicines safely are happy with the CLP's decision to scrap underground power?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, during my contribution to the ministerial report on Cyclone Fina I tabled a media release from the then Minister for Essential Services, Hon Selena Uibo, on 29 March 2023.

Ms Uibo: I am not in government anymore; what is your answer?

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections, please.

Mr CHARLS: The media release sent out by the government at that time said '2023 – Commence works Nakara'. That is in the Member for Casuarina's electorate. Nothing happened there. In the 2023–24 financial year—which is before the election last year; we came to government in 2024–25—works were to commence in Wagaman and Larrakeyah. Labor had a plan …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Pause, please, minister. Could you all be quiet?

Mr CHARLS: There was a plan outlined by the previous government. Labor members are saying that our government has scrapped their plan. We cannot scrap it if there is nothing. There was no money—no funding—so I do not know what the member was referring to. It was a paper that said $60m was allocated for the funding of a power project in 13 suburbs. The Treasurer outlined earlier that it was impossible and it would cost about $1bn.

The Deputy Opposition Leader thinks that you can deliver something that would cost $1bn with $60m and then try to work through that program. I want to know more about what Labor members were doing in the first two years that they had this plan. Why is there no powerline under Nakara and nothing in Wagaman?

Earlier the Chief Minister clearly addressed this as well. Once we are in a position to take this commitment as a government, we will take that on board. However, the current financial situation—the Chief Minister outlined there is about $15bn in debt—clearly means that we are not able to afford …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was about our senior Territorians. The question was: are you happy with your government scrapping underground power? They are struggling.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Everyone be quiet. You are asking …

Mr Young: He has not mentioned Fannie Bay.

Madam SPEAKER: You can be quiet too, Member for Daly. You have asked the question. You are asking whether he is happy. I am not sure that is a question suitable for parliament—whether he is happy or not. The minister can choose to answer it if he likes.

Mr CHARLS: I will say that I am unhappy with the previous government's plan that was never going to happen. Those opposite tried to inform the people that they would commit to something and gave false hope. Then they tried to put it on the new government. I am happy to repeat it again, although it got me into trouble earlier: telling lies again and again will not make a lie true. That is exactly what they are trying to do. They want to put the lies out again and again that we are …

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Member for Daly, sit down. The minister has 11 seconds.

Mr YOUNG: It is not Standing Order 110 …

Madam SPEAKER: No; please sit down.

Mr Young: It is offensive that he quotes Nazis in here. He is continuing to quote Nazis.

Members interjecting.

EXCLUSION OF MEMBER
Member for Daly

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, you can leave the parliament for one hour.

Mr Young: You are an embarrassment.

Madam SPEAKER: Leave in silence straightaway, please. Everyone take their seat. The Member for Daly will leave the Chamber.

Mr Young: Happy to.

Mr CHARLS: I will repeat that I am unhappy with the previous decision …

Mr Mackay interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Goyder, that was inappropriate.

Mr Brown: Kick him out.

Madam SPEAKER: I do not need commentary from anyone. A member of this Chamber has been thrown out because of inappropriate behaviour. I do not need any more commentary or inappropriate behaviour from anyone else.

Minister, you have seven seconds, and it is up to you whether you want to use that time.

Mr CHARLS: I will leave it there, thank you.

Tropical Cyclone Fina – Social Housing

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Cyclone Fina affected a large number of Territory residents, including a lot of people who reside in social housing, remote communities and other government-supported accommodation across the entire Top End of the Northern Territory and in local government, including in my electorate of Fong Lim. Can you explain what efforts were undertaken by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development to assist some of those vulnerable residents prior to the impact of Cyclone Fina and since the weekend to aid the recovery process?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Fong Lim is just as interested as our government has been in the planning and preparation for, response to and now the recovery from Cyclone Fina. Our government has been on the front line doing everything we possibly can to support Territorians.

I was in Darwin this weekend and saw firsthand the enormous contribution made by many people across the board, including volunteers, government departments and frontline workers. I know from my conversations with people in government agencies that many hours of work were undertaken prior to the cyclone, and in the days since, with staff busy preparing for Tropical Cyclone Fina.

In preparation for the impact of the cyclone, frontline staff from Housing, Local Government and Community Development contacted more than 700 of our most vulnerable tenants in the greater Darwin region either by phone or in person to ensure they were well informed in preparation for the cyclone, including sharing information on the location of cyclone shelters and other supports available for them if they chose to seek shelter in a place which was not their ordinary residence. That information was made clear to all residents in the Top End.

Public housing safety officers were patrolling our public housing complexes, engaging with tenants and members of the public. As part of their patrols all our field staff were monitoring the complexes and the common areas, ensuring the removal of waste and other items to minimise the potential for damage or other hazards in those areas. I am pleased to say that there were no reports of injury and seemingly only minimal damage to public housing properties.

Since the cyclone has passed we have transitioned into the recovery phase. Housing, Local Government and Community Development staff have also been deployed to assess damage at Wurrumiyanga on Bathurst Island, begin housing assessments in the community and ensure that any resources needed can be brought to assist in the Tiwi Islands and elsewhere. Department staff continue to actively engage with all public housing residents to ensure their needs are met and any damaged properties are restored to a safe standard.

As residents look to clean up debris and green waste, I am pleased to report that Litchfield and Palmerston Councils have opened their waste facilities to accept green waste and other rubbish. In Darwin I am proud to say that the NT Government has set up a site at the Hidden Valley Raceway car park where members of the public can dispose of their green waste.

Overall, the response by the department of Housing has been fantastic. Thank you to all the staff.

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

PAPERS TABLED

Public Accounts Committee Report on Inquiry into the Darwin Ship Lift Project

Mr HOWE (Chair of Public Accounts Committee): Madam Speaker, I table the Public Accounts Committee report Inquiry into the Darwin Ship Lift Project, and associated minutes of proceedings. Pursuant to Standing Order 200(4), the report was sent to the Speaker and made public on 30 October 2025.

This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the committee's inquiry into the Darwin ship lift project referred by the Treasurer, Hon Bill Yan MLA, on 11 May 2025.

The Ship Lift and Marine Industries complex (SLAMI complex) was first announced in 2015. What began as a $100m grant for private development then escalated to an $820m government project with completion expected by 1 March 2027.

These outcomes are not the result of unforeseeable market forces alone; they are primarily the direct result of decisions taken by the former Chief Minister Michael Gunner and subsequently endorsed in variation by former Chief Minister Eva Lawler. They both signed agreements that exposed taxpayers to the full financial burden of the project.

The committee examined alternatives, including cancellation or withdrawal. Evidence confirms that the contractual decisions made have left the Territory in a position where cancellation would still require taxpayers to pay for the ship lift in full plus substantial penalties. The Territory is contractually locked in not by necessity but by political choices made at the time. Therefore, the current government is contractually obliged to continue allocating budget as stipulated by the former government's contracts.

Beyond cost escalations, the committee is particularly concerned by the contractual structure executed by former Chief Minister Gunner and varied by former Chief Minister Lawler. These agreements transferred the significant commercial benefit of the ship lift's operations to a private entity while assigning substantial financial risk, capital cost and long-term liability to the Territory.

It is the committee's view that these decisions constituted the greatest transfer of public to private wealth in the Northern Territory's history. The Territory now carries more than $1.8bn in lifetime cost exposure while holding no right to revenue generated by the facility it is building. These decisions have left taxpayers underwriting a commercially operated but Territory-owned asset for decades to come.

Despite these failures, the committee acknowledges that the completed facility will still deliver strategic and commercial benefits that the Territory must now capture. Accordingly, we recommend that construction continue under strict cost and governance controls to prevent further erosion of value for taxpayers.

The committee is deeply concerned that the total project cost has doubled, and the Territory's contribution has increased eightfold. We recommend Treasurer-level approval for any further contract variations or cost increases.

To facilitate forward planning by prospective users of the SLAMI complex the committee has recommended that the government introduce the access and pricing legislation in the Legislative Assembly as soon as practical. To maximise the benefits of the SLAMI complex we have also recommended that the government coordinate the implementation of initiatives to address workforce skills shortages that may impact on the capacity of the ship lift facility to meet anticipated service demands.

The inquiry identified that Cabinet-in-confidence protections limited the committee's ability to fully review key documents associated with early decision-making. The Auditor-General similarly noted the importance of maintaining clear and accessible records to support oversight of major capital investments. The committee considers that future projects of this scale should include robust documented business cases and clearly

recorded decision pathways that enable appropriate accountability and auditability throughout the life of the project.

Paspaley Pearls Group and the Clough BMD Joint Venture (CBJV) came before the committee and fully and willingly participated in the committee's inquiry. As Chair I thank them for their meaningful participation.

It is not the responsibility of private enterprise to manage taxpayer spending; that responsibility lies with government. The committee found no evidence that the contractor, CBJV, contributed to cost blowouts. To the contrary, CBJV has implemented cost-saving measures in cooperation with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure.

Major cost escalation drivers were significant design revisions to the project after the construction contract was signed without adequate cost assurance.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all those who provided submissions, evidence or assistance during the inquiry, including the Auditor-General, government agencies and industry participants. I thank my fellow committee members for their focus on accountability in matters of significant public importance.

The public expects major projects to be managed with competence, transparency and strong risk control. Those standards were not upheld during the earlier contractual decision-making. This report is an important step forward in restoring confidence in the delivery of major infrastructure in the Northern Territory.

This was a massive body of work that included thousands upon thousands of pages of evidence. I sincerely thank all my committee members for their dedication in going through that huge volume, particularly the secretariat staff who assisted us throughout the process.

I would also like Territorians to note that this inquiry is a turning point in the Territory. No-one was spared from the PAC. We made it clear that we would exercise any and all powers to make sure that happened. It is a clear message to anyone willing to do business here that it will be done properly, and the parliament representing the people will ensure that it is done properly. It is an important milestone in Territory history that we delivered this.

I move that the report be noted.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to; debate adjourned.

Public Accounts Committee Report on Inquiry into the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum

Mr HOWE (Chair of Public Accounts Committee): Madam Speaker, I table the Public Accounts Committee report Inquiry into the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum, and associated minutes of proceedings. Pursuant to Standing Order 200(4), the report was sent to the Speaker and made public on 30 October 2025.

This report details the committee's findings and recommendations regarding its inquiry into the Indigenous Employment Provisional Sum (IEPS) which was referred to the committee by the Assembly on 22 May 2025.

The IEPS was created in 2014 to increase employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal Territorians through public construction projects. In 2017 the scheme was suspended following concerns raised about potential widespread misuse. Contrary to some public discussion the committee found no evidence of large-scale or systemic fraud. Of the $60.8m paid through the IEPS a total of $1.6m, approximately 2.6%, was later identified as overpayments and only $300,000 of that amount was proven to involve fraudulent conduct, resulting in three criminal convictions. The overwhelming majority of irregular payments stemmed from unclear policy design and inconsistent administrative processes, rather than deliberate wrongdoing by industry.

The committee also examined the costs associated with responding to these overpayments. More than $1.8m in taxpayer funds was spent on investigating and recovery efforts to recoup $0.9m. Although it was appropriate to pursue recovery action where possible, this outcome demonstrates an inefficient use of public money driven by process failures rather than misconduct. It is clear that the administrative burden created fell disproportionately on government and did not deliver value for the Territory.

The inquiry highlighted that private construction contractors acted within the policy and contract settings provided by the government, and in many cases worked cooperatively to resolve discrepancies. It is essential that lessons learned focus on improving government's own verification and oversight systems, not imposing new regulatory or administrative burden on the private sector.

Aboriginal employment obligations continue to play an important role within the Value for Territory framework and support real opportunities for Aboriginal Territorians. However, the committee notes that the verification of participation remains challenging for agencies. Any improvements made going forward must be designed with industry, and implemented in a way that is streamlined, practical and not detrimental to business operations.

Above all, this inquiry reinforces that major policy initiatives must be supported by adequate planning, documented business cases, clear guidance and appropriate systems before implementation. These safeguards protect the public purse and ensure that policy objectives deliver genuine economic benefit.

On behalf of the committee, I thank departmental officials, industry representatives and others who contributed to this inquiry.

I acknowledge my fellow committee members for their constructive and diligent approach to this important work. I personally thank each individual member for this year. The PAC has set a new record in the number of inquiries done in the Northern Territory. The record now stands at four and we have even commenced our fifth inquiry. The only other years with multiple inquiries were 1996, 2002 and 2014 with either two or three.

I thank the Member for Arafura, who had to come in many times for many hours and stay back after sittings to make sure we delivered on that record-setting number of inquiries. I thank the Member for Johnston for her diligent time as well—again, coming in and working through all those inquiries. It has been a pleasure to work with you both on the committee throughout the year.

I thank the Member for Fannie Bay for her assistance to me as deputy, going through that huge body of work. It has been a pleasure. I thank the Member for Karama for his steadfast support to the PAC, ensuring that we deliver for Territorians and get the answers that Territorians expect of us. My sincere thanks to you all.

We have begun our fifth inquiry, which is the Acacia report, and put out a public statement on that. We are extending submissions, and I ask the free press to look at that as we are looking for more submissions to gain more information about that inquiry so we can get into that next year.

I thank the secretariat staff because they have had a massive year. I know most of them have been unable to take leave while we have conducted these four—now into our fifth—inquiries. I sincerely thank them for their work.

I move that the report be noted.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to; debate adjourned.

Legislative Scrutiny Committee Report on
Inquiry into the Tourism NT Amendment (Integration of NTMEC) Bill 2025

Mrs CARLSON (Chair of Legislative Scrutiny Committee): Madam Speaker, I table the Legislative Scrutiny Committee report Inquiry into the Tourism NT Amendment (Integration of NTMEC) Bill 2025, and associated minutes of proceedings. Pursuant to Standing Order 200(4), the report was sent to the Speaker and made public on 31 October 2025.

The committee called for submissions on 17 October to be received by 24 October 2025. The committee received two submissions. Both submissions were supportive of the Bill, and the committee has no matters to bring to the attention of the Assembly. The committee recommends that the Assembly passes the Bill.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Legislative Scrutiny Committee Report on
Inquiry into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Mrs CARLSON (Chair of Legislative Scrutiny Committee): Madam Speaker, I table the Legislative Scrutiny Committee report Inquiry into the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment

Bill 2025, and associated minutes of proceedings. Pursuant to Standing Order 200(4), the report was sent to the Speaker and made public on 20 November 2025.

This report details the committee's findings regarding its consideration of the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Amending the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004* and the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations 2004, the Bill seeks to strengthen child safety, address governance issues and align with national standards.

The committee received five written submissions to its inquiry. The committee also held a public hearing in relation to the Bill, attended by 12 witnesses from six organisations. All stakeholders supported the Bill, emphasising the importance of ensuring child safety via mandatory registration of early childhood teachers and cross-jurisdictional information sharing. Stakeholders also largely supported changes to English proficiency requirements to align with other jurisdictions, and the increased opportunity for Aboriginal language teachers to teach specialist language and culture programs in schools. Accordingly, the committee is of the view that the Assembly should pass the Bill without amendment.

Although all stakeholders supported the Bill, the committee received evidence about the lack of clarity in regard to how the legislation will be implemented in practice and how it may impact the independence of the Teacher Registration Board. In light of these issues, the committee has recommended clarifying amendments be made to the explanatory statement and that policy guidelines developed by the department to support the implementation of the Bill address equivalency between early childhood, primary and secondary qualifications, the exercise of information sharing powers and acceptable forms of evidence of English language proficiency.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all those who made submissions to the inquiry. The committee also thanks the witnesses who attended the public hearing.

I thank my fellow committee members for their bipartisan commitment to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Legislative Scrutiny Committee Report on
Inquiry into the Building Legislation Amendment (Fidelity Fund) Bill 2025

Mrs CARLSON (Chair of Legislative Scrutiny Committee): Madam Speaker, I table the Legislative Scrutiny Committee Report Inquiry into the Building Legislation Amendment (Fidelity Fund) Bill 2025, and associated minutes of the proceedings. Pursuant to Standing Order 200(4), the report was sent to the Speaker and made public on 20 November 2025.

This report details the committee's findings regarding its consideration of the Building Legislation Amendment (Fidelity Fund) Bill 2025. Amending the *Building Act 1993* and the Building (RBI and Fidelity Fund Schemes) Regulations 2012, the Bill seeks to provide for administrative efficiencies to enhance transparency and accountability in the operation of approved fidelity fund schemes.

The committee received six written submissions to its inquiry. Although most submissions supported the government's aim to enhance transparency and accountability, concerns were raised regarding the broader functioning of the scheme. Following its examination of the Bill, the committee is of the view that the Assembly should pass the Bill with no amendments.

However, as set out in the report, the committee considered the issues raised that were beyond the scope of the current Bill, including concerns about issuing fidelity fund certificates; transparency of decision-making and risk projection; and broader structural and perceived compliance issues with the scheme. The committee has consequently recommended these issues be considered as part of a government review of the scheme, noting further amendments to the Building (RBI and Fidelity Fund Schemes) Regulations 2012 are being progressed.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all those who made submissions to the inquiry. The committee also thanks the representatives from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment for briefing the committee on the Bill.

I thank my fellow committee members for their bipartisan commitment to the legislative review process.

I commend this report to the Assembly.

INTEGRITY AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER BILL
Serial 46

Continued from 23 October 2025.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, this is an important Bill for the Northern Territory because integrity has been a strong theme since the CLP came to power 15 months ago, but not necessarily in a good way. The CLP promised a fresh new approach to integrity and transparency for Territorians, but it failed to say that would largely involve dishing up half-baked integrity measures or, as with this Bill, eroding the institutions responsible for overseeing and upholding integrity and accountability in the Northern Territory.

Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro has been at pains to say that this new Bill—which she effectively sprung on Territorians without any notice or opportunity for comment, insight, feedback or scrutiny—is not about cost cutting. She protests a little too much, particularly when the report that she recently commissioned into our integrity bodies explicitly says that bringing these bodies together will achieve economies of scale. It was the first and primary justification in that report for undertaking this change. Economies of scale is, in other words, cost-cutting measures for government.

As with much of what the CLP does, this proposed new model leaves more questions than answers for Territorians. Why did the Chief Minister undertake this work without telling anyone about it once it was commissioned? Why did the Chief Minister give no opportunity for feedback, particularly knowing the concerns Territorians have about integrity and accountability matters in relation to government?

Why did the CLP fail to send this Bill to the scrutiny committee? The government celebrates that it returned the scrutiny committee to the parliament. When an integrity Bill is not sent to a scrutiny committee of the parliament that is an example of irony. There is no transparency. It would be poetic if it was not an appalling betrayal of Territorians' trust not to send this integrity Bill to the scrutiny committee.

Integrity is a foundation of democracy. It is a pillar of the community's faith in our public institutions and our elected members. It is not about appearances; it is about genuine transparent accountability. Territorians deserve to know that the government of the day is working for them and not for itself.

When it comes to accountability the CLP can never show leadership and set a good example for the rest of the community, public servants, business and industry because it is already falling off the rails. Accountability has to start at the top. It has to be action based, not word based, because Territorians will judge all of us on our actions in this place.

With that in mind, let us examine the Chief Minister's greatest hits when it comes to integrity, transparency and accountability. It is important to put this in context because it explains the scepticism our Territory Labor team has for this Bill and the real reasons that the Chief Minister has plunged it into the parliamentary business. Let us look at some examples.

The Blow report into senior police recruitment had deliberately limited terms of reference, with Justice Blow hamstrung by what he could inquire into, as he was given no powers under the *Inquiries Act*. How phenomenal is that?

There was no referral to the scrutiny committee, which I have said already. A small portion of the government's Bills in the last 15 months have been referred to the committee. This important game-changing legislation for the Northern Territory was not, but that was no surprise. Meanwhile, the CLP government has blocked opposition and crossbench members—the non-government members in this parliament—from referring matters to the scrutiny committee. It has chopped, changed, cut, pasted and made a tiny split-second moment to be able to provide Territorians with the opportunity to scrutinise important legislation for the Northern Territory. The government has made it near impossible to allow this.

When we get the opportunity to put up scrutiny committee recommendations for legislation, they are voted down by the government which has the numbers in here and on every committee in the parliamentary structure. The CLP is frightened to have the scrutiny that Territorians deserve for much-needed and important legislation.

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 29: Reflection on Previous Vote. Although I enjoy the constant refresher on previous votes of this Assembly, we are talking about all the times that votes

have happened regarding whether something goes to a scrutiny committee. I was wondering about Standing Order 29's applicability; otherwise it would be Standing Order 35: Relevance to Subject.

Madam SPEAKER: Are you suggesting that the previous votes related to ICAC from 2017 to now?

Mr MACKAY: It is the reference to previous votes when this Assembly moved not to refer this Bill or other Bills to a scrutiny committee and the applicability of that standing order. Otherwise, it is Standing Order 35: Relevance to Subject. It has been five minutes, and we are yet to hear about the Bill.

Madam SPEAKER: With respect to Standing Order 29, both sides of this Chamber have complained ad nauseum about the lack of scrutiny committee processes over time. I think if you put an end to that now, it is probably not necessarily in the interests of government or opposition. Is that what you are asking?

Mr MACKAY: It is the reflection on previous votes in this Assembly for this legislation. It is the words around it.

Madam SPEAKER: It is a long stretch. The member has not breached Standing Order 29. Debate about referrals to scrutiny committees comes up incessantly and has done for many years, so I will let that go. What was your second point—relevance?

Mr MACKAY: Standing Order 35: Relevance to Subject.

Madam SPEAKER: No, I will let that go too; but it was worth a try.

Mr Mackay: No worries.

Ms UIBO: Madam Speaker, thank you for your ruling.

Might I remind the Member for Goyder that this Bill did not even get put to the scrutiny committee and therefore did not come to a vote. Standing Order 29 is irrelevant in this case, so you are talking about Standing Order 35, which deals with relevance. You just fluffed around and wasted time for the last two minutes in this debate on this important Bill for Territorians. It is irrelevant because the Bill did not have a chance to be voted on to go to the scrutiny committee. You should go back and check the *Hansard*. I do not know which side you were sitting on; maybe you were just fiddling with your computer and ignoring the importance of your duties in this parliament.

We all have an important duty to make sure the laws of the Northern Territory are fit for purpose and made for the best outcomes and impact for Territorians. I honestly and earnestly hope that is why everyone is in this place. The 25 seats show how diverse and amazing the Territory is and how challenging it can be. That is our job, regardless of whether you are one of the 17 members who have the numbers to put a vote for or against a decision. There are four members of the crossbench and four members of the Labor opposition. You do not need to be a rocket scientist to do the numbers. You do not need to waste parliament's time bringing on frivolous points of order that are not relevant to the cause and the Bill at hand.

Less than a quarter of the government's legislative agenda has been referred to any committee. The government's lack of robustness in creating Northern Territory law is not a surprise. The CLP proudly hangs its hat on the funding cuts to independent environmental groups to silence their advocacy work.

It is deeply cynical that the CLP government has referred non-controversial, but important, pieces of legislation like the Tourism and Major Events Bill. The scrutiny committee has provided a report on it. It is not controversial, challenging nor a complex piece of work; it is pretty much a mechanical and legislative process to change the Major Events Company and the Tourism department to create one.

The new legislation for police public safety officers was not sent to the scrutiny committee. It is important for community safety, with new positions being created and inserted into legislation. This is an important change on the government's community safety agenda, but the government is not providing Territorians and stakeholders with the robust and important process of scrutiny by a committee. There is a growing list of groups and individuals attacked by the CLP government for speaking out or for just existing sometimes, including lawyers, doctors, experts in their field, public servants, unions and trans people.

The Chief Minister failed to declare her husband's company directorship in her parliamentary register of members' interests. Minister Cahill had the lack of judgement to invite a CLP federal candidate during the federal government election to a closed, parliamentary government-dominated event for photo-ops for a political candidate. The Attorney-General sidestepped proper recruitment processes and refused

independent advice to make a captain's pick for the director of Legal Aid position; failed to disclose her family connection to a person before the courts and in subsequent media commentary on that court matter; and refused to release a briefing that she apparently relied on to sidestep governance concerns regarding the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. The Minister for Multicultural Affairs showed inadequate management of his own conflicts of interest when it comes to grants.

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 35: Relevance to Subject. If we want to do the greatest hits of integrity we can spend six hours going through Labor's failures; otherwise, maybe we can talk about the Bill before us.

Madam SPEAKER: I will give the Opposition Leader some latitude. Listing possible misconduct or corruption is at your own peril. If this is what you want to do, I am sure the government can stand up and do the same, but please make this relevant to the legislation, Opposition Leader.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate that the Member for Goyder is invested in this. He is listening carefully, but this Bill is entitled Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Bill.

This is a phenomenal change for the Northern Territory, one that I honestly and earnestly hoped would make our commission processes even better, but the detail in this Bill falls flat. I am on the Standing Committee on the ICAC, and I was privileged and honoured to receive firsthand from the Inspector of the ICAC the briefing on the report, as did my fellow committee members. Obviously the committee membership has now changed. The previous committee members received a briefing, and I thought, 'Wow! This will be an important step for the Northern Territory, particularly when we talk about the concerns raised year after year about the ICAC.' The committee's job is oversight of the ICAC and to get as much information as possible. The inspector's report was provided during an in-person briefing. I learned more about this process through the committee, which I am grateful for.

When I saw the Bill I thought it was relevant—I hope the Member for Goyder has done his research and looked at the Bill and is not just relying on what the government tells him to say, but has done the homework—to talk about our public institutions and our leaders. This Bill is about the condensation of four integrity commissions. If the Member for Goyder does not think that is relevant, then—goodness gracious—I do not know that any other debate in this place will be. We are talking about the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner of the Northern Territory, which this legislation seeks to establish.

Originally, the inspector spoke about the ACT Human Rights Commission model and the changes that were made there. We are also a small jurisdiction and a territory; we get that. There are different challenges in the ACT and the NT, but I understand that model has been successful for the ACT, so I was honestly excited to think about that quite progressive ACT model perhaps being reframed and redesigned to be fit for purpose for the Northern Territory through the introduction of legislation like the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Bill.

When the Chief Minister says that she is smashing the Territory's integrity bodies together without any additional funding, support or resourcing, it is important to consider the CLP's track record on transparency and accountability. With no evidence to the contrary and no opportunity to properly scrutinise this Bill publicly, we can only surmise that there are two reasons that this new model is being rushed through the parliament.

First, it is a cost-saving measure. The Chief Minister's strategic report clearly states in relation to this model:

> *The first and most obvious benefit is the economies of scale …*

That is despite the Chief Minister's claim otherwise.

Second, and I believe this is a more sinister reason, this new model is a clear attempt to erode the independence of integrity agencies in the Northern Territory. We just have to look at the evidence before us: there are no additional resources; no costings have been provided; and the government is not waiting for a budget process. Apparently the government cares muchly about the Territory's economy, but it can make huge decisions like this without a budget process. There is one commissioner appointed by the government to oversee each integrity arm of the government, except one. There is no clarity on managing conflicts or how work will be prioritised. There is capacity for resources to be shuffled out of one area of the new commission to another area of the commission, making it easier for one area to be starved of resources and unable to function effectively without proper recourse.

As well as failing to tell anyone that she had commissioned this report into the Territory's integrity agencies and failing to consult with Territorians, the Chief Minister is now failing to be up-front and honest about her

reasons for doing so. Our Labor team is happy to keep laying out the reasons for Territorians, since the Chief Minister will not do it herself.

A number of concerns have been raised about how this new one-stop integrity shop will impact the functions and effectiveness of individual agencies to do their work independently.

I will start with the ICAC (Independent Commissioner against Corruption). In September 2024 the ICAC Inspector released a special report into ICAC which found:

1. the Office of the ICAC had difficulties recruiting sufficient staff to perform its functions effectively

2. staff morale and job satisfaction were low, largely due to matters relating to the former commissioner and his subsequent leave

3. key performance indicators (KPIs) were not being met and no examinations had taken place during the reporting period.

The inspector pointed out clearly that this was in no way a criticism of the ICAC staff who had been operating under difficult circumstances. However, these are serious concerns, and there is no sense that smashing the ICAC in with other integrity agencies will go to addressing the deeper roots of the causes of the issues that the inspector reported in September 2024.

In 2024 the Northern Territory ICAC endorsed the 12 Fundamental Principles of Australian Anti-Corruption Commissions. It called for adequate funding, legislative protections and operational independence through the adoption of these principles.

A new key principle is strengthening protections for whistleblowers and witnesses. This principle is that a person who refers information or gives evidence to a commission should be immune from any criminal, civil, administrative or disciplinary liability, and from the enforcement against them of contractual rights or remedies for doing so.

During Estimates in June 2025 I asked the Chief Minister specifically about strengthening whistleblower protections. She indicated that part of the work she was doing would look at it. She said:

> *… what is working well and what is not and how we can make sure we have a strong, highly functioning ICAC into the future that Territorians can get behind and have confidence in.*

There is no provision in this legislation that strengthens whistleblower protections—which is what the Chief Minister said she would look at; she said that she would do the work on this important question—nor does it align more broadly with the endorsed national fundamental principles. Furthermore, when I asked the Chief Minister about this during Estimates, she said that this ‘may well end up being the case’. Clearly not.

In theory this should be a turning point for the ICAC, which has struggled through some difficult years since its establishment, which is no secret, unfortunately. It should be an opportunity for the ICAC to reset and get back to its core functions, which it has struggled to perform effectively over the past couple years.

For example, the last annual report highlighted two corruption risks that the ICAC is keen to focus on; that is, the recycling of former NT public service employees with a history of disciplinary breaches and the renewal of temporary employment contracts that do not comply with recruitment rules. These important focus areas will help to ensure that public servants have faith in recruitment practices. We have seen dramatic and public examples of where that has fallen flat made a rift with people who are working day-in and day-out in the public service. They have issues with some of the recruitment in their agencies.

It seems that this new model will be another period of upheaval for the ICAC, with more ground lost for little obvious gain. I call on the Chief Minister to assure Territorians that ICAC staff will be given the time and the resources to get back to their core functions, looking at the key focus areas against corruption. This will be for the benefit of all Territorians.

The Ombudsman has been provided with additional statutory responsibilities, including OPCAT oversight, judicial complaints handling and Police oversight, yet there has been only a slight funding increase. The vast majority of matters coming through the Ombudsman’s door relate to Police and Corrections. The Ombudsman’s office staff have strong knowledge and expertise in these areas and work with the NT Police Force and Corrections as well as other key agencies. They have built strong and constructive relationships.

There needs to be a guarantee that specialist staff are employed effectively and in line with their skills and experience within this new super commission.

Our Labor opposition also put on the record our deep concern that the CLP is not funding the Ombudsman's office to perform its mandated function in line with OPCAT (Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment). The Chief Minister needs to assure Territorians that this work, which essentially ensures that Territorians in our institutions are not being subject to torture or ill treatment, is and will continue to be resourced properly under this new super commission or mega agency.

The Chief Minister' strategic review report makes it clear that the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission is under-resourced and unable to carry out the full extent of its statutory mandate. It says that the commission requires targeted resourcing, structural clarity and legislative support. It is hard to see how any of this will be done under the new model.

In saying this, it is important to remember that a few years ago the HCSCC was spun off from the Ombudsman for a number of reasons: workload; concerns about conflicts of interest; the functions of the two offices being incompatible; and to improve public confidence in Health. All these reasons remain critical and are real concerns for this new smashed-together model presented in this legislation by the Chief Minister.

Rather than being two agencies, three currently independent and separately functioning agencies will be smashed together, bringing with it all the same issues—workload, conflicts of interest and how that is managed, incompatibility of key performance indicators and key focus areas and an erosion of public confidence in gaining access to or providing information without having to worry for their own jobs.

We will not support this legislation in its current form because we do not believe that the one-stop integrity shop approach will make these bodies—which are important to the functioning of the Northern Territory—more effective. In fact, we hold grave concerns in regard to a number of key issues, which I have already touched on, but I will reiterate them.

We are concerned about the erosion of independence. The point of having separate and distinct statutory bodies is to better ensure and preserve their independence and minimise the likelihood of them coming under undue influence. The Territory is a small place; we all know that. I believe there are two degrees of separation, not six, so bringing these agencies together under one commissioner blurs those key decision-making lines and removes their independence. This is a deliberate erosion of independence, which damages its reputation and credibility in Territorians' eyes. It is unclear how much power the chief executive officer (CEO), who will be a public servant under the PSEMA, will have over their decision-making and prioritisation of the new commission's work.

Our Labor opposition believes that the greatest risk from the Bill is the management of conflicts of interest in this new body. The commissioner will be given significant and far-reaching powers and responsibilities across four distinct integrity bodies. The likelihood of conflicts arising is significant in the Territory. The likelihood of multiple conflicts of interest having to be managed at any one time by the commissioners is significant, and that will be a real risk. It is not clear how those conflicts will be managed or disclosed to the general public so that Territorians can have faith and confidence that these conflicts of interest are being managed properly and well. There is no detail about that.

It is a concern that when a conflict arises for the commissioner, whoever is appointed on an interim basis to oversee the relevant matter does not have the same level of vetting as the commissioner position; they only have to be out of the public service for 12 months. That is the only criterion. Even if they had a 20-year public service career and developed strong relationships and networks in their time as a public servant, they could still be in a position to investigate matters related to their previous workplace.

We have many more specific questions related to conflicts of interest that we will raise during consideration in detail.

Principle 11 of the 12 Fundamental Principles of Australian Anti-Corruption Commissions deals with the transparency of appointments. It says:

> *The process for appointment of integrity commissioners impacts on the community's perceptions of an Anti-Corruption Commission's independence. Commissioner appointments should be made on the basis of merit following an open and transparent appointment process. Selection should be measured against publicly available criteria, with an independent panel putting forward a shortlist of suitable*

applicants to the relevant Minister for appointment. Merit should be the dominant consideration in selection.

We call on the Chief Minister to explain how her CLP government will ensure that appointments to positions in the new Integrity and Ethics Commission, particularly the commissioner and the oversight inspector, are merit based and not mates based, which is in the CLP's DNA.

The Blow report raised pertinent issues, which should also be applied to this new body, about having transparent and clear recruitment policies. The roles of the commissioner, the assistant commissioners and the inspector should not be captain's picks; there should be utter accountability and transparency on these important appointments. This government does not have a good track record on that, hence the relevance of the point made earlier, Member for Goyder. The Chief Minister needs to step out clearly how these appointments will be made and what vetting will be undertaken to ensure that the best, most skilled and most qualified person is appointed.

We are concerned about the lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities. Chief Minister Finocchiaro needs to explain how roles and responsibilities within the new super commission will be defined and clarified so that staff know what is expected of them and what skills and training they need to perform the functions, duties and tasks asked of them in their important roles.

There is a genuine risk that staff will be pulled in all directions. They will not be clear on their priorities or they will be expected to manage shifting priorities, given this new super commission will be taking on the already overburdened and under-resourced workload of each of the individual agencies being smashed together.

There is no clarity on how workload priorities will be set. This is a huge concern for the Labor opposition. Again, each of the currently separate bodies have significant workloads. I stress that none is less important than another. We know that in this situation where workloads will be smashed together, decisions will need to be made about how that workload is prioritised. We hope that will not be based on money and resources.

There is a real risk that critical functions will continue to be under-resourced and overlooked for other functions. While some functions may be streamlined, they are largely administrative rather than any that relate to examinations, inspections and investigations. That workload will not lessen under this model. Rather than addressing it, it will potentially create confusion and overlap and the risk that investigations will drop through the cracks because no-one has responsibility for a certain function.

The Chief Minister's strategic review warns that this model needs to be carefully transitioned to ensure that staff are clear about their roles and how to prioritise workloads; that there are clear conflict of interest processes and systems; and that processes are harmonised and not working against each other.

The ability to move resources from one area to another without justification is also concerning. In the strategic review Mr McClintock made it clear that implementing the recommended model will require careful transition planning and sustained engagement with affected offices and key stakeholders to ensure continuity of operations. Where is that planning work? What timeframe is the government aiming for? How is it being communicated to the staff of those bodies? How are they being supported through this proposed significant transition? There is no clarity on how this transition will be managed well.

This significant legislation will bring about significant change in the way that matters of integrity and ethics are overseen across the many government agencies we have in the Territory. We know that Territorians have massive concerns about this management. We often hear that Territorians have a high degree of cynicism about the transparency and accountability of this government, which the Labor opposition shares.

Our job is to ensure that we have a system of oversight that functions well and is transparent and effective. People deserve to know that when they have a genuine issue about how services are run in the Territory, how they have been treated by government agencies or a concern about undue influence in government decision-making that there is an effective body they can turn to so that those issues are investigated and addressed properly.

It is hard to believe that the Bill in its current form will provide confidence that the super agency will be able to perform its role for the Territory well. It looks too big and too unwieldy. There are too many conflict-of-interest risks in a small jurisdiction like ours for this integrity and ethics proposal. There is too little clarity on how the commission will manage its vast workload within its existing budget.

We call on the Chief Minister to commit to a 12-month report back to parliament on the implementation of this super agency, how it is functioning and whether it is achieving any of the government's stated goals. Territorians deserve, at the very least, this level of transparency on matters of ethics and integrity.

Once again we see that the Chief Minister's approach to leadership is 'it is my way or the highway'. That mentality of 'get out of the way and do what I say' clearly disrespects the expertise and skills here in the Territory.

This was supposed to be an opportunity for positive reform and a way to bring integrity to the ICAC and its processes and provide support and resourcing for the staff. It was supposed to be a constructive way forward, change that is lasting and better for Territorians in the short, medium and long term, but in its current form this legislation is not that. The CLP dropped the ball and missed the opportunity to make this Bill better because it thinks it knows better than everybody else. There should be an opportunity for feedback and constructive input into important laws and changes that affect all Territorians, not just the 17 members of government.

Our Labor opposition team will scrutinise this Bill to the best of our ability—because Territorians expect us to do our job and we definitely will—during consideration in detail because the Chief Minister did not provide that opportunity in an open format, which the public deserves. Our stakeholders and experts deserve to have input into this Bill. Without consultation this is truly an opportunity missed to make laws to make the Territory better. The questions remain many and the answers are small or silent.

We do not support the Bill in its current form.

Mr MALEY (Agriculture and Fisheries): Mr Deputy Speaker, before I make my contribution I will speak about a few things the Opposition Leader said.

She mentioned that the CLP had dropped the ball and thinks it knows better. This report was done by McClintock and Hiley, two renowned and senior people in Australia. If she is trying to rewrite history and say that we know better than anyone else, she should remember that the two people who authored this report are highly rated and have been around a long time. They have the criteria and credentials to write this report.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about this being a half-baked integrity Bill. We should look at history. Why are we in the situation that we have to rework the ICAC? In their report McClintock and Hiley said that the ICAC's reputation had been damaged and its standing needed to be rebuilt. I do not want to run through the whole history, but its reputation was destroyed on Labor's watch. I remember in Estimates when we talked about funding for that body the commissioner said that Labor had cut the funding year on year, which did not allow the ICAC to do the work it wanted.

The opposition says that we have not funded it correctly, but the previous government cut the funding. We are here dealing with this Bill because the previous Labor government—in which the Leader of the Opposition was a minister—failed Territorians. Labor failed to deal with the ICAC and it cut the funding. We are here today to fix this problem because the McClintock–Hiley review said that the ICAC's reputation had been damaged and its standing needed to be rebuilt.

The Opposition Leader spoke about economies of scale and costs. The previous government has no credibility in regard to spending money. That is why we have an almost $15bn debt.

This is about spending taxpayers' money wisely. That is the bottom line. We will make sure that we have the integrity commission and that we do it in a way that spends taxpayers' money wisely.

The previous Labor government messed up when it came to spending taxpayers' money. There are many examples, including the shade structure, the art gallery, the flyover, the aboveground/underground car park, the $12m grandstand and the $35m paid to juveniles, which the previous Labor government instructed its lawyers to suppress information about because it did not want that to get out. When it comes to funding and credibility in regard to cost-cutting measures, we know that the previous Labor government failed Territorians.

We are here to make sure that the Territory can rebuild the economy. We will keep the community safe and restore our lifestyle.

The Opposition Leader went on to talk about the Legislative Scrutiny Committee and how the Bill did not go to that. I will give a quick lesson. The previous Labor government cut the scrutiny committee. In its first term Labor brought in the committee and then got rid of it. Therefore, it is a bit rich for the Opposition Leader to say that the Bill did not go to the scrutiny committee, which is a committee that Labor cut.

She talked about how impossible it was because we rushed it through parliament. We are following the process of parliament. We have not rushed it through. This is the process of bringing legislation in and having it sit on the Notice Paper. Our job is to speak to the community about it and then come back and debate the Bill. This is the process of parliament; it is how the Westminster system works. There was no rushing of the Bill; we simply followed the same procedures as the Leader of the Opposition did for eight years when Labor was in government. Labor failed in government, which is why it is in opposition. We have simply followed the procedures of parliament as per the standing orders. That is how it is done in this place.

This Bill delivers long-overdue reform to the Northern Territory's integrity Act architecture. It modernises governance, restores public confidence and responds to the independent findings of the McClintock–Hiley review. It is a responsible and transparent Bill.

I bring this document to the attention of the Assembly. It is called Restoring Integrity to Government, which was tabled on 30 November 2016 by the previous Labor government. I will read the opening statement. This was signed by the previous Labor Leader of the Opposition:

Territorians want and deserve a Government they can trust.

An open, accountable and transparent Government is essential for this trust to exist.

We are talking about a government people can trust. Unfortunately, through the ICAC debacle under the previous Labor government, Territorians lost trust in the ICAC and the government. We are following the procedures of parliament to fix this and make sure that Territorians have confidence in the ICAC and the integrity commission. If there is an issue, people will have a body which they can report to. That is unlike the previous Labor government which cut funding year on year.

This Bill responds directly to what Territorians have been demanding for years—a system they can trust. For too long confidence has been eroded in the ICAC's integrity. With Labor's 2016 Restoring Integrity to Government document, the previous Labor government started with a high bar and it went downhill quickly, resulting in only four Labor members being left in parliament. Members of the previous Labor government were not open, did not read their own document and did not provide a government people could trust.

Since the establishment of the ICAC in 2018 there have been well-documented challenges and a weakening of public standing. The review made it crystal clear that the ICAC's reputation was damaged and needed to be rebuilt.

We all remember the most shocking example when the Member for Gwoja purchased shares in a liquor wholesaler supplying Alice Springs two months before Labor lifted alcohol bans. What followed next was 180 domestic violence callouts in the first week, 82 reports of neglect and seven reports of child exploitation. This was a clear conflict of interest with devastating consequences, and Territorians were rightly outraged. The Member for Gwoja made money out of misery. Territorians watched a government that was unable to manage conflicts and maintain standards and was unwilling or unable to uphold integrity when it mattered most. If ever there was a demonstration of why modern conflict-of-interest provisions work, this is it. A conflict-of-interest framework is essential, and this Bill provides that framework.

In July 2025 the Finocchiaro government commissioned the comprehensive independent review into structural models for statutory integrity offices, which was led by Mr McClintock and Hon Graham Hiley KC. These are two of the most respected integrity experts in Australia.

The report found that the current model was fragmented, public reputation had been damaged, administrative arrangements were inefficient, the structural design was outdated and continuing the existing system would lead to suboptimal results. Most importantly, the review made one thing clear: doing nothing was not an option.

The government accepted the recommendations in full. We tabled the report in parliament, published it online and briefed all acting integrity stakeholders. This is transparency of the highest order, which is what Territorians deserve. This Bill implements the review's recommendations in full.

The new Integrity and Ethics Commission will bring together the functions of the ICAC, the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner and the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission under one modern integrity framework. Each function remains fully independent but structurally supported, with the establishment of the Office of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner, a new agency led by a CEO providing shared corporate services, consolidated staffing and consistent governance. It replaces the fragmented system that we inherited from the previous Labor government.

The new Integrity and Ethics Oversight Inspector, an independent oversight officer responsible for the commissioner, the commissioner's office, the Auditor-General and the Auditor-General's Office, adds a layer of oversight that previously did not exist.

A robust conflict-of-interest system is crucial and ensures that conflicts are identified and managed and acting officers are appointed when needed. It is exactly the type of framework that was missing when the Member for Gwoja's conflicts caused harm throughout Alice Springs.

Acting appointments remain in place to ensure that there is certainty for Territorians.

The review identified structural issues that had accumulated for years, including overlapping jurisdictions, multiple small agencies duplicating effort, inconsistent corporate support and difficulty maintaining specialist staff. These problems were preventable, predictable and left unaddressed by the previous Labor government. Territorians deserve better.

This Bill has gone to the public. Two senior experts have given us information. We followed their report. It has been tabled and is online; it is transparent.

I do not think Labor can lecture anyone on integrity. It lifted alcohol bans against the advice of peak bodies, police and even its own federal MP. Labor had a minister who personally invested in a liquor wholesaler supplying the community. Labor has no credibility when it comes to integrity.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Bill, but I speak with great concern. This Bill fundamentally reshapes our integrity system in the Northern Territory.

We have heard in this Chamber that this Bill is the answer to the Territory's unique needs as a small jurisdiction with complex integrity challenges. However, it is because the Territory is so small that we need the strongest possible independent integrity bodies and conflict-of-interest management policies. We need them precisely because we are so small, not despite it. Being a small jurisdiction is not an excuse to give up on integrity; if anything, we must fight to protect it. This Bill does the opposite.

I am sure every one of us in this Chamber is deeply committed to integrity, ethical practice and addressing corruption. We are all deeply familiar with the problems we face in the Territory, with the history of the ICAC and the lack of confidence the community has had in this body.

This should be a welcome moment. We could be debating a Bill which will address these issues and strengthen our integrity agencies in the Territory, but that is not what we are doing.

To help inform good lawmaking I hoped the government would refer this Bill to its Legislative Scrutiny Committee which, as we all know, was set up to examine a Bill and whether it will work to achieve its outcomes and purposes and to help inform all of us as lawmakers.

Because, ironically, the government refused to refer the Bill to the scrutiny committee and there was a short timeframe to reflect on and analyse this Bill, I established the Community Scrutiny Forum and invited integrity experts, stakeholders and concerned Territorians to make submissions. The responses from integrity experts across Australia, organisations and community members in the Northern Territory was unequivocal—this Bill should not pass in this form.

Surely we can do better. We all know that our integrity bodies need reform, but we need to make the right decisions, informed by real expertise, to avoid further problems down the road. When we have an opportunity, as we do now, to fix something which we all want and need, let us take that opportunity and get it right.

The Community Scrutiny Forum received submissions reviewing and providing advice on the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Bill from Australia's leading integrity and transparency organisations and experts, including Transparency International, the Centre for Public Integrity, the Australian Democracy Network and former Commonwealth Ombudsman and Chair of Fairer Future, Allan Asher. The forum also received submissions from local organisations representing Territorians who use the integrity bodies that are being condensed by this Bill—NAAJA, the NT Mental Health Coalition and the NT Lived Experience Network.

Integrity experts are not our opponents. They are not raising concerns because they are anti-government, anti-CLP or trying to score political points. They have no political agenda here. Their job—indeed their entire purpose—is to help us get this right. They are offering decades of experience free of charge to ensure that we build a system that protects every Territorian. Why on earth would we not listen to that? Why would we

reject advice from the people whose mission it is to strengthen good governance and prevent past mistakes from being repeated? These experts are warning us not because they want to embarrass the government but because in their professional view this Bill will fail. They want to help us avoid these failures before they hurt real people.

Before anyone says that interstate experts do not understand the Territory, integrity systems are not about geography; they are about good governance. These people understand integrity systems, and we in this Chamber understand the Northern Territory. When we bring those strengths together, Territorians get the best outcome. We should welcome that advice, not dismiss it. If we take it seriously we have a genuine opportunity to build an integrity system that is robust, trusted, fit for purpose and truly worthy of the Territorians we represent. Their guidance gives us a chance to get this right together.

Every submission we received opposed this Bill or raised serious concerns about its design and consequences. Concerns were raised about excessive concentration of power; built-in conflicts of interest; loss of specialist expertise; repeating past failures; threats to the Auditor-General's independence; harm to vulnerable people; weak and insufficient oversight; and the removal of independent statutory officers.

These concerns are being raised by Australia's leading experts in integrity and by organisations on the ground which support people to navigate the systems that this Bill proposes to condense. Ignoring their advice and passing this Bill will do a disservice to the people we represent.

I seek leave to table the submissions received and the report from the Community Scrutiny Forum.

Leave granted.

J DAVIS: For those watching at home, these submissions, the report, information about the Community Scrutiny Forum and a short summary of the findings of that forum are available on my website. I note that the summary report was sent to every member of this Chamber yesterday to help inform the debate today.

This Bill will make accountability harder for vulnerable Territorians to achieve. Who needs the ICAC, the Ombudsman and the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission most? The Ombudsman is where vulnerable Territorians go with complaints about government agencies when they feel powerless and unheard—for example, prisoners who have experienced assault in prison. The ICAC is where public servants calling out corruption go, when they are brave enough to speak out and risk their careers. The health complaints commission is where vulnerable Territorians seeking accountability after unacceptable experiences in our healthcare system turn to when something has gone terribly wrong. These are the people who depend on these bodies working well. They are on the front line of bearing the consequences if we weaken our integrity framework, but weakening it will not only harm them; it will harm all of us.

I will highlight some key advice from the submissions we received because I believe that this guidance will help all of us make better, stronger law for Territorians. In regard to what the Bill prescribes in terms of structural separation and institutional expertise, Transparency International said:

> *Each agency's function is profoundly different from each other, although they may require investigative and support staff with similar skill sets. Each requires its own institutional culture, risk appetite, professional expertise and independence profile.*

Transparency International warned:

> *… critically, it creates a single point of failure in the integrity system where compromise, incapacity or poor performance of one individual affects all four accountability mechanisms simultaneously.*

It said:

> *Without Assistant Commissioners providing operational leadership for each function, there is substantial risk of diluting the anti-corruption mandate as routine complaints and administrative reviews consume the Commissioner's attention and resources that should be devoted to corruption detection and prevention. It risks blurring lines when matters overlap, creating confusion about which statutory framework applies.*

It also said:

> *In addition, the workload implications for one Commissioner are substantial, even with supporting staff.*

Transparency International highlighted a further concern:

> *One of the Review's central recommendations was separating the functions of quasi-judicial decision-making performed by the Commissioner and public sector management performed by a CEO.*
>
> *However, the Bill provides minimal legislative specification of this critical role. It includes no provisions regarding CEO appointment process, eligibility criteria, terms and conditions, specific statutory powers and functions, or relationship with the Commissioner.*

On the lack of scrutiny and democratic process, which we have heard about in the Chamber already, Allan Asher, ex-Commonwealth Ombudsman, from Fairer Future said:

> *As Justine Davis rightly noted in Parliament, it is 'astounding' that the government did not refer this bill to the scrutiny committee for oversight before introducing it. The review itself involved no public consultation. The government intends to pass the bill …*

Today:

> *… allowing minimal time for public input or parliamentary examination …*

The Bill is:

> *… an extraordinary concentration of power that deserves the most thorough examination possible, not a rushed debate and refusal of proper scrutiny.*

On this same matter NAAJA stated:

> *The Report recognised the need for 'targeted and extensive legislative amendments, careful transition planning, and sustained engagement with affected offices and key stakeholders to ensure continuity of operations'. Despite this, the Bill was introduced some two months after the Report and was not referred to the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committee.*
>
> *Despite the NT's regulation-making framework recognising the importance of public consultation, there has been no public consultation process or any opportunity for affected communities, complainants or representatives to assess and inform the legislative design and transitional arrangements. The absence of transparent inclusive consultation risks further undermining public confidence in a restructure that is intended to restore trust and increases the risk of unintended operational and governance consequences during and after transition.*

NAAJA went on to say that it:

> *… urges the NT Government to pause, consult and co-design an integrity framework that reflects the lived realities, rights and expectations of all Territorians, and to ensure that any reform strengthens, not erodes, the mechanisms intended to safeguard them.*

On the issue of consolidation of power and conflicts of interest, Allan Asher said:

> *… consolidating four distinct statutory offices into a single commissioner raises serious concerns about independence, conflicts of interest, loss of specialisation, and concentration of power.*

The Australian Democracy Network said:

> *Compromised Independence of the Inspector's Staff: While the Integrity and Ethics Oversight Inspector is legally 'not subject to direction by any person', the Inspector's staff structure undermines their operational independence. The staff consists of persons employed in an Agency who are merely 'made available by the Chief Executive Officer of the Agency' under arrangement with the Inspector. This reliance on staff seconded from government agencies, which are subjects of the Commissioner's and Inspector's oversight, introduces a structural dependence on the very entities the Inspector is mandated to investigate.*

The Centre for Public Integrity stated:

The government claims that the Inspector can manage these inevitable conflicts through a 'built-in mechanism'. This approach, however, relies on the commissioner to self-identify any conflicts and report them. This kind of self-accountability is not a reliable way to overcome the inevitable array of conflicts. For this reason, this super-commission is likely to continue to lead to actual or perceived conflicts of interest that undermine the ability of the integrity system to secure public trust in government.

The Centre for Public Integrity emphasised:

… any legislative reform to the NT integrity system must preserve an independent anti-corruption commission (ICAC). To work effectively, this NT ICAC must have suitable oversight. Effective oversight requires more than oversight by an Inspector. It also requires a joint parliamentary committee that plays an important role in the appointment, funding, and general oversight of these commissions. This is recognised in Principle 12 of the Fundamental Principles of Australian Anti-Corruption Commissions.

The Bill also poses risks to vulnerable people and lived-experience communities. The Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition said:

For people with mental health concerns, particularly those living with psychosocial disability, trauma histories, or cognitive impairments, this consolidation may create confusion about where and how to make a complaint; apprehension that a health-related concern could become a more serious or punitive matter; reduced confidence that staff will have mental health literacy or consumer expertise; and loss of a specialist, health-focused entry point that is visible, safe and trusted. The consolidation of functions risks reinforcing the perception that making a complaint is intimidating or unsafe. There are precedents such as in Tasmania where a health complaints function is exercised by a consolidated statutory office, though consumer protections and safeguards remain such as retaining specialist staff, ongoing training and clear complaints pathways.

This Bill does not reference consumer engagement despite being a major structural reform that affects the rights and safety of mental health consumers. In the Northern Territory context where the Mental Health Coalition and the Northern Territory Lived Experience Network are establishing a consumer peak body co-funded by NT Health, this is a missed opportunity. The Northern Territory will be undertaking a dangerous structural experiment, placing the rights, safety and wellbeing of vulnerable Territorians at risk. The Northern Territory Lived Experience Network said:

No modern integrity system allows:

- *senior oversight officials to report to a politically appointed CEO*
- *complaints bodies to be controlled through ministerial appointments*
- *corruption, health and ombudsman functions to be structurally subordinated within a hierarchy controlled by government*

This structure is unsafe and unprecedented.

Drawing together these submissions, the evidence and our history in the Northern Territory, the key concerns of this Bill can be summarised as follows.

The Bill vests sweeping authority in a single commissioner responsible for four fundamentally different functions—corruption investigations, administrative complaints, freedom of information decisions and health complaints. No other Australian jurisdiction uses such a model. Experts have warned us that merging these functions is unsafe, unworkable and removes vital checks and balances. They warn it also risks catastrophic failure if the wrong person is appointed to this role.

The Bill collapses functions that must remain separate. Matters such as corruption in health contracts and complaints about hospital care would be handled by the same office. The only safeguard is that the commissioner must self-identify conflicts between investigations, which experts say is neither realistic nor adequate. Previous reviews recommended establishing assistant commissioners to preserve independence and specialist knowledge. This Bill ignores that advice, leaving complex high-risk work to generalist staff who may be moved, removed or under-resourced at any time.

We have been here before. In 2011 the NT separated the health complaints commissioner from the Ombudsman because the roles clashed. This Bill reverses that reform, recreating the risk that the NT previously eliminated. Other jurisdictions have also previously combined statutory authorities in a similar way, only to undo the changes because they failed.

The Bill also gives the new inspector the power to investigate and assess the Auditor-General, who is an officer who must report directly to parliament without interference. Experts, including the Australasian Council of Auditors General, have warned that this will expose the Auditor-General to political pressure and compromise financial accountability. The proposed inspector would wield broad powers with minimal accountability and no proper parliamentary review.

Despite the McClintock–Hiley report recommending that the assistant commissioners have statutory powers, the Bill fails to do this. It is unclear why the government ignored this recommendation. To be clear, this Bill does not give statutory authority to the new assistant commissioners, meaning government would no longer be required to act on advice from the Assistant ICAC, Ombudsman or Health Complaints Commissioner.

Our report makes clear recommendations based on the submissions we received, which consistently recommended that we not proceed with the Bill in its current form and make the following recommendations:

1. The government should immediately withdraw the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Bill 2025.

2. Establish a comprehensive review led by three independent experts open to public submissions. This review must engage integrity specialists, legal groups, civil society and affected communities, and allow adequate time for detailed analysis. It should adopt the Australian anti-corruption commission principles.

3. Conduct genuine consultation with people with lived experience of mental illness, disability and health complaints, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, integrity and democracy experts, legal and human rights advocates and staff from existing integrity bodies.

4. Any future Bill must be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, released as an exposure draft for line-by-line review and revised in response to identified issues.

5. Strengthen existing integrity systems through secure funding, improved recruitment practices, clear statutory independence, adequate investigative resourcing and a genuine political commitment to transparency and accountability.

When integrity experts oppose a law that makes such significant changes to our integrity system, we do all Territorians a disservice when we ignore their advice. I strongly urge this Assembly, given the overwhelming advice received by all of us from these integrity experts, not to pass this Bill today.

This is not about being anti-reform. I accept that there are real problems that need fixing in our integrity system, including under-resourcing, ongoing acting appointments and recruitment failures, but fixing these problems requires adequate funding, political commitment to independence and a properly worked out statutory framework that will protect us all, not concentrating power and removing safeguards. As the integrity experts told us, no reform should proceed that weakens public confidence in the integrity system. This Bill fails that test.

I urge this Chamber and the government to withdraw this Bill, do the work properly and give the NT a model that truly strengthens rather than weakens the integrity system that we all deserve.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, I support this Bill.

It seems that this government is constantly having to fix up messes that were left to us after eight years of an incompetent failing Labor government.

I had high hopes in 2017 when then Chief Minister Michael Gunner first announced that he would bring in an ICAC, but I also had my doubts. People often call Labor governments ‘passion fingers’ because they manage to stuff up everything they touch. Time would show that the model chosen by the then Labor government was structurally fundamentally flawed for a small jurisdiction. It may have been more appropriate for a large jurisdiction such as those down south, but in the Northern Territory, where everyone has perhaps three degrees of separation and we often have to wear multiple hats to get things done, it was perhaps not the appropriate model.

The inaugural ICAC chosen by then Chief Minister Michael Gunner was Ken Fleming who at the time had a great history as a prosecutor and legal scholar. Those of us who are locals lived through his tenure and, unfortunately, to say that the ICAC was not covered in glory during that time is an understatement.

Who can forget the Turf Club investigation when Michael Gunner's chief of staff—whom I will not name, but is well covered in the media—sent an email to a certain person at the Turf Club saying, 'This is the letter you need to send us'. Michael Gunner then walked that letter into Cabinet. Who did the then ICAC find blame against? A private company, a private association, that had no fiduciary responsibility for taxpayer dollars. The covert recordings of witnesses were described by the inspector at the time as entirely inappropriate and a breach of trust.

Who could forget the then ICAC being appointed to oversee the police investigation of Kumanjayi Walker in Yuendumu, who then made prejudicial statements at a protest in Alice Springs and had to be removed from that position of oversight?

Ken Fleming retired early, likely due to health reasons. Vale, Ken Fleming.

He had a great career prior to this position, and it is likely he was a victim of the failed structure designed by the previous Labor government that we are today here to fix.

When he retired, I had high hopes that the new ICAC, Michael Riches, would bring in a clean broom. At the time I did not realise that the fundamental structure he was operating in was flawed. There were no appropriate checks and balances, which are necessary for a role such as that. I will not go into the details, but we all lived through the sordid tales, with the allegations made and the HR investigations that had to be undertaken and the failed handling of conflicts of interest by that ICAC.

This Bill remedies that situation. It restructures the ICAC and the other integrity bodies so that we can have a properly resourced and recruited integrity commissioner who will have oversight of those integrity bodies and appropriate management of conflicts of interest so that situations like those with the previous ICAC, Michael Riches, cannot happen again. Conflicts of interest can be appropriately managed and hopefully now, on a proper structural footing, this office can get on with its job of ensuring integrity in the Northern Territory.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I have serious concerns about the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Bill.

I have said many times and will continue to say that the NT has a critical transparency and integrity problem. In recent months we had issues with the lack of independence from the Chair of the NT EPA; the CLP government refused to share the ministerial white car policy; there has been a lack of referral to the Scrutiny Committee of any Bill of substance, including this Bill; the Racing and Wagering Commission openly admitted to accepting hospitality from the industry it is supposed to regulate; and the list goes on. This is just in the past few months, let alone the past two decades.

I am sure we are all aware of how drastically under-resourced our existing integrity commissioners are, and the myriad problems we have had with conflicts of interest, poor leadership and generally poor functioning. Therefore, I would have warmly welcomed an in-depth review of these existing commissions, with thorough scrutiny, a review process and the opportunity for real experts to make submissions on the changes needed.

Our communities deserve to have strong, effective accountability mechanisms, but what we got with the McClintock–Hiley review was a rushed report that took just three weeks; no real transparency or evidence of why this proposed restructuring would be suitable; no real consultation; and no evidence of what advice was provided to the reviewers on what changes should be made.

Not only do we have this rushed review process, but this government has chosen not to adopt the model that was recommended; rather, it has changed the operating structure, adding an additional role of integrity oversight inspector. This begs the question: where on earth is it getting advice on these enormous changes, if not from its own review?

I am not an expert on integrity commissions and what makes for suitable effective commissions. Luckily, I do not have to be because there are experts and recognised best practice we can look to. This government did not want to hear from any experts, and I wonder why. Forgive me for not trusting its sincerity in wanting to increase the effectiveness of these commissions when it is unwilling to engage in good-faith consultation on

this. You cannot be the most dishonest, secretive government we have seen in a long time and then expect us to trust you want to improve integrity.

Whilst claiming to value transparency and integrity, the government is doing the opposite by refusing any oversight of this incredibly significant Bill. It is literally a Bill about integrity and transparency, and the CLP does not want it scrutinised. It is a shame job. You cannot make up this stuff. I can only assume that the government did not want to do any public consultation because it knew that the experts and the public would not affirm the model recommended in the report or the subsequent Bill.

Therefore, instead of using plentiful government resources to properly seek advice on how to improve these vital commissions, it was left to the Member for Johnston who stepped up and sought expert advice from her own community scrutiny committee, and having done this with only 1.4 FTE staff. I thank everyone who made submissions to that forum and the Member for Johnston for creating that community committee because that is what leadership and integrity look like.

I wholeheartedly support the initiative of setting up this community scrutiny committee because I believe the public deserves to have more say in policymaking. I was pleasantly surprised by the incredibly response to this initiative and the high level of expertise that contributed. Nationally important leading organisations sent submissions to the Member for Johnston's forum, such as the Australasian Council of Auditors General, the Australian Democracy Network, Transparency International Australia, the Centre for Public Integrity, Fairer Future and more. It should give pause to all those on the opposite side, who are giving weak two-dimensional arguments in supporting this Bill, that national leading organisations went out of their way to make submissions to a forum put forward by the crossbench because the government could not be bothered to do it.

Those organisations all say the same thing—funny that. These expert submissions are the key basis for part of my contribution, as I believe in evidence-based practice—as much as the Attorney-General still does not like to hear about it—and that good leadership is looking to those wiser than yourself to inform policy.

I refer to the submission made by Fairer Future, which collaborates with the Australia Institute on the Deepening Democracy Project, an initiative to improve the operation of Australia's integrity institutions. Its submission pointed out serious concerns with the Bill. The main and recurring theme within these submissions was the way in which conflicts of interest will be increasingly common and harder to manage with pooled staffing resourcing and the role of a single commissioner.

The submission outlined a few examples in which conflicts could easily occur such as a person may lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman about an agency's handling of their FOI request, which the Information Commissioner is also examining; a health service may be subject to both administrative review through the Ombudsman and a corruption investigation, which is an ICAC function; or the same agency may be under investigation for corruption whilst also being the subject of systemic administrative complaints. These examples are not unlikely hypotheticals; they are examples of the key work that these commissions do. These conflicts will regularly arise. Simply tasking an inspector to help alleviate conflicts is not enough, especially when so much of the process will rely on self-reporting of conflicts.

Many of the submissions that I read, and community members I talked to, raised concern about the loss of specialised expertise and function through this merging. I recognise that the NT can struggle to find and retain specialists in general, but the merging of these commissions will only exacerbate this.

As outlined in the NAAJA and Fairer Future submissions, different integrity bodies serve distinct purposes with different skill sets, methodologies and institutional cultures. For example, anti-corruption bodies focus on detecting, investigating and exposing serious corruption through coercive investigative powers; Ombudsmen handle broader administrative complaints, systemic issues and agency improvement through persuasion and recommendations; Information Commissioners protect FOI and privacy rights through specialised legal expertise; and health complaints commissioners address specialised health service issues requiring medical knowledge. Therefore, merging these functions would see a loss of specialised expertise as generalist staff replace specialists.

Alongside this there will no doubt be technical conflicts between investigative and conciliation approaches, as well as confusion among the public about the body's role, functions and reduced focus on prevention and systemic improvement in favour of reactive investigation.

The role of an independent statutory body is important, particularly when the government changes every four years. Through a changing political landscape the commissions remain independent, with a largely

unchanging mandate bringing important stability and accountability. However, this Bill seeks to appoint a CEO into the mix who will oversee the staff and control the corporate side of the commission. During the briefing on this Bill the government was unable to provide specific boundaries on the role of the CEO, with discretion provided to the commissioner and CEO to decide how they will operate together. This is concerning on a number of levels as the CEO will be government appointed and will not have the same independent statutory mandate.

As identified in the Fairer Future submission, creating a single body may actually make it easier for government to exert pressure or influence. A diversified integrity architecture with multiple independent bodies provides checks and balances. Consolidation concentrates power in one office that can more easily be controlled through budgetary pressure. It runs the risk of the appointment of a compliant commissioner, and political pressure needs to be placed on only a single point of contact.

Earlier this year we heard from the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner that he was told that to receive more funding he had to demonstrate how his team was supporting the CLP government's mandate of rebuilding the economy, restoring the Territory lifestyle and reducing crime. Let me be clear that is inappropriate. When a government makes funding conditional on supporting its political agenda, it is actively undermining the independence these bodies are legally required to maintain. This is exactly the kind of political interference that integrity institutions are designed to protect against.

The merging into one commission alongside the introduction of a CEO raises serious concerns that the government could place its mandate upon this super commission rather than its actual statutory mandate, particularly when the commission will be balancing multiple statutory directives. As raised in NAAJA's submission to the Community Scrutiny Forum, it is unrealistic to expect that one commissioner will be capable of providing the same level of oversight and effective decision-making across all four regimes without compromising timelines, quality and continuity, particularly in high-risk areas, such as health complaints and corruption investigations. NAAJA's submission also pointed out that the NT struggles to find an appropriately qualified person to fill the role of a standalone commissioner, so how will we find someone experienced with expertise across all of these high-level areas?

When the Chief Minister first tabled this Bill she maintained—twice—that this was not a cost-saving measure. However, we have received no assurance of additional funding for this new commission. We heard today that it is about funding it properly, but that is not the evidence we see before us. It is hard to see why this new Integrity and Ethics Commission is being created if not purely for cost-saving measures, as the evidence does not show that this merging will make it any more effective; in fact, it does the opposite.

The NT Mental Health Coalition and the Northern Territory Lived Experience Network raised central concerns about the potential risks that this new commission poses to people with lived experience or who are vulnerable—namely, those with mental ill health, people with disability, older people, carers, Aboriginal Territorians and those living in remote communities, alongside people facing chronic health challenges. They said:

> *… this consolidation may create confusion about where and how to make a complaint; apprehension that a health-related concern could become a more serious or punitive matter; reduce confidence that staff will have mental health literacy …*

Or cultural awareness:

> *… or consumer expertise; loss of a specialist, health-focused entry point that is visible, safe and trusted. The consolidation of functions risks reinforcing the perception that making a complaint is intimidating or unsafe.*

There are numerous concerns, some quite technical, raised in the submissions to the Member for Johnston's scrutiny forum, but due to limited time I tried to focus on the core issues.

I will draw the Assembly's attention to one final pressing concern raised in the Australian Democracy Network submission, which is the fact that the ICAC was not included in the McClintock review. Per its submission:

> *The integrity of the process is compromised by the explicit exclusion of the very office central to previous ICAC accountability. The Office of the ICAC Inspector was explicitly excluded from the scope of the Review to manage conflicts related to one of the authors, who served as the current Inspector. This exclusion is a profound oversight, primarily since the entire accountability structure of the new system rests on creating an analogous but powerful Integrity and Ethics Oversight Inspector role.*

This is particularly concerning, given the ongoing issues that the NT has faced with the ICAC specifically. Out of all the commissions that the government seeks to merge it is the ICAC that Territorians would have heard the most troubling news stories about. How could there be such a failure by this government in commissioning a report that it knew could not reasonably consider the functions and limits of the ICAC? Of course, none on the other side bothered to mention this glaring mistake; they just parrot the lines given to them without any deep thought into what the ramifications of this will be.

This government has made it abundantly clear to Territorians that if they do not like the policy direction of the CLP they can just leave, despite the fact they are from here. Alongside this, the Chief Minister has refused to recognise that there might be any racism within the NT Police Force, despite Police doing its own investigation that affirmed there was structural racism, and the government removed the need for legislation to be compatible with human rights.

These are the issues that the Ombudsman and other commissioners exist to deal with, so now more than ever it is important that they exist in strength and independence. I am truly concerned by the way in which these changes might dismantle this.

This is another step from this government in the direction of less transparency, less accountability and more secrecy. I am concerned. This was such a missed opportunity. We could have really got in with a proper review, looked at the issues and what needs to happen, but, no, the government had a three-week review—a back-of-a-napkin kind of thing—and said, 'Let us do it with no scrutiny'. It is a disgrace.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank honourable members for their contributions to this important reform. We heard a lot of revisionism from those opposite, so it is important for us as a government to outline how we got here.

There are no two ways about it: Labor's ICAC failed to meet community expectation; that much is abundantly clear. Territorians did not feel that the ICAC delivered on its promises, and Labor ignored these issues and failed to do anything about it.

The ICAC was created in 2018 and, to date, it cost Territorians $35m. As we had seen over the years of the trust being damaged and Territorians in the end having to pay for two ICAC Commissioners at the one time while former Commissioner Riches remained on extended leave, upon coming to government we knew we had to do something to restore community confidence in this incredibly important institution.

Despite the ridiculous accusations by those opposite who seek nothing other than to throw as much mud as humanly possible, our greatest concern from day one has been: what will it take to restore people's trust in this integrity function? That has been an important consideration.

K McNamara: So you decided not to send it to the scrutiny committee.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry; I can barely hear myself over the constant interjections by the Member for Nightcliff, who had her chance to have her say. A lot of it was misleading rubbish, and I sat there and listened to it politely. If she listened to me she might learn something. That would be a new skill for you, Member for Nightcliff. I will continue.

There has been a substantive lack of confidence, and we have to deal with that, hence a structural reform. The McClintock–Hiley review found that there has been damage to the public reputation and standing of the ICAC and that standing has to be re-established. We agree with that. I have flagged this for a long time, given all the public events that have happened with this issue.

We had two highly esteemed, credentialled, nationally respected individuals, Bruce McClintock SC and Justice Hiley, undertake a report, of which we fully accepted the recommendations—I tabled it in parliament—to create a structure that provides for a strengthening of our integrity functions and an opportunity for Territorians to have confidence in the system moving forward, and that is the establishment of the Integrity and Ethics Commission.

This new body will strengthen and bring together all integrity functions, including the ICAC, Ombudsman, Information Commissioner and Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner, under one commissioner, while providing shared services to the Auditor-General, who deliberately and explicitly remains outside and independent of this new commission. Any allegations to the contrary is ridiculous; it is spelled out in black and white in the legislation.

Mr McClintock has briefed the acting ICAC, the Auditor-General, the acting Ombudsman and Information Commissioner and the acting health complaints commissioner on the recommended model. Interim arrangements are already in place for those integrity bodies.

This Bill will establish that principal integrity officer, bringing together those oversight functions. There will be dedicated corporate and administrative support. Need I remind members of the reason for Mr Riches' extended leave? This will better support staff in this agency with a CEO whose responsibility is to manage staff and the day-to-day functions of an agency as you would expect, allowing the commissioner not to have to deal with those matters and focus on the work at hand. It provides much better and clearer lines of responsibility and allows the integrity functions to be solely integrity functions.

The Bill provides for transitions, and is expected to be fully operational in the first half of 2026. Change is hard, and this will be a huge change for a lot of staff. However, we cannot keep limping along with the same model that Labor left us with. It has proven itself not to work, so we must do something different. Highly respected people in this field are giving us a blueprint which we are following.

This will be more sustainable. It will be a unified system, and we can expect a more streamlined, consistent and transparent approach as a result. Shared corporate services, for example, deliver economies of scale and efficiencies, which means that more of the budget can be spent doing the integrity work.

The Member for Nightcliff made cheap shots about this not being about money. If we can spend that money better, on the actual integrity and accountability functions, that will deliver better accountability and scrutiny of our democratic processes, which is exactly what we want—less money spent on back-of-house functions and duplication and more money being spent on the front of house.

I take exception to the comment two members made about generalists replacing specialists. I do not know where that has come from because it is not the case at all. It is not even worth me going into it, but it shows the lack of understanding from those opposite. They are blindly desperate to make this a bad thing, even though it is a good thing. I am astonished that the Labor opposition members are not supporting this change. They would rather have Territorians continue with the broken system that has been tried and tested, broken several times and cost taxpayers $35m on top of all the costs of those other agencies. Labor's position is to maintain a broken integrity function. It cannot stay that way.

This Bill retains all the powers and strengths of each respective function; it just harmonises it into one Act with one commissioner. All the powers which currently exist will continue to exist. This is a reform of the structure. It has been done through the proper parliamentary processes and is robust and contemporary.

I will circulate a small number of amendments—if they have not already been circulated—and we will go through them at the consideration in detail stage. They do not alter the overall intent of the Bill; they strengthen the integrity arrangements for managing conflicts of interest, which I am sure the Member for Johnston will be thrilled about. The acting ICAC raised that having a minister appoint an acting integrity officer could raise challenges so that has been addressed through the amendments which will be circulated.

I thank all the teams who worked on this legislation. It has been a terrific result. I thank Mr McClintock and His Honour Justice Hiley for their input and work.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 2:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 1 to clause 2.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 3:

Ms UIBO: Although I agreed to the amendment, can I still ask the Chief Minister a question about clause 2, as amended?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, we have just done that; sorry.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 5:

Ms UIBO: Why would you not rule out for clause 5 candidates of any political affiliation over any period rather than just a set time limit, given the need for this person to have the highest levels of integrity and impartiality?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no change in clause 5 from what is in the current ICAC Act.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clauses 6 and 7, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 8:

Ms UIBO: Who will select the commissioner for recommendation to the Legislative Assembly?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This will be a full national recruitment process with a panel.

Ms UIBO: Noting your answer to the previous question and to reassure Territorians that it will be a merit-based, open and transparent process, will recruitment to the role also include a focus on the 12 Fundamental Principles of Australian Anti-Corruption Commissions to which our Northern Territory ICAC is a signatory?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It will be a full recruitment process. The different criteria are found in subsequent sections. We want the best person for the job.

Ms UIBO: Will those selection criteria be publicly available so that people can see they are in line with the fundamental principles?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. A job description will be published as per the recruitment process. Clause 12, Eligibility for appointment, has those safeguards.

Ms UIBO: How will conflicts of interest be managed for panel members in the selection of that important position?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are strict rules, so it will be managed as per the process.

Ms UIBO: Will that process be available to Territorians to understand how that conflict of interest will be managed? Will it also be available online?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If people are on the panel they cannot be conflicted; that is the whole point. They will have to excuse themselves and follow those rules. I think you are straying a bit far from clause 8.

Ms UIBO: Is there a vetting process for candidates, including any past activities that may make them unsuitable for applying for the role?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. We have already talked about who is or is not eligible, so we will have to check whether people are eligible.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9:

Ms UIBO: What budget will the office have, noting that at this point your government has not flagged any changes for the operations?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: All the budgets will be rolled in. As the budget process happens it will be a matter for that process, but all the budgets will come together.

Ms UIBO: Will staffing, operation and administrative costs be publicly available through the normal budget process that you outlined?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There will be annual reports and Estimates like normal. This Bill just changes the structure; it does not change other powers, funding or anything like that.

Ms UIBO: Do you have the number of staff who will be available to make up the commission?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is the existing staff. They will come under a new structure.

Ms UIBO: Do you have that figure? Sorry to be picky.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not, but it is probably in an annual report. I note that there have been significant issues in being able to recruit to positions. It will have a staffing budget, but it will probably have fewer just because it cannot get people. It is about 60 FTE. That is a rough number.

Ms UIBO: I understand, and I appreciate that number.

How many administrative staff versus staff engaged to do the statutory functions will be in that 60 FTE, roughly?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I cannot break that down for you. It is not part of the clause. Ultimately, all the existing agencies have administrative staff, investigative staff and other types of roles. As they merge, they will work through that.

Ms UIBO: The chief executive officer will be a public servant. How will they be appointed? Will this also be an open, transparent and merit-based process?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is where the PSEMA comes into it. They will be recruited under the PSEMA.

Ms UIBO: Will the agency that appoints the CEO go through Chief Minister and Cabinet?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would be led by OCPE.

Ms UIBO: For all existing staff, both operational and administrative, will each integrity agency have a role for them in the new office out of those 60 FTEs?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is my understanding.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate that there will be a transition process, which is why I needed to ask this question.

If positions are made redundant or redeployed, at what point will that be made clear to those staff?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are operational matters. It will be a matter for the CEO.

Ms UIBO: I assume there has already been communication to staff about this transition. When will they start to transition?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Once a commissioner is appointed we will do that transition.

Ms UIBO: Will there be economies of scale or efficiencies, given that there will be the overarching commissioner, the CEO and presumably a deputy commissioner overseeing each of the office's functions?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, because they have shared expertise that they need. We talk about investigative or complaints-based staff. The ICAC, for example, is carrying significant staff shortages because it is difficult to fill those positions. We will immediately have many more staff with those skills and will be able to build up

that base as required. These are operational matters for the new commissioner. This needs to be driven by the new commissioner.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10:

Ms UIBO: Can you provide any detail for the appointment process?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I just explained it.

Ms UIBO: You did not mention the Administrator, so I am just checking.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, this is the same as under the ICAC Act.

Ms UIBO: Will conflicts of interest be managed in the decision-making process in the appointment of the commissioner?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is all part of recruitment.

Clause 10 agreed to.

Clause 11:

Ms UIBO: How will the commissioner be expected to manage conflicts of interest across such a broad sweep of powers, considering they have their function plus the three other integrity bodies sitting under them, essentially?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is dealt with a little further in the Bill and as part of my amendments.

Ms UIBO: How do you expect there will be a qualified person to make decisions across each of the four integrity agencies, given the number of Acts and, as you mentioned, specific requirements and skills in those roles which may then require different functions for each of those offices?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Because of the reform there is a number of things. First, they do not have to be a CEO anymore, which until this point has taken a huge amount of time and resources. That part of the workload has been shed because we need a CEO providing that proper support to staff and the functions of the office. Second, there are all the assistant commissioners underneath, providing that direct support to the commissioner. It is a new structure, but a well-supported one. We are hopeful that it will support greater interest in that role from senior experienced people, given the breadth of the work they will do.

Ms UIBO: If there is a conflict of interest, would the commissioner disclose that to the CEO?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is a process for that, and we will get to it. We will not skip over it, because I have amendments.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clause 12:

Ms UIBO: If the person appointed was previously a public officer, does this ensure their independence, given they will have established networks and relationships? How will this be managed?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Eligibility for appointment has the same criteria as it has under the current ICAC Act. We had to change a couple of words, but it is the same criteria.

Clause 12 agreed to.

Clauses 13 and 14, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 15:

Ms UIBO: If there is a leave of absence, who fills the role on an interim basis? Who makes the decision about that acting commissioner?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If the commissioner is on leave, the Administrator has to appoint an acting commissioner.

Ms UIBO: If the acting commissioner is a public officer, will they have to resign from their public officer role to take on the role of an interim commissioner?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, because it is temporary.

Ms UIBO: Will there be a limit to what is considered temporary?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Proposed section 16 deals with that vacancy component. It is the next clause.

Ms UIBO: Will the interim commissioner be required to undergo the same level of vetting and ensure that the same declarations about conflict of interest exist as for the full-time commissioner role?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, there will not be an interim commissioner. We will advertise and then have the commissioner.

Ms UIBO: I mean when there is an acting commissioner with a leave of absence. Sorry; I did not make that clear.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please say that again, then.

Ms UIBO: Will the acting commissioner—sorry, I said interim—be required to undergo the same level of conflict-of-interest scrutiny and declarations as the full-time commissioner would?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes; they have to be the commissioner, so they have to meet all the criteria.

Clause 15 agreed to.

Clause 16:

Ms UIBO: If the commissioner is facing criminal or civil charges or is under investigation, what happens to their role?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is the same as it is in the ICAC Act. We have changed 'ICAC' to 'commissioner', but that is the only change.

Ms UIBO: Does that mean the same sort of thing for that position? Would they be put on leave while the proceedings or the possible investigations are completed?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It depends. It is set out in the clause. For example, proposed section 16(c)(i) states that if they are:

> *found guilty of an offence, whether in the Territory or elsewhere, for which the maximum penalty is imprisonment for a term of at least 12 months, with or without a fine …*

There are different things. Bankruptcy is listed in paragraph (d). It depends whether it is one of those triggers.

Ms UIBO: Is there any fallout if the acting commissioner is in the role while the commissioner is on leave and their conflicts of interest are not adequately managed in an investigation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The conflict-of-interest process applies to an acting ICAC as well, which we have not quite got to yet. All those provisions would apply to an acting commissioner as they do to the commissioner.

Ms UIBO: Who terminates an appointment, and on what evidence will that be determined?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is further in the Bill. We will get to that.

Ms UIBO: What is the maximum or minimum timing for a temporary absence?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have not got to that yet. Clause 20 is about the acting commissioner. It says:

> *… a period or periods not exceeding in aggregate 6 months in any 12 months.*

We are not up to that yet; we are on clause 16, and the detail of the timeframe is in clause 20.

Ms UIBO: Will the decision to terminate the commissioner's position have to come back to the Legislative Assembly, similar to what was expected under the ICAC Act?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have two more clauses on that; there is clause 17, Resignation, and clause 18, which deals with suspension and termination.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clause 17, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 18:

Ms UIBO: Will the decision to terminate the commissioner's position come back to the Legislative Assembly?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, it has to.

Ms UIBO: What is the definition of 'incompetence', and who decides the threshold to be met?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is intentionally not defined, but that would be a matter for the inspector.

Ms UIBO: What is the definition of 'misbehaviour', and who decides the threshold to be met?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector.

Ms UIBO: If the commissioner is found to be engaging in corruption, would this mean immediate termination?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector would have to form that view, then they would suspend them and do the investigation and whatever came out of that would be what happens next.

Ms UIBO: I assume the circumstances for suspension and engaging in corruption would be if they break any of the criteria they are appointed by in the first place?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It could be much broader than that. If they were engaged in corruption, it could be all sorts of things.

Ms UIBO: Who has the decision-making capacity to determine whether a commissioner is suspended from duty?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Administrator.

Ms UIBO: What steps can be put in place to ensure suspensions do not drag on and create ongoing uncertainty for staff and Territorians?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Act allows for an acting commissioner to come in, so there would be that continuity.

Ms UIBO: What is the timeframe for tabling a statement of reasons for a suspension?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Within six sitting days.

Clause 18 agreed to.

Clause 19:

Ms UIBO: If it was necessary for the minister to direct the commissioner to take leave, who would conduct the investigation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector.

Ms UIBO: Would the inspector have a role in recommending to the minister that the commissioner take leave, or would it be separate until there is a recommendation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it would be from the inspector.

Ms UIBO: How will perceived or real conflicts of interest be managed in relation to the person who conducts the investigation, which would be the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is in clause 54.

Ms UIBO: What is the requirement for the minister to advise the Legislative Assembly if the commissioner has been directed to take a leave of absence, as opposed to suspension?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no legislative requirement to do that, but you would be notified.

Clause 19 agreed to.

Clause 20:

Ms UIBO: Is there a timeframe for the leave? It says 'vacant for a period of 18 months', but I wonder whether there is a leave timeframe.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you mean how much annual leave they get? They cannot be away for more than six months in any 12 months.

Ms UIBO: What vetting process will occur to ensure the acting commissioner is suitable for a role requiring such a high degree of integrity?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They have to meet the same conditions as the commissioner.

Ms UIBO: Given the legislation specifically requires the full-time commissioner not to be a public officer to ensure they retain independence, why is there less of a threshold for the acting commissioner role, given that person could be in the role for up to 18 months?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is because it is temporary.

J DAVIS: Under proposed section 20(1), what is the definition of 'an eligible person for appointment'?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is in the definitions section.

Clause 20 agreed to.

Clause 21:

Ms UIBO: Given the movement of public servants over time, does the restriction for an acting commissioner never to investigate their own department extend to previous departments? If they moved from Education to Infrastructure, would there be a restriction that they cannot investigate Education?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is about conflict management. If someone eligible for the role used to be in the department of Education 20 years ago—it is more about the conflict management component rather than any previous work experience per se.

Ms UIBO: Would that extend to previous colleagues or organisations that have liaised with government?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The full conflict management regime applies. People have to take all those appropriate steps.

Ms UIBO: Given that we are a small jurisdiction, how is this provision workable? Will there be clear guidelines regarding that conflict management framework?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, we are edging closer to it. It is all in there.

J DAVIS: With the conflict-of-interest conditions in proposed section 21, what happens if an acting commissioner is precluded from undertaking any of those roles? Who then does it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is not in clause 21. That is later with all the other conflict stuff.

Clause 21 agreed to.

Clause 22:

Ms UIBO: Who hears the oath?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Administrator.

Clause 22 agreed to.

Clause 23:

Ms UIBO: How will the inspector be appointed?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: By the Administrator.

Ms UIBO: Will a former public officer be eligible to become the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No.

Ms UIBO: What skills, experience and criteria are expected for the role of the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is the same criteria as the commissioner.

Ms UIBO: Will it be an open and transparent recruitment process for the appointment of the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. It is a recommendation of the Assembly to the Administrator.

J DAVIS: Who is the inspector accountable to?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Assembly.

J DAVIS: Can you explain that process?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector is required to do annual reports, and they are tabled through the Assembly.

J DAVIS: If someone has a complaint about the inspector, what is the process for making that complaint?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector's role is to provide oversight of the commission. There is not an inspector of the inspector, but there are all the usual avenues. For example, if it was criminal it would be through the DPP and that process to the courts. I will not engage in the hypothetical.

J DAVIS: I understand that we are allowed to explore hypotheticals as part of consideration in detail.

It is a question that people have asked me. If someone has a complaint or concern about the inspector, what process would they go through?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no public interface between members of the public and the inspector. The inspector has the oversight role over the commissioner.

J DAVIS: What if the commissioner has a complaint?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Would you like to elaborate on your hypothetical?

J DAVIS: If the commissioner alleged that the inspector was behaving in a way that was not appropriate in terms of their role.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It depends what that complaint could be.

Clause 23 agreed to.

Clause 24:

Ms UIBO: How many staff will the inspector's office have?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no staff attachment. The inspector's role is utilised when needed. Hypothetically, there could be an instance if there was some sort of investigation that they might need staff, but there is no staff allocation.

Ms UIBO: If there were to be staff, what skills and functions would be required for the inspector's office to support that role?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are suitability checks for the staff, if there were to be staff.

Ms UIBO: Will public officers be precluded from applying for jobs if there was the need in the inspector's office?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is in clause 32.

Ms UIBO: Will the budget for the office be the same as for the current ICAC inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, it is as needed because it depends on what work they have to do.

Ms UIBO: Will recommendations for improvement made by the inspector to the commissioner be made public?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, the inspector puts that in their annual report. If you look at the last one you will see various commentary.

Ms UIBO: Will that still be tabled?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, through the parliament.

Ms UIBO: Will the commissioner be required to respond to the recommendations and show action towards them, similar to when a minister has been provided perhaps a coronial and the government adopts or rejects of those recommendations? Would there be a requirement to show what they agree to and what they do not?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is operational, so they will have to work that out. If the inspector was to make a recommendation and the commissioner has to operationalise it all or make a response—to follow your analogy—like with a coronial, when the government looks at the report and what could be done it then decides which bits it can and cannot do. I hate to draw that analogy, but seeing as you raised it, it is similar.

The accountability measure, though, is that the inspector will report on it in the annual report, so if the commissioner had not done it everyone would know.

Ms UIBO: Thank you; that provides a bit of insight.

If a complaint is handled within the Auditor-General's or inspector's purview, would this also fall under the jurisdiction of the PSEMA, because the Auditor-General sits outside in that different box in the structure?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It just depends on the complaint. If it was a staff issue …

Ms UIBO: It would go to the CEO.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Because it comes under PSEMA—not for the Auditor-General; remember that the Auditor-General is separate.

Ms UIBO: If it was handled within the Auditor-General's Office, could a complaint about the work of the Auditor-General go to the commissioner?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If it was a complaint about improper conduct against the Auditor-General that would go to the inspector.

Ms UIBO: Thank you; that provides clarity. That is what I was looking for.

J DAVIS: Did you say that complaints about improper conduct of the Auditor-General would go to the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Clause 24 agreed to.

Clause 25:

Ms UIBO: Can you explain the former parties? Does this mean former commissioners and, if so, how far back do these powers extend?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As required; there is no limitation on how far back.

Clause 25 agreed to.

Clause 26:

Ms UIBO: What is the requirement for the inspector to brief or advise the minister of an investigation or the outcomes of an investigation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no requirement to report. The inspector has their annual report, but they also could report.

Ms UIBO: Do you mean the inspector could advise the minister, but there is no requirement?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no requirement; correct.

Ms UIBO: Will the inspector provide advice or recommendations to the minister about addressing the outcomes of an investigation or would that come later in the report?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Any recommendations would be in the report.

Ms UIBO: In a similar vein, could the inspector provide information if they chose to, as a heads-up?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Does the inspector have referral powers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: In the case of, say, a criminal matter would the referral powers go to the police?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes; that is all in clause 39.

Clause 26 agreed to.

Clause 27:

Ms UIBO: Are there clear criteria for the vetting process for the appointment of the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. Clause 27 sets out what an eligible person is.

Ms UIBO: Can they be a public officer?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No.

Ms UIBO: Will the recruitment process be open and transparent and available to the public to understand?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It will be public because it comes as a recommendation of the Assembly.

Ms UIBO: Does the panel make a decision that is recommended to the parliament?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. There has to be a vetting process. That likely is a panel, then that recommendation has to be brought to the Assembly, and the Assembly has to accept that recommendation. Then the Administrator will appoint them.

Ms UIBO: How are the panel members chosen, and will there be criteria for that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is an independent panel and there is a protocol for that.

Clause 27 agreed to.

Clauses 28 to 31, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 32:

Ms UIBO: If employed by an agency, how can the independence of a staff member be guaranteed? If this is a standard that is not applied to the inspector's staff, how will the commissioner deal with this?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is as required; the same provision is in the current ICAC Act. They must sign a confidential agreement with the inspector.

Ms UIBO: Does that entail a vetting process to manage any perceived or real conflicts?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that all must occur. It depends what type of staff the inspector would need, which would depend on what is happening. It is usually just administrative.

Clause 32 agreed to.

Clause 33:

Ms UIBO: Will staff or potential staff have background checks undertaken on partners or other family members?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The criteria are set out in clause 33, which is what it will be based on. It is the same as it is now under the ICAC Act.

Ms UIBO: As members of parliament we have members' interests and ministers have the ministerial code of conduct; would there be something similar with suitability checks for staff in regard to family or close friends?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It would be up to the inspector to some extent, but it would depend on the type of staff—usually it is administrative. There are lengthy criteria, which is the same as how it is now.

Clause 33 agreed to.

Clause 34:

Ms UIBO: In this clause there is wording in regard to encouraging honest and frank consideration. In everyday language—layman's terms—what does this clause aim to achieve?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is about the handling and storage of information. It is the same as it is in the ICAC Act; we have only updated the section number to correspond with the new sections.

Ms UIBO: Will this relate to all the acting commissioner components—their roles, duties and functionalities?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is only about the inspector.

Clause 34 agreed to.

Clause 35:

Ms UIBO: Will the inspector have powers to look at whether the commissioner is performing their full range of functions, that they are not just acting within a power but are fulfilling the entirety of the role and meeting community expectation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector does their annual report, and proposed subsection (2) says:

> *(a) whether the Commissioner … acted within power and in compliance with the Integrity Acts and any other relevant Acts or subordinate legislation; and*
>
> *(b) whether the Commissioner … has implemented any previous recommendations made by the Inspector …*

That goes to the earlier point you asked about: if the inspector was to make a recommendation and the commissioner did not do it, would we find out? This is that accountability piece.

Clause 35 agreed to.

Clause 36:

Ms UIBO: I want to be clear because the Chief Minister has alluded to this in different responses. Will there still be the annual report?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Clause 36 agreed to.

Clause 37:

Ms UIBO: Can you explain the definition of 'broad discretion' for this clause?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not see 'broad discretion' there, Opposition Leader. There is 'improper conduct or questionable conduct'.

Ms UIBO: Sorry; I wrote it down wrong.

Will there be public reporting on the number of complaints that are handled by the commission?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes; that is already a practice in the annual report and it will continue.

Clause 37 agreed to.

Clause 38:

Ms UIBO: Does 'premises' include people's homes if they work from home?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, IEC premises is defined in clause 3.

Ms UIBO: Does this include access to laptops and phones that may be stored or used at home or in a vehicle or something?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If it is for official use, yes.

Ms UIBO: Would this apply to all staff, including the administrative staff?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Clause 38 agreed to.

Clause 39:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 2 to clause 39.

Amendment agreed to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 3 to clause 39.

Amendment agreed to.

Ms UIBO: Can I check, Chair, when I can ask questions on the amended clause?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Before it is moved, I think.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. Have you finished the amendments?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Not all.

Ms UIBO: What is meant by raising matters 'to the attention of the Minister', and what is the purpose of that wording?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Which subclause are you on?

Ms UIBO: It is clause 39(4), which states:

> *If the Inspector is of the opinion that a matter needs to be brought to the attention of the Minister sooner than the next report under section 36 is due, the Inspector may make a report to the Minister.*

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is how it is currently under the ICAC Act. If the inspector feels it cannot wait for the annual report it can be done out of session, I suppose you could call it, in the intervening period.

Ms UIBO: Would that need action by the minister or is it just an information process?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The minister would table it in parliament instead of waiting for the annual report. For example, if it was provided to the minister in March, they would table it in the March sittings.

Ms UIBO: My follow-up question was about the obligation the minister has to act on that information. It is required that the minister table it in the Assembly.

Clause 39, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 40:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 4 to clause 40.

Amendment agreed to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 5 to clause 40.

Amendment agreed to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 6 to clause 40.

Amendment agreed to.

Ms UIBO: Will these decisions about the resolution of any conflict of interest be made public?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No.

Ms UIBO: Given that they will not be made public, what confidence can the public have that they are managed effectively?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector has that oversight function, and they deal with what happens next when it is raised.

J DAVIS: The commissioner's role is to self-identify conflicts. What mechanisms exist if the commissioner fails to do so?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would result in a conduct issue.

J DAVIS: Who would determine that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector.

Clause 40, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 41:

Ms UIBO: How will this work in practice with no oversight of the Judicial Commission?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is currently how it is. The Judicial Commission is separate. It will stay separate; we do not want to bring the Judicial Commission under that umbrella.

Ms UIBO: Are any other safeguards or mechanisms in place so that the commission does not undermine the integrity or the independence of the Judicial Commission?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is why they are separate, to make sure.

Clause 41 agreed to.

Clause 42, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 43:

J DAVIS: Why may the inspector at any time evaluate the Auditor-General when the evaluation of other commissioners is annually?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is because that would force it to be annual, and it is just as needed.

J DAVIS: There are examples in the clause, but can you elaborate on what 'any aspect of the Auditor-General's operations' could include?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The examples are set out in the proposed section:

> *Timeliness of reports, use of resources, management of contractors and compliance with statutory reporting and accountability obligations.*

For example, if there is an obligation for the Auditor-General to do an annual report by a certain time, the inspector could check on that.

J DAVIS: You also made reference to improper conduct. Are you happy to talk about that here or at clause 45?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: At clause 45.

Clause 43 agreed to.

Clause 44, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 45:

J DAVIS: Can you give examples of what improper or questionable conduct of the Auditor-General might encompass?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. 'Questionable conduct' is defined in clause 3 at the front of the Bill. 'Improper conduct' is defined in the ICAC Act.

J DAVIS: Will the Auditor-General now be under the same conditions as the current ICAC Act?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, and they already are.

J DAVIS: Can you define 'a member of the Auditor-General's staff'? Does that include people who are subcontracted or outsourced by the Auditor-General?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is defined in clause 3.

Ms UIBO: What other examples of complaints would fall under this clause if they are not audit judgements, methodologies or opinions of the Auditor-General?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is administrative governance-type things.

Clause 45 agreed to.

Clause 46:

Ms UIBO: What processes or tools can the inspector access under this clause?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is the same as he currently has under the ICAC Act.

Ms UIBO: What notice does the inspector have to give the Auditor-General's Office if he or she wants to inspect the premises and information?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is standard, as per the current ICAC Act.

Ms UIBO: Are the homes of staff members of the Auditor-General's Office also included under this proposed section?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: 'Auditor-General's premises' is defined further on in this clause:

> *Auditor-General's premises means premises occupied by the Auditor-General, members of the Auditor-General's staff or the Auditor-General's Office in connection with the performance of official functions.*

Therefore, it is on official matters.

Ms UIBO: If they are working from home, would that fall under that duty?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Clause 46 agreed to.

Clause 47:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 7 to clause 47.

Amendment agreed to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 8 to clause 47.

Amendment agreed to.

Ms UIBO: Can you provide the detail of the process for appointing an acting ICAC?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is in clause 59. We are on clause 47, Further powers of Inspector.

Ms UIBO: Does the inspector appoint the acting ICAC?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: I assume there are set criteria to manage conflicts of interest if a public officer is appointed as the acting ICAC?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, that is correct. The acting commissioner has to follow the same processes as the commissioner would; they stand in those shoes, so everything applies. The inspector is the person responsible for advising on conflict management and what happens from that point of being advised about the conflict.

Ms UIBO: Why would the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner not then undertake the investigation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is because the inspector does not have the same coercive-type powers as the commissioner does. The inspector does not inherently have those powers, so if they are required to be the acting commissioner they will need to assume those powers as well.

Clause 47, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 48:

Ms UIBO: Does this clause relate to any person or only public officials?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector—because they do not have the same powers as the commissioner—has that authority only over the staff. It could not be a member of the public, for example.

Ms UIBO: Can the staff acquire legal representation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of course.

Ms UIBO: Does the commissioner have these powers as well, in regard to what the inspector holds when it comes to legislation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you mean can the commissioner compel people to answer questions and all those things?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Under the ICAC Act, the powers of the commissioner are significant. They are not being changed by this clause.

Clause 48 agreed to.

Clause 49, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 50:

Ms UIBO: Can any person be required to produce documents or items to the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is the same, so just within his jurisdiction, which is the staff.

Ms UIBO: Is there an opportunity to have it in the Act or is it just set out so that it is only the staff?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It might not look like it at this point, but the inspector's roles, powers and responsibilities are clearly defined. This is almost identical to what is in the ICAC Act. All we did was change a bit of wording in subclause (4) to reflect subsection (3).

Clause 50 agreed to.

Clause 51, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 52:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 9 to clause 52.

Ms UIBO: I am fine with the amendment, but I want to clarify whether it relates to staff and contractors.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Earlier you asked me whether the inspector has staff. I said on a case-by-case basis, and we went through the criteria for the staff and those types of things. This is just assistance from those staff, not the staff of the commission. Does that clarify it?

Ms UIBO: If someone was brought into that role in the inspector's office, would it still cover them?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is who it would cover, yes.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 52, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 53, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 54:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 10 to clause 54.

Ms UIBO: If the inspector fails to disclose actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest, what falls on them as the penalty?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It requires stringent conflict identification and management. If it was not disclosed, it would be a conduct issue, like in the earlier example we used for the commissioner.

Ms UIBO: Is there a set penalty if they fail to disclose?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is a power to terminate the inspector's position, so I guess that would be an available option.

Ms UIBO: Does an acting integrity officer have the same eligibility terms and conditions as the inspector?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Eligibility for the integrity officer is separate, and dealt with a little later.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 54, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 55:

Ms UIBO: How is the inspector's use, communication or publication of protected information oversighted?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is straight from the ICAC Act.

Ms UIBO: It does not change any of the protected information, so will it still have an oversight mechanism?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think we changed it to 'exercise'. There was a different word and the drafters said it was better to use 'exercise'.

Clause 55 agreed to.

Clause 56:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 11 to clause 56.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 56, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 57, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 58:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 12 to clause 58.

Ms UIBO: Can a public officer be appointed, even though they are precluded from being a commissioner? Is this consistent?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, they can be a public officer because it is temporary.

J DAVIS: This is about all the acting integrity commissioners, and the McClintock report recommended they be statutory appointments. Am I asking this in the right clause?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know what the confusion is, Member for Johnston, and it is understandable. When we talk about the commissioners, it is the commissioner—the one Integrity and Ethics Commissioner—because they will be fulfilling the role of the health complaints commissioner, the ICAC Commissioner; all those different roles is one. It is separate in the Act because it has to pull it together, but this is not a reference to the assistant commissioners who sit underneath the commissioner. This is when wearing the hat of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner.

J DAVIS: Am I correct in understanding that there is no statutory authority for any commissioner, including acting commissioners, in this Bill?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Acting commissioners and the commissioner are statutory. It is the assistant commissioners who are not.

J DAVIS: Are acting commissioners statutory in the Bill?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 58, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 59:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 13 to clause 59.

Amendment agreed to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 14 to clause 59.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr PAECH: I am filling in for the Leader of the Opposition for a moment.

How does the acting ICAC interact with the inspector and vice versa?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is the same. If there is an acting ICAC, all the powers of the inspector apply to them as well. All the powers are vested in the acting and, therefore, the inspector has their powers as well.

Mr PAECH: Does the inspector have the same powers in relation to an acting ICAC as they have with the commissioner? Where is that dealt with in the legislation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I may have caused confusion. This acting ICAC component is for when there is a conflict on a particular matter, so there can be an acting ICAC for only that particular matter. They can just deal with that one thing.

Mr PAECH: I want to understand the mechanism for communicational reporting to the public when there are acting ICAC commissioners?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is exactly the same as under the ICAC Act now.

Mr PAECH: There are no changes; it is the same communication.

Clause 59, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 60:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 15 to clause 60.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr PAECH: Is this just effectively setting up another ICAC outside of the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner's office? Is this duplication?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it is just for a specific matter where that conflict has been identified by the inspector.

Clause 60, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 61:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 16 to clause 61.

Mr PAECH: This may be the same response to the question I asked about clause 60. Is this not just effectively doubling up, requiring the establishment of a separate Information Commissioner body full of

acting Information Commissioners, particularly given the likelihood of conflicts of interest arising with the IEC, given his or her broad sweeping functions and powers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is the same. Clauses 61 and 62 relate to the acting Ombudsman and the acting Information Commissioner, so it covers off on all of the reform piece to bring them all in. It is not a duplication; it is there to deal with that conflict matter so that the commissioner can continue to do all the other work, and that piece of work is carved off and given to someone else who can manage it and complete it. Then that is the end of that process.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 61, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 62:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 17 to clause 62.

Ms UIBO: Is this a doubling up of the requirement that is established with the separate Ombudsman function and an acting Ombudsman, particularly the likelihood of conflicts of interest arising with the IEC, given his or her broad sweeping functions and powers?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: These provisions are the same as the ones we just went through. It is for when a conflict has been raised with the inspector and someone else is appointed to do that specific piece of work, so the acting role is specific to that particular investigation.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 62, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 63:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 18 to clause 63.

Amendment agreed to.

J DAVIS: I am still unclear about an answer for the previous clause—all the things under the acting commissioners. Where do I ask about assistant commissioners? I understood that you said they are statutory appointments, but I cannot see that reflected anywhere in the Bill.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I said that the acting is statutory. The acting and the commissioner are; the assistants are not.

Clause 63, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 64:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 19 to clause 64.

Ms UIBO: Does this clause apply to all acting ICACs, acting Ombudsmen and acting Information Commissioners?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is correct.

Ms UIBO: I heard your answer to the Member for Gwoja's question. Will this be only when someone is acting for one complaint?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: How will the cost of the ICAC, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner be managed when there may be a full-time role and an acting role when there is an individual complaint that needs to be dealt with separately? Will this conflate some of the budget?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Those agencies already have to outsource. This is just another way of doing it that brings it in line with the legislation. It is a much more transparent way of doing it rather than having them contract someone to do it.

Ms UIBO: Will the IEC be expected to manage all these acting appointments within the budget; or would they be similar to the normal budget process of having to ask for special purpose money?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is normal. I will give you an example. The commissioner would have done it but for the conflict. It is work that was already on their desk that they have decided needs to be done, but that particular person cannot do the work. It is not additional because it is work they would do; it just cannot be done by that person. There is a proper process to work out who that person could be and what powers they have, then they complete the work and it is resolved.

Ms UIBO: The point is to check that there will not be work that is not completed because of budget pressures and measures. If the commission is over budget it will not have to drop a complaint because it is paying for an extra position for that one case.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is not about budget; it is about having a more transparent way to appoint the acting integrity officer.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 64, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 65, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 66:

Ms UIBO: Does this cover off on all the acting ICACs, Ombudsmen and information commissioners?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, and this is how it is in the ICAC Act. It clearly says, though:

This section does not apply in relation to the Inspector.

Clause 66 agreed to.

Clause 67:

Ms UIBO: Can you explain 'ineffective appointment' or one of the technical defects?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is a current provision in the ICAC Act. It could be like a clerical error or a typo.

Ms UIBO: Is there anything in the legislation about remedying technical defects or ineffective appointments?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For example, if the certificate of appointment or something like that had the name spelled wrong, it would not invalidate the appointment. It is just that kind of stuff.

Clause 67 agreed to.

Clause 68:

Ms UIBO: What is meant by 'certain registers'?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We are on clause 68, which states:

(1) The Administrator may make regulations …

(2) A regulation may provide for one or more registers to be kept by the Commissioner or the Inspector.

It is a standard provision.

Ms UIBO: Who would compile or keep those registers? Is that through the IEC?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is not one at the moment, but there could be in the future.

Ms UIBO: It says that it will be kept by the commissioner or the inspector. I do not want to do hypotheticals, but if it was by the inspector about the commissioner, I assume the register would be kept in the inspector's office to have separation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Where it is kept would be an operational matter.

Ms UIBO: Or the inspector role—and they can keep it where they want to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Would the registers be made public?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Regulations are public. If there were any they would be public.

Clause 68 agreed to.

Clause 69, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 70:

Ms UIBO: Can the inspector have been a public officer of some kind within the 12-month period?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. The inspector cannot have been a public officer.

Clause 70 agreed to.

Clause 71:

Ms UIBO: What is the decision-making for old matters to be reopened?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a discretion the inspector has.

Ms UIBO: If something was brought to the attention of the inspector could they choose to reopen it?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, it is within their discretionary power to do that.

Clause 71 agreed to.

Clause 72:

Ms UIBO: Why would they not just go to the new IEC Commissioner in the first instance, rather than the ICAC?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They will be. These are all the transitional moving pieces to get this to come together. If the ICAC Commissioner was investigating the Ombudsman, for example, it would not be appropriate to come under that, so it would go to the inspector.

Ms UIBO: Can they go straight to the inspector if the ICAC is investigating?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, they will go straight—they will not come via; they will go around.

Ms UIBO: Would it relate to only complaints or investigations regarding the IEC-related entities?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes; correct.

Ms UIBO: It would not be broader than that, at all?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No.

Clause 72 agreed to.

Clause 73:

Ms UIBO: How will conflicts or disclosures be managed—for example, for the ICAC staff—if they will now be colleagues with the IEC-related entities and perhaps sharing offices and resources?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That will not have an implication because the inspector will conduct the investigation. We talked about this before; they are not the same people. If the inspector needed staff, they would not be those staff.

Clause 73 agreed to.

Clause 74:

Ms UIBO: What is the volume of continuing complaints the inspector will deal with? How will the inspector get on with any of the new workload?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are independent.

Ms UIBO: Will there be no impact on their workload?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We do not have visibility of that.

Ms UIBO: Would only the inspector have that information?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The inspector deals with the complaints. I do not know about them.

Ms UIBO: They would have to deal with that workload if they had a volume of complaints versus if they had no complaints.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, exactly; it is on that as-required basis.

Clause 74 agreed to.

Clause 75, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 76:

Ms UIBO: When will it likely commence?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The only thing that commences once the Bill has been assented to is the transitional provisions to allow the people holding those roles to continue to do that work. It will not commence until after we have a commissioner.

Clause 76 agreed to.

Clause 77:

Ms UIBO: When is the current Auditor-General's contract finishing?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: September 2029.

Clause 77 agreed to.

Clauses 78 to 90, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 91:

Ms UIBO: On what basis was the decision made to give the inspector the power to deal with complaints about the Auditor-General, given that the Auditor-General has different functions from other integrity bodies and is currently oversighted by us in the Legislative Assembly and the Public Accounts Committee?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: All this does is allow that evaluation to take place. The substantive component was in the previous sections where we talked about evaluation of the administrative governance-type matters, not the technical work that the Auditor-General does.

Ms UIBO: What consultation has been done on this clause?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: All of the Bill was consulted on with all the current integrity officers, if I can call them that.

Ms UIBO: How does this correlate to oversight arrangements for the Auditor-General in other jurisdictions in Australia?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is not part of the clause, and that is the decision that has been taken. We have discussed at great length where the line is on what can and cannot be done and how the Auditor-General sits outside.

Ms UIBO: I asked that question because we want to ensure that we have the most contemporary, modernised and up-to-date legislation and we wanted to see the comparison with the Northern Territory.

Clause 91 agreed to.

Clause 92:

Ms UIBO: Who makes the decision to suspend or terminate the appointment of the Auditor-General?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Administrator.

Ms UIBO: Is there an example of the grounds or criteria on which the Administrator could do that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is clearly set out in the clause. If the Auditor-General becomes physically or mentally incapable of satisfactorily performing the duties, engages in corrupt conduct or in paid employment outside of the duties of office or if there is absenteeism from duty for certain periods, misbehaviour or incompetence.

Ms UIBO: Would it only be the act of the Administrator for termination of the appointment or would it go to the PAC (Public Accounts Committee) or the Legislative Assembly for final decision? Would it sit purely with the Administrator?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is how it is in the *Audit Act*; we are not changing anything.

Clause 92 agreed to.

Clause 93, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 94:

Ms UIBO: What is the basis for an annual review when the standard is five years?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That was recommended in the report. Currently ours is every three years, not five years. It will be annual instead.

Ms UIBO: Is there a particular reason?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is an additional transparency and scrutiny mechanism to have it annually. The reason the report recommended it must be that three years was too long.

Clause 94 agreed to.

Clause 95:

Ms UIBO: Who decides on the external auditor?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Administrator appoints the external auditor.

Ms UIBO: Does the Administrator go through a process of vetting?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a procurement process.

Clause 95 agreed to.

Clauses 96 to 102, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 103:

Ms UIBO: What is the chief executive officer's role across the commission?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Their functions come under the PSEMA, which is obviously detailed in that Act. A CEO is dealing with the HR components, managing the staff, paying the bills and ensuring the office is functioning efficiently.

Ms UIBO: How will the separation of powers between the commissioner and the chief executive officer work in practice?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are different roles. Currently they have to be the one person. It is a different skill set to be a commissioner from being someone who manages the day-to-day operations of an agency and the staff. They are different functions. This separates them so that the commissioner can focus on investigation work and not have to worry about whether Mary called in sick or Jane paid the power bill and those types of things.

Clause 103 agreed to.

Clause 104:

Ms UIBO: How can Territorians have assurance that the CEO will not be influencing how the commissioner and other staff in the commission, particularly those in acting assistant commissioner roles, perform their function, given they can give directions to staff under the PSEMA?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There is no ability to do that because the PSEMA functions are different from the integrity functions, so there is no overlap.

Ms UIBO: Who is the staff members' boss? Is it the CEO or can the commissioner direct staff members too?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is split out depending on the function. If the commissioner is giving a task to do and it is an integrity function, it is the commissioner. If it is being asked to fill out a timesheet, it is the CEO. It depends on the task being asked.

Ms UIBO: Is there protection for staff if there are conflicting directions from the commissioner and the CEO for a staff member or a group of staff members?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is hard to think there would be that situation because the roles are fundamentally different. It should not happen.

Ms UIBO: Are there mechanisms to prevent the CEO from influencing the commissioner's functions if the CEO is the one to sign off on the budget, engaging consultants or perhaps external services?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The whole point is to give the commissioner better support so that they are not the one doing everything and have someone who can ensure it is all working well. If the commissioner needs external lawyers or investigators, it will be the CEO's job—because their whole job is to support the commissioner—to go off and make that happen. It is one aspiration for that agency; they are on the same team in what they are trying to achieve, but they have different functions to do that.

Ms UIBO: I make the point, thinking in a traditional sense, that the CEO manages the budget, department and staff so if they are hamstrung with that focus, would it leave the commissioner exposed and restricted on what budget they may use if they have requested an external service to perform their function or complete their investigation? Do you know what I mean? If the CEO says that it will cost too much so we will not do it—is there a process to make sure that does not happen?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I know what you mean, but it is about managing the priorities which is led by the commissioner.

Ms UIBO: Ultimately, the commissioner requests those services and resources and they would get that from the CEO regardless of the budget.

Clause 104 agreed to.

Clause 105, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 106:

Ms UIBO: What provisions, terms and conditions of appointment apply to the assistant commissioners?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The assistant commissioners are not in the legislation. We have dealt with the acting and the commissioner, but the assistant commissioners are not in the legislation because they are PSEMA.

Clause 106 agreed to.

Clauses 107 to 110, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 111:

Ms UIBO: What assurances can Territorians have about the separation of powers for decision-making between the CEO who will have a specific duty in the commission and the commissioner who will have a series of roles, responsibilities and functions to perform?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are fundamentally different functions and there is no overlap. They are the same team, but with different jobs.

Clause 111 agreed to.

Clause 112:

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I move amendment 20 to clause 112.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 112, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 113 to 116, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 117:

Ms UIBO: Can you explain how staff members will be expected to take directions from both the commissioner and the CEO—this is similar to a previous question, but bear with me—in regard to the practice and staff positioning of their duties, particularly if they are working in different assistant commissioner support roles?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For clarity, there is the CEO to run the agency and the team and the commissioner controls all the investigative work. Those channels will just come down to the staff as you would expect.

Clause 117 agreed to.

Clauses 118 to 130, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 131:

Ms UIBO: You earlier commented that the assistant commissioner roles are not in the legislation, so can you explain how the delegation for those roles would exist?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The commissioner will have control of what that structure looks like and who is doing what. It is important. That is why it will not commence until we have the commissioner because the commissioner needs to make sure that the agency is fit for purpose to deliver all those integrity functions and outcomes and continue to maintain service delivery across the spectrum.

Ms UIBO: If an assistant commissioner has a complaint against them, where would that be directed?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: To the inspector.

Clause 131 agreed to.

Clauses 132 and 133, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 134:

Ms UIBO: Can you explain why this is excluded?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is to make sure that the inspector cannot meddle in the work that they are doing. The inspector cannot just come along and say, 'Let me have a look at that one. What are you doing there?' It is to make sure there is a proper process.

Clause 134 agreed to.

Clause 135, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 136:

Ms UIBO: How will this work in practice? How can Territorians be assured that their confidentiality will be maintained through this transition and in highly sensitive material that will be delegated through the different functions into the one commission?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This clause is specifically to ensure the integrity of that information is kept confidential.

Ms UIBO: Would penalties apply if that material was not kept confidential?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That would be a conduct issue if someone had the file and said, 'Would you like to see this file, lady walking past me?', or any breach like that.

Ms UIBO: Just to confirm, because there will be a transition period, will each of the responsible Acts stay intact unless there are any changes from this legislation?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is right. They will still stay quarantined in their existing roles.

Ms UIBO: I am just making sure—it is clear that our public servants are professional—that no Acts will fall away under this. It will combine them, as opposed to anything becoming a gap.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes; correct.

Clause 136 agreed to.

Clauses 137 to 151, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Schedule 1, by leave, agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill now be read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

TEACHER REGISTRATION (NORTHERN TERRITORY) LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 41

Continued from 16 October 2025.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 seeks to amend information-sharing arrangements, broaden the scope of teacher registration to include early childhood educators and amend the registration requirements and standards to include languages other than English. The Bill also amends powers of the minister and the Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Training in relation to the functions and responsibilities of the Teacher Registration Board.

There are several aspects of this Bill that Territory Labor broadly supports, which I will first speak to.

Child safety and information sharing is of the utmost importance when it comes to childcare, classrooms and, of course, our teachers. Strengthening child safety measures in schools and early childhood services is critical for safer outcomes for the Northern Territory. The broader information-sharing arrangements in this Bill expand the board's powers to enable it to be more proactive and vigilant in protecting kids from harm. The board will also be able to share information with regulatory authorities and other registration authorities to prevent harm or manage risks of harm.

The opposition unequivocally supports strengthening measures to increase child safety within our education system. That is a united goal across the country at a time when we have had horrific incidents of harm to and abuse of very young children. Parents across the Territory deserve to know that when they drop off their kids at childcare, they will come home safe and happy at the end of the day. Devastatingly, the Northern Territory is not immune from these concerns, and sadly our communities have felt the impact in our childcare centres. We know that regulation of childcare centres is a national and local concern. Safety of children is paramount. Childcare centres should be a place of safety, learning and joy.

Territorians need to be able to trust that our education sector's systems, policies and legislation prioritise child safety and take measures to protect kids. The opposition welcomes efforts to strengthen the board and proactively disclose information to regulatory authorities in order to prevent harm.

Territory Labor fully backs efforts to improve oversight and regulation of this sector. Under Labor, the 2023 *Education Act* amendments commenced work to improve child safety and wellbeing in schools and contemporise registration and assessment processes.

We support the aspects of this Bill that improve information sharing in order to improve child safety. Measures like this must continue to be built on to protect children in the Northern Territory.

Protecting children is everyone's business. We welcomed the decision to send this Bill to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, of which I am a member, but it is a great shame that this process, rarely used by the CLP, was not done in a way that maximised its purpose. A significant theme that emerged from witness testimony in the scrutiny committee process was their unease and disappointment regarding the consultation process. Multiple witnesses felt the timeframe in which to meaningfully engage in the scrutiny process was poor and limited.

If the CLP was serious about child safety and implementing real and lasting measures to better protect Territory kids, you would think it would have taken the scrutiny process seriously. This Bill is one of only eight or nine out of hundreds that could have been sent to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee. It is yet another example of this government's poor consultation on legislation. The CLP says that it wants better outcomes for our children, but its actions spell something different. The short timeframe for stakeholders, witnesses and experts to engage and participate in the legislative scrutiny process failed to allow for genuine, comprehensive and culturally appropriate input.

I am on that committee and heard firsthand the concerns about elements of this Bill, but because of the time restrictions and rushed processes there was little opportunity for wide-ranging consultation with the sector that will be impacted the most by this Bill. A number of elements in the Bill need further consultation, consideration and feedback from Territorians to ensure that the proposed amendments are fit for purpose.

I will step through these concerns. Territory Labor believes that there should be the appropriate recognition, oversight, registration and support for hardworking staff in early childhood education and care. Strengthening the teacher registration network is essential to building a foundation upon which child safety standards can be taken seriously.

All of our early childhood education staff deserve to be recognised professionally alongside their peers. The preparation and delivery of high-quality education and care for our youngsters is tough and nuanced work. Our teachers need to be recognised and supported for their skills and expertise.

This Bill introduces the one-teacher, one-profession model. This means that registration of early childhood educators will now be brought under the same umbrella as primary and secondary teachers.

Territory Labor holds concerns that this model might not be fit for purpose in the NT. The opposition is concerned that early childhood educators will not be specifically recognised as professionals specialising in early learning and development. At a time when Commonwealth laws are being introduced to increase regulation this is risky. We believe further consultation with the sector is required to understand whether the one-teacher, one-profession model is fit for purpose in the Northern Territory.

Where was the CLP consultation on how this model should be implemented for the NT? Has the CLP sought feedback from stakeholders on how this model will impact the sector? The short timeframe of and limited number of witnesses in the legislative scrutiny process was not good enough.

The opposition heard concerns from stakeholders about potential adverse outcomes the one-teacher, one-profession model will have on early childhood educators' registration. The proposed model may impact on the already low number of early childhood educators as it provides flexibility for them to move into the school setting.

Teaching is a regulated profession, and it comes with benchmarks for entry that take into account the complexity of the jobs in schools. The intensity of classroom educating, providing safe and conducive learning environments for kids of all abilities is part of the territory, especially for those students who need extra assistance and who may be struggling with learning challenges, have mental health concerns or disabilities or live in remote communities. This intensity will not alleviate.

The opposition believes that this government has more work to do to hear from the stakeholders about nuances relating to registration standards for early childhood educators and primary and secondary teachers.

The education accreditation framework is based on consultation and agreement across jurisdictions about the appropriate standards and requirements for teachers to become registered and certified, ready to teach and be in those complex classroom environments. The fundamental requirements for teacher registration have been established to make sure the board has confidence in who is in the classroom so that parents have confidence that the person teaching their child is qualified and capable. The framework sets standards to ensure that educators have the skills and expertise fundamental to teaching in early childhood education settings. Any dilution of this framework and registration process will not prepare new teachers for the complexity and intensity of the work.

The one-teacher, one-profession model setting could fail our educators. The CLP does not know whether this model is the right path. It has failed to do the appropriate consultation and engagement with the sector to find out. It has failed to listen to stakeholders who raised these concerns in the public scrutiny hearing.

Territory Labor heard from stakeholders and witnesses at the public hearing that they support and recommend a distinct early childhood specialist registration category rather than one teacher, one profession. This approach would recognise early childhood development training and qualifications separately to that of primary and secondary teachers.

The CLP government needs to consult with Territorians to know whether the measures in this Bill are enough to ensure that the NT's legislative requirements meet the National Quality Framework standards for early childhood education. Will this model be enough? Will it allow for improvements to the regulation of early childhood education and services that we desperately need?

One of the biggest alarm bells in this Bill is the blurring of the impartiality and independence of the Teacher Registration Board. The TRB's mandate is to drive the quality, profession and status of the teaching profession in the Northern Territory. This is critical to every student's educational progress and achievement. Given its responsibility for registering and authorising teachers and managing professional conduct matters, it is crucial that the TRB can operate free from political or bureaucratic interference and influence.

The opposition does not support the TRB sitting within the Department of Education and Training rather than operating as a standalone entity. Territory Labor does not support the increased and legislative ministerial powers.

The CLP claims that these changes will clarify functions and responsibilities; however, there is little evidence to support that claim. If the minister has the evidence, I strongly encourage her to share it with us. If this is

nothing more than a cost-cutting exercise at the expense of a strong independent TRB, she should be honest about that.

The minister has not done any consultation or work to ensure the necessary independence of the TRB will be maintained under this new structure. It is yet another example of the government's disregard for integrity, accountability and transparency.

Stakeholders continue to raise serious concerns about the regulatory intent of this Bill. For example, the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory had these concerns:

> *While the Director is accountable to the Board for statutory functions, this dual reporting line create ambiguity and potential conflict, particularly when regulatory decisions involved departmental employees or intersect with broader departmental interests.*
>
> *This structure does not sufficiently separate the regulation of teachers from the operations of the Department. It risks compromising the transparency and impartiality of the TRB …*

Essentially, this Bill means that the regulator will be regulating itself.

The independence of the TRB from the department of Education and the minister is crucial. The Department of Education and Training is the largest employer of teachers in the Territory. How can the community have confidence that it will be able to separate its dual roles, managing the teaching workforce at the same time as regulating?

It is another example of CLP legislation that erodes public and professional confidence in the government's integrity and commitment to accountability. The CLP needs to do the work to understand why it is important that the Northern Territory has an independent regulatory body that is separate from the department of Education and is adequately resourced.

As it stands, Territory Labor has no confidence that the governance structure or risk mitigation framework exist for when the minister gets involved. We have heard nothing about how the CLP will reassure the community that robust risk management strategies will be in place to ensure that the Teacher Registration Board's integrity and independence remain. This is the type of governance that Territorians have come to expect.

Labor supports the increased flexibility and broader pathways into teaching registration through mechanisms like the authority-to-teach exemptions. Although Territory Labor supports the streamlining of administrative processes, such as the expansion of the renewal period of authority-to-teach exemptions from 12 months to two years, we are concerned that there will be unintended consequences from aspects of the authority-to-teach amendments.

Territory Labor has been and will continue to be a strong advocate for the invaluable contribution of Aboriginal Territorians in our education system. We cannot afford to take our foot off the gas when it comes to recognising and supporting the strengths that our teachers, especially Aboriginal teachers, bring to Territory remote classrooms. Supporting accessible, engaged and quality learning means targeted investment in infrastructure, workforce, training and career pathways as well as wellbeing.

I am concerned that reliance on the authority-to-teach exemptions may provide greater avenues for pathways to employment for Aboriginal language specialists in remote communities in the short term but be detrimental in the long term. We want Aboriginal teachers, especially in remote communities, to become qualified teachers and teacher assistants with the professional supports in place to lead greater employment equity. If the right structures and supports are not in place to monitor the use of these exemptions in remote communities this amendment could hinder local employment. We want more supported pathways for Aboriginal Territorians into the education workforce in remote communities. Supporting local employment drives stability, equity, sustainable service delivery and long-term investments in communities.

We support this amendment but reiterate that it needs to be accompanied by a robust structure for decision-making. The department of Education needs to work with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to establish recognised and culturally informed accreditation processes. Territorians, teachers and the education sector need further clarification about how the authority-to-teach exemptions will impact assessments. How will applicants know they are being assessed for an exemption? What is the renewal process for exemptions? What do these changes mean on the ground in practical terms?

Labor supports the Bill and we are working with the government, but we must ensure that these amendments are robust and meaningful. Amendments that lack detail, operational clarity and robust consultation with the sector are concerning. We support greater flexibility to increase teacher workforce for those with specialist subjects, but there needs to be clear, transparent and publicly accessible benchmarks to ensure consistency and fairness.

Labor supports this Bill in principle. We are supportive of the measures to strengthen child safety such as increased information-sharing options.

A number of elements require considerably more consultation to ensure that this Bill is fit for purpose. Amendments such as those to the exemptions need to be carefully worked through to limit the unintended consequences for our remote education workforce. Territory Labor strongly advocates against an arms-length TRB model that could compromise the independence and impartiality needed for a regulatory body.

It is important to recognise the amazing contributions of all our education staff across the Northern Territory.

Through the Legislative Scrutiny Committee process we learned that the department of Education has no formal recognition or qualification for language speakers. We have an amazing opportunity to embed that relationship with the department of Education and the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to formally recognise those educators in our schools for a number of reasons, including opportunities for development and employment. Recognising them as fluent Aboriginal interpreters not only gives them a greater opportunity for jobs in their local community; it also gives parents a clear understanding that their children are being spoken to in mother tongue—their appropriate language—to the highest standard. It is alarming that the department of Education has no formal process other than schools individually having to say that they are satisfied.

This is an important opportunity for the Education department to work with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service to formalise a process to recognise the skills of our educators who teach in First Nations language across the Territory so that they can work in schools and be interpreters for health matters and in the court system and the local government space.

I acknowledge that the Legislative Scrutiny Committee did an amazing job in a short timeframe to pull this together to have submissions and hearings. I thank the members of the secretariat for all their work. I acknowledge the bipartisanship of the committee in working within that timeframe.

There are many aspects of the Bill we support and there are areas we have concerns about.

While we are talking about teacher registration let us acknowledge our educators, principals, teachers, assistant teachers, Families as First Teachers staff and support staff across every Territory school. They all do an amazing job every day to support kids to have the best chance at a bigger and brighter future through education. Education is the way that we can change the trajectory of our Territory. There is an opportunity for all Territorians to participate in the education space.

Through this process the opposition talked to teachers across the Northern Territory. Thank you for everything you do. We see you, we hear you and we value you.

A number of changes in this legislation will streamline processes and make it easier. The safety of Territory children is paramount. Letting more Aboriginal staff into schools and classrooms is not a bad thing. It will not jeopardise a child's safety; it is embedding cultural safety principles to help our children have the best chance. The rigorous processes already in place will remain when this Bill passes, ensuring that every person going into a Territory school has the appropriate checks to ensure that kids at school are safe every day.

I thank all the people from education institutions, facilities and organisations who came to the committee to give testimony. I thank the Territory's education unions for standing up to support our hardworking teachers.

The hearing was a great opportunity to learn about the wonderful makeup of the Northern Territory education system. Private schools, public schools, faith-based schools, independent schools and homeland schools all play an important role in shaping the future of our next generation of Territorians.

I acknowledge the hard work of the department of Education.

I give a shout-out to the people on the Teacher Registration Board. They do a huge volume of work, assessing and looking at complaints and registrations.

I thank the members of the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for participating in the process. Important work was done respectfully by everyone. We agreed on a number of aspects of the inquiry, and I provided a dissenting report only to ensure that the voices of people who gave testimony were not lost by elevating their concerns about the short timeframes. Some people felt it risked cultural safety because they did not have enough time to talk to their communities and stakeholders beyond the boundaries of the greater Darwin region. Thank you again to my fellow committee members.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, I believe that the 2025 amendments in the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill mark a pivotal moment for education in the Territory.

These amendments show that our government takes teacher registration and child safety seriously, which may come as a refreshing change for those of us who recall when registering a teacher seemed about as consistent as a fully functioning sprinkler system in the Dry Season under the previous Labor administration. This Bill reaffirms our government's deep commitment to child safety, professional excellence and the future strength of our teaching workforce.

At its core, this Bill mandates the registration of all early childhood teachers by the end of 2026, strengthening child safety in the earliest, most formative years of education. By ensuring that every educator in early childhood settings meets stringent registration criteria, we are protecting our most vulnerable children from unqualified or unsuitable persons having access to childcare and learning environments. This move is not merely bureaucratic; it is fundamental to the duty we owe every child entrusted to our schools and services.

Beyond registration, the Bill advances critical reforms facilitating improved information sharing. The Teacher Registration Board will be empowered to exchange registration information with relevant regulatory bodies across jurisdictions if there is a reasonable belief that it will prevent harm to a child.

This addresses a troubling loophole highlighted by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which exposed how lack of communication between teacher registration authorities allowed some individuals to evade scrutiny by moving between states and territories. Our amendments decisively close this gap, fostering a culture of transparency and rapid action to protect children no matter where they learn.

Governance is also clarified and strengthened. The Bill better defines the minister's policy-setting powers and the chief executive's role in managing the TRB's performance, all while preserving the board's independence in regulating the profession. This clear separation of powers and accountability ensures the board operates with integrity and effectiveness, free from undue influence while still being supported by the Department of Education and Training.

It is important to know that national consistency is a guiding principle of these reforms. By aligning minimum qualifications, currency of practice and English language proficiency with the Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia, the Northern Territory aligns itself fully with national standards. This framework—agreed upon by all Education ministers in 2024—guarantees that our teachers are professionally equipped and culturally responsive to meet contemporary educational demands.

Moreover, the Bill introduces a two-way registration system—provisional and full registration. This system supports new graduates and those returning to teaching with structured, supervised induction periods before granting full registration, ensuring that teachers are fully prepared to provide high-quality education from day one. This protects students and bolsters confidence in our teaching workforce.

Importantly, the amendments modernise the language and inclusivity of our laws by replacing 'foreign language' with 'language other than English', explicitly recognising Aboriginal languages as specialist subjects. This change facilitates employment authorities for unregistered persons teaching Aboriginal languages where registered teachers are unavailable or do not have the appropriate knowledge, supporting the cultural and linguistic richness of our region while providing pathways for Aboriginal educators to become fully registered under programs like Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education, or RATE as many people know it.

Currently, approximately 5,500 teachers are registered, with more than 200 unregistered but authorised to teach. This means 4% of our teaching workforce operates under employment authorities, many of whom teach specialist subjects such as vocational education or Aboriginal languages. This Bill removes outdated expiry limitations for these authorities, streamlining processes, reducing administrative burden—which many of you know is my favourite thing to do—and allowing authorities to be tailored to employment terms for up to two years. These changes promote flexibility without compromising the quality or safety of teaching.

Child safety remains the cornerstone of these reforms. It seems that previous efforts to safeguard our children and regulate our teachers were, shall we say, still in provisional registration mode, whereas this government is committed to full registration, accountability and protection.

The legislation protects whistleblowers and encourages a culture where safeguarding students is paramount. The enhanced powers of the TRB to manage complaints, conduct investigations and share critical information ensure that those who seek to compromise our children will be identified and prevented from teaching. The royal commission's warnings about inconsistent information sharing are addressed squarely, reducing risk and enhancing protective oversight.

Additionally, there are benefits to a closer relationship between the department of Education and the TRB, with enhancements in support and staffing services, the streamlining of processes and understanding the teacher workforce and existing support for teachers.

The intent is to preserve the independence of the TRB and the director of the TRB with respect to their statutory roles in regulating the teaching profession. We are attempting to provide more clarity on the separation of powers. It is not changing anything specifically in the Act; it is making it obvious that there is a clear separation between employees and the board under the PSEMA, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the CE and the minister.

These amendments align with the minimum qualification, currency of practice and English language proficiency requirements of the Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia. The adoption of this framework was agreed by all Education ministers in September 2024. Under these reforms, only early childhood teachers who meet the minimum requirements in the framework will be eligible for registration.

This Bill is not just administrative reform. These amendments commit to this government's desire to cut red tape and reduce the administrative burden for teachers and education staff, honouring our government's promise to minimise administrative burdens on our frontline workers. Those who remember my maiden speech will recall my passion and commitment for reducing the administrative burden for all frontline staff, which definitely includes teachers, school staff and staff in the Department of Education and Training.

Efficient registration processes and clear regulatory expectations mean teachers can focus on what truly matters—educating our children in safe, supportive and inspiring environments.

These amendments embody a comprehensive reform agenda. They deliver strong child safety measures, elevate professional standards, reconnect governance responsibilities with clear roles and foster inclusivity through recognition of Aboriginal languages and diverse teaching pathways.

This Bill is a robust framework that protects our children, supports our teachers and strengthens the backbone of education in the Northern Territory. It is a commitment to students, parents, carers and teachers across the Territory that education and child safety is a foundation for a strong, vibrant community.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I also support this Bill. It is important legislation.

I support the committee's recommendation that the Bill be passed. As members may know, I submitted a dissenting report, or what I sometimes like to call an additional report, to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee. That report was not about opposing the Bill; it was about making sure that the voices of the people this Bill most affects are heard—the voices of teachers, principals, unions, Aboriginal educators and sector representatives—and that the issues they raised were not lost in that final report.

There are matters that need attention as the government moves into implementation, and I will briefly touch on some of them.

I acknowledge that education is one of the most important responsibilities we have as a parliament, and at the heart of it all are teachers. Their professionalism, cultural knowledge and commitment to our Territory children are the backbone of our education system. Any legislative change we make must strengthen the profession, not complicate or undermine it.

Throughout the inquiry, stakeholders raised many issues. When I went through the submissions and when we held the inquiry I counted 13 separate issues, and only a few of these were captured in our recommendations. Although we captured things like equivalency criteria, information-sharing guidance and

English proficiency, there were many other things we did not cover. These include there being no early childhood specialist registration category; concerns about conditional registration; the risks in lowering qualification standards; the need for flexibility in the transition period; alternative pathways for Aboriginal language and VET teachers; there being no requirement for Aboriginal community consultation; there being no formal Indigenous language proficiency framework; questions about the independence of the board; the need for an implementation plan; and concerns about the rushed consultation overall. These points came directly from people working on the ground, and we owe it to them to take their views seriously.

One issue raised by several witnesses was the need for flexibility in the 12-month transitional exemption period. Some witnesses said that would not be an issue for them, but they understood it may be for others. What works in an urban school does not always work in a remote one. Many teachers in remote communities rely on bridging or equivalency pathways, and for some of them 12 months will not be long enough. People suggested a targeted extension option used only when needed so that we could support those teachers without slowing down the reform for everyone else.

Another issue raised was the lack of a formal framework for assessing Aboriginal language proficiency. This Bill recognises Aboriginal languages as specialist subjects, which is welcome; however, recognition is not enough if there is no clear pathway for Aboriginal language educators to become registered. We do not have a Territory-wide culturally informed accreditation process. The department recognised this when it gave evidence. Stakeholders who gave evidence supported creating one. A formal framework for assessing Aboriginal language proficiency is essential for bilingual education, creating local employment pathways and protecting Aboriginal languages and culture. It is crucial work.

We also heard from many stakeholders that consultation was too rushed. If we want these reforms to work effectively in all communities, including remote and Aboriginal communities, we need to involve them properly in the Bill's design. Hopefully, that will happen as part of the implementation and rollout of this legislation.

Most of the witnesses raised concerns about the independence of the Teacher Registration Board and the director, given that the director is employed and performance managed by the CEO of the department, the largest employer of teachers in the Territory. Things may be working well now—we talked about this during the inquiry—but that does not mean they always will. We need to make sure that independence is protected and visible.

We need more transparent guidelines on how conflicts are managed and how concerns can be raised. That is not a complicated issue; it is good governance.

Some stakeholders told us that they struggled to participate in the inquiry because the consultation period was too short. We heard about this in the Chamber already. It is great that this Bill was referred to the scrutiny committee. It is the committee's job to hear from people to inform the Assembly about how a Bill may work. It is important for all of us that we have the proper scope to do that well. It is something to serve us, not undermine our work.

Despite these concerns, I support this Bill. These are necessary reforms and they will work to modernise our teacher registration framework. However, the issues raised in my additional report and by people who gave us evidence should not be left behind now that we are passing the Bill. They are practical, reasonable issues that are grounded in real experience. At the end of the day teachers are at the heart of our education system and we need to make sure that the reforms we make will support them as strongly and well as possible. I trust that when this Bill passes and is implemented that the government will take all these matters seriously as that implementation gets underway.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, the focus areas of this legislation are child safety, regulatory integrity, efficiencies and alignment with national frameworks. Some of those matters are set to be addressed upon commencement. Other matters will be delayed, like clauses 29 to 38. My colleague the Member for Fannie Bay already neatly summarised a lot of the strengths of the legislation. The Part 2 matters that will come into effect after assent—information sharing, strengthening integrity and national consistency—are broadly agreed upon by everyone as a good step forward. The Part 3—clauses 29 to 38—measures for mandatory registration for early childhood teachers, likewise, are agreed upon as useful, albeit matters that will be addressed in a year or so from now.

I am grateful to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for its work. I read the majority report and the two additional—as the Member for Johnston would have it—reports. It is great that there was an expansion of the scope for looking forward to what we might do in this space to be constructive.

This Bill in isolation is not particularly controversial—there are small things that can be refined, one-percentile improvements and perhaps some five-percentile improvements—but I have chosen to speak tonight because it is important to recognise that this is a piece of the broader puzzle to improve public education and education outcomes in the Northern Territory. At the risk of being contrary on a Bill where there is broad consensus that we will support it, I speak not to just extend platitudes and recognise our schools and wonderful educators—wonderful though they might be—but also to have a bit of a stocktake and see where this fits in the broader picture.

The fact is that our public education system is not tracking as well as we would like. We are on the verge of significant changes. Next year will be a major year in education reform. It is important for us to put these matters in context to understand where we are at and where we go from here. This government is trying hard to strengthen the teacher workforce. It is committed to attracting and keeping teachers through all the work it is doing, fixing education and directly getting kids back in school.

Honestly speaking, all the gnashing of teeth about the one percentile stuff that I hear from some about the Bill are no longer of concern to me in the broader equation. I am now more interested in how we start turning around public education. We can keep on saying, 'This one percentile will improve things', but there are broader structural forces that we need to address. We need to have an eye to history in what has been happening in education for the best part of a decade.

Streamlining processes and reducing administrative obstacles are important. The Member for Fannie Bay outlined how some of that will happen, with the strengthening of regulatory integrity, mandating registration of early childhood educators, creating national consistency and improving information sharing, all of which I applaud. I am all for doing things that bring us into accord with the national standard.

Child safety with be strengthened by mandating professional registration for qualified teachers and improving information sharing with other jurisdictions. That will prevent harm in the long run.

The Bill will strengthen regulatory integrity by tightening things to do with the TRB (Teacher Registration Board), albeit there are concerns about the centralisation of power and decision-making. Here is a reality check for everyone: the centralisation of power is happening the world over and in parliaments across Australia in actual fact. To some extent I am now less about fighting it the whole time and am starting to think that if we are centralising power and mechanisms, how do we still ensure we get good outcomes or, quite frankly, better outcomes than we have been getting?

We have tried a number of mechanisms to create all of the rigour in the world. I am not just concerned with respect to failing our educators, as it was put by one of my colleagues, or the one-teacher, one-profession model; I am thinking more generally about concerns with the education system writ large.

Alignment with the national Framework for Teacher Registration is a great thing. The amendment in the Bill to ensure Aboriginal languages are captured as specialist subjects is a great matter. The amendment recognises the importance of Aboriginal teachers in the teaching of students in their first language and it supports flexible employment options for remote schools.

There is interaction with flexibility in the labour market for us. In a place of small population and limited options we must start thinking about how we create regulatory efficiency by reducing administrative burden. There is a number of interactions. This is not just a bureaucratic piece about registration and child safety; it is part of the broader ecosystem of understanding where our public education system is at. This Bill will streamline registration processes and thereby create flexibility for employers to seek authority—for example, to employ an unregistered person to teach specialist subjects, which is important in the VET space and for individuals working towards gaining teaching qualifications.

All of that said, the question might be: why is this of such interest to me? It is not because my electorate is replete with schools. My electorate has few schools, but they represent the polarities of our system and illustrate neatly some of the systemic problems we have.

On one end of the spectrum I have Haileybury Rendall School, a high-performance private school with fantastic opportunities for its kids. In addition to delivering highly on the core curriculum, it has all manner of extracurricular options available to people there. It has been my great pleasure to be involved with that school and to do high value-adding tasks there to be part of its community and contribute where possible. The extent of my interaction—or our interaction—with it, to some extent, is about preventing things like the Berrimah Road duplication to ensure that the school is not disrupted.

On the other end of the continuum I have a great investment in public education. I am the product of five public schools in the Northern Territory. The equality of opportunity that I had going through schools historically, like Anula, Karama, Sanderson and Casuarina, gave me a fair go to realise my potential. That was the case for generations past, and I am not convinced it is the case for generations going forward and there is ample evidence to suggest that.

This is why we have to be making these kind of moves in these kinds of spaces to try to think in a more agile way about how we attract and retain teachers. How do we integrate better with our labour market? How do we deliver for not just educators but also kids? The numbers do not make for great reading based on 15 months of what this government has been doing and the last 10 years of governance in this place. In that regard I have to be honest that I am getting frustrated with the platitudes treating the Labor government of the past as though it had a monopoly on being able to provide solid educational outcomes. In fact the parlous state of the public education system is a product of the last eight years of Labor governance. It is time to start facing up to that reality.

Stuart Park Primary School is one of my schools. It is an excellent school that is regarded—I say this tongue in cheek and slightly in jest but also semi-seriously—as something of a Labor fortress. That school has been socially progressive in many ways. It is wonderfully led by Maria Albion. The school has invested in continuous professional development. It is a place of significant longstanding with experienced and dedicated staff, stable enrolment numbers and consistent attendance in advance of 90%. It even has a great school band which I very much look forward to playing with tomorrow at the music assembly. The fact is that it is increasingly an aberration in our public schooling system.

When you look at the numbers and the metrics you start to realise just how much damage has been done to our public education system and why there is growth in independent and private schools. I am not anti-private schools; arguably I represent the elite private school in the Northern Territory, Haileybury Rendall School. It is a fantastic school with fantastic opportunities. It is well run. The other day it had surplus capacity to take Year 9 students for wellbeing week to clean up trash in Charles Darwin National Park. That is a great activity to be part of. It also has fantastic scores in test results across the board. That school is not failing our kids educationally.

It is not just about infrastructure or the registration of teachers; it is about the end result—the outcome—for kids. I do not believe we are facing up to the reality of that situation. Speaking about this today is an opportunity to face that reality as we move forward into the next phase of education reform that has been necessitated by the fact that in the Northern Territory we have dropped the ball on public education over a long time, and certainly over the best part of the last decade.

What are examples of that? At a basic level, I will talk about that primary school I was at. For all its successes, at the beginning of the year it did not have working locks, keys and doors for basic security in its upper primary school. I thank the minister for her responsiveness as it resulted in me being able to resolve these minor capital works. I am grateful for her swift resolution. These are not the kind of issues that schools should have to be wrestling with. Basic infrastructure deficits is the tip of the iceberg.

I read committee members' additional reports which pointed to extra things we could do for teacher registration, but we have a bigger problem that is a function of educational failures by the previous government over the best part of a decade.

The truth is that the numbers speak for themselves. When Labor came to power in 2016 school attendance rates were on the other side of 80%. By the time it had finished two terms of government and was voted out, attendance had fallen to almost 70%. That is a significant metric. We are worried about one-percentile teacher registration stuff and, yes, it matters, but look at the bigger picture of what needs to be done to create the architecture of opportunity in the Northern Territory; otherwise, you are missing the wood for the trees.

After years of inaction by the former Labor government the CLP government is progressing important secondary school reform, which is long overdue. Half of us in this House are beneficiaries of the old education system which provided that architecture of opportunity before we had the middle school rollback. I do not want to hear that we are rushing it, it is too fast and people cannot keep up with it. I do not want to hear people asking how we will implement this. It is already overdue. We will not compromise educational outcomes, but at the same time a lot of this stuff is happening quickly and with a higher risk tolerance because we recognise that this reform is necessary to create opportunity in the Northern Territory. That is the reality. To create opportunity you must invest in the things that work and take chances. So far no great mistakes or missteps have been made, particularly in the education space.

In the last parliament the Member for Katherine presented a petition from 940 people calling for a dedicated special needs school for residents in Palmerston and the rural area. It was not a bad idea then and it is not a bad idea now. I will have plenty to say at budget time about how we spend our money, but that is a good investment. However, it was not a suitable investment for political expediency purposes at the time. Now we are investing in something that makes sense in that regard.

I do not even want to talk about the intensive support roll, but the numbers speak for themselves. They were clearly used to make attendance figures look better than they were. We are being transparent about those figures. It is important that we face up to what those numbers say. It is pleasing that in Term 3 of 2025 we have seen 300-plus fewer kids on the ISR compared with a year ago, in Term 3 of 2024.

We are increasing accountability mechanisms for parents whose children consistently fail to attend school. Will all the policy levers that we pull work? No. I do not believe they will, but will more of them work than if we sit around twiddling our thumbs? I believe that is the case, which is why I am backing the totality of the package of education reform being driven by the minister.

The CLP government committed $1.9m to employ school counsellors based in schools. Proportionate to our population we have more public servants than anywhere else. We know that education is one space where it makes the least sense to have a concentration of people in the Mitchell Centre because you need a bunch of people on the ground in schools. School counsellors is an example of a good initiative in that regard.

The worst of it all in my mind is that under Labor Territory kids lagged behind the rest of the country in literacy and numeracy. I do not want to be harsh, but that is why we cannot continue to all dance around those figures and talk about the one percentiles. One-third of all NT students are categorised as needing additional support in literacy and numeracy compared with one in 10 nationally. When the Leader of the Opposition and I went to school here the schools were proportionately, per capita, funded better than anywhere else in the country. We essentially had a public schooling system that was the envy of the rest of the country. We made prudent use of the money that we were gifted by the federal government in our education sector.

This is the great irony. It is true that the former Labor government secured money from the federal government—its fair share of the pie—but what did it do with that to result in the standard of literacy and numeracy falling? Our NAPLAN results under Labor showed 58% of all NT students, including 85% of Indigenous students, did not meet basic literacy and numeracy standards.

That is why we are focused on getting kids back to school, via the $14m Boosting Literacy and Numeracy plan, including embracing a consistent evidence-based approach centred on explicit teaching. It has not been pulled out of nowhere; it works elsewhere. The data and the evidence was out there. If the former government wanted to do something about that it could have, but it did not. The bottom line is that the days of viewing public education as the remit of Labor are over. I am done with hearing about it. Whilst getting our cut of the national education accord, Labor oversaw the decline of public education in the Northern Territory.

There are innumerable fronts on which I could detail the argument, but one of the most compelling is the aggregate enrolment data in the last eight years of government. In 2016—Labor's first term data—there were 33,300 kids in schools. In 2017 it went up to 34,400; in 2018 it was 34,300; in 2019 it was 34,200; and in 2020 it was 34,500. It stayed roughly consistent, but in real terms that means it was declining. In that period whilst Labor was failing our public education sector, the private sector was having to pick up the slack.

The real telling data is what happened in the second term of the Gunner government. If you look at that period you will see a persistent decline in enrolment numbers. It went from 34,600 in 2021 to 34,400 in the following year, to 33,000, to 32,000 and to 32,500. Why did that happen? It is not proportionate to or commensurate with our population growth; it is to do with falling standards in our public education system overseen by the last Labor government and its failure to manage the money it was given to produce better educational outcomes for our kids.

All of this tinkering and additional reports do not mean anything when there has been a decline in standards, numbers and the architecture of opportunity. That is what I am interested in.

The architecture of opportunity in the Northern Territory since the set-up of this place has comprised public health, housing, infrastructure and education. If you fail on those things you will fail to grow the Territory. I am done with the historic romanticisation and revisionism. Make no mistake, the erosion of that architecture is the product of Labor's poor choices over a decade. It is the reason that there are 17 of us on this side and four left on the other side. That is the reality.

I am not trying to say that the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill will correct all the failures in the education system, let alone all the structural failures created by the Labor government over the last eight years, but it is a step in the right direction. It is one of many that this government will have to take in order to bring that architecture of opportunity back into accord and to bring public education standards up to scratch at the junior and secondary levels.

It is an important time to take these steps because 2026 will be a significant year in education reform, with the long overdue rectification of the middle school transition, the necessary moves in child safety improvements and the strengthening of regulatory integrity.

This government is acting to improve public education, not just dealing in platitudes and feel-good stories and talking about the virtues of education in the abstract or our wonderful teachers. Yes, our teachers are wonderful. My teachers were wonderful and my father is a wonderful teacher, but I am done with hearing the stories about wonderful teachers being the be-all and end-all of our system. There are systemic failures that have made it impossible for our education to succeed. Those systemic and structural failures must be addressed, and I believe this government will do that.

I wrote down this quote because I thought it was a good. In the ministerial report in the last parliamentary sitting, the minister said:

> *… departments have had to be agile over the last year to set things in place. We have not just talked about it; we acted on it.*

That is what it will take. The gnashing of teeth over the one-percentile stuff, whilst virtuous is the enemy of the good at this point, as far as I am concerned.

The prevarication and bureaucratisation of public education in particular but also the education sector writ large is a significant problem in the Northern Territory. We may end up having the same conversation in regard to what Labor did with health or public infrastructure. We can keep talking about it or we can do things about it, and that is what the government is getting on with and actually doing. I support the moves being made by the Minister for Education and Training in this space. We are taking calculated positive chances to move things forward at the pace needed because, quite frankly, we are watching otherwise a slow-motion spiral and public education will not remedy itself. The education sector in general will only get back on its feet if we intervene and stimulate the sector at this point. On that basis, I look forward to continuing the process of righting the wrongs done to public education over the last decade.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr EDGINGTON (Aboriginal Affairs): Madam Speaker, I support the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The Bill introduces many important reforms that I am confident will have a positive impact on the next generation of Territorians.

As the Member for Barkly and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I am excited about the amendments that recognise the important of Aboriginal teachers and the teaching of students in language, as well as amendments that will support many flexible employment options for local people in remote schools.

Prior to these amendments, regulation 5(3) of the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations provides an exemption for a person to teach without meeting English language proficiency requirements if that person is only teaching a foreign language. This government understands that in the Territory's remote communities English is often not the primary language spoken and it therefore does not make sense for English language proficiency to be a barrier to teaching first languages in community. The proposed amendment rewords the legislation to replace the term 'foreign language' with 'language other than English'. This amendment clarifies that Aboriginal languages are included for the purpose of the exemption.

In practice this amendment ensures that Aboriginal teachers who hold deep cultural and linguistic knowledge are not excluded from the classroom simply because English is not their first language. It removes unnecessary barriers to employment in remote schools and strengthens a pipeline of local educators who can teach children in their own language. The impact will be profound. Students will learn in ways that reflect their identity, culture and community, while schools benefit from teachers who bring lived experience and connection. Over time, this reform will help preserve Aboriginal languages, improve educational outcomes and build stronger bridges between communities and the education system.

This important amendment is another step by the CLP government towards fixing our education system, not just in Darwin but across the Northern Territory. I commend the minister for bringing forward this amendment.

Complementary to this change, which enables more local teachers to be employed in our remote communities, the Bill also streamlines registration processes and provides greater flexibility for employers to engage unregistered teachers—that is, individuals who may not yet hold a full teaching qualification such as those undertaking a teaching degree—to teach specialist subjects. This Bill removes the limitation that the authority for a school to employ an unregistered teacher expires at the end of each calendar year. This change will enable the employment of valuable individuals who may just need more time to complete their formal qualifications. Across the communities in my electorate alone, I know that for many students studying remotely it is more difficult for them to complete formal education within standard timeframes. This amendment will allow remote teachers still in training to continue to be engaged through practical and paid classroom teaching without the need for additional bureaucracy.

The teacher registration amendment Bill complements the work already underway by this government and the minister for Education to ensure better education outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians. This government, as part of the $1.1bn Better and Fairer Schools funding, has committed to strengthening instruction of Aboriginal languages through the NT Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum; greater recognition of Aboriginal educators' knowledge with the development of an Aboriginal workforce strategy that includes professional learning designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and increasing the diversity of the education workforce, particularly through security of employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in schools.

The amendments made in this Bill make direct progress towards these outcomes, ensuring more Aboriginal teachers can work in our schools and teach their languages.

The amendments made today will also strengthen the bilingual education programs this government backed in 2025, with an additional $3.1m in funding. These programs will now have greater access to teaching staff who were unable to teach language under the previous legislation.

The Bill makes important changes and delivers our commitments to retaining and attracting teachers, improving education and getting kids back to school. I thank the minister for Education for bringing this forward.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I will touch on a few things raised by members in their contributions. I thank all members for supporting the legislation.

The Member for Gwoja spoke about the importance of child safety and information sharing. It was interesting that he spoke about integrity and transparency. We do not need to go on about the 'restoring integrity to government' slogan when Labor was in government. I do not think the opposition has a lot to say in the integrity space. We are bringing in these changes to make sure we are being more transparent, so I felt like it was a case of here we go again, with those opposite saying they were so great at integrity and transparency when clearly they were not.

He also mentioned the consultation, which has been over 12 months. I am not sure what the detriment to Aboriginal language teachers would be. As we heard from the Member for Barkly, who goes to remote and very remote areas, clause 23 strengthens the authority to teach. He elaborated on how that is necessary to get language teachers in very remote settings. We have modified the legislation so that it is not just about a foreign language; it is any language other than English.

We also heard from the Member for Fannie Bay. I note the member previously worked in the department and I could hear that passion throughout her contribution.

The Member for Johnston went on about the timeframe of the consultation, which was quite generous. We want to protect Aboriginal culture, and these changes do that.

The Member for Johnston wanted to know whether I would take it seriously. I assure you, Member for Johnston, I take seriously everything to do with education. A lot of things we have done this year have assured opposition and crossbench members that we are not about just saying we will make changes in education; we are getting on with doing that job.

I thank the Member for Fong Lim who always eloquently gives a contribution. This is part of strengthening and reforming education. As he said, we have been doing this over the last 15 months. As a government, we and the department—which I thank—have been agile over that time. As the Member for Fong Lim said, we are acting.

The CLP government is taking action to strengthen the teacher workforce and deliver its commitments to keeping and attracting teachers, fixing education and getting kids back to school.

Our government is committed to ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of government agencies and delivering value for Territorians. One of our key three priorities is to rebuild the economy by enhancing efficiencies through streamlining processes and reducing administrative obstacles. This helps.

The Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 amends the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004* and the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations 2004. The proposed amendments focus on these key areas: strengthening the regulatory integrity of the Teacher Registration Board and the office of the board; mandating the registration of early childhood teachers teaching in education and care services; improving national consistency for the registration of all teachers; and improving information sharing across jurisdictions. The key points are as follows.

Child safety is strengthened by mandating professional registration for qualified teachers teaching in the early childhood education and care sector. This amendment will also strengthen the teacher workforce through attracting more early childhood education and care teachers to the teaching profession.

The reform will also create flexibility for school principals to make resourcing decisions that respond to the needs of the school.

The Bill further strengthens child safety by improving information-sharing arrangements. A provision is included in the Bill that enables the board to share information kept on the register of teachers with teacher registration authorities in other jurisdictions. This includes the sharing of information that the board reasonably believes will prevent harm to a child.

The Bill strengthens child safety through information-sharing provisions that address gaps highlighted by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and further by the child safety review conducted by the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

The Bill will strengthen the regulatory integrity of the Teacher Registration Board and the office of the Teacher Registration Board by clarifying the minister's powers to set policy, performance and accountability expectations and that the CE of the agency is responsible for teacher registration and regulation to manage the performance of the director of the board. This amendment will result in increased trust and confidence in the operations of the board and the office of the board. I note that some contributions had concerns in that area, but this is about making sure it is more transparent and that the board is more robust and accountable.

The regulatory framework for teacher registration and regulation in the NT is amended to align with the national Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia. This includes minimum qualification, currency of practice and English language proficiency requirements. These amendments support national consistency, making it easier for the NT to attract teachers from other jurisdictions.

Amendments in the Bill ensure that Aboriginal languages are captured as a specialist subject, eligible for an employer to apply for an authority to employ an unregistered person to teach, on behalf of a person who does not hold the required qualifications for registration. This amendment recognises the importance Aboriginal teachers bring with teaching of students in their first language and supports flexible employment options for remote schools. I note that was one of the Member for Gwoja's concerns. The Member for Johnston spoke about that as well. We have nine bilingual schools and this, as the Member for Barkly spoke about, will help strengthen that.

The Bill will streamline registration processes and create greater flexibility for employers to seek an authority to employ an unregistered person to teach specialist subjects—for example, VET trainers, language teachers and individuals working towards their teaching qualifications.

Administrative burden is reduced by removing the limitation of an authority to employ an unregistered person expiring at the end of each calendar year. Quite a few people contacted us when we came into government to say that there was a real blockage at the end of the school year when everyone was due to renew their registration. It is a holiday period, so there are not as many people at work and some people could not get

that registration renewed. This will enable the board to set the period of an authority to align with the relevant circumstances of employment up to a maximum of two years or as prescribed by the regulations.

The Members for Gwoja and Johnston shared concerns from the committee hearings about the governance and independence of the board. I have gone over that. These reforms clarify existing roles and responsibilities through the PSEMA. The director of TRB (Teacher Registration Board) is a public sector employee under the PSEMA and a statutory officer. They must be employed by an agency. In this case that is the Department of Education and Training. The Chief Executive of Education and Training is responsible for the director's accountability and performance only. The board is the regulatory authority and reports to me as the minister.

Authority-to-teach concerns are unfounded. This is to employ an Aboriginal member for language and to remove the use of the term 'foreign language'. This term is outdated and this change makes it more contemporary. As Aboriginal teachers are employed under this area and generally are an elder and hold cultural responsibility to the area, these decisions can be made by the school community for that employment.

Other efficiencies are moving from a paper-based manual application which is outdated to a new ICT automated system that will be in place by 1 September 2026. Streamlining the process and making it more efficient is part of our government's mandate to cut red tape and remove administrative burdens.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clauses 1 to 7, by leave, taken together agreed to.

Clause 8:

Mr PAECH: How will the hierarchy of approval or conflict be managed when a ministerial direction is given to the board if the direction conflicts with the director of the board, as well as the CE?

Mrs HERSEY: Can you explain that more?

Mr PAECH: Essentially, the Director of the Teacher Registration Board could get a direction from the board and could also get one from the CE which are in conflict with one another. How does the hierarchy work of the director being told by the board to do one thing but being told by the CE or the minister to do another? What is the hierarchy of approvals or direction?

Mrs HERSEY: First of all, the minister cannot intervene in the board matters. That is part of it.

Mr PAECH: What about the chief executive and the board?

Mrs HERSEY: There will not be any conflict because the CE only directs the director under the PSEMA.

Mr PAECH: Are there grounds for the chief executive to ever direct the director in contradiction to what the board has directed?

Mrs HERSEY: No.

Mr PAECH: Some stakeholders wanted us to confirm that.

How will perceived, real and possible conflict be managed when the board is both the regulator and the employer of teachers?

Mrs HERSEY: Do you mean the department? The board does not actually employ the teachers; the department does.

Mr PAECH: This goes to the heart of what we heard from people during the inquiry which is the real, possible and potential conflict when the department of Education employs teachers and now the department will have the Teacher Registration Board sitting within it? How will it manage that perceived conflict?

Mrs HERSEY: As I said, the director has always been an employee of the agency. The minister has the responsibility of the board. There is no conflict of interest under that.

Mr PAECH: You are bringing the teacher registration board at arms-length, as it is referred to, into the department. What is the process for mitigating any real, perceived or possible conflict when they are working together? People are saying that bringing it in removes the element of independence.

Mrs HERSEY: The CEO is responsible for the performance of employees within the department with respect to upholding the code of conduct and performance under the PSEMA. Although there is a direct relationship between the department and the office of the board, the department cannot interfere with the statutory powers of the board.

Mr PAECH: Can you confirm whether the minister can override a decision of the board?

Mrs HERSEY: No.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

BUILDING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FIDELITY FUND) BILL
Serial 45

Continued from 22 October 2025.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, Labor supports this Bill. This is measured and sensible legislation that strengthens oversight, transparency and accountability in an area that directly affects Territorians' confidence in our building and construction system.

The Fidelity Fund plays an important role in protecting homeowners, builders and the wider community. When things go wrong in the construction process, the fund is there as a backstop, providing assurance to Territorians that they will not be left carrying the financial burden of an incomplete or defective residential building work.

For many families, building a home is the biggest investment of their lives. They deserve to know the systems designed to protect them are strong, well governed and operating in the public interest. That is why Labor supports steps that give the minister clearer and stronger oversight of how the Fidelity Fund is managed.

Territorians expect this fund to operate with the highest standards of transparency and accountability. They expect trustees to be properly appointed, appropriately vetted and subject to clear oversight. They expect that the minister of the day has the authority to intervene when something does not look right. The Bill does exactly that.

It modernises the existing framework, introduces clear processes for the approval and removal of trustees and ensures that decision-makers responsible for managing the fund are accountable to government and the public. Importantly, amendments requiring trustee appointments to be approved by the minister bring greater assurance that the right people with integrity, capability and a genuine commitment to good governance are overseeing what is ultimately a public protection mechanism.

The Bill also creates the minister's observer, a practical and effective oversight measure that ensures the minister has real-time visibility of how the scheme is operating. This is not about interference; it is about assurance and making sure the systems that protect Territorians are working as they should and that emerging risks are identified early.

Good governments do not just wait for problems to arise; they set up structures that help prevent them. Labor supports these amendments because we have always believed that strong transparent governance is essential to maintaining public confidence. If Territorians are to trust the Fidelity Fund they must have confidence that it is being managed responsibly, ethically and in line with its purpose. These reforms help ensure that.

This Bill also expands the types of information the minister can request from the scheme. That change is not only reasonable; it is necessary. You cannot hold a body accountable if you can see only one part of its operations. A broader information-gathering power allows for better scrutiny, decision-making and outcomes for the Territory.

This is practical legislation. It enhances oversight without adding unnecessary burden. It protects Territorians while strengthening confidence in the construction sector. It reflects a government taking its responsibility seriously. Labor is committed to ensuring Territorians can build, work and invest with confidence. We support this Bill because it strengthens the integrity of a fund that plays a vital role in safeguarding the Territory's interests.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, as a member of the scrutiny committee I had the opportunity to talk to people who had an interest in this Bill and learn more about it. I acknowledge the work of my fellow scrutiny committee members on this Bill and the previous Bill. Committee members take their job seriously, and I thank them.

I support the passage of this Bill, but as with the previous Bill, I provided an additional report highlighting concerns about the development of the legislation and some of the Bill's content. The explanatory statement describes the purpose of the Bill as:

> *… to enhance transparency and accountability in the operation of approved fidelity fund schemes.*

That is a purpose I wholeheartedly support. Transparent oversight of fidelity funds is critical for the industry and the consumers who rely on this protection. The Fidelity Fund is essential so that people who are building homes know there is an insurer to protect them.

Many people raised concerns with the committee that the Bill's amendments do not achieve additional transparency and accountability. The Bill offers limited administrative adjustments, which fall well short of a lot of the transparency and accountability improvements that submitters to the committee called for.

There was limited scope for people to engage with the committee because of timeframes. We received submissions, but were unable to have a public hearing on them. Many submissions raised issues that were diverse and saw problems in the Bill. That was a missed opportunity for us to learn as a committee and then as a parliament about the concerns there might be with this Bill and whether there are ways to strengthen it.

Submitters raised a number of concerns about the operation of the current Fidelity Fund. The scrutiny committee report included some of them, noting that they were outside the scope of this Bill. The key purpose of the Bill is to enhance accountability and transparency, and many of those concerns go to that. Issues were raised about insufficient regulation of conflicts of interest and a lack of transparency with trustee appointments. It is not public who the trustees are or what they are paid. Information that people believe should be publicly available, like annual reports, is not. People found that concerning and said that this Bill was an opportunity to strengthen that and it is a failure that we did not embrace that opportunity.

I support the committee's recommendation—which people will know if they read our report—for a comprehensive consultation-driven review of the entire Fidelity Fund scheme. I note that this addresses a small part of the scheme. It is important for people who are using this scheme and for the trustees who also expressed strong views about changes to the legislation that any kind of review is genuine, robust and collaborative and that builders, homeowners, trustees, consumer advocates and industry bodies are central to that process.

I support the passage of this Bill on the understanding that this is just a first administrative step; it is not a solution to some of the systemic issues that have been identified in the fund which need addressing.

It appears to me that this Bill fell short of its stated purpose in the explanatory statement. I urge the government to bring forward broader, more substantive reforms that reflect the seriousness of the issues that were raised with the committee.

We heard in this Chamber, and I agree, that the building industry, consumers and people who are looking after them—trustees—deserve a modern, transparent and accountable Fidelity Fund scheme. I encourage the government to approach what I hope is a forthcoming review with openness, rigour and a commitment to genuine reform.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank all members who contributed to the debate, the scrutiny committee for its consideration of the Bill, those who made submissions and the members who took the opportunity to receive a briefing on the Bill. I thank the Member for Arafura for his encouragement and wonderful speech about this Bill. I also thank the Member for Johnston for her contribution, and I read her dissenting report in regard to the concerns she had about this Bill.

I one hundred per cent acknowledge the builders I have spoken to. I heard them loud and clear.

In closing this debate I highlight that as a legislator and in regard to the *Building Act* which essentially oversees the Fidelity Fund, there are limited levers the government can pull to ensure we are achieving what we set out to do.

It is our belief, through making these amendments, that we can achieve everything the Member for Johnston spoke about. Builders came to me in my former role as an opposition member and other people have come since we came to government to seek reform in this space. It is about ensuring that those who run the Fidelity Fund have that level of transparency.

I will speak about this throughout my contribution, but there was limited information that the minister could seek in relation to the Fidelity Fund. Being able to expand that allows us to look into the Fidelity Fund, see what is occurring and either speak to those builders and allay their concerns or otherwise. That is an important function of this Bill. We put everyone on notice that we can always do better in these spaces. That is what this is about.

The Fidelity Fund was originally set up with seed money from the Northern Territory Government and it is about protecting consumers. We often talk about builders, but the consumers sometimes get lost in this conversation. This is to ensure that for mums and dads, when they are quite often making the largest financial decision they will make in their lives about purchasing or building that first new home, there are protections in place if something should go wrong if a builder becomes insolvent or leaves. That is an important function we have in the Northern Territory through the Fidelity Fund.

Going back to the crux of this, the Bill contains practical and sensible regulatory reforms to improve the oversight and accountability in the operation of approved fidelity fund schemes. The Bill responds directly to feedback from industry stakeholders about the operation of Fidelity Fund NT. Stakeholders have expressed a clear desire for greater clarity and efficiency in how the fund operates, and I have spoken to the fund about that in my numerous meetings with it.

The reforms in this Bill include:

- clarity that the appointment of trustees to a fidelity fund scheme is subject to minister's approval
- provision for the minister to confirm the proposed trustee meets eligibility criteria before approval and improves oversight of trustee appointment
- clarity, as the minister must approve appointment of trustee and the minister can also revoke approval of appointment of a trustee on certain grounds
- appointment of the minister's observer to attend trustee meetings and provide advice to the minister
- broadening the information that the minister can request from the fund, relevant to the operation and management of the fidelity fund schemes in compliance with the *Building Act 1993* and regulations.

The amendments will improve government oversight with the ability to better understand the operations of the fund, monitor legislative compliance and address any concerns which are raised with us.

Fidelity Fund NT is the only option for building cover in the Northern Territory for consumers. Should the fund be unable to issue certificates there would be a major issue for the Northern Territory housing industry. The legislative amendments support improved oversight of the fund to minimise risk to the housing industry and home builders. These changes provide for a good-governance approach of critical consumer protections for

people building a home. Importantly, it is a step forward in ensuring the fund continues to operate effectively and fairly and remains a trusted mechanism for protecting Territorians in times of uncertainty.

This Bill aligns with the strategic initiative for this government in the Rebuilding the Economy strategy to deliver a regulatory reform program that improves certainty and should improve confidence in the fund's practices and the building industry. These reforms also support growth in housing development, which is a strategic initiative in the Restoring the Territory Lifestyle strategy.

Lastly, I acknowledge the officers who have contributed to this Bill and the people from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment who have been here this afternoon providing support to me for this Bill. I thank them for their work on this Bill.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

PAPERS TABLED
Government Response to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee Report on the Inquiry into the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Legislation Amendment (Expansion of CDS and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I report that the government response to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee report, Inquiry into the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Legislation Amendment (Expansion of CDS and Other Matters) Bill 2025, was deemed tabled on 14 November 2025, pursuant to Standing Order 201.

Schedule of Government Responses to Committee Reports

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the Schedule of Government Responses to Committee Reports, November 2025.

Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption NT General Report

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption NT General Report.

RESPONSE TO PETITION
Petition No 16 – Northern Territory Anti-Voluntary Assisted Dying

The CLERK: Honourable members, the following response from the Attorney-General to Petition number 16 has been received and forwarded to the member for distribution to the petitioners.

As required by Standing Order 123, I am responding to Petition No. 16 'Northern Territory Anti-Voluntary Assisted Dying' (the Petition). The Petition was read in the Legislative Assembly on 14 October 2025, with a response required by me, within 12 meeting days of the Legislative Assembly, being 10 March 2026.

The Petition was signed by 861 concerned Territorians and was presented to the Legislative Assembly by the Hon Robyn Lambley MLA, Member for Araluen.

The subject matter of the Petition raises concerns about the potential legalisation of Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) in the Territory and expressed desire for Parliamentary time to instead be spent advocating for better palliative and aged care services. The Petition specifically raised concerns about the potential risk posed to Aboriginal Territorians, including that VAD may result in Aboriginal Territorians delaying or refusing access to health care because of fears surrounding VAD.

In September 2025, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee (the Committee) published the Final Report on Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory (the Report). The Committee engaged in extensive consultation, particularly in remote communities and with Aboriginal Territorians,

to inform the findings in the Report. The Report ultimately recommended that legislation be introduced to establish a framework for VAD in the Territory.

The Report makes 86 recommendations in relation to VAD in the Territory, including that palliative care and VAD services should remain separate and that a Palliative Care Strategy be developed concurrently with VAD legislation to improve palliative care services in the Territory. The Report also emphasised the importance of developing a policy to address cultural safety issues and concerns as a core part of the operationalisation of VAD.

The Government is committed to developing a Bill to give effect to the recommended legal framework for VAD made by the Report, with the Members of the Legislative Assembly being afforded the opportunity for a conscience vote on passage of the Bill.

I thank the petitioners for expressing their views, and the Member for Araluen for bringing this petition to the attention of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Regulation of the Onshore Gas Industry

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Nightcliff as follows:

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance:

The need for better regulation of the onshore gas industry in the NT.

The letter is signed by the Member for Nightcliff. Is discussion supported? There must be four members standing. Discussion is supported.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I put this matter of public importance before the Assembly—the urgent need for better regulation of the gas industry in the Northern Territory.

What I am about to detail is nothing short of a public health scandal. It is a story of regulatory failure, corporate capture and governments that have abandoned their primary duty to keep Territorians safe. In the past three months alone we have witnessed revelations about leaks and air poisoning by multibillion-dollar corporations that should be totally unacceptable to every elected member in this House.

In October 2025 Japanese giant INPEX admitted it had under-reported benzene emissions from its Bladin Point facility by 13,400%. Originally these emissions were declared at just 4.12 tonnes for 2023–24. The actual figure was 556.9 tonnes of benzene, which is a known carcinogen for which the World Health Organization says that there is no safe level of exposure. This facility sits just three kilometres from residential suburbs and four kilometres from the Darwin CBD. I am deeply disappointed and so are many of the residents of the electorates closest to it, like Blain and Brennan, who are having their air contaminated by potentially unsafe levels of benzene while their elected members stay silent.

INPEX's toluene emissions were similarly under-reported by 112 times, exceeding 500 tonnes. This chemical, also called methylbenzene, is another toxic hydrocarbon. Like benzene, it is a volatile organic compound (VOC). The health effects of this one include neurological damage, respiratory irritation, kidney and liver damage, reproductive harm and pregnancy complications among others.

This brings the jump in total VOCs from 1,618 tonnes to more than 3,500 tonnes that have been underestimated and misreported. The company's two acid gas incinerators—these are the devices that are designed to destroy the chemicals before they are released—have been out of operation for extended periods since 2019, meaning that for months, or potentially years, these substances have been spewing into the air unmitigated. No legal consequences have followed this.

On 13 October this year 36,000 litres of hot oil spilled across the INPEX plant, flowing into stormwater drains and Darwin Harbour. Workers contacted the Australian Workers' Union, alleging burns from hot oil and describing 'a toxic workplace where staff concerns are dismissed' and maintained that INPEX 'prioritised production over the environment and over safety'. That was reported in a news article recently.

In another scandal in September this year ABC investigations into freedom of information documents revealed that Santos' Darwin LNG facility has been leaking methane since 2006 for nearly 20 years. Drone

measurements detected emissions of up to 184 kilograms of methane per hour. This leak was so significant that it contributed to the collapse of ADNOC's $30bn takeover bid for Santos.

Multiple government agencies knew about this leak but not one informed the public. No-one required the leak to be fixed. Instead, authorities approved Santos' 25-year Barossa offshore gas project without requiring repair or replacement of the leaking tank which is still leaking to this day. As Kirsty Howey from the Environment Centre NT said:

> *This is a national scandal and an unfolding disaster …*
>
> *Santos has been caught red-handed putting the environment, climate and the health and safety of the people of Darwin at risk, while regulators have been asleep at the wheel.*

Let me turn to the human cost. In an article recently, Darwin paediatrician Dr Louise Woodward spoke of anecdotal experiences of increased cases of severe asthma, allergies and sinusitis at Royal Darwin Hospital. She said that knowing the emissions:

> *… are actually 130 times higher is quite extraordinary and really frightening as a resident …*
>
> *It really makes my blood run cold to think of the risk that the people of Darwin have been put through by these companies not doing the right thing but also by our [NT] Government not regulating them properly …*

Distinguished scientists from QUT's International Laboratory for Air Quality & Health, which is a World Health Organization collaborating centre, directly contradicted INPEX's claims that the emissions pose no health risk. Professor Melissa Haswell, Associate Professor Branka Miljevic and Distinguished Professor Lidia Morawska stated:

> *We view the potential health implications to be significant—they require an urgent, comprehensive and independent investigation.*

Peer-reviewed studies link exposure to benzene, toluene and xylene to multiple cancers, including leukemia; asthma and respiratory disease; heart attacks; cardiovascular damage; pregnancy complications and premature birth; congenital abnormalities; and early death. A recent US study found oil and gas pollution was linked to 91,000 premature deaths annually.

What was the Chief Minister's response to concerns about health impacts from these emissions? It was to express public statements of faith in INPEX and suggest that this incident illustrated the reliability of industry self-reporting.

Let me also address the economic myth that underpins this government's subservience to the gas industry. INPEX's two main entities earned $20.4bn in income in 2022–23 and paid zero corporate income tax and zero petroleum resource rent tax. Since 2015 INPEX has paid no corporate tax on $21bn in gas exports. Over the past four years $37bn of LNG has been exported from Darwin. The royalties and petroleum taxes paid on those exports were zero. NT motorists pay 32 times more in vehicle registration than the entire gas industry pays in royalties. In 2023 gas royalties totalled just $2.6m, representing 0.04% of Territory government revenue. For comparison, the Texas oil and gas industry paid $27.3bn in state and local taxes and royalties in the 2024 financial year; that is $74m per day.

We get crumbs while they take our gas and poison our air. How did we get here? The answer is corporate capture. The NT appointed Stuart Knowles, former INPEX general manager, as interim Territory Coordinator with powers to exempt gas projects from environmental regulations. The Australia Institute called this:

> *… a classic example of revolving door between industry and government that leads to corporate capture …*

Former Minister Manison was recruited by Tamboran Resources as vice president of government relations after retiring from politics. Tamboran, with interests in Beetaloo fracking, donated $28,000 to NT Labor before the last election. National integrity expert Geoffrey Watson from the Centre for Public Integrity described the Brookline Advisory situation—where a senior political adviser to the former Chief Minister co-owned a registered federal lobbyist for Tamboran whilst having access to Cabinet documents—as the most obvious conflict of interest he had ever seen.

Until recently the NT was the only jurisdiction in Australia without a lobbyist register. The CLP implemented a toothless and gutless lobbyist register that gives zero transparency to the public about which lobbyists are meeting with which ministers. We also have no upper House to check executive power, and this government has stripped away the few protections that existed.

The NT Government passed legislation removing third-party merits reviews from the *Petroleum Act*, *Planning Act* and *Water Act.* This directly contradicted recommendation 14.24 of the Pepper inquiry into hydraulic fracturing, which specifically called for third-party merits reviews for petroleum products. The government claimed that this was to end 'green lawfare' but provided no evidence for this claim.

The record shows that of 18 third-party merits reviews on water decisions since 2020 almost all the original decisions were upheld, proving that these reviews were not frivolous. As barrister Greg Barns SC stated, cutting environmental group funding and removing review rights is:

> *… about silencing critics and preventing legitimate concerns about environmental issues being agitated in courts and communities.*

Currently, there is no legal limit on the amount of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that INPEX can emit. This came out during the Senate inquiry into Middle Arm. When asked about the safe levels, we heard from the INPEX authorities that everything was below the safe levels they were emitting, only to then find out there were no limits placed on them. INPEX can effectively emit however many of these volatile organic compounds as it likes with no consequence; there is no legal limit.

The industry self-reports emissions with minimal oversight. The regulators did not catch the massive under-reporting; INPEX caught itself. Mark Ogge from the Australia Institute put it plainly; this reeks of a gas industry capture of Australia's regulators.

Given the severity of these regulatory failures, I have today referred these matters to the Public Accounts Committee for investigation. I seek leave to table my letter to the PAC.

Leave granted.

K McNAMARA: I have asked the committee to examine whether:

- the NT Environment Protection Authority is adequately resourced to effectively regulate and ensure compliance of the gas industry
- current licensing conditions are rigorous enough to ensure protection of the environment and human health
- the current compliance and enforcement policy is fit for purpose
- the NT EPA has effective mechanisms to ensure conflicts of interest are appropriately managed
- current legislation within the remit of the NT EPA is suitable to ensure effective regulation
- current mechanisms adequately protect the health and safety of workers and the public, including air monitoring for VOCs, public disclosure of major leaks and spills and a timely response to environmental damage.

This is not a radical request; it is the bare minimum response that we should have to these scandals. The people of Darwin deserve answers about whether their environmental regulator is capable of protecting them from this industry, and this parliament has a responsibility to find out. The PAC investigation, if it goes ahead, will not fix this broken system, but it is the bare minimum that we need to see. Real protection for Territorians would require substantive reforms.

I also call on this government to take the following actions. First, establish an independent and comprehensive health investigation into the impacts of INPEX and Santos emissions on Darwin residents, not one led by compromised regulators. Second, mandate real-time emissions monitoring with public disclosure; no more secret leaks and no more self-reporting without verification. Third, establish legal limits on toxic emissions, including VOCs and benzene, with meaningful penalties for violations. Fourth, restore third-party merits reviews rights for petroleum, planning and water decisions, as the Pepper inquiry recommended. Fifth, improve the lobbyist register to enforce longer cooling-off periods, preventing ministers

and senior staff from joining industries that they regulated, and publish ministerial diaries so that the public has transparency on who is lobbying whom.

The gas industry has this government in a chokehold. It takes our gas, poisons our air, pays little to no taxes and receives billions in subsidies. When the infrastructure breaks and the industry leaks oil into our environment and leaks methane into our air, there are no consequences. When companies under-report carcinogens by 136 times, the Chief Minister expresses faith in self-reporting. This is not governance; this is capture.

The people of Darwin and across the Territory deserve to breathe clean air. They deserve to know when toxic chemicals are being released into their environment, and they deserve a government that puts their health ahead of corporate profits.

I want a healthy place for Territory children to thrive in for coming generations. I hope and expect that all members of this House want the same thing. To ensure this we must drastically improve the regulation of this industry, and we must do it now.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Nightcliff for bringing this matter of public importance before the Chamber.

I will start by highlighting something that is important during this debate. Virtually everything the Member for Nightcliff has just spoken about relates to offshore gas activities. That is important because the MPI is about the need for better regulation of the onshore gas industry in the Northern Territory. Everything that the Member for Nightcliff has spoken about this evening regarding INPEX and many of the gas proponents are offshore. They are offshore in Commonwealth waters regulated by Commonwealth legislation and the royalties go to the Commonwealth.

There is a lot of confusion from some of those opposite about exactly what the Northern Territory regulates and the strength of those regulations. I am keen to speak about that in relation to this matter of public importance.

The current regulations for onshore gas, not offshore, relates to the Northern Territory's regulatory framework of onshore petroleum. It is world-class and one of the most, if not the most, comprehensive and robust in the world. The regulatory framework includes the *Petroleum Act 1984*, the Petroleum Regulations 2016 and the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016. These laws set out the requirements for environmental management; well and infrastructure integrity; land access; and compliance reporting. Regulatory oversight of the onshore gas industry is shared between the following agencies:

- Department of Lands, Planning and Environment for environmental regulation, which I am responsible for

- Department of Mining and Energy—that is Minister Maley's responsibility—which is responsible for petroleum titles and infrastructure integrity, including well construction

- Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority for projects that trigger assessment under the *Environment Protection Act 2019*. The NT EPA is an important independent authority that does an incredible job to ensure our environment is protected.

The regulation of the onshore gas industry is also governed by enforceable requirements, when necessary, in an environment management plan and individual statutory requirements for operators as detailed in the onshore gas code of practice.

Under the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016, administered by the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, a gas company must have an approved environment management plan (EMP) to ensure environmental impacts and risks are properly managed. EMPs must be in accordance with the Code of Practice: Onshore Petroleum Activities in the Northern Territory. They identify environmental risks and demonstrate that they are reduced to as low as reasonably practicable. They undergo public consultation for activities involving drilling or hydraulic fracturing.

I will now speak about the comprehensive environmental baseline monitoring. This is all the work that goes into ensuring there are baseline assessments before we do anything in the Northern Territory. They have been comprehensive, especially as it relates to the Beetaloo and our onshore gas industry. Industry regulation and environmental assurance is also informed by more than $35m which has been invested into researching and assessing the water resources, biodiversity and land values of the Beetaloo region. Our

government is keen to achieve and access that so we can have the benefit of the royalties which will stem from it.

This includes the CSIRO's work from the Geological and Bioregional Assessment Program as well as the Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessment, led by the Northern Territory Government. A huge amount of work went into the SREBA to ensure that there was a strong baseline and evidence of work that could go into monitoring any impacts in the future as a result of that industry starting up. Collectively, these studies mean that the Beetaloo region is the most comprehensively studied region in the Northern Territory and there is the detailed environmental baseline understanding necessary to make informed and sound regulatory decisions now and in the future.

Ongoing environmental monitoring of the biophysical assets in the Beetaloo region is being undertaken by Charles Darwin University through a $2m research program funded by the Northern Territory Government. We are doing all this to ensure that there is strong regulation and protections.

There is comprehensive regulation across government. In addition to the regulatory regime established through the *Petroleum Act 1984* and its regulations for onshore gas exploration and production activities, the following things must also happen: Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority certificates must be issued prior to the decision on an environment management plan to ensure the protection of sacred sites; groundwater extraction licences are required for all onshore gas activities to ensure sustainable extraction and use of water; and stringent greenhouse gas emissions reporting requirements must be met.

The Territory's regime is complemented by key federal regulatory frameworks that provide overarching protections for matters of national environmental significance, greenhouse gas emissions, water resources and Aboriginal land rights. Notable examples include the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*; *National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007*; *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*; and *Native Title Act 1993.*

Environmental regulation of the onshore petroleum industry is supported by three key financial mechanisms. This is important, and it comes before me before anything needs to be signed off. There is a cost-recovery framework requiring payment of fees for the environment management plan assessments; a monitoring and compliance levy applied annually to approved and in force environment management plans; and an environmental security to ensure that funds are available for rehabilitation and remediation.

It has been fantastic to work with Minister Maley's office more recently because there are historical issues related to mining, which is separate to this. Those funds are now put there. Where previously things were not properly rehabilitated—the legacy mines—part of Minister Maley's department can now plan how it will properly rehabilitate those areas. That is an important part of the regulatory framework.

It is important that we constantly ensure there is reporting and compliance monitoring. Environment management plans require annual and quarterly reporting, monitoring of groundwater and emissions and timely incident reporting. Many of the issues that the Member for Nightcliff raised have been brought forward by proponents through self-reporting. That is an important part of the process. If something goes wrong it needs to be self-reported so that the relevant agencies can go on the ground to see whether there have been any risks to the environment.

Reports submitted to the Petroleum Regulation Unit within the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment are published online to ensure transparency and accountability. They are available via the NT Government's free online portal POINT that holds all key information and data about onshore petroleum.

Last year the Petroleum Regulation Unit undertook a compliance program that prioritised groundwater data. The petroleum unit built a tool to assess compliance using industry databases; conducted drilling and hydraulic fracturing inspections; checked chemical storage, bunding liners and freeboard requirements; undertook land clearing audits to verify compliance with approved land clearing limits; improved spatial data reporting; and undertook rehabilitation audits, reviewing plans and reports, which was validated with drone imagery. A huge amount of work goes into ensuring that when someone says they will do something in an environment management plan there is the follow-up to see they are doing just that.

Over the past 12 months the Petroleum Regulation Unit has conducted 28 inspections and two formal audits across nine active petroleum sites to ensure the safe development of the onshore petroleum industry in the Northern Territory.

To conclude, when we talk about the need for better regulation of the onshore gas industry it is important that we acknowledge the work of many people in the departments—not only my Department of Lands, Planning and Environment but also the Mining department—who are out there every day ensuring the environment is protected and that strong regulation is in place to oversee these important works that are occurring whilst the Northern Territory takes advantage of its natural resources.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Nightcliff for bringing this matter of public importance to the Chamber. It is important that we talk about the urgent need for stronger, transparent and accountable regulation of the gas industry in the Northern Territory.

There has been confusion in public debate, and even in this Chamber tonight, about the distinction between onshore and offshore gas regulation in the Northern Territory. I will clarify this because misunderstanding it puts Territorians at risk.

Offshore gas wells and platforms are regulated by the Commonwealth, but the moment that gas reaches our coastline through pipelines, processing plants, storage tanks, power generation, emissions infrastructure, waste systems and shipping it becomes the responsibility of the Northern Territory Government. The Darwin LNG plant, the Barossa backfill works, emissions reporting, methane leaks, fuel and chemical storage, coastal impacts and anything occurring within Darwin Harbour are all regulated by the Territory. Although some projects begin offshore, every impact ultimately becomes onshore and it is the Northern Territory Government that must ensure that these systems are safe, cyclone ready, compliant and transparent. 'Offshore' may define where the gas comes from but 'onshore' determines whether Territorians are protected, and that is our job.

As we have discussed, this week Territorians are recovering from Cyclone Fina, which is a powerful reminder of the increasing severity of extreme weather events in our region. Climate risk is no longer theoretical. We have heard that from everyone in this Chamber. It is here, it is escalating and it must shape how we regulate industries operating in and around Darwin Harbour and across the Northern Territory. When we allow heavy industry, gas giants and foreign corporations to operate without proper oversight, safeguards and, as we have seen repeatedly, basic compliance with their environmental obligations, we put Territorians at risk. In the face of cyclones, as we had this weekend, these risks multiply.

I will speak plainly about what is happening in our harbour and our gas sector because it is important that we talk about the truth. It is important that this parliament has a clear picture of the regulatory failures and what we have to address. I have been told by some people in this Chamber that when I open my mouth and talk everyone hears 'blah blah blah'. This is important to Territorians. It is important to my family, my children, your children and our future. We can work together on this to make sure that we are protecting the people we are here to represent. I am not standing here to say 'blah blah blah' but because I deeply care about the Territory, safety and all our futures. I want to work with everyone in this Chamber to make sure that we are protecting the Territory, looking after our country and our people.

I will go through some things that happened this year. In March it was revealed that the massive US military Project Caymus fuel tanks designed to store 300 million litres of highly flammable jet fuel were built to the wrong importance level—being designed to withstand winds of up to only 193 kilometres an hour, which were almost the winds we had in Darwin this weekend—and without the correct building permit. I think a Category 3 cyclone has winds above 224 kilometres an hour. We were lucky this weekend that was not what affected us in Darwin, but it easily could have, and it will.

Engineering advice is that these tanks should have been designed for winds up to 295 kilometres an hour, and they have not been. The independent engineering report warned that failure of the tanks in a cyclonic wind event could result in more than 200 million litres of flammable and/or combustible liquid becoming uncontained with catastrophic consequences. The hazard to human life would be at least substantial if not extreme. That is in our harbour; it is going on right here.

If a cyclone like Fina were to track differently the consequences of structural failure of the fuel tanks could be unimaginable, yet on 5 September this year the proponent, Crowley Australia, was granted full environmental approval despite groundwater leaking through the safety liner of multiple tanks. This is not regulation and it is not the protection that Territorians deserve.

On 1 September the public learned that Santos' Darwin LNG facilities have been leaking up to 184 kilograms of methane per hour for nearly 20 years—two decades. Methane is between 28 and 84 times more potent than CO_2 and this leak was allegedly concealed to avoid jeopardising the Barossa project. Multiple agencies knew about this leak, and they did nothing. The NT EPA, NT WorkSafe, the Clean Energy Regulator,

NOPSEMA and even CSIRO had knowledge of it. This is the textbook definition of regulatory capture—that is, when agencies are working not for the job they should be doing but to support industry.

On 12 September we learned that the Chair of the NT EPA was simultaneously working with an industry lobbyist whose client list included INPEX, a co-owner of the leaking Darwin LNG plant. He did not disclose this conflict. We heard from the Member for Nightcliff—she may have quoted this—that experts described this conflict as 'one of the most obvious instances of a conflict of interest I have ever seen'. Days later it was revealed that Dr Vogel had also taken a job advising mining company VBX Ltd while still making regulatory decisions in the Northern Territory. It beggars belief that this can happen.

On 19 September the NT EPA renewed Santos' licence for another five years without requiring the methane leak to be fixed.

This is not an isolated example; it is systemic. Last month INPEX admitted to under-reporting benzene emissions, a known carcinogen, by 13,400%. Benzene emissions did not increase by 13% or 130%; they increased by 13,400%, from four tonnes to more than 550 tonnes in one reporting period. The company also admitted to under-reporting volatile organic compounds by thousands of tonnes. If that was not enough, on 13 October INPEX reported 36,000-litre oil spill after heavy rain—rain exacerbated by climate change—that washed oil into the harbour and into mangrove ecosystems. Our regulatory response was silence.

We had a lucky escape with Cyclone Fina, but it reminds us how exposed we are. Every tank, pipeline, emissions vent, chemical storage facility and gas asset in our harbour sits in the path of increasingly severe potential weather threats. When regulation fails during calm weather, it does not magically stop when the winds hit 250 kilometres per hour. Whether it is 300 million litres of jet fuel in noncompliant tanks, a methane leak that has been allowed to continue for two decades, carcinogenic emissions under-reported by 13,400% or oil being washed into our harbour during storms, the pattern is the same: we have a regulatory system that is too close to industry, under-resourced, compromised and reluctant to enforce consequences.

We live in an environment with extreme weather risks and we must have systems that can withstand the risks we face. We need:

- comprehensive regulatory reform that centres safety, transparency and independence, including mandatory disclosure of all industrial risks and noncompliance incidents
- a truly independent EPA Chair appointed through a conflict-free process
- immediate investigation into the Darwin LNG methane leak and enforcement action to stop it
- a full safety reassessment of the Project Caymus fuel tanks before any operation can commence
- mandatory cyclone resilience standards for all major fuel, gas and industrial infrastructure
- full public reporting of toxic emissions—no more self-reporting without verification
- an independent inquiry into regulatory capture in the Northern Territory.

None of these things are radical; they are the minimum standard that Territorians should expect. They should expect that we in this Chamber are supporting them in keeping them safe. Our harbour is not a dumping ground, our communities are not collateral and our regulatory system should not be an accessory to negligence.

As we recover from Cyclone Fina we are reminded of our responsibility to ensure that every piece of industrial infrastructure in our region is safe, compliant and subjected to the highest standards of oversight. When systems fail, it is Territorians, families, workers, fishers, traditional owners and coastal communities which pay the price. The time for excuses is over; the time for proper regulation is now.

Mr MALEY (Mining and Energy): Madam Speaker, I will speak about the development of the Northern Territory's onshore gas industry and the major regulatory reforms this government has delivered to ensure that development is safe, responsible and world-leading.

My agencies and those of the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment together regulate every part of the sector from petroleum titles and well integrity to environmental regulation, reservoir performance, surface infrastructure and compliance. This is a modern and sophisticated regulatory system. It is the foundation that supports responsible growth of the Territory's onshore gas industry.

Development of the onshore gas industry is a key priority of this government. The Beetaloo Sub-basin is a world-class shale resource. One shale layer alone contains an estimated 500 trillion cubic feet of gas, more than 1,000 times Australia's annual domestic consumption.

Development of the Beetaloo will strengthen energy security for the Northern Territory, help address the long-term east coast gas crisis, support our regional neighbours through energy transition, create thousands of jobs over the next 20 years, pay royalties to the traditional owners and royalties which will end up supporting our education and health systems and our police. Companies such as Beetaloo Energy Australia, Tamboran Resources and Daly Waters Energy have invested for years because they have the confidence in the resource and in our regulatory system. First gas to the NT market is expected from mid-2026.

The Amadeus Basin has supplied Territorians for more than 40 years; it gives us the gas that keeps the lights on. However, new investment is needed to ensure long-term energy supply and economic strength. That will allow people to have jobs in the gas industry—20,000—and not only direct jobs but also indirect jobs. To attract that investment we must maintain a modern, clear and consistent regulatory framework.

In 2016 the former government imposed a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing which led to the independent scientific inquiry. The inquiry made 135 recommendations, forming the basis of our world-leading regulatory framework. This government has strengthened that system.

On 25 February 2025 we delivered another step forward. Two new regulatory instruments were gazetted—the 2025 Code of Practice: Well Integrity and the revised 2025 Code of Practice: Onshore Petroleum Activities in the Northern Territory. These reforms corrected the flaw in the 2019 code which tried to combine environmental regulation and well integrity regulation into one document despite being overseen by different regulators under different laws. This caused confusion for industry, landholders and regulators. We have now fixed that.

The 2025 well integrity code deals exclusively with well operations and well integrity. Environmental requirements remain in the environmental code managed by the Department for Lands, Planning and Environment. Importantly, we did not delete material from the 2019 code. We struck it through so that Territorians can see what has moved, what has changed and what remains in force. All environmental protections remain unchanged; none have been weakened. Matters covered by the *Work Health and Safety Act* such as hydrogen sulfide handling now sit with NT WorkSafe. This ensures the right regulator addresses the right risk.

Well integrity is fundamental. The new code strengthens monitoring across every phase of a well's life; increases mandatory content in well operations management plans; sets stronger decommissioning standards and firm timeframes; introduces new post-closure monitoring; and mandates compliance with 22 international standards, including key ISO standards.

These reforms were developed over two years with CSIRO, senior petroleum engineers, geologists, NT WorkSafe and the Queensland petroleum inspectorate. This is a rigorous, evidence-based technical reform program.

Some commentary has misunderstood these reforms. Let me be clear that the 2025 well integrity code increases regulatory requirements; it does not weaken them.

Extensive public consultation occurred in 2018–19. This update required technical expert input, not broad community submissions.

Claims that landholders will not be informed of leaks are wrong. The legal obligations are clear: serious incidents must be reported to the minister within two hours; NT WorkSafe must be notified immediately when people or property are at risk; landholders must be notified under land access agreements; and environmental spills must be publicly reported within two days. These protections are enforceable and unchanged.

The *Petroleum Act* provides a world-class suite of enforcement powers, including entry and inspection powers; directions and stop-work notices; audit directions; Supreme Court injunctions; infringement notices; enforceable undertakings; prosecutions; and cancellations of petroleum interests. Our department uses these powers actively.

Over the past four years the Department of Mining and Energy has conducted more than 120 physical inspections supported by frequent desktop engineering assessments. Inspectors are currently in the

Beetaloo assessing compliance, identifying potential issues and taking action when required. This is a modern, high-accountability, enforcement-driven system.

Territorians expect onshore gas development to be safe, well-regulated, transparent and responsible. This government has delivered world-leading regulatory settings, strengthened codes of practice, clear division of regulatory responsibility, stronger monitoring and decommissioning requirements, transparent reporting obligations and a robust enforcement system.

These reforms attract investment, protect landholders and ensure the industry operates to the highest standards. The 2025 codes deliver a regulatory system that is rigorous, modern, transparent and aligns with global best practice. Our inspectors, engineers and compliance officers uphold it. Our industry continues to invest because of the confidence in our resource and our regulatory framework.

This government remains committed to ensuring that the onshore gas industry in the Northern Territory develops safely, sustainably and to the highest international standards.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, Labor supports a robust regulatory framework for the gas industry.

When we were in government we had the independent hydraulic fracturing inquiry that was conducted by Justice Pepper. This inquiry was commissioned to address community concerns, environmental risks and the regulatory gaps left behind by the previous CLP government with its reckless rush in regard to onshore gas in the Northern Territory.

The Pepper inquiry was the most comprehensive environmental and scientific review ever undertaken in the Northern Territory. It set the foundation for a safe, careful and scientifically led pathway for gas development—not a blank cheque for industry, which is the way the former CLP government used to do business.

The Pepper inquiry did not take a political view; it took an evidence-based view. Anyone would think that evidence is a dirty word now with the CLP government in power, but the Pepper inquiry was thorough and took that evidence-based view. Every recommendation of the inquiry was built around risk identification, risk mitigation and public transparency.

Rather than shutting the community out, Pepper's recommendations strengthened the community's rights to information, participation and, dare I say, accountability, with regular updates on the recommendations that were being progressed.

The former Labor government was proud to accept all 135 recommendations of that independent scientific inquiry. In line with the Pepper inquiry we built a modern environmental regulatory system, strengthened the *Environment Protection Act*, improved water protections and supported improved traditional owner rights in decision-making, ensuring that statutory processes for Aboriginal land were protected.

In contrast the CLP, in its short time in government so far, has reduced rights for Territorians to appeal environmental decisions or request reviews. The CLP has created a higher threshold for community objections to mining, land clearing and environmental approvals. The CLP has walked away from its own emissions target and the 50% renewable energy target. What is it aiming for? A pie in the sky or is it fingers crossed and hope for the best?

In this important space there is no plan for futureproofing, ensuring stability in energy connectivity and bringing on new work, which I heard the Treasurer grumbling about. NTESMO was work by the former Labor government, so there is nothing new. The CLP has no ideas and plans for the future of the Territory, big industry, power, energy and development. The government is out of ideas, has no plan and is hoping for the best.

I am thinking that in the next three to six months it will have exhausted every one of the projects that the former Labor government started, which the CLP has been taking credit for over the last 14 months, as though the projects suddenly sprung up and did not take years of work. That is fine. We are glad that the CLP has not scrapped those new projects, like it did almost every other thing because the CLP is small-minded and politically nasty like that.

The CLP created the Territory Coordinator, giving unprecedented power to an unelected official. So far, as we know from Estimates in the middle of the year, $21m was spent on that role, and there has not been a single project of significance to date.

In the October sittings I said that there is a strange loop between the Territory Coordinator's website and the Chief Minister's website, which takes you back to the Territory Coordinator's website which then takes you to the Chief Minister's website, so you do not actually get any information. Well done to whoever created the website; it looks nice and quite fancy. I am a bit sceptical of a couple of the images. I think they have been borrowed from down south. It almost looks like a wheat farm in one of the pictures, but I am happy to be corrected if that is not the case. Ultimately it looks pretty, but there is no substance to it.

There is nothing to show Territorians for the $21m. The government could have built a school with that money, but, no, it established an office that has pretty much done nothing.

Mr Young: Alekarenge School.

Ms UIBO: The government could have fixed all the classrooms at Alekarenge School—absolutely! The government could have done nearly two-and-a-half classrooms if you think about that costing—$8m plus $8m, plus maybe a bit extra for a nice playground for the mob there.

The government set up the Territory Coordinator, watered down the Sacred Sites Act and deliberately weakened protections in relation to fast development. It does not have community support for this.

We have met with big industries. They want to have a positive social licence and ensure that the development they are doing is supported by the community. They want to contribute back to the community, not have a free pass where their mates pat them on the back and then everyone is annoyed and not happy with them for doing business in the Territory. They want that balance. This is years and years of changes in the industry, some of which still need to be worked on, but ultimately the industry knows that it has to operate in a conscious way and have that social licence.

The CLP cannot be trusted with ensuring that robust and rigorous processes are in place for the industries in the Northern Territory, particularly gas, which is the subject of the Member for Nightcliff's MPI. In order to support development and protect the environment, there needs to be the consciousness, will and hard work of government to stay on track and focus on those guiding regulations and legislation, not give out free passes to make it easier because CLP members cannot be bothered to do the hard work of government. Unfortunately, we have already seen that this year with the erosion of public trust in the processes that provide for community members.

Today I hosted the Ropa Woda Governance Council members from Mataranka, Jilkminggan, Mulggan, Minyerri, Urapunga and Ngukurr. These are some of the communities in the Arnhem electorate that I am proud to represent. They were at Parliament House this morning because the Supreme Court hearing today was about the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan. That was pushed through—it was rushed—a couple of days before Christmas last year by Minister Burgoyne, Thee was no big fanfare; it was just pushed through quietly.

I understand some people at Jilkminggan are still waiting for a visit. The minister promised he would visit the people on country in Jilkminggan. I will reach out to Minister Burgoyne more formally on their behalf, and for me as the local member, to support a visit from him because they are concerned about the waterways.

This ties in with regulation, rigour and the community trusting that the government can have hard conversations and put difficult processes into law to protect the environment and support development. There are processes that have been many years in the making. The other week SunCable signed the Indigenous land use agreement with the traditional owners in the area it is conducting business, working on and supporting …

Mr Edgington: The land of opportunity.

Ms UIBO: It is in the land of opportunity. The Member for Barkly is proud. Guess when it started? It was not under the CLP government; it was under the former Labor government. It is great to see projects like that have transcended political lines and are still being supported by the CLP. It has not cut that project. The Member for Barkly is a poor thing, but at least the CLP has given him some wins when it is cutting funding to things like classrooms in the Barkly electorate.

The processes of gas regulation in the Northern Territory need to be robust and world leading. The Member for Nelson spoke about world-class robust regulation. I would like to see the work he has been driving in that space. I am pretty sure—everyone who is here will be my witness—that the Member for Nelson, who is the Minister for Mining and Energy and the Minister for Renewables, even though he does not believe in renewables, earlier this year said, 'Don't worry about the gas industry; it will regulate itself.'

That is the type of cowboy approach by the CLP, with the Deputy Chief Minister, second in charge of the Northern Territory's decision-making, saying that gas companies will regulate themselves. That does not meet Territorians' expectations. It does not even fit with what gas companies are trying to do, having social licence and operating in a way that is harmonious and supportive of the Territory's social and cultural expectations for the environment and industry.

For tonight's contribution the Member for Nelson had a nice prepared speech written by someone. He had no comment today—'Don't worry, this MPI doesn't matter because the gas industry will regulate itself'. I hope he is hanging his head in shame about that comment because I am sure it will haunt him for years to come.

The processes that have been eroded under the CLP is at the heart of the Member for Nightcliff's MPI. The processes need to stay in place, not be watered down, cut up or thrown away. We know the rhetoric about red tape, green tape, beige tape and whatever colour tape, but the CLP failed to point out what it has done to improve rigour for regulation and the processes so that there is a fair and balanced opportunity for people not to be litigious but to present real concerns. Removing those structures, mechanisms and legalities from Territorians will have a detrimental effect in the long run for the environment and the social and cultural licence that Territorians want in good faith.

There are people who do not support the gas industry; I recognise that. There are people who support it. It is a balance; we want the economy of the Northern Territory to grow and the environment to be protected. We want Territorians to be the beneficiaries of a beautiful pristine environment and a regulated industry with processes in place.

The work undertaken by Justice Pepper was world leading. We had processes in place that were so stringent with the 135 recommendations that industry bodies and large global companies looking at the Northern Territory said, 'There are strong regulations, processes and laws in place in the NT, but we want to do business there. We recognise there is an opportunity, and we want to continue to do business.' It was not necessarily a deterrent. We set the bar high, and we are proud of that. People knew that when they came to the Territory there would not be dirty cowboy politics—which we have returned to, unfortunately, under the current CLP government—because we have the expertise to be a mature, insightful, planned and determined jurisdiction when it comes to the gas industry. We were leading regulation and reform to ensure there is a balance for Territorians to benefit. We did not put our hearts and souls at risk by selling to people who want to make a quick buck or take a quick political stance.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I speak about an issue deeply important to me and the people of Central Australia. This issue demands urgent action from the Northern Territory and federal governments. What I have to say is not only alarming; it is heartbreaking. It is a story of buck passing, of what smells like a cover-up and an even deeper political stench. It is a school, the children who attend that school and the dedicated staff, some who have worked there for decades, who are paying the price.

Yipirinya School is far too important to the people of Alice Springs to lose. For decades it has been a place that nurtures our children, honours and enriches culture and identity by preserving languages and gives hope to families who are too often forgotten. Now that hope is under threat.

This proud school has been driven into turmoil because of the actions of one bad actor—the former principal—and several senior executives. Their behaviour has pushed it to the brink of collapse. They should be ashamed of themselves for the damage they have caused. The political representatives who knew of some of this behaviour and stood by and did nothing because it was not to their political advantage to call it out should have the moral backbone to stand up and help this school in its fight for a future.

For months I have called on the Northern Territory Government and the registrar of NT schools to release the report of the special investigation into Yipirinya School, in the interests of parents, caregivers and the whole community. Instead, I have been handballed from agency to agency, with no-one taking responsibility and no transparency. I was even offered a briefing that was nothing more than a whitewash, a 'nothing to see here' exercise. I reject that completely.

Who is responsible for the report and acting on its findings? Is it the department of Education; the registrar; the department of Trade, Business and Innovation; or the statutory manager acting on behalf of the school board?

Parents, caregivers and staff have told me deeply disturbing allegations of corruption, fraud, misconduct, sexual harassment and misuse of funds. I have been told of:

- huge sums of money spent on travel and personal expenses with no oversight
- children sent interstate after damaging school property, without parental consent
- child abuse concerns withheld and manipulated to support a political media strategy
- children questioned by the former principal and the media, without parental consent
- children questioned about sexual assault allegations by a journalist with no parental or guardian consent and no qualified support on hand
- loans to staff that have not been repaid
- a $40,000 invoice to mow lawns
- bar tabs charged to school credit cards
- sexual harassment claims settled out of court
- $500,000 to fit out a shopfront in the Todd Mall
- people paid to stay silent and a principal directing staff to be paid wages even though they were absent from school
- external organisations being paid large sums of money to provide educational programs when they are not schools
- threats of cultural payback
- hotel room charges and fines paid by the school
- costs charged to the school that were incurred by the former principal who was involved in plans to restructure the land council and change its present CEO.

All these damning actions and allegations are outlined in the special investigation report.

A whistleblower, concerned at the lack of accountability and the burying of this report in a dark corner by the CLP government, entrusted me with the contents of that report. Parts of that report have been redacted. Given the shocking allegations and findings of the report, I have to wonder how bad and harmful the redacted sections may be.

The school, staff, parents and the new leadership are all trying to pick up the pieces. They are doing it alone without the support of either the Territory or the federal government. They are rebuilding trust, restoring the reputation and doing the heavy lifting. I thank them.

Parents tell me things are slowly improving under the new management, but serious concerns remain about the statutory manager, Mr Stuart Reid. Staff report that proposals made months ago continue to be ignored and there is no transparency. In five months Mr Reid has been at the school for one week. He has never been into a classroom or spoken to the language teachers, yet he speaks for the school. Most alarming of all, he told the school that it owes millions, creating fear of mass redundancies which we are seeing now.

I am angry and upset; more than 20 Aboriginal people working in meaningful jobs are about to lose their job, and no-one in government seems to care. Twenty people gone, just like that. We constantly hear both governments talk about closing the gap and getting more Aboriginal people into work, but when 20 jobs are on the line, there is silence. Education minister, if this were a school in Katherine would you be showing as

little care for the students and staff as you are now? Chief Minister, if this was a school in Palmerston, would you be as blind and deaf to the needs of the school community as you are to Yipirinya?

The Northern Territory Government must now be open, transparent and accountable. Alice Springs deserves answers to these questions: how long will Yipirinya remain under statutory management? Why have staff proposals been ignored? Why was a liquidator appointed instead of someone with experience in education and community rebuilding? When will the considered recommendations of the government's investigation be implemented? It is coming up to a year since the special investigator completed his report. The silence and inaction of this government is reprehensible.

I fight for Yipirinya because I care for the kids, teachers and families who rely on this school. The failures belong to the former principal and his allies, not the staff and children who remain. Why is the government punishing the victims? Where are all the voices who were previously loud about Yipirinya School under the regime of the disgraced former principal?

Where are Senator Jacinta Price and Senator Sarah Henderson? Not so long ago they were putting out media releases calling on the federal government to fund Yipirinya to the tune of $12m for the former principal's pet project. The senators were vocal in the media about the school's needs, praising the former principal, using children for political mileage and attacking the Central Land Council. Where are they now when the school truly needs their help? The former principal has gone and is awaiting sentence for assaulting children. Senator Price's mother no longer works at the school. The senator's silence is damning. It is now clear that their actions were nothing more than a politically motivated attempt to destabilise and gain power. It is disgusting and morally corrupt.

Yipirinya is not just a school; it is the heart and soul of our community. It serves children from some of the most challenging and diverse backgrounds. These kids deserve stability, compassion and opportunity. Most of all, they deserve to learn in an environment strengthened by language and culture. Yipirinya deserves better. Our children deserve better, and our community will not stop fighting until they get it.

Tonight we demand accountability, transparency and integrity.

I seek leave to table the report of the special investigation into Yipirinya school.

Leave granted.

Mr PAECH: This report should serve as a reminder to everyone. I hope that the government takes it seriously and the police look at the allegations in this report and look at investigating them. Anyone who uses a school for their own political agenda and allows the erosion of the care and protection of children in an educational facility is a disgrace. We demand action.

I ask all members, when you leave here tonight, to think of the 20 Aboriginal staff, or thereabouts, who have been told that they are not worthy of a job at that school. Doris O'Brien, an Aboriginal educator who has been at that school for 47 years, has been told that she is not valued and she is irrelevant. She is being made redundant. That is a disgrace!

At a time when we should be empowering people to support Aboriginal economic opportunities and employment, we are saying no. Do better.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I recently visited the beautiful region of West Arnhem. I had the pleasure of travelling to the community of Maningrida for the official opening of the incredible new change rooms, a project that has been years in the making.

It was a day when we could feel the pride in the air. This was not just a ribbon-cutting trip but also an opportunity to explore so many elements of my portfolios—Disability, Arts, Youth and Sport—and an impressive reminder that culture is strong and alive in this town.

Notably, there were dignitaries. I acknowledge the Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, and the Member for Arafura, Manuel Brown, traditional owners, families and a whole bunch of excited kids. The Sydney Swans were in town for their annual football festival. This brought an incredible burst to the whole community. We could feel the energy in the air, one of those moments where everyone was smiling and proud. How wonderful to see the traditional Welcome to Country dance and song to commence the opening ceremony from the smallest child to the eldest.

I had the pleasure of a tour of the sports change rooms and I thank Clem Beard and the West Arnhem Regional Council for facilitating this. I have to say that the facilities are impressive. The change rooms probably rival some of those in the big smoke of Darwin, all designed, built and set up to be culturally safe. It is a big asset for the community. This is meaningful progress to creating culturally safe, gender appropriate and disability accessible sporting facilities.

At the opening I joined fellow dignitaries in cutting the ribbon to mark the occasion. The Australian Army, AFLNT and Mala'la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation were also present to show their support for tackling Indigenous smoking and building strong bodies.

The CLP promised to restore our unique Territory lifestyle, and we are pleased that the Commonwealth is playing its part in supporting local sport and wellbeing.

Thank you to local community leaders—David Jones, traditional owner; James Woods, West Arnhem Regional Council Mayor; and Katharine Murray, CEO of West Arnhem Regional Council—for making us welcome.

Whilst there I was lucky enough to visit Djomi Museum, a living record of history, culture and story, curated with so much care. I was privileged to have Joseph Diddo and his wife, Debbie, who walked us through each piece and timeline. They shared incredible personal stories along the way, showing their fathers and grandmothers and their memories of events. I was fascinated by the striking similarities between local techniques and those found in my regional home in India, such as the way robes are made and canoes constructed. What a powerful reflection of timeless ingenuity and global connections embedded in First Nations cultures.

I give a big thank you to Kelly Butler, Maningrida art centre manager, who gave additional context to the art, artists and museum practices. Kelly also kindly showed me through the Maningrida Arts and Culture Centre, a place where local artists continue to keep culture strong and showcase Maningrida's world-renowned creative talent.

My visit to the Murnun Men's Shed showed me dedication to skill building, connection and wellbeing. This place makes the link between them so obvious. Thank you to Dan Bell for explaining the programs run at the men's shed, supported and managed by Mala'la Health Service, providing a hub for men in the community to meet. This is clearly a place built on quiet strength and community leadership. It is a credit to you all.

I was also deeply impressed by our visit to Nja-marleya. Its focus on elevating young voices and strengthening connections to culture and community is evident. We met Elizabeth Wullunmingu. An appointed law and justice group member, Elizabeth shared her knowledge and mission with us. This group operating out of the Maningrida Youth Centre, along with the incredible youth workers, is supporting the cultural justice model. To the amazing team who are turning up every day to make a difference, you are doing your community proud.

I thank Seide Ramadani, CEO of Nja-marleya, for talking us through the process of the NDIS data commissioning project and the progress being made there. We look forward to seeing further progress when Carpentaria officially commences therapy services for NDIS participants in January 2026. Whilst in Maningrida I was fortunate to be shown through one of the newly built houses. The family moving into the purpose-built house, inclusive of accessible ramps and bathrooms, were happy community members. I thank Minister Edgington who is making sure that the government is delivering houses in remote communities.

I give a big thank you to Riley Thompson, local regional sport coordinator from the Department of People, Sport and Culture. His time was invaluable in ensuring that we saw as much as possible while we were there. A shout-out also goes to Edward Dudanga from West Arnhem sport and rec, whom we met at the sports oval. He does great work engaging with local youths, helping to keep them occupied.

Our government is proud to support our remote communities. Through the Active Regional and Remote Communities program our government has provided funding of $384,000 this year to West Arnhem Regional Council. This funding supports ongoing delivery of structured sport and recreation across multiple communities in the region. Maningrida is a strong example of what locally led sport and recreation delivery can achieve. Maningrida is a place of cultural strength, innovation, resilience and community pride. It was an honour to be there for such a positive moment.

I will now talk about another wonderful event that we had today at the Main Hall of the parliament, recognising and celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first arrival of Timorese refugees to the Northern Territory in 1975. This event was hosted by the Chief Minister. It was wonderful to see the community leaders and members

of the community there. They talked about how the community had initial hardships but now the community is thriving and embedded in the Northern Territory community. The Timorese community is a good example. We can see that the third generation of Timorese people are active in all walks of life in the Top End and across the Territory.

I thank all the community leaders who made sure that the community had the right support, specifically Consul-General Jose, for providing support in recent years. I also thank the community associations, like the NT Timor Chinese Association and the Portuguese and Timorese sports club, for ensuring the community has a place to come and celebrate. They are seeking government funding grants to take back to the community to give people that opportunity.

It was also good to see Emeritus Bishop Eugene and Bishop Charles Gauci of the Diocese of Darwin at this wonderful event. I thank the Deputy Chief Minister for being there and making sure that the community felt welcome when the Chief Minister was in the middle of consideration in detail of a Bill and missed the event. I thank all my colleagues who were there to support the community.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am on a theme tonight. I bring to this Assembly's attention another serious public health concern. This one has been ignored for most of the last 50 years—that is, the asbestos contamination along the Nightcliff foreshore.

Since moving to Nightcliff I have always been perplexed that a public place could have such extensive contamination of a known dangerous material. During my election campaign and since being elected, many constituents have approached me with concerns about the asbestos fragments they find in the sand on Nightcliff Beach. They want to know why nothing has ever been done about it.

This is one of the classic instances of authorities shrugging their shoulders and allowing something serious to be ignored simply because 'it is the Territory'. In no other jurisdiction would asbestos be allowed to remain on a public beach, and that is the truth. This laissez-faire attitude to public safety is not good enough.

I did some digging to try to find out more about the history of this issue and what has been done thus far, if anything. In 2008 it appears that Darwin City Council engaged AEC Environmental Pty Ltd to prepare a risk assessment on asbestos waste along the Nightcliff foreshore via inspections, testing and monitoring, with further testing completed in 2009 by another contracting group.

These reports documented significant asbestos contamination from World War II military dumping and post-Cyclone Tracy debris disposal. This included flat asbestos cement wall sheeting, corrugated roof sheeting and water pipes embedded in the cliff face and scattered across the beach. Although these findings assessed the risk as low, with air quality safe for the community, it was per the understanding that the asbestos remained undisturbed, which is obviously not the case on Nightcliff Beach.

Since 2009 the understanding of asbestos risks has progressed significantly, with the Australian Government's Asbestos and Silica Safety and Eradication Agency stating that there is no identified safe threshold for exposure to asbestos. Asbestos poses a serious risk to health, causing life-threatening disease such as lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis.

In my research into asbestos over the last few months I found that asbestos is heightened in coastal environments, particularly beaches, due to tides, winds and waves increasing wear and erosion. Alongside this, children face disproportionate risk due to their play behaviours, longer time to disease development and greater vulnerability.

I have been working on this issue for a few months and was surprised to see already in that time another asbestos issue hit the news with the recent scare about potential asbestos exposure to children from the kinetic play sand in schools. With that, we saw just how seriously potential asbestos contamination is taken. The swift action on that issue was fantastic and demonstrates how seriously we should be taking this issue.

We can look at interstate examples to see how this problem can and should be handled. On 2 August 2020 Randwick City Council in New South Wales was alerted by a local resident that they had found what appeared to be asbestos material at Little Bay Beach. On 3 August, the next day, Randwick City Council engaged specialist remediation contractors to visit the beach and conduct a preliminary investigation. Suspected asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) were collected. All samples returned positive for asbestos.

Specialist asbestos removal crews continued to search for and pick out the asbestos-containing material for the first week. While these picks were being done—they call them emu picks, for some reason—the area was barricaded, signage installed and air monitoring undertaken.

The council then appointed external expert consultants and asbestos removalists to undertake ongoing inspections of the beach and air monitoring to visually detect and remove any material which was suspected to contain asbestos. Since August 2020 Randwick Council has continued twice-weekly emu picks, and it keeps finding more asbestos-containing material. More than 2,000 pieces of that material has been found and removed.

Within seven days of being notified of the contamination, that council fully responded and worked to clear the beach. That is how serious asbestos is and how we should be responding.

There has been significant speculation over the past two decades about whether the Northern Territory Government or Darwin City Council is responsible for the asbestos debris in Nightcliff. Due to the high tidal range and the fact that the asbestos is littered from the cliffs to the waterline it is unclear where the jurisdictional responsibility lies.

That kind of vagueness leads to the two levels of government trying to pass the buck, but my constituents are sick of that. There is a strong community expectation that this issue not be delayed by jurisdictional debates between levels of government, but be addressed cooperatively with shared responsibility for remediation.

I was recently shown an email communication between a Nightcliff constituent and the previous Member for Nightcliff in which the constituent raised serious concerns about the asbestos her children kept finding on the beach. She asked the previous member what was being done and why the Territory government was not responding in the same way as the government in New South Wales did. That was the case I mentioned.

The response from the previous member was the issues, particularly the origins of the asbestos, differed in the NT and that the unique and challenging factors here meant that type of remediation would not be appropriate or successful. That response from the previous Member for Nightcliff is misleading, as the asbestos found on New South Wales beaches in that example was also historical rubbish from an older dump. It has similar origins to ours, but, for some reason, ours is not treated with the same urgency or care. The previous member's email concluded:

'The department's signage in place and periodic emu picks are an appropriate way to manage our ACM issues.'

To this I say: not good enough. It is not good enough that the safety of children playing on beaches in New South Wales is treated more seriously than children on Nightcliff Beach. Please, let us not ignore this issue simply because it has been ignored for so long.

I will do everything in my power to tackle this issue once and for all, but I am not a member of government; I simply do not have the resources to combat this on my own. I implore this government to work alongside Darwin City Council to finally make a plan to remove all the asbestos and protect the many people who enjoy the beautiful Nightcliff foreshore.

I have reached out to the new Lord Mayor and the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, and I am awaiting a response. I am also seeking support from environmental organisations and health organisations in the Top End as well as the asbestos disease advocacy organisations from around the country.

I seek leave to table the letters that I sent to the minister and the mayor.

Leave granted.

K McNAMARA: I want the public to have full transparency of what is happening on this issue, so I call on the council and NT Government in partnership to, firstly, commission an updated, comprehensive environmental assessment for beach use patterns, vulnerable populations like children and the 15 years of weathering and deterioration that has happened since the original assessment.

With this information I believe that the next step will be for Darwin City Council and the NT Government to develop a partnership approach with cost-sharing arrangements and commit to comprehensive remediation of the asbestos. I flag that there is possibly Commonwealth funding for this, given it is historic Commonwealth waste. During this process it is important that there is open dialogue with the community and a clear timeline for the asbestos to be fully cleared.

I understand that this is a complex inherited problem, that neither Darwin City Council nor the NT Government caused this contamination and that comprehensive remediation will require funding, but surely the health of our community is worth it. I hope that the government and the council will find it so.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Mr Deputy Speaker, on 15 November I had the pleasure to support the Ringers Rugby in Katherine by offering both of our marquees. I attended the grounds where a huge crowd of ringers, pastoralists and station owners attended the Ringers Rugby tournament.

The inaugural event was held in 2021, with just four men's teams and two women's teams. It was held in 2022 with eight men's teams and four women's teams. In 2023 the number of teams grew to 12 men's teams and seven women's teams. In 2024 it grew again, with 16 men's teams and eight women's teams. This year there was a whopping 17 men's teams and nine women's teams. It was a fantastic event.

This is extraordinary growth and dedication to what has become a must-attend event on anyone's calendar in the region. Town is buzzing, shops are thriving and all the coffee shops and beauty salons are full of punters for the big weekend in town.

At the start, players hailed from Victoria River Downs, Mainoru Station, Mountain Valley Station, Manbulloo and Heli-Muster to form the first Ringers from the Top End team to play in the Katherine 7s competition in 2019. This motley crew of ringers made it all the way through to the finals with Jim Leonhardt as the coach. Word of this mighty team spread across Territory cattle stations, and in the following year two men's teams and a women's team comprising ringers from across the Top End were entered in the Katherine 7s 2020 competition. This growth and traction of the men's and women's ringers teams in a single year and the pure dedication the players showed, travelling on some of the roughest roads and distances far and wide, sparked the idea for the Ringers Rugby 7s. This year was the biggest yet.

A shout-out goes to the Top Saddlery and Bush Boutique which had a giveaway for its customers. It was a very busy weekend for the well-stocked shop. The prize for the lucky shopper was a knife roll, which went to Lachie Gedye. I am sure that is a prized possession for any ringer. Lachie is from the Heytesbury Hornets.

I give a huge thanks to Kerrie and Andrew Scott from Tanumbirini Station who were on the microphone for the day; Katherine Rugby League Club which ran the canteen; the volunteers on the barbecue; and the people who did the strapping of competitors.

I thank Jodie and Wilde who donated to the dash-for-cash race. This year's female winner was Emma Darcy from the Heartbreak Heifers, and the male winner was Gus Mallany from the Black Shakes.

The winning men's team of the day was, for the third year in a row, the Borderline Brumbies. The winning ladies' team was the Heartbreak Heifers.

It was a great afternoon that saw a huge storm come in, bringing down the temperature considerably and even a shower of rain, making the playing conditions slippery, but better than stinking hot.

Without sponsors it is near impossible to hold events such as the Ringers Rugby, which is a fantastic afternoon. I thank all the sponsors that made this event possible: Top End Heli Muster Services; Betta Home Living; Consolidated Pastoral Company; Orange County Auctions; JKH Transport; Rod and Rifle Katherine; Katherine Laser Wash; Katherine Vet Care; Comcat NT; Big Rivers Electrical; Second Skin; Dragonfly Catering; Heytesbury Pastoral; Impact Mechanical Maintenance; NT Rugby; DK Grazing; Ringers from the Top End; APA; Nutrien Ag; XXXX; the Top Saddlery and Bush Boutique; Yowy; Katherine Auto Electrics; and Power and Water.

I give a huge shout-out to Power Clean, which donated rubbish removal and the can disposal for recycling.

I send a big shout-out to Kylie and Jim Leonhardt, who organised the competition with the passion and dedication they would put towards organising a wedding. The attention to detail is amazing. Jim and Kylie drive around picking up the prizes. Businesses are happy to get on board as it is a fantastic event and supports our incredible community.

I thank everyone who donated, the teams that travelled to have a great weekend in Katherine and, once again, Jim and Kylie and everyone who made it another fantastic event.

I celebrate our Northern Territory finalists in the Australian Training Awards. Apprentices, trainees, trainers and students completing VET qualifications across the Territory are the lifeblood of our economy. They are

gutsy, determined and fearless in their pursuit of building a career, completing their training and shaping a stronger, more prosperous Northern Territory.

I proudly recognise our individual superstars who will be taking centre stage at the Australian Training Awards hosted in Darwin on 5 December. Our finalists are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year, Nicholas Yarran; Austin Asche Apprentice of the Year, Evangelene Rushworth; Trainee of the Year, Jade McGowan; Vocational Student of the Year, Jacqueline Florance; School-based Apprentice of the Year, Zeth King; VET in Schools Student of the Year, Tenzin Finch; and VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year, George Chingwangwe.

We will loudly cheer for these finalists as we go head to head with the best from every state and territory. They represent the strength, talent and future of the Northern Territory. Vocational education is where it is all happening, and the Territory is leading the way.

On 13 November I had the pleasure of hosting the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award ceremony at Parliament House where we celebrated the remarkable achievements of 91 young Territorians who completed their award this year. The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award is a global program that has been empowering young people since it was founded in 1956 by Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. Today the award operates in more than 130 countries, inspiring young people to challenge themselves, build new skills, contribute to their communities and discover just how capable they truly are.

In the Territory the program continues to go from strength to strength. It is now delivered through 20 government schools, 12 non-government schools and one youth organisation, supported by 79 trained award leaders who guide and mentor participants every step of the way.

I acknowledge the 4Sport initiative, a partnership between the Department of People, Sport and Culture and the Duke of Edinburgh's award, which allows participants to complete components of their award through involvement in local sporting clubs. I give a big shout-out to Badminton NT, Netball NT, Softball NT and Tennis NT which this year joined existing partners, Darwin Sailing Club and NT Rugby, giving participants more ways to stay active, build teamwork skills and contribute to their communities.

I extend my sincere thanks to the volunteers, mentors and award leaders whose dedication ensures the success of the program. Their support helps young Territorians build the confidence and capability that will carry them into their future.

Congratulations to all the young people who successfully achieved their Duke of Edinburgh's International Award this year.

The Gold Award recipients were Cooper Bament from Darwing High School; Jay Churly, Amaya Jeffers, Kaiden Maher, Brianna Morris, Angus Packwood and Billy Timbs from Junior Police Rangers; Oliver Archbold, Lachlan Davidson, Mikhail Fodra, Tikki Gohier and Dylan Hall from Nightcliff Middle School; Samson Bament from O'Loughlin Catholic College; and Tehan Abeywickrama, Ryan Carpenter, Tamsin Groves, Samhitha Heraganahally and Jeswin Johnson from The Essington School.

The Silver Award recipients were:

- Casuarina Senior College—Chrisopher Koulakis
- Darwin High School—Hannah Davis and Nicole Ting
- Good Shepherd Lutheran College—Isaac Holland
- Haileybury Rendall School—Lucinda Ganzer and Peta Gibson
- Junior Police Rangers—Charlie Clay, Patrick Crowe, Stella Di Toro, Sophia Gardini, Ethan Kingsbury, Jade Knight, Sophie Lam Paktsun, Phoebe Lam Paktsun, Lily Murray, Ameya Nair and Georgia Ravlich
- Nightcliff Middle School—Mariya Abhilash, Ritaj Alzoubi, Oliver Blackney, Kaiya Blomeley, Evzen Boby, Miguel Clark, Kotoka Cullen, Jesse Davey, Ethan Dela Cruz, Citta Doughty, Savanah Garrett, Star Giri, Taj Gray, Will Gray, Lola Hagenaar, Harriet Hendry, Riley Hollingworth, Xanthippi Iliou, Lilyrose Innes, Gede Lindner, Mischa Lo, Olive Lobo, Stephanie Luu, Enrico Mariotti, Olive Megarrell, Mai Morante, Avaneesh Nirmal, Evan O'Sullivan, Jordi O'Toole, Antara Panchal, Finley Myer Paran, Ysue Pen, Ahnouk

Roseth, Harley Scott, Harley Smart, Anouk Stitfold, Ryan Symonds, Hien Ta, Dylan Wake and Heidi Zoldak

- NT School of Distance Education—Bailey Kennedy and Lily Kenny
- Sattler Christian College—Amy Carter
- SEDA College NT—Liam Eadie and Sienna Ridley
- The Essington School—Ismahan Belarouci, Alicia David, Sophie Fellows, Anastasia Hill, Larry Law, Athanasia Papandonakis, Indah Prastika, Lincoln Pratt, Supipi Rathnayake, Siya Sabu, Devaganga Santhosh and Luca Toonson.

Ms CAHILL (Port Darwin): Mr Deputy Speaker, I speak about the celebration of the achievements of our international students at the 2025 International Student Awards as well as the contribution of our 2025 International Student Ambassadors who actively participated in various activities to enhance the experiences of their peers and contributed to promoting the Northern Territory as a study destination. The 19 incredible international students who graduated from the Ambassador program in 2025 are:

- Abdurrahman Aliyu, Nigeria, CDU
- Amina Salha, India, CDU
- Araiz Ahmad, Pakistan, Darwin High School
- Bernardo Massard, Brazil, Sydney City College
- Clarilyn Quirante Isip, Philippines, Latitude College
- Daniellee Jane Delfin, Philippines, Alana Kaye College
- Ivan Nieto, Colombia, Latitude College
- Gilbertofer Tanoto, Indonesia, CDU
- Hadisurya Sugiharto Temmuyin, Indonesia, CDU
- Howard Mai, China, CDU
- Harnoor Kaur, India, St John’s Catholic College
- Ishan Sumanasekara, Sri Lanka, CDU
- Muhammad Kamal Chohan, Pakistan, CDU
- Nithya Romeshika Yamasinghe, Sri Lanka, CDU
- Sana-e-Zehra Haidry, Pakistan, CDU
- Thanh Trung Do (James), Vietnam, CDU
- Kome Tran, Vietnam, CDU
- Mit Dinh, Vietnam, CDU
- Wenqing Yang, China, CDU.

This takes me to the 2025 International Student Awards. These awards, which have been running for nine years, acknowledge the outstanding academic achievements, leadership, community engagement and career accomplishments from international students and alumni.

The awards also recognise Northern Territory businesses that champion and advocate for international students. They not only provide our international students and graduates an opportunity to gain valuable work experience but also go above and beyond to support them in their journey, welcoming them as new Territorians and contributing members of our growing Northern Territory community.

Congratulations to all the nominees, finalists and winners of the 2025 International Student Awards.

The Study NT International Student of the Year—the top honour—went to Gilbertofer Tanoto from Charles Darwin University. Since moving from Indonesia Gilbert, as he is more readily known, has been a passionate advocate for student needs, a peer mentor and an inspiring leader.

The International Student Alumni of the Year is Ali Dhirani, who is originally from Tanzania and studied at CDU. He is now a well-established and successful businessman running an accounting practice that operates in not just the Northern Territory but also Victoria and Queensland.

The International Student Volunteer of the Year is Mengdie Momo Zhao from China, who studies at CDU. The International Student Employer of the Year is Kinetic IT. The Student Ambassador of the Year is Mit Dinh from Vietnam, who is at CDU.

Each of these students and the entire international student community contribute enormously to the Territory community and economy. I do not know what we would do without them because everywhere I go, at every event I go to and every festival I attend, they are there in force, volunteering, supporting our community and proudly showing their culture. I thank them for their contribution.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak in adjournment about Cyclone Fina because I did not get the chance to do so earlier.

First, I acknowledge everyone who went through it in Darwin, in our communities and even our regional centres. I watched Cyclone Fina carefully for five days zigzagging back and forth. It did a 180 U-turn near Croker Island in my electorate.

I have been through a few cyclones. I was in Darwin in 2018 for Marcus. I was more anxious this time because of the speed at which it was coming. It seemed to take forever to get past Darwin, and it was building strength. My constituents on the Tiwi Islands got the full brunt of it. Tiwi College is in the Pickertaramoor community. All the staff members and groundsmen were there, and the eye was on the southern part of Melville Island which is where that community is.

I say a big thank you to the emergency services team. I thank the parliamentary members who texted me—my team, the Members for Drysdale and Sanderson and, of course, the Chief Minister, who was keeping me up-to-date daily on the movements and who to call.

Cyclone Fina went through Minjilang on Croker Island. It was a Category 2, but there was only tree damage. It then went to the southern tip of Melville Island. I was in Darwin—I am sure most of us were—and we felt the brunt of it.

I have seen videos from the school principal and schoolteachers of Pickertaramoor, which is the community that the eye went over. It looked scary. Pickertaramoor is still isolated; planes can get in, but people in the community of Milikapiti, with all its services and volunteers, are currently making progress of about six kilometres a day towards Tiwi College. I missed today's debate on it because I was on the phone coordinating that with the police and everybody else.

I thank federal Ministers Malarndirri McCarthy and Kristy McBain, Marion Scrymgour, the Chief Minister and the team for coming out yesterday to see the community. When we arrived the power was back on in certain parts of Wurrumiyanga community, which changed the whole spirit of the community. Everyone was grateful we were there, which is more to do with remote communities not being forgotten in these times. It was good that both sides of government and even federal members were there.

I thank the Chief Minister for giving me hourly updates.

Pickertaramoor on Melville Island and Minjilang were hit the hardest. Everyone knows about the situation there. I thank the responders. I give a shout-out to the police, the shire councils, the Mayors of West Arnhem and TIRC (Tiwi Islands Regional Council) and the Tiwi Land Council members for being leaders in the community and keeping everybody calm with what was going on and filtering information down. When we

got to Wurrumiyanga there was a community barbecue, and everyone was upbeat and ready to go back to their homes. A couple of houses still need to be reconnected to power.

I thank Jangala Coombes, my cousin-brother, for donating his time and his efforts and community members Austin Wonaeamirri, Brenton Toy, Deanne Rioli and all the Rioli family. Coming over from Milikapiti to Garden Point, most of the roads are still inaccessible, but the community and the police are working in conjunction with the land council and the shire to sort it out. I reckon that within a couple of days they should be able to reach Garden Point. It is a team effort, and I am proud of them. Instead of waiting for external services to come in they are chipping in and using all their equipment—chainsaws, axes and trailers—to get things done and get access to these communities. Well done, guys.

Mr BURGOYNE (Braitling): Madam Speaker, the wonderful Alice Springs Christmas Show was held on Saturday afternoon.

I give a huge thank you to the committee and event staff for putting on an incredible event that was enjoyed by many in our community. To Nicky, Racheal, Andrew, Craig and the entire Alice Springs Show committee, thank you for your efforts.

In the evening there were many stall holders and volunteers. I acknowledge them for their work, especially considering the hot 39-degree afternoon. Well done to:

- Angeligue Glasson, who sold tickets all afternoon for the Christmas stocking competition
- Shane Thompson, whose baked goods and Christmas puddings are always in high demand
- Naomi Hunter, who not only sold her incredible clay earrings but also supported the fundraising efforts of Ross Park Primary School which sold wrapping paper and cookbooks
- Amy Sabadin, whose desert flowers added colour and vibrance to everyone who bought them
- Megan Deans, who helped throughout the evening, running around and ensuring everyone was where they needed to be
- the CBBA (Centralian Beef Breeders Association), which had a stall on the evening.

Rural shows, no matter what time of year and which form they take, need community support to survive. It made my day to see so many stall holders put in the effort to be there.

The Member for Namatjira and I, with assistance from the Namatjira office, handed out 500 Zooper Doopers to children and parents alike who were looking for some cold relief.

I thank the event organisers for all their work in ensuring that this much-loved event continues to take place.

I will touch briefly on Movember. I am once again growing a mo to raise awareness for men's health. This year it hits home for my family and I more than ever.

Only two weeks ago we lost my Uncle Greg to brain cancer after a short fight. Uncle Greg, like many men, did not want to make a fuss and did not seek medical attention when early signs that something was wrong occurred. Uncle Greg was a key carer for his mum, my grandmother, who has been suffering from dementia for some years. Through putting everyone else first Uncle Greg ignored his own illness, and it cost him his life.

This year, although a bit of facial hair may not change the world, I am once again glad that I can do my bit to start a conversation and raise funds for men's health so that others can seek help when the early signs that something may be wrong occur. We all need to look out for and support one another with our health.

I thank Minister Cahill, who made a generous contribution to my Movember journey this year. If you are keen to donate to anyone taking part in Movember, go online and search their name on the Movember website, view the incredible moustaches men across Australia are growing to raise funds and awareness for men's health and support this important Initiative if you can.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, the McKinnon Institute is Australia's only nonpartisan organisation dedicated to strengthening the performance of our governments and parliaments.

It is best known for the McKinnon Prize, which has been awarded for a number of years. It is notable that the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory was nominated this year in the state and territory category of Leader of the Year, something that received little attention and is worthy of recognition. It is not an insignificant achievement in my opinion.

The other thing the McKinnon Institute is known for is professional development and its Advanced Political Leadership course which seeks to equip politicians with the skill sets and mindsets they need to better serve Australian communities by addressing the big challenges that Australia faces.

Over the last six months I am pleased and proud to report—in fact, it was my great privilege—that I was the beneficiary of a professional development opportunity under the auspices of the McKinnon Institute. It involved learning from a wide range of experts. It was a phenomenal opportunity to be able to learn from practitioners in politics, the media and industry—people at the top of their game. Equally, and more importantly in some ways, there was the opportunity to connect with colleagues from across Australia.

I will share a little about my most recent experience with the McKinnon Institute. On 5 and 6 November I spent time in Canberra in the Australian Parliament, meeting with federal colleagues from across the aisle. It was an invaluable opportunity. All of us in this place are afforded the opportunity to spend some of our electorate allowance on professional development. It is great to see how other parliaments function and to learn how we might better function.

I am grateful to the Member for Nicholls for being kind enough to host me on my stay and to his staff, Mark Skilbeck and Morgan Dyer, for taking such good care of me and helping me to arrange all the logistics and the meetings that I had.

It was an opportunity to do things for the benefit of the Northern Territory in many ways, because connection matters. It was a chance to learn about process, build bridges with others and plant seeds for the future.

I am also grateful to the Members for Parramatta, Cook, Lyons, Fairfax, Flinders and Swan, amongst many others, and the staff of all the aforementioned for helping me to make progress in Canberra.

It was a great opportunity to meet with economists from across the aisle. We face great economic challenges in the Northern Territory, as we all know. To be able to speak with the likes of Steve Hamilton and Jonathon Deans was important.

For those of you who have not done it in person, it is a lot of fun and a learning experience to witness a Question Time in federal parliament. It was extra special to watch our Member for Solomon being mercilessly roasted, quite frankly, by the Member for Cook. It made for entertaining viewing from the gallery, but it raised a serious point about the quality of our federal representation. The Northern Territory has profound economic and social challenges. The likelihood of us resolving any of those things is negligible to zero unless we can not only work with the federal parliament but also have people in the federal parliament who are working for us. Connection matters.

I am grateful for the opportunity that the McKinnon Institute afforded me to spend time looking at the Victorian, New South Wales and federal parliaments. Being in spaces like that means you get to meet mayors and other industry players.

In the short space of time I was there, I met with the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, whose work is important in the Northern Territory in relation to boarding school students and the challenges they face.

Australian Pathology had things on in the federal parliament at the time. It was Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. I am pleased to say that I finally had a PSA test done. At least that is not a problem I have to worry about. The Pharmacy Guild had its annual parliamentary dinner, and I am grateful to Keely Quinn for the opportunity to participate in that.

Canberra, however, was the precursor to the main event I attended on 7 November called Future-Ready Government in the Opera House. That McKinnon scholars' day focused primarily on what artificial intelligence means for future-ready governance and our democracy at this moment.

We are all aware that there are challenges in this space. It is a fast-moving area. Indeed, even today in federal parliament there were Bills introduced relating to artificial intelligence regulation and moving forward constructively.

It was fascinating to learn about the new frontiers of AI from Ashley Llorens, Corporate VP of Microsoft Research; AI in Australian industry from Lee Hickin, the new Executive Director of the Australian National AI Centre; and AI regulatory frameworks from Felix Kartte from the European Commission. Perhaps no-one was more instructive than Professor Anthea Roberts at ANU and the CEO of Dragonfly Thinking, who has made the profound shift from being a gold-star legal scholar to an AI trailblazer. Her new focus is on how people in technology together can help navigate complex challenges, including Australia's slow productivity growth.

Why does this matter to us? It matters because the Northern Territory has complex challenges. Structural economic reform, productivity reform and public sector reform will all need to be addressed in the coming years, and we need tools to do that. Technology drives GDP growth and the pace of change is accelerating. If you think about the printing press, electrification, assembly lines, synthetic fertilisers, the internet and AI, you see that it is an exponential curve of growth.

In a 2025 global study on trust attitudes in the use of AI, Australia is the most worried jurisdiction and the least excited. We are risk-averse and worried about job losses and have little homegrown success and low AI literacy. What we have in Australia are either non-critical users just generating cat memes or critical non-users, people who are putting their heads in the sand.

I confess to being in the latter category despite my previous academic work in this space, so over the forthcoming period I will try to remedy this by diving in the deep end to improve my AI literacy, ideas and output towards augmentation because the goal is to augment, not just automate, processes. I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly on that.

I am already beginning to learn and appreciate that LLMs are not stochastic systems nor vending machines; they do not deliver the same results over and again. If you start to understand context windows, temperature setting, path dependence, prompt engineering, token prediction, epistemic hygiene and agentic systems, you realise that this is the vernacular of productivity reform going into the next century and that these are things we will all have to know about. We have to move away from jobs-apocalypse thinking towards using agentic systems as thought partners.

Why does this matter? It matters because smart teams have a diversity of cognitive thinkers. They allow for multi-lens analysis of challenges, which is what we will need to do.

It is possible there is an AI investment bubble forming that may burst, but equally it is probable that AI and LLM technologies are here to stay, to say nothing of more advanced machine-learning applications. On that basis it is prudent for all of us to lean into rather than out of these systems. It will form part of our education, infrastructure and problem-solving. If we want to do more with less we will have to learn how to employ these new technologies in not just Canberra and the APS space but also the Northern Territory public service.

I am grateful to the McKinnon Institute for the opportunity this year to learn and build bridges, particularly the McKinnon team and Professor Rod Glover, the outgoing CEO, and Professor Anne Tiernan. I encourage all parliamentarians in this room—as they are encouraged elsewhere—to explore the McKinnon Institute and all the resources it offers to improve systems and to help us help ourselves. There is not a lot of professional development for parliamentarians. Almost everybody who participates or engages with the McKinnon tools and processes ends up coming away saying that it was a great opportunity and helped them be a better politician, parliamentarian and problem-solver.

In summary, in a polarised world and uncertain times nothing gives me more hope for Australian democracy than the emergence of the McKinnon Institute and its impact on public policy across the country. I am grateful for its support throughout the course of the year. I look forward to continuing my association with the institute in coming years.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I place on the record my congratulations to the 2026 Australians of the Year for the Northern Territory which was announced on 3 November.

Congratulations to the 2026 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory, Dr Felix Ho ASM from Darwin; the 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory, Jenny Duggan from Katherine; the 2026 Young Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory, Jaiden Dickenson from Tennant Creek; and the 2026 Local Hero for the Northern Territory, Ron Green BM, ESM from Katherine.

The four Northern Territory recipients will join those from other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2026. I wish them all the best for their trip to Canberra. I will share the bios

of our Territory representatives and the impressive reasons that we have four high-calibre award winners who will proudly represent the Northern Territory.

The 2026 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory is Dr Felix Ho, who tirelessly serves remote communities in the Northern Territory as a medical practitioner, but for Felix that is not enough; he also volunteers thousands of his hours building the St John Youth program and helps at public events as a St John first responder. Since joining as a St John cadet in 1995 at the age of 13, Felix has faithfully served others, including overseas as an intensive care paramedic on a United Nations mission to Timor-Leste. Now 43, Felix brings people together across geography and generations to equip Australia's youths to save lives through first aid in an emergency. Congratulations, Felix.

The 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory is Jenny Duggan, who has shown extraordinary grassroots leadership as Katherine's rubbish warrior, quietly transforming the landscape and community spirit of her town. Each morning 67-year-old Jenny walks the banks of the Katherine River to remove litter. In collecting hundreds of kilograms of rubbish she has put the spotlight on environmental safety. Jenny supports community members experiencing hardship through her volunteer work in the St Vincent de Paul Society. Jenny serves on the management committee of Ormonde House, which provides housing for men in need, and on the management committee for Katherine's Vinnies store. Congratulations, Jenny.

The 2026 Young Australian of the Year for the NT is proud Warumungu man Jaiden Dickenson. He is a beacon of hope and resilience for young people in the Tennant Creek, Ali Curung and Elliott communities. In his role as a Tennant Creek Mob Youth Diversion Officer 18-year-old Jaiden helps young people address the trauma at the root of crime and social disorder by taking responsibility for their behaviour, overcoming their personal challenges and moving towards rehabilitation. In mentoring young people Jaiden's influence has created a ripple effect, empowering other young people to take up roles as mentors within the Tennant Creek Mob.

The 2026 Local Hero for the Northern Territory is local legend Ron Green, who has volunteered hundreds of hours keeping his community safe in times of crisis. Since 2005 he has grown and strengthened the success of the Katherine Volunteer Unit of the Northern Territory Emergency Service. Ron, 50, also fights bushfires and attends vehicle crashes as a volunteer for the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service. On top of this, he leads the Katherine Youth Division of St John Ambulance, where he inspires and trains future generations of emergency first responders.

That is a small snapshot of the four exceptional Territorians who will represent us in Canberra at the national awards next year. I wish Felix, Jenny, Jaiden and Ron all the best in their venture.

I seek leave to table the full biographies from the NT Australian of the Year Awards.

Madam SPEAKER: You can do that without leave.

Ms UIBO: Perfect, thank you.

I travelled to Minyerri community at the end of October after the parliament sittings fortnight where I witnessed firsthand the new subdivision works. This is a huge development for the people of Minyerri and the region. Minyerri was recognised, unfortunately, as the most overcrowded community in the Northern Territory.

Since becoming the local member in 2020, I have strongly advocated for better housing for Minyerri. It is complex in terms of the land tenure for that community. Different parcels of land belong under different legislation. It has been a complex and difficult journey, but we did the work when we were in government.

I was proud that at one point I could get the chief executive officer and deputy chief executive officer of the Housing department at the time; the general manager of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics; the late Chairman of the Northern Land Council, Dr Bush-Blanasi; and the regional executive director of the Big Rivers region, who was based in the Katherine, to have a huge focus on Minyerri, particularly that complex land tenure, to see that land clearing work happen. The work of the traditional owners is making sure that the nearby sacred site is protected, recognised and certified for that development, where there will be more than 50 lots. This will make a huge difference to the living conditions and quality of life for the people of Minyerri.

I am proud to have advocated for that as the local member and to see it now come to fruition. The land servicing for the first transitional court, which will have six houses built on it, has been completed. I look forward to seeing those six houses. Out bush, people believe it when they see it. They hear something time

and again, so when they see it that makes a huge difference to believing they are not forgotten. I will continue to push for that good development.

I hosted an event at Territory Manor in Mataranka, which is one of the iconic accommodations in Mataranka. It was a pizza night with me as the local member and two of the three newly elected councillors for the Never Never Ward, who are based in Mataranka, Councillors Des Barritt and Sue Edwards. We represented two different tiers of government. It was a fantastic event. It was quite warm, as you can imagine, in the humidity. In November Mataranka can get up to 45 degrees during the day, but thankfully it cooled off. Well done to everyone who braved the weather. There were 20 or so people and another 10 or 15 kids running around. I thank Territory Manor for the pizzas; it was great not having to cook that night. We will be working on different types of engagement, based on community feedback, and positive constructive ways to speak with elected members at the local, Territory and federal level.

Thank you to everyone for coming to enjoy the pizza night at Mataranka. We will do it again, maybe in the Dry Season when the weather is a bit cooler.

I mentioned earlier in debate the work of the Ropa Woda Governance Council. I was proud to host close to 30 traditional owners and community members at parliament this morning for breakfast before they went to the hearing at the Supreme Court for the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan which is being disputed—hopefully giving them a bit of strength about the way that has been handled.

It was great to be in Jilkminggan with the women's committee of that governance council, led by Cecilia Lake, who is an impressive woman. I look forward to continuing to advocate for the council's work which is focused on water security on country and changes to the environment and climate change. The council members are advocating strongly with the future generations in mind. Well done to the Ropa Woda Governance Council. Thank you for having me at Jilkminggan last week and taking me out on country.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.