Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

15th Assembly



Parliamentary Record
Debates and Questions



Tuesday 12 May 2026

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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT
Committee Membership

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I report that pursuant to Standing Order 181 on 8 May 2026 the following changes were made to committee memberships:

- House Committee—the Member for Arafura replaced the Member for Daly
- Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee—the Member for Gwoja replaced the Member for Daly
- Legislative Scrutiny Committee—the Member for Daly replaced the Member for Gwoja
- Public Accounts Committee—the Member for Nightcliff replaced the Member for Arafura
- Estimates Committee—pursuant to paragraph 2 of the resolution of the Assembly dated 6 May 2026, the following members have been nominated: the Members for Drysdale, Fannie Bay, Johnston, Karama and Nightcliff.

VISITORS
Michael Long Learning and Leadership Centre

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of students and teachers from Ramingining as part of their week at the Michael Long Learning and Leadership Centre. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

APPROPRIATION (2026–2027) BILL
Serial 63
and
TREASURY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 64

Continued from 7 May 2026.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, in speaking on Budget 2026–27, I do so not for the sake of opposition but to highlight where I believe this budget falls short of the greater ambition needed for the future of the Northern Territory.

Budgets are about priorities; they reveal what governments value, what they are prepared to invest in and what kind of future they want to build for this place.

I acknowledge how hard it is to deliver a Territory budget. There is only a handful of us in this Chamber who truly understand the pressure of balancing competing priorities, rising costs and the expectations of Territorians spread across one of the most unique and complex jurisdictions in the country.

The Northern Territory is like nowhere else. We have a small population spread across more than 1.3 million square kilometres. Delivering services in Kintore, Kalkarindji, Yuendumu and Alice Springs will always cost more than delivering services in Melbourne or Sydney. Building roads, schools, homes and hospitals in the bush comes with enormous logistical and financial challenges. Every government faces those realities. Acknowledging those challenges cannot become an excuse for lowering ambition.

The Territory has long faced structural and financial pressures. About 70% of the Territory's budget is supported by Commonwealth funding, thanks to the Albanese government. That reality means we must start having mature conversations about growing self-generated revenue and building a stronger more sustainable economy and home. I support conversations about increasing Territory revenue so long as it is done responsibly, sustainably and without sacrificing our environment, communities, future and sacred sites.

We need long-term investments that create long-term returns. If households pay for water, large-scale mining exploration companies should not have unlimited access for free. A fair price and a framework on water for industrial use could generate an additional $30m to $40m annually for the Territory. That money could help

fund housing, hospitals, health services, schools and roads and support other Territory businesses to grow. Water is precious in the Territory; it has value. Territorians expect that value to benefit the public.

We should be looking at growing industries that build on our natural strengths. The Territory has enormous potential in carbon farming, biodiversity markets, savannah burning, conservation projects and renewable industries. Aboriginal ranger groups and traditional owners are already leading much of this work on country. The government should be backing them to grow these industries and attract investment to the Territory.

We have an opportunity to rethink our tourism economy. The Territory has one of the strongest tourism brands in the nation, but there is enormous room for growth. We should be expanding ecotourism and cultural tourism, investing in our festivals and arts and improving regional roads and tourism infrastructure. We should be strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal organisations and communities because let us face it: people come here for an Aboriginal experience of language, law and culture. Our landscapes, cultures, stories and experiences are globally unique. More visitors mean more jobs, stronger regional economies and more money circulating through Territory businesses.

We should be thinking bigger about industries for the future. Australia is facing massive challenges with renewable energy waste. Solar panels and wind turbines are reaching the end of their life span, and much of that material ends up in landfill. Why should the Northern Territory not become the renewable recycling powerhouse of this nation? Why should we not create jobs recovering valuable materials like silver, silicon and rare minerals while building new manufacturing and recycling industries in the Territory? That is the kind of bold thinking we should be bringing to the economic future of the Territory.

We must talk about unlocking the economic potential of Aboriginal communities and lands. Much of the Territory is Aboriginal land and rightfully so; it always was and always will be Aboriginal land, but Aboriginal Territorians should not be excluded from economic opportunity. Governments must work with traditional owners, land councils and communities as equal partners to unlock opportunities in agriculture, tourism, renewable energy, conservation and business development. We need a participatory economy where Aboriginal Territorians are not just consulted but also genuinely empowered to build wealth, create jobs and shape the future for their communities.

Economic growth matters, but that growth means little if it does not translate into stronger services, safer communities and better opportunities for all Territorians.

Turning to the budget, I believe we need to see greater investment in health, justice, housing and early intervention. Top End Territorians deserve a new hospital, like many others do. As a Centralian I say clearly that Alice Springs and Katherine Hospitals must be part of a long-term planning process for new hospitals as well.

Health infrastructure is not just a building project; it is an investment in people, jobs, safety and future capacity for our health system. The government should begin conversations with the Commonwealth on the future of the Berrimah barracks site. Its location between Darwin and Palmerston and its proximity to the airport make it ideal for future health infrastructure and aeromedical retrieval services. The Palmerston Regional Hospital site could then evolve into expanded aged care, rehabilitation, women's and children's health services or even a dedicated Territory-owned training and teaching facility.

How does the government expect to improve health outcomes when funding for primary healthcare and mental health appears to be going backwards in real terms, particularly once CPI increases are considered and last year's overspend are taken into account?

Does this budget include any genuine measures to improve pay conditions and retention strategies for frontline workers in an effort to keep experienced and senior staff in the Territory's health system long term? This is not a budget for health, and it is not a budget for workers.

For people living with disability, and for our seniors, this budget falls short. Important concessions are being frozen at a time when the cost of living continues to rise. Across the Territory grocery prices keep climbing. Territorians doing it toughest should not be falling behind further while this government pats itself on the back. Our seniors, carers and people living with disability deserve dignity, support and real investment, not cuts by neglect and frozen concessions that will fail to keep up with the reality.

When it comes to justice what disappoints me most is the lack of investment in programs and initiatives that work. Alternatives to custody, therapeutic programs, diversion programs and rehabilitation all work. We have

reductions in recidivism when governments invest in diversion, behaviour change programs, rehabilitation and community-led justice initiatives.

Law and justice groups should also be expanded and properly funded. Governments often talk about the role that elders and community members should play in improving community safety, but those conversations and that government narrative must be matched with investment and support. The government is just paying lip-service to these issues.

I am deeply concerned by the reductions in legal assistance funding. You cannot continue to place pressure on courts, police and Corrections while reducing support for legal services. Justice systems function effectively only when every part of the justice system is properly resourced. When legal services are stretched beyond capacity delays grow, vulnerable people miss out on support and pressure builds across the entire justice system.

We hear that Legal Aid NT is once again having to consider cutting legal services because the CLP has reduced overall funding. The Attorney-General will try to spin it that the government has increased funding, when it has cut Legal Aid NT funding. Legal Aid NT can no longer access Treasurer's advances or one-off funding agreements for expensive cases or if it anticipates higher workloads in the year ahead. Under the CLP there has been a cut of about 18% to Legal Aid funding.

If we are serious about the future of the Northern Territory we must be serious about our children, our young people and the families who will shape it. Territory children are our future. Every child deserves a life filled with safety, opportunity, love and hope.

Although this budget addresses some areas, it falls short in delivering the scale of early intervention investment needed to truly support children and families. We need stronger family supports; more frontline workers, particularly in regional offices; better case management; greater support for kinship and foster carers; and more investment aimed at preventing children from entering the child protection system in the first place. Early intervention and support change lives.

It is also important that this government delivers more childcare facilities across our regional and remote communities. Families in the bush deserve access to affordable, safe and reliable childcare services. When young children can learn, grow and flourish, it means parents can work, study and participate in the local economy. Access to childcare is not just about early learning; it is about creating stronger families, supporting workforce participation and building stronger communities across the Territory.

Domestic, family and sexual violence must remain a key priority for any government. Although I acknowledge this budget includes investment in this area, it falls short of delivering transformational reform that is needed. Too much of what we are seeing is money shifted from one program to another, repackaged under a different name, rather than a genuine new investment that expands existing services, strengthens prevention and delivers lasting change. Territorians deserve more than rebranding. They deserve real action, long-term investment and a system that protects victim–survivors and breaks the cycle of violence.

Housing remains one of the greatest challenges that the Northern Territory faces. I acknowledge the significant investment from the Albanese government, because homes change lives. Central Australia must not be forgotten. Remote communities, town camps and urban public housing in Central Australia all need significant investment. We need new homes in the urban areas of Alice Springs, the town camps of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek and in every Central Australian remote community. Territorians deserve safe, secure and liveable homes no matter where they live.

If we are serious about building a stronger, more confident Territory economy, we cannot ignore the industries that help define who we are. As someone who is deeply passionate about the arts, I am disappointed by the lack of new investment for the creative sector. The arts contribute more than $735m into the Territory economy annually. Every dollar invested in the arts delivers an enormous economic and social return. The arts are not an afterthought; they are part of our identity, economy and national reputation.

Through its budget the CLP government has shown that it does not care about the arts. It has not invested in delivering new funding to support Territory artists, not even increases in line with CPI. Creatives are forgotten under this government. CLP members can turn up to as many arts functions they want and claim that they care about Territorians, but their actions speak louder than words. This budget tells the real story; the CLP government does not care about the arts, because there has been minimal investment in the arts.

We constantly hear talk about local communities delivering local solutions and local answers, yet when it comes to local government reform, this government stops short of putting real money on the table. The government has repeatedly spoken about its desire to de-amalgamate regional councils into smaller councils, but this budget contains no meaningful additional investment to support that transition—not one extra cent. De-amalgamation costs money. It requires planning, workforce support, governance reform, infrastructure and long-term financial backing. None of that appears in the budget. Territorians are left to ask: is this truly a priority for the government? Where is this investment to deliver it?

It feels less like genuine reform and more like political rhetoric designed to create headlines ahead of the next Territory election. If we are serious regarding strengthening local government, empowering communities and delivering local decision-making, we must match words with action and see the government provide resources to make this reform a reality.

Growing the population is critical to the future success of the Territory. Skilled migration must be an important part of that story. If we are genuinely serious about population growth, every member of this Chamber must be serious about embracing multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion, not using them as tools to divide. We cannot say that we want more people while failing to champion what makes communities stronger and welcoming. Growing our population is not just about numbers; it is about building a Territory that people believe in and choose to call home.

The future of the Northern Territory can be bright, but it will not have a bright future through fear, cuts and short-term politics. The Territory cannot cut its way to prosperity. The Territory's future will not be built on pulling back, thinking small or settling for less than Territorians deserve. We must grow industries, back communities and invest in infrastructure that creates the long-term economic activity that keeps wealth circulating locally. We must invest in housing, health, education, justice and jobs. We must push to back the bush, unlock opportunity and ensure that no Territorian is left behind. This is the Territory I believe in; it is bold, ambitious and fair. It is a Territory that builds for the future, not managing the decline.

The CLP will talk about financial management. I make it clear that we need to have conversations about the Territory's future and growing self-generated revenue, but that cannot come at the cost of selling assets. Territory Labor will stand behind Territory assets. We will not privatise Territory assets to make the budget books look better for the short term to try to trick Territorians, like the CLP did previously when it sold important Territory assets like TIO, the Territory's own insurance office.

Insurance premiums and the cost of living are rising. Territorians are being asked to pay $30,000 per year to insure their homes along the banks of the Todd River in Alice Springs. Rural residents are being asked to pay $15,000 per year for insurance on their rural properties. If it was not for the short-sightedness of the CLP—if the Territory had kept the Territory Insurance Office—what would those premiums be today?

Territory Labor backs public servants. We will not be like …

Mrs Zio: When?

Mr PAECH: I pick up on the interjection from the Member for Fannie Bay who said, 'When?' We back Territorians and public servants every day, unlike the DNA of the CLP and the Member for Fong Lim who said that the public service is over-inflated. He basically said that it needs to be cut. They are Territory jobs. Those public servants are injecting into the local economy.

Mr Maley: Why didn't you fix it?

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Nelson!

Mr PAECH: They are people who call the Territory home and who have decided to stay here.

Mr Maley: You had eight years.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Nelson!

Mr PAECH: Those public servants are teachers, nurses and doctors. They are people who show up every day and do the hard work.

The CLP needs to consider what its Member for Fong Lim said. He talked about cutting the public servant numbers—the people you rely on, who treat you when you are sick and greet your children when you drop them off to hospital. They are public servants …

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: I pick up on the Member for Fong Lim clapping at the cuts. He wants to cut the public service. It is disgraceful …

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: He continues to interject, backing his claim to cut public servant numbers—and now we are getting laughter.

Labor will not privatise Territory-owned assets; they will stay in the hands of Territorians. We will not cut hardworking public servant numbers—the nurses, teachers, educators and people in the Housing and Mining departments. They do all the hard work for you, and you want to cut them. It is disgraceful. It is a coward's way out.

Under this government there is a lack of vision and opportunity. We lack a bright future.

There are many ways to grow self-generated revenue. That is the conversation this government should be having, not looking at ways to tell hardworking public servants that they are not needed anymore.

I look forward to hearing from the Member for Fong Lim about which public servants he wants to cut. Will he be silenced again, as he has been? Will he hide from the media, as he continues to do? Will he tell us which public servant positions this government is talking about cutting? When he says that the public service is over-inflated, he is saying that he wants to cut public service jobs. Who are they? Be honest with people.

The government claims to be open, transparent and accountable, so tell us who you are looking at. Which agencies—departments—are you looking at to see whether you can find an efficiency dividend? That is a hardworking public servant. Every public servant I know goes to work for the Northern Territory Public Sector because they are committed to making a difference. We should not be telling them that their service is not required. It is shameful.

Earlier I acknowledged that the Treasurer has done a difficult job. He has a difficult job. The Treasurer and you, Madam Speaker, as a former Treasurer, know how hard it is. I am not saying that it is an easy task, by any means. You have to manage priorities, your colleagues and the backbenchers who have no idea how a Territory Cabinet and budget process run because they have never been in it. It is a hard job. I acknowledge the Member for Namatjira has done that.

Budgets are about the priorities of the government. We are in the opposition. We believe that there are other areas, priorities and opportunities to look at. I am not disputing that; this is an opportunity for us to have that conversation. We will go through the Estimates process where we can ask questions in more detail.

I accept that it is a hard job. I acknowledge that we need hard conversations about self-generated revenue and how we can work with industrial, commercial, private, third-party stakeholders and investors and the Commonwealth to leverage additional investment. In my speech I said a number of things that we could all look at to increase investment in the Northern Territory. I am happy to have that conversation with members of the government. I am happy for us to look at parliamentary inquiries into how we can do that. Let us do it. There are things I wanted to do when we were in government. As Cabinet members would know, we all have our priorities, but then we have to sit around the Cabinet table and battle it out to try to get the best we can for our portfolio, local community or electorate. I acknowledge that is a hard job, so why do we as a parliament not look at inquiries and things to increase revenue to help deliver infrastructure across the bush?

I am not blaming the CLP or previous governments. Let us be under no illusion: when we were given self-government we inherited a massive infrastructure and social service deficit. We have been playing catch-up since the Territory was given the keys to govern itself. We have been unable to catch up and address that infrastructure and social service deficit because we do not have our own revenue for that investment. They are the conversations we need to have.

Yes, we get GST, but we need to make sure that goes to increasing living standards and addressing disadvantage. There is $389m of untied Commonwealth revenue coming to the Territory as part of that GST.

That is enough to build a Darwin or Alice Springs hospital or to start the process at least. That is enough to help build critical roads and schools across the Northern Territory. The GST comes to the Territory to address disadvantage, and we need to make sure that money goes to disadvantaged communities.

I thank the Treasurer for bringing the Appropriation Bill to the Assembly. It is an important conversation to have. I acknowledge all the CLP Cabinet members who had a difficult job in pulling it together.

I look forward to Estimates to unpack that a little further and ask questions about the commitments and deliverables over the last 12 months.

I reaffirm our commitment that Territory Labor will never be in a position to sell Territory assets, and we will always back our hardworking public servants.

Mr Kerle: You would just put it on the credit card.

Mr Edgington: You would give them away for nothing.

Mr Kerle: You would give them away for free.

Mr PAECH: We did not cut their jobs.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Gwoja for delivering what I can only assume was meant to be the Opposition Leader's budget reply last Wednesday. It is refreshing to hear someone speak off the cuff and not from an AI-written speech like last Wednesday.

Although I could talk about the whole of government and the budget, my number one priority and focus is the rural area. This government has two-and-a-bit rural members—the Member for Karama holds Knuckey Lagoon in his electorate—and we on this side of the Chamber love the rural area. If you read the budget papers you know that the Treasurer loves the rural area too. This government is ensuring the rural area gets its fair share after years of neglect by previous governments. This year's budget continues the work we have done to deliver for the rural area.

One of the projects in this year's budget is the $26m toward the Coolalinga road safety upgrades. This is a project I first became aware of in 2018 when it was announced by the federal government. It was re-announced in 2021, 2022 and 2023. We are having another crack at it, but this time we will deliver. These road safety upgrades will make Coolalinga and our rural roads safer. I am excited about the potential for the roundabout to connect Henning Road behind Coolalinga Woolies to Virginia Road, allowing people to bypass turning onto the highway to head to Coolalinga shops. I look forward to seeing you at the Freds Pass Rural Markets, Madam Speaker. For those Territorians turning right onto the highway, the turning lane is on top of a hill. This roundabout will help them bypass that and put less traffic on our highway and more traffic where it is safe and coordinated. I am a major fan; thank you to the Treasurer and the DLI team for making it happen.

This is on the back of the $80m in last year's budget which is continuing for the Arnhem Highway duplication. Madam Speaker, you often go down the Arnhem Highway. You will have noticed when you turn onto the Arnhem Highway from the Stuart Highway that the fence line from the Arnhem nursery has moved in by about 20 to 30 metres. That is because the government has secured the road corridor for the duplication. This government is committed to making sure these works happen as soon as possible and all the pieces are in place.

The Member for Nightcliff knows that a lot goes into building new roads and duplications. I am sure that when he is on his way to Berry Springs he will look forward to popping down the Arnhem Highway to get a pie from the world-famous Humpty Doo Bakery and admire the road corridor getting wider. Hopefully next year he will admire the extra lanes. My understanding is that project will go to tender later this year for the final design and geotechnical surveys, with works being done, hopefully, in the next two Dry Seasons.

The budget has the Bees Creek Road–Stuart Highway intersection upgrade. That is where you turn off to go to the world-famous Freds Pass markets. This upgrade will improve turning lanes and slip lanes to ensure as much safety as possible for all the busy families heading to Freds Pass Reserve, Bees Creek Primary School, Sattler school and Litchfield Council.

This year's budget also includes $4m for Cox Peninsula Road pavement rehabilitation. I often travel that road and can see some of that work is underway. There is more to go, but we are getting on with the job.

A $30.5m roads repair package was announced. That includes Cox Peninsula Road, Daly River Road, Wooliana Road and Port Keats Road. This is in addition to the $100m flood recovery fund which will see many of our roads touched up and repaired.

We on this side love our rural schools. We know how important it is to make sure that the teachers and staff have the infrastructure they need to deliver for our rural kids. This budget includes more than $1m for rural school improvements. Some of these are not ribbon-cutting events; it could be air conditioning or a roof repair, but it is stuff needed to make sure our schools are in the best possible nick. Those repairs are finally being done under this CLP government.

We also love our parks and getting out and about.

Mr Young: Mandorah jetty—you missed that one.

Mr MACKAY: I note the interjection from the Member for Daly, who may not care about our parks like I do, but I am trying to get through my speech.

The minister for Tourism and Parks announced $10m funding, which includes upgrading the barbecues at Berry Springs. I do not know how often people in this Chamber go to Berry Springs for a swim or a barbecue, but it is a treat to go there, especially in the Dry Season when the water is nice and clear. You can cook up a feed and some snags there, and we are making sure that the barbecues are in the best possible condition to do that.

This budget also includes re-sheeting for the Central Valley access road in Litchfield National Park. Central Valley might just be my favourite camping spot in Litchfield National Park—until Silkwood is officially merged, and then I will have new hot springs for you, Madam Speaker—and this re-sheeting will make it a bit nicer to get in there and be a little less rough on the gear, so I 100% welcome it.

The budget also has $1.2m in targeted works for Silkwood, which includes new safety, directional and interpretive signage to guide visitors along soon-to-be-upgraded trails. Clearly defined campground areas will ensure that visitors can explore with confidence while protecting habitats and wildlife. I look forward to the development of Silkwood over my career in this place because it truly is the pinnacle of the Territory.

Plenty more is happening, including upgrades at the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre; Bushfires NT, which is getting a piece; the King and Dry River upgrades to gauging stations; the $4m that the Minister for Recreational Fishing announced for fishing compliance; $1.73bn for community safety; $1.73bn for education; $2.56bn for health, including the much-needed $10m additional funding for St John; and $290m in cost-of-living relief and subsidies.

That is on top of the work already being delivered by this government, such as the lights at Norbuilt Oval at Freds Pass Reserve where we see all throughout the Wet Season—thanks to the Minister for People, Sport and Culture and the Minister for Essential Services for getting the timelines to make sure it was open for the first home game last season. We saw the kids, women and men playing under lights out of the hottest part of the day in the nice cool evenings. It is incredible. Every time I drive home I will look out of the window and smile at that.

We also delivered $20,000 for Middle Point School, which was used to deliver a new lawnmower and trailer upgrades so that when the kids from Middle Point go to Adelaide River School for their sports carnivals, they can tow all the gear they need, and have general improvements to the condition of their school. They have a fantastic principal, Mez Flynn, who is appreciative of this government's commitment to the school.

We recently announced the $100,000—thanks to the Minister for People, Sport and Culture—for the Humpty Doo golf club playground upgrades. These upgrades had been ordered. Madam Speaker, if you come out for a beer in about three months' time, we will be able to have a go on the slide.

We also expanded Harrison Dam and are actively working on expanding our hunting reserves.

This government will and is continuing to deliver for rural residents, which is exciting. I am proud to be part of this government that is ensuring the rural area is finally getting its fair share.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, I support the Treasurer's 2026–27 budget.

Let me be clear from the outset that when the Leader of the Opposition calls this budget a failure, she is not offering serious analysis; she is trying to distract from her own side's record. Territorians have not forgotten who was in government for the last eight years. They have not forgotten the rising debt, persistent deficits, pressure on crime and under-resourced systems that Labor left behind. Territorians have not forgotten who now turns up in opposition to complain about the very problems they helped create.

This budget is about the priorities Territorians care about—safer communities, cost-of-living relief, housing and jobs. It is a budget that puts money where it matters. It is a budget that does not pretend that the Territory can be fixed with slogans. It is a budget that begins the hard work of repairing what those opposite neglected.

Let me deal directly with the criticism from the former Attorney-General. The Member for Gwoja told us that there is not enough invested in the legal system for the courts, justice and the rule of law. That is the complaint, but the former Attorney-General was part of a government that for nearly a decade failed to invest in the system and failed to do it well. Labor members had eight years, eight budgets and eight chances to strengthen the courts, support legal services and plan for future demand. What did Territorians get? Backlogs, delays, pressure and a justice system left to strain under Labor's inaction.

Let us be clear: you do not get to neglect the system for eight years and then in opposition act outraged that it now needs serious attention. This is not concern; this is convenience. You do not get to leave the system under pressure and then complain when a new government starts doing the hard work you refused to do. You do not get to ignore the damage and then criticise the repair job. That is the dishonesty in the opposition's argument. Those opposite sound concerned about the justice system now, but where was that concern when they had the power to fix it? Where was the urgency? Where was the planning? Where was the sustained investment? It was nowhere because, under Labor, the pattern was always the same—delay the hard decisions, ignore the pressure and leave the problem for someone else to solve.

This budget does not accept that approach. A record $654m investment in the Northern Territory Police Force sends a clear message that community safety comes first. That means more police support, more recruitment, police public safety officers, better infrastructure, better police housing and a strong frontline response because the truth is simple: the justice system does not start in the courtroom; it starts on the street. When crime is allowed to rise and systems are left to buckle, the damage is felt everywhere. Territorians know that, and they know which government let the pressure build.

The opposition also claims that this budget lacks a plan for the future. That is extraordinary. A government that left behind growing debt, persistent deficits and underfunded systems is in no position to accuse anyone else of lacking a plan.

This budget has a plan. It is not a spin document; it is not a press release. It is a serious budget with real measures. It delivers cost-of-living relief, supports housing through extended grants, backs business with payroll tax reform and invests in community safety where it is needed the most. That is what a plan looks like.

The opposition talks about legal system investment because it is one of the few areas that it thinks it can attack this budget, but the public is not fooled. Territorians can see the difference between a government that is finally acting and an opposition that had years to act and chose not to. They can see the difference between a government that is funding police, supporting the system and taking responsibility, and a former government that left the Territory with the bill.

People in Fannie Bay wants safer streets, real relief from cost pressures, a housing market that gives people a chance and a government that focuses on outcomes, not excuses. This budget does that. It does not claim that every problem will be solved overnight, but it does what responsible governments should do: it faces the problems, funds the priorities and starts the repair job. That is more than those opposite ever managed to do.

The former Attorney-General, the Member for Gwoja, complains about what is in this budget. In opposition you may not listen to me much because you look down at everyone who is not on sitting on your side, but this may be one thing you want to listen to: the public will not judge you by your speeches in this Chamber in opposition and the grandstanding you so often do; they will judge you by the record you left behind when you were in government. That record is clear: the Territory fell apart under Labor's watch. In government Labor had the time, position and opportunity, but it failed to act. Now Labor members want to pretend to be the champions of a system they left under pressure. Territorians are entitled to call this out for what it is: opposition politics, not serious leadership.

This budget is about correcting the course, making decisions that were avoided for far too long, backing the people who keep this Territory running and delivering the practical outcomes that Territorians deserve. That is why I support it. I commend the Treasurer for the 2026–27 budget.

I commend the budget to the Assembly.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker …

Mr Young: No care for Daly River.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, you are interrupting your own member. Please be quiet.

Mr BROWN: The Northern Territory budget is being sold as a plan for safety and stability, but in reality it is a short-term prison-heavy budget that fails to address the root causes of crime, disadvantage and economic stagnation, especially in remote and regional areas. While the government has committed record funding to Corrections and policing, it has underinvested in prevention, mental health, housing, youth diversion and community services—a bleak future of incarceration rather than rehabilitation and prevention.

The budget also offers little to no new cost-of-living relief, despite growing pressures on households. Community organisations and social service groups said the same thing: Territorians struggle with housing, and energy and food costs are largely ignored. The Northern Territory Council of Social Service said that there are key gaps in housing affordability, domestic violence services and targeted support for vulnerable families. Health and mental health groups said that the budget relies on headline spending rather than frontline capacity. There is insufficient investment in preventive healthcare. We need investment in youth intervention and crime prevention, expanding housing and homelessness support, strengthening regional and remote services, improving healthcare access and mental health funding and supporting Aboriginal-led economic development. We need a focus on long-term economic diversification rather than expanding incarceration infrastructure.

The key issues affecting Aboriginal Territorians in the budget include a major focus on law and order spending, with $1.73bn allocated to policing, Corrections and public safety. This disproportionately affects Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal Territorians who are heavily over-represented in the justice system. Community groups are concerned that there is insufficient investment in prevention programs.

There needs to be continued spending on remote housing and infrastructure, including funding linked to roads, regional services and remote lease housing. This budget does not match the scale of need in Aboriginal communities.

Education measures include stronger school attendance enforcement, including expanded income management for parents of persistently absent students. The truancy program has been controversial, especially in remote Aboriginal communities. I will talk about that more later.

Health funding includes new hospital beds, mental health units and regional equipment upgrades. I acknowledge the Member for Barkly is getting a new CT scanner for the Barkly region; he advocated for it for a long time. Health outcomes for remote populations remain significantly worse than the national average.

The NT Government said that the budget is focused on reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle, but we do not feel the same about that in remote areas. There is underfunding in remote and Indigenous communities, where a significant portion of the population lives. The budget fails to address the unique needs and challenges of these communities, including housing, health services and education. Most people in these remote communities speak two or three different languages, which means there needs to be more emphasis on interpreter services. As a result, these communities face overcrowding, limited access to medical care and poorer education outcomes.

The health system is strained. The NT has one of the highest per capita health needs in Australia. I acknowledge the government's $2.5bn injection, but I am yet to see the details of it. I hope that the Oenpelli clinic will be included so that people will not have leave their homes to travel to Darwin for specialised treatment. It compounds on the strained health system in Katherine, Gove and Darwin, so it makes sense to build clinics in remote communities so that people can stay in them.

The budget does not deliver for students, families and communities. Every Territory family and child, no matter where they live, whether it is remote or in an urban community, must be supported with access to

early childhood education and care. Every Territory child has the right to attain the highest-quality education and schooling so that they have the best opportunities to succeed in life.

Let us look at early years education and care. Territory kids and families continue to face significant barriers to participation in early childhood care and preschool services designed to improve development in the years before schooling. As I said, children in remote communities normally have a variety of different languages, which is another obstacle. Early childhood education services in the Territory are struggling to keep up with demand. This is not a new issue. Families are struggling to afford rising power prices and the cost of groceries, rent and fuel while paying for childcare services to get the support needed to ensure their child is school-ready. The demand for these services is greater in remote communities. The NT continues to experience significant workforce challenges that directly impact how well students engage in and how families access early education.

Territorians have it made it clear what they want to see from the government in this space. The Labor opposition knows that we need:

- stronger investment in capacity and capability in the early childhood workforce, especially remote and Aboriginal staff
- to progressively increase the funded hours of four-year-old preschoolers, starting with priority cohorts
- better diversity in preschools to create flexibility for families
- simplified funding for preschools by consolidating all Northern Territory Government funding into a single funding pool
- planning and implementation for fit-for-purpose infrastructure, starting with locations with the greatest needs.

What has the CLP invested in developing our early years education and care workforce?

Early years services have been given less than 2% of the education budget. Early years attendance rates have dropped. In the Barkly, they are down by 2%; Big Rivers, 3%; Central Australia, 4%; and Darwin, 1%.

Most of the reforms have been driven by the federal government to improve safety in our early childhood centres and develop staff and educators, ensuring that they have the time for and access to necessary professional development.

The NT is the only jurisdiction going backwards in terms of meeting the Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal children and preschool enrolment. Two in every five children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more of the areas that measure how well they are growing. This is also twice the national average.

There are no extra dollars in the CLP budget to expand health-related childhood development plan initiatives.

Despite the extensive reporting of alleged abuse at childcare centres in other jurisdictions, at the Education Ministers Meeting on 22 August 2025, the CLP government was the only one to fail to commit any further funding to the suite of federal reforms.

This budget reflects a government that is putting our youngest Territorians last. Children and babies are missing out on early years support, care and development because the CLP government has failed to help parents, especially women, manage work and keep their kids in childcare. This is even harder for Aboriginal children and families in remote and very remote communities where services are even fewer and far between, yet this government chooses to spend just under half-a-billion dollars on Corrections and punitive measures that do nothing to create safer communities or help everyday Territorians.

Regarding Better and Fairer Schools funding, it is ridiculous that the government claims credit for the hard work that the previous Labor government and the Albanese Labor government did to fully fund all Territory schools. There are 150 public schools in the Northern Territory. Better and Fairer Schools money should mean that, on average, every public school student will be $33,700 better off and every non-government school student will be $7,500 better off over the lifetime of the agreement.

Additional funding is needed to ensure that there are adequate trainees, inclusive support staff and administration staff without simply ticking the teacher-to-student ratio box. The budget has ignored calls from the education and training sector on where to invest. Stakeholders in schools have raised the alarm about

Better and Fairer Schools funding having to be spent on increased power prices, which hiked up by 600% because of the CLP decision to cut support for the basics.

The gap between NT public schools and private schools is widening.

If you are not living in Palmerston, this budget is not for you. I acknowledge the advocacy on the part of the Palmerston members. There is nothing in the education budget for Central Australia, East Arnhem, Big Rivers or the rest of the Top End. When I look through the budget papers, I try to spot my communities. Kakadu and Jabiru are there. Oenpelli is not there. Wurrumiyanga, with another big school, is not there. I must be reading the budget paper wrongly.

There is no investment in growing on-country learning, expanding STEAM in schools or funding special programs in schools.

School attendance continues to plummet. Not only is attendance going down but also the number of assaults on students doubled in Term 1 this year compared with the same period in 2025. The failed $20m truancy program resulted in worse attendance records for the Territory.

What a waste of money that could have been spent on building specialised classrooms to support the special needs of children with disability and additional needs; designing and building breakout tutoring rooms for smaller groups of students; and providing private rooms for therapeutic and counselling services. Communities deserve to know how the government is supporting them to help them achieve their outcomes.

On top of that, the Member for Barkly failed to advocate for his own electorate and has been allocated only half of what the previous Labor government committed to Alekarenge School for infrastructure upgrades.

NTCOGSO called for the CLP government to take serious action on strengthening partnerships between schools, training providers and industry; expanding access to VET school-based apprenticeships, regardless of location; and supporting culturally responsive pathways for Aboriginal students that align with community priorities and economic opportunities.

NTCOSS said:

> *We are seeing … nowhere near enough in the community. It's about keeping kids in school, more youth engagement programs around the regions …*

As of 30 January 2026 there were 60 reported classroom teacher vacancies for Term 1. My home town of Milikapiti on the Tiwi Islands has, in the last three years, been through between 10 and 15 principals. The turnover in our remote schools is high. The government needs to look at that issue. The budget ignores those calls, so there is no new investment to attract and retain teachers in our remote communities.

I have a special interest in urban housing. Earlier this year I had numerous calls from people who were being evicted. I asked the minister and advisers about what is being done in regard to educating, budgeting, overcrowding and domestic violence. The Member for Blain is right; most of these people are visitors from communities who come to our urban settings and wreak havoc. I have asked what is being done in regard to educating, referring and supporting these families, instead of cutting up their contract and making another family homeless.

Critics argue that these measures do not match the scale of the housing crisis, especially in urban areas where rents and homelessness continue to rise. Community organisations and tenant advocates are calling for more public housing construction, stronger tenant protections, faster maintenance responses, climate-safe housing standards and expanded support services integrated with health and social care. One of the families who came to me early in the year had children with disabilities. I am not too sure whether assessments are being done to ensure that these people can stay in their houses. They were homeless six weeks later, with a disabled kid or two.

I turn to my electorate. Jabiru and Kakadu get a major funding boost for our roads, which I welcome. We are getting tourism up and running there. I still have a few questions about the airport. The government has supported in principle, but there are a few issues around the power grid that will be cut from ERA. We need government support to get that up and running, whether it is solar or a generator. That is something for those on the other side to think about.

For the Tiwi Islands a $40m-odd road upgrade has been included in the budget. I sometimes wonder whether that could that be a rollover from the last time we funded that program, from the federal government. It is tricky; we have to read the budget properly to know whether some things are federally funded or being rolled over.

Last year the Minister for Health said in Question Time that the Oenpelli clinic $20m funding would be in the budget papers this year. I eagerly opened the budget papers and looked for it, and it was not there. There is no money for that. What I have to do now is invite you to look at that run-down facility. Oenpelli clinic is a makeshift clinic; it was modified in the 1980s to support the growing community and all the people in the rock country coming together. People can say that the Jabiru clinic is not far, but Cahills Crossing will not open until later this week. Jabiru and Oenpelli have been separated since November. People will be able to go there after that, but Oenpelli becomes a remote island after the Wet Season sets in.

The next best option, which costs an arm and a leg, is for people to fly in and out from Oenpelli, in the middle of nowhere. If we could get a better facility, community members could stay home and go to the clinic there. Then the government would not have to cover the additional costs of housing to put those people in Aboriginal hostels, and, in turn, their family who follow them in, and that spills out into the streets because they have nowhere to stay. You see itinerants—if you pull up and chat to a person on the street about why they are here, 60% to 70% of them will say that they are here because they are supporting family members who are getting specialist treatment. They have nowhere to stay, so they are in the parks in Karama, Gray and Palmerston. It is a big issue.

If you do not live in the big cities, down the Stuart Highway, near a gas plant or a mine, you have been forgotten in this budget.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, budgets provide governments with a vehicle for pursuing their agenda and giving life to their vision for the community and the economy. They tell a clear story about what a government values and whether its focus is on making people's lives better, as it should be.

There is a story being told through the set of budget documents the Treasurer presented last week, but it is not a story of betterment, progress or reform; rather, it is a story of missed opportunities and misguided priorities—missed opportunities to build a fairer, stronger and more resilient Territory and misguided priorities that favour prisons and punishment over prevention and safety.

I have wasted no time since being declared the Member for Nightcliff. I have been out in the community talking to constituents and meeting with key stakeholders across my shadow portfolio responsibilities. There are clear and consistent messages that I and the Labor opposition team have heard from a broad range of community members and organisations who are feeling anxious about the future, partly due to external forces impacting us all and because of the direction of this government. They are feeling incredibly undervalued and overlooked. My speech reflects their real concerns, because it is my job to represent my electorate and the businesses, industries and individuals who deserve to have a voice, but feel unheard by this government.

Last week those opposite sought to denigrate and diminish everything the Labor opposition team had to say about the budget and their leadership, but there is an important point they overlooked: the concerns we raise reflect views that exist across the community. We are speaking out on behalf of Territorians up and down the track, in our cities, towns, regions and remote communities. We are speaking out for the many Territorians whose queries, calls and requests for meetings or assistance are ignored by this government. Every time those opposite criticise us for raising issues about their lack of a plan, lack of vision and misguided priorities, they are criticising the Territorians they are meant to be governing for.

Territorians are seeing what we are seeing: that this budget fails to invest in or prioritise what matters most now—cost-of-living pressures, roads, housing, renewables, health and education. Instead, the CLP government has chosen to pursue a costly and ultimately detrimental Corrections agenda above all else. The reality is that this budget invests in things that will cost the community down the track while failing to invest in the things that drive the Territory forward.

I turn to infrastructure. As well as admitting that the budget failed to deliver cost-of-living relief, there were other stunning admissions from those opposite last week. The Treasurer was happy to agree that his new budget had significantly underspent on infrastructure, with up to $341m in unspent infrastructure projects. It is clear that the CLP has not done the work over the Wet Season to get projects ready for the Dry, leaving construction businesses with enormous uncertainty about where their next contract is coming from.

The budget papers clearly show that the government failed to progress a long list of major road projects critical to the Territory's economic and social prosperity from the last financial year into this one. These projects include

Tanami Road; Outback Way; Buntine Highway; Port Keats Road; the Arnhem Highway duplication, which was raised earlier; Kakadu National Park roads; Tiwi Islands roads; the Newman–Katherine corridor; Sandover Highway; national network highway upgrades; and the NT Strategic Roads Package, just to name a few.

There has been no movement on upgrades to the Elcho Island, Ali Curung and Hughes airstrips. They have simply been rolled over into this budget.

Ultimately, these delays are not about the Wet Season; they represent a planning and process failure by this government. The flow-on effect to the broader community is significant, with lost jobs, lost spending in shops and restaurants and, most of all, lost confidence. When we talk about major work not getting out the door, this is what we are talking about. It is a long list of stalled projects that the government urgently needs to activate to stimulate the economy, ensure our construction sector has work and keep our tradies employed.

I turn to housing. Last week the Chief Minister suggested that we read the Budget and Regional Overview. It contains a wealth of information about the state of the budget and the economy that you will not find in any of the CLP press releases. The drop in state final demand by 2.1% is one of the more worrying stories in that budget paper, given it is the canary in the coalmine when it comes to forecasting economic growth.

Another interesting fact is that government spending on housing and community amenity as a proportion of overall spending has dropped by more than 2% over the past two budgets. That is a $51m reduction. Spending on prisons and punishment is up, but this deliberate decision to reduce funding for housing and community amenity is one of many signposts about what matters most to this government.

At a time when many Territorians are finding it harder to make ends meet, pay rising rents and meet mortgage repayments, this government has reduced the proportion of public funding going into building more housing, repairing and maintaining existing housing and investing in infrastructure that makes our communities stronger and safer. This is despite a $410m windfall in additional Commonwealth funding and mining royalties; the biggest boost to the coffers any Territory Treasurer has ever received in a single budget. The CLP may like to spruik its prisons-first approach, but in doing so it is sending a clear message that the needs of Territorians on low and middle incomes do not matter in this government's eyes.

I spoke at length last week about this government's bare-minimum approach to land release and boosting housing stock, one of the most pressing issues facing the Territory. It is irresponsible and unacceptable.

The Treasurer kept referring to everyday Territorians in his budget speech. If he is referring to Territorians who go to work every day in our childcare and aged-care centres, hospitals and schools, restaurants and shops, he needs to stop saying that this budget is aimed at them, because it is not. There is no real cost-of-living relief and no relief from the housing and rental pressures that thousands of everyday Territorians are facing.

The National Housing Accord saw all levels of government sign up to a target of building 1.2 million new homes over five years. The NT's share was close to 11,500 homes, with the CLP government walking away from that target in early 2025. Its response to the industry's loud and clear calls to boost housing construction was to scrap the targets and not even try. We all know that housing construction in the Territory is challenging, with high costs and significant skilled workforce shortages. No-one disputes that. However, it is deeply concerning that this government is not even trying to address this real and pressing issue for thousands of Territorians.

The March quarterly report from the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council shows that we have met only 5% of our housing accord target. Every other jurisdiction is well into the double figures. Housing accord approvals in the NT over the 12 months to March are down by 13%.

The affordable housing pipeline is shrinking under this government while the housing crisis grows. On behalf of Territorians struggling to afford a home—whether to rent or buy—we call on the CLP to urgently turn its attention to this pressing issue.

A member interjecting.

Mr SMELT: Local government is a favourite of mine. Local governments do an incredible job of delivering critical services to communities across the Territory …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; the Member for Nightcliff is trying to deliver his budget reply. He has not interjected on anyone else. I ask that the same respect be given to him.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, I do too. We will all remain silent and respectful.

Mr SMELT: I know this from my time on council, but I also know it from the many conversations I had across Nightcliff: many of the issues raised by residents are council issues. Roads, footpaths, lighting, verge maintenance, rubbish collection and community events are all deeply important to our local communities. Councils do all this with limited budgets that require great care and due diligence in putting them together to ensure that they can keep delivering those services.

Unfortunately, councils have a government that is working against their ability to support communities and deliver services. The government's sneaky cost-shifting has caused enormous difficulties for councils preparing their budgets this year.

Last year the CLP government quietly published a release that local government councils would be subject to cost-reflective power prices. It ripped away power subsidies without telling councils it was doing that. The government did this with no warning and no follow-up notification. When it finally got around to telling councils, it was after councils had prepared their budget for the year ahead. This is an appalling lack of engagement and transparency. It has put councils across the Territory in the incredibly difficult position of having to raise rates or cut services.

We are hearing from councils that they are now planning to cut back on the lighting. That makes a big difference to community safety in particular. I spoke to many people about it during the Nightcliff by-election. They were all incredibly appreciative of additional lighting in places like the Nightcliff foreshore.

Those sorts of projects are now being reconsidered by councils due to the increased power costs that are associated with running them. This government says that it is all about safety, yet these decisions it makes on a day-to-day basis suggest otherwise.

Another thing the CLP quietly cut is the immediate response grants to councils. There was no warning and no explanation. These important local grants allowed councils to undertake critical local projects. That bucket of funding is now no longer available to them. Again, it is communities like mine that suffer the consequences of this no-vision, no-plan government.

Over the past two years we have seen a government that does not value local councils and does not treat them as partners. It has shown disdain for them by ripping away services and refusing to consult or engage with them constructively. We are hearing time and again from councils across the NT that they are feeling ignored and overlooked by this government.

Perhaps the CLP's biggest betrayal of councils and communities has been around its false promise to replace shire councils with community-based councils. This is what the minister for Local Government promised communities before the election. He spruiked this far and wide to anyone who would listen. It was a core promise. What is he saying now? Nothing. There is absolutely nothing in the budget to support its delivery. Again, this is appalling treatment of communities and of councils. It is about time the CLP government came clean and admitted that this was a hollow commitment that it never had any intention of following through with.

The government's track record so far on local government is incredibly disappointing. Like so much of what it does, it lacks direction, vision and any kind of plan. As I said, our councils are critical to the social and economic prosperity of the Northern Territory, and it is about time that the government engaged with them genuinely and meaningfully.

We have just experienced one of the worst flooding seasons in our history. Communities are still recovering and hundreds of Territorians will be unable to return home for months. It has been a traumatic and devastating time for many people.

The CLP spends a lot of time gaslighting the community with its language. That was the case over this past season when it continually referred to the floods as 'unprecedented', as though they will never happen again. The reality is that this is the new norm because of our changing climate. The CLP says that it believes in climate science and the environment is 'super important', yet its actions suggest otherwise. The budget papers mention renewables only a handful of times, largely in passing. They do not mention climate change or climate adaptation at all—not once.

Meanwhile, the CLP has walked away from the NT's renewable energy target. It has backflipped on its election commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030. The CLP's supposed commitment to net zero by 2050 is highly questionable. At a time when Territorians are facing dire impacts

from extreme weather events, the CLP has turned its back on them. Again, these are the everyday Territorians the government keeps referring to.

Many everyday Territorians work in our incredibly important job-creating tourism and hospitality sectors—tens of thousands of them, in fact. Under this government, like so many, they have become the forgotten Territorians. At a time when our tourism businesses—many of them small mum-and-dad operations—should be reaping the benefits of the Dry Season, they are instead staring down the barrel of cancelled bookings and an uncertain future. There are many reasons for this: flood impacts; fuel costs; and rising cost-of-living pressures for operators and customers. The drive market has reduced considerably as tourists decide to cancel or scale back their road trips. There are 45,000 fewer aviation seats coming into the Territory. Forward bookings are down by 39% and may even fall by 50%. It is the toughest period the sector has faced since COVID.

For those badly impacted by the floods, including a number of operators in the Member for Daly's electorate, they are still counting the costs and dealing with ongoing impacts before they can even think about trading again. Meanwhile, the recent closures of much-loved institutions like Epilogue in Alice Springs and Flora's Temper in my electorate of Nightcliff are heartbreaking. They are the heart and soul of our local communities and a sign of just how fragile our hospitality sector is now.

Our tourism sector is resilient. It has been through many ups and downs, but it needs a government that backs it with not just nice words, but real and measurable support. The sector has asked for practical targeted support from the CLP government to help it through this period. It needs demand stimulation measures, like the Territory Tourism Voucher implemented by the former Territory Labor government during COVID; aviation support to get more people flying into the Territory; or targeted relief for operators to help them get through. The minister can spruik the $10m barbecue fund all she wants, but when operators are dealing with reduced bookings and rising costs, they need to rethink their priorities.

Meanwhile, two significant visitor-boosting initiatives have been effectively cancelled by this government—the State Square art gallery in Darwin and the Alice Springs art gallery. This is incredibly short-sighted decision-making. The State Square art gallery would have given visitors a reason to stay another night in Darwin, injecting significant additional spend into the economy. As with the Alice Springs art gallery, these projects have been left to languish. There is no visibility about the government's misguided expression of interest process. It has disappeared.

The government's recent tourism strategy talked up infrastructure upgrades across our parks, public–private partnerships to support tourism developments, funding for all-weather visitor experiences and sustainable utilities for parks and reserves, such as solar power and waterless toilets, but none of this was to be seen in the budget. When you compare the strategy with the budget you see that there is a clear disconnect between what the CLP says it will do for our valuable tourism sector and what it is delivering.

Tourism businesses are not just numbers; they are Territory families, or individuals having a go and doing what they love. They are the everyday Territorians, and like so many other Territorians, they have been left behind by this budget and this CLP government.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, this is a budget of missed opportunities and misguided priorities. It is a budget without a clear plan, vision and ambition. It is a maintenance budget that will not build the Territory. It fails to meet the moment when it comes to the pressures faced by households, businesses and communities. Ultimately, it is everyday Territorians who will pay the price.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, last week was significant for me for a number of reasons.

The first was that it was budget week. I have a lot of thoughts about our economic affairs, so it is always nice to say a few words about our fiscal fortunes.

Last week was also significant for not only me but also a lot of people around the world because it marked the 100th birthday of Sir David Attenborough, the natural historian and widely respected man who I do not think anyone would pick fault with.

It may not be known to everyone in the House, but in the early 1960s Sir David Attenborough visited Darwin and the Northern Territory. He subsequently wrote *Quest Under Capricorn* in 1963. I recently re-read it. It is a fantastic book that I encourage you all to read. What is amazing about that book, which was written 63 years ago, is how prescient it is to our situation and how telling and timely it is to explain where the Northern Territory is at and where it is not at.

I will read a few short paragraphs from it because they offer an enormous amount of insight from a man who nobody could possibly suggest is anything other than …

Ms Uibo: A legend.

Dr RAHMAN: A legend and a treasure—thank you, Leader of the Opposition.

Chapter 1, 'East from Darwin', states:

> *DARWIN, perched on the northern rim of Australia, is a lonely town. Its nearest big city, Adelaide, is as far away as London is from the centre of the Sahara. It is closer to Singapore than it is to Sydney. Its doorstep is lapped by a tropical ocean, empty except for the obscure coral-girt islands of eastern Indonesia; at its back stretches a million square miles of desert.*
>
> *The town has proffered many excuses for its existence since it was named in 1836—a port for pearlers, a clearing house for bullion during the gold rushes of the eighties and nineties, a terminal for oil tankers, a link between the end of the Overland Telegraph that reached here in 1872 and the submarine cables that took messages on to London—but none has been convincing enough to sustain a town of any size. Today, having been designated the capital of the Northern Territory, it lives on its administrators and the airlines, who use it as a convenient half-way stage on the long haul between Asia and Southern Australia. It has no industries of its own. Its citizens tell you its only import is civil servants and its only export empty beer bottles.*
>
> *Yet it has all the trappings of a modern metropolis. A huge new government building is rising above the harbour. The shops are full of refrigerators, transistor radios, long-playing gramophone records and all the nick-nacks of the twentieth century. Both the Protestant and Catholic Churches have built splendid stylish cathedrals. Away beyond the commercial centre, on the shores of the Timor Sea, stand rows of elegant expensive houses inhabited by Government officials and bank managers. But the place, perhaps because it has to grow so fast to keep pace with its diet of bureaucrats, still has an unsettled temporary look about it. Buildings appear to have been set down in an arbitrary fashion—a modern concrete bank with a glass and mosaic porch garlanded with cacti, stands opposite an empty plot strewn with the twisted wrecks of cars and rusting petrol drums; a half-demolished shack squats beside a villa built with confident dignity thirty years ago.*
>
> *The town has drawn its population from all over the world. Chinese families, whose forebears came here to work the gold mines, now run several of the stores. Newly immigrated Italians and Viennese have travelled up from Sydney to start restaurants and serve schnitzels and ravioli which were revelations to bushmen brought up on damper and wallaby stew. In the Post Office, you meet Cockneys and New Zealanders, a man from Birmingham and another from Brisbane. Only a minority seem involved in the ferocious wilderness that begins at the end of the main street. You may occasionally hear about a man in a pub talking about gold strikes or a lonely uranium mine. A few aborigines in vividly coloured sweatshirts lounge outside the cinemas sucking soft drinks through straws. And occasionally a tall cattleman in a cowboy hat and spurs strides down the street among the dapper bank clerks.*

Why did I read that? Because 63 years ago this man, who surveys the natural world and provides erudite commentary on the state of places, came here. He talked about three things in relation to the Northern Territory: the public service; infrastructure; and population. Here we are 63 years later having the same conversations about frontier towns not developing in a sustainable way; infrastructure that is haphazard and failed to be delivered properly; and a population which is wide and diverse, but ultimately disaggregated. We are still having these conversations because the Northern Territory has never economically emancipated itself.

Last week I was grateful for the opportunity that the Leader of the Opposition provided to allow us all to think at length about budgetary failure. There was a series of excellent contributions, and I thank everyone in the House for affording me the indulgence to speak at length about what works, what does not and how we can move forward. As was reported widely in the press, there was bipartisan support, including from my nemesis the Member for Gwoja, whom I thank for extending me some time in the House to speak further on this topic.

Mr Paech: I will do it again today.

Dr RAHMAN: Last week we had what I felt was one of the first serious constructive conversations in here about our fiscal and economic fortunes and a way forward, facing reality and acknowledging that budgets are not just about cherrypicking line items and talking about spending, but starting to seriously talk about how

we make and save money and stop the wastage of money institutionally. That is what grown-up conversations about the budget discuss.

The sad truth of it is, after five speeches from the opposition, I heard only one idea about how to do any of the latter. I have heard plenty about how we should spend money. I would like to spend money on a lot of the same priorities that the opposition identified; indeed, I believe, so would many of my colleagues. We would all like to create more opportunity in the Northern Territory, but we cannot provide opportunity sustainably and enduringly until we fix our finances. That requires having an honest grown-up conversation about where we are at and how we got here.

I will not fling mud. You can keep flinging much mud, cherrypicking the arguments, trying to sensationalise things, catastrophising and scaremongering, but I will not indulge in it. It is more important that we have the real conversations.

I acknowledged the Member for Gwoja's salient and sensible idea about water pricing the other day. I did not turn it on its head; I acknowledged it as a legitimate discussion point.

I am tired of having bare-knuckle boxing matches in here. I do not think it is productive. We should be pugilists, and we should box and punch hard, but we should punch above the belt.

Last week I spoke, with the indulgence of the Treasurer and my nemesis in a moment of cross-party unity, for 70 minutes about where we are at economically and how we might go forward constructively. Bless—the ABC chose to focus on 70 seconds of that 70 minutes, framing my contribution as a slash and burn of the public service. It is disappointing because that is not constructive to the debate. I encourage anyone tuning in, particularly from the public service ranks, to listen to all 70 minutes of what I had to say and then come back and tell me what you think.

Here is the thing that floored me over the last few days since the Assembly rose: I could not believe the number of people who got in touch with me over the last weekend—I will not say it was hundreds, but it was not far off—to say, 'Good on you and good on your government for having the courage to finally start to do the hard work to deliver grown-up governance and budgeting and face the reality of the fact that our wages bill is astronomically high, and we must collectively work together to figure out a way to address it'.

The best part about it was that I was not contacted by right-wing Liberal ideologues; I was contacted by everyday Territorians of all stripes and by people in our public service at the highest levels. I will not out anyone or name and shame them or anything like that. It taught me that the everyday Territorians we talk about want us to do better, have the real conversations and create opportunity in housing, health, education and infrastructure. They are not stupid. They get that we are super in debt and that part of the reason for that is we have not had the courage to make tough choices to repair and rebuild our economy.

The opposition and the crossbench have an opportunity; this is an inflection point. You are not to blame in large part for the budgetary choices made over the last three Labor governments. Some of you were ministers, but largely you just had to take orders and be complicit in the decisions that were made for you.

No-one on this side of the House is responsible for the choices we made. We are not talking about selling off TIO or public assets; nor were we complicit in those decisions. We are moving forward positively and constructively.

Ms Uibo: The Chief Minister was part of that government.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, stop the interjections, please.

Dr RAHMAN: This is what I am getting at: there are people who care about the Northern Territory and are staying the course and want us in this House to do better. It starts and finishes—certainly for me—with economic affairs. All the social priorities can be funded only if we start accepting the reality about what we are doing in the budgetary and fiscal space. I will not fight back without gloves or throw mud; I will not have that. If you want to do that, do it; however, I think you can do better.

I will not point out the litany of people who contacted me to say, 'Good on you for having tough conversations. Good on your government for having robust discussions and not just gagging you, as is the way in many governments.' I am not being gagged. Just because I do not choose to go on the ABC and jump to its tune at a moment's notice, that does not say anything about being gagged. I speak my mind. My colleagues and I have robust discussions respectfully.

I do not have any closer colleague in the team than the Member for Drysdale who is at the opposite end of the pole to me ideologically. We are two bookends of this party continuum. He is a real conservative and I am a real liberal democrat. We both know that, but we have respectful discussions. We are both invested in the future of the Territory and opportunity for people.

I thank the Treasurer, my learned colleague, for not reprimanding me, putting me in a box, locking me up, shutting me down and gagging me in the way that happened in previous governments to Ken Vowles, Scott McConnell and Jeff Collins. They raised the alarm about you blowing the budget. What did you do? You threw them out of parliament. I thank my learned colleague the Treasurer for allowing us to have these discussions. He could be a draconian Treasurer and say, 'No. Read off the talking points. Shut up; that is all you will do', but we are having real discussions because we are trying to fix real problems.

I will single out only one person who got in touch with me about my comments last week. He took the time to watch all 70 minutes of it. I reckon he is a significant person worth pointing out to the Treasurer, the Member for Gwoja and Madam Speaker—Mr Alex Nelson. He wrote enormously long emails to me, providing fantastic commentary. I will not pat myself on the back, but he said nice things about what I had to say, and I am grateful to Mr Nelson for saying them. However, the main reason I bring up his contribution and the fact he got in touch with me is that Alex Nelson is a much-respected Centralian who speaks with authority regarding Centralian history and has written extensively regarding economic affairs. He is a well-regarded individual. He is not a partisan hack who got in touch to say, 'Good on you for thumping Labor', or something like that, but to say, 'I am impressed that you and your government are having the tough discussions and are trying to fix things. I hope you keep it up and keep up the standard rather than just flinging mud, which people are sick and tired of.' He did not exactly say that; I do not want to misquote him, just to be clear.

As is obvious to everyone in the House, from time to time I read a bit and I try to read widely. I do not often read the Alice Springs News. It is not a publication I am particularly across. Mr Nelson very kindly sent me a series of articles he had written around 2018-ish and then again recently. These articles were instructive. He said that the ABC story focused on my remarks about the NT public service, which instantly brought to mind the situation that prevailed in 1990–91. This period marked the largest imposition of restrained public service growth and recruitment in the history of the Territory. He went on to talk about the same thing in late 2018 in relation to the Gunner government appointing John Langoulant to Chair the fiscal strategy panel and the comments that he made at the time.

You would think from what was in the press that I had been the first person to say that we might need to start thinking about how we manage our economy and its structural reform. I have been talking about this for three years. Literally from when I was a senior public servant in this building, in Chief Minister and Cabinet, to when I was a political candidate to when I have been in the House, I have consistently talked about structural economic reform, productivity reform and public sector reform. I am not hiding any of this; I have said it all along. I have said it in probably 20 speeches in the House, and everyone here knows it. There is no secret to any of this, and the reason we are saying it is that we all know we have to face reality and move forward.

I restrained myself from doing it in the past, but last week I went through the difference between the rhetoric and the reality of Labor budgets for the last eight years, where that gap was really wide and why we are in the mess we are in. I promised that would be the first and last time I did it. This time next year I will not be looking backwards; I will be looking forwards at what our government is doing now that we have full control of the economic levers. However, it was important to talk about those things because we had to address them at some point.

I spoke about 10 things in that 70 minutes. I spoke about the structural deficit; record net debt per capita; over-reliance on GST windfalls; failure to achieve population growth targets; the Darwin ship lift blowout; stagnant private investment; the failure in revoting projects over and again; the cost of living and utility price squeezes; housing supply and homelessness; and, lastly, for about 70 seconds of my 70 minutes, the public service bracket creep. The preceding nine items were equally important.

I do not want to do this all the time. All we do is bare-knuckle box for short-term political gain without fixing anything for anyone in the Northern Territory.

I want a future where we have more money and more capacity to spend it on all the priorities that all of you have. We all have priorities. It is traditional at budget time to talk at length about the specific commitments in your electorate.

For Fong Lim there is $1.6m, of which $825,000 is basically to upgrade curves in Hidden Valley. I am not getting a vote out of that, but it is necessary stuff. I am keen to support it, because the government has made the tough choices this year to give nobody bells and whistles; nobody gets sweets, lollies and trinkets. We are doing the essential things that need to happen, so I am delighted to say that in my area we are drain clearing and doing investigation works in Berrimah for $400,000. I am pleased that we are putting a new electric front gate on the Darwin Fire Station in my patch and that we are spending $825,000 to basically tidy up and bring up to code things in Hidden Valley. I may not be a super-duper motorsport enthusiast and people in my electorate may not be, but it matters to all of us economically.

The government is making decent choices. There is no pork-barrelling and no prioritising. Nobody is getting anything special. The Chief Minister, after 15 years of campaigning, is finally getting a roundabout in Kirkland Road. If you want to call that pork-barrelling, go for it.

Mr Kerle: We actually need that one.

Dr RAHMAN: Absolutely we need that one, Member for Blain; I take the interjection.

My point is simply that we are not cherrypicking or pork-barrelling; we are spending on the things that are needed. People in the wider Territory ecosystem—in our public service, hospitals, police force and private sector—have told me, 'Well done to you guys for not just spending and spending'. When we are spending, it is consistent with what we said we would spend on. We are spending on correctional services, crime reduction, the police force and frontline workers. We are staying true to what we said we would do; we are not making this up on the fly.

I am grateful to Alex Nelson for all the material he sent and his kind words. On 24 December 2018 he wrote an article called, 'The forgotten lesson: Take tough decisions now or borrow against tomorrow into unmanageable debt'. The first two sentences of that article read:

> *The Northern Territory's economy is staggering and its immediate future prospects look bleak. The public service is bloated and the NT Government is spending beyond its means.*

I am not the first person in the world to call for a reality check. We need to take the temperature down and agree that we have to work together to figure out what the priorities are. I do not have a specific hit list. It is not about having a 20% efficiency dividend and saying, 'Sack all those people'; that is not how it works.

In my time as a public servant for nine months when I came back, from August 2023, I was on a floor with I do not know how many commissioners and executive directors, and nobody could work the photocopier. You need more soldiers than generals to run an efficient army, and we do not; we have wild distortions throughout lots of parts of our public service. There are too many backend people in some places and not enough frontline people—too many generals and not enough soldiers.

We can either have an honest conversation about this and work together to look at what we have and what we want to prioritise, or we can just keep flinging mud. I will give it to you, Member for Gwoja: you have outmatched me. I cannot bare-knuckle box with you and win; I will go down valiantly. I think you have more to offer this House in that regard. I still dislike you, but want to work with you to try to improve our fiscal fortunes because I believe you have a contribution to make in that regard …

Ms Uibo: Work with the Treasurer; he is the decision-maker.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please!

Dr RAHMAN: This is the frustration. The Leader of the Opposition is just—I will not dignify it.

The first line from an article from 28 December 2018 called, 'NT a "failed state"? Too harsh, said Perron … a year ago', is:

> *Territory governments have faced difficult times before although none have amassed a mind boggling debt, with a cynical lack of transparency, as has the Gunner Government.*

You would think I was the first person who suddenly had something to say about the fact that we need structural economic reform, productivity reform and public service reform. Why do I want to do that? It is not for the sake of balancing the books arbitrarily; it is so that we can create more opportunity and have more money to spend on public health, housing, education and infrastructure. You have to do the hard work

because you cannot attract private investment at the rate you want to unless you create the conditions to make this an attractive investment destination. The Treasurer is starting to do that work. We are doing the outreach better than we have done it before to try to attract that investment. However, it will not happen unless we all agree that we are over-leveraged and at this point have to collectively do something about it or we simply will not come back from it.

I could have been a real so-and-so the other day, if I wanted to, and destroyed or shamed Treasurers Manison, Gunner and Lawler for the hypocrisy and the things that do not add up in these budget papers. There is so much to pick from in the massive gap between the rhetoric and reality, but I am trying to punch with gloves on and fight the fair fight. Therefore, I have not exhaustively gone through the millions of things in the budget papers. However, I will read two lines that are instructive of where we are at. In the first budget Treasurer Manison handed down on 2 May 2017 she said:

> *The previous government failed to have plans in place for either public or private investment, preferring instead an ad hoc approach to public policy making that saw the Territory chasing one shiny object after another.*
>
> *Our predecessors left a legacy of slowing population growth and a loss of people interstate.*

You had eight years, and we went backwards on all of that. As I said last week, I do not think a lot of this happened because of malice necessarily; it may have happened because of the tyranny of small choices à la the Alfred Kahn paper from 1966 which I quoted the other day whereby lots of small bad decisions cumulatively put you in a position that is suboptimal.

We are where we are. We can sling mud or we can all collectively draw a line in the sand, face reality and say, 'We are in a tough financial spot. We are seriously in debt. We have serous workforce and population problems. We still need to stabilise antisocial behaviour and reduce crime. Let us do it together.'

We have a plan for how we will go about it. We modulate our plans and listen to opposition members when they provide us with something we can work with. However, if all you want to do is cherrypick, fling mud and bare-knuckle box, we will not get anywhere. We will be peddling the same nonsense and crying for a bailout from the federal government because we are over-leveraged beyond an inch of our lives. Pretty soon it will not be possible to come back unless we are careful.

The Chief Minister stayed true to her word on our spending priorities. Contrast that with—this is the only other thing I will point out from these eight years of budget speeches—what then Treasurer Michael Gunner said on 4 May 2021:

> *And now that we are moving out of our health emergency phase, I am giving two new directions to CEs:*
>
> - *don't blow your budget*
> - *don't blow your wages bill.*
>
> *In the future, if any CE breaches their budget by anything more than 1%, the Chief Minister will use his powers to act. These powers range from a formal explanation, to an independent financial audit, to a suspension of the CE, right through to the sacking of the CE.*

Can anyone in here—I am happy to be corrected—show me one instance of the use of any of those powers?

I do not blame the opposition as it stands for the state of our financial fortunes; I blame its masters from the past. It is up to you whether you want to stand by them or draw a line in the sand and move forward with us to create opportunity for Territorians. We do not create opportunity by spending our entire time in here flinging mud. It is not productive anymore.

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

Motion agreed to.

Mr Paech: I was going to wait for it to be a minute.

Madam SPEAKER: He got in early, so an extension has been granted, there being no objections.

Dr RAHMAN: I object to the Member for Gwoja not moving my extension of time on this occasion, but I will take it on the chin.

Ms Uibo: You had two minutes left.

Dr RAHMAN: I am just being cheeky. Thank you for the indulgence and the opportunity to speak about the budget.

It is not easy to have the tough conversations, but we must have them. I will not go over my 70 minutes' worth of critique from last week. We do not need to do that. We need to talk about our budget Bill, what is in it and why it is a good budget. We need to focus on the things that are constructive and headline them, if you like.

The 2026–27 budget papers confirm that the Territory is forecasting a $95m operating surplus for 2025–26 and we are aiming to end the cycle of borrowing for wages. That is a good thing that we should all get behind. Net debt is projected to stabilise at $13.2bn, which we all agree is a huge number that needs to come down, but for now that is the work we could do on turning around the debt barge, with a net-debt-to-revenue ratio of 15 percentage points better than we had previously projected.

The papers acknowledge the substantial $800m blowout of the ship lift, but we have also framed the project as being past the point of return. What we are committing to is strict management, rather than cancellation, of that endeavour. The Public Accounts Committee advised that is the direction we should take.

Importantly, given everybody in this House is fixated on it, the infrastructure focus has shifted to a $4.25bn program with $460m of new, fresh cash to start ensuring there is actual delivery.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

NOTICES

Mr MALEY (Corrections): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Youth Justice and Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 66.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Attorney-General Legislation Amendment (Boards, Committees and Statutory Offices) Bill 2026, Serial 65.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Consumer Affairs and Essential Goods and Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 68.

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 Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026, Serial 67.

QUESTION TIME

Budget 2026–27 – Health Infrastructure

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for HEALTH

Madam Speaker, I put on the record a welcome to the ALPA student experience participants who have come to watch parliament. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Ms UIBO: Minister, despite overseeing a $4.25bn infrastructure program, your budget allocates just $8m to new health infrastructure across the Territory. At the same time, overall capital infrastructure funding has dropped by $56m. The bulk of projects underway were already initiated under the former Territory Labor government. Your Health department CEO has publicly called for a new Darwin hospital, yet there is still no meaningful investment in expanding hospital capacity, no serious commitment to maternity ward upgrades and no clear plan to deal with a health system under enormous strain.

Why have you allocated so little to new health infrastructure across the Northern Territory when hospitals are bursting at the seams? Is this budget proof that your government has no real plan for Territory healthcare into the future?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, there is record investment in health services across the Northern Territory.

Just over two years ago we were facing a $200m to $300m deficit in the health system, led by the Leader of the Opposition. We have been advocating hard for additional funds. We are still $200m short because the former Labor government failed to advocate for aged care and increases in remote primary healthcare. It failed to deal with the aeromedical services that we have been funding year-in, year-out for a number of years, costing our health system $53m per year. Labor did nothing about that; in fact, the previous government was silent when it came to dealing with that.

Turning to infrastructure, there is $20m for the new health clinic at Borroloola, which is a fantastic investment. Under the Labor government, there were eight years of failure to deliver health infrastructure. Labor let our health system get out of control when it came to funding and delivered no meaningful infrastructure across the health system. We are delivering. We are investing $20m in the Borroloola health clinic, which Labor failed to do.

We are also investing in upgrades to Tennant Creek Hospital because the Barkly was neglected under the former Labor government. There was no investment in the Barkly because that mob over there neglected the Barkly. All those opposite thought about was themselves, resulting in underfunding in the health system. We are modifying a room to put a CT scanner in Tennant Creek Hospital. That will pay for itself in four years. That business case was available when Labor was in government, but what it did …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; I am waiting for an answer about the Royal Darwin Hospital capacity pressures.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am happy to talk about the pressures in Darwin. Eighty aged-care patients are in our hospitals every day of the week. They are there because for eight years Territory Labor failed to even advocate to its Labor colleagues in Canberra. We have been advocating, which is why there is $60m to invest in aged care in Darwin. We have committed $30m to assist with the infrastructure to build the aged-care facility at the Palmerston site. That will take pressure off EDs across the Northern Territory, which Labor failed to deliver.

Federal Budget 2026–27

Mr HOWE to CHIEF MINISTER

The Finocchiaro CLP government will always stand up for everyday Territorians and what they deserve: fair funding and a genuine commitment from Canberra to the future of the north. Tonight Territorians will also be looking closely at the performance of the Territory's federal Labor representatives. Can you outline what the Finocchiaro CLP government will look for in tonight's federal budget and explain why securing a fair deal for the Territory is so important?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I look forward to tonight's federal budget in which we should be delivered our fair share because Territorians deserve it. We will see whether the federal Labor members were worth the effort. We on this side have strong relationships with the federal Labor government and we are hopeful that the work we have been doing with it will have the appropriate level of investment that Territorians deserve.

There has been a lot of talk, whingeing and complaining from the Territory-based federal Labor members. We will see tonight whether the $10m that the Member for Solomon likes to talk about for the Royal Darwin Hospital maternity ward is in the budget; whether there is a special economic zone for the Northern Territory to grow our economy; and whether the federal government is backing people to live and work in the north through changes to the zone tax offset, changes to migration to make the Territory a place where people can come and build their lives, and changes to taxation to make it easier, cheaper and more affordable to live in the north. That is what we want to see out of this budget. We would get that if we had a Territory Labor team who did their job, so Member for Drysdale, we are hopeful of that.

As the Territory government we have also been advocating strongly for the delivery of federal Labor's election commitment of $200m for the duplication of the Stuart Highway, with no strings attached. Territorians should not have to pay for that; it should be federal money, and we are desperately hoping we see that.

As the Health minister just touched on, the Territory's health budget spends $200m a year on shouldering the burden of federal government responsibility in aeromedical retrievals, primary healthcare and aged care. The Territory is playing its part. Our budget released last week has $20m banked cash ready to go for an aged-care facility at the Palmerston Regional Hospital site. Where is federal Labor on the Territory's fair share for aged care? That is the question that we are looking at coming out of tonight's budget.

We are hopeful that Territorians will get their fair share, because we need it and deserve it. The way in which the GST is allocated, and even though we have gone in hard and gotten a good amount, means that it is maintenance money. People have heard me talk about this before. In fact, Denise Bowden did an excellent editorial in the *Australian* a couple of days ago, lamenting that same point—that is, status quo is status quo. That is why our government is focused on making sure everything we do centres on reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our unique Territory lifestyle. Tonight we will see whether the federal government believes in the future of the Northern Territory.

Budget 2026–27 – Hospitals

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for HEALTH

Last week on ABC radio AMA NT President Dr John Zorbas exposed a hidden $20m cut to hospital operational funding buried within your budget papers. This comes at a time when the Commonwealth is delivering record health funding to the Territory, yet our hospitals remain under enormous pressure, staff are stretched, wait times are growing and services are struggling to keep up with the demand. Why is your CLP government cutting frontline hospital funding in the middle of a health crisis across the Territory? What services, staffing or patient care will suffer as a result of your hospital funding cuts in this budget?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, firstly I put clearly on the table that we have a significant increase in the health budget. It is $2.6bn, which is up from $2.33bn last year. When the former Health minister talks about health cuts, clearly she has not read the bottom line or taken the time to read the budget papers. If she did, she would see that there has been an increase in the health budget.

Earlier this year our Chief Minister negotiated a five-year hospital agreement with the federal government which was an increase of about $1bn over five years. The former Labor government failed to do that. It racked up deficits of between $200m and $300m per year, failed to advocate to get increased funding for aged care and primary healthcare and failed to do anything about the aeromedical retrieval service that we are funding out of our health budget and which is a clear federal responsibility.

I do not know why Labor members were shy to advocate to their federal colleagues. As the Chief Minister said, it will be interesting to see what comes up in the federal government's budget tonight. The Members for Solomon and Lingiari and the Minister for Indigenous Australians have been talking about what should be done and the investments they want to make, but the reality is that we face the same issues with federal funding.

I spoke about the housing budget last week and the turnover of the number of …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; specifically, why is there a $20m cut to hospital operations?

Mr EDGINGTON: As I said, there are no cuts in the health budget.

We have a number of federal funding agreements. I explained to the Member for Gwoja last week that federal funding agreements come and go, some are signed and others are waiting to be signed and money comes in at different times of the year.

A range of issues impact on the Northern Territory budget. The Leader of the Opposition has obviously struggled to read the budget papers. I am happy to sit with her and work through it line by line to explain how the budget works.

There has been a funding increase; there is up to $2.6bn in the health budget, which is a significant increase on the $2.33bn last year.

Beetaloo Sub-basin Gas

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY

The Northern Territory has potential to become the powerhouse of the nation through the Beetaloo Sub-basin development which, luckily, is being progressed vigorously by our CLP government rather than being stymied by the previous Labor government. Our government has been crystal clear that we cannot rebuild the Territory economy without affordable, reliable and abundant energy for Territory homes and businesses, including those based in my electorate of Karama.

The Beetaloo has enough gas to power the Territory and nation for the next 200 years; however, that means nothing if we cannot get it to market. Can you inform the Assembly of the impact of the proposed federal gas reservation policy on the work our government is doing to get Beetaloo gas to market?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Karama understands how important Beetaloo gas is for our economy and Territory jobs.

Late last week the Albanese government announced a new domestic gas reservation policy of 20% for the exporters. That announcement lacks detail. As the Chief Minister mentioned, it will be interesting to see how hard the federal Labor representatives have worked to protect the Northern Territory's interests and jobs.

This uncertainty could not have come at a worse possible time. There is an ongoing conflict in the Middle East and concerns about our fuel and security. When I say 'our', I mean Australia. This policy may influence investment in Beetaloo in the future, but we do not know. It may derail that long-term investment.

It will be interesting to see what the Labor opposition's mates—the federal representatives—will do about this. Are they backing the Territory or are they just sitting back, letting the Albanese government do what it wants? Have they forgotten about the Northern Territory?

The gas reservation policy is one part, but what about getting the gas to the southern market? The Member for Karama spoke about that. Our sub-basin could power Australia for 200 years. How do we get that gas to market? Is the federal government helping to fund or underwrite the pipelines needed to get that gas to the market? Are the Labor federal representatives backing that? Are they pushing the f government to put money into those pipelines? It will require billions of dollars to build those pipelines. They are important because we want to get the gas to market.

The CLP government is doing everything it can to deliver approvals and project certainty for the gas industry. As the Chief Minister said, there is nothing on our desk which will inhibit or stop Beetaloo. We are promoting the gas industry because we know how important it is to the Territory economy. The Labor government's own fracking report says on page 45—I encourage you to read it—that the real output is estimated to be $17.5bn to the economy. That is how important it is to the Northern Territory. We need a guarantee of abundant energy from the Beetaloo.

In relation to the 'no certainty', I make it clear that this government supports the gas industry. Drill, baby, drill.

Tennant Creek Watch House

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS referred to MINISTER for HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Your CLP government removed the funding for the redesign and rebuild of the Tennant Creek watch house, which was in last year's budget. The planning process was well underway when it was cancelled, stalling this project without any notification to the agencies responsible for delivering the Barkly Regional Deal. Even the local Tennant Creek police did not know it had been cut from last year's budget. Why have you held up this critical project for the Barkly? Did the Member for Barkly agree to this cancellation of funding for the Tennant Creek watch house?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we need to do the history lesson again. The former Labor government promised it three years in a row. Where is it? That is the question. It has not been delivered.

The member talked about the Barkly Regional Deal. I will pass to the Health minister because he knows how important it is to get the Barkly—the land of opportunity—up and running.

Ms Uibo: He is not the relevant minister. Why would you pass it to him?

Madam SPEAKER: You have referred the question to the Minister for Health. Are you saying that is his portfolio to answer the question?

Mr MALEY: Housing and Local Government.

Madam SPEAKER: Please continue.

Mr EDGINGTON: Madam Speaker, it is about …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110(3) states:

A Minister may redirect the answering of a question to another Minister.

I am struggling to figure out how this question relates to the Health minister. If I wanted to ask him about health, I would have done so. This is about the Tennant Creek watch house and it is infrastructure. It relates to Corrections.

Madam SPEAKER: I think that is a fair question; that is where I was going. I will allow the minister for Housing to answer the question within his portfolio.

Mr EDGINGTON: I know that the Opposition Leader was the minister responsible for the regional deal. I recall asking her questions at Estimates a number of times about the regional deal, and she had no idea what was in the Barkly Regional Deal.

Ms Uibo: So why did you cut the budget for your own Tennant Creek watch house?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader!

Mr EDGINGTON: The police watch house was an initiative under the Barkly Regional Deal. I set everybody straight on that because there is some confusion on the other side of the Chamber.

In April 2019 the Labor government—I think it was under former Chief Minister Michael Gunner—signed the regional deal and committed $3.4m to build a new watch house in Tennant Creek. Here we are, seven years down the track. Labor did nothing for four years. The Infrastructure minister four years ago said that the Labor government would commit $11.5m. Guess what? The following year she put out the same media release saying that it would commit $11.5m to build a watch house in Tennant Creek. Labor promised it three times and put out media releases. It was all part of Labor's infrastructure plan that was not funded and never delivered.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; specifically, why has the CLP cut funding out of the design and scope for the Tennant Creek watch house?

Madam SPEAKER: I think the minister is answering the question, but we will see what happens.

Relevance, please, minister.

Ms Uibo: It is a history lesson that has nothing to do with the budget that you delivered on Tuesday.

Mr EDGINGTON: This needs to be put into context.

We are talking about Labor failures in the Barkly. I have a long list of failures by the Labor government in the Barkly. The Barkly Regional Deal is one of them. The Labor government promised the watch house in 2019 and never delivered it. When did Labor finish government? It was in 2024. Labor had five years to build the

watch house but it never put one shovel in the ground. Those opposite talk about the police watch house, but under their government not one shovel hit the ground.

Those opposite are putting this back on the CLP, but we are working through it. There is $1m in the budget, and we are getting on with the job.

NT Floods – Business Restart Grants

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for TOURISM and HOSPITALITY

Many of our tourism, hospitality and events businesses across the Territory endured severe weather, flooding and disruption leading into the 2026 season. Can you update Territorians on how the Finocchiaro CLP government is supporting affected operators to get back on their feet ahead of the peak period?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Goyder is right; tourism businesses are not all beginning this peak season from the same starting point. We had serious weather events at the beginning of this year in particular, with flooding throughout our regions and a cyclone that just would not let up.

I have been on the ground listening to our tourism businesses, particularly those going through tough times. I went to the Douglas Daly Holiday Park—the Member for Goyder knows that park well—and spent time with Leanne to see firsthand the damage she had endured. It broke my heart because of all the things that she has done for that park; there has been so much damage. I came back to my office and said that we have to do something for the businesses that have been impacted. The Katherine region is the same. We found some money to step up straightaway and get out the door the $5,000 grants as a restart for tourism businesses to repair the things that need it. I am pleased to say that the Douglas Daly Holiday Park could reopen. That bit of money helped—it was out the door quickly—so that Leanne could get up and running. She also had a lot of support from the community.

Other providers are applicants as well, such as John Dealy from the Adelaide River jumping croc cruises. He applied to repair a little road. He wrote to us and said, 'I just wanted to drop a note in regard to the recent Business Restart Fund grant we received. It was the correct amount to help and give us the little kickstart we needed when everything was tight after the recent damage from the cyclones and flooding.' It is an important bucket of money to help tourism businesses.

I look forward to seeing what is in the federal budget. We have three Labor members in the feds and I have not heard them talk about anything to do with tourism. We have had a horrible start to the season.

I hear about the Stuart Highway upgrades and the promise with no strings attached. We need the Stuart Highway upgrades so that caravans and tourists' cars can come up the highway. We want them to come to the Territory and know that we are open for business. If there is money for road repair in the budget tonight it will make a huge difference for our Territory tourism industry. I look forward to that. Forty per cent of our tourism market are people who drive here from other places. It is a big part of our industry.

We need to ensure that every cent we get from the federal government goes towards things that make a difference. The things that matter to Territorians are people having amazing experiences as tourists and as locals.

Child Protection Office – Alice Springs

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for CHILD PROTECTION

The Alice Springs office is under enormous pressure with workloads and staff shortages. Can you confirm how many staff are employed in the Alice Springs office in terms of child protection and what the average caseload is per staff member?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is important to recognise the work that is done by the people working in the child protection area. It is a tough area to work in. Many incredible people dedicate their time and effort to making sure that our Territory kids are safe, which is the most important thing.

It is not just one team. About 390 people work across the child protection team in the wraparound services, the backend administration services, frontline child protection services or the family support area. It is a fully integrated team, which is fluid; people go where they are needed when they are needed most.

A huge amount of interest is placed on what is happening in the child protection space. We are making sure the systems in place are correct for the work that needs to be done. We announced record funding in the child protection team across all those areas—the family safety frameworks and the child protection space—which cannot be unwound from each other. They all have to work together because, first and foremost, is the safety of the child, which means working with families, making sure they keep their end of the bargain in terms of looking after their kids. We make sure they have all the tools they need to look after them so that together we can make sure that every child in the Territory is safe when they go to bed at night.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: Have you finished your response, minister?

Ms CAHILL: I have, Madam Speaker.

Mr Paech: You failed to answer about the caseloads and staff.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, there is no point of order.

Budget 2026–27 – Cost of Living

Mr PATEL to TREASURER

This budget works hard to continue the Finocchiaro CLP government's good work of restoring the economy, reducing crime and restoring our lifestyle. We on this side of the House know that those three priorities are interlinked. Constituents in my electorate of Casuarina have welcomed the government's focus on these areas and are encouraged by ongoing work to support growth, certainty and security across the Territory. Can you outline how this budget is helping to restore and support our great Territory lifestyle, including by providing cost-of-living support for all Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Casuarina works hard for his electorate. It is a bit of a mixed electorate, with retail, businesses and homes. The member and his electorate understand what the cost of living and growth in the Territory mean.

We are still committed to our three pillars for the Northern Territory: reducing crime; rebuilding our economy; and restoring our lifestyle. We are well underway on progressing those three priorities. As the Member for Casuarina said, those priorities are interlinked. We have to do those three things to grow our economy, repair the Territory and make it the best place to live in the country. That is our goal.

Those opposite made a lot of commentary about the cost of living. We have invested $290m in cost-of-living relief for Territorians.

There is $25m in the CSO to ensure that Territory families, mums and dads are not paying high prices for their electricity. We are not seeing the federal government providing much relief in that area, but the CLP government is. We are making sure that Territorian families are saving nearly $2,000 a year on their power bills. That is real money in their pockets that they can use for other things.

We are providing free swimming lessons, Sport Vouchers and back-to-school vouchers.

The over-65s have the $550 prepaid card and the Seniors Recognition Scheme available to them.

There is $1,000 for apprentices to get tools and equipment for their trade. We need more apprentices and tradies. If we are to rebuild our economy and the Territory we will need apprentices.

We are helping businesses with our changes to the payroll tax scheme; that $2.5m lift has given businesses more money to employ people and the certainty that they will not be penalised for it.

We have provided a $19.5m reduction in the fuel excise, plus the Commonwealth came up with an extra $5.6m. That is real savings for Territorians; that is money in people's pockets when everybody is doing it hard.

We are investing in our lifestyle with Silkwood. We have spoken about that all week, and we will have a chance to speak about it again. This is parks and additional spaces for Territorians and people visiting the Territory.

We are doing the hard work and the hard yards to rebuild our economy, restore our lifestyle and, of course, reduce crime.

Independent Commissioner Against Corruption

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

At a time when the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) has warned about systemic governance and conflict-of-interest failures across the public sector, why did your CLP government fail to inform Territorians that the Acting ICAC had resigned? Who is exercising the power of the commissioner? When did you first become aware of the resignation? When will a permanent anti-corruption commissioner be appointed to restore public confidence in the integrity system?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, there has been a process. You will recall that we have rebuilt the integrity functions in the Northern Territory through the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner. The previous Labor government had several chances to get it right, which it did not. I do not need to go over that history. Needless to say, it needed a fresh set of eyes. We had the McClintock–Hiley review and implemented legislative change. That process has been happening and the recruitment is happening. That will all come to a close in the Assembly. As the Opposition Leader should be aware, that is a matter for the Assembly going forward.

It has been business as usual. The support to the staff on making the changes, bringing in the Ombudsman and health complaints commissioner, there has been a lot of—what is it called? It is some HR word for when you are merging groups of people together and you have to do that change …

A member: Change management.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Change management—thank you. All the change management work is happening. That is all I have to say.

Budget 2026–27 – MyRoster System

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for CORPORATE and DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

The Finocchiaro CLP government has delivered its second budget, which puts Territorians first and is a budget for everyday Territorians.

More than 79% of Territorians employed with the Northern Territory Government are frontline workers with complex employment conditions and who work tirelessly to keep the community safe and deliver essential services. These frontline employees are often shiftworkers who fall under different enterprise agreements outlining their conditions of employment and, most importantly, their entitlements. Can you outline the latest innovation the CLP government is rolling out to ensure our essential frontline workers are paid in a timely and accurate manner?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Blain was a hardworking Territorian in the Department of Corporate and Digital Development.

Our Finocchiaro CLP government is always looking at ways to improve efficiency across the public service. We back our public servants and want to make sure that they get their pay on time. We are addressing longstanding technical deficiencies that the Labor government overlooked for eight years. When we see something that needs to be fixed, we fix it. That is what it is all about. It will be to the pleasure of my good friend and colleague the Treasurer to understand how we will improve the budget bottom line while delivering these efficiencies for everyday Territorians.

As part of the 2026–27 budget there will be a new e-rostering system for youth justice and Community Corrections called MyRoster. There will be $6.2m in the first two years and $1.5m ongoing to expand the broader government use of this important system. This will get rid of some paper-based systems and deliver the efficiencies we need. This important system is already being rolled out through NT Fire and Emergency Services and with the NT Police Force.

These are important public servants on the front line every day. The last thing we want when they have just put in a 12-hour shift is for them to manually fill out paperwork, hoping that they will be paid the right amount. We are improving efficiencies so that when they work additional hours they are paid what they need.

There is no singular rostering system across the NT Public Sector. We are working to fix this. Consistency will improve transparency, planning and productivity while preventing system exploitation, saving taxpayer dollars, which my good friend and colleague the Treasurer is all about.

The second project we are looking at is important upgrades to the NTG payroll system to reduce manual processing and human error risk. I have been to the department and seen the entire floor of people who work tirelessly to ensure that everyone is paid on time. As the Member for Blain said, all their necessary systems are all worked out. We will improve payroll by investing in HR processes, ensuring that public servants, particularly frontline workers, can focus on their core business. That is what it is all about.

Our Finocchiaro CLP government is investing in the public sector to ensure there are efficiencies so that we can deliver for Territorians and save money whilst we do so.

Budget 2026–27 – Aboriginal Justice Agreement

Mr GUYULA to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

In Budget Paper No 3, Agency Budget Statements, the section that refers to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement has been removed. Does this government remain committed to the AJA? Which objectives of the AJA will be achieved in this budget?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, like I have said a number of times in this House, the CLP government is committed to reducing crime. We will never apologise for that, because the safety of Territorians comes first.

We have also spoken at length about the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the commitment we made to that with a bipartisan approach. I said in this Chamber last week, during the budget week, that we will continue with the five law and justice groups we set up. I remind members that Labor did not fund those law and justice groups under its budgets. It had several budgets leading up to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Our government is committed to continuing the five law and justice groups.

I sat with the Member for Mulka about a month ago and we had a good conversation about crime across the Territory and in remote communities and different pockets. He explained to me how, from his perspective, he would like to see some of those changes. I take on board all those things. I look forward to continuing those conversations.

However, I will be clear: I do not make any apologies for the strong stance that we as a government have taken on law and order. We will continue to put the rights of Territorian victims above the rights of offenders any day of the week. If that means crime is reducing because more people have been remanded or sentenced or are in Corrections facilities now, that is the way it is. We are happy to stand and live by that, saying we will put the rights of Territorians and their safety above the rights of anybody else who wants to be a criminal.

Buy Local Campaign

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for TRADE, BUSINESS and ASIAN RELATIONS

Territory businesses are the backbone of our economy. They employ local people, support local families and keep money circulating in our communities. The Finocchiaro CLP government has made it clear that rebuilding the economy means backing local enterprise …

Ms Uibo: Why don’t they make you Treasurer?

Dr RAHMAN: … cutting through barriers and giving Territory businesses every opportunity to compete and grow.

Can you update the Assembly on how the government's Buy Local campaign is supporting local businesses, strengthening confidence, creating jobs and helping to restore the lifestyle Territorians deserve across every region of the Territory?

Ms Uibo: You should have been the Treasurer.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I have to say that I do not think there is a member of our team who is more gung-ho about getting involved and supporting local businesses than the Member for Fong Lim. He has been incredibly active in his electorate, seeing what the businesses need and how we can promote them. That is one of the reasons we are looking at what we can do to make sure …

Ms Uibo: How is the Treasurer's work?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader!

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! There are constant interjections from the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, there are.

Ms Uibo: I was complimenting the Member for Fong Lim.

Madam SPEAKER: She is still interjecting. Please, silence.

Ms CAHILL: One of the reasons we have put together this Buy Local campaign is to remind Territorians that everything they need to keep their lifestyle to the standard they are after and all the things they need for work, play and pleasure, they can get in the Northern Territory. My message to all the people out there, our everyday Territorians, is: get offline, get outside and get into the stores and support your local businesses.

I had the pleasure today of calling in to one of our local businesses to have a chat about what this means for them. They said that this is the most support they have had for their local business for a long time. They thanked the Finocchiaro CLP government for realising that buying local is critical to rebuilding our economy.

About 96% of businesses in the Northern Territory are small businesses. These are the everyday Territorians we talked about in our budget who we need to be backing and supporting. They are creating jobs and opportunity and keeping our economy growing and building.

We will make sure we are reaching them on every platform. We are getting in the face of all Territorians, on social media, in print and on television to say, 'What you need is at your back door. Get out there and support our tradies, cafes and retailers. Make sure that when you buy that piece of clothing you have been looking at for a while, do not go online and get it from Myer down south; visit local retailers like Stomp, Pinkhill or Sarah Lyn Lingerie.' All these wonderful people supply everything we need from Territory businesses. Together, if we do that, we will make sure our economy grows and that people understand the Territory is the best place to live, do business and work. With the lifestyle here being second to none, what else could you possibly need?

Especially on the back of the terrible flooding we have experienced, when businesses have been fighting to get back on their feet, this is the time to get offline, get out there, buy local and support your local Territory businesses.

Legal Aid Funding Cap

J DAVIS to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The media reports that your government's budget has cut $3.2m in overall funding to Legal Aid, despite letters to legal practitioners showing that Legal Aid is hitting its funding cap within the first fortnight of every month. This month the cap was reached in just one week. This means that for at least two weeks out of every month, even prisoners locked up in watch houses and jails are unable to access legal representation. The Criminal Lawyers Association has warned that this is keeping defendants in custody for longer than

necessary. No wonder this government has to keep spending more and more of Territorians' money on bigger prisons.

How is it acceptable that a functioning legal system leaves people on remand without a lawyer for weeks? How many children and adults have been unable to access Legal Aid since the November cuts were introduced? Has the government received any legal advice about the risks of people appearing unrepresented because of these cuts?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I feel like I am a bit of a broken record on Legal Aid, so I have to give everyone a history lesson. When we first came to government, Legal Aid came crying to us to tell us that it was severely underfunded and, rightly so, because under the previous Labor government it was. Legal Aid used to ask all the time for extra funding, and every now and then funds would come through from the Labor government, just to top it up a little more.

One of the first things I did as Attorney-General was to give Legal Aid a top-up, because NAAJA was imploding and unable to do cases for Territorians. It was not taking on new clients, and it was in a world of hurt. The federal government funds NAAJA. While it was sorting out NAAJA, we helped Legal Aid stay open and take on new clients. I make it clear that there was an amount of money we had to give to ensure that Legal Aid could continue to represent Territorians.

Let us wind forward a bit. We made a heap of changes. I put on a new director and put in a whole new board; I am pretty sure that there is not one old member on that board. There is new governance. I offered Legal Aid, at its request, a multi-year funding agreement, which it had asked for over a long time. That conversation started in May last year; a year later that is still unsigned by Legal Aid. It is Legal Aid not wanting to do the work, make the changes within its own organisation and sign a multi-year funding agreement so that we can give the money over. Okay?

Legal Aid has been explaining it to you, but this government is supporting the services that we need, to ensure that victims come first. We need people to be defended. We need Legal Aid and NAAJA to ensure defendants are represented so that victims can get faster justice.

The last thing I will say about this is that, under our government, the courts are running more efficiently than ever before. NAAJA is a full service; it is fine. It has all the money, so it is okay, but. I am not sure about Legal Aid. However, our courts are operating more efficiently than ever. They had 25,000 cases go through, 75% of which were finalised in the first six months. That is much better than under Labor. I think the data and the record speak for themselves.

Legal Aid Funding Cap – Supplementary Question

J DAVIS to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Are you saying that the funding shortages to Legal Aid are the fault of Legal Aid?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I think I have answered the question. My expectations are that Legal Aid has increased funding—a baseline increase of over 80% year-on-year ongoing, under hopefully a multi-year agreement when it signs that. It is up to Legal Aid to decide how it will deliver that service.

Elite Athletes – Warm Weather Training Camps

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for PEOPLE, SPORT and CULTURE

Most people in this House know that I love my sport. I love the health benefits, mental health benefits and social life it brings to people who participate. In the electorate of Fannie Bay we have amazing sporting facilities like Gardens Oval, Fannie Bay Oval, Gardens Park Golf Links and Gardens Tennis. Last night I visited another amazing facility, Parap Pool, with the Minister for People, Sport and Culture.

The rest of the nation is experiencing winter, and the Territory's Dry Season climate continues to be a major drawcard for sporting teams and clubs from interstate. Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro

CLP government is creating opportunities for elite athletes to undertake warm weather training camps as we approach the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, today is International Nurses Day. I give a huge shout-out to all the nurses because they are the unsung heroes who work around the clock. I am proud to say that I was one of them; I was proud to be a nurse.

Swimming is one of the elite sports that brings a lot of medals for Australia in the Olympics. The Finocchiaro CLP government has committed $150,000 with Swimming Australia to bring elite athletes to Darwin for their training while it is winter down south. It is the perfect opportunity for them to be in Darwin, and they are practising at the Parap and Casuarina swimming pools.

Yesterday the Member for Fannie Bay and I met three Olympians, Mollie O'Callaghan, Milla Jansen and Hannah Fredericks, along with the head coach of the Australian swimming team, Rohan Taylor.

This is an incredible opportunity for young Territorians, especially as we have more than 20 swimmers who participated in national events, which is a much higher number compared with previous years. This is an opportunity for our younger generations to watch elite athletes perform and especially while being coached.

The Member for Fannie Bay and I asked about their training schedules. They informed us that they practise for about three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. They spend a few hours in the gym in between, which means that they are training for more than eight hours.

There was an opportunity for young swimmers from the Northern Territory to meet them over the weekend and ask questions, interact and understand the type of commitments needed and the pathways available to them. This $150,000 will deliver that. These athletes will be here for the next two weeks to train, and it is an opportunity for Territorians to support them.

We have Sam Watson and Greg Shaw from Swimming Australia in the gallery, and it is good to see them here again.

We look forward to ensuring our facilities will be available for the Brisbane 2032 Olympics and Paralympics. We say out loud to the world and the rest of Australia that during this time of the year we have facilities available which you can access. We will also support those opportunities for Territorians.

Child and Family Centres

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for CHILD PROTECTION

In April this year the Northern Territory Government joined the Commonwealth Government to sign the latest Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. Of that agreement, $135m was allocated to the establishment of 12 new child and family centres and expanded support for 19 remote safe houses. Can you confirm which 12 communities will receive these new child and family centres, when construction will start and who will run these centres?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the pertinent point the Member for Gwoja made was that the agreement was reached in April, just a couple of weeks ago. Work has to be done, such as consultation with the communities about where they will go. The work is being done at an operational level. When the time is right the announcements will be made.

Pharmacy Scope of Practice

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for HEALTH

The Finocchiaro CLP government made a clear election commitment to expand the pharmacy scope of practice to improve access to healthcare for Territorians. As the assistant minister for Health, I was pleased to see today's announcement that pharmacists can treat a broader range of common conditions, and this is allowing my constituents to save time and money and be treated earlier. Community pharmacies play a critical role in improving access to timely and convenient care.

Can you update Territorians on the expansion of the pharmacy scope of practice and how these changes are improving access to care across the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, as the Member for Wanguri knows, community pharmacists play an extremely important role to improve access in a timely and convenient way for Territorians across the Northern Territory from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine to Darwin. It is great that our community pharmacists are out and about doing the work and supporting Territorians.

The important point is that the CLP government is delivering another election commitment. We promised to expand the scope of practice for community pharmacists in the Northern Territory, and today I am proud to say that is what we are delivering. We are getting on with the job, training pharmacists to provide medications for a specific set of conditions, rather than Territorians having to find a GP to deliver that service. We know GPs are under the pump. For example, in Tennant Creek it can take up to two to three weeks for someone to get a GP appointment.

After our community pharmacists complete the training they will be able to provide care for up to 21 common healthcare conditions. It saves times, reduces costs and avoids unnecessary trips to the doctor. Already, our community pharmacists have been delivering UTI support for patients across the Northern Territory. I am proud that as at 28 February 2026, community pharmacists have delivered 523 UTI treatments for Territorians.

This puts the Northern Territory as a national leader in the expansion of the pharmacy scope of practice. Our community pharmacists are highly trained, regulated health professionals and have the skills, knowledge and competence to provide these additional services. They must complete training, including prescribing competency, clinical assessment, supervised practice and clinical examinations. I am proud that the Finocchiaro government is committing $1m to assist pharmacists to complete this training. This reduces the burden on the health services for conditions which can be safely managed by pharmacists across the Northern Territory.

Enterprise Bargaining Agreements – Interstate Lawyers

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for PUBLIC SERVICE

Last week you told this Assembly that you cannot offer real wage increases to public servants because you need to be fiscally responsible. After botching negotiations with Correction officers, you brought in senior counsel from Corrs Chambers Westgarth in Brisbane to clean up your mess. How much are Territorians paying for these interstate lawyers, and how does that square with your claim of fiscal responsibility?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, those opposite have short memories today and last week regarding the budget. They were in government for eight years and did nothing to progress the Territory; in fact, we went backwards. They froze public servants' wages, and we had to clean up their mess.

We value our public servants across the Territory. Our government is making sure that we look after them with all the pay deals going on. We have increased our number of frontline workers because we value them, and they are doing the heavy lifting across the Territory every day.

We have many agreements underway. They are all negotiated in good faith. I do not know what the member expects me to say: is it that we do not value our public servants? However, I can tell you that Labor froze the wages and did nothing for them. We are …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I redirect the minister to the question: how much are Territorians paying for these interstate lawyers?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, would you like to make it relevant.

Mrs HERSEY: I was saying that Labor froze the public service. We value the public service; we are negotiating all enterprise bargaining agreements in good faith. We are making sure that we are getting on. The commissioner is negotiating with the relevant agencies across all the enterprise bargaining agreements that are going on.

We value them. We have roughly 25,000 public servants; they are doing …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I redirect the minister to the question: how much are Territorians paying for these interstate lawyers? It is clear that she is not touching on it.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, she still has a third of her time to answer the question, so I will give the minister the benefit of the doubt.

Mrs HERSEY: It is their right to ask the question and it is my right to give an answer. They may not like the answer that I give, but I can guarantee you that there is no fudging on this side.

We came to government with a debt that we could hardly even jump over. Last week the Treasurer delivered a budget for all Territorians. We are being fiscally responsible across the Territory and across the board.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance.

Madam SPEAKER: No …

Mr Young: She has not answered the question …

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, I have not even given you the call and you are yelling across the Chamber. That is the third point of order on relevance you have made within about 30 seconds. You can take your seat and the minister can complete her answer.

Have you finished?

Mrs Hersey: I am done.

Madam SPEAKER: She has finished her answer.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Can I have some silence. Until I give members the call, you do not start yelling at me or across the Chamber.

Swimming in Schools Program

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

Swimming and water safety skills are essential for Territory children, given the environment we live in and the number of waterways our communities access every day. There is nothing better than taking my young children to Casuarina pool on a hot day to burn some energy and cool off, and you know I love Casuarina. Can you update the Assembly on how the Swimming in Schools program is improving safety outcomes for Territory students, supporting families with cost-of-living relief and ensuring equitable access across urban and remote schools?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker …

Mr Paech: Minister for Clark Rubber.

Madam SPEAKER: What did you say, Member for Gwoja?

Mr PAECH: I said, ‘Minister for Clark Rubber’.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, that is out of order.

Mrs HERSEY: Fortunately, this minister has extremely broad shoulders and I am not offended by such comments from the Member for Gwoja.

We on this side of the House value the Swimming in Schools program which we announced last year. I am sure I have spoken about my previous experience teaching swimming before I came to this role. It is valued on this side of the Chamber. It is a $3m commitment from our government to schools and parents to offer real cost-of-living relief. It is something that the Member for Casuarina knows about with the pool in his electorate. I was at the Nightcliff pool with the Member for Braitling this morning, having a swim.

People have access to a lot of water across the Territory, including backyard pools. These free swimming lessons are lifesaving for many families. Every child needs to know how to swim.

This year the School of Sport Education NT, under Principal Tim East—I shout out to Tim, who is an ex-Katherine teacher as well; all good people come from Katherine—has a booking schedule for schools to book their swimming. I caught up with the Ramingining students this morning who were doing their swimming lessons and looking forward to it this afternoon. That is what it is about. Last week the Member for Arafura asked about swimming and remote schools. He talked about swimming at Warruwi. Those schools all go through the School of Sport Education to book their swimming lessons. Those lifesaving lessons across the Territory are all being paid for by the department.

Last year almost 18,000 students accessed those swimming lessons. When I was in the Barkly last year students from about four remote communities came to Tennant Creek and were having a fantastic time learning how to swim. That finished with a swimming carnival.

There are not only are the lifesaving swimming lessons at school but also the $200 Sport Vouchers for the under-fives. Again, the Finocchiaro CLP government is delivering real cost-of-living relief.

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

APPROPRIATION (2026–27) BILL
Serial 63
and
TREASURY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 64

Continued from earlier this day.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, fearmongering and flinging mud will not fix our economy, but grown-up governance will. It will rebuild our economy and is what the Treasurer has provided in the 2026–27 budget, laying the foundations for opportunity for everyday Territorians into the future.

I have given wide-ranging commentary on the budget and our budgetary failures in the past. It is time to move past that and speak specifically to a strategic defence of our budget, contrasting our current fiscal pivot with the structural economic failures of the past once and for all. Let us do so from the perspective of a neutral economic observer who is focused on long-term fiscal sustainability.

I will speak on four points of contrast in this, my final of four addresses on the economy. The headline item is that we are moving from borrowing for consumption—which happened for years as we tried to spend our way out of the problem—towards investing for resilience. These budget papers provide an investment for long-term fiscal resilience.

Under the first head, it is important we understand that we are restoring fiscal integrity. We are ending the cycle of recurrent debt cycles. The primary improvement of the 2026–27 budget is the definitive break from unsustainable positions of borrowing to fund recurrent activities. Instead, we are specifically paying public sector wages and interest costs without having to do it on a credit card. The discipline we are showing is in trying to deliver a $95m operating surplus for 2025–26, which will be the first since 2022–23. This ensures that the Territory is finally living within its means for daily operations rather than paying wages on credit.

Contrast that with what was a core failure identified in the Langoulant report in 2018, which warned that the NT was in structural deficit cycles where debt was being used to fund consumption rather than productive assets. Between 2016 and 2024 we know that net debt spiralled from $1.8bn to more than $10bn due to a lack of expenditure restraint.

We are providing sustainability by trying to achieve a surplus. The government has reduced projected debt growth by 18% and improved the net-debt-to-revenue ratio by 15 percentage points compared with previous

forecasts. That stabilisation is validated by what looks to be a stable credit rating from Moody's as well, providing a foundation for lower future interest bills.

The second head we should consider as a point of contrast is infrastructure realism. We are replacing phantom projects with funded delivery, meaning that the hallmark of previous economic management, which was the announcement of major projects and the lack of business cases that led to massive blowouts and revoted funding, will not happen going forward for us.

The discipline we are showing is in removing those phantom projects and initiatives that existed only in rhetoric and not in reality and did not have realistic pathways. The current $4.25bn infrastructure program is backed by $460m in additional capital works cash to ensure projects move to construction, rather than remaining undelivered in perpetuity.

We have spoken about the ship lift, and we have committed to strict Treasury-level oversight to maximise the asset's return on investment for a maritime precinct over the long haul.

We are also focused on resilience, which we had little chance to speak about. The flood recovery fund of $100m and the $30.5m in the roads repair package are a shift towards building back better for the long term to reduce the long-term maintenance burden caused by the NT's exposure to extreme weather.

The third head is population and community safety, which we are now utilising as an economic lever. For a decade, the Territory has attempted to solve its population stagnation through expensive campaigns without doing the real work to arrest the loss of residents to other states. The realism we are bringing is to move away from shiny marketing campaigns and instead address the primary reasons people leave, which include antisocial behaviour, crime, social dysfunction and the cost of living. They are the things we are consistently tackling.

We acknowledge that population growth will be modest but realistic over the forward estimates, hovering at about 1.1%. If we improve on that position, it will be great for everyone in the Territory.

The first most important thing to do is treat safety as economy now. We are investing $1.7bn in law and order, introducing 100 more police on the streets and establishing a 212-strong police public safety officer workforce because we are framing it as an economic necessity at this point. We are trying to reduce crime further, stabilise the population base and restore business confidence.

For the cost of living we are providing $290m in practical concessions, including a $19.7m contribution to reducing fuel excise. That is a targeted attempt to mitigate the inflation gap that previously made the NT less competitive than the east coast.

The last head is frontline priority versus bureaucratic restraint. Previous budgets saw significant growth in the non-frontline public service, even as we had ongoing code yellows and shortages of police. The discipline that we are trying to instil now is in providing a 6% growth in frontline workers—that is in the budget papers—such as nurses, police, teachers whilst explicitly directing agencies to restrain back office administrative staffing. We are trying to ensure that taxpayer funds are directed towards service delivery rather than head office bloat. I will be specific about this because I feel that it may have been missed by some.

It is not in Budget Paper No 1, 2, 3 or 4; it is in the Budget and Regional Overview. If you look at page 4, Fiscal outlook, you will see the giant box titled 'Restraining non-frontline staffing growth'. It spells out all the extra areas that we are adding frontline staff to—assistant teachers, police, classroom teachers, medical officers, correctional officers, nurses, police auxiliaries and senior teachers. It is there in black and white; read the papers. We are trying to slowly deal with the state of our wages bill by ensuring that we prioritise the front line, create efficiencies and improve productivity over time.

The end strategic verdict of this all is that in this budget we are trying to transition to grown-up governance. We are prioritising operating surpluses, stabilising debt and funding essential services with cash rather than credit. This budget addresses the structural failures of the preceding decade. For the taxpayer I believe this budget offers the first credible pathway towards long-term fiscal resilience.

The budget Bill is being debated in cognate with a Bill regarding the first home owner grants and some adjustments to payroll tax. I make it clear that I am supportive of those manoeuvres. Continuing HomeGrown Territory, which sees more action in the Fong Lim electorate than anywhere else, is a great step forward; likewise, introducing a payroll tax rate of 6.5%—an increase of 1%—for large national businesses to ensure that we continue to grow our additional payroll tax revenue and, hopefully, raise an extra $25m per annum.

We are in charge of ensuring community safety. This budget will continue to invest in law and order, police, courts and Corrections. It is not about new promises; it is about sticking to our plans and continuing to deliver them.

Net debt will remain a challenge for everyone in this House, and we will have to work collectively on that by not flinging mud and fearmongering but working out where we want to try to create efficiencies and improve productivity. This government has a clear plan and a responsibility it takes seriously to manage debt responsibly whilst continuing to invest in priority areas. We are not shirking our responsibilities by simply kicking the can down the road and leaving it to future generations or future governments to pick up the pieces. Instead, we are staying focused on our priorities. Those priorities mean that in this budget we are not focused on spending; we are focused on creating restraint. Sometimes the best investment a government can make is restraint. We did not create the debt problem, but we will be the ones to fix it over time.

How will we do that? With my final minute, I simply say to everyone in the House: look at the Industry Outlook. It is not distributed with the other budget papers we get; it is available online from Treasury. It explains how important the minerals and onshore gas industries are to our long-term future potentially. We are supportive of trying to generate wealth and create opportunity for the Northern Territory because the multiplier effect of those industries, once seeded, will create an architecture of opportunity for the everyday Territorian in public health, housing, education and infrastructure.

It is my great privilege and joy this year to speak on the Appropriation Bill, support my learned colleague the Treasurer and endorse wholeheartedly this Bill.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I noted a few points made earlier. The selling of assets was raised multiple times. It is interesting to look back at the history of assets. A bit of corporate knowledge goes a long way.

It was interesting for me to discover that in 2012 during caretaker mode the Labor government gave the Stella Maris building to Unions NT for free. In caretaker mode it gave away assets. I can see why there is now a gap with Labor and the unions; it is because they do not get free buildings anymore. We also discussed at length the giving of $1.8bn for the ship lift and what that has added up to, so I remind those opposite that when they give away things for free it seems to be to very good friends and connected people.

We stand by the sales that were made because it was for financial reasons for the health of the overall NT people, not given to union friends and personal friends. There is a vast difference in those two.

I give credit where credit is due. On my history endeavour I noted that the Member for Gwoja spoke out against ‘He who shall not be named’ in 2019. There were leaked messages about the Member for Gwoja’s disappointment with how the budget was going and the lines that they were being told they had to wheel out and say. Credit where credit is due, Member for Gwoja.

There is a great danger posed to every government in the modern world, which is inflation. It is a toxic cancer to the economy. When government convinces the public that it can spend and print money endlessly without consequence, it is straightforward that it leads to inflation. I will outline what inflation does to people in my electorate of Drysdale and why I care so much about the inflation rate.

Printing money does not create wealth, and I think we all agree with that. I will outline how it does the opposite. It makes the people of Drysdale poorer. Why does this bother me so much? It is because the ordinary people of Drysdale, the Northern Territory and the wider country, pay for inflation. It is not the bureaucracy or politicians, but the people who pay when inflation is high. Everyday Territorians, families who buy groceries, apprentices trying to move out of home, pensioners watching power bills rise and small business owners paying more for freight, insurance, wages, fuel and interest rates—they are the real people who pay for inflation.

Ultimately, inflation is the decline in the purchasing power of honest work. The people of Drysdale are still doing their jobs, and the reason I hate inflation is that it devalues their productive work. Every time they go to work, their real earning power is less. That means less money for school, education, sport, a family holiday, rent or a mortgage. This is what inflation does.

Inflation is fundamentally a monetary phenomenon. It is driven by monetary policy. It is simple: when more money is injected into the economy than it is producing, the dollar is devalued.

As I outlined, goods, services and housing become more expensive because the dollar people work for is literally worth less. Someone who goes to work and does their same eight-hour shift has less purchasing power from that time worked. Therefore, every dollar saved and every pay rise lose value. Ultimately, that is why inflation is a hidden tax.

Inflation is worse than a straight-up tax because a parliament votes for it and you know about it. With inflation, there is no Bill announced by the Assembly and no bill arrives in the mail telling you to cough up more money; none of that exists. Governments can continue taking that bigger burden by taking more value out of the ordinary person's pocket, and they profit from it.

It seems that governments are not responsible. This responsibility shift can be seen purely when the inflation rate is going down, as it did previously. The government's monetary policy is responsible when the inflation rate is coming down—every politician likes to claim it—but when the inflation rate goes up, all of a sudden it is because of market forces. The biggest controller—the person who has the biggest levers for not just the Northern Territory but every jurisdiction in the country—is the federal Treasurer. With a high inflation rate that is staying stubbornly high, the responsibility squarely sits with the government of the day in Canberra.

I have highlighted that it is a hidden tax, but what is worse is that there are no announcements and no votes. A constituent from Drysdale simply realises that they have 10% less to spend on groceries. That is the shame of it.

Another thing that happens with inflation is government revenues rise. As you will see, revenues go up because the value of commodities, like iron ore, does not change; it just takes more dollars to buy them. That flows on through our tax system to government. Throughout the budget there is talk of increasing revenues, and it is because of inflation. Governments everywhere are taking that money. It is coming out of people's pockets, including the people of Drysdale.

What happens then is because the people are hurting—we have heard it a lot from this side of the Chamber—there is cost-of-living relief. This is where the drug cycle begins, and it very much represents an addiction cycle. The people are hurting because of overspending, so the government coffers are filling up because of inflation, and then they will give us cost-of-living relief, which is more spending. They keep injecting the economy and it is this vicious cycle; it is a positive feedback loop. This is the real balance that we are trying to bring to the Northern Territory budget. How do we get the Northern Territory off that drug cycle? How do we get a balanced budget without causing too much pain and harm? It is a balancing act, but just like a drug addict, the sooner you can get off, the better. The longer you stay on that treadmill, the more pain that will exist for the people.

It is easy to jump up and say, 'Cost-of-living relief', but we need to ensure that the people of the Northern Territory, the people in my electorate of Drysdale, do not get poorer. I will not sit in this place while they get poorer. We have to do what we were put in this Chamber to do: manage the economy for all so that the aspirational people of Drysdale do not keep rocking up to Coles and Woolworths with less real money every shop.

That is why I care about delivering a balanced budget that gives targeted relief, but withdraws the economy off that debt spiral. I put it that this is not just an exercise in fiscal discipline; it is truly a moral argument that we have to get in a healthy position so that we do not cause more pain. It is so easy for a government to say, 'Here we go. Everyone, here is cost-of-living relief. Have more money. We are driving inflation up and in five or 10 years, real wealth per person in this country will plummet to the ground, but that's not our problem because we'll be out of here.' That is the problem with our system.

What does a responsible individual in government do? You have to face it and say, 'No, even if I am not here, I will not commit the people of the Northern Territory to that'. That is why the delivery of this budget is critical. It is a turning point, and should be seen as such, in our self-government of the Northern Territory in that we can control the books. It is a cornerstone of being able to govern.

Another real shame with inflation which makes it even worse is that it genuinely punishes the virtuous. What do I mean? The workers who are educated, get a job and save up are the ones who are punished. Their savings are reduced. Their hours worked are fewer. Truly, the worker who did everything right under the model that has been projected to them, which is how they succeed, then has inflation come along and kick them in the teeth.

What does that cause? It breaks the social contract between government and citizen. We said that if people were educated, got a job, saved up and bought a house, they would have an economically solid foothold.

When they have done all that and cannot pay rent or afford groceries, the social contract breaks down and the trust degrades. We see a widening of distrust of our institutions across the country. I put it to the floor that inflation speeds up that process, because you are fundamentally breaking a promise to the ordinary citizen that their delayed gratification would pay off. When inflation is high, delayed gratification does not pay off—and it should always. It is the role of individuals who hold office throughout the country to ensure that they control inflation.

I have explained that inflation is a concealed tax that makes people poorer and punishes the practice of good financial management. That is why it is immoral.

In tonight's federal budget I hope for the people of the Northern Territory and in my electorate of Drysdale that the money-printing, happy-to-spend federal government looks at that inflation rate and takes proactive measures to bring it under control because it is my people who get poorer, not the wealthy.

There are a few classes that do fine with inflation: the asset-rich, because their values keep going up; and the bureaucratic class, because they will get their sweet deals tied to CPI, so they are not suffering. They will pay more, of course, but it is the people in my electorate of Drysdale, the ordinary workers, who will truly pay. Our biggest asset might be the family home. We are young as well, with a median age between 34 and 35, so a lot of us are at the start of our mortgages. When interest rate hikes hit, it hits us hard. If we are renting, it will flow on. It is genuinely the people in my electorate who will shoulder Labor's inflation.

We must stabilise our currency to uphold the social contract in this country. It is driving distrust in institutions, because if people do everything right they will end up poor as long as inflation is high.

Our government has shown we understand productive economies, and this is the key. We have to drive productivity because we got in this situation when government injected too much money into the economy without production going up. It is simple: we injected money and production did not go up; therefore, what is there now costs more money because it was injected into the system.

What are we focusing on? Generating productive assets in the economy and productive goods and services—mining, gas, agriculture, Defence, logistics, energy.

I have spoken about energy many times. We pay a ridiculous rate in this country for energy. It is outrageous. To have the resources we do and pay what we do for energy makes a laughing-stock of the long-term policy direction in this country. The fact that I can travel to one of our closest neighbours, Indonesia, and on the island of Bali where many of us like to visit, electricity is one-third the price it is here. Why with the resources that this country enjoys are we paying the prices for electricity that we do? There is the flow-on effect: why invest? Why manufacture? When I look back at what the country sat on 50 years ago in the way of manufacturing energy supply and what we used for energy and then think about where we are now, I see that it is just failed policy. Now we are suffering for it.

I have been an extremely strong proponent of gas because I will not see my people get poorer. It is simple: I will not see mums and dads in Drysdale struggling at the checkout and to pay rent. I will make sure that there are industries and jobs for them.

As we have outlined, real productivity does not come from government expansion. Anyone who wants to push that line should read an economics book. Productivity comes through private industries that generate goods and services; it is simple.

I have outlined the problem. What do we need to do to stop this cycle? When we look back through history we see that this is not the first time people have faced higher inflation. For a lot of us, it will be the first time in our living memory. It will be the first time we have experienced this, but the cycle just repeats whereby the public pays through higher prices, lower savings, reduced investment, diminished confidence and the great addict that is government. How do we stop it?

First, it takes education to tackle this problem. Everyone leaving school should have a full in-depth knowledge of how inflations works and the damage it has done. I call strongly for financial literacy and economic knowledge to be bolstered in our schools. We can do that in the Northern Territory. It will be the most empowering thing to give the citizen. When they leave school, they will not need someone to explain what inflation is doing; they will know. They will know the whole cycle and can make an informed vote because then they will have politicians who will not try to pull the wool over their eyes regarding inflation.

It seems like there are generational gaps; a generation will experience high inflation and there will be fiscally conservative measures for a couple of decades afterwards, but then it is forgotten and we repeat it. Perhaps education on the impact of inflation, what inflation is and how government ultimately drives inflation is one of the best long-term fixes, so I will gladly continue to push for financial literacy because that will create long-term change in the Australian and the NT economies.

This is a bit of side note. I will talk about representation in regard to the federal budget. It seems to me from my 18 months in this place that Canberra generally holds a noose around the NT's neck. This was highlighted to me recently when a Senate committee came to Darwin and spoke about tying approximately 80% of our revenue to targets of the federal government's making. I say to everyone in this Chamber: that is a direct threat to our self-government. Whoever is in Canberra and on Senate committees will change. We might agree with it today, but why should anyone from Canberra stipulate how the Northern Territory can spend its money? The problem is that we get 80% of our revenue from the federal government, so it has huge leverage over the Northern Territory.

Therefore, I speak of representation. We need statehood and a constitution in the Northern Territory. I would go so far as to say that enshrined in that constitution should be a protected sovereign wealth fund that the government of the day cannot get its hands on too easily. It would be protected by a state and a constitution. In pushing for statehood we need full Senate representation, and then there will be a massive shift. When the representation in Canberra is almost quadrupled, there will be a shift in how Canberra views the Northern Territory. When politicians are fighting for seats that can potentially swing who gets government, we will see a change in how we are viewed and we cannot be threatened with things like tying our money to certain outcomes that could change.

It does not matter what that Senate committee said it wanted to tie revenue to, but I note for the record that it wanted it tied to Closing the Gap measures. Who decides how that gets closed? No-one here is fighting against closing the gap; we just all have different beliefs of how we get there. No-one from Canberra should tell the Northern Territory people how that gap gets closed; that is for us to decide. The people of Drysdale, Daly and Goyder will decide that.

For the long term we need to educate our children on financial literacy. They need to understand inflation because we have a federal government which is making the citizens and the country poorer. It is making people in the electorate of Drysdale poorer. I do not want them to be crawling to government for cost-of-living relief. I want them to earn and be able to provide for themselves and their families and create wealth. I do not want the federal government to turn my electorate into a people reliant on a welfare state. It is wrong. It robs an individual of empowerment; you are not truly free if you cannot live free from the government purse.

I put to the floor that in the long term we need statehood, to be free from threats from Senate committees, to administer ourselves and to have a much larger representation in Canberra so that the federal government starts taking the Northern Territory seriously.

There is a number of things I will talk about for the electorate. I have been clear from the beginning of my time in this Assembly that I believe in the importance of education. I owe almost everything to education. I thank all those who invested in my education—my parents, teachers and principals.

I am glad that in Drysdale, thanks to the Education minister and the Treasurer, we have already implemented the Driver Primary School kiss and go; it is open. There is more. We are also spending almost $1m to upgrade Driver Primary's air conditioning. As a man formerly from the mechanical services industry I can assure you of the importance of the mechanical scope and air conditioners throughout our schools. New units have far better CO_2 scrubbing …

Mrs HERSEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

Mr HOWE: I am stoked to be delivering that air-con upgrade to the students of Driver Primary. We have made big investments in Driver Primary in the short time we have been in government.

I thank the Education minister who has supported the schools in my electorate no end. We also have upgrades to mechanical services at Gray Primary, which is fantastic.

Excitingly we have upgrades coming for Gray Oval. There are a few things, and I will not announce them all now, but I can say that the funding for the change rooms is approved, which is fantastic news. It is great news for the humungous number of players at the Palmerston Rovers Football Club, including all the Howe ladies who play and coach there. It is fantastic to see the growth of the Palmerston Rovers Football Club and the huge interest we are getting in the young teams coming through. Those upgrades are vital. I thank the Sports minister. I have been hounding him for a long time about Gray Oval. I am pleased and sincerely thankful that funding came through in this budget. It means a lot to the community.

I look forward to hearing about the federal budget tonight. It sounds as though there could be some big changes. I will wait to see them. Change is not always a bad thing. I genuinely urge us to get inflation under control; we have to do that. If I can send any message to Canberra it is: for the sake of the people in my electorate of Drysdale, get inflation under control. We are sick of the impact. It is making us poorer. Take the duty of the office seriously and get that figure down.

I thank the Treasurer for the huge body of work to compile the budget. I thank my Cabinet colleagues. It was great to see many things for Drysdale in the budget whilst making sure we are not feeding the problem. That is important. We have two levels of government that can inject money—state and federal. We are doing our part, and we need the feds to do theirs so that we have a healthier economic future and prospects for the Northern Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Mr Deputy Speaker, I contribute to the debate on the Northern Territory 2026 budget delivered by the Treasurer a week ago because I have spoken on the budget routinely for the last 15 years that I served in this Chamber, and this year will be no exception.

I was wondering whether people have driven 20 kilometres out of Darwin in any direction recently and had a look at the regions. My electorate sits in the region of Central Australia, and there are many other regions in the Northern Territory. When you drive 20 or 50 kilometres out of Darwin you see a distinct difference in the amenities and infrastructure, and that transpires into the way we live in the regions. One thing that astounds me time and again, no matter who is in government, is the neglect of the regions.

The last time we had an economic boom in Alice Springs was during the intervention. Some would argue that it was one of the few positives that came out of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, but it was by no means a small thing. The economic injection into the whole of Central Australia was profound; we have not seen anything like it since.

In 2007 when the Howard government kicked off the intervention, things started to change dramatically. There was then a change of federal government when Kevin Rudd—Kevin 07—became the Prime Minister, and Labor basically rolled out the entire emergency response from that point to about 2011 or 2012 when it started to finish. The partnership agreements from the intervention started to wind down and conclude.

That three to five years in Alice Springs was unbelievable. Everyone was cashed up and money was flowing in from all directions. People were flocking to Central Australia to work and needed accommodation in Alice Springs and throughout the communities. Things had not looked that good for many years.

Since then, Alice Springs and the Barkly—I will stick to Central Australia, the region I know the best—have gone slowly downhill because no federal or Northern Territory Government has backed us. That has been incredibly disappointing.

For a few years we had a Chief Minister—who I did not got on well with, and I think everyone would attest to that—who invested in Alice Springs. We had a couple of good years of things happening in the town from 2013 to 2016 when Adam Giles was Chief Minister. There was investment in the town and things picked up; Parrtjima was created, the Red CentreNATS happened, amenities improved and money was splashed around. That was good, but from 2016 to now we have been starved.

Going back to my question earlier: have you been for a drive in any direction outside of Darwin? You need to, particularly people in government, because most of you live in Darwin and so you probably do not know much about what happens—that is a generalisation, and it is probably unfair to some of you …

Mr Young: It is fair.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You probably do not realise just how difficult we have been doing it outside of Darwin for many years.

I take the interjection from the Member for Daly because he was a part of a government that seriously neglected Central Australia for many years.

Mr Young: Not the seat of Daly—a new swimming pool, roads.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In fact, there was pretty much nothing forthcoming to Alice Springs during the eight years of the former Gunner–Fyles–Lawler—and whoever else was Chief Minister—Labor government.

If Daly benefited from the former Labor government, Member for Daly, good for you; that is good news. I am not sure whether I am convinced of that, but that is fine; that is where you sit.

Mr Young interjecting.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Please let me speak.

From a Central Australian perspective, we have been starved and neglected. I think that is fair to say. The Member for Barkly knows full well what that feels like; he has been hammering away, advocating for his community in the Barkly for years, as have I. It gets repetitive. It probably gets pretty boring, bleating away in parliament saying how hard done by we are in Alice Springs and the Barkly—boohoo. I am sure that is how it is interpreted or perceived by people who are based in the beautiful city of Darwin.

It is a fact; there can be no denying that Darwin is an iconic beautiful capital city, and the facilities are magnificent. You have everything you need and more. You have buildings that you do not know what to do with. Look at the one across the way in State Square: you have a multimillion-dollar building that has no purpose because there is no operational funding to run it as an art gallery; there probably never was.

I see that building over there as evidence of how wrong the fiscal settings have been in the Northern Territory for too long. That epitomises it; it is a monument to waste and mismanagement, and it is a shame. It was seriously defended by the former Chief Minister Eva Lawler time and again. She spoke in here many times about how you have to borrow money to make money and you have to spend money to inject prosperity into the economy. That is why the former government built this massive art gallery that no-one needs or wants. It seems like a waste of money. We had people in charge of our public money who had no idea of how to manage it. It was bordering on criminal.

This budget that we are debating and studying, going through the budget papers like we do every year, is pretty boring and uninspiring, but I think that is exactly what we need. We need a budget that is not about throwing money at stupid, crazy, irresponsible things. We need a budget that is responsible, prudent and even a bit stingy compared with what we have had in recent years, because it is not legal to manage our money in a way that is so irresponsible. The FITA (*Fiscal Integrity and Transparency Act*) is a piece of legislation that means every cent we spend on behalf of Territorians has to be spent with the greatest of integrity and responsibility, not thrown around willy-nilly at things we do not need and not overspending in one part of the Northern Territory at the expense of the rest of us. It is not fair, responsible or sustainable to do that. Therefore, this budget, although in many ways uninspiring, is responsible.

As I said on radio last week, I am not paid or sponsored by the CLP. I had no prior discussions; I have not been briefed by the CLP government. I am not in any way connected to the CLP. The Treasurer is my colleague from Alice Springs, but I know just as much as the crossbenchers know about how this budget has come about and what it means. I am an Independent, but I am a conservative Independent and I am definitely fiscally conservative.

I used to take the mickey out of my father—we all did—saying that he had the first dollar he ever earned and took it to his grave. I am a chip off the old block; I am generous with my friends and family, but I am careful with how I spend money. We should be managing the coffers of the Northern Territory with that degree of attention and prudence. We need to ask: where is the money going? What are we getting for it? Is it giving us bang for buck? If it is not, we need not to spend it and waste it.

My goodness me, have I seen some waste within this Chamber by governments throwing money around as though they were kids in a lolly shop. I remember the first budget that Nicole Manison brought out as the Treasurer in 2017. The Member for Fong Lim cited it in this Chamber yesterday. I remember that it was like watching a bunch of children with their hands in the lolly pots, saying, ‘How can we spend this?’ Money went flooding out in all directions; there was nothing focused or intentional. It seemed as though they got their hands on money and it was going out, and it was satisfying like the personal gratification that children get from eating lollies. We saw that continue for eight years, with the budget blowing out year after year.

My parents used to say to us kids all the time, and I am sure I am not alone, ‘Money doesn’t grow on trees’. However, I still hear people in this Chamber talk as though it does, that somehow it miraculously falls on us and we spend it with little thought as to where it comes from. That is my perspective, and I make no apologies. I am fiscally conservative. I am a business owner; my husband and I have owned a business in Alice Springs for 26 years, and 10 prior to coming to this place in 2015. We were fully self-employed. No government gave us anything; we were not dependent on anyone, and that is how we have lived our lives. That is how I was brought up—to be financially independent.

There are only a few of us in this place who are business owners. I know the Member for Casuarina is, and there are probably other people, but that makes us fairly unique in this place. I dare say that there are people in this Chamber who understand how businesses run, but unless you have run a business and counted every cent, and every cent that you earn is because you have been there for hours and hours, seven days a week, dealing with all the problems and demands of being a business owner, I do not think you do get it.

There is a lot of compassion and support, but, interestingly, as business owners, my husband and I never had any support from government apart from Biz Secure to upgrade the security in our business a couple of years ago. When I hear of support available for businesses, it always makes me kind of laugh because I think, ‘Good on them. Which businesses are accessing support?’ It did not come our way in 26 years.

I want to talk less about myself and more about Alice Springs. We have been neglected; there is no doubt about it. There are a few stories that I want to put on the record again, which exemplify and illustrate where we are still at in terms of government funding and support. Although I commend the austerity or prudence of the Treasurer, Alice Springs has missed out again to some extent.

The story that exemplifies the neglect, mistreatment and mismanagement of Alice Springs is the national Aboriginal art gallery. I will not continue to flog this dead horse for long, but I do not think there are too many other stories in the history of the Northern Territory that speak of mismanagement like the proposed national Aboriginal art gallery for Alice Springs. What a shemozzle! What a sham that was.

It was announced by the former Giles CLP government in 2016 just before the August election. There was $70m put on the table. Years later, the former Labor government was still crying and arguing over where it would go. Remember it made a compulsory acquisition of Anzac Oval—unbelievable. The Labor government bought Anzac Oval off the town council so that it could build the art gallery there. Eight years later at the 2024 election Labor was still saying that it would happen.

Then, through a series of political manoeuvring and juggling, the Northern Territory Treasurer finally pulled the pin and it was gone—disappeared, kaput. All those years of planning and money went down the drain. The nonsense that people carried on with disappeared. All that hope and promise of prosperity that it was set to generate for the town of Alice Springs was gone.

Nothing has been put on the table to replace it. It was an exercise in futility and a waste of money—tens of millions of dollars would have been wasted on the consultations, the purchase of Anzac Oval and the design and all the things that went into it. That is unbelievable.

The second thing I put on the record is that the federal government gave Alice Springs Hospital $25.7m for a new outpatient department, a new ambulatory care centre, in 2019. That is seven years ago. Where is that? Nowhere; it just did not happen. The $25.7m for the general outpatient department originally included a broad range of services—oncology, obstetrics, gynaecology, midwifery and renal dialysis. It was confirmed in the budget papers in 2021, 2022 and 2023, but nothing has come of it.

It is interesting that this budget has a few million dollars for design work. I think I saw that somewhere—anyway, there is a couple of million dollars. The Minister for Health will be across that. It is apparently not off the table, yet this is what routinely happens in Alice Springs. Five, six, seven, eight and nine years later, there is nothing.

Call me cynical or a bit painful or whatever, these two initiatives that were meant to change the lives of people in Alice Springs—one from a tourism perspective and the other from a health perspective—were not delivered.

I am glad to see it, and we are appreciative of anything we get. We know that we are sort of the poor cousins way down the highway. I went to Katherine a few weeks ago. It is looking a bit dull and worse for wear after the flood. Katherine has been neglected. When you go down the highway you see that Tennant Creek is more dull, tired and neglected than Katherine. When you get to Alice Springs you see that we are somewhere in the middle.

Let us see whether, under this government, we get that outpatient department which has never been delivered. I guess I should be pleased to say that it is still in the budget to some extent.

The other story of neglect is the flood mitigation commitment to our town. Despite an extensive inquiry undertaken in 2016—triggered by former Chief Minister Adam Giles, who formed a committee in 2016—and a report being tabled and given to then Chief Minister Michael Gunner in 2017, nothing happened. Sorry; there could have been some minor work done within the department of Infrastructure along the lines of the recommendations in that report. I think there was, so I will give credit where credit is due, but no new flood mitigation measures have been put in place since before 2016 when the committee was formed. Nothing has happened for all those years. Under the former Labor government there were promises—we will do this and that; we are looking into this; there are studies being done, blah, blah, blah—but nothing changed.

Here we are, and I am still confused about exactly how much is on the table for flood mitigation. I will talk to the Treasurer at some point, maybe during Estimates, for clarification. I think the Member for Katherine mentioned in her budget response speech that there is $9m for flood mitigation for Alice Springs and Katherine—if I am misquoting you, I apologise—but in the budget papers it is back down to $4.9m.

The point is that we need flood mitigation. We need regular clearing out of the river. We need to get back to the way we treated flood mitigation when I first became an alderman on the Alice Springs Town Council. There was more of a commitment to it then. The council talked about it and work was done regularly to clear out the river.

Unbelievably, there have been years of talking about flood mitigation and the report's recommendations, and nothing has been delivered—nothing at all. I hope that this CLP government is committed to flood mitigation and that we will see some changes because, by Lord, we need it. We are all on the waiting list now. Katherine has been smashed by a big flood. Parts of Alice Springs along the river got smashed in February. We are all in line waiting with our hand out for flood mitigation funding.

The same can be said for new hospitals. It was interesting to hear someone earlier talk about how eventually, if you wait long enough, you get what you ask for. They gave the example of the Chief Minister and her roundabout. That is not always the case in my experience. If that happens, it means that someone has made that happen for you and you have spoken to the right person. That is politics. That is government. I hope that having two Alice Springs members as ministers in Cabinet means that we will get something out of this term of government—that Alice Springs will benefit from having you in those positions—because that is the way it works. Call it pork-barrelling—call it what you want—but the Member for Barkly should be in line to get a number of things he has wanted and has been patiently waiting for in his electorate. I am talking about the regions.

In this budget, I am not seeing that sense of gratitude coming towards Alice Springs so much. We are getting new money in the form of $12m for more prison beds—I am not sure exactly what that is. Obviously, Corrections is the boom industry. It was booming under Labor too. The former Corrections minister, the Member for Gwoja, extended the Alice Springs prison by about 100 beds—or that was the plan; I am not sure whether it came to fruition. Corrections started to boom under Labor, and it has gone gangbusters under the CLP. We get that, but it needs to broaden out.

We are all Territorians wanting to live our best lives. We all want to have a future in the Northern Territory. Yes, crime has been curtailed; it is reducing in Alice Springs. I am enormously grateful for that. Thank you to this government for getting onto crime. That is my priority every day, no question. However, after crime comes down and that investment has been made in prisons and law and order, we need to start living a reasonably comfortable life.

It will never equate to what you have in Darwin; we get that. This is the capital city and most of the members of this Assembly live here. The politics is such that you will always get more than everyone else in the Northern Territory, but we demand our fair share. We demand to have a future that is significantly better than it looks now. We want nice amenities. We want to drive into Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy or wherever and have a sense of pride in what we see. We do not want to see faded signs and things looking pretty ordinary and dull. We want to feel the sense of economic prosperity that Darwin enjoys routinely. We want to give our children, friends and family a future in the towns where we live.

I am afraid that is not the case in Alice Springs. People are not satisfied with our amenities and how we live. That is partly due to the fact that crime has degraded that. Crime does not just affect people personally; it affects things physically. Shops have closed. People have had enough and are not investing in the town because of crime. Tourists have not been coming as much as they used to years ago because of the crime.

The impact of crime has been profound, but it is also about the government investing in the infrastructure of the town and leveraging private enterprise. The old Melanka site is privately owned, but the government has the ability to leverage in and back private investment.

In conclusion—I will not string this out any more than my allocated time—this is a budget that makes sense. There are no frills or cash splash. It is not something that you would write home about, but it is prudent. I commend the Treasurer for that, but I also would like to see a sense of fairness and equity in the distribution of public funds throughout the Northern Territory.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr YAN (Treasurer)(In reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill and the Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill. I listened to all those contributions closely.

Over the course of this debate we have heard from members on both sides of the Chamber, and I welcome that because this budget deserves proper consideration. We heard from government members the clear and consistent message that this is a responsible and disciplined budget for everyday Territorians. It is a budget that continues the work the Finocchiaro CLP government has started to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore the Territory lifestyle we treasure so much. As the Treasurer I am proud to say that the hard work is paying off. This budget is honest, deliverable and puts Territorians first.

Before I turn to individual contributions, let me be clear about what this budget does. It delivers an operating surplus in 2025–26. For the first time in years, this government is not borrowing money just to pay the wages. I want everybody to think about that. No longer will we continue the practice of paying wages with the credit card.

We have a $4.25bn infrastructure program that, for the first time, is properly funded. It is not just a wish list, a list of press releases or a glossy brochure full of projects that will never see a shovel in the ground; these are real projects that will actually be built.

We raised our payroll tax-free threshold and exempted apprentices and trainees, and we saw an increase in the amount of payroll tax we collected. That shows businesses are supporting and backing the Territory because they are seeing positive growth and consistency.

There is more than $290m in concessions and support in this budget. We are helping Territorians with their power bills, school vouchers, swimming lessons, TAFE placements, childcare, apprentice grants and, of course, fuel relief.

We have extended the nation’s most generous home-building grants, giving certainty to our construction industry and continuing to boost our housing stock.

Under Labor, debt was growing at 22% per annum. We have brought that down to 4%. That is an 18% reduction. That is not a slogan; that is the hard work we are doing as a CLP government. In the 12 months since our last budget, this government has achieved a reduction in peak debt by $757m. They are staggering numbers. Not only that, debt will reduce faster than previously forecast, which means our interest bill is getting smaller sooner. Every dollar we are not paying in interest is a dollar that stays in the Territory’s pocket. Two budgets in, and the trajectory has changed. That means over time we will spend less to service Labor’s debt. This is not our debt; we are dealing with Labor’s debt. We will have more capacity to deliver services, infrastructure and programs for all Territorians.

I reiterated those numbers because they matter, and the contributions from those opposite during this debate suggest that they either have not read the budget papers or read them and chose to misrepresent them.

I acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues on this side of the Chamber, who came to this debate prepared, informed and with a genuine understanding of what this budget means for the people they represent.

Law and order is a key priority for this government; it always has been and always will be. That is reflected in this budget with a record spend of $1.73bn in this area. As the Chief Minister outlined, that will fund more police officers, the newly formed police public safety officer program, upgrades to police stations and the Circuit Breaker Program, just to name a few.

Still in the law and order space, there is $525m for Corrections in 2026–27. As Deputy Chief Minister Maley pointed out, a safer Territory requires a justice system that works from police on the streets through to courts and Corrections. Corrections is an area that Labor seriously neglected. I know that firsthand, and I have said that many times.

I touch on another point that the Deputy Chief made, which is that this budget provides $4.9m ongoing for alternative-to-custody programs in Alice Springs and Groote Eylandt. We seek to improve the efficiency of our justice system through a variety of measures, including the $2.4m allocated to supporting Supreme Court operations. I was also pleased to hear that victims levy collections have increased by 142%. This government continues to put victims first.

We continue to back the Territory lifestyle and have had high tourist numbers and increased visitor nights. This is backed by initiatives such as our purchase of Silkwood, increased funding to attract sporting events and support for festivals across the Territory.

We are investing $2.56bn in health. I know my friend the Member for Barkly was pleased to report that Tennant Creek Hospital will be getting a CT scanner. It was a long-term goal for the town that will help provide those needed services for the region and alleviate pressure on Alice Springs Hospital.

As Minister for Health, Mr Edgington also spoke about the $314m allocated for primary healthcare services and the $135m allocated to improve mental health services across the Territory. Both items will help ease pressure on our hospitals.

It has been a good budget for the Barkly. The Member for Barkly spoke about our planned rebuild of the remote Alekarenge School and the new Tennant Creek boarding facilities. We are delivering these projects. Labor had eight long years and opted not to do these things. The CLP is delivering in the Barkly.

In fact, the CLP is delivering for education in a big way. I thank the minister for Education for her input into the budget process. This fact may be lost on those opposite, but it is a fact nonetheless: the education spend in this budget is practically equal to our law and order budget, because we know our kids matter; they are our future.

I noted from Minister Hersey's speech that there are 4,480 apprentices across the Territory. Each one is exempted from payroll tax, thanks to this Finocchiaro CLP government.

As Minister Burgoyne noted in his speech, maintaining the pipeline of residential land releases ensures adequate land in the future and provides certainty to industry and our community. 'We have lots of lots available', he said, 'and we would love to see houses built on them'. I share his excitement at the developments occurring in Alice Springs and across the Territory. We allocated money to support land releases and headworks in Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, in residential and industrial areas.

I mentioned the Circuit Breaker initiative earlier and want to focus on it in greater detail, as Minister Cahill did in her speech. Not only has it been backed with an $8.3m investment but also we heard a personal story about how it intervened and changed the direction of an individual's life. That is what this program is all about. Multiply that by 314 times, which is the number of program participants.

I thank Minister Cahill for pointing out the infrastructure upgrades for domestic violence programs, including safe house programs and upgrades to the Wugularr safe house.

Another important program, which I thank Minister Charls for mentioning in his speech, is Operation Thrive, our action plan to implement the first Northern Territory Defence Veterans Strategy. Operation Thrive supports veterans and their families with transition, employment and education; health and wellbeing; and respect and recognition. Under Operation Thrive, our government will fund a second round of veteran community higher education scholarships in 2026 and 2027. Five scholarships are available to members of the veteran community commencing their studies in Semester 2 at CDU.

I will briefly touch on the comments made by the Independent members. I was disappointed to hear the Member for Johnston say that we are selling off the Territory piece by piece to the highest bidder, when the opposite is true. The Finocchiaro CLP government recently bought a piece of the Territory—30,000 hectares at Silkwood—and folded it into Litchfield National Park.

I thank the Member for Mulka for his contribution. I note the attention to detail in where the money is being spent, and I can assure him that it is not just a Darwin-based budget.

I thank the Speaker and Independent Member for Araluen for her contribution. She has been in this Chamber for a long time and has seen a lot of budgets handed down; I value her contribution and take on her comments. Although I come from Alice Springs and would love to see more investment there, we invested heavily in Central Australia in our first budget. This budget takes more of a responsible approach, but I am hoping to see those investments continue into the future.

I turn to the contributions from the opposition. I can only conclude that the Leader of the Opposition wrote her speech before she read the budget papers. Her contribution was disappointing; it was all spin, and there was not a lot of substance. It must be tough to be in a Caucus of five where four people want to be the leader, but that is no excuse for the blatant misrepresentations from the Leader of the Opposition. Allow me to address a few.

Her claim that housing supply has stagnated is not reflective of the facts on the ground. We have Australia's most generous home-building grants, and we have extended them. Just yesterday we saw the news that Master Builders Northern Territory estimated a 46% increase in building activity since September 2024 and confirmed that confidence is returning to the market.

I note at this point that potential changes to the capital gains tax in the federal budget are predicted to hit the Northern Territory in a much harder way than other jurisdictions. I hope federal Labor has taken that into account. We sent a long wish list to the federal government for programs and projects that we want funded, but we are pretty realistic. Let us hope that the federal Treasurer is laying out a budget that is designed not to put upward pressure on inflation; that is the last thing we want to see in the Northern Territory.

Not every project can take place at the same time, and we acknowledge that. The opposition should know that as well. The Leader of the Opposition also claimed that the CLP inherited strong conditions. I do not think a $1.4bn blackhole of unfunded liabilities, record debt, infrastructure blowouts, contractual straitjackets, out-of-control crime and a laundry list of unfunded projects are strong conditions; I would hate to see what poor conditions were.

The Leader of the Opposition stated that our Corrections approach is misguided. We accommodate criminals in jail; those opposite accommodate criminals in their policies. I only have to look at what happened to Corrections under the former Labor government. Corrections went backwards. I will speak more about the contributions from the Member for Gwoja later.

I looked for comments on the Territory's gas industry, but there was nothing from the opposition or the Independents. I have not heard anything about the biggest potential project in the Northern Territory's future. The Finocchiaro CLP government is backing the Beetaloo, and the Leader of the Opposition will not even mention it. The Leader of the Opposition's commentary shows that Territory Labor is not serious about our development and the industries that will lead the Territory's economic reform. The opposition offered no alternative vision—no vision at all.

The Member for Daly asked: why is the Mandorah jetty in the budget papers? If he understood the budget papers and logistics and infrastructure, he would probably figure out that there is more work to do over there. I am happy if he does not want the work to happen because I will take the money away and use it for something else. The old Mandorah jetty still needs work and a bit of love to make it safe, and we want to keep it there as infrastructure for fishos and that community ongoing. That is why it is in the budget papers, but he does not seem to get that. If he does not want it, he can tell his community why, and I will take the money and use it for something else productive.

The Member for Gwoja talked about priorities and growing own-source revenue. At least somebody in Territory Labor is thinking about growing our economy. It was a more constructive speech than that of the Leader of the Opposition, but there was still no mention of the Beetaloo. It was a fiery speech from the Member for Gwoja—perhaps the Leader of the Opposition should look out.

The Member for Gwoja spoke about recidivism. Recidivism went up under Territory Labor while he was the Attorney-General responsible for correctional services, so I will not take lessons on that topic from him. The only time that I am aware of a reduction in recidivism was under a former CLP government. In 2015 and 2016 we had a reduction in recidivism of 2.6%, if my memory serves me correctly. When Labor got into government it slashed programs in Corrections and industries. All the hard work done to reduce recidivism went out the window.

The Member for Gwoja also spoke about public servants. We have hired more frontline workers, teachers, police officers, prison officers and nurses. Labor froze public service wages when in power and drove public servants away.

At least the Member for Nightcliff had the courage to raise State Square. Under Labor, the cost blew out by $60m.

The Member for Nightcliff was in the department of Infrastructure as an executive working on roads, so he probably knows about the directions I gave to the department to start pushing out that pipeline of work and get those tenders moving. Now he pretends that instruction may never have happened. It makes you wonder what he was doing when he was in the job.

He talked about the $350m cash underspend. That is astounding. He repeated the lines of the Leader of the Opposition. There have been a few events in the last four or five months. There has been a big Wet Season, a couple of cyclones and floods. That causes a delay in getting money out the door. Now that he is no longer in the department maybe things will start moving. Who knows? If the Member for Nightcliff was advising Labor in government, no wonder its program was a bit of a disaster.

In closing my budget reply speech, I reflect on how much work we have done to get to where we are today. This budget has seen a dramatic turnaround in the Territory's finances, delivering an operating surplus while we have expanded our frontline headcount. It has been delivered under extraordinary circumstances, and I spoke of the weather events and the impact they are having on communities across the Northern Territory.

There have been floods in Alice Springs, the Barkly, Darwin and the Daly River region. Pastoralists have been hit badly. We cannot forget about Katherine and the effects of the major flooding there. There has been a cyclone, more rain and more uncertainty. The work to deliver this budget has been done. The responsibility we showed in the initial preparation of this budget allowed us the ability to be flexible in how we approach these major events that have affected the Territory, and we can start getting out there and helping the communities, people and businesses who need it the most in these trying times.

I thank the entire Treasury team for the work they have done over the past five months in delivering this budget in uncertain times, with not just the flooding events but also international events. The delivery of the economic piece in the budget books was probably the hardest thing to do because things were changing day by day. The economic forecast for inflation and what things will look like for people in the Northern Territory was difficult to determine. We had to draw a line in the sand and pick a time on the best outcome for us.

We did that in conjunction with the federal government. We spoke with federal Treasury, which was trying to model how what is happening in the Middle East may affect the Australian economy. We will find out about that tonight from the federal Treasurer, but it had an effect on us. The team from Treasury have done a stellar and outstanding job, and I cannot thank them enough.

I thank my Cabinet colleagues, the Chief Minister and my backbench colleagues for their input.

This is a budget that I am proud to hand down in the name of the Finocchiaro CLP government. This budget continues to work on reducing crime, rebuilding our economy and restoring our fantastic Territory lifestyle.

I commend the Bills to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bills read a second time.

RACING AND WAGERING AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 59

Continued from 18 March 2026.

Ms BOOTHBY (Racing): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, this government strongly supports the racing industry in the Northern Territory, which contributes about $120m annually to our economy. It supports jobs all the way across the Territory and plays a vital role in our regional communities.

This is relevant when you look at what took place the other weekend in Central Australia with the Alice Springs Cup. People came from all over Australia and Darwin to support the cup events on Thursday night and Friday,

the yearling sale and the cup on Monday. The town was so vibrant after a week I think we would probably have rather forgotten. It was nice to have a bit of fun and frivolity and a sense of enjoyment across our community throughout the cup carnival.

Race days are about far more than just the event itself. In Alice Springs they fill our hotels and support our pubs, clubs and restaurants. This support flows through to other local businesses. Race days get visitors into our regional towns and communities and generate activity across our local economy, with benefits flowing well beyond the racecourse gates. Everybody gets a drink when the races are on in town. Visitors come from across the Northern Territory, interstate and overseas, with many of our racing events becoming recognised fixtures on tourism calendars year after year. Importantly, these race days create economic activity and opportunity in communities across the Territory. They support our local jobs, drive visitation and help sustain businesses in our regional centres.

Race days also contribute something that cannot always be measured purely in economic terms; they contribute to the vibrancy and identity of the community and the community spirit. They are all an important part of the Territory lifestyle that everyone values immensely. For many communities, race days are major social occasions that bring people together. They provide an opportunity for local residents, families, businesses and visitors to gather, connect and celebrate their community.

I can speak highly of one of those events because it is where we get our Picnic Day holiday from. Everybody thinks it is a holiday for Darwin, but the Picnic Day holiday started because of the Harts Range races. At Harts Range (Atitjere) in my electorate of Namatjira, people from Alice Springs and the bush communities all come together as one for that wonderful weekend. It epitomises what our local races are about. Those social functions are an important part of what makes Territory racing so valuable.

This Bill is about securing the long-term future of that industry. It is about ensuring we have a framework that is clear, modern and fit for purpose and provides certainty, supports growth and gives confidence to participants, businesses and communities across the Territory. This Bill strengthens and modernises the racing and wagering framework in the Northern Territory, ensuring it is clearer and more effective in practice and, of course, better equipped to support the industry now and into the future. There are also amendments to clarify how the Act operates in practice and to improve the clarity and consistency of terms.

The Racing and Wagering Amendment Bill 2026 has been informed by the independent strategic review commissioned by the Minister for Racing. That review examined the long-term future of the racing industry in the Northern Territory and identified a clear direction for strengthening and modernising the framework to better support sustainability and future growth across the sector.

A number of consistent themes emerged through that review process, including the importance of strong and clear governance structures, the need for clearly identified roles and responsibilities across the framework and the opportunity to modernise existing arrangements so that they are better equipped to support a changing and evolving industry environment.

The findings and recommendations of that review have formed a significant foundation for the reforms contained within this Bill and have helped guide the approach taken by the government in developing these changes.

Engagement with and feedback from the industry has also fed into this Bill, ensuring that the model will be workable. That process made it clear that although foundations are in place, practical improvements are needed to ensure the system operates as effectively as it should. We consistently heard that the industry needed more clarity on roles and responsibilities across the racing and wagering framework, ensuring that there is no ambiguity about who is responsible for what and that each part of the system can focus on its core function. There was a demand for more effective governance. Decision-making needed to be more efficient. We are ensuring there are modern settings that are better aligned with current industry needs, reflecting how racing and wagering operates today and supporting future growth and sustainability of the industry.

This Bill improves how the system works in practice by addressing operational issues that have emerged since the framework commenced in July 2024, making sure processes are more streamlined and consistent and far better align with how the industry operates on the ground. It ensures the framework is clear and that it is efficient and fit for the future by refining existing arrangements and strengthening governance structures. We are modernising key elements so that the system can respond effectively to a changing and increasingly competitive national environment. It provides certainty for growth and competition by giving industry

participants, operators and stakeholders a more stable and predictable regulatory environment by supporting confidence in long-term planning.

We are supporting investment and participation in the Territory's racing sector. We are taking these steps because we recognise the simple reality that the industry is continually evolving and that our regulatory framework must evolve with it.

This Bill will ensure a clearer distinction between racing and wagering, with more focus and independence.

We are establishing Racing NT as a dedicated race control body, bringing the Territory more closely in line with the governance models used in other Australian jurisdictions. Racing NT will act as a dedicated race control body for thoroughbred and greyhound racing across the Northern Territory. This change creates a single point of responsibility for race control and the functions that give the industry a more defined point of contact as it moves forward. This will mean more effective and sustainable governance and a more focused and strategic leadership framework.

Decision-making will also be improved by this separation, with more defined silos of responsibility and far better definition in the decision-making processes. Decisions will be made faster, and that will give the industry more certainty and ensure that consumers receive timely responses to inquiries.

Racing NT will provide strategic leadership for the industry, overseeing key regulatory and operational functions and ensuring there is a clearer and more coordinated approach to the management and future direction of racing across the Northern Territory. It will support the long-term financial sustainability and commercial growth of the industry, while also driving strategic planning and development to ensure the sector remains competitive, sustainable and well positioned into the future.

The board will bring together a combination of skills and expertise in governance, particularly in financial management and industry expertise, while ensuring the racing industry benefits from strong oversight and informed decision-making. This is an important step in ensuring the racing industry has the structure, leadership and strategic direction required to support its long-term future and continued contributions to the Territory's economy and regional communities.

Key to all this is public belief in the system. We will maintain our jurisdiction as a great place to do business and the Territory public will know that this is an important industry. It will be allowed to grow and prosper with high standards and effective oversight. We want industry to grow in the Northern Territory. It sits at the intersection of the Territory lifestyle and economy, two of the pillars upon which our government is primarily focused.

It is important that we recognise the broader national environment in which the racing industry operates. The racing industry is not standing still; it changes rapidly. Across Australia this industry is facing stronger scrutiny than ever before. There are far higher public expectations regarding integrity, transparency, governance and accountability. Communities expect that confidence in the systems that regulate racing, and participants expect frameworks that are modern, efficient and capable of supporting the industry into the future.

When jurisdictions get the fundamentals right it places them in the stronger position to grow their industries. These create confidence, certainty and, more importantly, an environment where people are willing to invest for the longer term. That is why these reforms matter.

This Bill is about ensuring the Northern Territory remains competitive in that national environment. It is about making sure we have effective governance, with effective arrangements that are clear, modern and capable of supporting a sustainable industry well into the future.

Importantly, this is not change just for the sake of change. These reforms are practical, measured and informed by operational experience from industry, including industry engagement and an independent review. They are about getting the fundamentals right. When the fundamentals are strong, the industry, confidence and investment grow and the opportunities then grow for Territory communities. That is what this government wants for the future of racing in the Territory.

This Bill is ultimately about supporting an industry that remains deeply important to the Northern Territory. It is an industry I want to see grow. I love getting out to race meets across the Territory, particularly those bush events that are so colourful and engage communities.

Do not come to me for betting tips. I am probably the worst punter you have ever seen. If you want to know what horse will lose, come ask me.

Importantly, these reforms support an industry that contributes strongly to our economy and the social fabric of many of our regional centres. From Darwin to Alice Springs and Katherine to Tennant Creek, racing continues to bring communities together as it has done over time across the Territory. When you read books of early settlers here, they speak about racing carnivals organised between pastoralists, with people travelling hundreds of kilometres on foot to attend racing events at Barrow Creek or in Tennant Creek. Some of those stories are amazing.

The Bill provides a clearer structure for the future administration of the industry through the establishment of Racing NT and a stronger governance arrangement that is better suited to a modern operating environment.

Importantly, the Bill does not weaken integrity measures or reduce oversight. The opposite is true; it strengthens the framework by improving accountability, clarifying those functions and supporting better administration across the system.

These are practical commonsense reforms. They are measured and have been informed by review, consultation, operational experience and engagement with industry. They are not reactive. This Bill was arrived at after a significant process. This government recognised the value of racing to the Territory economy, our regional communities and our lifestyle. This Bill helps secure the long-term future of that industry and positions it to continue contributing strongly to the Territory for many years to come.

I thank the Attorney-General.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, at the outset it is important to acknowledge that this is primarily a governance and structural reform Bill. As outlined in the public material, the legislation seeks to separate racing and wagering functions, establish a new governance model for racing administration and modernise elements of the regulatory framework surrounding wagering in the Northern Territory. There are also amendments designed to improve operational efficiency, reduce duplication and streamline decision-making processes. In total, these amount to substantial administrative and governance changes, and it is appropriate that the parliament considers them carefully.

Scrutiny of legislation matters. One of the useful functions of the scrutiny process is not simply to determine whether a Bill can operate administratively, but whether it adequately responds to the broader public interest concerns that exist in the community.

During the scrutiny process, a number of submitters raised concerns. Although the Bill focuses heavily on governance and structural arrangements, there is comparatively little emphasis on gambling harm minimisation or consumer protection outcomes. A number of submissions questioned whether the legislation represents a missed opportunity to introduce stronger harm reduction measures into the Territory's wagering framework. Concerns were raised that although the Bill restructures institutions and redistributes power, it does not substantially alter the policy settings that govern how gambling harms are prevented or reduced.

Some submitters also questioned whether there had been sufficient engagement with groups focused on gambling harm prevention and consumer advocacy during the development of the reforms. Others raised concerns about the Territory's broader role as the national licensing jurisdiction for online wagering operators and whether the existing regulatory framework appropriately balances economic activity with public health considerations. These concerns deserve consideration, because gambling harm plagues many in our community. It has real consequences in communities across Australia, including here at home in the Northern Territory.

Research over recent years has increasingly demonstrated the scale and seriousness of gambling-related harm. The 2023 Northern Territory Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Survey Report found an increase in problem gambling in the Territory compared with previous surveys. The research identified disproportionate impacts on lower-income households and Aboriginal communities. Other Territory-focused research has highlighted links between gambling harm and financial distress, family conflict, mental health challenges, housing insecurity and broader social disadvantage. Research commissioned in the Northern Territory has also estimated the social cost of gambling harm to be substantial when accounting for lost productivity, health impacts, relationship breakdowns, justice system costs and community harm.

Importantly, modern evidence increasingly approaches gambling harm through a public health lens. Harm is no longer understood as solely affecting a small number of people with severe gambling addiction; rather,

the evidence suggests that harm exists across a spectrum and can affect individuals, families and communities in varying ways.

The growth of online wagering has also fundamentally changed the nature of gambling accessibility. Betting products are now available 24 hours a day, heavily advertised and integrated into sporting culture in ways that would have been difficult to imagine decades ago. Research nationally has shown that younger Australians are increasingly exposed to gambling promotion at an earlier age, particularly through sport and digital platforms.

None of this means that the racing and wagering industries should not exist. These industries employ Territorians and contribute to economic activity such as our great tourism attractions. However, it means that regulatory reform needs to be considered through not only the lens of efficiency and commercial sustainability but also, most importantly, the lens of public health, consumer protection and community wellbeing.

One of the recurring themes raised throughout the scrutiny process was the question of balance. Several submissions accepted the rationale for the clearer structural separation between racing administration and wagering regulation. However, concerns remain about whether the reforms genuinely strengthen independence or concentrate authority more heavily in the office of the director. Questions were also raised about whether expanded powers and delegation arrangements were accompanied by sufficient safeguards, oversight and accountability mechanisms.

Other concerns related to whether the complaints framework adequately protects consumers, particularly vulnerable individuals experiencing gambling harm. There were also concerns that harm minimisation remains secondary within the legislative framework rather than being embedded as a central regulatory objective.

These are not insignificant questions. Ultimately, the effectiveness of a wagering regulatory framework should be measured by whether it protects people from harm and maintains public confidence in the integrity of the system.

It is also worth recognising that gambling harm often does not occur in isolation. It intersects with broader issues, including financial stress, family violence, mental health pressures and disadvantage. In the Northern Territory context where many communities already face significant socioeconomic pressures, these impacts can be particularly severe.

The scrutiny process highlighted that there remains ongoing debate nationally about what the appropriate balance should be between industry development, regulatory independence and harm minimisation. The Bill does not resolve all those debates; nor does it attempt to fundamentally redesign the Territory's approach to gambling harm reduction.

Legislation of this nature should always prompt us to reflect on the broader role of regulation. It is about ensuring industries operate responsibly, transparently and in a way that maintains public trust. As wagering markets continue to evolve, particularly through digital and online platforms, governments and regulators across the country will continue to face pressure to ensure that regulatory systems keep pace with emerging harms and changing community expectations.

The evidence before the scrutiny committee demonstrated that although there is support for elements of structural reform contained within this Bill, there are also ongoing concerns about whether enough is being done to address the social impacts associated with gambling harm. Those concerns should not be dismissed. They reflect a growing body of research, lived experience and public debate occurring in the Territory and nationally. As members of parliament, we should continue engaging with that evidence and consider future reforms to strengthen consumer protections and harm minimisation outcomes.

For those reasons I acknowledge the stated intent of the Bill and the concerns raised during the scrutiny process. I thank all those who participated in the inquiry and contributed evidence to assist the parliament in its consideration of this legislation.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, the Racing and Wagering Amendment Bill introduced by the Minister for Racing represents a significant step forward for one of the Northern Territory's most iconic business industries, an industry that employs hundreds of people, supports rural communities from Katherine to Alice Springs and delivers excitement to Territorians across the Territory, including in my amazing electorate of Fannie Bay. Racing is more than a sport; it is a vital part of our social fabric, economy and regional way of life. For too long its governance has been tangled, inefficient and open to question. This Bill fixes that; it delivers clarity, integrity and long-term certainty.

The Darwin Turf Club is in the heart of Fannie Bay. Last night I dropped into its annual general meeting and spent time chatting to members, trainers, volunteers and officials about the incredible work they do. They spoke passionately about keeping the track world-class for major events like the Darwin Cup Carnival, supporting young jockeys and apprentices, maintaining facilities that attract sponsorship and punters and the need for stable predictable governance to plan investments. These hardworking Territorians pour their hearts into our racing industry, and I heard clearly that they want certainty, reduced red tape and a regulator that they can trust. This Bill delivers exactly that.

The Bill implements a structural reset of racing and wagering governance. It separates racing administration from wagering regulation, transferring all the racing responsibilities from the Northern Territory Racing and Wagering Commission to the Director of Racing and Wagering. This creates clear lines of accountability, with no more divided loyalties or blurred responsibilities. The commission becomes the Northern Territory Wagering Commission, laser-focused on licensing compliance, online wagering oversight and dispute resolution.

More importantly, the Bill dissolves Thoroughbred Racing Northern Territory and establishes Racing NT as the single race control body for thoroughbred and greyhound racing. This delivers key recommendations from the strategic review of the NT racing industry, which this government commissioned after the 2024 election, accepting 14 of the 15 recommendations. Racing NT brings independent skills-based board governance, a ministerial charter of rights and responsibilities, centralised integrity and compliance functions and better coordination between thoroughbred and greyhound racing.

For the Darwin Turf Club, this means streamlined operations and reduced duplication, multi-year funding certainty, transparent capital works allocations, refined race programming for bigger fields and wagering and shared services across race clubs.

Integrity underpins everything. The Bill introduces gold-standard conflict-of-interest safeguards, with commission members prohibited from wagering on NT race club events, holding accounts with NT licensed wagering operators and owning a racing animal or an interest in a racing animal. There are mandatory conflict-of-interest disclosures within 10 days, a 12-month cooling-off period for licensees and six-year maximum terms. These build public trust and address concerns from the membership review.

Let us be clear about the contrast: the previous Labor government left racing governance outdated, conflicted and inefficient under its 2024 Act. Labor had years in power; we commissioned the strategic review within months of taking office. Labor created overlapping roles; we are delivering clean separation and accountability.

Darwin Turf Club members last night were clear that Labor's system was not working; the Finocchiaro CLP government is fixing it. These reforms secure jobs for trainers, jockeys and track staff in Fannie Bay; revenue certainty for the Darwin Turf Club and regional tracks; increased sponsorship and wagering turnover; and better commercial use of racecourse land. This positions the NT as Australia's most attractive jurisdiction for racing and wagering investment. This Bill is for the Darwin Turf Club members I spoke with last night. It gives them the stable governance they need to focus on what they do best: delivering world-class racing that puts Fannie Bay on the map even more. It protects the industry that supports their families, communities and way of life.

I commend the Minister for Racing and the Racing and Wagering Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, as we have already heard in this Chamber, getting gambling regulation right is something that matters. It matters not just for regulatory integrity, as the Treasurer so clearly outlined, but also because gambling harm has real human consequences in our community.

Too often, gambling is treated as an entertainment or revenue policy, but for many Territorians it is a public health, financial stress, mental health, family violence and, in some cases, suicide prevention issue. Behind every statistic is a person who has lost savings, housing security, relationships, trust or their sense of stability. We know that online wagering platforms are designed to make it increasingly harder for people to stop. I want to be clear that this is not about saying that Territorians should not have fun, participate in racing or place a bet if they choose to; it is about recognising that governments have a responsibility to ensure that gambling is regulated in a way that prevents foreseeable harm and protects the public.

As we just heard from the Member for Fannie Bay, racing has a long history in the Territory, and it remains an important part of community life for many people. People should be able to enjoy race days, social events and recreational betting if they choose to. However, supporting racing does not mean that we should ignore the reality that modern online wagering systems are increasingly sophisticated, pervasive and designed to maximise spending. We are no longer talking about a once-a-year flutter at the races; we are talking about

24-hour online gambling platforms operating in people's pockets, backed by algorithms, inducements and relentless advertising.

It is entirely possible to support the racing industry while still expecting strong consumer protections, proper safeguards and meaningful harm minimisation. If an industry is valuable and important to the community, that is more reason to ensure that the regulatory system around it is trusted, transparent and sustainable.

Wanting gambling regulation that protects Territorians is not anti-racing or anti-fun; it is pro-community, pro-accountability and pro-public safety. As the Treasurer said, 'Regulation should be clear and robust'; I agree with that. A genuinely clear and robust regulatory system is one that serves the whole community, not just industry certainty but also consumer protection, integrity and harm minimisation.

In the Northern Territory we sit at the centre of this issue because we license more online wagering operators than any other jurisdiction in Australia. Decisions made in this parliament do not just affect Territorians; they shape gambling regulation nationally. This means that we have an opportunity and an obligation to lead. This Bill is an opportunity to do that, but ultimately it is a missed opportunity, and I will be specific about why.

The evidence we heard in the scrutiny committee inquiry told us clearly what is missing, and Territorians deserve better than what is before this House. I acknowledge the work of the Legislative Scrutiny Committee and the committee secretariat who all worked hard over many Bills leading up to this sitting, and this Bill in particular. As people know, I am on the scrutiny committee. We engaged deeply with the submissions that we received. We thought about them and made recommendations based on what those submissions told us. This is exactly the kind of scrutiny that the committee is meant to provide to parliament.

I have heard—not from the minister—that the minister will not accept any of those recommendations, and I look forward to hearing the rationale for that. If that is the case, it is incredibly disappointing that the work that this parliament has charged the committee with to do is not being taken with the seriousness that it deserves. The people who took the time to submit to the committee are not being respected, and we are left with a Bill that could be greatly strengthened, still meeting its obligations and key intent, but also taking on board the concerns that were raised in those submissions.

The committee recommended some simple and genuinely important improvements, including explicit harm minimisation functions for both the commission and the director, prohibiting commission members from wagering on Northern Territory races and extending the complaints timeframe. I have heard, and look forward to confirmation one way or the other, that the government has rejected even these modest commonsense recommendations from a committee which is dominated by government members.

Let me read out in full one of the recommendations the government has rejected:

> *The Committee recommends that clause 7 of the Bill be amended to provide the Northern Territory Wagering Commission the function to protect the public from adverse impacts of unsafe wagering …*

The government rejected that; it will not even explicitly require the commission to protect the public.

The amendments suggested by the committee should only be the beginning, not the end, when experts and advocates with lived experience—people who have experienced firsthand the financial, emotional and social devastation that gambling harm causes—have provided us with a clear direction to better protect the public.

This Bill moves the furniture, but does not make any significant changes to gambling regulation in the Northern Territory. It makes administrative improvements, but does nothing to tackle gambling harm. It prioritises industry certainty and pushes critical integrity reforms to a future policy review when we could be dealing with them now.

Having considered the evidence and having been on the scrutiny committee to engage with those submissions and talk to my fellow committee members, I have a schedule of amendments which people have before them. I look forward to talking through them when we come to that stage of the debate, but I will talk about some of them briefly now.

A regulator's composition shapes its culture and priorities. A commission dominated by industry insiders, as this commission will be, will regulate like an industry body. A commission that includes people with genuine expertise in harm will be regulated like a public health body. What the commission does will flow from who sits on it. That choice shapes a regulator's culture, priorities and the questions it will and will not ask.

The Bill, as it sits before us, places no meaningful limits on industry representation within the commission's membership. I propose that no more than two members may have industry-specific racing or wagering knowledge; at least three members must have demonstrable expertise in areas like public health, gambling harm, consumer protection, social services or financial compliance; and, critically, at least one person appointed to the commission must have specific expertise in gambling harm.

I also propose that the cooling-off period for former industry employees be extended from two to five years. The current drafting is far too narrow, so my amendment explicitly captures former employees of any licensee or wagering business, not just racing clubs. We all know that everywhere, but particularly in the Territory, that people move between roles. The cooling-off period needs to reflect that reality to make sure we protect the people we should be protecting.

Regarding gifts, hospitality and integrity, the Bill leaves structural conflicts entirely unaddressed. In the public briefing the department advised that the commission is developing its own internal gifts and benefits policy and code of conduct, but an internal document or reassurance is not the same as evidence or law; an internal policy can be changed by the people it is meant to control, whereas a law cannot. What we have is a regulator that has faced severe national scrutiny being asked to self-police its relationship with the industry it regulates. That is not adequate. Public trust is rebuilt by what the law requires, not what a regulator promises it will or will not do. Therefore, I will move an amendment to make it an offence for a commission member to accept a gift or benefit of any kind from a licensee or applicant, backed by criminal penalties.

The Bill introduces safeguards prohibiting members from holding a wagering account with a Northern Territory-licensed operator—which I support—but it does not prevent members from holding accounts with operators licensed in other jurisdictions; nor does it prohibit them from placing in-person wagers. The explanatory statement for this Bill refers to the intrinsic link between racing and wagering to justify prohibiting commission members from owning racing animals anywhere in Australia, so it defies logic that this same intrinsic link does not justify a prohibition on members holding wagering accounts in any jurisdiction. It does not make sense; if it applies to one, it should apply to the other. My amendments extend the prohibition to any licensed wagering provider in Australia for someone who is on the commission.

The Bill introduces new disclosure requirements, but proposed section 19C(4) explicitly states that the failure of a member to comply with disclosure requirements does not affect the validity of a decision of the commission. In effect, the Bill creates a disclosure obligation and removes any meaningful consequence for breaching it. Therefore, I propose we replace that with a comprehensive framework that clearly defines direct interest, indirect financial interest and interest by close association, and mandate a public register of declared conflicts. Transparency is not optional; Territorians deserve it. Critically, I will also move an amendment that if a member contravenes disclosure requirements, NTCAT can review the relevant decision.

I will also move amendments to ensure that the commission and the director cannot delegate their powers relating to the determination of applications or issuing of licences. These are not minor administrative details; licensing decisions are among the most consequential things that the regulator does. They should not be delegated away from the decision-makers who are accountable for them.

The committee discussed complaints timeframes at length. The Bill as drafted provides a 60-day window. The evidence from advocates with lived experience was abundantly clear on this. Harm often takes time to recognise, name and act on. Gambling harm is accompanied by isolation, shame and delayed recognition. It can take considerable time for someone to understand what happened to them, name it and feel able to act on it. A 60-day timeframe effectively closes the door on most complainants before they have had a chance to open it. My amendments extend this timeframe to six years. Imposing a strict deadline does nothing to improve regulatory efficiency. We are simply shielding noncompliant licensees from accountability. In jurisdictions like Victoria, no such arbitrary time limit applies. A complaints framework should be, by definition, designed to protect consumers, not exhaust them. It certainly should not protect operators by simply running out the clock on the most vulnerable victims.

Although the amendments I will be speaking to soon address some structural integrity issues, I must also speak to what this Bill comprehensively fails to do.

Submitters provided compelling evidence that the Northern Territory penalty framework is too weak to deter serious misconduct. Financial penalties are so low that they are routinely absorbed by large wagering companies just as a cost of doing business. On the committee there was a suggestion that alignment with other jurisdictions could be considered in a 2027 review, but there is no reason for us to wait to implement penalties that genuinely hold operators accountable. Harm minimisation should not be an afterthought relegated to a post-implementation review; it should be the central pillar of this legislation.

This Bill misses a critical opportunity to introduce a statutory consumer duty, requiring licensees to continuously monitor consumer behaviour and intervene when red flags are detected. That could be done now; all that information is there before them. It is silent on basic protections, like strict legislative prohibitions on inducements, VIP schemes, sign-up bonuses and free bets that are specifically designed to keep people gambling.

Community safety and consumer protection are about much more than just administrative reshuffling. If we pass a law that fails to impose a statutory duty of care, delays the alignment of penalties and allows conflicted commissioners to continue wagering we are not making our community any safer.

Interestingly, today the federal government finally tabled its response to its inquiry into online gambling, 'You win some, you lose more', which recommended a national regulator with a sole focus on harm reduction. Although the federal government has committed to reforms that I strongly support, such as a ban on gambling advertising in stadiums and on jerseys, it falls well short of the commonsense, pressing and necessary recommendations made in the report, including any kind of national regulation.

In the absence of national reform, the NT has an opportunity and an obligation to lead. We license more online wagering operators than any other jurisdiction in Australia; we are the de facto regulator of online gambling in Australia. The decisions made here affect people in the Territory and across the country. Where industry has failed to protect consumers, it is our role to do that. This Bill does not do that; it just reorganises.

All Territorians deserve legislation that is clear, evidence based and genuinely centred on the public interest. This Bill does not pass that test. The amendments I propose today will strengthen it, but they still leave us far short of what the public has a right to expect. I intend to bring in a private member's Bill in the near future because Territorians deserve a regulatory framework built on genuine consumer protection, accountability and a commitment to putting people first.

Ms BOOTHBY (Racing)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank the scrutiny committee for the work it did to look at this Bill and for the opportunity to respond, noting that a number of the matters raised are not legislative amendments related to this Bill and are more appropriately considered through existing administrative arrangements or a future review process.

This Bill has two primary objectives: first, to amend the *Racing and Wagering Act 2024* to enable the establishment of Racing NT as the race control body for thoroughbred and greyhound racing in the Territory; and, second, to strengthen the management of potential conflicts of interest within the renamed Wagering Commission.

In relation to the scrutiny committee's recommendation 2, section 16(j) of the Act already empowers the commission to direct wagering licensees to implement consumer protection and harm minimisation measures. This aligns with section 3(d), which establishes the protection of the public from the adverse impacts of unsafe wagering as a central objective of the Act. Accordingly, no further amendment is considered necessary.

Recommendation 3 of the scrutiny committee proposes that delegations be required to be in writing. This is unnecessary as delegations are already governed by departmental policies and procedures. Current commission delegations have been in place since July 2024 in accordance with section 17 of the Act.

Recommendation 4 suggests granting the Director of Racing and Wagering the power to direct racecourse licence holders to implement consumer protection and harm minimisation measures related to the racing industry. However, such measures relate to wagering licensees and fall within the remit of the commission, not the racing industry itself.

Recommendations 5 and 8 propose amendments to the explanatory statement; however, it has already been tabled, and no amendment is proposed at this stage. The matters raised are already sufficiently addressed administratively and operationally. In relation to recommendation 5, reporting on the Racing and Wagering Fund will be captured within the annual report of the department supporting the Director of Racing and Wagering, which is currently the Department of Tourism and Hospitality. In relation to recommendation 8, if exercised, a notice that the responsible minister has made the charter of rights and responsibilities will be published in the gazette, rather than publishing the charter itself.

Recommendations 6 and 10 raise matters for consideration during the three-year review, and it should be noted that NT legislation cannot regulate members of other jurisdictions. However, the commission members in the NT will be prohibited from holding accounts with any wagering provider licensed under the Act.

Penalties under the Act will also be reviewed as part of the three-year evaluation. The current penalties represent a substantial increase from the repealed Racing and Betting Act 1983, rising from a maximum of 175 penalty units to 2,500. Any further increases may require a separate legislative framework similar to that governing the Liquor Commission.

Recommendation 7 seeks to prohibit commission members from wagering on races conducted in the Territory. Once this Bill is enacted, the commission will no longer regulate the racing industry and members will be prohibited from holding accounts with NT licensed wagering operators; therefore, there is no basis to prohibit wagering through an interstate provider on NT races.

Recommendation 9 concerns the timeframe for lodging complaints. The Bill extends the existing period from 14 days to 60 days, with discretion from the commission or director to allow extensions up to a maximum of two years. This upper limit is intended to prevent unreasonable retrospective claims, and there is no proposal to extend it further.

Recommendation 11 proposes conferring jurisdiction on the NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal to review certain decisions. This matter will be considered at a later time during the technical review.

The proposed changes to commission membership, including prohibitions on owning racing animals and holding accounts with NT wagering operators, will strengthen governance and reinforce the separation between regulator and industry.

Establishing Racing NT as the racing control body for thoroughbred and greyhound racing will support a more commercially focused structure and address concerns identified in the NT racing industry review regarding potential conflicts of interest. Improved governance and operational practices are expected to enhance the quality of NT racing products, leading to increased participation, sponsorships and expanded market offerings by wagering operators, particularly in the online sector.

Finally, removing all racing-related functions from the commission will enable it to focus on wagering regulation and more effectively address outstanding complaints.

I now wish to start where this debate should have started: on the ground, at the track. This is not just about legislation; it is about people. It is about the bloke standing on the rail at Fannie Bay, and the Member for Fannie Bay talked about going to the Darwin Turf Club last night and listening to people in the industry. It is about the small team in Katherine running a race day that keeps the town ticking over. It is about the trainer up before sunrise, the strapper washing down a horse in the dark—because it is early in the morning—and the small business that counts on race weekend to pay wages. That is what we are talking about.

This industry contributes about $120m to the Territory economy and supports jobs across our regions. The Member for Namatjira talked about the Harts Range races; that is a remote region in the Northern Territory, out of Alice Springs, that benefits from racing.

This industry brings people together and supports our Territory lifestyle. As the Tourism and Hospitality minister, I see this firsthand. Racing events do not sit in isolation; they fill hotels, support our pubs, clubs and cafes, and bring people into towns that rely on that extra lift. You only have to go to the packed Winnellie Park—I cannot wait to take the Member for Johnston one day—to the greyhound Darwin Cup to see it.

J Davis: I am waiting for my invite.

Ms BOOTHBY: That money and energy all goes into local people and local businesses.

Our government has just launched the Northern Territory Visitor Economy Strategy, taking us through to 2032 with a target of growing our economy to $3bn. Racing is a part of that story; it always has been, and I am the minister driving that. At the same time, our government has been clear about restoring our Territory lifestyle, not as just a slogan but as something you can actually feel—events, togetherness, things that bring Territorians out of their homes and into the community doing more of what they have always loved. Racing sits in the middle of that. When we talk about this Bill, let us be clear: this is about backing that industry and making sure it is set up properly and has a framework that works not just on paper, but in the real world.

I listened carefully to the submissions put forward to the scrutiny committee and the contributions made today. Not all of them say the same thing, and that is expected. Some want more, some want different settings and some are heavily focused on harm.

I heard you loud and clear, Members for Johnston and Nightcliff, about harm. Most of your speeches were about gambling harm. Please note that this Bill is not about gambling harm; it is about our industry, our lifestyle, tourism and hospitality and the framework to set up the Racing NT body to split racing and wagering altogether. We will do other work on harm, but this is not that, so do not conflate the two. This is the nature of that space; it is inconsistent. What is consistent is the support that we give to this industry for clear structures and strengthened governance. I hear loud and clear that there is support for improving integrity. I get that, which is why I am making these changes.

I reiterate that gambling harm has been raised and that this Bill is not trying to do everything. It is focused on governance, the structure and the regulator being strong, clear, credible and effective. Without that, there really is no future. This Bill is focused on getting the framework right. That does not mean other issues are ignored, but it means that this legislation will do its job. Of course, work on root causes and harm minimisation continues by government, as it should.

I understand that racing is changing across the globe and in the Northern Territory. It is under more scrutiny. At the same time, it is becoming more competitive. The jurisdictions that get the fundamentals right will attract the investment, participants and major events. Other locations are shutting down racing. In that lies our opportunity because this matters in the Northern Territory; we are the home of racing. It is in our DNA. It was a CLP government that brought in the framework to allow betting agencies to set up here. That is 1,000 jobs for Territorians in the racing industry and the betting industry, allowing them to put food on the table for their families. That is important and cannot be dismissed.

We just had the Alice Springs Cup Carnival. It was moved back to the long weekend. I am waiting to hear the numbers, but from all accounts, despite what Alice Springs is going through, it was a successful weekend. People were out and about at the racetrack. We need to back regions like Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. The Tennant Creek Races are on this weekend coming. Last year it was a strong success with good numbers. One of the cup winners went on to do something even better in Victoria.

We hold our own when it comes to racing in the Northern Territory. I am a strong supporter, as the minister in this government. When I go around the country I talk about racing in the Northern Territory. I will continue to back racing because if you want to have a punt on a Saturday at the track, you should be able to do that and have a bit of fun.

I look forward to taking the Member for Johnston with me to show her how many people it employs at the track.

J Davis: I am not trying to stop the jobs.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am trying to remember any piece of legislation in this House that the Member for Johnston has supported …

J Davis: I would love to support one so much; give me one.

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not remember any of them. It does not matter what you are talking about. You could be talking about mining, tourism, Defence, the economy, crime or anything; she does not back any of it.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clauses 1 to 3, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 4:

J DAVIS: I move amendment 1 to clause 4.

This amendment inserts definitions for ‘conflict of interest’ and ‘register of declared conflicts’. The reason for this amendment is straightforward. The Bill imposes obligations regarding conflicts of interest but never defines what a conflict of interest actually is, which is a significant drafting act. If the law is to require members to disclose conflicts, exclude themselves from decisions and face consequences for noncompliance, the term needs to be clearly defined in the Act itself, not left to interpretation or convention.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clauses 5 to 8, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 9:

J DAVIS: Will provision be made for reporting publicly, such as in the annual report, when the Wagering Commission delegates any of its powers and functions to a public servant?

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 2 to clause 9.

Looking ahead, amendment 3 will insert a new subsection limiting the commission's power to delegate, specifically preventing the commission from delegating its powers in relation to the determination of applications or the issuing of licences under Part 4.

The Bill as drafted allows the commission to delegate broadly without limit, which creates a risk that the most consequential decisions the regulator makes—who gets a licence and on what basis—could be made by someone other than the accountable decision-maker. Licensing decisions determine who operates in this industry and have significant consequences for consumers, the industry and the integrity of the regulatory framework. The commission exists precisely to make these kind of decisions and delegating them defeats the purpose of having an independent commission at all.

The amendment does not prevent delegation of administrative or operational functions; it just draws a line on the decisions that matter most and keeps them with the commission.

Amendment not agreed to.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 3 to clause 9.

I have already talked about the purpose of this amendment.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10:

J DAVIS: I move amendment 4 to clause 10.

This is in regard to the makeup and eligibility of the commission. I propose to insert three new subsections after section 19(1) that change who can sit on the commission and what expertise they must bring.

In my speech I said why I believe it is important. I reiterate that the Bill as drafted places no meaningful limits on industry representation and there are no requirements for expertise in public health and gambling harm, which I have heard is important to the minister, or consumer protection. A commission composed predominantly of people with industry backgrounds will inevitably approach regulation from an industry perspective. I note that regulating an industry is not separate from ensuring we are preventing harm to people. That is not a criticism of individuals; it is a structural reality that this is how things work.

My amendment addresses this by capping the number of industry-specific members to two. It does not exclude industry knowledge—I accept that is important—but ensures it does not dominate and that there are other views on the commission as well.

Subsection (1B) requires at least three members to have expertise in public health, gambling harm, consumer protection, social services or financial compliance, which are the disciplines that understand the impacts of gambling.

Subsection (1C) requires at least one member, who could also be an industry member, to have specific expertise in gambling harm—not general health knowledge, but gambling harm specifically—because that knowledge will be important and significant to the work the commission does.

Amendment not agreed to.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 5 to clause 10.

This amendment proposes that the cooling-off period that applies to former industry employees before they can be appointed to the commission be extended from two years to five years. Two years is not long enough in this industry because relationships, institutional knowledge and professional loyalties persist well beyond two years. An employee who has left a role within the last 18 months or two years is not sufficiently distanced from that role to make impartial decisions.

The second change broadens the scope. The drafting captures only former employees of racing clubs, but the wagering industry encompasses licensees and a wide range of businesses involved in wagering operations. People move between these roles regularly—as I discussed in my speech—and the cooling-off period needs to follow people across the industry, not just apply to one corner of it. This amendment ensures that it does.

Amendment not agreed to.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 6 to clause 10.

This amendment inserts a new subsection, preventing the minister from appointing a person to the commission if that person holds another statutory appointment that would be reasonably likely to give rise to a conflict of interest. Nothing in the Bill prevents that from happening, so a person could hold a position under another Act with a direct or indirect interest in how the commission regulates and still be appointed as a commission member.

This is a structural and integrity conflict. It has nothing to do with trying to limit how the gambling industry operates; it is just trying to make sure that it operates with integrity so that Territorians can trust it. It is a proactive amendment because it does not wait until after a conflict has arisen to then require disclosure. It comes before that and says the appointment should not happen where a conflict is reasonably foreseeable. That is a higher and more appropriate standard for a public regulatory body like the commission.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 10 agreed to.

Clause 11:

Mr SMELT: If the rationale for prohibiting commission members from holding betting accounts with NT-licensed operators is to avoid perceptions of bias or preferential treatment, why does that concern not extend to betting accounts held with operators interstate or overseas?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is about the commission regulating the NT operators. It does not have jurisdiction over interstate operators; it only has jurisdiction over the Northern Territory.

Mr SMELT: What safeguards exist to prevent commission members from indirectly benefiting financially through wagering accounts held in other jurisdictions?

Ms BOOTHBY: The commissioner will be treated as an ordinary customer of that interstate wagering operator.

Mr SMELT: What are the consequences if a commission member breaches these provisions and retains or opens a prohibited wagering account?

Ms BOOTHBY: As the minister, I have the power to terminate the commission member.

Mr SMELT: Can you confirm that there are no criminal, civil or administrative penalties attached to breaches of that conflict-of-interest provision?

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

Mr SMELT: Were these options considered in the drafting?

Ms BOOTHBY: Under the July 2024 Act, there was no reference to anything of this nature. We have inserted that the minister has the discretion to stand down a commission member.

Mr SMELT: Are there no consequences, only termination from the commission?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is right; they will lose their role on the commission.

Mr SMELT: Is the enforcement of that termination discretionary or automatic?

Ms BOOTHBY: The minister determines the termination.

Mr SMELT: Is it at the minister's discretion?

Ms BOOTHBY: Under the Act.

Mr SMELT: Is the discretion with the minister to terminate?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is, under the Act.

Mr SMELT: I will take that as a yes.

Will commission members be required to periodically declare or certify that they do not hold prohibited wagering accounts?

Ms BOOTHBY: The onus will be on the commission members to declare their conflict of interest.

Mr SMELT: Is there no annual renewal or confirmation required under the Act or regulations?

Ms BOOTHBY: The onus will be on the commissioners to make sure that their conflicts of interest are up to scratch.

Mr SMELT: Is the onus on the individual commissioners?

Ms BOOTHBY: As per the Act.

Mr SMELT: In terms of monitoring and enforcing compliance with the requirements, who is responsible?

Ms BOOTHBY: The Act falls under the minister, so the minister is ultimately responsible.

Mr SMELT: In terms of how that will be practically enacted day to day, who will police whether a member holds wagering accounts in another jurisdiction, particularly where online operators operate across multiple markets?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have already answered this question. The onus is on the commission.

Mr SMELT: Does the prohibition on owning racing animals extend to indirect ownership through trusts, syndicates, companies or any other financial relationship?

Ms BOOTHBY: It says clearly in the Act that a commissioner:

must not, during the person's term of office, acquire a racing animal or an interest in a racing animal.

Mr SMELT: Does that includes trusts, syndicates, companies and other financial arrangements?

Ms BOOTHBY: I read out section 19B(1)(b), which states:

must not, during the person's term of office, acquire a racing animal or an interest in a racing animal.

Section 19C(2) says:

> *If a member of the Commission acquires a direct or indirect interest that conflicts or may conflict with the member's functions, the member must give the Minister written notice of the interest within 5 business days after the acquisition.*

Mr SMELT: Can you define 'interest'?

Ms BOOTHBY: It would be the legal definition of 'interest'.

Mr SMELT: Is that detailed in the Act? Can you explain that?

Ms BOOTHBY: It would be given the ordinary meaning according to law.

J DAVIS: If someone fails to disclose a conflict, what are the penalties?

Mr EDGINGTON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I think the minister has already answered that question. She indicated that she has the power to dismiss.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will give the minister the option. If she declines, she declines.

Ms BOOTHBY: I feel like I am repeating myself.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister claims that she has already answered the question.

J DAVIS: For the purposes of clarity, could you please answer again?

Ms BOOTHBY: What was the question?

J DAVIS: If a commissioner fails to disclose their interest within five days, which is what I think you said, what is the penalty?

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

J DAVIS: It was not a yes or no question; I asked what is the penalty. Do you mean that there is no penalty? Is that the answer?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is right.

J DAVIS: There is no penalty if they fail to disclose their interest.

Ms BOOTHBY: You asked me about the specific timing—the five days.

J DAVIS: I said what you outlined, that they have to disclose their interest within five days. I will ask a broader question. If they fail to disclose their interest—you said five days—at any point, what is the penalty?

Ms BOOTHBY: As I said, the minister can terminate commission members.

J DAVIS: Is it at your discretion?

Ms BOOTHBY: As per the Act.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have gone down that line of questions.

Mr SMELT: The Bill states that a commission decision is not invalidated if a member fails to declare a relevant interest. Why has the government chosen to prioritise preserving decisions over ensuring strict compliance with conflict disclosure obligations?

Ms BOOTHBY: This section is to ensure that if a licence application or complaint is put forward there is the ability for that to continue with the commission without having to stop the whole process and start again.

J DAVIS: Does that mean a commissioner could fail to disclose a conflict of interest and vote on a consequential decision that directly benefits them, but the legislation explicitly ensures that the decision remains valid?

Ms BOOTHBY: No, the commissioner would be dealt with under the Act.

J DAVIS: The question was whether the decision would remain valid.

Ms BOOTHBY: It may or may not.

J DAVIS: It may or may not; could you explain that further?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have answered that question.

J DAVIS: The decision may remain not valid in what circumstances.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: May or may not is what the minister said.

J DAVIS: May or may not; sorry. In what circumstances it may or may not remain valid?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is a hypothetical question.

J DAVIS: I am allowed to ask hypothetical questions.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hypotheticals are allowed in consideration in detail, but it is up to the minister how she chooses to answer.

Ms BOOTHBY: I will not look into a crystal ball to make up scenarios. I have answered that question.

J DAVIS: I am not asking for a crystal ball. Can you give me an example of when it would or would not remain valid?

Mr EDGINGTON: This is becoming repetitive, Mr Deputy Speaker. The minister has answered the question.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I understand where the Member for Johnston is coming from, but the minister has answered 'may or may not' and has left it at that. We need to move on.

Mr SMELT: To close out that thread, who makes the decision that it may or may not be invalidated?

Ms BOOTHBY: There will always be three members of the commission who make decisions. Therefore, the one who cannot be involved steps out and the others will make a decision.

Mr SMELT: If an undeclared conflict is later identified, what remedies would be available to parties that may have been affected by that decision?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is the same question. I have already answered it.

Mr SMELT: This is about remedies if a decision is found to have been made inappropriately by a commissioner. What remedies are available to parties that may have been affected by the decision made when the commissioner should not have been participating in that decision?

Ms BOOTHBY: I should clarify that there are always multiple commissioners involved in a decision.

Mr SMELT: This is in a scenario when a decision has been made and one of the commissioners who participated in the decision subsequently found that they should not have been involved in that, and then a party may seek remedy. What occurs under that scenario?

Ms BOOTHBY: There always has to be at least three commissioners involved; often there are all six. They make that decision together.

Mr SMELT: If a decision was made that included a commissioner who had a conflict that was not declared at the time, would the commission be open to re-examining that decision if a party raised that concern?

Ms BOOTHBY: We have never had this situation, and I do not want to hypothesise and make up a scenario that is not there.

Mr SMELT: If someone made a decision while they had a conflict of interest, is there no recourse under this section of the Act?

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! It is repetitive.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is becoming repetitive. The minister mentioned there are multiple commissioners involved and so on. We need to move on from this topic.

Mr SMELT: Does the government intend to publish a list of declared interests of commission members, to provide transparency and public confidence?

Ms BOOTHBY: That would be a matter for the commission to deal with.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 7 to clause 11.

This was discussed in the questions. This amendment extends the prohibition on commission members holding wagering accounts beyond NT licensed operators, for reasons I explained earlier, to any licensed wagering provider in Australia. A commission member cannot hold an account with an NT operator, but they could hold one with Sportsbet, Ladbrokes or Betfair; they can place in-person wagers at an on-course bookmaker; and they can bet on interstate races or sporting events through any number of interstate-licensed platforms.

As I said, the explanatory statement identifies the clear intrinsic link between racing and wagering as the justification for prohibiting commission members from owning racing animals anywhere in Australia. That is an implied conflict and it should apply across racing and wagering. This amendment applies the government's own logic consistently across racing and wagering.

Amendment not agreed to.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 8 to clause 11.

I covered amendment 8 in my previous remarks.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clauses 12 to 14, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

After clause 14:

J DAVIS: I move amendment 9 to insert new clause 14A.

I propose to insert this new clause regarding robust conflict-of-interest policy, a register and ban on gifts. I note the minister talked about the importance of strong conflict-of-interest provisions—that has been partially addressed in this legislation—and the importance of having a commission that has public trust. This amendment goes to that.

This amendment provides a clear and comprehensive definition of 'conflict of interest', covering direct interest, indirect financial interest, indirect interest by close association and indirect interest due to conflicting duties. Each is defined with clear examples.

We already discussed what interests might look like; this will give us a clear definition. It is necessary because with clear definitions the disclosure obligations that follow become enforceable. Members on the commission need to know with certainty what triggers their obligations. They have a right to know that. Regulators need to know what they are enforcing, and the public needs to know whether the framework is working. Vague obligations that are not clear to the minister, the public or whoever it is are not obligations; they are just suggestions. This amendment will turn them into law so that everyone knows exactly where they stand. Two sensible exceptions are preserved, being an interest shared with the general public and an interest so remote that it could not reasonably influence a decision. Therefore, it is a comprehensive framework, but it is not unreasonable.

Section 28A is about what a member must do when they identify a conflict of interest. We spoke about that earlier. Under section 19C(4), the failure to comply with disclosure requirements does not affect the validity of a commission decision, which is extraordinary. It creates an obligation and at the same time removes any meaningful consequence for ignoring it. This new section replaces that with a clear framework that members must disclose at a commission meeting and in writing to the minister; they must absent themselves from consideration of the matter; and they must not participate in the decision or attempt to influence the outcome. If they breach those obligations they commit a criminal offence, in line with other Acts. It is not punitive; it reflects the seriousness of what is at stake when a regulator's decisions are compromised or could be perceived to be compromised by conflicts.

New section 28B is for a public register of declared conflicts. The Member for Nightcliff also asked a question about that, and we heard there is no intention. Therefore, I moved this amendment with the possibility that the minister may be open to including it. This new section requires the minister to maintain a public register of all declared conflicts of interest, published on the commission's website.

Transparency cannot just be internal. A conflict of interest that is disclosed privately to the minister and recorded nowhere accessible to the public is not genuine transparency. Members of the public have a right to know when there are conflicts that might impact them. They deserve to know what they are and what was done about them. The new section outlines how the register should work, including the name of the member, the nature of the interest and the nature of the question on which the conflict arises.

New section 28C is about legislative bans on gifts and benefits. This makes it a criminal offence for a commission member to accept any gift or benefit from a licensee or licence applicant. The Bill relies entirely on the commission developing its own internal gifts and benefits policy. That is not adequate for the many people I heard from who have concerns about the regulator. Some may be historical, but they have a high level of concern based on the serious national scrutiny that our regulator has faced. They want to know that it is robust and they can trust whatever gifts and benefits are happening and that their interests are being protected.

An internal policy—as we have heard many times in this Chamber and in Estimates—cannot be shared publicly and may be amended, interpreted or quietly set aside by the people it is meant to constrain, but a law cannot; a law is there in the public space. It gives the community confidence and protects the regulator, commission and community.

I have moved this amendment to continue to strengthen the integrity that the minister has said is important.

Mr SMELT: I support the Member for Johnston's amendment. It goes to the heart of this Bill regarding conflicts of interest and improving integrity and transparency. As we learnt through the questioning earlier, there are no penalties or offences for failing to manage the conflict-of-interest register. That is important. As we know, we are a small jurisdiction; many people wear many hats in the Territory. It is important to take the opportunity to increase transparency, and follow that up with real consequences, not just an axing from the commission if those conflict-of-interest registers fail to be updated.

I support the Member for Johnston's amendment, including the offences regarding conflicts of interest and, most importantly, the requirement for them to be published on the commission's website. That is key. I also support the provisions regarding gifts and benefits. In all, I support this amendment.

Ms BOOTHBY: The Member for Nightcliff said that there were no consequences for not disclosing. I correct the record: there is a consequence, which is that you will no longer be on the commission.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 7	Noes 17
Mr Brown	Ms Boothby
J Davis	Mr Burgoyne
Mr Guyula	Ms Cahill
Mr Paech	Mrs Carlson
Mr Smelt	Mr Charls
Ms Uibo	Mr Edgington
Mr Young	Mrs Finocchiaro
	Mrs Hersey
	Mr Howe
	Mr Kerle

Mr Mackay
Mr Maley
Mr O'Gallagher
Mr Patel
Dr Rahman
Mr Yan
Mrs Zio

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 15, by leave, agreed to.

After clause 15:

J DAVIS: I move amendment 10 to insert new clause 15A.

This extends the proposed cooling-off period from one year to five years for commission members, and from six months to five years for the director or an inspector.

I also talked about this in my speech, but the proposed short timeframes fail to genuinely protect the commission's independence or prevent regulatory capture. It is an insufficient barrier to stop what we see all the time with the revolving door and the perception of conflict. This is not attacking any individual, but it is important that Territorians can feel trust in their regulatory bodies. I hear all the time from people that it is difficult to feel trust when someone is making a decision who they know recently had some personal interest in something. This amendment seeks to address that by extending the timeframe so that there is a genuine statutory safeguard to ensure there is public trust in the commission.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 16:

J DAVIS: I move amendment 11 to clause 16.

It is the same amendment, so we can move on.

Amendment not agreed to.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 12 to clause 16.

It is the same amendment.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clauses 17 to 25, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 26:

J DAVIS: Under this 60-day window, if a person experiencing profound gambling harm takes three months to find a financial counsellor, recognise the predatory behaviour of an operator and build the courage to speak up, will they simply be told by the regulator that they are out of time?

Ms BOOTHBY: The commission and the director have discretion to allows extensions of up to a maximum of two years.

J DAVIS: I am glad to hear that, as it was something that the committee recommended. I know people who are affected by gambling will be grateful for that. My amendment goes further.

I move amendment 13 to clause 26.

This amendment extends the timeframe to six years. That is based on the expertise of people who are involved in gambling harm prevention to ensure that people have adequate time to do whatever they need

to do to make a complaint. It does not extend the timeframe indefinitely or unreasonably, but ensures that people who are harmed have the capacity to approach the commission and have that harm addressed. It is not an arbitrary timeframe; it aligns with general limitation periods in other consumer protection contexts, which is why six years was chosen. Although it is great that there is the discretion to extend complaints to two years, I have still moved this amendment to extend the complaint time to six years so that there is certainty for people. It is not a discretionary decision, but people will know that they have that time to make a complaint.

Amendment not agreed to.

J DAVIS: I move amendment 14.

It is the same.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 26 agreed to.

Clauses 27 to 33, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

After clause 33:

J DAVIS: I move amendment 15 to insert new clause 33A.

This goes to the questions asked earlier about the avenues for review that someone has if a decision is made that impacts negatively on them. I understand from the minister there are none. This clause adds a new ground of review to section 240 that a commission delegation can be reviewed by NTCAT where a member has contravened their disclosure obligations under section 28A in relation to that decision. There is no way for someone to apply for review if they are in that situation. This amendment attempts to address that. It makes explicit what processes people can use. Having clear, robust, explicit frameworks benefits everyone. It benefits the complainant, the commission and the industry, so everyone knows where they stand.

Ms BOOTHBY: I make it clear that this allows certain decisions made by the director in relation to a racecourse licence or a direction to a race control body to be reviewed by NTCAT. In essence, it already does what you are asking it to do, because you can refer to NTCAT.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 34 agreed to.

Clause 35:

J DAVIS: I move amendment 16 to clause 35.

This specifies that changes to eligibility do not apply to this term of office. This inserts a transitional provision, making sure that new commission composition requirements do not apply to members who are currently serving their term. This is for basic fairness and legal certainty. People who were appointed to the commission under the existing framework accepted those roles under the rules that applied at the time and retrospectively applying new rules would be unjust and potentially legally problematic. The new requirements would apply in full to future appointments but not to current commission members.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 35 agreed to.

Clauses 36 to 46, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Schedule, by leave, agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Ms BOOTHBY (Racing): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FAST TRACK APPROVALS) BILL
Serial 62

Continued from 18 March 2026.

Ms BOOTHBY (Tourism and Hospitality): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill now be read a second time.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I start by acknowledging what this Bill is trying to do. The government has been clear that this Bill is about implementing recommendations from the Saying 'Yes' to Business report about cutting red tape, making the approval process faster and creating more efficiencies in the licensing system. I get it; they are legitimate goals, and I do not dismiss them. I am not against everything, Attorney-General.

However, it is important to pause on the report for a moment because it tells us something about this Bill. The Saying 'Yes' to Business report does not mention harm reduction. The only safeguards it discusses are safeguards for businesses, not for community. It was developed by a taskforce made up primarily of industry stakeholders—including the alcohol industry—consulting solely with industry and no public health experts, Aboriginal peak bodies or community organisations. It is that report, developed in that way, that this Bill is designed to implement. This matters, because when you build reform on a foundation that did not ask the question of what it means for community safety, you get a Bill that reflects that omission, which is what we have before us.

In the Northern Territory the gap between what a liquor licensing Bill is supposed to do, and what it does, matters a great deal. It matters for families, communities and the police officers who are called out on Friday and Saturday nights to deal with the consequences of too much alcohol in the wrong place. It matters most for the people who bear the greatest burden of alcohol-related harm in the Territory, who are consistently and disproportionately Aboriginal Territorians.

It is important to be clear about the scale of this burden because it easy to talk about generalities and lose sight of what the numbers mean. The Northern Territory has the highest alcohol consumption per capita of any state or territory in Australia. In the Northern Territory 40% of adults drink in ways that put their health at risk compared with a national average of 31%. Northern Territory Police data from last year recorded close to 200 assaults every week across the Territory; nearly half of them involved alcohol and two-thirds were associated with domestic violence. A coronial inquest in 2024 examined the deaths of 87 women killed by their domestic partners in the Northern Territory since 2000. Every male perpetrator was intoxicated at the time of the killing. That is the context in which we are being asked to consider reforms to our liquor licensing framework; that is what is at stake. I do not think this Bill has adequately grappled with that reality.

Eleven submissions came before the scrutiny committee, and the majority raised serious concerns. My fellow committee members and I considered that evidence carefully. Based on that, I have comments to make about this Bill.

The consultation process was not good enough. Submitters were given seven working days to respond to a Bill that makes significant changes to how alcohol licences are approved in a jurisdiction with the alcohol harm profile that I just described. It is unreasonable to expect community groups with limited resources to respond meaningfully in that timeframe. The fact that multiple community groups made submissions reflects how important they consider these issues. It is not an endorsement of the process.

The Bill is optimised for industry outcomes which might be efficient, but it is not balanced. The *Liquor Act 2019* is built on the balance between making the system work for business and protecting the community from harm, but this Bill from its inception tilts that balance in one direction.

At the heart of this Bill is a fast-track pathway for applications classified as low risk, which removes the public interest test, the community impact assessment and the requirement to publicly notify. They sound like bureaucratic processes, but they are not.

The public interest test asks: is granting this licence good for the community, not just the applicant? It requires consideration of things like minimising harm to people and the safeguarding of public order and safety.

The community impact assessment captures local knowledge. It asks: what does this licence mean for people who live here? Is this near a school? Is it in an area that already experiences alcohol-related problems? What is the density of licences already in this area? What are the trading hours? What is the volume of sales?

The public notification requirement means that people who will live with the consequences of the decision get the chance to say something about it before it is made.

Removing all three of those things at once for applications that are supposedly low risk is a significant weakening of the protections that this community relies on. As was noted in submissions, it is directly contrary to the primary purpose of the *Liquor Act*.

The Bill defines 'low risk' based on a licence category. Essentially the category is the type of business, but this is clearly the wrong tool for the job. The risk-based licensing framework in the 2019 Act was designed to assess the overall risk of a licence application using multiple factors—not only business type but also trading hours, volume of sales and compliance history. The low-risk classification in this Bill looks at only the first of those factors and ignores the rest.

In practice this means that an application could be classified as low risk and therefore be exempt from the public interest test, community impact assessment and public notification, even though when trading hours and volume are factored in, it would attract a modest risk assessment. The classification is doing work that it was not designed to do, and it will produce outcomes that do not reflect the actual risk profile of the application.

Lower risk does not mean zero risk. Assessing risk to communities is never redundant, and the Bill as drafted removes that assessment for a category of applications that are defined in a way that will systematically underestimate that risk.

The Bill also shifts the system from prevention to reaction, and that is a false economy. The department explained that if something goes wrong it can be dealt with after the fact through enforcement and complaints, but that fundamentally misunderstands the purpose of preventive safeguards. Prevention matters because the harm that is prevented never has to be cleaned up. When we talk about alcohol-related harm in the Northern Territory—domestic violence, assaults or the deaths of women at the hands of intoxicated partners—'We will deal with it afterwards' is an unacceptable answer. Shifting from prevention to reaction does not make the harm disappear; it just means someone else carries it, and usually that is the community.

The Bill undermines our commitment to reducing gendered violence. National Cabinet has committed to reviewing and amending alcohol laws to address alcohol's contribution to domestic, family and sexual violence. First Ministers agreed to identify best-practice reforms and report on progress. This Bill moves the Northern Territory, which has the most significant harm to women and the most significant harm caused by alcohol, in the opposite direction. It reduces regulatory oversight of alcohol licensing in a jurisdiction where a coronial inquest found alcohol to be a factor in every intimate partner homicide over a 25-year period. We should not be passing liquor reforms that go backwards on this. We should be asking how every change to the *Liquor Act* advances our obligations to reduce gendered violence, not whether we can get applications processed faster.

I will flag a couple of specific provisions. Regarding the fit-and-proper person test, clause 5 introduces a statutory test which is welcome in principle but is too narrow. It focuses mainly on liquor-related offences, and does not adequately capture violence, fraud or dishonesty. Key criteria remain in administrative guidance rather than legislation, which means they can be changed without parliamentary oversight.

Clause 16 extends the period of the mandatory responsible service of alcohol training that people have to do before they can serve alcohol, from three years to five. The justification is that is how New South Wales does it, but we are not New South Wales—we say that all the time—we are different in the Territory. Our rates of alcohol-related harm are significantly higher, and the complexities we deal with are significantly more challenging. In the absence of Territory-specific evidence that this reduction is appropriate for our context, we must keep the three-year requirement.

The Bill also gives the Director of Liquor Licensing broad discretion to determine which applications are fast-tracked, without prescribed criteria and merits review. The existing framework already provides a fast track. The commission can delegate low-risk applications to the director. This Bill cuts out the commission entirely, removing the independent oversight that gives the public confidence that decisions are made fairly and consistently. The separation between the commission and the director exists for good reasons, and the Bill removes it without justification.

When we pass laws we have the obligation to make sure that they are the best laws we can pass and that they are good laws for everyone in the Territory—the people who actually live here. We debate laws in this parliament and have a scrutiny committee to help us do this work, to ask questions about how the laws will work and make recommendations to ensure that they will achieve good outcomes for the people we represent. As a signatory to international human rights covenants we also have a legal obligation to ensure that our laws prioritise the health and wellbeing of our community. We have a specific commitment made through National Cabinet to review alcohol laws through the lens of gendered violence. We have the evidence presented clearly and consistently to the scrutiny committee by submitters with deep expertise and frontline experience that this Bill as drafted does not meet those obligations.

I am not saying that the fast-track concept is wrong. I am saying that a fast track without adequate safeguards is not reform; it is risk transfer. The risk does not disappear; it lands on communities, families and people who are already carrying too much.

What I recommended in relation to this Bill would still allow it to do what it sets out to do. Businesses would still get faster approval processes and the system would still be more efficient, but it could be efficient in a way that maintains the protections Territorians are entitled to expect and that we as an Assembly are obligated to uphold. That is what good lawmaking looks like. It is not about being faster at any cost; it is about being better for everyone in the Territory.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, this debate goes to the heart of a challenge that every government in the NT has grappled with for decades: how we manage alcohol harm in a way that protects community safety, supports public health, respects local voices and gives communities confidence that decisions are being made transparently and fairly.

There is no denying the reality of alcohol harm in the Northern Territory. We know the statistics, the stories and the impacts on families, frontline workers, police, emergency departments, children and communities across the Territory.

Research released over recent years by Charles Darwin University and the Australian National University has again confirmed that the NT experiences some of the highest rates of alcohol-related harm in the country. Their study examining alcohol-related injury hospitalisations found that more than one in five injury admissions in the Territory involved alcohol. The same research also pointed to reductions in harm where targeted alcohol measures had been implemented consistently alongside broader supports.

Research undertaken through the LEARNT project involving Deakin University, the Menzies School of Health Research and a range of Territory health and community partners similarly found that alcohol reforms were most effective when measures operated together and were supported by community partnership and wraparound services.

At the same time, many experts and community organisations have repeatedly made the point that there is no single silver bullet, no one law, no one restriction and no one policy announcement that alone can solve the complex relationship the Territory has with alcohol harm.

This Bill raises concerns because it changes who gets a voice in parts of the liquor approval process. Regardless of where members stand on the detail of the legislation, it is important to acknowledge that a significant number of submitters to the scrutiny committee inquiry on this Bill raised concerns that the Bill narrows opportunities for community participation. A recurring theme in many of the submissions was not opposition to the reform itself, but concern that the pendulum may be swinging too far away from transparency and local participation. Several submissions argued that local residents, health organisations, Aboriginal organisations, community advocates and frontline services often have direct knowledge of the real-world impacts of alcohol-related harm in their communities. They argued that these voices provide important evidence that may not otherwise be visible through formal statistical data alone.

Some submissions pointed to the fact that alcohol harm does not occur in isolation; it affects hospitals, housing services, child protection systems, domestic violence services, policing resources and community safety more broadly.

A number of organisations also expressed concern that reducing community participation risks undermining public trust in the liquor licensing system. When communities feel excluded from decisions that directly affect them, confidence in institutions erodes. In the Territory context where alcohol policy has historically been contentious and deeply connected to community wellbeing, transparency and consultation become even more important.

Several submissions also made the point that community consultation processes can improve the quality of decision-making. They argued that local input often identifies unintended consequences, patterns of harm or operational issues that otherwise may not be considered by regulators.

Others raised concerns that the changes could disproportionately affect Aboriginal communities, particularly remote communities and organisations that already face barriers in engaging with complex administrative systems.

There are also concerns that the proposed framework may privilege well-resourced applicants while making it harder for ordinary community members or smaller organisations to participate meaningfully in the process.

Many of the submissions came from organisations and individuals with decades of experience dealing directly with the consequences of alcohol harm in the Territory. Some work on the frontline of health responses, in community legal services or in harm reduction; others represent police and emergency workers; and, further still, some work directly with families and children impacted by alcohol misuse. Regardless of whether we agree with every recommendation they make, their experience deserves respect.

Alcohol policy cannot simply be about approvals and enforcement in isolation. If governments are serious about reducing harm, investment is also required in treatment services, rehabilitation, mental health supports, housing, early intervention programs and community-led responses. We know that many communities continue to face enormous pressures linked to overcrowding, intergenerational trauma, poverty and limited access to services. Those broader social determinants cannot be separated from conversations about alcohol harm.

Analysis undertaken by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress pointed to improvements in a number of alcohol-related harm indicators following targeted restrictions in Alice Springs, while similarly warning that long-term progress requires broader investment in social supports and community wellbeing.

There is a legitimate concern about the perception created when community voices appear to be reduced rather than expanded in decision-making processes. If the message to communities is that they will have fewer opportunities to raise concerns, object to or participate in decisions affecting their neighbourhoods, that risks increasing frustration rather than building consensus. Alcohol policy imposed without community confidence rarely succeeds in the long term.

That does not mean every objection should automatically stop an application; nor does it mean every reform should never have consultation. It does mean that robust consultation and accessible participation processes are important safeguards within the system.

It is important to acknowledge that there are competing pressures in this debate. There are businesses seeking certainty and efficiency; concerns about administrative burdens and lengthy approval processes; and arguments that the system should avoid duplication and vexatious objections. These are legitimate considerations, but the challenge for the government is ensuring that efficiency does not come at the expense of accountability and community trust, particularly in the Northern Territory where the impacts of alcohol-related harm are visible and deeply felt.

This debate should not descend into simplistic slogans. The Territory's relationship with alcohol is complex. Communities want safer streets, families want fewer harms, frontline workers want better support and businesses want certainty. Residents also want confidence that decisions affecting their communities are being made transparently and with appropriate scrutiny. Those goals should not be mutually exclusive.

Ultimately, many of the submissions before the committee reflect a broader warning that removing or narrowing community participation in alcohol-related decision-making risks weakening public confidence at a time when trust and cooperation are needed most. The evidence from Territory researchers, health organisations and community bodies tells us that alcohol harm is a multifaceted issue requiring coordinated responses across health, justice, community safety and social policy.

Although there may be different views about the best mechanisms to achieve reform, I do not believe the answer lies in reducing the ability of communities to have their voices heard. Territorians understand better than most that there is no easy fix to alcohol-related harm. If we are serious about long-term solutions, communities must remain part of the conversation every step of the way, and not be removed from it.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I support this Bill, which came out of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce. It works towards our commitment to rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle.

A few years ago I was part of a community group which tried to do something that used to be simple—that is, put on a fundraiser. We would invite everyone to the clubhouse, put on a barbecue, sell a few beers and make a bit of money to fill up the club's coffers. That was about 2021 or 2022, post the former Member for Nightcliff's alcohol reforms in 2019. You would not believe how hard it was. The person in charge of organising it had not run one of these events in a few years, and the last time they had, they said that all they had to do was duck down to the police station, have a chat to the senior sergeant and fill out some forms.

It was an event that would have a maximum of 30 people. There would be food, an esky, members and invited guests only; it would be extremely low risk. That club's members were in for the shock of their lives when they saw the results of the former Member for Nightcliff's alcohol reforms. They had to hand over their firstborn, an arm and a leg and a pint of blood. There was about five pages of things that they had to do; they had to get this, that and the other; sign this; swear to that; sign in blood; have it lie on the table for 30 days; and get public notices. It was just a little, dinky community club and all we wanted to do was raise a little money for the club, but there was this huge process to go through. I support this legislation, which is all about making things easier for low-risk and very low-risk liquor licences to be granted and streamlining things that, honestly, are in the bleedingly obvious category.

The former Labor government had no idea how to manage alcohol. That is proven because it had to outsource it to esteemed former Chief Justice Trevor Riley, who did a power of work handing down the Riley review. At the time, Michael Gunner accepted all but one of the recommendations. By the time the rubber hit the road, he had thrown most of them in the bin. I think he ended up accepting only about 70 out of 240.

Ms Uibo: No; it was 119 out of 120.

Mr KERLE: Sorry, Leader of the Opposition. It was 119 out of 240.

Ms Uibo: No—out of 120.

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections. If you want to speak after the member, you are more than welcome.

Mr KERLE: I am just quoting the ABC reporting at the time. That was the rewrite of the *Liquor Act 1978*, which the former Member for Nightcliff ran through.

On the one hand, Labor had onerous alcohol restrictions for low-risk licences and, on the other hand, it was dealing with the 'Dan ban' on premises larger than 400 square metres. This was specifically to prevent Dan Murphy's from coming to Darwin. That was a great pro-business step by the former Territory Labor government.

In the continued litany of failures of the former government on alcohol, it allowed Stronger Futures to lapse with no transition plan. Sadly, there were predictable results in the rivers of grog that flowed into communities and town camps, particularly in Alice Springs, harming the most vulnerable Territorians. Waves of battered women presented to Alice Springs Hospital, with domestic violence spiking out of control. It was a predictable consequence.

The Member for Gwoja bought shares in an alcohol wholesaler before Stronger Futures lapsed, and he sold them only when his Chief Minister was brought down in a share scandal. Funny timing, that. I hope you made some money off it, but based on the reporting I do not think you did.

I will not talk for a long time; I do not see the point. This is commonsense reform that was suggested by our Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce to implement a risk-based approach. It delivers on our commitments to rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle.

This Bill is about matching effort to risk. This Bill supports local businesses, local community clubs, jobs and economic activity. It improves how the system works without lowering standards. It is another practical step in how our government is rebuilding the Territory economy and restoring confidence.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Ms BOOTHBY (Tourism and Hospitality)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank members for their contributions this evening. I also thank the scrutiny committee for the work it has done and everyone who made submissions. I will address all the recommendations that were made by the scrutiny committee in my summing-up speech.

Recommendations 2 and 5 relate to a post-implementation review. The committee recommended that within 24 months of the commencement the impacts of the low-risk application framework be reviewed and that the operation of the fit-and-proper-person test also be examined. The government considers this a sensible approach. Departments will always look at reform closely post-implementation and make sure the operations are reviewed as part of ongoing program evaluation and continuous improvement.

Recommendation 3 concerns transparency and consistency in decision-making under new section 52A. The committee recommended that guidance be developed and published on the factors that the director may consider when determining whether an application should proceed as a low-risk application. Again, we support this recommendation in principle. The guidance will be developed and made public to promote consistency and transparency in decision-making while preserving the director's ability to determine when applications should not proceed as low risk where the public interest requires it. That does not impact this legislation.

Recommendation 4 relates to the reviewability of decisions under section 52A(2). For clarity, the Bill provides that the determination by the director to remove an application from the low-risk framework is not reviewable by the Liquor Commission or the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal. This reflects the procedural nature of those determinations and ensures that the applications are assessed through the appropriate pathway where risk or community concerns arise.

Recommendation 6 raised questions about the application of the public interest considerations to decisions on applications to make material alterations to licensed premises. The Bill transfers responsibility of those decisions from the Liquor Commission to the director and restructures the relevant legislative provisions accordingly. Under the amended framework, decisions on material alterations continue to be made within the statutory scheme and with regard to the matters required by the Act.

Recommendation 7 concerns the extension of the responsible service of alcohol refresher training period from three years to five years. This change does not lower standards. Obligations on licensees and staff remain unchanged; compliance expectations continue to apply; and refresher training remains readily available, including through free online options. The extended period reflects contemporary practice while maintaining community protections.

Finally, recommendation 8 related to clarity about the scope and effect of the Bill. For the avoidance of doubt, the Bill amends the *Liquor Act 2019*, the Liquor Regulations 2019 and the *Liquor Commission Act 2018*. Among other things, it confirms that determinations made under proposed section 52A(2) are excluded from review by the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

This Bill delivers reforms arising from the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce that is designed to improve regulatory efficiency by better aligning assessment effort with risk while maintaining appropriate safeguards. It does not alter alcohol policy settings, increase alcohol supply and weaken the public interest framework that underpins liquor regulation in the Northern Territory.

With that, I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clauses 1 to 4, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 5:

Mr SMELT: Why has the government chosen to limit the mandatory consideration period to offences committed within the previous 10 years when determining whether a person is a fit-and-proper person? Why not five or 15 years?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is consistent with the *Racing and Wagering Act*.

Mr SMELT: Are there any offences of such seriousness that a person would be permanently disqualified from being considered a fit-and-proper person—for example, manslaughter or serious organised crime offences? Does the provision mean that once the 10-year period has elapsed, the person is automatically a fit-and-proper person again?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes, because section 5D(1)(b) says:

may have regard to any other information the Commission considers relevant.

Mr SMELT: Does the fit-and-proper person test apply solely to the licensee, or does it also extend to directors, nominees, business partners or other individuals who may have a financial or ownership interest in a licensed venue?

Ms BOOTHBY: Just the licensee.

Mr SMELT: Can you outline what types of offences under corresponding interstate or Commonwealth legislation are intended to be captured by the regulation-making power in this proposed section?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is the equivalent liquor legislation from around the country.

Mr SMELT: Given the commission may have regard to any other information it considers relevant, what safeguards are in place to ensure that decisions are transparent, consistent and procedurally fair?

Ms BOOTHBY: In cases that the commission sees it as relevant, you would have to do a criminal history check and present that to the commission.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6:

Mr SMELT: Can you provide a definition of 'material alteration'?

Ms BOOTHBY: It would be as per what would ordinarily be in law.

Mr SMELT: Can you give an example of what that would be?

Ms BOOTHBY: An example of material alteration could be if a premises wants to extend its whole bar.

Mr SMELT: If nothing changes external to the venue—if it is all internal to the venue—would that be an example?

Ms BOOTHBY: That would depend.

Mr SMELT: Would that be a material alteration?

Ms BOOTHBY: It would depend on what is being altered.

J DAVIS: What is the rationale for removing independent oversight for material alterations from the Liquor Commission?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will give you an example of one that happened recently to help with understanding. Bill's Bar & Grill in Leanyer removed the little pretend fireplace that was in the bar. In the previous iteration, before this legislation, they had to go through a full arduous process, but that was not really a material alteration to their venue.

J DAVIS: I understood that is not really a material alteration, but the Act now removes material alterations which could also include expanding the size of a venue.

Ms BOOTHBY: No, that is not correct.

J DAVIS: Just in terms of the definition that the Member for Nightcliff was asking about, so I am clear, a material alteration cannot change a venue's size or nature.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is correct.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 8:

Mr SMELT: What public interest and community impact matters is a decision-maker normally required to consider prior to issuing a licence or authority?

Ms BOOTHBY: It could be a range of things, but it is on the application form. You have to state what the public interest or community impact is when you are applying for a licence.

Mr SMELT: This clause is removing them, so why are they not deemed necessary anymore?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is because this is only for low-risk licence applications.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9:

Mr SMELT: How are low-risk applications currently granted?

Ms BOOTHBY: Someone applies, it is assessed and if the director has the delegation they either approve or not; otherwise, if there are concerns it goes to the commission.

Mr SMELT: What consultation is currently required for low-risk applications?

Ms BOOTHBY: The director can already exempt community impact statements, but this puts in the legislation that you do not need to for low-risk applications unless there is a concern, in which case you can then ask.

Mr SMELT: Do those low-risk applications currently have some public consultation process?

Ms BOOTHBY: I will give you an example. Eight liquor licence applications were assessed as meeting low-risk criteria that were approved in 2025. These included Eva's Cafe at the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens, Motor City Pizza at Stuart Park and the Wangi Falls Cafe. There was quite low-risk serving of alcohol in those places.

Mr SMELT: Did they all have a public consultation process attached to them?

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

Mr SMELT: Did the director or the commission use their powers to assess them without public consultation?

Ms BOOTHBY: The director might need to go through the files to double-check those eight, because she assesses many applications.

Mr SMELT: Under this new process, how will low-risk applications be defined for the purpose of this clause, and what criteria will be used to make that decision?

Ms BOOTHBY: The risk categories are already defined in the regulations.

Mr SMELT: Between the commission, the director and another decision-maker, who will ultimately decide whether the application is low risk?

Ms BOOTHBY: That is also defined in the regulations.

Mr SMELT: If a low-risk application is exempt from community impact consultation requirements, how will local residents and nearby businesses be made aware that an application has been lodged?

Ms BOOTHBY: Those applications are exempt.

Mr SMELT: Can you confirm that local residents and businesses will not be aware?

Ms BOOTHBY: The applications are exempt from that process.

Mr SMELT: Can you provide examples of the types of applications that the government anticipates will fall within this new low-risk application?

Ms BOOTHBY: Eight happened in 2025, including Eva's Cafe, Motor City Pizza and the Wangi Falls Cafe.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10:

Mr SMELT: While low-risk applications are exempt from these requirements initially, section 52A still allows the director to later determine affidavits and supporting evidence be provided. What criteria will the director use to make that determination?

Ms BOOTHBY: I addressed this in my summing-up speech. We support that recommendation which came out of the scrutiny committee. Guidance will be developed and made publicly available to promote consistency and transparency in decision-making while, of course, preserving the director's ability to determine that an application should not be treated as low risk where the public interest requires it.

Mr SMELT: Is that criteria still to be written?

Ms BOOTHBY: I have answered that question.

Mr SMELT: When will we see that published?

Ms BOOTHBY: That guidance will be developed post-implementation of the new Act.

Clause 10 agreed to.

VISITOR
Councillor Edwin Joseph

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Councillor Edwin Joseph from Darwin City Council's Richardson Ward.

Members: Hear, hear!

Clause 11:

Mr SMELT: What factors will the director take into account when determining whether it is in the public interest for an application not to be treated as low risk?

Ms BOOTHBY: That guidance will be developed and made publicly available to promote consistency and transparency in decision-making.

Mr SMELT: Can you provide an example of the circumstances when an application that would otherwise qualify as low risk may be excluded on public interest grounds?

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not want to name venues specifically. Without having a copy of the regulations and this guidance, I do not want to say either way.

Mr SMELT: Will the director be required to consider matters such as community safety, alcohol-related harm, police concerns, proximity to sensitive facilities or cumulative alcohol density when making that public interest determination?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr SMELT: Will that public interest test be wrapped up in those same published guidelines and policy framework to ensure consistency and transparency?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr SMELT: If concerns were raised by local residents, police, health services or community organisations within the 14-day assessment period, could that trigger a determination that an application should no longer be treated as low risk?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr SMELT: Given the determination is not reviewable by either the commission or NTCAT, what safeguards are in place to ensure the director's discretion is exercised fairly and consistently?

Ms BOOTHBY: When the director determines it is not low risk, that is when the community can have that consultation and make sure it has that input.

J DAVIS: Why is the director's decision to classify an application as low risk exempt from merits review?

Ms BOOTHBY: The reason for the change is to ensure that the director can go out to the community and ask for feedback about the licence.

J DAVIS: Is the reason for exempting it from merits review so that the director can talk to the community?

Ms BOOTHBY: It makes it much easier, so the community can be talked to about it.

J DAVIS: Can you explain how it makes it easier?

Ms BOOTHBY: It allows the director to go to the community and ask for feedback, where she feels it should be involved.

J DAVIS: Can you explain how merits review would prevent that?

Ms BOOTHBY: It could get tied up in a legal proceeding for months on end and the applicant would be unable to have their licence issued.

Mr SMELT: Will the reasons for determining that an application is not to be treated as low risk be made public or provided only to the applicant?

Ms BOOTHBY: Just the applicant.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clause 12, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 13:

Mr SMELT: If low-risk applications are no longer subject to public notice provisions, how will communities become aware that an application affecting their area has been lodged?

Ms BOOTHBY: They will not know.

Mr SMELT: Without mandatory public notification, how can surrounding businesses, schools, community organisations or nearby residents know that an application with potential local impacts is being considered?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is low risk, which is why there is no impact. No-one will even know.

Mr SMELT: If a community member is unaware that an application has been lodged because there is no public notice required, what avenue will they have to provide input or raise objections, if any?

Ms BOOTHBY: If there is a problem with the low-risk event or licence that is issued, they can raise a complaint with police.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 17	Noes 7
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Ms Cahill	Mr Guyula
Mrs Carlson	Mr Paech
Mr Charls	Mr Smelt
Mr Edgington	Ms Uibo

Mrs Finocchiaro
Mrs Hersey
Mr Howe
Mr Kerle
Mr Mackay
Mr Maley
Mr O'Gallagher
Mr Patel
Dr Rahman
Mr Yan
Mrs Zio
Mr Young

Clause 13 agreed to.

Clauses 14 and 15, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 16:

J DAVIS: What Northern Territory-specific evidence supports the claim that a five-year period is sufficient to maintain staff competency, given our significantly higher rates of alcohol harm compared with other jurisdictions?

Ms BOOTHBY: There have been no complaints against RSA holders in the Northern Territory recently.

J DAVIS: Is the fact that there have been no complaints the evidence that extending it to five years has no risk attached?

Ms BOOTHBY: It is not specifically relevant, because it is a policy question, but they are not the problem with alcohol-related harm.

J DAVIS: To clarify, the evidence is that there have been no complaints.

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! The minister has answered the question. This is becoming highly repetitive.

J DAVIS: It is not highly repetitive; I have only done it once. 'Highly' is a few times.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clauses 17 to 24, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Schedule, by leave, agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Ms BOOTHBY (Tourism and Hospitality): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

PAPER TABLED
Fisheries Amendment Regulations 2026

Mr MALEY (Agriculture and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, I table the Northern Territory of Australia Fisheries Amendment Regulations 2026 and seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave granted.

Mr MALEY: These amendments modernise the regulatory framework for the offshore net and line fishery and increase the recreational possession limit for tarpon.

The tarpon limit will increase from five to 30, which is in line with other baitfish and without posing a substantial risk to tarpon. The change provides a more practical allowance for fishos who use tarpon for live bait.

Previously, somehow tarpon got missed when the mullet and crustacean limits went to 30. Tarpon is a little fish that people use for live bait. It is normally caught in a throw net and people take it on their boat for live bait for barramundi.

This government is committed to rebuilding our Territory lifestyle, and recreational fishing is part of that. We are the barra capital of the country and we need to ensure our anglers can go out to try to catch a barramundi. Some people use lures and some people use live bait. These changes will make it easier for fishos to go out to catch some fish. Some people believe using lures is the only way to go and that people who use tarpon are cheaters, but I am a cheater when it comes to live bait.

For the offshore net and line fishery the regulations remove outdated transitional provisions and strengthen the integrity of the fisheries quota management framework. The transitional arrangement supported commercial fishos to adjust to the introduction of a quota into the fishery in December 2018 and is no longer required. Simply, we have moved through that. It was introduced for a transitional period in 2018.

These changes align with the fisheries management framework and help the industry to provide an adaptive management process. These changes were supported by the industry.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Lack of Roads and Infrastructure Delivery for Central Australia

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: lack of roads and infrastructure delivery for Central Australia.

The letter is signed by the Member for Nightcliff. Is discussion supported? Discussion is supported.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, this speech is about the people of Central Australia and the lack of roads and infrastructure delivery for Central Australia.

Budgets are about priorities. We have talked a lot about that this week. When Territorians in Central Australia read this budget they are entitled to ask the simple questions: how has their region been prioritised in this budget? What is the vision for their community? When you compare this budget with previous years, it becomes apparent quickly that Central Australia is receiving less ambition, transformational investment and attention from this government.

In previous budgets there was still a strong sense that governments understood the importance of investing in Alice Springs and the broader Central Australian region as an economic, cultural and service hub for inland Australia. There were major commitments to civic, tourism and sporting infrastructure and cultural projects that had the potential to diversify the economy, create jobs and build confidence in the future of the region. Projects like the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art gallery demonstrated an understanding that infrastructure investment is more than concrete and bitumen; it is about creating opportunity and giving communities confidence. In this year's budget much of that ambition has disappeared. Instead, Central Australians are being asked to celebrate projects that are either already underway or largely funded by the Commonwealth.

The Treasurer keeps talking about sweets and lollies, but he is the only one; nobody asked for it. People asked for a clear plan on how this government intends to invest in the future of the Territory because that is what governments are meant to do—lead and provide direction and a clear path for the future of our communities and regions. They will not find any pathway in this budget.

People also will not find anything designed to attract families to stay in Alice Springs. There is nothing to diversify or grow the economy. Instead, they have been handed a budget that is devoid of the kind of city-shaping infrastructure investment that Central Australia deserves. It lacks the boldness and long-term thinking needed to position Alice Springs and Central Australia for future growth.

That matters, because Central Australia is not just another region of the Territory. It is a critical service hub, a tourism gateway and home to world-leading Aboriginal art and culture. It is strategically positioned to support mining, logistics, Defence and renewable energy opportunities across inland Australia. None of that potential will be realised if governments stop investing in the future of the region.

This budget comes at a time when Central Australia is facing significant challenges. Businesses are doing it tough, families are facing rising costs and communities are crying out for investment, certainty and confidence, yet this budget offers little in the way of genuine long-term economic vision for the region. There is no significant new tourism infrastructure package and no major housing or civic infrastructure agenda for Alice Springs. There is little that says to Central Australians, 'This government believes in your future'. Instead, the region is missing out on major economic infrastructure investment. Central Australians are right to feel left behind. We see billions discussed in relation to marine infrastructure, Defence opportunities and Top End industrial development, while Central Australians are left asking where their equivalent nation-building investments are.

The scrapping of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art gallery by this government will go down as one of the most short-sighted decisions ever made for the region. Many Alice Springs businesses had geared up for this project and done their planning for it. There were contractors on the ground, and many people were looking forward to the economic opportunity it would bring. They are still bitterly disappointed by this government's wilful disregard for a project that would have brought thousands of new visitors and injected tens of millions of dollars into the economy every year. Many local businesses have been left out of pocket by the CLP's gallery fail, but you will not hear the government talking about that.

I will give those opposite credit; they finally released the tender for Santa Teresa Road today. It is well overdue. I know the Member for Gwoja has been calling for this project to be progress for well over a year. I point out that there is a lack of progress on major critical road upgrades across Central Australia. It is a clear demonstration of what we are hearing from contractors throughout the Territory: there is no pipeline of works coming from this government.

Just today we received the updated Construction Snapshot from the government. I will highlight three projects in that.

The first one being Schwarz Crescent, constructing a new roundabout and installing traffic lights in the centre of Alice Springs. The 30 June 2025 Construction Snapshot said that it was scheduled to be under construction in Q3, 2025. The update at the end of 2025 said that it would be under construction now, in Q2, 2026. Then we find out today that it will not occur until Q1, 2027.

The second example is the Sandover Highway upgrade to seal standard from chainage 170 to 197 kilometres. I know the Member for Barkly is interested in this project.

Members interjecting.

Mr SMELT: He would be well aware that in mid-2025 that project was to be under construction in Q4, 2025, according to the government's own Construction Snapshot. By the end of the year it was listed as being under construction in Q2, 2026.

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; you would think the Member for Nightcliff has been here for 20 years with the level of interjections he is getting from all sides. I would love to hear what he has to say about my home, Central Australia.

Madam SPEAKER: Hear, hear! He will be heard in silence.

Mr SMELT: Just to recap on the Sandover Highway that the Member for Barkly is so keen on hearing about, the Construction Snapshot said that it would be under construction in Q4, 2025. The update at the end of 2025 said that it would be under construction in Q2, 2026. We found out today that it has now been extended to Q3, 2026 and does not appear on the future tender list.

The third example is the Central Land Council main office extension. In mid-2025 that project was to be under construction by the end of that calendar year. Jump forward to the end of 2025 and it was to be underway in Q1, 2026. Today we find out that it has been delayed yet again and will not be under construction until Q3, 2026. This is the government's own Construction Snapshot, reporting to the community.

If you do a search for the Mereenie Loop road tender, you find that it was due to be released in February 2026. We are in May now, so February 2026 is hardly a future opportunity. People in the tourism sector are desperate for this sealing work to happen; it will be a game changer for the region. They need progress on this work, and urgently.

The government has failed to get $341m in infrastructure funding out the door; that is in the budget papers. This is money that should be circulating in the community, supporting jobs, roads and other essential community infrastructure upgrades. This is not about fiscal responsibility; this is a failure to deliver. Much of this is Commonwealth funding that has been sitting there, languishing. It comes on top of the $1.1bn already stripped from the infrastructure pipeline.

The Treasurer, who is also the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure, needs to explain to the civil and construction sector and the freight, agriculture, mining and tourism industries, as well as communities across Central Australia, when upgrades will be underway for the Sandover Highway and the Mereenie Loop, as well as future packages for the Tanami and the Outback Way. This government is long on rhetoric but short on delivery. It is time that it focused on getting work out the door and contractors on the ground.

I have spoken about the significant housing challenges faced in Alice Springs. At a time when Central Australian residents are struggling with rising costs, the government has failed to invest in land release and affordable housing stock for Alice Springs. Essential workers in Alice Springs are feeling the squeeze with rising rents and no option to enter the housing market, but there is nothing in this budget that helps alleviate those pressures. Today a CDU lecturer in economics and business called out the need for significant intervention to boost housing supply, noting that the housing crisis is a handbrake on economic growth in the Territory. The warning signs are flashing, but the government has its back turned.

This budget effectively tells us that strategic infrastructure investment in Central Australian communities is not a priority for this government. Instead, it has chosen to pursue a costly and ultimately detrimental Corrections agenda above all else. As the Leader of the Opposition said last week, it is an agenda that even Treasury has identified as a risk to the Territory budget in the future. It is saying that there is no return on investment, socially or economically, from this approach.

Strategic infrastructure investment in things that matter to the community and drive the Territory forward is not reckless spending, as those opposite would have you believe. It is about shaping the future, growing the economy, creating jobs, building confidence and giving essential workers and young people a reason to stay. As you mentioned this afternoon, Madam Speaker, it is about fairness, equity and ensuring every part of the Territory has the opportunity to grow and prosper.

This budget does not send the message that Central Australia is a priority. After two years in office, the CLP government cannot point to a defining vision project for Alice Springs or the Red Centre. Central Australians deserve more than recycled announcements and maintenance spending dressed up as a regional vision. They deserve a government that is willing to invest in the long-term future of the region and recognises that a strong Territory requires a strong Central Australia.

Mr YAN (Logistics and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I am astounded by this matter of public importance. It is as though Territory Labor, after 10 years, just remembered where Central Australia is. There was not much happening under the previous Labor government in Central Australia for the last eight years. Not a lot of projects happened under its watch.

There were a couple, and I can rattle them off the top of my head. There were some infrastructure upgrades and additional bedding put into the correctional centre; upgrades and the development of the youth justice facility, which blew out the budget and time; and the much-needed upgrades to the women's shelter, which I am glad happened. That is about it in eight years, plus some general maintenance and a few little jobs at the hospital—some R&M-type stuff.

What we got from those opposite was a litany of projects and programs that were announced and never happened. I will go through some of them.

The Member for Nightcliff was part of the team that was making up the mix and baking the cake whilst he was at DLI. Now he does not seem to like the taste of the cake. What he said effectively compromises himself and puts down the team he worked for. If I were his colleagues at DLI, I would be pretty upset.

He talked about the lack of delivery in Central Australia, but the reality is that a lot of projects were announced and reannounced and budgets rolled over year after year with nothing to show for it on the ground. Throughout much of this period the Member for Nightcliff worked inside the very department responsible for delivering roads and infrastructure across the Territory. He has to take responsibility for that lack of delivery. If he criticises the department for it, he should remember that he was part of that department's delivery team. If he wants to ask why projects stalled, blew out or failed, perhaps he should start by reflecting on what happened inside the department while Labor was in government.

What we inherited in August 2024 was not a ready-to-go pipeline; it was a backlog of delayed projects, unresolved approvals, cost blowouts and incomplete planning, which I will touch on. This government had to do the hard work of turning those announcements into reality and delivery.

I will start with the Santa Teresa Road. This is a great day to talk about that because, as the Member for Namatjira, Santa Teresa is one of my communities. I commend Marion Scrymgour for getting the money for the Santa Teresa Road, but I will not commend Territory Labor for any delivery on that project. It did a bit, and when I spoke with the Labor Infrastructure ministers about how long it would take to deliver that project, I was always told that it was coming. When we got into government I checked, and it was going nowhere fast.

Ms Uibo: What—you were not checking before? It is part of your electorate.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, the Member for Gwoja made a point of order just a few minutes ago, pointing out the interjections from the government. Remember that and remain silent.

Mr YAN: I put pressure on the department to deliver that road because I know what it means for the people of Santa Teresa. Finally, that tender has gone out. It has been on program since 2022, four long years. I have been in the Territory for 35 years and I understand the importance of remote roads.

The delay on that project has been significant. I commend DLI, particularly the team in Central Australia, for the work it did with the Central Land Council to progress the issues regarding delivery of that project. There was no impetus from the previous government to do that. We found out what the delay was, and I asked the team to work on developing those relationships and solving that problem, and it did. I thank the CLC for the final approvals just before Christmas. I look forward to that project being delivered. It is out for tender now.

The Tanami Road project first appeared on the books in 2019, and it continues to progress. Years later, despite all the announcements and carryovers, we are still waiting for it to be fully delivered. Although some works occurred, it is this CLP government that is getting on with the job and driving that project forward. I hope to provide the Assembly with good news on that project in the coming months. Some exciting developments are happening out there because we are doing the work. There are 55 kilometres of seal under construction, with $75m of construction packages in progress which were awarded in quarter 4 of 2025. Previous sections dragged on for years before this government came to office. This road is an economic enabler and a connector to the remote communities in the electorate of Gwoja.

The Plenty Highway is part of the Outback Way, which is a nationally significant freight, tourism and economic corridor connecting Central Australia to Queensland and across to Western Australia. We refer to it as Australia's longest shortcut. We have $41m and 27 kilometres of seal in construction by Aldebaran Contracting, with completion expected this month. Two additional packages for upgrades to the Plenty Highway are in design, and I expect the new package to progress to tender for construction in early 2027.

The Mereenie Loop is my favourite. The Member for Gwoja asked me about this in our last sittings of parliament. How long has this been spoken about? Again, I give credit where credit is due; Marion Scrymgour got the federal funding to do this, but where has that project gone? It has gone nowhere. The good thing is that DLI has been doing the hard work on design. There are six packages. The first package is at 95% design and is pretty well ready to go out to tender.

It is a primary driver for tourism in this area, and the tourism industry has been calling for this upgrade for ages. The Mereenie Loop will be a big economic driver, connecting Alice Springs, Kings Canyon and Yulara. This project will also help the communities in the electorate of Gwoja that have been dealing with those dirt roads for eons. There is $133m on the program to upgrade this. It has been on the program since 2022. We have been pushing hard to get this delivered. I can tell you why there are delays: there has been difficulty getting approvals through the Central Land Council to get this project underway. The land council application was lodged in quarter 3 of 2023, and we are still awaiting an outcome. We know the importance of this, so we started that important work with the land council because we know there is a want and a will from it and us to get this project underway. We are nearing agreement—we are advised that we will have it soon, which I look forward to—and then we will be able to this project over the line.

What did Labor do? It was happy to let things trundle along their merry way. There was no real pressure applied within the departments to start doing the hard work to make sure we could get those agreements to get this project moving. This has been talked about for years. I look forward to seeing that first stage get out the door so that we can start developing our tourism sector through the Mereenie Loop.

The Member for Nightcliff spoke about Schwarz Crescent, and I am keen to talk about it because this one is a cracker. We are delivering this program. It first appeared on the books in 2019, seven long years ago. The Member for Nightcliff said that there is a delay and we have not delivered it, but I am happy to explain why that is to those opposite.

It was put on the program in 2019 with some money, but Labor messed around and did not do anything. When we got into government I said to DLI that we need to get this project done because it is a real issue for the people of Central Australia. Of course, the money that was allocated in 2019 does not carry as much weight as it does now in 2026; the project would cost more. I thank Catherine King because, through the work we have done on our relationship with the Commonwealth, we have today—it was announced in the federal budget—secured the additional $2.5m to deliver that project. It is happening. The detailed design is complete, and I hope this project will go out to tender with boots on the ground to start this year.

The Sandover Highway is a critical freight and access corridor connecting Central Australia, the Barkly and Queensland. We know how much this road is used. There is $29m on the program for another 22 kilometres of seal for stage 1. Again, this is a project that sat in the infrastructure program under the previous government since 2023 and never moved anywhere. I expect to see this package rolling out the door in 2026–27.

Member for Gwoja, you will like this one: there is $2.4m for a 10-kilometre re-sheet of the Kintore Road and work is underway between Haasts Bluff and the Mount Liebig turn-offs. Re-sheeting and maintenance are desperately needed to deal with some of the issues on that road.

The opposition never mentions the amount of unresolved work left behind. The Member for Nightcliff is smack bang in the middle of all that. He needs to take some responsibility. These road packages sat on the program for years, unfunded, without approvals and no real pathway to deliver them.

Our engagement with the Central Land Council has been outstanding. I thank the land council and the team at DLI for the work they are doing to get these projects moving, dealing with the unresolved gravel pits and the underfunded programs against real market costs. That is what we are facing, because all these things were thrown on the program but were not correctly costed. We are dealing with incomplete or completely under-scoped designs. That has delayed delivery in Central Australia. Despite inheriting those problems, this government is getting on with the job.

When severe flooding hit Central Australia earlier this year, we reacted immediately. Emergency repairs were rolled out across the region through the emergency procedure program. Repairs were completed on the Tanami Road, Plenty Highway, Mount Denison Road, Tobermorey Station access, Urandangi Road and multiple partial access routes. More than $5m in emergency repair work progressed urgently across remote regions of Central Australia.

Flood mitigation works received additional funding in the 2026 budget. We continue to progress this complex work with $9m on the infrastructure program and an additional $4.9m announced through the flood recovery fund. This was something Labor announced and never did anything about. Labor members did not care about Central Australia. In these last two weeks, they have remembered where we are, and I am happy to see that because I get the opportunity to talk about my home.

In June 2023 the Australian Government announced the $2bn Social Housing Accelerator Payment to support investment for new social rental homes across Australia, and we received a $50m allocation. That funding agreement was signed and the money landed in the NT coffers before 30 June 2023. How many homes did Labor deliver under the program? Zero—none. We have four homes to be completed this financial year in Gillen, two in Sadadeen and six homes in The Gap by 2027. That is delivering. That is how you get things done.

We continue to support growth and economic development with land releases. We have $11m for headworks infrastructure at Kilgariff, delivering 36 lots; $3m for the next stage of Kilgariff and industrial land; and extended HomeGrown grants. We hope that the people of Central Australia take up those opportunities.

Infrastructure projects have been raised by the Member for Nightcliff in this matter of public importance. We delivered $66m in investment for key projects in our first year, including $15m for the Gillen Oval multisport precinct, $12m for a multicultural centre and $1.2m for Jim McConville Oval lighting upgrades. Grants to Alice Springs Town Council and works already completed include $14.96m for the new library; a $1.8m investment from the Territory government for the new skate park which is extremely popular, and it is great to see so many families using it; a $200,000 contribution to the Teague Park upgrades in my electorate; and

$4.8m for the new visitor information centre at Tourism Central Australia's new headquarters. We have delivered more in 12 months than Labor delivered in eight long years.

This is a record law and order budget. We delivered significant investment in Central Australia to support that. A further $12m has been committed for critical infrastructure upgrades at the Alice Springs Correctional Centre, which Labor neglected year on year. This investment strengthens Corrections infrastructure and improves operational capacity and safety outcomes for the entire prison. All this delivers real work for our local contractors, tradies and the construction sector in general in Central Australia.

There was a lot in the Member for Nightcliff's contribution about the art gallery in Central Australia. Again, Labor is trying to rewrite history. Look at what took place with that program. You mentioned it in your budget contribution this afternoon, Madam Speaker, so I will not go into too much detail. Labor divided our community. It divided a lot of traditional owners who had different views on that area and the rest of the Alice Springs community who wanted Anzac Oval kept. There was the forceful acquisition of Anzac Oval by Territory Labor. There was only $160m in the budget, with $80m from us and $80m from the Commonwealth. When we came into government we saw the plans and that it would be $300m-plus to deliver that project. That was money we did not have; it would need to be borrowed.

The way Labor did business when it was in government was to announce a project for $200m, when really it might cost $600m or $700m, and say, 'That is all right; we will just borrow the money and deliver it.' There was no thought; Labor was not serious about how it was spending our money.

We had to make that tough decision. We had a budget and did a redesign and scope to fit within that budget. The federal Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, did not like what she saw. She went to the Commonwealth and said, 'I do not agree'. That put us in a stalemate as to how we would deliver the gallery. The decision was made and the program ended. I do not regret that decision because I would not throw $300m-plus of Territorians' money after a project that did not stack up in a lot of respects.

Everybody is happy that we have Anzac Oval back. We are investing in the multicultural centre on that site, and we have been able to invest a little extra money into delivering that project, which is great.

Let us have a reality check: the Member for Nightcliff should also explain why so many road projects sat in the infrastructure program year after year under Labor without delivery. The Leader of the Opposition's favourite, she has said, has seen projects revoted year after year with no progress. What we have seen from those opposite is empty words and no outcomes. Territorians became good at hearing announcements from the former government. What we did not get, particularly those of us in Central Australia, was delivery.

This government is restoring discipline to our infrastructure delivery. Our program this year was a bit over $4bn. We are cashing our program properly year on year so that we can get these projects out the door. We are also matching scope to available funding. For these projects that Labor drew up many years ago, the money does not stack up anymore, so we have to rescope and revalue them. More importantly, we are rebuilding confidence that when government announces a road or infrastructure project, we deliver it and get it built. Those opposite did not do that; there was just media release after media release, photo opportunities and a program that was so big there was no cash to deliver it. It was never funded properly. I am proud to fix that program and deliver what we say we will do.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, Central Australia is important to the entire Northern Territory, and a priority of mine is making sure people in Central Australia are not left behind.

Across the bush we see incredible infrastructure, but we need to see more of that infrastructure being delivered. People in the bush matter. They deserve to have access to the same quality of infrastructure that you see in Darwin. People in Kintore, Lajamanu, Docker River, Papunya and Mutitjulu all deserve to have the same access to infrastructure that people in the big cities have. They deserve good-quality clinics, schools, shops, housing, footy ovals and parks. Just because you live in the bush does not mean you should be forgotten.

Everyone in this parliament needs to remember that bush people matter. Delivering critical infrastructure and roads to those communities is important. It is a responsibility of everyone in this place to look beyond their own electorate and make sure that people outside Darwin are being looked after. Whether it is in my electorate, Barkly, Arnhem, Arafura, Daly, Namatjira or Katherine, we need to make sure that these communities get good-quality infrastructure. Roads are not just for businesses; they are also for our people, families and communities. When roads are not good, motor vehicles get damaged, and families cannot travel

to town to visit family or play sports or take their kids or themselves to medical appointments. It is important to invest in roads.

I have heard a lot of chatter about road announcements, but I make it clear that people in Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Kintore, Mount Liebig, Titjikala, Sandover, Docker River, Nyirripi, Willowra, Lajamanu, Pigeon Hole and Yarralin are still calling for greater investment in their roads.

The Member for Namatjira spoke about a significant volume of work that happened in the Territory in the past. There has been significant investment in remote housing. I was a Remote Housing minister and during that time I delivered record investment in housing across the bush. I am proud to say that I invested $40m in the Alice Springs town camps for 64 homes. I cannot say that for the CLP government. How many new homes has the CLP flagged or built in Alice Springs town camps since it came to government? A big fat zero.

Investment is not just about the Top End. I have had this conversation with the Member for Barkly, and he will agree with me: we need houses in Central Australia. We might not have the population, but our need is just as great. Our families deserve safe, secure and affordable homes, and we will not settle until housing in the bush in Central Australia is delivered. It is critical.

The Member for Namatjira spoke about a bunch of projects. Let us be clear that we have seen investment in Alice Springs. A new women's shelter and a healing centre at Akeyulerre were built. There was the CBD revitalisation, which might have annoyed us at the time—I know it annoyed me—but it is beautiful in Central Australia. We saw a passion project of yours, Madam Speaker—that is, the hospital car park in Alice Springs. There was the Kilgariff headworks. A youth detention centre was built in Alice Springs. AIATSIS opened its first regional office in Alice Springs through a partnership with the previous government. The home improvement grants rolled out across the Territory, and Albrecht Oval received a new grandstand, female toilets and lighting upgrades. There has been investment in Central Australia. Was it enough? As a Central Australian I say no, because it will never be enough. Central Australia is the heart of the Territory and we will always need record investment because people in the Centre matter.

All governments keep talking and talking. When I was in government a significant partnership agreement was signed between the NT Government and the Commonwealth Government to deliver pretty impressive and critical infrastructure.

The Commonwealth has given a lot of money to the Territory government to deliver these projects. Has a cultural centre been built in Ti Tree and Yuendumu yet? No. Has an outside auditorium and public toilet been built in Laramba yet? No. Is there a new visitor camp, oval upgrades, change rooms, grandstands and a men's shed refurbishment in Yuelamu? No. Are there change room and lighting upgrades at Atitjere? People are saying no. Is there a new toilet near the softball oval in Engawala? No. Has there been an oval and grandstand relocation and a farm established in Willowra? No. Is there a new store at Pmara Jutunta? No. Is there a new recreation hall at Ti Tree station? I look forward to hearing from the Member for Barkly. Are there community laundries and toilets in Kintore and Areyonga? No. Is there one in Docker River? It is being completed. Is there a new BMX pump track and refurbishment in Titjikala? No. Is there a splash pad in Papunya and Hermannsburg? No. Has a pump track and community garden been established in Papunya community? No. Is there a community garden and orchard in Finke? No.

The Territory government has been given federal dollars to drive this infrastructure, and we have still not seen that infrastructure roll out the door. When you talk to members of the Aboriginal Leadership Group on that steering committee who came up with that list of recommendations and investments, they will tell you that they are waiting for the CLP government to sign off so that they can get these projects and tenders out the door. We still do not see them.

I look forward to hearing from the Member for Barkly, because I asked the ALG members yesterday: where are the splash pads for Hermannsburg and Papunya? They said that it is with the CLP government, waiting to be signed off. Minister, you might want to check with your department because people are still waiting. People get broken in the bush when they hear about all these things and they are not delivered.

I am not picking on the Member for Barkly, because he is probably the only person on that side of the Chamber who actually does some work. I have seen him out there; I have seen those beautiful selfies he takes with those houses. Good on him—great investment. Thank you, Albanese government for that investment in remote housing. It is incredibly important. The Member for Barkly is probably the only one on the other side who knows that housing changes lives. It gives people a bedroom for the first time. It gives families the opportunity to bring elders home to be in community. It allows children to stay with their families

in safe, secure and affordable housing rather than have them removed to somewhere hundreds of kilometres from their family members.

These are all incredible investments, but we need clear timelines on when they will be delivered. Therefore, I am putting pressure on the Territory and the Commonwealth, because I can see the frustration growing from people in the bush who want to know where all those projects I read out are at and when they will be delivered. When will we see a change? They are projects that will change our remote communities.

Having splash pads in Papunya and Hermannsburg provides young children with the opportunity to cool down in the middle of summer when it is incredibly hot. The Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments cannot get a straight answer out of anyone. When will these projects be built? When can people start seeing them?

For Ti Tree, Docker River, Utju, Laramba and Willowra these are all critical pieces of infrastructure that we want to see, because they will give people opportunities and provide recreation for people out bush. We hear time and again people in the bush saying that they do not get everything that all the town mob get. They are just asking for basic infrastructure; that is all they want. They do not want the big bells and whistles and modern-day stuff; they just want infrastructure to help keep their families together and engaged and to help de-escalate their community. These are important investments that we need to get behind. We need to back our local communities to have this critical infrastructure delivered.

Roads are important. There has been a massive Wet Season. Half of my electorate and the Top End have been washed out and cut off. The weather patterns are changing. I acknowledge that the government has brought forward money to respond to that. The federal budget being handed down tonight has money for roads, and I welcome that investment. However, we need to look at how we address these critical infrastructure needs when the climate and weather patterns are changing. How do we make sure that places in the bush have safe and secure housing and good clinics, schools and food?

I have been horrified during these flood events to hear the devastating stories that people in the bush went for months without access to fresh milk. Imagine having a young family and being unable to provide fresh fruit and vegetables for your child, because the critical infrastructure in our remote communities does not allow for large wholesaling of food. That is appalling. We all have to address the critical need for infrastructure.

I went to Kintore and Nyirripi. Kintore community did not have telecommunications for one week. People could not recharge their power cards, buy food at the store or call to check how family were going. It is 2026. This is basic infrastructure. We need to come up with a basic level of infrastructure that is the bare minimum standard for communities across the Northern Territory and make sure we have that.

I agree with comments made by a member who encouraged the Top Enders to get out of Darwin and go off the beaten track and into remote communities—hire a four-wheel drive if you do not have one—to see what we live through every day. The road conditions are appalling. I do not blame this government, as weather has come through, but we need more money to respond quickly to those things.

Get your backside down to Alice Springs and see the level of infrastructure we have. We have great infrastructure, but a town our size, given where we are and who we are, should have more investment from the Territory and federal governments; we deserve it. We are an amazing place and have our challenges, but the way we address that is through critical infrastructure. It is truly needed.

People talk about what they do not have, but they should get out and see Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine, and then have a chat to me about infrastructure. We need to futureproof our regional towns and remote communities. It is not always about Darwin. I love Darwin, but I love the regions better. We need to make sure that we look after everyone in the Territory. Time and again when family come in and see the bright lights of the Top End, of course they do not want to go home because it is fun and there are things to do. We need to make sure we have that same level of infrastructure in the bush.

When you look at our remote communities—as I said in my budget reply speech, it is hard and I do not deny that it is costly because of the logistical challenges—you see we need that investment. I am keen to hear from the Commonwealth and Territory governments the timelines for all the projects that I listed. I do not blame the Member for Barkly—I know it is not his fault and he is only one person—but if we can get answers for the members of our local communities, they will have something to look forward to. That is important, and we need it done.

I give a shout-out to all the people in Central Australia who were strong and hard in calling on the CLP government to do better with urban housing. Your voice mattered, and Minister Edgington heard your voice and got proper scared. He then suddenly found money to do up the derelict houses in Alice Springs. I hope he did not use remote housing money for that, but we will find out in Estimates. Thank you; you mob made the minister do something good.

Mr EDGINGTON (Essential Services): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to speak in regard to the Member for Nightcliff's MPI that there is a lack of roads and infrastructure delivery for Central Australia, because after considering all the issues and looking at our budget versus what happened between 2016 and 2024, I can only assume he is talking about that period. That is when there was clearly a lack of roads and infrastructure delivery in Central Australia.

As the Member for Gwoja knows, working out bush there are lots of things we notice every day, and we receive lots of feedback from those living in remote areas who often feel they have been underdone when it comes to that investment.

Regarding Central Australia, even the Member for Nightcliff is talking about roads in the Barkly. Central Australia is well known as covering a large portion, probably the whole bottom half, of the Northern Territory. The Member for Gwoja would probably agree with me when I say that.

I am pleased the Treasurer and Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure said that there is an additional $60m investment in the 2026–27 infrastructure program. It is important to talk about the $30.5m roads repair package to help rebuild key infrastructure damaged by the recent flooding.

In the Barkly, $6.5m will assist with upgrading Murray Downs Road, the Elkedra road and the Kurrundie road. There are roadworks underway on Kinjurra Road; 20 kilometres of work is being done from the Stuart Highway into Ali Curung. I drove through there a couple of weeks ago, stopped and spoke to Johnny Parry-Atie who works for Phillips Earthmoving and looked at local contractors doing the work out there. To suggest that there is a lack of infrastructure investment happening across Central Australia is wrong.

When I heard the Member for Nightcliff, the first thing that sprang to mind was: has he actually been outside of Darwin? He talked about my electorate, Alice Springs and Central Australia, but he could not grasp the message he was trying to get across. That sent a strong message to me that he probably has not been out bush like the Member for Gwoja or me as the Member for Barkly. We are out and about as often as we can, travelling these roads and visiting the communities.

Roads are often in poor condition. I lost two sets of numberplates off my vehicle when I was in opposition, travelling on those roads that were highly neglected between 2016 and 2024. For the short period I was in opposition, the Sandover Highway was in shocking condition. I remember travelling from Utopia to the Plenty Highway before realising my numberplate had disappeared because of the corrugation on that road. These are the things we are constantly up against in Central Australia.

The CLP is delivering better infrastructure for residents in the Barkly. We are investing $5.3m in a CT scanner and some modifications will be made to Tennant Creek Hospital. At the moment, those requiring a CT scan have to travel all the way to Alice Springs. There is $1m to recommission the theatre at Tennant Creek Hospital. We are delivering better infrastructure in the Barkly. This MPI suggests that is not happening.

We are constructing a boarding facility in Tennant Creek for $8.3m under the Barkly Regional Deal. We have announced $3.5m to upgrade Alekarenge School, which the Labor government failed to do between 2016 and 2024. That is one example where Labor failed to invest in education in the Barkly to give young people the best start in life. That upgrade will include the early learning centre and admin facilities for staff. This investment will assist the FaFT program and encourage children to attend school.

We are driving growth in Central Australia and the Barkly. We are investing $1m across the next two years to support timely industrial and residential subdivisions. I thank the Lands, Planning and Environment minister. He is from Central Australia, so he knows, just as I do, that investing in land to create subdivisions in the Barkly in Tennant Creek and Central Australia is needed to drive development in those areas.

The Member for Nightcliff is opposed to housing construction. He made that part of his election campaign. He said that Labor was opposed to a housing development in Darwin somewhere. It is concerning that he now talks about lack of infrastructure but he is the person who is opposed to development in the Northern Territory.

Regarding remote communities, we are investing $4.14m in the Borroloola power station and $20m to construct a new clinic at Borroloola. We recently opened the $11.7m Borroloola sports and cyclone shelter.

We have just installed a new $1.35m generator at Ali Curung to replace the old one that Labor failed to invest in. I recall Labor not investing in power generation in Ali Curung, failing and allowing that community to go without power for nearly 24 hours. I had to ring the minister to get the generator moving in that community.

We know that from 2016 to 2024 Labor did not invest in the Barkly electorate; it simply did not care enough to do so.

There are several minor works at Tennant Creek Hospital, with $400,000 to upgrade the security system; $2.7m in minor works to improve infrastructure in communities across the Barkly; $800,000 to replace the boundary fence at Ali Curung Police Station; $100,000 for Murray Downs School to get a new double-bay storage shed; and $100,000 to design and upgrade the preschool bathroom at Elliott School.

Our government is also providing $180,707 to the Barkly Regional Council to install a fence at Purkiss Reserve to improve security during the football season this year.

In December I went to Tennant Creek Swimming Pool and confirmed that our government would provide the council with $151,621 to conduct emergency works there.

As part of the $5.8m co-investment program with Telstra, residents living in Corella Creek community have access to mobile phone coverage for the first time. We are getting on with the job. I thank the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, who has invested across the board when it comes to Telstra and connecting communities across the Barkly and Central Australia.

Labor had the opportunity to seal the Ali Curung and Ampilatwatja airstrips. It failed to do that during its two terms of government from 2016 to 2024. We are investing $3.8m at Ali Curung and $3.5m at Ampilatwatja.

We are investing $27.3m to seal about 22 kilometres of the Sandover Highway—another project that Labor failed to deliver.

The Member for Gwoja will be interested to hear this, we are putting $1.1m into Urapunga for a splash pad. The people at Utopia homelands will be thrilled that money is going into Utopia, because they were neglected by the Labor government between 2016 and 2024. We are getting on with the job and providing money for a splash pad at Urapunga.

Our investments in the Barkly are a part of improving the infrastructure and lifestyle in the Barkly. We are delivering more remote housing, and 17 new homes and 16 upgrades in Central Australia. We set a target to bring 70 vacant public housing dwellings in Alice Springs back online. I was there a week or two ago. We have brought 59 of those 70 homes back online. Eleven more are being completed as I speak. Think about what having 70 homes back online will mean for families in Central Australia.

We support housing and housing developments, which the Member for Nightcliff simply does not. The crux of it is that we want development, people with roofs over their heads, first home owners and opportunities for economic development in Central Australia and the Barkly. While the Member for Nightcliff is opposing housing developments, we are getting on with it.

We are also investing $5m to assist with round 3 HAFF applications in Tennant Creek; $12m to support a HAFF application for the St Mary's site in Central Australia; and $0.8m for Musgrave Street in Alice Springs.

The Labor government promised early learning centres in Ti Tree, Borroloola and Arlparra, and not one of them was delivered. It promised new health clinics at Ali Curung and Borroloola, and not one of them was delivered. We are getting on with the job and delivering in Borroloola. Labor promised to open a 35-lot subdivision in Borroloola. That was promised year-in and year-out for about four years while Labor was in government and it still has not been delivered. Not one shovel hit the ground while the Labor government existed.

We opened the new justice facility in Tennant Creek and the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art & Culture Centre. We finished the $9m Purkiss Reserve and the streetscape program in Tennant Creek. Labor said that it would do all these things; there was plenty of talk and no real action. The constant theme in the Barkly under Labor was: plenty of talk, but little action.

Rather than investing in Central Australia, Labor spent $12.7m on the Nightcliff Police Station which was open between 8 am and 4 pm; built a $12m grandstand at Fannie Bay; overspent on Garramilla Boulevard by $14m; spent $432,000 on moving a bus stop from Cavenagh Street to Smith Street and back again; and had a $7m blowout on the car park under Parliament House. What about the Tiger Brennan bridge? We heard that the Member for Nightcliff was involved in that development which was $100m over budget. I am sure that the Member for Gwoja will agree with me: imagine $164m being spent in Central Australia, rather than being wasted on a bridge in Darwin. We often advocate for putting more money into Central Australia. The one that always catches my attention is that Labor had the Boundless Possible tourism strategy. It spent $40,000 advertising that on a rocket launched from Queensland and its tourism strategy was never seen again after that launch.

We are not only building the Barkly and Central Australia but also getting on with it and delivering tourism across the Barkly and Central Australia.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is good to speak on this MPI about Central Australia and the infrastructure.

I am not sure what the Member for Nightcliff has been told by those opposite, but I think he is severely misguided. He spent the first part of his speech talking about the Aboriginal art gallery in Central Australia. Some in this Chamber, who may not know the saga around the art gallery, could think, 'Member for Nightcliff, that does not sound good at all'. He did not touch on one thing that happened under Labor that was an absolute disgrace, so I will go through some of the things that happened with the national Aboriginal art gallery and led us to the position we ended up in. It was a disgrace that Labor started and, in the end, stopped from happening.

Early on in the piece, I remember the CLP government put money on the table for an art gallery and cultural centre. It was a fantastic idea for Central Australia to showcase our art and culture to people from around the country and the world. Labor came into government and for four years—I kid you not—there were consultations and a steering committee that said not to put the gallery on Anzac Oval but in Desert Park. The then Chief Minister Michael Gunner ignored the steering committee's recommendation and decided it should go on Anzac Oval.

The then Member for Braitling, Dale Wakefield, held cups of tea in the mall. The Member for Johnston talks about consultation, but imagine if we decided, 'Let us consult on our Bill. Let us just walk down the mall, have a cup of tea and see who would like to come up and chat to us.' That was Labor's level of consultation about the Aboriginal art gallery going on Anzac Oval. That announcement went out—'I will have cups of tea with people to find out the community sentiment'. It was a joke and a disgrace.

Then there was the compulsory acquisition. I am trying to put this into perspective for the Member for Nightcliff. Imagine the Nightcliff Tigers' home ground in Darwin, a football oval, being compulsorily acquired to stick an art gallery on it. I reckon people would go mad—berserk. That is what happened in Alice Springs, and people were not happy. Labor tried to heritage list the oval, and I think the Member for Gwoja at the time had to step in. People went berko. The rugby teams were not happy; it ended up ruining their seasons and they finally recovered …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 1; I want that retracted. I was not involved in any heritage decisions of that site. That was before my time.

Mr BURGOYNE: I retract that statement implicating the Member for Gwoja in regard to that heritage.

The saga that was the art gallery was a disgrace, and it goes to show that the Member for Gwoja wants nothing to do with it either. He does not want his name laden with the disgrace that was the art gallery.

For the Member for Nightcliff to try to put that at our feet is a disgrace. When we got into government, we had a difficult decision to make. Labor had a $150m budget. Imagine going to your builder and saying that you have half-a-million dollars to build a house, but they come back to you and say, 'Build this one for $1m'. You would say that you cannot because you have only half-a-million dollars. The Labor government had a $150m budget and designed an art gallery that would cost $300m to build. We did not have that money; that was the reality of the situation.

We worked with the community and acknowledged that we would not build the gallery on a sporting oval. Many people and many business owners I spoke to, including people with art galleries and people who set up businesses in the mall, believed it was the right location, down that end of the mall, to drive traffic down

Todd Mall. That is what they believed, so we were backing those businesses. By making the gallery smaller, so it could still be delivered within budget, we could reap those benefits that the Member for Nightcliff spoke about—the additional tourists to our town and possibly additional investment. That is what we were trying to achieve as a government.

It was redesigned and put up to the federal Labor government. The Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, decided that was not what she wanted. That is what happened. Alice Springs, as a community, missed out as a result. That frustrates me because although I might not have personally agreed with an art gallery, as a leader in the community I wanted the best thing for Alice Springs to occur. A $150m investment to showcase Aboriginal art in our town and possibly brought in thousands of people would have been a huge benefit. It is frustrating that one person stood in the way of all that, and that was the Member for Lingiari.

If the Member for Nightcliff wants to rewrite history, he can go and get his facts checked.

In regard to the Schwarz Crescent intersection, my learned colleague the Treasurer hit the nail on the head. It was in the budget books for seven years. Every time I would pick up the budget to look at what Labor promised Central Australia I would see that Schwarz Crescent was there again. Nothing happened for seven years. What a disgrace. We will finally see that delivered, and I thank the Treasurer for getting the additional money so that this can happen because, as we have seen over a long time, things are costing more. The quote done years ago to complete this has now increased.

The CBD revitalisation mentioned by the Member for Gwoja—hooley dooley.

A member: It is beautiful.

Mr BURGOYNE: I will try to explain for everyone what happened with the CBD revitalisation. It took years for it to be completed. When it was finally completed under Labor, the roads melted. People got stuck walking across the road. Can you imagine walking across Mitchell Street and getting stuck in the road? Labor had water carts driving up and down the main streets of Alice Springs watering the roads. It was a disgrace—something only Territory Labor could deliver. How could you do that? Labor put gravel on top of it and watered it. I do not know what the Labor government expected to happen. Once again, the minister for Infrastructure had to find the millions of dollars to fix the roads. The roads had to be re-sheeted—dug up and put back down.

The Member for Nightcliff talked about Alice Springs being a forgotten place and there not being the proper investment, but he should look at those seated beside him. Those Territory Labor members forgot about the town I love and grew up in. It was a disgrace.

He also spoke about land release, which I am passionate about. Kilgariff is not only where I live but also a place being developed in Alice Springs so that families who want to come to our town can take advantage of our great benefits, the $50,000 first home builders grant.

It is important to continuously have land release. The former Labor government basically got to the point where there was no land available in Alice Springs. It failed to deliver land release. I was working as an electrician at that time. Work dried up and builders packed up and left and never came back. That is what Territory Labor delivered for the people of Alice Springs. There was no land release and additional homes to build, so the builders left because they could not secure work. The take-up was fantastic in the initial stage, but Labor did not plan for the future. It took 18 months before the next stage was completed, so we lost all momentum and have struggled ever since.

It is fantastic to see that, under our government, we have just put an additional 36 titled lots to the market. That is on top of the lots that are already available. It will mean land is constantly available for those who wish to build in Alice Springs. That is a positive thing.

Flood mitigation has been spoken about a lot in this Chamber over the last six years. A report was done, and Labor put some money towards it but did not spend one dollar of that. I am proud as the minister responsible for Lands, Planning and Environment to say that since coming to government we have done the hard work and put money towards this. I cannot wait to get in one of those drains and see work done so that we can mitigate against future flooding for the community of Alice Springs. It is important.

I heard people in this Chamber talk about insurance costs. Do you know why those costs are going up? It is because nothing has been done in over a decade to mitigate against flooding in our town. The Finocchiaro CLP government is getting on with delivering that for Alice Springs and Central Australia.

The $250m the Member for Gwoja spoke about—strewth, let us remind everyone why we got $250m in the first place. The Territory Labor government saw the lapsing of the Stronger Futures legislation and put nothing in place. That is the reality. I was in this Chamber when there was a vote. Labor decided to open up the floodgates to grog and we saw unfettered crime and domestic violence across our community. A number that is burnt into my memory—it literally sits on the wall in my office—is the 179 domestic violence-related callouts that police responded to in the first week after the Stronger Futures measures lapsed in Alice Springs.

The fact that I can still remember this after all those years shows you how much that impacted me and my community. We saw alcohol sales increase by hundreds of per cent at certain IGAs across town. People could go into places where they had not been allowed previously and buy as much grog as they wanted to, and then take it home to where women and children were. Where previously they were not allowed to consume alcohol, all of a sudden they were. It took the Prime Minister of Australia to come to our town and say to then Chief Minister Natasha Fyles, 'Enough is enough. You have to stop this.'

The $250m provided was meant to be immediate emergency funding to deliver real change in our community. You have to ask: after all that time Labor was in government and all that money—before we even got into government—had been allocated, what have we seen? The Member for Gwoja read out a wish list of play parks and all the rest of it. How is that meant to help deal with the alcohol-fuelled violence we saw? This all happened under Territory Labor and federal Labor.

I will touch on what Minister Edgington said about 59 homes being brought back online in Alice Springs. That is important for the community of Alice Springs. A lot of community housing homes in our town were essentially beyond economic repair; a lot of them were wrecked. I am pleased that Minister Edgington has taken it upon himself to find the funds to get 59 of those homes, many of them in my electorate, brought back online.

A constituent got in touch with me the other day to thank us. There had been a house with rubbish everywhere in the backyard, broken cars and smashed windows. Rodents had an impact on his home because of the state of that house over the last however many years. We got in there and cleaned it up. It is now ready to go back into the housing stock. I know that with Minister Edgington at the wheel, whoever goes in there will be managed appropriately so that it does not fall into the same state of disrepair that it did under Labor.

It is important that I acknowledge so much was not done in Central Australia over eight years of Labor. As a government we have committed millions of dollars and are getting on with delivering real change for our town so that we can see the benefits. People in Alice Springs deserve beautiful places to play with their kids and sporting ovals. We are delivering that for the fantastic town of Alice Springs and Central Australia.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, it is a privilege to speak about the importance of our regions. The regions are critical to the Northern Territory and northern Australia because they are the engine room of our economy. It does not matter which region you visit—Central Australia, the Barkly, Alice Springs, Katherine, the Daly, Nhulunbuy or Gove—they are critical. Over the border the Kimberley, Mount Isa and western Queensland regions are critical to the whole Australian economy. I hope that tonight the federal budget reflects that and contributes to the importance of the regions, particularly in northern Australia, because they are the engine room of the whole Australian economy, not just the Northern Territory economy.

Infrastructure and services across those regions are vital; I fully agree. We need roads, water, energy and a range of services there. Why? Just think of the industries in the regions.

I heard the Member for Barkly say that he was not too sure whether the Member for Nightcliff had ever been in the regions. I have. In my various careers, I have been to the Newmont mine in Tanami. It has a fly-in fly-out workforce of about 1,800. Those people come from everywhere, including Alice Springs, Darwin, Perth and Brisbane. It is a huge economic driver and an important tier 1 mine for the whole country. I have seen the mining at McArthur River, Nhulunbuy and South32 on Groote Eylandt. I have physically been to the regions and taken industry players there. I was particularly focused on getting mining operations to employ more local businesses and increase local content; that was the big driver behind a lot of those visits.

The regions have oil and gas. We spoke about the Beetaloo, which is the growth area with 200-odd years of energy. We have to develop this and bring in the infrastructure and services to make it happen. We also need the federal government to get behind it because this is for not only the Territory's interests but also the national interest. It is a great employer and industry driver for the Territory. Let us do the best we can.

There are water projects, like AROWS. The Daly has agriculture and everything. Tourism is everywhere across the Territory. These regions drive our economy. They are critical, and I support everyone who has that sentiment.

For the benefit of the Member for Gwoja—he may not know this—I have been to Mount Liebig. My wife taught there for six months. I have driven there on the corrugations from Alice Springs in a hire car. I went to the Gold Coast Suns versus St Kilda football match on Saturday. Everyone was going for the Gold Coast Suns. My wife is a St Kilda tragic. I also supported St Kilda on this occasion. The people at Mount Liebig all seem to go for St Kilda—they love it—it is their team. Do not tell me I have not been out there; I have and I know what it is like.

There are great opportunities in our remote areas and we need to develop them long term for everyone. Having said that, I must go back to the matter of public importance—lack of roads and infrastructure delivery for Central Australia. That is the focus.

The Member for Barkly touched on this. We need to adjust it to be 'lack of roads and infrastructure delivery for Central Australia by the previous Labor government'. Labor members were the ones who lacked delivery, not us. We are trying to pick up the pieces and grow it. Labor should own that because it let down the regions and neglected them. Labor members should have put a lot more emphasis on the regions.

We heard the debate and carry-on about waste. Imagine the ship lift: we heard that over the contract period we will be contractually committed to up to $1.8bn. If I gave $1.8bn to the Member for Gwoja I am sure that he could use it to do fantastic work in Central Australia and across the regions. He would say, 'Thank you very much. Just give me that; do not let us waste this. If only we had our time again. If we had invested that $1.8bn in our regions it would be fantastic.' He could address a lot of the issues he has been trying to and it would be money well spent. Do not let Labor try to tell us about it.

I do not know where the Member for Nightcliff has been. I hope he has been to the regions. I have been there, as I have demonstrated.

I cannot forget the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply speech—'No plan, no vision, no future'. In my budget reply I shot down the idea that we had no plan. I gave it back to her. I demonstrated that we were committed to a plan and we delivered. This second budget continues that. As I said, we will reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle. Then the Leader of the Opposition had the temerity to say that we have no vision. Part of our vision is that we would not have wasted that $1.8bn.

This is for the benefit of the Member for Nightcliff; he is new here, so he may not have heard these conversations previously. First of all, I suggest that the Labor team members go to Specsavers. They could probably get a deal—five for the price of one or whatever—on good specs so that they could start to see stuff and maybe read a good plan. That would be a good thing to use their new specs on; find out what a real plan is like.

Member for Nightcliff, I have told the Labor opposition numerous times that it has to start listening. I have a few spare vouchers for a free hearing test at Northlakes shops. I am happy to make them available for those opposite.

If Labor members can start seeing and listening properly maybe we could move on and they could become a credible opposition. That is what I would like.

I remind everyone of the importance of the regions. Think of all the industries—mining, oil and gas, agriculture and tourism.

Do not forget Defence. Central Australia has Pine Gap which has a range of facilities. Katherine has RAAF Base Tindal. There is the Bradshaw Field Training Area and all that. Defence is a big part of this economy. The important parts of Defence are in the regions. Defence personnel do all the big training exercises there. It is magnificent. They do live bombing runs at the training park. The Singapore Air Force cannot do a strafing run up the Malay Peninsula, but they can come here and practise. They can join with our ADF and get cohesion. That is important for geopolitical security.

I will not go on, but I have shot down the idea of us having no plan. Those opposite said that we have no vision, and I told them to go to Specsavers and to do a hearing test. That would be good.

Labor members say that we have no future, but we have created a future. Let us go back to the topic of the lack of roads and infrastructure delivery for Central Australia—by the previous Labor government, I suggest.

The 2026–27 budget delivers a $4.25bn infrastructure program to build roads, housing, schools, police facilities and economic opportunity across the Territory, and 59%—I will round it up to 60%—of this year's program is allocated to our important remote and regional areas. Do not tell us that this government is not committed to the regions; we are. That spend goes across the regions. It includes the Daly and Katherine flood recovery. It covers all the other areas. The Member for Barkly talked about the CT scanner and other great initiatives. Money is available for various projects in Alice Springs.

We recognise the importance of infrastructure and services, particularly in our regional areas because that benefits the whole Territory, but to fund them we must have a disciplined approach to the budget. The Member for Araluen said that this budget is not all that sexy, but it is disciplined and this is the time to have that. We are not wasting money and promising the world. It is a fully funded budget; that is the way to go.

We are not borrowing off credit cards to pay salaries anymore. It is one of the few times this has happened. You would not get it from a Labor government. Labor spends and when one credit card runs out, it gets another one and pretend that it did not. Labor governments then pay interest on interest. I remind members that this is not my money or their money; it is taxpayers' money. It is Territorians' money, so we have to be respectful in how we spend it. We have to justify to them that it has been well spent.

Strategic investment in our regions is welcome. It has to be long term, and we have to be able to afford it. I would love to have that $1.8bn back and talk to the Member for Gwoja about how to best spend it in the regions, but that is in the past. We need to keep a focus on the regions, and I am a big supporter of them.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, it was good that the Member for Karama went back to the subject. I went to dinner. We had been all day talking about the arts centre in Alice Springs, so I thought I had missed my jump.

Thanks for the recommendations for hearing aids and eye tests. You can keep the vouchers, mate; it is all good.

I will talk about the importance of infrastructure and roads in our regions, especially our remote areas. Road connectivity is essential to all Top End remote communities, including the desert. They are heavily dependent on transport links for everyday life and economic activities. Roads connect remote towns to Indigenous communities and healthcare. They provide better access to healthcare services, and ambulance and medical staff can travel faster and more safely. Residents can reach hospitals, clinics and specialist appointments more easily and quickly. During emergencies, such as floods and accidents, reliable roads can save lives.

Better roads lead to better education outcomes in the Northern Territory because transport infrastructure directly affects school access, especially in my electorate of Arafura. A four-wheel drive bus goes to the outstations for homelands schooling. It contributes to attendance, teacher retention and service delivery in remote communities.

In many parts of the NT, especially during the Wet Season, poor road conditions can isolate communities for days and weeks. Oenpelli, which I spoke about earlier, has been separated from the Arnhem Highway since November, when Cyclone Fina came through. It should reopen within the next couple of days, and we are hopeful that visitors will come soon to visit the amazing Cahills Crossing.

When roads become impassable, students miss school, teachers struggle to travel and essential education resources are delayed. Improved roads make it easier for students to attend school consistently and safely. Regular attendance is strongly linked to higher literacy and numeracy and graduation rates. I know that the roads in Central Australia were hit hard by floods too, and I imagine that the people there will be experiencing all this as well.

Road upgrades support broader social and economic development. Communities with reliable transport links often gain improved access to healthcare, employment, internet infrastructure and training opportunities—all of which contribute indirectly to stronger outcomes. However, roads alone are not enough. General infrastructure investment must work alongside culturally responsive teaching, local community partnerships, housing, digital access and long-term support for remote schools.

In the past couple of months most of our roads have not been in good shape, especially going to Jabiru and Katherine where there are a lot of potholes everywhere.

Industries such as mining, agriculture, tourism, Defence and logistics rely on reliable highways to move goods and people efficiently. Better roads significantly support economic development in the Northern Territory in several ways, including improved access to regional and remote areas; growth in tourism and agriculture; job creation; stronger regional communities; and trade and freight efficiency. This all contributes to tourism growth, freight and trade.

Better roads equal better disaster resilience, better access to health services; improved education opportunities; a lower cost of living because people are not needing to fix cars that have been destroyed by hitting potholes; and safer travel.

I always contact the Member for Goyder when I travel to Jabiru because there is a lot of cattle between the Bark Hut Inn and Corroboree Park. On Sunday night I saw them again, so I will keep humbugging you.

Roads also provide support during emergencies and long-term economic development.

The Northern Territory has a vast area. All roads need to be maintained so that we can attract more tourists and jobs and grow our economy.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, I recently had the privilege of going to Sattler Christian College in the rural area where I got to pretend to be the Speaker for the day.

The kids chose the motion they wanted to debate. They are very much engaged with what is going on in the world. These young people decided to debate a Bill to allow the Northern Territory to begin creating its own fuel. I will read out some of their contributions to that debate.

Elaina said, ‘I support this Bill because it is expensive for fuel. Some cars to fill the whole tank is over $300. It is $3.50 for one litre and that is why we should make our own fuel.’ This just goes to show that these young people are fully engaged with what is going on.

Another student wrote that they support the Bill because if fuel costs go down, it will be good for the Territory.

Rani wrote, ‘I support this Bill because if we make our own fuel we will have to make lots of jobs for people’. They are already thinking about employment at such a young age.

Another student wrote against the Bill, saying that some kids will get high from it, there will be more pollution and it will be bad for the environment.

This goes to show that each of these kids has their own angle and something to look forward to as they get older.

Penelope wrote, ‘It will be cheap for others and people need to get to important places like shops to buy food or go to work’.

Archer wrote that they support the Bill because, ‘We have a crisis with fuel at $4.35 a litre. Ridiculous!’

Julian wrote, ‘We don’t want to wait for fuel from other places, so the Territory will have cheaper fuel’. They are already thinking about supply chains.

Delilah wrote that she does not support the Bill because, ‘It can be bad for the environment and animals. It will cost too much and probably make too much fuel for the Territory. It will take a lot of people and time, so I say it is a horrible idea. It is too much money. It could affect our environment, and it will take too long before the fuel crisis resolves.’

Liam wrote, ‘I think that this law is good because now we do not have to go out for fuel, since it is a lot of money. Now we can have more fuel.’

Joshua wrote, ‘Fuel has to be cheaper to protect the environment. If we just keep on lifting the prices, there will be more reports of stealing.’

Billie wrote that it would take too long to build the fuel stations and make fuel, and it will take eight to 10 years before it is viable. These kids are already thinking it through.

Maddy wrote, ‘We should make our own fuel because it is so expensive and almost up to $4. If it gets any higher, we will have to ride pushbikes around the rural area.’

Pippa wrote, ‘Fuel has been getting way too expensive and we need more fuel so that we can drive where we need to go. We do not need to spend too much money because we need money for food, school and so many more things.’ Good on you, Pippa.

Tate wrote, ‘We should not have a lot of fuel. If it gets in nature it will be bad, and people might steal fuel. Lots of people might have to get cheap fuel, but we do not have enough houses.’ They are already thinking about priorities in the budget, which we have heard lots about this week in the Assembly.

Penelope wrote, ‘It is a lot of money for fuel and we need it now for buildings’. They are talking about the infrastructure spending that the Member for Gwoja has talked about all week.

Isobel wrote, ‘It is very dangerous. It also may cause more bombing because other countries might have less, so they might attack. It can cause explosions, so this is why we should not make our own fuel.’ These kids are probably about the age of 10. They are already talking about global conflicts and are in tune with the news. I was impressed by their level of knowledge.

The final argument, won by Ella, was, ‘We should make our own fuel so we can show independence. We can lower prices because we will not have many problems with shipping. Maybe we can sell the fuel to get some money to go towards schools and roads.’ She is already looking at own-source revenue.

Lawrence wrote, ‘It would take too long to build; I think eight to 10 years. That would be eight years without driving. We would run out of fuel before we could build our own fuel.’

Evie wrote, ‘It is hard already to make fuel and oil, and having a community making their own fuel means that people have to work long hours and shifts. Many people will miss their family, and children will miss their parents. Fuel is also becoming more expensive and harder to afford. It is also bad for the environment and animals will start dying. Therefore, I think this is not a good law.’

I give a massive shout-out to the Year 5 teacher at Sattler, Mr Jeff Vale; the Assistant Head of Primary, Ms Leisa Beynon; Principal Michael Tooler; and all the kids who engaged in the process.

A special shout-out goes to the Parliamentary Education Office for trekking out to the beautiful rural area and engaging with these young people.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I will speak about our incredible frontline ambulance service and public hospital system. I had a chance to do direct research with them this weekend when I was in the Member for Nightcliff’s electorate on my bike and, unfortunately, came off it and broke my arm. I was at the beautiful Seabreeze Festival. I give a shout-out to that incredible community festival that I am sure we will hear about in the Chamber; I would love to talk about it another time.

I was lucky that St John Ambulance staff were there; they were incredible. I give a special shout-out to Johannes, who is a constituent of mine—I did not know that—and he told me he thought I had a broken arm. Of course I was not that happy with him, because it was not what I wanted to hear; nevertheless, I went to the hospital.

I give a big shout-out to all the staff at the hospital, particularly Atur, who also happens to be a constituent of mine, coincidentally. He treated me well, as all the staff did for every person who was in hospital on Saturday night. Anyone who has been lucky, or unlucky, enough to be in Accident and Emergency on a weekend night in Darwin hospital knows that it is a challenging place to be.

I have spent more time in that hospital than I would have liked, but what consistently and overwhelmingly strikes me is the level of professionalism, care and kindness the people who work in that place show to people who are having their worst day. It is amazing.

We have heard a lot in the last couple of weeks about some terrible treatment of our frontline workers and ambulance workers. I express my support, admiration and gratitude for the work they do every day and for

the work they have done for me personally. It is not over yet; I have more to do. I will have to do more research on Royal Darwin Hospital that I will continue to share with people.

I put on the record now my gratitude and thanks to all the people who helped me.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I could not have had a better segue to my speech than what I just heard from the Member for Johnston. I give a big shout-out to our frontline health workers.

I have a personal interest in this. As many people know, my son Fergus is a paramedic with St John. I have seen him get feedback from people like the Member for Johnston, who have been treated by him, that he and his colleagues do a magnificent job, under trying circumstances sometimes. For the benefit of everyone in here, my son Fergus is hoping to advance to become an intensive care paramedic because it is part of his career path.

Today is International Nurses Day, so I give a big shout-out to all the nurses. Once again, I have a personal connection because my son Fergus' partner, Amy, is a nurse with CareFlight. She flies to remote areas and does a lot of treatment. I know she has been on jets taking patients to Adelaide and back. She and my son Fergus live together upstairs in the house with us. They are shiftworkers. Shiftwork is hard at any time, but they manage to run a great life together. They are fantastic people who serve the community—occasionally they forget to feed the dogs and I must do it, but that is okay. I am happy to help them.

They epitomise the generosity and the kindness—I think the Member for Johnston mentioned that—health workers exhibit, and we should all be grateful that these frontline workers do that. Like the Member for Johnston, I have heard, and I know firsthand, that they are abused and come under a lot of attacks. I have no sympathy for people who attack our frontline workers, including health workers. It should never happen to paramedics and nurses. Sometimes they may be involved with the involuntary actions of patients, and that is okay; they understand that. However, when it is deliberate—punching them, spitting on them and throwing rocks at the CareFlight planes and all that sort of stuff—that is unacceptable.

Our government will step up to the mark and crack down on it. We have already introduced legislation and may have to get a bit tougher. I think I speak on behalf of the whole Assembly when I say that we need to protect our frontline workers.

I give a big shout-out to all the frontline workers, particularly our nurses as today is International Nurses Day and, on behalf of my son, all the paramedics.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I congratulate Chris Cleanthous for more than 35 years of dedicated service to Stokes Hill and Fort Hill Wharves. I was contacted by Alexander, his son, to let me know that Mr Cleanthous had spent the better part of three-and-a-half decades making sure that people had a great time when they were at Stokes Hill and Fort Hill Wharves during his time as director of C&G Management Services. It is fair to say that over that time Mr Cleanthous made an enormous contribution to the operations and development of these important facilities, which Territorians and tourists love to enjoy.

I thank him very much; 35 years is an incredibly long time. To diligently and with great passion dedicate the better part of his life to that service speaks highly of Mr Cleanthous' integrity, generosity of spirit and genuine care for our community, and his deep pride in the Northern Territory. The Territory is only as good as the people who love her, and it is clear that Mr Cleanthous has dedicated his life to making the Territory a better place. I warmly congratulate and thank him for 35 years of service. I know that he is not well at the moment, and we send all our thoughts, love and prayers to him. I reinforce the incredible legacy of service that he leaves behind and for which we are all tremendously grateful.

I recognise an exceptional young Territorian who is making history on the national sporting stage, Fynn Goat. He is a 14-year-old sailor who has been selected for the Australian Sailing National Youth Squad. Fynn's selection is historic. At just 14 years of age he has become the first Territorian ever chosen for the Australian Sailing National Youth Squad, earning his place in the formula kite foil discipline, one of the fastest and most technically demanding sailing classes in the world.

What makes Fynn's achievement even more remarkable is that he has reached this level without access to the clubs, coaches and competitive pathways that many young athletes interstate take for granted. Training out of Darwin's coastal waters, including Rapid Creek, Fynn has shown extraordinary discipline, resilience and self-motivation in pursuing his sport.

Formula kite foiling is now an Olympic sailing discipline, debuting in Paris and is set to feature at future games, including Brisbane 2032. Fynn's selection places him firmly within Australia's future Olympic pathway, which is a remarkable accomplishment for any young athlete, let alone one from such a remote base.

On behalf of the Northern Territory Government, I congratulate Fynn on his outstanding achievement and wish him every success as he represents Australia, and the Northern Territory on the national stage.

I draw attention to the achievements of two young Territorians whose dedication to football is gaining recognition well beyond the Northern Territory, Halle Wamara of Verdi Football Club and Anna Lambrinidis of Darwin Olympic Sporting Club. Halle and Anna were selected for and took part in the 2026 Emerging Matildas tournament in Melbourne, a nationally significant program designed to identify and develop Australia's future elite female footballers. Their selection places them among a highly competitive group of young athletes and reflects the standard they have reached through their persistence, commitment and hard work.

Their involvement at this level is a credit not only to their individual dedication but also to the vital role that local clubs play in nurturing talent and opening doors for young Territorians to compete on larger stages. Their achievements also remind us that behind every young athlete is a network of families, coaches and clubs providing guidance, encouragement and belief. That support is essential in helping young Territorians pursue their ambitions.

On behalf of the Northern Territory Government, I warmly congratulate Halle Wamara and Anna Lambrinidis on their achievements to date and wish them continued success as they proudly represent the Northern Territory in their sporting journeys.

I honour the life and contribution of John Pepperill, a true legend of Northern Territory football and a much-loved member of our community. I had the privilege of knowing Johnny and I will always cherish the conversations we shared. He had a warm smile and true heart of green and gold.

John, widely known as Mr Magic, was one of the Territory's finest Aussie Rules footballers. He was admired for his exceptional skills, sportsmanship and natural flair on the field. His ability to take a high mark, glide through traffic and create time and space where there seemed to be none, captivated crowds across the Top End and Central Australia. His footwork and instinct were exceptional, shaped in part by his early success as a Golden Gloves boxing champion. His style of play brought excitement and pride to all who watched him. He was quite simply a player people came to see.

John's achievements were outstanding. He won the Nichols Medal in 1969 and 1970 with St Mary's in the NTFL and the Minahan Medal in 1967–68 with Pioneer in Central Australia. They are two of the highest individual honours in Territory football. He earned national recognition as an all-Australian at the 1969 North Australian Championships. He also proudly represented Australia at the 1975 National Aboriginal Sports Carnival.

In 2023 he was inducted into the AFL Northern Territory Hall of Fame, an honour that placed him among the greats of Territory football. It was at that Hall of Fame dinner on the oval at TIO Stadium where I first met Johnny and we were friends ever since.

After we had a great chat at the dinner, I took Johnny out to lunch at Cool Spot. It was a special moment that I will always remember. We spoke about his journey, his love of the game and the many people and communities that shaped his life. What stood out to me most was his humility; despite all he achieved, he remained grounded, warm and generous in spirit. He carried that honour with quiet pride, never losing sight of what mattered most to people and community.

Beyond the field Johnny Pepperill was a proud Territorian whose impact extended far beyond football. He helped shape the identity and spirit of the game in the Northern Territory and inspired generations of young players who followed in his footsteps.

I was shocked and saddened to learn of his passing just before Christmas. I called his daughter Linda in absolute disbelief to offer my sincerest and heartfelt condolences.

There is no question that his loss is deeply felt, and at the AFL Awards night earlier this year I acknowledged his passing.

People remember not only what he did on the field but also how he inspired them and made them feel proud and connected. Johnny Pepperill leaves a legacy that will endure, not just in the record books or on the honour boards, but in the stories he shared, the memories held and the lives he touched along the way. We can never forget his big smile.

On behalf of the Assembly and the Northern Territory Government, I extend my sincerest condolences to his daughter Linda Pepperill and all his family, friends, former teammates and everyone whose lives he touched.

John will be greatly missed. May his legacy as Mr Magic continue to inspire future generations.

One outstanding young Territorian, who is representing our Territory on the national stage, is Niesha Casimiro. She has been selected for the Australian under-18 squad touring India. This is an extraordinary achievement and a significant milestone for any young athlete, particularly one developing her talent in the Territory. Competing overseas will test both skill and character. It is an invaluable experience that will help shape Niesha's future, whether at the elite level of her sport or as a role model for young Territorians who aspire to follow a similar path.

Niesha's achievements highlight the quality of the sporting talent in the Northern Territory and demonstrates that young Territorians can compete and succeed on the national and international stage. I acknowledge the role of her family, her coaches and the local sporting community who have supported her development to help make this possible.

On behalf of the Northern Territory Government, I congratulate Niesha Casimiro on her selection in the Australian under-18 squad, and wish her every success on her tour as she represents both Australia and the Northern Territory with pride.

I recognise and congratulate the outstanding Territorians honoured at the Surf Life Saving Northern Territory Awards of Excellence held at Wharf One restaurant in Darwin on Saturday 18 April. With my colleagues Hon Jinson Charls and Clinton Howe and as Patron of the Darwin Surf Life Saving Club, it was a privilege to see firsthand the passion, professionalism and depth of commitment within this organisation and across its clubs.

This year's awards celebrated individuals whose service and excellence helped keep Territorians and visitors safe along our coastline and our waterways. The recipients were Surf Life Saver of the Year, Lee Shearer; Volunteer of the Year, Samantha Ratley; Athlete of the Year, Nathan Gibson; Official of the Year, Beryl Edwards; Educator of the Year, Steven Krohn; Youth Surf Life Saver of the Year, Lewis Smythe; Youth Athlete of the Year, Cooper Smythe; Youth Volunteer of the Year, Asheton Bayard-Hewitt; Individual Commendation, Jayna Gordon; Team Commendation, Lee Shearer and Sam Edwards; Team Commendation, Silver Medallion Aquatic Rescue; and President's Award, Meg Irvine.

I congratulate everyone for their individual excellence and for being part of the surf lifesaving community in the Northern Territory, across Casuarina, Mindil and the Gove Peninsula. It is demanding work, and they truly are unsung heroes. It was a wonderful night. On behalf of the Northern Territory Government, I send my sincerest congratulations and heartfelt thanks to everyone.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge International Nurses Day and recognise the incredible contribution nurses make to our community across the Northern Territory.

Nursing is more than a profession; it is a calling built on compassion, strength, patience and care. Every nurse supports Territorians through some of the hardest and most important moments in their lives. They are there when our babies are born; when families are grieving; and when our people are sick, frightened, injured or needing support. So much of what nurses do happens quietly behind the scenes, but the impact of their work is felt in every hospital ward, clinic, remote health centre, aged-care home and community across the Northern Territory.

In the Northern Territory, nurses work in unique and some of the most challenging conditions in the country. From our major hospitals through to remote communities, nurses are often on the front line, delivering care in environments that can be demanding, isolated and, at times, incredibly tough, yet they continue to show up for Territorians with professionalism, kindness and dedication. I acknowledge the work of nurses in remote Aboriginal communities across Central Australia and the bush. Many nurses travel long distances, spend time away from their families and work around the clock to make sure our communities have access to quality healthcare and support. Their contribution is enormous and often does not receive the recognition it deserves.

International Nurses Day is an opportunity for all of us to pause and thank them for the care they provide, the sacrifices they make and the compassion they show every day.

As policymakers and leaders we all have a responsibility to support nurses properly through better workforce planning, safer staffing levels, strong conditions, housing, professional support and investment in our health system. If we want a healthier Territory we must value and invest in the people who care for Territorians every day.

To all nurses across the Northern Territory, thank you. Your work matters deeply, your contribution is valued, and the Territory is a better place because of you. To our nurses in the hospitals, the Aboriginal medical services, the private practices and, importantly, our hardworking nurses' unions, thank you.

The nursing awards took place over the weekend, but every nurse in the Territory is a winner. They do an amazing job, and it is important to recognise their amazing contribution.

I support Legal Aid NT and the important role it plays across the Northern Territory's justice system. If we are serious about law and order, we must also be serious about properly funding every part of the justice system—not just police and prisons, but also courts, Legal Aid, Aboriginal legal services, rehabilitation and early intervention.

The reality is that Legal Aid NT is under enormous pressure. In 2024–25 baseline Northern Territory Government funding for criminal law services was about $6.3m. On top of that, additional funding had to be provided through Treasurer's advances, including $5.2m for service delivery continuity and another $3.5m linked to growing justice system demand pressures. During our time in government we allowed Legal Aid NT to seek Treasurer's advances and funding outside the budget cycle to ensure it could continue operating and delivering services without the risk of running out of funding and Territorians being denied access to justice.

Despite this, demand for criminal law duty services continues to grow, matters are becoming more complex and operational costs continue to rise. As a result of these pressures Legal Aid NT was forced to reduce parts of its criminal law services in late 2025, including limiting support for many people who are not in custody.

This should concern every member of this parliament because when people cannot access legal representation the pressure does not disappear; it flows directly into courts, delays proceedings, increases strain on staff and impacts the overall functioning of the justice system. However, instead of acknowledging the reality that the CLP government has effectively reduced funding to Legal Aid NT by about 20%, the Attorney-General attempted to criticise and blame the service trying to hold the justice system together under increasing pressure.

Legal Aid supports Territorians through some of the hardest moments in their lives. It assists vulnerable people, people experiencing domestic and family violence, people living with disadvantage and many Territorians across communities who would otherwise have little or no access to legal support. Justice should not depend on how much money someone has in their bank account. Legal Aid is not an optional extra; it is an essential service that helps uphold fairness, access to justice and the integrity of the Northern Territory legal system.

To the staff, lawyers and advocates at Legal Aid NT, thank you for your work. You continue to work under increasing pressure for the Territory's communities, and we recognise and value that.

Last Sunday was Mother's Day. I acknowledge all the mothers in parliament, the aunties, nannas, sisters, cousins and foster carers—every person who fulfils that role or function as a mum and provides care to young children in the Northern Territory. It is important to acknowledge the role that mums play, and I thank them. It is definitely not an easy job for people who take on that role. Thank you to all the Territory mums and caregivers for the amazing work you do every day. I hope everyone had a wonderful Mother's Day.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I will finish my adjournment speech from 5 May about my visit to Nauiyu and Palumpa.

During my visit I met nurse Tilly Todd-Hunter, who is doing an exceptional job in the new clinic space after the old clinic experienced severe flood damage, and nurse Georgia, who as well as doing her duties had been taking care of all the community dogs awaiting the return of their families.

At the barbecue I also met the teacher who is working at the temporary top camp school, ensuring that the kids can continue their education while their school is being re-established.

On my visit I spoke with Liam Bentley, Marli De Castro, Sarah Gotch, Dee Winters, Daniel Tedcastle and Michelle who are part of the wider surge workforce team which has worked tirelessly to restore this community. I thank all those involved in the recovery process for their commitment.

Although this recovery is by no means over, I can attest to the relief of being back in your own home after a flood. By the end of last week, we expected all houses in the bottom camp to be restored. Although there is still more work to be done to repair damaged infrastructure such as the store and cleaning out the school and clinic, we are pleased to see this community returned and a shift to long-term recovery beginning.

Likewise, for Nauiyu the road to recovery will be a long one. Our government has committed significant resources to assist in the necessary steps to ensure the community is cleaned up, with a plan for a more secure and certain future.

I look forward to continuing to work with communities and the flood recovery coordination unit to build our communities back stronger and more resilient than before.

I put on the record recognition for some amazing, incredible professional ladies in our centre of the universe, Katherine. Last week the NT News Woman of the Year Awards was held at Mindil Beach Casino. These awards recognised professional leaders and change-makers in their professional field or social circles, recognising their dedication and the contribution they have made to our community. These women are outstanding in our community and an inspiration in the work they do.

Jenny Duggan, recognised in the Angels Among Us category, is just that. Jenny Duggan OAM was recognised for her selfless and enduring dedication to keeping our beautiful Katherine riverbanks clean, removing hundreds of kilograms of rubbish over many years. Jenny was also recognised as our NT Senior Australian of the Year 2026 and went to Canberra for the Australia Day Awards. She has also been on many community groups and is a Neighbourhood Watch advocate, dedicating a lot of time over many years to sporting clubs, not only when her children were little but also through her grandchildren and the Golden Oldies Rugby in Katherine.

The second amazing lady, in the Champion of Sport category, is our incredible Emma Robertson. Emma who works full-time also puts in as much time as a volunteer with Katherine Motorsports—speedway. Emma is the club secretary and there is nothing or no-one that Emma does not know. She has volunteered for seven years and is always striving for excellence with Katherine Speedway. Under Emma's leadership speedway is in the process of developing an app for all the go-to info for speedway. Emma was also instrumental in the five awards Katherine Speedway recently received at the NT Motorsports Awards 2026, and Emma herself won Administrator of the Year and Club Person of the Year. These are prestigious awards. Emma should be congratulated for all she does for the speedway in our town.

The third amazing woman is Annabel Curtain. The other half of the Katherine Outback Experience with her husband, Tom, Annabel is an exemplary leader and instrumental in their award-winning business renowned for the incredible shows put on for tourists. The growth this business has made over the last 10 years is fantastic. Katherine Outback Experience is well known across Australia and was inducted into the Hall of Fame category at the awards. Annabel is on the board of Tourism NT and chairs its marketing team. Katherine Outback Experience travels for seven months of the year and comes back to our amazing town for the Dry Season. Annabel is kept busy with the incredible show, involving many animals—dogs, goats and ducks—and Tom singing on the back of a horse. It truly is a show not to be missed when travelling the country.

I could not be prouder of these trailblazing women who go above and beyond for our town and put it on the map for all the right reasons. The centre of the universe is surely alive and well.

I give a big shout-out to all the nurses across the Territory, especially those under the leadership of Executive Director Renae Daniel at Katherine Hospital. Jen, my electorate officer, delivered some goodies to the emergency department, the Jack Roney Ward and the kids' ward. I shout out to all the nurses at the hospital in Katherine; thank you for your dedication and the hard work you do every day. Nurses do a lot of heavy lifting and carry the burden of a lot of the health issues we have across the Territory. This is a day to recognise them and celebrate them in many ways.

Mr BURGOYNE (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I remember a valued and much-respected Territorian, Loraine Braham. From our team to Loraine Braham's family and friends, I give our deepest condolences and respect. This includes her late husband, Graeme; daughter, Michelle; son, Peter, who sadly passed away in 2023; grandchildren, Samantha, Leah, Kasey and Finn; and great-grandchildren, Lachlan and Sophie.

It was a privilege to attend and speak at Loraine's state memorial last month. It was a true celebration of her incredible life. I thank her loved ones for giving me the opportunity to speak. Her daughter, Michelle, and you, Madam Speaker, shared heartfelt stories and fond memories of Loraine. We also heard some great memories from Loraine's best friend of 63 years, Mary Blaiklock, who was also my principal when I was a young boy at Braitling Primary School. Alice Springs really is a small place.

Loraine was a true Territorian whose love and advocacy for the Northern Territory, particularly Central Australia, was fierce and unwavering. It would be easy to pigeonhole Loraine as a politician and a former Speaker, but she was much more than that. She was a teacher and principal at Braitling Primary School. She was the first principal of Sadadeen School. She was a short-term opal miner, a local councillor, a hardworking local member, a dedicated wife and mother, a trailblazer and a pioneer. She was the first woman from Central Australia to hold a ministry, the first female Speaker of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and the first Central Australian female member of the parliament.

Loraine was dedicated, loyal and loved. She was born and raised elsewhere, but with a lifetime of love for the Territory, particularly Central Australia. She left an indelible mark which will be forever remembered. She cared deeply about her community.

Loraine made a lasting mark during her time as Speaker of the Assembly from 1997 to 1999 and again from 2001 to 2005. Loraine introduced the sin bin, a concept well known by opposition members. As she explained it in her retirement speech:

> *… you would evict people for one hour rather than a whole day because I remember at the time there were only seven members of the opposition … In this circumstance if you threw out one member of the opposition for a whole day, it would probably be rather disastrous and not very democratic.*

She remembered her time as Speaker fondly, and it certainly was not dull. One of the highlights for her, though, was the sittings held in Alice Springs for the first time to celebrate the 25th anniversary of self-government. Loraine told the parliament at those historic sittings at the Alice Springs Convention Centre:

> *We are Centralians and, although we are Centralians, we are also proud to be Territorians. We need to bear in mind that the Territory parliament is for everyone—every Territorian—not just for the people who can access it quickly in Darwin.*

Alice Springs and Central Australia were clearly where her heart was, and her parliamentary career was liberally peppered with her wins for the Red Centre. Among them was construction of the Convention Centre and her passionate championing of the then Alice–Darwin railway project.

Loraine was also a former Member for Braitling. I will always remember her fondly as an incredibly strong and dedicated advocate for the good people of Alice Springs and Central Australia, and a powerful voice for our community.

On 12 June 2008 Loraine Braham delivered her retirement speech to parliament. She said:

> *It has been a fruitful and full life …*
>
> *…*
>
> *We do not always get what we want but in my life experience you hope you give as much as you get.*

Loraine certainly did and more.

I express my sincere condolences to Loraine's family, her loved ones and everyone who is grieving her loss. It was a privilege to know Loraine. She has left a lasting legacy in Alice Springs and across the Northern Territory. Loraine showed us how to live with purpose, lead with courage, embrace every opportunity and face life with strength and determination, even during the toughest of times. Loraine Braham will be greatly missed by so many and she will never be forgotten.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I congratulate and thank all the volunteers, the committee and everyone who attended the annual Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival. It was a fantastic event for the whole community and it was terrific to see the incredible turnout from across the Top End in Nightcliff on the weekend.

I was proud to sign on as a financial sponsor this year to help ensure that this much-loved event continues to inspire our arts and general local community.

I was also proud to continue the great tradition as the Member for Nightcliff by running the sand sculpture competition, a key feature of the Seabreeze event. This goes back to the original festival in 2005 when the then Member for Nightcliff Jane Aagaard supported the competition. This was followed by the previous Members for Nightcliff Natasha Fyles and Kat McNamara. Like so much of what we do in this place, you will not find anything in a job description about running a sand sculpture competition, but it is the best part of the role to be out there involved in and supporting our local community.

There were many fantastic entries this year. There were scale models of Nightcliff and Rapid Creek with a full roadmap, water towers, the jetty and the bridge. There were crocs, hippos, intricate sandcastles and so many other fantastic entries from a great range of ages. Thank you to everyone who participated and got involved. It truly was a fantastic activity.

I also had the great honour of being the emcee for the dance stage on Sunday afternoon. You may be shocked to know that I do not come from a line of incredible dancing pedigree, but it was a fantastic experience. A diverse and entertaining set of dance groups performed, including Dance Construct; Darwin Line Dancers; Tara Academy Darwin; Corrugated Iron Youth Arts; Igen Mason; the BGs (Baby & Guardian Grooves); the Tamil Society NT; and Dream Team, the Korean cultural group. There was a wide range of ages and abilities; everyone was out there having a go and thoroughly enjoying themselves.

This event is valued by our whole community, and is the best celebration of arts and culture. Most importantly, it is all Territory homegrown performers. It is wonderful to see an event like this bring so many people together from different walks of life. It is incredibly important to have these kind of events and come together as a community to celebrate something positive and special. This was Darwin and the Top End at their best.

I give a massive shout-out to all the volunteers; the crew; the performers; everyone I worked with on the dance stage, including Bryn, Marita, Eve and Matt; and all those behind the scenes who make it happen every year.

A special mention goes to all the dance mums who were supporting on Mother's Day. Thank you for everything that you do.

The Seabreeze Festival is a must-see event in Nightcliff. It deserves to be supported by all levels of government to ensure that it is a permanent fixture on the Top End events calendar.

I had a ball, from the sand sculptures to the dance stage, and I cannot wait to be back again next year.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I will speak on three matters that remind us why we are here to serve, advocate and stand beside people in our community when they need support. These are real experiences from the Sanderson electorate. They reflect hardship, resilience, kindness and the importance of persistence.

The first concerns Mr Peter Windle, a valued member of our community. Peter is someone who quietly gives back. He volunteers with senior groups, attends the Sanderson Men's Group at my electorate office and is always willing to support others.

In February 2025 Peter came to my office after learning the home he rented would be sold. Despite being on the housing register for seven years, suitable accommodation was not available. At nearly 70 years of age and facing health challenges, Peter found himself living in his car during the Darwin Build-Up. Even during this difficult time, Peter continued caring for an elderly friend who was unwell, helping her attend medical appointments and supporting her day to day.

I am pleased to say that through continued advocacy, collaboration and persistence, Peter has now moved into accommodation in Bellamack. I thank the Member for Blain and his office for the collaborative work to support Peter. It is a positive outcome, but it also reminds us of the importance of safe and stable housing.

The second matter involves Marie and Carla, constituents who endured years of distressing antisocial behaviour next door to their home. When I first met Carla during the campaign, she was caring for her daughter and her ageing mother, Marie. They were exhausted, frightened and feeling helpless. For nearly 18 months my office worked closely with the department of Housing, police and the responsible minister's office to ensure that their concerns continued to be heard. Despite setbacks and frustration, Marie and Carla kept going. They continued reporting incidents, gathering evidence and standing up for their family's safety. My electorate office supported them throughout this process.

I am pleased to report that the tenants involved in this antisocial behaviour recently moved out of that address. Not long after, Marie and her granddaughter visited my office with flowers as a gesture of thanks. She said that she had a peaceful Easter weekend, after a long time. It was a simple but deeply meaningful moment and a reminder that advocacy matters and restoring peace to a family home can change lives.

The third matter speaks to the strength of community in Wagaman. Residents came together after months of alleged crime and antisocial behaviour in their neighbourhood. Many were emotionally exhausted. Some sat in my office in tears, speaking about the impact it was having on their families and sense of safety. They did not give up. I did not give up, and I stood up for my constituents. They supported one another, continued reporting incidents and worked together with determination and resilience.

Through the persistence of these residents, along with support from the Minister for Police, the minister for Housing and the Minister for Children and Families, the problem was addressed. Now those residents in Wagaman, the people I represent, are having quiet nights.

These three matters are different, but they share a common thread—resilience, community and the importance of standing beside people through difficult times. They also remind us that although systems sometimes move slowly, advocacy, persistence and community matter.

I thank the staff involved from NT Police, the department of Housing and the Department of Children and Families; my electorate officer; and, most importantly, the residents themselves for their patience, strength and courage.

At the heart of this is a simple truth: every person deserves to feel safe, be heard and have a place that they can truly call home.

I will update the Assembly on activities, events and initiatives across the Sanderson electorate.

I acknowledge the individuals and organisations who continue to make our community strong, connected and compassionate. It is a privilege to serve a community where volunteers, educators, community leaders and families work tirelessly to support, include and empower others.

Supporting not-for-profit organisations and grassroots groups remains an important part of my role as the local member. These organisations often step forward first in times of need and continue to provide connection, support and opportunity across our community.

Since we last met I have been proud to support a range of organisations through raffle prizes, sponsorships and community contributions. These include Breast Cancer Voice and its upcoming forum; Darwin Visual Arts through the Deckchair Cinema fundraiser; the Chung Wah Society's Chinese New Year celebrations; Neighbourhood Watch and its Safety Expo; Goodstart ELC Eaton and Bowling with a Disability through their Mother's Day raffles; Wagaman Primary School with Meaningful Maths packs; and the Darwin Dog Obedience Club with a club-branded marquee.

This support is strengthened through collaboration. I acknowledge my colleagues in the northern suburbs CLP team, the Members for Wanguri, Casuarina and Karama. Together we have supported initiatives, including ground signage sponsorships for the South Darwin Rabbitohs Rugby League Club; Primavera Soccer; and the Chillax soccer team which were runners-up in this year's Multicultural Soccer Tournament.

These are more than sponsorships; they are investments in participation, inclusion and community pride, recognising the important role that sport plays in bringing people together across cultures and generations.

NT Legacy coordinated a Mother's Day high tea on 8 May. I thank the Member for Wanguri for attending this event where about 60 Defence widows, families and volunteers came together. NT Legacy provides extraordinary support to Defence families. I particularly acknowledge Joan Mettam, affectionately known as the 'Lunch Lady'. Joan, a widow and a former member of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service,

continues to dedicate her time to supporting others through organising luncheons and ensuring widows feel connected and cared for. I was proud to nominate Joan for the NT News Woman of the Year Award in the Angels Among Us category. She was one of the finalists. Congratulations, Joan.

I recently had the honour of supporting important ceremonies at Marrara Christian College, Sanderson High School, Anula Primary School, Wagaman Primary School and Wulagi Primary School. These Anzac Day ceremonies reflected respect, reflection and strong community values. I was pleased to provide a commemorative book to each school, supporting an understanding of service, sacrifice and community responsibility among our young people.

I also acknowledge Sanderson High School Captain Rhiannon, who capably delivered my address in my absence. Her leadership and composure were a credit to her school and community.

The Sanderson community room in the electorate office continues to be a highly valued space for meetings, planning sessions and annual general meetings. Following feedback from community members, and at the request of Ian Harkness from Riding for the Disabled, we have now installed a smart TV with wi-fi capability to support presentations, virtual meetings and small conferences. It is a modest but meaningful improvement that will benefit many local groups using the facility.

The Sanderson Seniors Morning Tea also continues to grow, with our April gathering exceptionally well attended. We welcomed Micha and Elina from Darwin Community Legal Service and Craig from Elder Abuse Action Australia, who provided valuable information and support to attendees.

It was my pleasure to launch the new Sanderson seniors information flyer, inspired by the contributions of Ken Cohalan OAM and his regular ‘Seniors Snippets’ shared with the electorate office. This resource will help seniors and families to better access available services and support.

Last month also marked our first Seniors Morning Tea without Uncle Vic Ludwig OAM. Uncle Vic was deeply respected and greatly loved within our community. I was honoured to attend his funeral, alongside his family, friends and Territorians celebrating his life and mourning his passing. His wisdom, warmth and presence are deeply missed across the Sanderson community.

These moments remind us of the strength of the community and how people come together in both celebration and sorrow to support one another.

I reaffirm my commitment to the people of Sanderson. I will continue to advocate for our community, support local organisations and work collaboratively to deliver meaningful outcomes. Sanderson is a community defined by generosity, resilience and connection, and it remains an honour to represent it in this House.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I celebrate and congratulate the organisers of the Never Never Festival held in the great electorate of Arnhem in Mataranka township over the weekend. It was a shame we did not get you up from Alice Springs.

Dr RAHMAN: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I draw your attention to the clock.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Fong Lim.

Ms UIBO: I would not want to speak about this for a minute, when I have a whole 10 minutes; thank you.

The festival was well organised and coordinated, and it was a ripper rodeo. I give a huge congratulations to the Mataranka Fishing, Sporting and Recreation Club which drove this year’s festival, particularly the rodeo. Some of the volunteers from Mataranka were there for about 16 hours preparing on the Saturday and into the rodeo night. About 1,500 people attended.

Mataranka is a small township, as some of you may know. Many people may have visited the beautiful Bitter Springs or the Mataranka Thermal Pool that have some of the most beautiful water to swim in. It is pristine. Both swimming areas are now officially open. I give a big thanks to the Parks and Wildlife teams for all the work after the big Wet Season. A few small crocodiles may have slipped in, but they made it safe just in time for the Never Never Festival. For the rest of the Dry Season hopefully people will be flocking to support the Never Never region and our Territory businesses.

I put on the record the phenomenal efforts from Darryl Chong, or ‘Chongy’ as he is fondly known. He originally came from Queensland and has been living and working in the NT and doing the rodeo circuit. He elevated

the rodeo to another level. He was super organised with supporting the community. He is now living and working in the region, which is awesome. He is a real go-getter. Chongy, you and your team, community and volunteers did an awesome job. You got a bunch of sponsors from not just Mataranka but also around the Northern Territory, particularly Katherine.

The festival started off with a deckchair cinema at Bitter Springs Cabins and Camping. That is a beautiful spot. I give my big appreciation and thanks to Michael and Glenys Somers who run that camping area next to Elsey National Park. It was bring-your-own chairs, grab a pizza and watch the movie *Australia*, which many people have seen.

The bushman's breakfast was hosted by the Little Roper Stock Camp. Anyone who has heard of Des Barritt knows that he is a great character in Mataranka. He is now Councillor Barritt; he represents the Never Never Ward on the Roper Gulf Regional Council. He does the best Johnny cakes. If anyone goes down for a weekend and gets the chance, go to the Little Roper Stock Camp—if you are lucky enough you can secure a spot; it is often super busy—which has farm animals and everything for the kids, and the Johnny cakes there are particularly delicious. Thanks, Des, for hosting that. I had the Johnny cakes at the market the next day.

Competitors specifically flew from Queensland to attend the Mataranka Rodeo; that is the type of connection and relationship, particularly from the place that Chongy hails from, it has to get a high calibre of competitors as well as the high level of Territory competitors. There are novice competitors too.

The juniors went early, riding the poddy calves. A big congratulations goes to Kade—the son of my electorate officer Jessie—who got third place. He spent most of his prize money on the lucky dip stall the next day. I do not know whether he took much of it home to Katherine, but it was awesome to see the young ones getting up and having a go with some of them who compete on the circuit. They are looking forward to the next rodeo as well.

There was live music and dancing. I had a little shimmy when I walked past, but I kept on the straight and narrow and walked straight out the gate. DJ Casey Bishop was putting on a great show.

The Mataranka Markets on Mother's Day started off with a beautiful church bush service. I give big appreciation to Barb Sullivan who is always there to support that service. There was a lovely little crowd for the church service. The markets had all the wonderful local gifts and food, hosted by the Mataranka Better Half Club. The club does some of the best cakes. I challenged myself. I took a gluten-free chocolate cake and it was delicious. If I had closed my eyes I would not have known it was gluten free, so there you go; the club members are that good at cake making. There were biscuits, brownies and all the delicious things that you want to treat yourself to on Mother's Day. I ate the cake before my kids came across to try to get it from me. I gave them some cookies and kept them happy in that sense, but I ate a whole slice of cake myself, which was my little treat.

A big thanks to all the sponsors. These types of community festivals and events do not run without the support of the community, as the Member for Nightcliff said, particularly those businesses that want great outcomes for their town, community and region. They get behind these events that are unique in some sense to the Territory.

Thanks to the Roper Gulf Regional Council staff. We were pulling out the tent and had about six kids all running around. Some of the staff came over to help us pop up the shade tent.

There are amazing people in the Never Never region and those who travelled there especially. I saw people from Darwin and community members and service providers from Ngukurr, so people travelled hundreds of kilometres to go to the Never Never Festival, particularly the rodeo. We have not had those types of numbers since COVID. I think the largest Mataranka Rodeo attendance I have seen as the local member in the last 10 years was about 2,000, and I reckon it was close to that with roughly 1,500.

There were many volunteers behind the scenes and those working with the food and the bar on the Saturday night were there for 16 hours; they were up early, setting up about 7.30 am at the markets to do all the local stalls as well. It is fantastic. That was the first Dry Season markets for the Mataranka tourism season, so if you are passing through, please spend locally.

We stayed at Mataranka Homestead to support Ben Moore and the family who have done it tough because of the floods. They have made the homestead look spick and span. If you get a chance to support local businesses in Mataranka, there are fantastic live music shows and whip cracking every weekend, so you will

not miss out. Go there, spend some money locally, go to a show, have a feed, go for a swim in the morning and buy some local arts and crafts or Johnny cakes at the Mataranka Markets. Please put some money back into the areas that were affected by the floods. We are still waiting on the drive market, of course, but if you can, dig deep and support each other.

I must acknowledge my electorate officers Vayda and Jessie who travelled down early on Saturday to make sure all our paraphernalia was set up. Jessie volunteered; she was doing nomination forms and helping to organise some of the competitors as well as having her son compete in the juniors and taking great photos right to the end. She and her husband, Tyler, then packed up the tent and off we went, ready for the next event the next morning. A big thanks to them for their special efforts.

It is not always that fun working on Mother's Day, but Jessie had her four kids with her and I had my two kids with me. I felt lucky to spend time with my kids this year—last year I missed out—be with Jessie's kids as well, enjoy the great Dry Season and think about how special it is to be a part of and support the Northern Territory and represent the great people of the Arnhem electorate.

Well done to everyone involved in the Mataranka Rodeo and Never Never Festival. Next year looks like it will be an even bigger and better year. I acknowledge and appreciate all the efforts and the sponsors who put in money to make a great event happen. I thank the volunteers, who are worth their weight in gold—Loretta and all the team.

The team of volunteers put together a great poster; interestingly, the only two photos on the poster are me and the Member for Katherine. It is quite a giggle if you want to see what AI did to both of us. Hopefully the Member for Katherine sees the funny side. I had a giggle to Des Barritt and said that if I am having a tough day in parliament, I will look at that poster to keep myself entertained. If anyone wants to see the pictures, get on and have a look at that, it was gold.

Mr EDGINGTON (Barkly): Madam Speaker, today on International Nurses Day we celebrate all nurses across the Northern Territory and thank them for the work they do in our hospitals, community centres, the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, mental health, aged care and in the many different areas where nurses work around the Territory. I thank them for their commitment, their compassion and the care they provide for Territorians 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Without our nurses and their dedication we would miss the care and compassion they provide to Territorians across the board. On International Nurses Day, I thank all our nurses for their service to Territorians.

On Friday night we had the Territory Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards. What a fantastic night. It was held at the Mindil Beach Casino Resort on the lawns at the back and the scenery and the weather were incredible. About 450 people attended. To see so many people there recognising the best of our nurses and midwives from around the Territory was fantastic. I put on the record my thanks because the awards shone a spotlight on the excellent work our nurses and midwives do and their compassion, professionalism and commitment to providing the services we have all become accustomed to. They are out there 365 days a year, 24 hours a day doing the job that some people do not want to do.

The winners of the 2026 Northern Territory Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards were outstanding and recognised for their amazing service to the Territory:

- National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre Nurse of the Year Award—Kelly Hosking, Sexual Health and Blood Borne Viruses Strategic and Policy Unit NT Health/Menzies School of Research

- Midwife of the Year—Kayla Kemp, remote outreach midwife, Big Rivers Region, NT Health

- NT Administrator's Medal for Lifetime Achievement—Prudence (Prue) Boylan, Sexual Assault Referral Centre Darwin, NT Health. This was an incredible achievement by Prue. The work that the Sexual Assault Referral Centre staff do in Darwin and in Alice Springs is just incredible. The work they do is extremely valued by everybody and it is one of those difficult areas to work in, but the staff continue to do an amazing job under the leadership of Prudence Boylan

- Enrolled Nurse of the Year—Natalie Firth, Outpatients Department, Gove District Hospital, East Arnhem Region, NT Health

- Rising Star – Early Career—Chloe Harris, Jack Roney Ward, Katherine Hospital, Big Rivers Region, NT Health

- Excellence in Education—Dean Blackney, CareFlight NT

- Excellence in Research/Quality Improvement—Kelly Hosking, Sexual Health and Blood Borne Viruses Strategic and Policy Unit, NT Health/Menzies School of Research

- Excellence in Aged and Residential Care—Sarah Campbell, Katherine Hostel, Australian Regional and Remote Community Services (ARRCS)

- Excellence in Leadership—Elizabeth Watkins, Diabetes Unit, Royal Darwin Hospital, Top End Region, NT Health

- Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANMF) NT Excellence in Rural and Remote Nursing/Midwifery—Thomas Rampal, Numbulwar Primary Health Centre, Big Rivers Region, NT Health

- Excellence in Primary Care, Public Health and Community Nursing/Midwifery—Kelly Hosking, Sexual Health and Blood Borne Viruses Strategic and Policy Unit, NT Health/Menzies School of Research

- Team Excellence Award—Alcohol and Other Drugs Central Australia (ADSCA) Clinic, Central Australia Region, NT Health; a fantastic achievement for ADSCA

- Client Appreciation Excellence Award (Individual or Team)—Madison Hebb, Midwifery Group Practice (Green Team), Royal Darwin Hospital, Top End Region, NT Health

- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurse or Midwife of the Year—Tammy Allyn Fernandes, Charles Darwin University Faculty of Health and Population and Primary Health Care, Top End Region, NT Health.

I thank not just the nurses and midwifery staff, but all the NT Health leadership teams and the people who organised these fantastic excellence awards. They did an incredible job. The important part of the night was recognising the outstanding commitment and service delivery from our nurses and midwives. Thank you very much for everything you do, and congratulations on your awards.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I honour several groups and individuals from my electorate.

From Goodstart Early Learning Moulden on Temple Terrace I thank Miss Indra for her quick thinking and prompt action in April. One of the children in the preschool room started coughing. The preschool room leader, Miss Indra, noticed and contacted the family. Mum arrived promptly and took the child to the doctor where it turned out to be an asthma attack, even though the child had never shown any signs of asthma before. Because of Miss Indra's quick thinking and care, the child got the support they needed straightaway. Goodstart Early Learning Moulden is proud to share that she has been recognised with a certificate for her effective communication and awareness. Moments like this remind us how important it is to stay observant and act early. Well done, Miss Indra, for your observance and quick thinking. Thank you.

I thank the Woodroffe Primary School Council and Chair Kat O'Donohue for writing to me recently to raise an important issue about bus services to and from Woodroffe Primary School. I was shocked to learn that prior to 2023 there was no school bus service to or from Woodroffe Primary School in the mornings or afternoons. Woodroffe students attempting to travel by bus in the morning must take bus 111 to Gray Primary School, cross the road and then board bus 72—which is a public service—to reach Woodroffe Primary. This process is unsafe and inappropriate for primary school-age children.

I thank Principal Kristy West for her strong advocacy at the time in 2023 which resulted in DIPL extending the afternoon route for bus 111 so that it started outside Woodroffe Primary School and continued past Sacred Heart Primary School, Gray Primary School, Driver Primary School and on to the interchange. However, the school still does not have a morning drop-off service. Students have to alight at Gray Primary and switch to a public service.

Thank you to Kat O'Donohue and the Woodroffe Primary School Council for writing to me. I will write to the DLI minister to advocate for the morning 111 bus to continue and end at Woodroffe Primary School to assist children getting to school.

I thank the graduating members of recruit constable squad 161 of the Northern Territory Police Force. You have chosen to take an oath to serve the King and keep his peace and, through him, the good people of this Northern Territory. There will be tough times ahead of you, but there will also be the camaraderie of your

fellow members. You will have the opportunity to do great good and help Territorians in ways which few others can do. I thank you for your service and look forward to seeing you around the Territory.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.