Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

15th Assembly



Parliamentary Record
Debates and Questions



Tuesday 20 May 2025

CONTENTS

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT 1885
Estimates Committee – Membership 1885
DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 1885
Serial 22 1885
VISITORS 1899
YouthWorX 1899
NOTICES 1902
DISTINGUISHED VISITORS 1903
Hon Willem Westra van Holthe 1903
Hon Christopher Pyne 1903
PETITION 1903
Petition No 11 – Securing Screen Territory Funding 1903
QUESTION TIME 1904
Community Safety 1904
Bail Laws 1905
Alcohol-related Assaults 1905
Territory Energy Link 1906
Police – Katherine 1907
Mineral Royalties – GEMCO 1908
Domestic Violence-related Assaults 1909
Cullen Bay Ferry Terminal 1909
Private Hospital – Maternity Services Closure 1910
Schools – Swimming Lessons 1911
Circuit Breaker Program 1912
Fines Recovery Unit 1913
North Australia Fire Information Service 1914
International Students and Skilled Migrants 1915
Casuarina Bus Interchange 1916
Casuarina Bus Interchange – Supplementary Question 1916
Public Housing – Crime 1917
DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 1917
Serial 22 1917
WATER AMENDMENT (ABORIGINAL WATER RESERVES) BILL 1937
Serial 21 1937
PAPER TABLED 1956
Members' Quarterly Fuel Transaction Report, Quarter 1 – January to March 2025 1956
MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE 1956
Ranger Programs in Northern Territory 1956
ADJOURNMENT 1972

Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT
Estimates Committee – Membership

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received nominations appointing the Members for Arafura, Drysdale, Fannie Bay, Johnston and Karama to the Estimates Committee.

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 22

Continued from 26 March 2025.

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

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, no Territorian should ever have their safety threatened—not at home, in public or anywhere, and certainly not by someone who claims to love them.

Domestic, family and sexual violence numbers are rising across Australia, but nowhere has its increase been as sharp, sustained or as devastating as in the Northern Territory. This crisis demands more than statements; it demands real leadership. As members of this Assembly we must stand together united in condemning domestic, family and sexual violence in the strongest possible terms.

We all know the devastating headlines, the faces of people who have been affected. Too many Territory women, children and families have been devastated by violence from someone they once trusted or still trust. These are not just stories; they are shattered lives, grieving communities and a system struggling to cope. Domestic, family and sexual violence is not confined by postcode, income or background; it is a widespread, life-threatening issue across the Territory. We all must do better stamp it out. I believe that we can.

Although the Labor opposition supports some of the amendments that are provided in this Bill, particularly in regard to the Victims Register and notifications, we cannot and do not support the mandatory sentencing provisions. That is because we have been listening to the experts from the frontline services who, unfortunately, day to day deal with the devastating impact of domestic violence. Those organisations and individuals made submissions to the scrutiny committee about this legislation.

The committee inquiry received 21 submissions. Every one of the 21 submissions opposed mandatory sentencing. It is hard to know whether the Attorney-General bothered to read the scrutiny committee report or the 21 submissions, given that she is forging ahead—as far as we can tell, because often we are not told about legislation until the last minute—with the legislation in its current form, which does not take on expert advice, particularly from the organisations that provided submissions. The Attorney-General either does not care or does not know that anybody working in the field of domestic violence will say that mandatory sentencing does not solve the problem. Many submissions said that it unfortunately can exacerbate the problem.

The CLP government is putting the lives of Territorians at risk by choosing to put mandatory sentencing in the legislation. Every domestic violence service provider and legal expert is against including mandatory sentencing in this legislation. Every frontline advocate who made a submission to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee told the CLP government not to proceed with the Bill in its current form. Unfortunately, as far as we know, those expert voices have been ignored.

The committee Chair, the Member for Wanguri, rubberstamped it on behalf of the government, despite the huge call from the experts to remove the mandatory sentencing provision from this Bill. No public hearings were held. All 25 members of this Assembly know that every day a Territorian is affected by domestic, family and sexual violence. It affects all our electorates and the communities we represent, but the committee held no public hearings and there was no direct consultation with victim–survivors and the very people affected by this legislation. Even the Attorney-General's Department could not provide data or evidence that the mandatory sentencing provision in this Bill would make a positive difference.

Clearly the CLP government ignores expert advice, blocks Territorians from speaking out and fails to provide any evidence and data to prove otherwise. It has decided to push forward with this element anyway. That is not leadership; it is negligence.

Here is what some of those who made submissions had to say about this Bill. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety said:

> *Our primary value to our stakeholders is our understanding of the evidence base about what works to reduce the risk of people who use violence. It is in keeping with that role that we raise our concerns about the Government's current position that incarceration will improve the safety of victim–survivors and significantly reduce the risk of ongoing violence.*
>
> *The evidence shows that improvements in safety come from investments outside of or alongside the criminal justice system. Our research shows that there is no evidence that the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing legislation in the NT will have positive impacts on, or improve the safety of, women, children and the broader community.*
>
> *Indeed, research from across Australia demonstrates imprisonment does not reduce recidivism and that short terms of imprisonment in particular can result in* increased *criminal behaviour.*

No to Violence, Australia's largest peak body dedicated to ending male family violence, had this to say:

> *Evidence suggests short-term incarceration can increase the likelihood of individuals committing crimes in the future, especially when they lack access to adequate behaviour change programs or interventions while incarcerated. Incarceration can exacerbate risk factors for violence, such as trauma, disconnection from support networks and financial stress.*
>
> *It is essential to recognise incarcerating someone does not necessarily stop their coercive and controlling behaviour.*

The NT Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) said in their submission:

> *It is known that mandatory sentencing increases incarceration, is costly and is not effective as a crime deterrent … NT Corrections systems are not equipped for increasingly high numbers of DSFV offenders generally and particularly for the increase of offenders on short sentences as a result of this amendment. NT Corrections facilities do not have suitable programs for DSFV offenders and as a result mandatory sentencing will not reduce offending. There is evidence that periods of incarceration can increase the chances of re-offending.*

The Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory said:

> *We hold serious concerns the proposed mandatory sentencing provisions will:*
>
> 1. *Disproportionately impact Aboriginal women;*
> 2. *Undermine judicial discretion;*
> 3. *Risk deterring victim–survivors from reporting;*
> 4. *Increase pressure on already-overcrowded correctional facilities;*
> 5. *Divert resources away from prevention, rehabilitation and victim support; and*
> 6. *Potentially increase the risk of harm or death to victims.*

I could continue reading the submissions the scrutiny committee received, but it is fair to say from this small but powerful sample that there is strong and consistent advice, thoughts and expertise from all quarters not to support the mandatory sentencing provision in this legislation. Mandatory sentencing for DV offences not only does not work but also can make things worse. Experts have seen and heard this.

The Labor opposition supports many aspects of this Bill. We support the measures that reflect best practice and enhance community safety, and we always will when it comes to representing Territorians. Based on expert advice, we cannot and will not support the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing.

It is beyond belief that the CLP government is pushing ahead with this—although we may be pleasantly surprised; it may move an amendment in consideration in detail to remove this provision, which we would support. It is frustrating that the CLP government refuses to listen to anyone, let alone the experts in the field. The CLP forges ahead with its plans thinking that it knows better than the people across the Territory who deal with DV day-in and day-out. Despite all the evidence of harm in our community and the anticipated harm

this amendment will cause to women and children, the government remains silent, which indicates to me that it will continue with this provision in the legislation.

This Bill introduces mandatory sentencing with no minimum term, meaning that someone who breaches a domestic violence order (DVO) could be jailed for just seven days. That is not long enough to access rehabilitation to change violent behaviour, for us to keep victims safe and for an offender to sit in a cell and grow more compassionate. It is, in fact, the opposite; seven days is long enough to sit in a cell to grow angrier and perhaps return home more dangerous.

There is no mechanism for these sentences to be served in alternative-to-custody programs or residential behaviour change facilities. If the government could speak about that it would be a great help. The real change happens in programs that are grounded in healing, not punishment. Absolutely people need to face the consequences, but there are already inconsistencies from the CLP government in many different areas whereby it does not follow through with that belief it has.

We need laws built on evidence and data that, dare I say, are led by experts. We need laws that empower victims and not just generate headlines for political purposes. We need genuine consultation, not just announcements. We need action, not posturing. The Bill in its current form is not what the Territory needs.

The government has spoken endlessly about root causes, yet it has failed to name one or address them. This Bill does not have the provisions that are needed.

Victim–survivors have been clear about what they need: safe, stable housing; financial independence; and access to community-based services and support. They do not want more punitive approaches, short sentences that do not have an impact but cost the taxpayer a lot of money and government spin.

Clara Mills from the Katherine Women's Information & Legal Service, among other domestic violence providers, urged the CLP government to act on the real drivers of violence by reducing the housing waitlist, addressing food insecurity and investing in essential services and enabling infrastructure across the Territory. She is right, and we have listened.

The CLP does not need to reinvent the wheel; the roadmap is already there, with the Coroner's 35 recommendations, the ICRO road map and the insights and advice of all the workers and experts on the front line.

This is an important change to ensure that victim–survivors have more protections, but when there are rushed laws that have not gone through a full process of scrutiny, that is where mistakes are made by government. The Labor opposition wants thoughtful reform that will create and promote community safety.

I welcome the government finally tabling this week Coroner Elisabeth Armitage's Inquests into the Deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood. The CLP has struggled to talk about these coronial findings, so this is a big step that the Labor opposition welcomes. The CLP says that it is implementing most of the recommendations, and I strongly encourage it to ensure that this work is done meaningfully. There is too much at stake to rush efforts, but there is also the mistake of not taking any action to the words said by government members. We know that any life lost to domestic, family and sexual violence is one too many.

The token efforts we have already seen from the CLP government will not make a long-term difference. If government members are honest about making a difference in domestic, family and sexual violence and stopping the crime associated with domestic violence for the sake of claiming political points—if it is meaningful, we will support it. We need to ensure that the CLP government is genuinely investing in these reforms because they will make that long-term difference needed in all our electorates across the NT. There is no quick fix or shortcuts, just hard effort which needs to be sustained to make a difference.

The CLP says that it will make life safer for many Territory women and children, including through funding for therapeutic culturally safe responses, more alternatives to custody and victim-centred trauma-informed justice pathways. We hope it continues that work and that there are not just words but action behind those words.

The CLP says that it is the government of action, and I urge it to prove this by not repeating the mistakes of CLP governments of the past and to ensure its work goes beyond repeating the catchphrases and slogans CLP members have said many times in the last few months.

The former Territory Labor government did a lot of work in this space, but not enough. Territorians cannot continue to die at the hands of their partners and have the CLP play political football with that. We want to ensure that any Territory government can build strongly on the previous work, not reinvent the wheel and, most importantly, listen to the experts in the field. We urge the government to listen to the experts and act on their advice; do not reinvent the wheel or stop engaging with, listening to and learning from organisations. If we are to make a difference, this is where it will happen.

The Safe, Respected and Free From Violence framework released by the Labor government in 2018 is a solid guidepost for continuing much-needed reform across the Northern Territory. We accompanied it with $70m in the 2024 budget, including an additional $30m over two years, to implement the second action plan and invest in health, justice and early intervention. The former Labor government funded men's behaviour change programs in Alice Springs and Wadeye and a pilot program in Katherine.

The CLP is proud that it has made an ongoing $36m a year commitment to tackling domestic, family and sexual violence. We welcome its commitment in this area, although it is not enough. Real reform will start when prevention measures are instigated, and that is where we want to see the CLP focusing more effort.

The latest crime statistics bear this out. In March 2025 there were 626 domestic violence-related assaults reported across the Territory—a jump of nearly 14% in just 12 months. In the seven months since the CLP came to office the Northern Territory has seen 4,481 DV-related assaults, 428 more than in the previous seven months, or an increase of almost 11%. Darwin's DV assaults are up by nearly 23% since the CLP took office. Double-digit increases have been recorded in Katherine, Tennant Creek and across regional areas.

I do not want to make this debate about statistics, but I made that contribution because those statistics were released on Friday. To do anything other than tell the true story would be disingenuous of the government. Clearly the story needs to be about the real horror and trauma experienced by too many Territory women and children in all the communities we represent. Statistics are an incredibly clinical way to look at this deeply troubling issue, but I used these statistics because the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence has quoted statistics multiple times. I hope she looks at those latest crime stats and works with her department on reducing DV harm. She has made big promises about turning that around.

We look forward to supporting these initiatives, particularly in our electorates but anywhere across the NT, if people benefit from real changes led by experts in the field to keep Territory women and children safe. I acknowledge that men can be victims of domestic, family and sexual violence as well. Alarmingly, the stats show that it is women and children who face the brunt of DV in our community.

I hope Minister Cahill is looking at the latest figures and realising that there are key areas requiring her complete focus if we are to end violence against women and children. We encourage the minister to focus on building strong and enduring partnerships, providing well-resourced prevention measures, taking evidence-based approaches and making targeted and sustained investment.

Six months ago I stood outside this parliament with my opposition colleagues and crossbench members, offering bipartisan support to lobby Canberra for needs-based funding. Since then there has been silence. Today is an opportune time to renew that call for us to all work together to secure that much-needed needs-based funding for the Territory so that all the people we represent can benefit from a reduction in domestic, family and sexual violence. Let us work to improve the response to and prevent crime and ensure that there are long-term community-led solutions. Let us ensure that our remote communities are not left behind and forgotten when it comes to investment. Let us ensure that we all work together so that every man, woman and child and their families are supported to live in safety and with dignity.

To all those who work in the legal services and organisations that pick up people, mop up the blood, wipe away the tears and help people who are at their most vulnerable and traumatised, particularly the women's safe houses and those frontline workers who see fellow Territorians at their lowest and their worst, thank you for the amazing work that you do. You do not just do that work once and you do not just do it in business hours; you do that work all the time, sometimes even in your private residence. We thank all those who work to keep the Territory safe.

We hope that the CLP government will listen to all those people and support the measures that will make a difference, not just over the next three-and-a-half years of this term, but as an enduring legacy of working together with the option of leaning on the opposition and the crossbench in a bipartisan way so that we will see the difference we need today happening tomorrow. We will keep fighting for people in the domestic, family and sexual violence sector and continue encouraging the government to listen to those experts to

provide the safety measures that will create a community that can once and for all stamp out domestic, family and sexual violence.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I proudly support the domestic and family violence reforms introduced by this government. These reforms mark a long overdue turning point in how we protect victims and hold repeat offenders to account.

I acknowledge my good friend the Attorney-General for her leadership in bringing forward this legislation and the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence who also leads the way in this space.

The Leader of the Opposition said that in the last seven months—she was cherrypicking statistics, which I enjoy seeing—the CLP has not done enough in this space. However, we are here to pass legislation that will make a change. We acknowledge that there is more work to be done, and that is why we will vote on and pass this Bill. That is our job.

Tackling domestic and family violence is never easy. It involves confronting some of the most traumatic, complex and emotionally charged issues we face as legislators. Through these reforms the minister has shown that the government is willing to do what is necessary to protect the most vulnerable members of our community. These are not easy issues to tackle, and this government is showing the courage to act where others stalled. In fact, we went backwards under the previous Labor government.

Domestic and family violence has plagued our communities and the system has let down victims for far too long. The system has spoken in soft words and had soft hands, while women—mostly women, although I acknowledge children and men too—have suffered, endured and in far too many cases lost their lives.

We all know the statistics, but behind every number is a name, a family and a life torn apart. According to the Northern Territory Police there has been a 117% increase in domestic and family violence-related calls over the past decade. This is not just a number; it is a staggering measure of pain, fear and trauma playing out in homes across the Territory.

Under the previous Labor government mandatory sentencing for domestic violence offenders was scrapped. What followed was nearly a decade of worsening abuse and rising fear. We saw the consequences of the soft-on-crime approach—more violence, breaches and women murdered by partners who should have been stopped.

Enough is enough. This government is drawing a line in the sand. Under these new laws we are restoring mandatory sentencing for repeat and serious breaches of domestic violence orders. This is not about being punitive for the sake of it; it is about community safety. That is not just tough talk; this is common sense because if the perpetrator is behind bars, the victim is safe. This is about telling perpetrators that the days of ignoring court orders and walking free are over. If you breach a DVO and cause or threaten harm, you will go to prison. The Minister for Corrections will find you a bed. If you previously breached a DVO and do it again, you will go to prison. If you repeatedly breach an order within a short period, you will go to prison.

This approach is backed by research. We know that a small proportion of repeat offenders are responsible for a large share of violent crimes. This is what criminologists refer to as the Pareto principle—the 80/20 rule. Roughly 20% of offenders are responsible for about 80% of the harm. These laws are designed to deal with those chronic offenders and high-risk individuals who do not just make a mistake but return to cause harm time and again. Mandatory sentencing targets them. It protects the community, reduces the risk of escalation and sends a clear message that if you break these laws or breach a DVO, there will be consequences.

A small but vocal number of critics have emerged—some legal organisations and commenters—who are more concerned about the rights of perpetrators than the safety of victims. I say to them: your priorities are backwards. Let me be clear that if your first instinct is to protect the abuser rather than the abused, you need to reassess your priorities.

This government is standing on the side of victims, and we do not apologise for that. It is not justice to let a violent partner breach an order and walk away with a slap on the wrist. It is not compassion to protect someone who has repeatedly ignored the court's authority and placed the victim in fear. It is not reform to maintain a system where women are being abused and murdered by men who are already on the police radar. These reforms are victim centred. They are designed to protect lives, not ideologies. I am proud to support a government that understands that.

These reforms do not just stop with sentencing. The Victims Register is being expanded to better support those at risk so that survivors will be notified if the offender breaches parole or electronic monitoring. Previously the register could notify victims only if the offender was sentenced to imprisonment, and that is not good enough. Under our changes, victims will now be alerted to breaches of electronic monitoring, conditions of parole, suspended sentences and more. This is about empowering victims with information and letting them take the necessary precautions to protect themselves when a threat is emerging. This is common sense. This is real-time protection and a clear message to victims that they are no longer being left in the dark. It is a simple principle—one which has been neglected for far too long—that victims deserve to know.

We are also increasing the victims of crime levy so that those found guilty of offences still contribute to the support services victims so desperately need. It is a fairer system that puts the burden where it belongs—on the perpetrator, not the victim.

Let us not forget how these laws stack up nationally. The Northern Territory is now clearly one of the strongest jurisdictions in Australia when it comes to mandatory domestic violence sentencing. Only New South Wales has something comparable, and even its regime is more limited, requiring that an act of violence accompany the breach. Ours captures a broader set of dangerous behaviours and gives courts the tools to deal with them appropriately.

This is what real leadership looks like. We are not waiting for another tragedy, turning a blind eye or offering words without action; we are getting on with the job of protecting Territorians. We are standing up for those who have been unheard and unprotected for far too long.

I commend the minister for bringing forward these strong reforms. The Northern Territory is now leading the nation in how we respond to domestic and family violence.

Let us not forget the lives lost and the lives still at risk of domestic, family and sexual violence. This legislation is not just legal reform; it is a moral obligation. My colleagues in this Chamber all know of someone directly or through friends who has been affected by domestic violence. It could be a friend, neighbour or family member. These reforms are not abstract; they are real and will save lives. They will give victims hope and offenders a reason to think twice. I urge all members of this Assembly to support these reforms with the seriousness and respect they deserve.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I support the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, Serial 22, brought to the House by the Attorney-General, as the amendments in this Bill ensure that in certain circumstances the court must sentence an offender guilty of a breach of a DVO to a term of actual imprisonment. For far too long victims were left behind by the previous Labor government, which removed mandatory sentencing for domestic violence offences. This amendment Bill restores our commitment to those victims.

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007*, the Domestic and Family Violence Regulations 2008, the *Victims of Crime Rights and Services Act 2006*, the Victims of Crime Rights and Services Regulations 2010 and the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006*.

Under the new mandatory sentencing regime, the court must now sentence an offender to an actual term of imprisonment when an offender breaches an existing DVO and harm or a threat of harm was involved against the victim. There is also an actual term of imprisonment for an offender who breaches their DVO and has a prior breach of a DVO or when the offender has repeatedly breached their DVO in a short period—28 days.

I extend the offer of the hearing test that the Member for Karama always offers the Labor members because—I repeat—these are existing DVOs and harm and offenders who have prior breaches and repeated breaches of their DVO.

Under Labor's watch over the past eight years the Territory experienced an extremely high level of domestic violence assaults, with a number of women murdered by their partners. Many victims live day-in and day-out with domestic violence. In the past too many of these victims paid a high price with their life. This is a tragedy for the deceased and their family members.

By specifying a reduced timeframe we will see perpetrators removed from the family unit earlier so that no further harm can be done to the victims.

The Bill amends section 8 of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* to allow for a modernised electronic application process aimed at speeding up these applications.

The Bill also increases the victims levy and provides more funds for the use of victim services. The opposition and crossbench members are always advocating for more funds in this space.

These changes show our government's commitment to putting the rights of victims and their families first. Last week the budget was handed down with—a record by the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence—ongoing funding of $36m a year to address domestic, family and sexual violence for new, expanded and ongoing programs to prevent domestic violence. This incudes the Circuit Breaker Program; co-responder early intervention with NT Police; offender programs in prisons; domestic, family and sexual violence resource centres; remote safe houses; programs in prison for people who committed domestic, family and sexual violence; specialist domestic violence courts; and programs in community settings for people committing domestic, family and sexual violence.

For too long victims had no voice. It is time for our government to listen to them and act on their behalf. These changes show our government's commitment to putting their rights first.

In eight years under the Labor government domestic and family violence increased by 81% across the Territory. We need to make sure programs are effective in reducing and preventing domestic violence.

This government is committed to reducing crime and placing the rights and needs of the victims first, including those who are victims of domestic violence. I thank the whole of government for working together to put these victims first. I thank the Attorney-General for bringing in these amendments.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, domestic, family and sexual violence is a heartbreaking and pressing issue which affects many in our community.

Each time we speak of statistics we must never lose sight of their true meaning. Every number represents someone who was deeply loved, who mattered and who brought value to the lives of others. Each statistic is a life taken from us too soon. We cannot ignore the devastating reality that more than eight women in the Northern Territory have allegedly been murdered as a direct result of domestic violence. These lives were stolen, and those families now carry the weight of the unimaginable loss.

I support the provisions that strengthen notification requirements, ensuring victims are informed when perpetrators are released from prison. This is a critical step in prioritising safety and peace of mind.

I strongly endorse the increase in the victims levy, a measure that not only reinforces accountability but also provides vital resources to support those who are most affected by domestic violence.

We owe it to the women in the Northern Territory and every individual affected by this epidemic to act decisively, be bold and deliver meaningful change. This is not just a legislative amendment; this is a call for action for justice and safety in our communities. DV is an insidious disease. It is treatable and preventable, and it continues to plague our communities. Over the last three weeks I have personally intervened by contacting the police and emergency services to respond to safety concerns in my community relating to community members calling out desperately for help. This is the grim reality we must commit to change, collectively and resolutely.

A world where domestic violence is eradicated must be more than a vision; it must be a shared mission for a world where women and children live free from domestic violence, jealousy and aggression are never tolerated and respect and equity prevail. This is a future I am passionate about and dedicated to building alongside the resilient members of our domestic and family violence sector and our community. Together we can make this vision a reality. To achieve this we must continue to support the domestic violence sector. We must empower those at the forefront to lead, innovate and deliver meaningful programs and solutions.

Violence is not inherited; it is learned. This understanding must guide our approach, addressing domestic violence at its root causes and making bold investment in primary prevention. That means dismantling systemic barriers, tackling discrimination, promoting gender equality and fostering an environment where violence is never normalised nor excused.

The coronial inquest into the tragic deaths of four Aboriginal women yielded 35 vital recommendations outlined in the Coroner's report. These recommendations provide a clear and actionable pathway to preventing domestic, family and sexual violence across the Northern Territory. Implementing these recommendations must be an urgent priority, and a response must be led by local voices, specialist services and, critically, Aboriginal communities and victim–survivors. We must not repeat the same deep harms caused by the Northern Territory intervention; instead we must focus on providing the necessary support, resources and funding to bolster a specialist workforce capable of driving these changes.

The Legislative Scrutiny Committee's examination of the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Bill revealed valuable insights, with 21 well-researched submissions from stakeholders, experts and victim–survivors. Those contributions were invaluable; however, it is deeply disappointing that the committee did not hold a public hearing. By denying a platform for public testimony, the voices of victims, frontline workers and community members were sidelined. This omission falls short of best-practice consultation, undermining this Bill and the trust of our community. Public hearings are not a procedural luxury. They are essential to robust legislative processes. They provide a space for lived experience, actionable recommendations and crucial expertise to strengthen and inform our laws.

I must address a grave concern within this Bill—that is, the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing. Although the opposition supports many of this Bill's provisions, we cannot support the mandatory sentencing provision.

Evidence consistently shows that mandatory sentencing fails to deter domestic and family violence. Worse, brief sentences, sometimes as short as seven days, deprive offenders of the opportunity to engage in meaningful programs, behaviour change programs, alcohol and other drug programs and positive living programs. Without alternative-to-custody facilities or interventions targeting the root causes of the criminal behaviour, mandatory sentencing will not make our communities safer. In fact, shorter sentences can heighten the risk to women and children immediately following an offender's release. Without sufficient post-release support and monitoring, this heightened risk goes unchecked. Investment in post-release services is not optional; it is necessary for victim safety and long-term community security.

The opposition remains steadfast in its commitment to evidence-based solutions. Fully implementing the coronial inquest recommendations is essential to achieving meaningful progress. I urge the government to seriously consider the well-informed submissions received and to translate these insights into action.

I will address the government's allocations of funds for tackling domestic, family and sexual violence. Although the promised $180m over four years becoming $36m annually is a step in the right direction, its allocation raises serious concerns. The domestic violence sector, already under strain, has voiced doubts about whether its funding will deliver the positive outcomes we all desire. Many decisions regarding this funding have been made unilaterally, bypassing the voices of frontline workers and, critically, the victims themselves. A significant portion of this funding has been allocated to agencies such as Corrections, and although we support offender rehabilitation initiatives, funding these programs at the expense of services supporting women and children is unacceptable. Frontline services are already struggling to meet the growing demand, and further diverting funds undermines their capacity to provide effective and life-saving support.

The government claims to prioritise prevention and early intervention, yet the programs it touts as successes are, in reality, rebranded initiatives from many previous administrations. Take the Circuit Breaker Program, for example. Although it provides valuable support for at-risk youths, it is a misstep to allocate $6.6m from domestic violence funding to this initiative. Such decisions short-change women and children in crisis, robbing them of well-funded services they need and deserve.

Moreover, the abolition of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Advisory Forum has left a glaring gap in consultation mechanisms. This absence undermines transparency and reduces the effectiveness of decision-making. Had the forum been involved, the allocation of funds might have been more thoughtful and impactful.

The $36m allocated this year is a welcomed contribution, but to maximise its impact we must meaningfully engage with frontline experts, victim–survivors and the broader community. Only through collaboration can we ensure that every dollar spent addresses the immediate needs and achieves long-term change.

I commend the dedication of the organisations, experts and individuals who contributed to the legislative inquiry. Their submissions are a testament to the community's unwavering commitment to eradicating domestic, family and sexual violence.

Moving forward, the government must prioritise genuine consultation, evidence-based reforms and accountability to create a Territory where violence is not tolerated.

We heard again this morning the conversation about statistics. Let us remember that as more women gain confidence in the system there will be an increase in reported statistics. This rise reflects their growing trust in the system, willingness to disclose their experiences and courage to seek help. As members of parliament we must carefully consider this context when referring to statistics. In some cases such increases can be measured as a sign of growing progress in this sector, evidence that awareness is growing and that, in part, the system is continuing to grow and support them.

It is important to acknowledge across the Northern Territory the organisations that continue every day to do an amazing job, including Women's Safety Services of Central Australia; Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group; Dawn House; DAIWS; Top End Women's Legal Service; Katherine Women's Information & Legal Service; Central Australian Women's Legal Service; Legal Aid; NAAJA; and the Domestic Violence Legal Service. All these amazing organisations are doing the hard work every day on the front line.

Importantly, I acknowledge the work in our remote communities. There is a number of safe houses spread across the Northern Territory that do an incredible job. They provide critical services and are a safe place for women and children in our community to get help and support. I acknowledge the safe houses in Angurugu, Ti Tree, Ali Curung, Elliott, Galiwinku and Gunbalanya. In the Gwoja electorate the Hermannsburg, Lajamanu and Kalkarindji safe houses do an amazing job, providing a wonderful service to our community.

I acknowledge that domestic, family and sexual violence law reform will always be needed. As best-practice standards change the law needs to be contemporised to reflect those practices, which we should all be mindful of and work on each day.

The previous government undertook significant reform in this space with the Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2023. I was proud to deliver that reform, which addressed a number of measures. For the first time in the Northern Territory it ensured that coercive control featured in legislation and that provisions were in place to begin the work to address misidentification, particularly of Aboriginal women, in domestic and family violence situations. That important work needs to continue.

I acknowledge the work which has been undertaken and carried forward by this new government to deliver training to our frontline workers to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. It is important to understand and do that work.

In the last three weeks I have reported matters to police and sat with victims of domestic and family violence on the side of the street while we waited for the authorities. I have taken time to talk with young people in these situations while waiting for an ambulance or the police.

We understand that there is a significant volume of work to be done in this space across all levels. One is about informing and working with people in our community to understand what domestic and family violence is. It does not necessarily always have to be in the form of physical violence. There is much in this space which needs to be continually discussed, and we need to work with people to understand that.

This is also about continuing to increase the investment in the Northern Territory to respond to this situation. We have spoken about the need to call on the Commonwealth Government for needs-based funding because it is critical that we invest to reform this space and drive the changes needed in our community.

Another initiative, which I have spoken about many times in parliament, is the need to look at public housing complexes and whether we can transition some to women's safety services, so we can have transitional accommodation for women when they leave women's crisis services and shelters. It is important we have those provisions in place to support women and children.

The men's behaviour change programs rolled out across the Northern Territory are amazing, and I acknowledge the organisations that deliver those services. I have seen firsthand many participants who have done the programs and now advocate for people to continue with and engage in those programs moving forward. It is a positive step in the right direction.

It is also important for men to stand up and call out domestic, family and sexual violence in our communities. Every man has a role to play in this space. We need to set the example and show people in our community that violence in any form is not okay. We need to make sure that we change the horrific rate of domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory.

We also need to be mindful of language because it matters. People can sometimes get carried away on the sporting field and start by not recognising that they are being derogatory towards women. We need to be mindful of this in our communities, and we need to continue this work because this is how we drive change. We can drive change in all areas.

Domestic and family violence is everyone's business. It is not a blak issue; it is a Territory issue. We must work together to overcome those horrific rates of domestic, family and sexual violence. As a jurisdiction we want to be known for what the Territory is best for, which is our amazing community, lifestyle and wonderful people, not the horrific rates of domestic, family and sexual violence we continue to see.

This has been an issue for some time, and we all need to work together to drive change. The best change we will see is when we empower our local communities to look at local solutions, law and justice groups and supporting DV and specialist services. Doing that important work is fundamental to the success of the Northern Territory.

This is important legislation. I have seen many times where these changes will be welcomed. I remember as a small kid being out in community, visiting my family and family talking about how sometimes someone would be released from prison and put on a bus to go back to the community where the person to whom they caused harm was. Therefore, I support this Bill's changes to the notification provisions and the increase to the victims levy.

The mandatory sentencing repeal came into effect only in 2023, so it has not been in for a significant time, as some people in this Chamber alluded to. From the expert testimony in the submissions and speaking with the Attorney-General's Department we have learnt that people are talking about the maximum term of imprisonment as though that is what every person who is sentenced will receive, but they are failing to speak about there being no minimum requirement for a term of imprisonment. Therefore, someone may well be sent to prison for seven or 14 days and in the current climate that means they will be unable to participate in a program to address their behaviour because no program runs for only seven to 14 days. That is the problem with mandatory sentencing and no minimum periods.

Someone going to prison for seven or 14 days will not give women and children extensive respite from these situations. It perpetuates their anxiety and fear because while the perpetrator is incarcerated, there is no program and they will be angry and frustrated that they are in prison. The offender is being told things, but no-one is addressing their complex needs and providing the intensive support and intervention they require to respond and change their behaviour. That is lacking.

The changes being brought in by the CLP government do not provide an option for the court to look at mandatory sentencing to an alternative-to-custody facility. Evidence and quantitative and qualitative datasets show us that alternative-to-custody programs are successful. They are working and changing lives. The women's life skills camp program in Alice Springs and the alternative-to-custody program on Groote Eylandt have a good success rate and a reduction in recidivism. These programs work. We need more of these programs. We should be allowing the court to consider these initiatives.

Maximum and minimum terms of imprisonment will change nothing if there are no programs in place to address the complex needs and challenges that people face. In their submissions to the committee inquiry people said that it is worse for women and children if someone is sitting in prison for only seven or 14 days with no program. It is better if someone can be sent to a residential rehabilitation program or sentenced to a men's behaviour change program, a life skills program or a drug and alcohol program. They are the things that matter.

I acknowledge that people will talk about alcohol, but people who blame alcohol as the sole reason for domestic and family violence are cowards. Alcohol exacerbates the severity of domestic and family violence, but it does not cause it. People's behaviours and attitudes towards their loved ones are a pre-existing condition. Alcohol intensifies the severity, but we need to address the actual behaviours. When people who are before court or being interviewed about why they committed DV say, 'It was because I was drunk', they are being cowardly because they are blaming a substance for their behaviour. We need to change that behaviour and change the way they think about it or think it is okay.

An important piece of work that needs to be undertaken across the Northern Territory is one that not many people are talking about—that is, jealousing. We need to address people seeing jealousing as a way to justify violence, because it is not. We need to invest more resources into working with our younger cohorts on this thing called jealousing, what it means and how it causes great harm in our communities. This includes delivering programs in schools and dismantling stereotypes. There is a great program in the Northern

Territory called Girls Can Boys Can, also known as Mums Can Dads Can. It helps in regard to normalising and dismantling by teaching people that it does not matter what your gender is, you can do anything and take on important roles in your community. We must continue to support that work.

When we were in government we did significant work to roll out the specialist domestic violence courts. We are proud of that initiative. We have heard that the CLP will continue that initiative and roll it out in other locations across the Northern Territory. For members of parliament who have not been to the court in Alice Springs, if you have the opportunity to go, talk to the people there about the specialist DV court. It is a wonderful initiative that worked with the sector to address the concerns about people giving testimony, evidence or victim statements in the courtroom and not wanting to be there, suffering from severe stress and anxiety and being scared to be in the room with the perpetrator at the time of giving evidence. Careful consideration and design led to a wonderful program being developed in the Alice Springs Local Court. It is heartening to hear that will be rolled out across the Northern Territory, because it is important.

It is an important issue. We must all continue to work in this space. Many of these changes are welcomed. It is important to acknowledge that the government is bringing in a round of measures, but we want to listen to the expert advice and the lived experience in our communities.

A point of order, Madam Speaker! I move an extension of time to continue my remarks.

Motion agreed to.

Mr PAECH: The most important people in this entire conversation are our victims. We must make sure that we have a victim-centred approach in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence and that their voices are embedded and empowered in all our conversations and any contemporisation of legislation. It is incredibly important that we do that.

The real heroes in this space are our amazing organisations on the front line that deal with these conflict situations every day and the trauma that many people in our community are faced with. They have to be strong and resilient. Thank you for the work you do. You are seen, heard and valued. We need to continue to do the work to help you help the community.

It is important that as men we all stand up. I am standing as a proud Aboriginal man. I have said it time and again: there may be aspects of our culture that non-Indigenous people see as brutal and harmful when we go through ceremonial business and sorry business when we lose a loved one, but domestic, family and sexual violence has no place in the Aboriginal community. It is not our way, and it is not our culture. This demonisation of all men, regardless of whether they are Aboriginal, is something we need to work through. The more men who stand up and call out domestic, family and sexual violence the more chance we have to respond to this and the more we can work together in our communities to help.

As I said, nine women in the Northern Territory have lost their lives already this year to domestic, family and sexual violence. There are three other women in the Northern Territory who have been tragically killed by a motor vehicle running them down. That is also allegedly—it is going through the process—directly connected to domestic, family and sexual violence. That is 12 women who have been killed and who meant so much to us. They are now silenced; they are not here.

Everything we do must be to change what is happening in the Northern Territory. I am devastated at the way in which domestic, family and sexual violence nationally is somehow being normalised. It is not okay. DV is a problem across Australia. We all need to work together to respond to it.

I thank the Attorney-General for many of the provisions in the Bill. The notification period and the victims levy are important. I acknowledge the work done by the previous government on featuring coercive control in legislation, contemporising the language, DVOs and the provision of enforced Corrections orders. They are all important, but we need to continue this work.

Thank you to all the people who do the work in the services. We need to continue to talk about this and get behind and fund the family and domestic violence sector.

I am heartened to see a new federal Labor minister in Tanya Plibersek and the assistant minister Ged Kearney. I have spoken to them already about getting them to the Northern Territory to meet people in our hardworking frontline services to hear about the experiences that many of them have to deal with every day. It is important that we continue as a parliament to lobby the Commonwealth for that investment.

I will support parts of the Bill, but I will not support the mandatory sentencing provisions in line with the submissions put forward to the committee. There are other ways to do this.

The work of the ICRO created a pathway forward for us. We know what needs to be done. Work has been done, but we need investment from the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments to continue that. This is how we drive the change. We do not need to go back and redo the work; we need to listen to the sector and victims and invest in the areas they have identified.

We heard from the sector that as people are comfortable in coming forward and disclosing, there will be a spike in the stats. As women feel comfortable that the system is working and will protect them, they will seek help knowing that there will be an appropriate response. We all need to be mindful that every time we talk about domestic, family and sexual violence statistics we are talking about one of ours—a Territorian. We all need to be respectful in this space.

I look forward to the other contributions. To the members of this parliament who have not had the opportunity to meet with our wonderful hardworking people in the DV sector, reach out and talk with them, understand their challenges and listen to their solutions. Reach out to the people in CatholicCare, Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group, the legal services and the women's safety services to hear about the programs that are having a huge impact. They will tell you how those programs are working and changing lives. We expanded the capacity for the programs, but we need to look at how they are growing and invest in them.

I acknowledge the contributions today have been respectful, which demonstrates that this is important to everyone in this Chamber.

There will be ongoing work to address domestic, family and sexual violence in our community. We all have a role and responsibility to call out the violence when we see it. Do not drive or walk past it because that will be the standard you accept. If people need help, stop and give them that help or call the authorities to give them that help; you need to be safe as well. We cannot normalise this terrible behaviour; we need to respond. It is insidious, and we need to continue to work in this space.

I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, which is important.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I begin by acknowledging the intent behind this legislation to increase safety for victim–survivors and to strengthen accountability for those who use violence. These are objectives I support without hesitation, and I know they are objectives that everyone in this Chamber stands behind.

However, I cannot support Part 2, Division 1, section 5 of this Bill, which introduces mandatory sentencing for contravention of domestic violence orders. I believe this provision should not pass. This mandatory sentencing provision will not make victim–survivors safer; in fact, the overwhelming evidence tells us that it risks doing exactly the opposite.

Let me be clear that I am not opposing this measure because I underestimate the scale or urgency of the domestic and family violence crisis; on the contrary, this issue fills me with despair. Domestic violence is the most devastating crime crisis we face. It claims lives; overwhelms our prisons; stretches police and domestic, family and sexual violence services to the brink; and shatters families and communities. I support strong immediate action, but that action must be effective, based on evidence and, above all, not cause further harm.

What fills me with despair is not just the violence itself but the knowledge that we could be doing more to protect victims and we are not. We are choosing politics over solutions and ignoring what works. This is not leadership. We have a responsibility not to be populist and chase headlines, but to act wisely, consult deeply and legislate with integrity.

Saying that we do not need evidence and we do not need to listen to experts or victim–survivors is simply not good enough. It was not good enough for Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood. It was not good enough for the 12 women—that we know of—who have been allegedly killed by DV since this parliament began sitting in October last year. It will never be good enough for those still at risk.

This parliament must be mature enough to work together, guided by the best information available to make laws that actually work. This is what our communities expect and deserve.

In preparation for this morning I spoke again to domestic violence legal services and frontline services. They all reiterated that mandatory sentencing will not make us safer. This Bill cannot pass in its current form. These

people are working every day with the people this Bill is designed to protect and keep safe, and they are telling us that it will not work and will make things worse.

It will come as no surprise to the members in this Chamber that I have significant concerns about mandatory sentencing. In October last year I spoke about mandatory sentencing and the research I had done at that point to see whether and how it was effective. At that time, I was unable to find one piece of evidence in the hundreds of papers that have been published or any suggestion that mandatory sentencing has provided a deterrent for offenders or made communities safer.

I refer again, as I did then, to the report of the Northern Territory Law Reform Committee in May 2021, which stated unequivocally that mandatory sentencing does not work. In the words of Justice Mildren:

> *The premise of those who argue in favour of mandatory sentencing is that it acts as a deterrent. There is no evidence whatsoever to support this premise.*

The underlying paradigm of sentencing law is that a sentence involves the exercise of discretion by a judicial officer, someone who has trained for and is paid to do this job. Judges are the experts, not politicians.

As this government continues to expand mandatory sentencing laws, I have continued to look and ask for evidence supporting this approach and that it will make us safer and address the crime crisis. I have still been unable to find one piece of evidence that supports this. When asked, the Attorney-General's Department could not produce a piece of evidence that mandatory sentencing works. Instead, it offered a vague hope that short-term prison terms might act as a circuit breaker, but we know that prison is not a circuit breaker; it is a pressure cooker. This is not evidence; it is politicisation of people's lives and poses great risks to victims in our community who are already vulnerable to incredibly harmful situations.

All 21 expert submissions to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, of which I am a member, warned us that this Bill will not reduce domestic violence; it will increase harm. Once again, the government members of this committee refused to hold public hearings on this Bill, despite many submissions requesting the opportunity to speak to the committee.

Australia's National Research Organisation For Women's Safety (ANROWS) is our national body dedicated to understanding and responding to domestic and family violence. It said plainly in its submission:

> *… that there is no evidence that the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing legislation in the NT will have positive impacts on, or improve the safety of, women, children and the broader community.*

This is the organisation whose sole mandate is to assess what works to keep victims safe. What does its research tell us? It said:

> *The evidence shows that improvements in safety come from investments outside of or alongside the criminal justice system.*

The path to safety is not through blunt instruments like mandatory sentencing; it is through evidence-based programs, early intervention and properly resourced services.

The Northern Territory women's legal services, a critical voice on the front line of this crisis, echoed these concerns. In its submission it warns:

> *… that the measures in the proposed Bill may not only be ineffective in achieving that objective, but may cause some unintended adverse consequences in relation to victim–survivor safety …*

It also noted:

> *… mandatory sentencing is … inconsistent with the value our legal system places on judicial discretion … and is unlikely to achieve the desired outcomes of improved victim safety and increased accountability …*

Why? Because accountability does not come from a formula; it comes from informed case-by-case decision-making by trained judicial officers who understand the dynamics of violence, coercive control, trauma and misidentification.

I highlight that the NT women's legal services strongly warned us of the real and persistent risk of misidentification whereby victim–survivors, often Aboriginal women, are wrongly named as perpetrators. They are being placed under domestic violence orders when, in fact, they are the ones being abused. Under mandatory sentencing provisions those same women would be automatically jailed if the order is breached, even if the breach was initiated by their abuser and even if it was part of a pattern of coercive control. Is this what we want our justice system to do—jail victim–survivors? This is not justice; this is harm.

We are told that this provision targets repeat and serious breaches of DVOs, but we already have sentencing tools to deal with this and serious harm. The *Sentencing Act* directs judges to impose just sentences in all circumstances. If the courts are not responding appropriately, we need to be strengthening judicial training, not stripping discretion altogether. We need to address the crisis in our courts. The system is already not working; this will make it collapse.

One of the services working with victims sent me this message this morning:

'Last Monday we filed an urgent DVO. It still has not been processed by the court registry. We have been told that the courts have been so overwhelmed that they cannot get through the processing.

'For DVOs that get listed, it can be up to a month for a first mention. Then they often will not get to the judge in the busy court list.

'We had one urgent matter held over three times before it got to a judge. The mechanisms that we have for victim–survivor safety, like applying for DVOs, are failing because the system is not working fast enough and in the way it should.

'This Bill will not address that.'

The Member for Goyder talked about the small group of people agitating for the protection of perpetrators rather than victims. I remind him that every submission received by the scrutiny committee was from an organisation working with and for victims.

Services like the NT women's legal services provide a clear alternative. They call on the government to invest in specialist training and domestic, family and sexual violence-informed judicial education; increased resourcing for women's legal and support services; greater access to behaviour change programs for those who use violence; and implementation of the recommendations from the NT Coroner's domestic violence inquest, including alternatives to custody, co-responder models and wraparound legal and housing support. I acknowledge—I am grateful and welcome this—that we heard from the government that some of these changes will be happening.

These are practical proven reforms based on data. We know that they will work. This is what we should be doing. These are the reforms that will make women safer, not mandatory sentencing or populist legal reforms that ignore the evidence and defy the advice of ANROWS, Aboriginal legal services, frontline workers and other national experts.

As ANROWS rightly noted, incarceration is not a circuit breaker; it is in too many cases a pressure cooker that leads to escalated risk when a person is released. It often leads to reoffending and re-harming someone, not rehabilitation.

The NT Coroner warned us in the recent inquest that one of the most dangerous times for a woman is just after the perpetrator is released from custody, and I welcome the aspect of this Bill that addresses that. However, this Bill also guarantees the risk that short stints of jail time will be followed by even more dangerous behaviour.

Let me remind this Assembly that crime increased when mandatory sentencing for property offences was introduced in the Northern Territory in the late 1990s. When it was repealed, crime declined. We have done this before, and we know how it ends.

The costs—financial and human—are staggering. It costs more than $122,000 per person per year to imprison someone in the NT. With that same money we could fund an entire men's behaviour change program, support a full-time legal advocate in a remote community or provide safe housing for multiple families fleeing violence.

This is a choice between what looks tough and what works. It is a choice between populist responses and principled, evidence-based reform. It is a choice between harm and healing.

I conclude with the words of ANROWS once more:

> *We … understand the necessity for rapid improvements in safety for women, children and communities … we raise our concerns about the Government's current position that incarceration will improve the safety of victim–survivors …*

It will not. It does not, and we should not pretend that it will.

I call on the government not to pass this Bill with mandatory sentencing in place. Remove the clause, invest in what works, strengthen judicial discretion—do not undermine it—and act with the courage to make decisions, not because they are politically popular but because they will make all our communities safer.

Should this government choose to ignore all the evidence on mandatory sentencing and pass this Bill in full, I call on it to establish a published monitoring report on the impacts of the reform so that we can see whether, as the CLP says, these new laws will work to protect victims and keep us safer.

VISITORS
YouthWorX

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of young adults from YouthWorX, accompanied by their teacher. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I will speak about this Bill and, more broadly, the issues of domestic violence.

Anyone who has grown up in the Territory is, sadly, all too familiar with the tragic scene of men beating women in public, at the shops, on the streets, outside schools and outside corner stores. It has become so common that many long-term Territorians have become desensitised to it. I remind those listening that there are mandatory reporting requirements for domestic violence, so if you see it, please call the police and make a report. It has become part of life in the Territory, sadly, and under the former Labor government this scene was common.

In my electorate of Blain there are many people in public housing fleeing from domestic violence. In Palmerston we have a few safe houses where women who are fleeing domestic violence can go and be safe and secure from the perpetrators and get respite. I have met some of the workers in that space, and I commend them. It is a hard job, but they turn up to work every day because they are committed to the women, victim–survivors and children.

I have spoken before in this House about my own experience with domestic violence, so I will not go over it again. I have intimate knowledge of what it is like for children to grow up in a home where domestic violence occurs and to see it happen to people you know well—friends and family members.

I give credit to the Member for Gwoja. He is right; alcohol exacerbates it, but there are underlying attitudes and behaviours that need addressing. Still, it cannot be tolerated. This government will not tolerate domestic violence.

Unlike those opposite, who mischaracterised the Member for Drysdale's words, I would say that men's strength is to protect and provide. I have three boys, and I tell them this as often as I can because they are strong and the day will come when they will be stronger than their mum and me, but that day has not yet arrived. I remind them regularly as they grow in strength, that strength is not to hurt, bully or harm; it is to protect and provide for their loved ones and those more vulnerable than them.

It was said last week in this Chamber—this was verballing one of the members on this side—that the only thing that could go against violence was violence. Unfortunately, given the situation we are in, this relates to police. When a violent person is threatening severe harm to loved ones, those who are close to them or members of the community, we call the police. The police start by using nice words, but if there is no compliance they eventually have no choice but to take that person into custody against their will with the use of force. Violence, sadly, is a part of the discussion, but it is important that it is shaped, framed and used legitimately by those who are sworn to serve and protect society and by men in society to protect and provide for their family and to keep them safe.

I was at the markets two Dry Seasons ago when the Member for Drysdale's family was surrounded by a group of juveniles engaging in what can only be described as a riot. He swept up his family and formed a human shield with his own body to protect his wife and his two little girls. That is a demonstration of strength to protect his family.

I will now speak about the role of domestic violence orders. I have had the dubious honour and the sadness to know people who have been on both sides of domestic violence orders. These are a key legal instrument to keep women safe when they reach the point that they realise that their loved one, the person who promised to love and cherish them, is causing so much harm to them that they must go to the police and courts in order to feel safe. Domestic violence orders are an order of the court. Unfortunately, as has been well documented, if someone has so little regard for their loved one, police, the court, laws of society and good decency, they will breach that domestic violence order and re-perpetrate harm against their loved one. There needs to be a strong response and a circuit breaker.

Member for Johnston, I agree that when the legal system gets involved in a domestic dispute there is often an increased risk of harm in the immediate aftermath. The person can be angry, upset, not thinking clearly and wanting to lash out. The person they most want to lash out at is the person they blame for this domestic violence order, their partner. At this time it is critical that the person's partner is safe from them because if that person breaches the domestic violence order, the chance of them inflicting serious harm is greatly increased.

I support this Bill because mandatory sentencing is an important circuit breaker for women survivors in order to take the time, seven days at least, to get their affairs in order and find a safe house. I know people who have gone through this. When they get a domestic violence order, the planning which goes into their escape from their predicament is unbelievable. They are often tangled in all kinds of webs of financial, physical and coercive control, and to escape from this scenario is a huge effort. I commend these women who plan for weeks, months or years to get out of these circumstances.

When they escape, their partner can be angry and seek to lash out. I have heard threats of them taking their guns and killing the woman, children and themselves. This is the sort of thing that women have to deal with when they come to the realisation that the person who promised to love and cherish them is now their greatest source of danger. If that person breaches the domestic violence order—they have found the woman and now have a charge over their head and other consequences—and we let them out straightaway, what do you think will they do?

It is critical to put a circuit breaker in place so that the woman has time to seek a safe place to stay, get her affairs in order and move her things out. This is the basic logistics of getting out of the shared domestic home so that she can sleep comfortably at night where, hopefully, her abuser does not know she and the children are staying.

I will speak briefly about how we ended up in this position with this government restoring mandatory sentencing for people who breach domestic violence orders.

In 2019 the Labor government had a pattern of watering down laws to put the rights of offenders over the rights of victims. This pattern was seen across many areas of legislation. The point when the Labor government dipped its toe in the water was with the Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2019, Serial 113, which was debated on Thursday 25 June 2020. I will read from *Hansard* comments that the now Chief Minister made at the time:

> *I place firmly on the record that … we have strong concerns based on the feedback we received in the committee proceedings and from Women's Legal Service about how this will operate, because it provides an alternative to mandatory sentencing without adequate safeguards that ought to go with such a change in position.*
>
> *…*
>
> *In a nutshell, the components of the bill we are concerned about would allow a domestic violence offender to be bailed to a rehabilitative program and allow the court the discretion to deem completion of that program as an exceptional circumstance, potentially meaning the offender would not go on to undertake their sentence.*

In his contribution the Member for Gwoja said—correct me if I am wrong—that he wants 12 months. You need a significant amount of time in order for a men's behaviour change program to take root in someone. When

I was campaigning, I talked to police. They said that one of the programs implemented for that legislation was a 16-hour course with Tangentyere. The courts would consider that exceptional and bail them …

Mr Paech: Sixteen weeks.

Mr KERLE: Was it 16 weeks? I was told 16 hours by police. I hope it was 16 weeks.

That was the Labor government dipping its toe in the water to water down mandatory sentencing for domestic violence offenders.

In 2023 the Labor government went all the way with the Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2023, introduced by the Member for Gwoja when he was the Attorney-General. He was perhaps the worst Attorney-General in the history of the Northern Territory, as he oversaw the destruction of our legal system, NAAJA, Legal Aid, neglect of our Corrections system and shutting down the prison industries in Corrections. He also failed to invest for the growing prisoner numbers, which he was aware of.

If it is better to release domestic violence offenders to rehab, where were these rehab programs? This morning I had a look at today's court lists. This is not an authoritative academic study; it is one sample for today, but I think it is representative. There were 101 domestic violence matters before the courts around the Northern Territory today between Darwin, Alice Springs, communities, Katherine and Tennant Creek. That represents 101 domestic violence orders being considered by the courts today. There are 66 charges of engaging in conduct that contravenes DVO before the courts today. That is a river of domestic violence offending that would require, even for 16 weeks, a huge number of programs.

I am not an expert in that area. I will wait for the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence's response, as she might have more information on this matter. I was not aware, as a citizen of the Northern Territory, of any programs of that scale and nature that would protect or even function as a circuit breaker for women.

Detention is not ideal. No-one on this side is saying that detention is ideal; it is not. However, it is essential to keep the community, women and children safe. It is better than what the previous government was doing for victims, which was nothing or next to nothing.

This government is different. We will continue to put the rights of victims above those of offenders. We will continue to protect women and children, give them the time they need to seek shelter, move out of their circumstances, set themselves up for safety and engage in family safety frameworks and any programs that the police and courts have in order to keep them safe.

For that reason, I support this Bill and commend it to the Assembly.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, this is an important issue, especially in the electorate of Drysdale in which, unfortunately, a large number of domestic, family and sexual violence matters occur. This is why I am committed to stepping forward. I believe male leadership is needed in this space, and I intend to continue in that pursuit.

In line with that, I spoke last week sincerely about some ideas and thoughts I have that could work. We heard the opposition call for bipartisanship. I ask those opposite to act accordingly as well. I believe there are many ideas from people in here and we need to work together in this space.

I receive a large number of domestic violence complaints. I notice that usually it is once people have decided to leave that they will come into my office or if they are chasing justice for historical abuse. Many people are impacted. There are victims of coercive control, manipulation and financial abuse. These are all forms of violence, which the Member for Gwoja discussed, and I agree; there is a large spectrum of family violence that occurs. I get a lot of information from people who report their neighbour for abusing their partner or their children. Regardless of what the data says, which is shocking, I know from personal experience in the electorate that it is at a shocking rate.

I acknowledge that DV happens to both genders; however, there is a vast difference in the damage that a man can inflict. Yes, domestic violence can happen to men. I have worked in welfare with the military, and men can have severe emotional and physical damage. However, the vast majority is perpetrated by men. If you look at the size of me compared with some of my colleagues—such as the Member for Wanguri—you see it is quite simple; a man can cause horrendous damage when domestic violence is carried out.

Men, let us face reality. I have spoken about the strength that a man has and the responsibilities that come with it. That is also part of this issue; when men perpetrate domestic violence, particularly to women, they can and will do much more severe damage. As men we must face that, and we must challenge each other and remind each other what it means to be a man. Domestic violence, in my eyes, has no place in what it means to be a man and what it means to be masculine.

I support this legislation as it targets people who breach and repeatedly breach their DVOs. Let us remind ourselves why DVOs are in place; it is to lower the risk of reoffending. Therefore, I have no issue in giving these measures some teeth for enforcement so that when perpetrators break their DVOs they know there will be a consequence. It goes back to a core message of our government, which is essentially a philosophical standpoint—that is, we believe there should be consequence for action. If you break those orders knowingly, there will be consequences. That is an important aspect.

We have discussed the time of punishment, which we could discuss all day. My standpoint, which is probably further than that of most in the Chamber, is that serious times of punishment are needed to induce change. However, I support the fact that now there will be at least a minimum amount of time to let people know that what they have done is wrong.

We are left with this scourge of domestic violence on our society. Why is the home breaking down? At its core the Country Liberal Party believes in the family home being fundamental to a healthy society. That family home evolves—it has changed as time has gone on—in how it is made up, but it still does not change what that family home means to a healthy society. It is where we are raising our children and it should be a place of safety, love, nurture and education for our children. That is why I am supportive of those traditional family values. I do not mean in the traditional makeup; I mean in the traditional values that are enshrined in the home. We need to be pushing that.

This Bill speaks to that. We are saying that if people threaten the sanctity or safety of the home, the law will punish them. That is important. People need to know that our government values the sanctity of the home and will take action against anyone who threatens it. It is important for our children to know that as well. Unfortunately, in probably every electorate, there will be children who witness domestic and family violence in one of its many forms. We need to send a message to them so that they know what that parent or carer is doing is not right.

I thank the minister for her work, ongoing advocacy and tenacity for change in this space. I welcome the reforms and our government's approach. I will continue to learn more, advocate and attempt to be a man who stands up and pushes for change we need to have.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

NOTICES

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I present an amendment to General Business Notice Number 1:

That the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly:

1. affirms the NT's obligation to prevent racism and racial discrimination under the positive duty law, and calls for system-wide action aligned with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement

2. urges the co-design of an NT anti-racism strategy grounded in the National Anti-Racism Framework in full alignment with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly calls on the CLP government to:

- negotiate in good faith with employee representatives and finalise outstanding public sector enterprise agreements

- honour its commitment not to sack public servants

- amend its wages policy so that workers are not forced to trade entitlements for wage increases.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion calling on the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly to:

1. recognise the importance of individual choice in accessing public and private healthcare services across the Northern Territory and the critical role choice plays in ensuring timely, quality and accessible care for Territorians

2. recognise that preserving and expanding choice between public and private providers allows Territorians to make decisions that best suit their medical needs, financial circumstances and personal preferences

3. urge the Finocchiaro CLP government to:

   (i) work with healthcare stakeholders and the federal government to maintain and encourage access to private healthcare options across the Northern Territory; and

   (ii) support the growth and sustainability of private healthcare providers in the Territory.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS
Hon Willem Westra van Holthe

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I welcome Hon Willem Westra van Holthe, former Member for Katherine, to the Chamber.

Members: Hear, hear!

Hon Christopher Pyne

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): I believe Christopher Pyne, a former federal minister, is also in the gallery.

Madam SPEAKER: Sorry. Welcome, Christopher Pyne, former federal Education minister.

Members: Hear, hear!

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present a motion calling on the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly to:

1. urgently invest in renewable energy infrastructure and technology to support the Territory's sustainable energy future

2. recommit to the 50% renewable target by 2030 in recognition of the importance of progressing our renewable energy capabilities

3. continue to commit to the remote power system strategy so that 70% of the combined electricity consumed in the 72 remote Territory communities serviced by Indigenous Essential Services (IES) comes from renewable energy by 2030.

PETITION
Petition No 11 – Securing Screen Territory Funding

J DAVIS (Johnston)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I present a petition not conforming with standing orders from 363 petitioners requesting the protection of the film industry. I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read:

Requesting the protection of the film industry and increases to funding.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I move that the petition be referred to the Public Accounts Committee to consider whether the petition should be debated.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTION TIME

Community Safety

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

The latest crime statistics reveal the total offences against the person have jumped from 7,409 to 7,959 during your seven months in office, which is a surge of 550 offences, or a roughly 7.4% increase. Over the same period total property offences have risen from 11,709 to 12,236, which is an increase of 527 offences, or a 4.5% increase across the Territory. Given your repeated promises and your election commitment to bring crime under control, how do you justify these significant increases in violent and property crime under your leadership?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I love talking about community safety because that is exactly why the CLP was elected—to fix eight years of chaos and distress and violence being perpetrated on Territorians.

Do you know what, Opposition Leader? Change does not happen overnight, despite the fact that within eight weeks of coming to government we increased the laws. We passed Declan's law and laws to deal with stronger bail, posting and boasting, wanding for knife crime, ram raids, nuisance public drinking and DV. We have given police better powers of entry. We even recalled parliament in an historic move to pass Australia's strongest bail laws. For those listening at home, Labor did not support us on anything except for the bail laws a couple of weeks ago.

Crime stats are only one measure. We are on record as tirelessly saying that the measure of success on reducing crime is when our community feels safe. That is what success looks like. Are we there yet? No. We are not there yet.

When we look at the crime stats—Opposition Leader, I know you cherrypicked—we see that broadly across the Territory house break-ins …

Ms Uibo: You cherrypicked the Katherine stats the other day on the radio.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Excuse me, it is my turn to talk.

Ms Uibo: Yes, but you cherrypicked too; why don't you admit that?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, silence!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are significant reductions in house break-ins—big numbers. For example, in Darwin and Palmerston house break-ins are down by 47%; Alice Springs is down by only 2%; and Katherine is down by 38%. It is consistent, with the exception of Tennant Creek. Robberies are significantly down in big numbers too. There are good signs, but there is much more work to do.

Let us not forget that our record $1.5bn budget for crime prevention will fix your mess, former Attorney-General, with the courts and for not funding Legal Aid; and your mess, former Corrections minister, for not building new beds and for underinvesting in Corrections. In this budget we will fix all these messes you left behind, and that is before we even get to dealing with the root causes of crime.

There is our work in making sure that parents are getting kids to school and our work with Circuit Breaker to get kids the care and support they need to turn their lives around. We are building a boot camp in Alice Springs. We have brought online 500 more beds in just nine months. The list of what we have done goes on.

Is it enough? Absolutely not, but are we stopping? No. This is just the beginning. We have only just started, and we will not rest until the Territory is a safe place to live, work, visit and invest.

Bail Laws

Mr O'GALLAGHER to CHIEF MINISTER

Yesterday the *NT News* reported that a Malak mother with a history of harming cops had her bail application rejected after fresh accusations she assaulted police in the line of duty. The *NT News* reported that the judge said that he does not have a high degree of confidence in releasing her back into the community. Even though it is still early days this seems to be a clear example of how our tough new bail laws are working. Can you update the Assembly on how community safety is being improved by our strong approach?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Karama is a tireless vocal advocate for his community. I have been in his electorate with him many times and seen the personal way in which he is out there with members of his community in their living rooms, front yards and businesses, supporting them through what has been hell on Earth under Labor. Member for Karama, I commend you for your leadership and being such a strong voice for your community. People in the Karama electorate, more than anyone else, care about reducing crime.

A couple of weeks ago we brought back parliament to pass Australia's toughest bail laws. We are proud of that because Territorians deserve to be safe. We have been sending the judges and courts the message from day one about what we need, and we will keep going until everyone in the justice system understands the message.

I saw that story in the paper. I am seeing stories about how bail was denied and a person was remanded, so it is working. We do not have hard data as yet—we will look at it when the time comes—but it is showing that it is delivering what we wanted, which is a strong threshold in regard to community safety.

We have done what Labor members could never bring themselves to do—that is, embed community safety in the test for bail, not just once but twice. The member referenced a quote from the judge saying that they did not have a high degree of confidence. We have made sure that community safety must be the paramount consideration. The judge will then move through Declan's law, which is a strong test for bail dealing with repeat and serious violent offenders. Then the judge must be satisfied that if the person is still to be bailed that they have a high degree of confidence that person does not present an ongoing risk to the community.

We have layered the fundamental core belief of our government, the community's right to be safe, into the laws of the Northern Territory because we believe that these laws must meet the community's expectations. That is what our government is working through and delivering.

Crime stats are one measure, and I know your community will look to them. There are some improvements. There are some numbers are going up; that is the sad reality we face. We will not give up; we have only just started. We have passed a range of additional powers for police; a record $1.5bn budget to deliver crime prevention across courts, Corrections and police; a record $608m budget for police, which is up $47m on last year; and had more police through the college than ever before.

We are backing community safety. We love the Territory and we are fixing the mess that Labor left us.

Alcohol-related Assaults

Mr YOUNG to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Territorians are reporting a notable increase in problem drinking, with your government scrapping the minimum floor price. There has also been a sharp rise in alcohol-related assaults in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. Can you provide any data on how removing the floor price has impacted problem drinking and alcohol-related harm in our communities? If not, why are you not monitoring the impacts of your changes to alcohol policy and the harm it is having on the community?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I too read the crime stats and see the results coming through, particularly in relation to alcohol-related assaults.

We need to remember that under eight years of Labor, alcohol-related assaults increased by 38%. Labor chose to do nothing about it. All the measures Labor put in place were hotchpotch all over the place. There was the BDR and the MUP.

Madam Speaker, you would clearly remember that Labor let Stronger Futures lapse, which let the rivers of grog flow through Alice Springs, causing destruction to that town. Labor did not listen to anyone in the community about the harm it would cause.

The Member for Gwoja made money out of it. He bought shares in an alcohol company just before he allowed the rivers of grog to flow. Those on the other side have no credibility on alcohol measures.

We came into government and started changing those laws. We were elected on a promise to reduce crime, and there is much more work to do.

Ms Uibo: You were lobbied by the industry to do so. Why don't you admit that?

Ms BOOTHBY: I hear the Leader of the Opposition interjecting. You have no credibility. You let alcohol-related assaults go through the roof and did nothing about it. Your minimum floor price resulted in smashed glass everywhere. We could have had cask wine being used as a weapon instead of smashed glass, but, no you let that go.

We removed the minimum floor price because we believe that the focus should be on demand, not the supply of alcohol. Labor never focused on the demand.

A huge body of work to do with alcohol treatment and the BDR is being undertaken by the Minister for Health to see what will work. We will look at the information brought forward to us and make those decisions.

One thing is for sure: we will not just rest on our laurels and hope and pray that things will get better …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I appreciate that the Attorney-General has not really answered the question. The question was specific: can you provide any data on how removing the floor price has impacted problem drinking and alcohol-related harm, and why are you not monitoring this?

Madam SPEAKER: He asked for data. Please continue, Attorney-General.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am pretty sure that the Member for Daly would know that Licensing NT monitors all the data that comes in and sees whether there are spikes within the regions. That data is looked at all the time. If it is not working, we will relook at it; we will not just double-down and pretend that there is nothing to see here, which is what Labor did over eight years. It watched the stats go through the roof and did nothing about it.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. What is the data, and can you please show the reasons for the MUP …

Madam SPEAKER: No more points of order. You have 25 seconds, Attorney-General; do you have any data?

Ms BOOTHBY: As I said, Licensing NT looks at all the data throughout the regions. I know that there is a slight increase in Palmerston and a slight decrease in Katherine and a few other regions. I do not have the statistics with me, but that is data that we look at as a government all the time because this is not set and forget; we will look at anything that is needed to keep Territorians safe.

Territory Energy Link

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

With the Northern Territory's economic growth being heavily reliant on major infrastructure investment, businesses and investors are calling for greater certainty and timely action from the government to unlock opportunities, particularly in relation to energy and resource projects like those in the Beetaloo Sub-basin.

Can you update the Assembly on how the CLP government is delivering action, certainty and security for industry and how initiatives like the Territory Energy Link are helping to drive private investment, create local jobs and futureproof the Territory's infrastructure and economy?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Goyder has a keen interest, like all of us in the Chamber and across the Territory, in seeing Beetaloo gas deliver Territory jobs and investment.

The Territory Energy Link project is a defining one for the future of economic growth. It will provide multi-user infrastructure access to an approved corridor that will carry gas, water, fibre optics and other services. The corridor will cover 670 kilometres from Elliott to Darwin, connecting projects and resources from the middle of the Territory to customers and other strategic infrastructure in Darwin such as the Middle Arm precinct.

This is a smart investment that will streamline access and approvals to help shape the Territory's future. It will give businesses the confidence they need to invest in the Territory for the long term. It delivers investment. We are laying the groundwork literally and strategically for real and sustained growth in private investment and future wealth for all Territorians.

The CLP government will work with stakeholders to ensure an appropriate process is undertaken to secure the right pathway, avoiding our major towns and more populated areas.

This corridor will open new opportunities in industries we need to grow such as energy, including gas; critical minerals; and essential services, such as water and fibre optics. It will connect Central Australia and the Beetaloo region to Darwin and beyond in a smart, secure and coordinated way. We know businesses need certainty in access, land use and timing. The Territory Energy Link provides all that. It will lower risks and make it easier for businesses and proponents to plan and invest. This is not just about building pipelines; it is about building confidence and making the most of our natural advantages.

The CLP government is taking clear strong steps forward with the Territory Energy Link. We are building more than infrastructure; we are building a stronger economy and a better future for all Territorians. We are sending a clear message to investors and proponents that we are serious about the Territory's future and its growth through all-important investment in enabling infrastructure. The Territory can become a powerhouse in the Australian energy market, and enabling infrastructure programs like the Territory Energy Link will make this a reality.

This is great infrastructure for the future of the Territory and Territorians. It will help us rebuild and grow our economy.

Police – Katherine

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Your own Member for Katherine admitted on radio, 'We never seem to have enough police in Katherine'. The Member for Katherine also confirmed that there are no police auxiliary liquor inspectors at bottle shops in Katherine, and she has described the situation as 'very bad'. The latest crime statistics back up the Member for Katherine. Since the CLP took office, assaults in Katherine have increased by 12%, serious harm offences have jumped by 40%, and assaults in March were 27% higher than in March 2024.

How can the people of Katherine have faith in your government's law and order agenda when your own member, who is also a government minister, says that there are not enough police, there is no point-of-sale intervention at bottle shops and violence in the community is getting worse?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, that is an interesting question from the Opposition Leader. It is just like the last eight years never happened. It is like a magical fairy came and waved special fairy dust on the Opposition Leader and she is absolved of all responsibility and memory of anything that happened prior to August last year.

Let me correct the record on a couple of things you said, Opposition Leader. Number one, it was your government that got rid of PALIs. Labor recruited all the PALIs to become constables, and they are now fully-fledged constables, and that is why there are none.

Ms Uibo: What rubbish! Why don't you read your briefing notes before you answer?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is like it is the first time she has ever heard it. I remember sitting where you are sitting, Opposition Leader, looking at you guys and thinking, 'What will happen to PALIs?' It is a bit cute.

Ms Uibo: Not getting rid of PALIs—giving them an opportunity to become a police officer.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, silence.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When it comes to Katherine the data is just one measure. I do not like to harp on about the data because it is largely indicative; it is not how people feel. House break-in statistics have improved by 38%, just in Katherine. Robbery has improved by 83%. There are some fantastic results happening in Katherine that are improving people's lives. Are other things going up? Absolutely. For example, commercial break-ins increased by 15%, and assaults went up significantly. That is not good enough.

We inherited a crippled, broken, dilapidated, forgotten system, which we are fixing. I can talk about the $1.5bn we have invested in courts, Corrections and police. Labor dropped the ball on that. I can talk about our work on addressing the root causes of crime. Why do you think people are committing more crimes? They did not wake up under a CLP government and decide to be a criminal. They were criminals because of Labor's framework; Labor did not empower the bush, provide economic opportunities and employment and make kids go to school.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The Chief Minister is focused on giving everyone a history lesson, but the question was specifically: why are you not listening to the Member for Katherine, with the people of Katherine saying things are getting worse?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, I think the Chief Minister is responding to your question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You did not hold parents accountable for sending their kids to school. You did not refer anyone to income management when they were neglecting their children. The list of neglect and incompetence under your watch is abhorrent.

In nine months we have done a lot to try to shift the dial.

Police in Katherine are doing an exceptional job. We are sending another 15 or 16 to Katherine soon as we graduate yet another police recruit squad. We have 56 additional police under the CLP than there were under Labor.

Mineral Royalties – GEMCO

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY

Last week our government handed down Budget 2025–26. We heard that the mining sector was the largest contributor to the NT's gross state product in 2023–24, at almost 25%. The mining sector employees more than 4,000 people. Moreover, the mineral royalties provided by NT mines, including more than $200m provided in 2024–25, are critical to rebuilding the NT economy.

One of the NT's flagship mining operations is GEMCO, the world's largest manganese mine. It has been offline since March 2024 due to a tropical cyclone. Can you update the Assembly as to when GEMCO will be back online and providing for Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Casuarina understands that the royalties from the resource sector pay for the hospital in Casuarina, the schools in his electorate and the police across the Northern Territory, including in Katherine. The resource sector is important to our community because it pays the bills.

Under our government royalty revenue is set to significantly rise because GEMCO came back online this week. In fact, a boat is being loaded now.

The Member for Nightcliff said last week that the NT royalties forecast are in slow decline. If she had read the budget papers she would have realised that the dozen-plus mining projects awaiting final investment decision are not included in those forecasts. The $346m expected in royalties in this coming financial year is a 16% increase on 2024–25.

The resource sector, which includes gas and mining, is the central focus of our government's strategy to rebuild the economy because it makes money for the Territory. It pays for the hospitals, the police, the education system and our bills here. It makes money for the government to spend.

We expect a substantial increase in mining royalties and associated revenue due to several projects coming online. This includes this week's recommencement of operations at GEMCO and the opening of the Nobles Nob goldmine in Tennant Creek, the land of opportunity.

I congratulate GEMCO on its rapid work to repair the wharf, install a critical bridge and conduct other mine repairs. It took more than 370,000 work hours to get it back online. That will pay for the Territory to move forward.

In 2023–24 GEMCO manganese was almost one-quarter of the Territory's output in mineral value. The loss of GEMCO production in March 2024 resulted in an estimated $170m loss of royalty revenue in the 2023–24 budget's finalised figures. Thankfully, the NT will begin to receive this vital own-source revenue again. GEMCO manganese is a critical component of the global steel industry and a large component of the expected $4.8bn mineral value for 2025–26.

The Commonwealth is expected to receive almost $2bn through the petroleum rent resource tax as part of the 2025–26 budget.

Domestic Violence-related Assaults

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The latest crime statistics confirm that domestic violence is getting worse under the CLP government. In March 2025 there were 626 domestic violence-related assaults across the Territory, 75 more than in March 2024. That is an increase of nearly 14% in just 12 months. This is not a one-off spike. In seven months since the CLP took office there have been 4,481 DV-related assaults in the Northern Territory; that is 428 more than in the previous seven months, which is an increase of almost 11%. Domestic violence assaults in Darwin are up by nearly 23%, with double-digit increases also recorded in Katherine, Tennant Creek and our regional areas.

What urgent action under you leadership will you take to protect victims and reverse the alarming trend across the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the reality is that we inherited such a terrible situation with domestic, family and sexual violence. We inherited an environment where many programs were rolled out and many millions of dollars were spent with zero focus on whether those programs were achieving outcomes. When you want to unwind what is happening in a space where you cannot see what is working and what is not and there is so much noise going on, it unfortunately takes some time to drill down and see what is not happening.

Proactive engagement was not happening to bring into the picture all those smaller organisations that are working tirelessly in their communities to stop this terrible situation where violence is apparently the answer to everything that ails you in your relationship. Labor was not engaged or asking what those organisations needed in their communities. They were not asked to show what they felt would make a difference. There are pockets of community service organisations doing incredible work in isolation. I have taken the time to go there, talk to these groups and find out what they need. They need empowerment in their communities to take control of what is happening.

We have seen the results of eight years of Labor's failure to act in the outcomes of the coronial investigations. We have seen time and again recommendations made that were not taken up. We have seen a persistence in continuing to throw good money after bad for programs that are simply not delivering the results we need.

Turning that ship around is a big task which involves bringing everyone along on the journey, not just in the crisis space but, most importantly, in the prevention space so that we can address the root causes and work with young people to show them that violence is not the answer. The answer is going to school, learning a job, facing the reality of what they are living with and helping to turn that around.

Cullen Bay Ferry Terminal

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

The Cullen Bay ferry terminal is a critical transport hub for thousands of Territorians, particularly those living in the communities of the Tiwi Islands and Mandorah.

Mr Young: Mandorah is not a community.

Mrs ZIO: With recent disruptions caused by sediment build-up in the ferry channel, there are growing concerns about safety, reliability and continued access. Can you update the Assembly on what actions the Finocchiaro CLP government is taking to address these issues, and how the government is delivering the certainty and security that ferry passengers and operators rely on?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I picked up the interjection from the Member for Daly while the Member for Fannie Bay was asking the question. You would think he would like to sit here quietly and listen, because this affects the residents of his electorate greatly.

The Finocchiaro CLP government is taking real action, not just talking, to maintain safe and reliable ferry services for Territorians. Every year more than 150,000 people rely on those ferry routes, including thousands of trips between Darwin, the Tiwi Islands and Mandorah. This is a critical link for families, workers and communities across the Top End.

Delayed maintenance and Labor's failure to act has caused many headaches for passengers and operators. It is simply not acceptable for families to gamble on whether they will make it to work or school or for local businesses to be left uncertain about staff arrivals. What was Labor's plan? No further dredging was scheduled until 2026. We found this out when we came to government; the problem already existed, and Labor knew about it. This was leaving Mandorah residents to face yet another year of unreliable services.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. For the minister, Mandorah is not a community. It is Wagait Beach and Belyuen.

Madam SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. Try that again, and there will be no more points of order.

Mr Young: Everyone will tell you that.

Madam SPEAKER: You are on a warning, Member for Daly.

Mr YAN: The Member for Daly thinks this is a joke. This is about the communities he represents. That shows the respect he has for the people who live across the other side of the harbour and on the Tiwi Islands …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition members, please be quiet and respectful and listen to the minister.

Mr YAN: I am pleased to advise the Assembly that we have brought this program forward by a year. At lunchtime I looked across the harbour and watched that dredge being towed to Cullen Bay to do that channel.

In response to the faster-than-usual sediment build-ups affecting ferry operations, we have committed to 24/7 dredging efforts to cut the timeline in half, meaning less disruption for passengers. Of course, this also means that the Cullen Bay facility will be ready well before the new Mandorah marine facility opens in July.

We are not just responding to problems; we are planning for the future. Long-term environmental approvals are already underway to allow faster and more efficient dredging to ensure that this essential corridor remains open.

The Cullen Bay ferry terminal is vital to keep people connected, protect access and ensure services continue safely and reliably. It is our responsibility to ensure it remains accessible, functional and future-ready.

Our focus is on keeping the Territory moving, our communities connected and our infrastructure strong for today and years ahead. I thank the communities at Mandorah and all the stakeholders for their relentless advocacy and patience. I have heard from many residents that they are pleased about this coming forward early.

Private Hospital – Maternity Services Closure

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for HEALTH

Healthscope announced the closure of private maternity services at Darwin Private Hospital on 20 February, but you have known about it since September last year. It has taken you more than eight months—almost

as long as it takes to have a baby—to secure an alternative for private patients who still have unanswered questions about their postnatal care. It has also taken you that long to request federal government assistance to support increased demand at RDH, even though Tasmania secured support in February. Meanwhile, Budget 2025–26 provides no funding for the extra 300 births a year expected in our public system.

You claim to deliver action and certainty, but your inaction has created deep uncertainty and insecurity for pregnant Territory women. When will you do something for those left in limbo?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Daly said that we had known about the closure since last year, but in his first statement he confirmed that we were formally advised in February this year that Healthscope would close its maternity services. Despite the speculation that the Member for Daly is creating, we were advised in February that Healthscope would be closing maternity services at the hospital.

Yes, we have been working across the board since we were formally advised that Healthscope would be closing maternity services. There has been some back and forth with Healthscope. It first said that it would be closing in April, then we had further advice it would be closing in June.

The advice we have is that there are 250 babies born per year, not the 300 that the Member for Daly seems to think, born at the private hospital. I confirm that the Darwin public hospital is fully equipped to take on the extra births at Royal Darwin Hospital. It is roughly 10% additional births.

Last night we held a forum with some of the families affected by the closure of the private service. Yes, many of the families are frustrated and angry that Healthscope made the decision to close those services. To the best of our ability we are filling the void that has been left behind by Healthscope. It is Healthscope closing the service, not the Northern Territory Government. We have been working across the board. We were there last night to look at the luxury hotel package for mothers who can clinically be assessed to leave the hospital early. Those packages are available at the hotel or they can go home to their residence in Darwin.

We want to assure all families …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. There was another part to the question in regard to why you have not spoken to the federal government for assistance for increased demand at RDH.

Mr EDGINGTON: I was getting to that.

We are working with those families and delivering the packages that we promised right from the word go. We have written to the federal government asking for $35m to improve the infrastructure at Royal Darwin Hospital. That letter went to the federal minister, and we hope to hear back from him soon to move ahead, improve the services and the infrastructure to ensure the safe delivery of babies at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Schools – Swimming Lessons

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

People in my electorate of Wanguri are doing it tough with the increased cost of living. For families, especially with more than one child, it is getting harder to juggle the family budget. I have heard of families in my electorate being forced to choose between paying for activities and sports for the kids and simply putting food on the table. Can you explain how the Education budget this year will provide relief for parents who are struggling with the cost of living?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, like all Territorians the good people of Wanguri are struggling with the increased cost of living. Therefore, I am delighted to announce that Budget 2025 will deliver $3m in the Education budget to provide free swimming lessons for all primary students in Years 1 to 6. This means parents do not need to put their hand in their pocket to use their $100 sports vouchers to ensure their children learn lifesaving water skills. Swimming lessons are free; I have spoken about this numerous times. All transport and pool entry costs are covered under this. It is another example of the CLP listening to families feeling the cost-of-living pressures.

A range of delivery models have been implemented so far this year to ensure all students benefit from this program, regardless of where their school is. So far 127 out of 134 schools across the Territory have locked in their Swim and Survive program this year. Of those, 44 schools have already completed their program in Term 1, which is more than 3,600 students who have already received free swimming lessons. About half of those students have met the national benchmark 1, which means we are on track to turn around our alarming statistics of only 5% of Year 6 students meeting the national benchmark. By the end of Term 2, 26 schools will have conducted their programs, with the remaining schools participating in Terms 3 and 4. The department is working through the logistics with seven very remote schools to bring their programs to fruition.

Being in and around water is a huge part of our lifestyle, with our amazing weather, national parks, outdoor lifestyle and fishing, yet we see the highest rates of drowning per capita in the country. Our government is determined to change that by removing the financial burden on parents.

The Labor Party said that the budget lacked vision and a commitment to address issues for Territorians. Would Labor cancel this program if it was in government? It is clear that Labor does not care about the cost of living for Territorians. Does the Labor opposition not want this to improve our drowning rate? In 2023–24 it was reported to be nearly two per 100,000 people.

It was great to see photos of Gunbalanya School students taking part in their free swimming program. These children were learning a skill that might one day save their life or the life of a friend or family member.

I am proud that Budget 2025 will continue to deliver this vital program in all Territory schools.

Circuit Breaker Program

J DAVIS to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

We have heard a lot about the Circuit Breaker Program from this government; in fact, it is the main answer the government gives when we ask about where domestic violence money is being spent. However, when I look at the Circuit Breaker website or the Territory Community Safety website about the Circuit Breaker Program there is no mention of domestic violence.

Can the minister explain how the Circuit Breaker Program is informed by domestic violence prevention expertise and what evaluation measures the minister is using when she tells us that it is successful in domestic violence prevention? Can the minister share this data with the Assembly?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am often talking about the statistics and the success of Circuit Breaker, so I am not sure how she has missed it, but I am more than happy to tout those statistics again.

If we are to change what is happening in the domestic violence space, we have to start with our kids. We have to work with them and get them to understand that what they are being exposed to often on a daily basis is not normal behaviour. The Member for Gwoja said that violence is not normal in our Indigenous communities, and this is right. We have to make sure that we show these kids who are being exposed to horrendous situations that is not the answer, that is not normal behaviour and that is not the path they should take.

What do you do? You try to get these kids before they get into trouble, before they find themselves in the court system and before they find themselves in Don Dale earning that apparently greatest hits piece of jewellery that everybody is seeking now, which is the ankle monitor. Kids are now getting fake ones so that they can fit in. That is how distorted the community has become.

Circuit Breaker has now been in place since December last year. The team who piloted that project and demonstrated how successful it is in Alice Springs has been doing an amazing job. If you want to talk about frontline workers who are delivering, the Circuit Breaker team is delivering without question. They are out every night working with kids and their families to make sure that the kids are safe and that they can find out exactly what is going on with those families that means a child is out on the street. They then bring the wraparound services into the program …

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. My question was: can you tell us how it is informed by DV prevention expertise and what evaluation measures are put in place to show that it is preventing DV? Can you share that data with the Assembly?

Ms CAHILL: Those team members are out every night. They work with the families to find out what is going wrong that those kids are out on the street. They then do referrals to support services; sometimes it is the Health department for health issues; sometimes it is domestic, family and sexual violence-specific crisis accommodation because the family as a whole have members who are at risk; sometimes it is getting the child to school; and sometimes it is about seeing what referrals can be made to men's behaviour programs …

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. There is no question that this program is doing things. My question was about where is the data to show and the evaluation. Can you share with the Assembly that it is working to prevent domestic violence?

Ms CAHILL: There have been 141 kids brought into this program. That is 141 kids who are now safer and not being exposed to horrendous situations.

The evaluation will come out at the end of the first 12 months.

Fines Recovery Unit

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for CORPORATE and DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

In November 2024 this government passed legislation to fix issues relating to enforcement orders for unpaid fines and penalties—a problem that went on for some 20 years. When the problem was identified a few months before the CLP came into government, all enforcement processes ceased. This meant many fines and infringements were not being recovered, essentially meaning that people were doing the wrong thing without any enforcement of a consequence. Can you update the Assembly on how these legislative changes not only provided a solution to a decades-long blunder but also improved enforcement processes and increased recovery of funds owed?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, in October 2024, less than two months after the CLP came into power, we drafted two Bills to urgently remedy an historical noncompliance issue that went on for about 20 years. The changes to the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* were passed on urgency and validated past enforcement actions, ensured all processes in the Act used by the Fines Recovery Unit are consistent and streamlined what was previously an arduous application process to enforce penalties.

At the time of the Bills' introduction there were approximately 206,000 outstanding fines and infringements worth a whopping $120m, with more than $104m owed to the NT Government. We could do with that now; I know the Treasurer would like that money.

When the previous government learnt of the issue in July 2024, rather than finding a solution to the expensive blunder it promised an independent review to identify the problem—another waste of taxpayer funds. Instead of pushing pointless expenses onto the taxpayer we worked quickly with the Department of Corporate and Digital Development to make necessary changes to fix the issue.

The Fines Recovery Unit is actively working to recover money owed to the NT Government. In the financial year to date 46,682 fines were issued of which 38,590 have been paid in full. This represents an 83% clearance rate, with the total debt recovered amounting to more than $16m. We know most people do the right thing and pay on time, but these figures do not lie. They send a clear message that if you do the wrong thing you will pay the fine.

These numbers tell the story of a system that is now working the way it is supposed to. The changes this government made to the fines and penalties legislation are working, and the enforcement of fines and significant recovery of funds owed to the government directly supports our economic rebuild. It promotes accountability and public confidence, supporting safer communities and a more stable economic environment.

As previously stated, if people are unable to pay their fines there are flexible alternative options, like community work orders which permit people to work off their debt and time-to-pay arrangements.

An enormous amount of work went into this. Our government will continue to hold people to account and ensure that we are recovering those funds.

North Australia Fire Information Service

K McNAMARA to MINISTER for FIRE and EMERGENCY SERVICES

The North Australia Fire Information service (NAFI) is a crucial tool for firefighting agencies, pastoralists, land managers and Parks and Wildlife across the NT and all of northern Australia. It underpins the Indigenous carbon abatement industry in Arnhem Land which brings $20m to $30m a year into the NT economy. This critical national digital infrastructure is operated by a dedicated team at CDU. Despite the critical nature of this service and it costing less than $1m a year, every year it faces funding uncertainty through short-term last-minute federal funding. Disappointingly, there was nothing in your latest budget to assist NAFI with the funding cliff it is facing. The service is at crisis point; it now has six weeks until shutdown with no federal or Territory funding announced.

Will you, as a matter of urgency, consider Territory funding to keep NAFI active? Will you also urgently advocate to the federal government to commit to ongoing funding?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, everyone is well aware of that important function. Being the Fire and bushfires minister, I know it is used and interacted with a lot.

To be clear that database or resource—you could call it that—is federally funded. If the federal government has chosen not to fund it I can get behind lobbying Canberra to deliver it. That is where we need to start.

I note that the newly re-elected Member for Solomon has a lot to say about the Territory CLP government but little to say about his actual job, which is representing the people of Solomon. What is he doing? I would love to know what he is doing about NAFI and why this funding is being gutted from the Territory. What is he doing about Healthscope and its withdrawal of private maternity services from the Territory and the speculation that it might pull out altogether? Where is Luke Gosling? He has probably gone back into hiding, where he has been for the last three terms, after having a big swing against him.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. If the Chief Minister does not know the answer, which is clearly about north-east Arnhem Land in the Lingiari electorate, will she take it on notice?

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, it is your call.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not even know what to say, because the Opposition Leader is a real treat. What are you talking about? We are talking about a database resource which is used across the Territory.

I have just finished answering the question that it is federally funded, and I will get on to that straightaway. I am raising a good point. If you want to bring Marion Scrymgour, the Member for Lingiari, into this, then what is she and Labor doing with their federal representatives in the Territory? They won an election, and they have vanished and are taking cheap shots at a Territory level and not doing their own job at a federal level.

K McNAMARA: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I appreciate the response that you will be advocating to the federal government, thank you. The other part of question was: would you also consider Territory funding to help keep NAFI active in the meantime?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I believe this sits squarely with the Commonwealth. We have just delivered our budget, and this is not in the budget because it is Commonwealth funded.

I do not think we should let the Commonwealth off the hook. At the end of the day, about 70% of the Territory's budget is dependent on the federal government, but it is maintenance money. It is not driving massive changes to infrastructure development, massive social changes or outcomes or reducing crime; it is status quo funding. That is not good enough. We cannot live without it, but we cannot grow as a jurisdiction with the funding the way it is. When the federal government starts penny pinching on things like NAFI, it makes us wonder whether it cares about the Territory at all.

Going back to our favourite Member for Solomon, when he was snubbed for the fourth time for assistant ministries or ministries he said that the federal government does not understand the Northern Territory. For the first time in a long time I agreed with him. What is he doing about it? That is the number one question.

I will raise that. Thank you, Member for Nightcliff, for bringing it to my attention.

International Students and Skilled Migrants

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, MIGRATION and POPULATION

The Northern Territory's economy is underpinned by the people who live, work and play here. Over the last eight years of the Labor government, as I have repeatedly pointed out over eight months, there has been a period of demographic decline. Our population has gone backwards and businesses have been hurt, which put pressure on our economy.

The Territory's communities and economy were built by migration, with new Territorians bringing skills and their culture to help us create the multicultural diverse Territory we know and love. More recently, international students have also played an increasingly large part in choosing Darwin as a place to study and live. Can you update the Assembly on the work that is being done to attract skilled migrants and international students to the Territory and the impact that will have in helping us to rebuild our economy?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Fong Lim, in his capacity as assistant minister for International Education, Migration and Population, is providing critical support and advocacy for his constituents and the Territory community more broadly in this space.

Our CLP government has made it clear how important international students and skilled migrants are to the future of the Northern Territory. International students provide essential labour for industries such as retail, hospitality and tourism and contribute significantly to the service sector, especially during peak seasons.

The international education and training sector is projected to contribute $280m to the NT economy by 2026, positioning it as the Territory's second-largest service export by revenue. Each skilled migrant worker in the Territory is estimated to contribute $108,000 per annum to the Territory's economy, demonstrating how critical they are to rebuilding our economy.

In delivering the Finocchiaro CLP government's 2025–26 budget, the Treasurer outlined our government's commitment to supporting these critical pathways to the Northern Territory through the announcement of $2m per annum over the next two years to attract international students and skilled migrants to the Territory. This will be achieved through supporting Migration NT with almost $500,000 to ensure timely assessment of the increased—almost doubled—general skilled migration applications and the NT Designated Area Migration Agreement, which we increased significantly from 600 to 2,500, from memory, which is a massive increase for us.

The remainder of the funding will:

- facilitate business and community engagement, including migration information sessions hosted throughout the Territory
- IT and portal enhancements to improve efficiency
- support retention of skilled migrants through the expansion of the skilled workers engagement and support program
- deliver interstate and international marketing and events in target locations that promote the Territory as a place to work and live, working to grow our population which is so critical to our future
- support marketing and management of the WorkerConnect platform, which connects interstate and international jobseekers with employment opportunities in the Territory
- support international education and roundtable industry discussions
- support international education agent engagements, including agent familiarisation, to showcase the Territory as a place to study, live and work.

In our year of action, certainty and security this funding supports our commitment to rebuild our economy and restore our beautiful Territory lifestyle.

Casuarina Bus Interchange

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT referred to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

Earlier this year the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure denied that your government was planning to move the Casuarina bus interchange to Leanyer. Given your government made the decision to move the northern suburbs youth block to Crown land at Leanyer without prior notice or community consultation, can you advise whether you have been involved in discussions with your colleagues about moving the Casuarina bus interchange? If so, when will you be honest with the community about it?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I will pass this question to the minister for Infrastructure, who is the minister responsible for this matter.

Mr YAN: Madam Speaker, I can set the record straight. There are no plans to ever move the Casuarina bus interchange to Leanyer. Someone got that wrong and posted something on Facebook. It was an application for a taxi licence to park some cars at a residence around Karama, if I remember correctly. There was never any consideration of moving the Casuarina bus interchange to Leanyer.

I am happy to give the Assembly advice about what will happen with the Casuarina bus interchange. We have been working consistently with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure over the past months because of the issues at the Casuarina bus interchange. We will get rid of the thing; we will remove the Casuarina bus interchange. It soon will cease to exist.

We are redoing the bus routes. There is a whole piece of work that DLI is doing on the bus network and safety on the network, and the interchange is part of that work. The interchange at Casuarina will go. There will be additional stops, and the department will look at how those stops will work around the Casuarina supermarket and that whole centre.

We will be able to reduce some of the social order issues we have seen at Casuarina due to the bus interchange. These issues crept in under the last eight years of the previous government, which did not want to do anything about it. The previous government never did any work with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure to look at how it may solve some of those issues and deal with some of the social determinants on our public network in Darwin and Alice Springs.

We are also working on the Palmerston interchange. We are working through how we may change the Palmerston interchange so that we can remove the social order issues there.

The previous Labor government never considered this. It was happy to just kick the can down the road and let people become victims of crime at those interchanges.

We are doing something about it; we have listened to the communities of Palmerston and Casuarina, and we are working hard now to deal with the social order issues we see on our public transport network. We will solve this problem.

Casuarina Bus Interchange – Supplementary Question

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

You have just confirmed that you will get rid of the interchanges. Can you confirm that no Territorian will be left worse off and their usual travel route will not be disrupted by your changes?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, there is a review taking place of the entire public network for our buses in the Top End. That will make sure we are providing an efficient good service with fewer social order issues on that network. The department will make sure that the buses will run on time. People will still get to work and kids will still get to school when they need to.

The work that the previous government failed to do is now being done. It was not interested in reforming the public transport network; it just wanted to keep things moving the way they were.

The review of the entire network is taking place, and we will make sure that people can get to where they need to be on time each day.

Public Housing – Crime

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

As you and those in this House are aware, the suburb of Gray is home to some of the most problematic housing complexes in the NT. Earlier this month I made you aware of my concerns about the increase of alcohol-fuelled violence in and around my electorate, specifically in public housing. My constituents have had enough of having their lives impacted by tenants and associated visitors who demonstrate zero consideration or respect for those living around them. As I said time and again …

Mr Paech: Tenants are your constituents.

Mr HOWE: I note the interjection from the prevaricator, the Member for Gwoja.

As I said time and again, good tenants are trapped while problem tenants wreak havoc in public housing. Can you update the Assembly on some of the key actions that have been taken to address these concerns?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, with community safety as our number one priority, I know the Member for Drysdale is passionate about addressing the ongoing issues, as are the other members in this House. Drinking and disgraceful behaviour are all impacting on the community.

For those who need reminding, for 19 of the last 24 years Labor was in government. With the inaction of the Labor government, housing complexes such as the ones in Gray have been left defenceless, unsupported and people fearing for their safety as common areas are used as local pubs, bathrooms and fight clubs. Good tenants have been left to tolerate public drinking and ongoing antisocial behaviour for far too long. They have been left to fear for their safety when walking out their front door.

I stood in this House earlier this year and made a commitment that the CLP government would take decisive action to provide certainty and security for Territorians. I can now announce that as part of the housing reform, consultation has already been happening with Licensing NT. Negotiations have been held to declare common areas in public housing complexes alcohol-restricted areas.

Member for Drysdale, in April 2025 the application to declare the common area of 107 Emery Avenue alcohol restricted due to the severity of ongoing antisocial behaviour was approved. This is a huge achievement. Any person, whether they be a public housing resident or visitor, who is found to have alcohol in their possession will have it tipped out and they will be escorted off the premises by our authorities. Fines will be issued, with the potential to ban persons from the premises for a full 12 months. We are getting back to basics with better services, safer streets and stronger communities. Member for Drysdale, I am pleased to share that with the successful outcome at Emery Avenue, multiple applications have been initiated for our high-risk complexes throughout the Northern Territory. We will put accountability back on those who do the wrong thing in public housing complexes and ensure safety for all Territorians.

This had been going on for far too long. We have seen an increase in drinking and antisocial behaviour in public housing. After eight years of inaction under the Labor government, we are moving ahead with all these changes. There will be further changes, and we look forward to implementing them.

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

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 22

Continued from earlier this day.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I start by responding to some of the things we have heard in the Chamber so far today.

One is the idea that there is a minority of loud voices who supposedly support perpetrators over victims. I have no idea who those voices are. I have not heard anyone calling for support of perpetrators over the rights of victims, but if members are talking about frontline services and experts who are speaking out against the moves by this government, that is frankly insulting. It shows to me that the members saying these things have never had a conversation with people working on the front line to defend these victims, let alone listened to anything they say.

There is also something that many of us, victim–survivors, are finding fairly aggravating, to be honest; that is, the sentiment of some of those opposite suddenly trying to convince us that they really care about victims when we, victim–survivors, and those who dedicate their lives to protecting women and children have been holding vigils and marches for the women killed by men—mostly Aboriginal women—and not once in the seven years I have been attending these vigils in the NT have I seen one member of the CLP attend. The only time I have was post them getting elected, when I saw two members attend a vigil. Granted, I have not been to every one, but my community and I, as part of the victim–survivors, have been constantly marching and holding vigils every time a woman is killed. It is extremely grating to us to hear all this incredible insincerity. Where were they? They were not there. Excuse me if the sincerity of those opposite to support victims now seems unconvincing to us, because they have been absent until now.

As a victim–survivor I take this topic extremely seriously. I know what it means to physically run in fear from someone who wants to hurt you. When I visited Dawn House recently—the incredible refuge that our Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence is still yet to meet with after nine months of being in the role—I was told about the increase in sophistication of tracking devices that men are using to track their victims. These devices are hidden in cars and children's toys. The terror of this hit me in the gut.

Even with my life experience, I must turn to those who work in this field for guidance on what the evidence says will work. Genuinely all I want is to support something that actually works. I take my role here incredibly seriously. Therefore, I take being proactive with reaching out and listening very seriously.

A recent conversation I had about this Bill, with a senior experienced frontline worker in the domestic violence sector, was helpful for me to better understand the whole picture of the reality of proposals like this. She spoke to me about the reality of working in the domestic violence sector in regional and remote parts of the NT and how it is different from other parts of Australia, particularly urban centres and areas interstate.

She said that many people think that when a man is convicted of DV the woman, and possibly the children, escape. They move, change their names, move on and the man is imprisoned for a length of time. The reality is that, most often, the victim and perpetrator are living in a small community, where everyone knows everyone. The woman should not have to leave her entire family and support network, so often they are still there, having to maintain a relationship. These victim–survivors often have to manage the perpetrator for when they are eventually released.

Many of them speak with fear about the changes that happen to these men, getting angrier and more violent after being brutalised in prison with no rehabilitation. Do not get me wrong; she spoke about the fact that incarceration can be part of a proper DV response in terms of giving the victim a break, but that option already exists. We already imprison DV perpetrators; judges use that if deemed necessary. Mandatory sentencing, however, which is in this Bill, is different. I have learnt that it is detrimental to the positive outcomes in this space, for the reasons I will detail.

I understand how tempting and good it feels to stand up and give platitudes about standing strong in the face of violence and having zero tolerance. Those platitudes are empty if they do not make anything better. It feels good to say those things because they are easy to say, but sometimes taking the easiest route is not the correct one; it is just lazy. The truth lives down a more complex nuanced path. As they say, if it is worth doing it will be hard, and if it is not hard it is probably not worth doing.

Domestic, family and sexual violence is at a crisis point in the Northern Territory, but the voices of experts and people with lived experience are absent in this Bill. Those opposite have shown time and again that their policies are driven by their own ideologies or what they think will make a good headline, rather than what will have a meaningful long term impact on reducing violence.

I echo the concerns of the sector that this Bill is being rushed through without proper consultation and consideration. Unlike other legislation the CLP has rushed through parliament, this Bill at least went to the scrutiny committee for feedback and assessment. However, with no hearings the consultation process falls far short. It is not clear to me that the government has taken on board the feedback of experts and victim–survivors. As such, I cannot and will not support this Bill at this time. My primary concern …

A member: What a surprise.

K McNAMARA: I pick up on that interjection—'What a surprise'. I …

Madam SPEAKER: Comments through me, please.

K McNAMARA: This kind of dismissiveness—I am standing here and genuinely giving a good-faith read. I talked with and reached out to centres that your own domestic violence minister has not met with. I am taking this seriously and in good faith, and if they want to do the sarcastic 'Surprise, surprise' it tells me a whole lot more about them than it does about me.

Turning to mandatory sentencing and judicial discretion, my primary concern is that the Bill proposes the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing and removes the discretion of the court to consider the individual circumstances of the case. This concern is held widely across the Territory. This idea of the separation of power and the kind of motivations of a government that wants to put tighter controls on the judiciary—they are supposed to be separated for a reason. The appropriate exercise of judicial discretion is an essential function of our justice system and our democracy, and I am concerned by the infringements that this Bill has on the separation of powers. I urge the government to listen to the calls of the sector and to ensure that our judiciary is supported and trained to make informed decisions about domestic violence.

If it is 'such a surprise' that I am constantly calling for the government to listen to evidence, I am glad that it is not a surprise. I am glad I am up here all the time saying, 'Let us listen to evidence and victim–survivors', because it is often missing with this government.

I stand in solidarity with the sector in opposing the introduction of mandatory sentencing for domestic violence offences and call on the government to listen to the experts and victim–survivors. There is a mountain of evidence indicating that mandatory sentencing of DFV offenders does not work to reduce violence. Coroner Elisabeth Armitage has said that this insidious violence is a crisis that we cannot arrest our way out of. It is an enormously complex social issue that requires a holistic approach centred on prevention and rehabilitation.

I will outline the evidence provided in submissions to the scrutiny committee as to why mandatory sentencing should be opposed. I note that I went into this looking to learn and listen. I was interested to see the submissions and to see all of them written were of the same view from the people who have been doing this for decades. What is the point of having a scrutiny committee if the government looks at all these unanimous submissions and then says, 'No, we reckon the opposite'? It is frustrating.

First, evidence shows that imprisonment does not act as a deterrent to crime. It has been said many times, but warrants repeating: if imprisonment worked, the NT would be safest place in Australia. However, our prisons are overflowing and nothing has changed. NAAJA's submission on this Bill made the point:

> *There is no clear evidentiary basis for the proposition that mandatory sentencing reduces reoffending. Rather, this approach increases the number of people in custody without delivering better outcomes for victim–survivors or communities.*

To keep our communities safe and thriving we need to prevent violence from happening in the first place. Mandatory imprisonment is not the answer.

Second, evidence shows that once someone goes to prison, they are more likely to offend again and end up back there. We need to ensure that imprisonment is used as a last resort. The people I have spoken to in the sector acknowledge that imprisonment is part of it in terms of giving the women a break, but mandatory sentencing will not work. The judges can give sentences of imprisonment, and they do. The NT has the highest recidivism rate in Australia with almost 60% of offenders returning to prison, which tells us that something is broken in the system. Our prisons are not rehabilitative; they encourage further criminal behaviour. We cannot take someone out of a bad situation, provide them with no rehabilitation or support and put them back into the same situation expecting a different outcome.

Third, putting offenders in prison is a terrible use of taxpayer money. The government boasted last week when it released the budget that there is a record spend on Corrections. This is nothing to be proud of; it shows that we are failing to prevent crime and reoffending.

Stopping Family Violence—a DFV peak body—made the point in its submission that the cost of imprisoning someone for 14 days costs the same amount as to put them through a men's behaviour change program.

These are the kinds of programs we need to be focusing on to prevent people ending up in prison again and, more importantly, to stop violence from happening.

One of the largest red flags people in the sector raised is that a poor understanding of domestic and family violence, with racism, overpolicing, communication and language barriers, poverty and other factors, means that victim–survivors may be mistaken for perpetrators of violence and end up in custody themselves. This happens somewhat frequently and is a real danger. Our inflexible systems mean that people who are victims of domestic and family violence may end up labelled perpetrators on DVOs. Then if they breach them for financial security, family or cultural reasons, they end up incarcerated themselves—the victims.

This will be exacerbated by the removal of judicial discretion in this Bill. This is exactly why discretion exists. Judges need to assess matters on a case-by-case basis to ensure that they are not misidentifying victim–survivors as perpetrators. I stress that the frontline workers I spoke to used the word 'terrifying' at the thought of victims being caught up with mandatory sentencing—a terrible miscarriage of justice. This will now undoubtedly occur under this legislation.

We need to move away from police and prisons as the answer to crime and focus on ensuring victim–survivors have the support and agency they need to get out of violent situations. We need to focus on building more housing, behaviour change programs, specialist training of police to prevent misidentification of victims as offenders, improving access to interpreters and culturally safe support systems to ensure that DVOs work to protect victims rather than punish them.

As aforementioned, mandatory sentencing may lead to underreporting of violence or DVO breaches. I heard from people, particularly those working in remote areas, that the idea of mandatory reporting stops women from reporting because they do not want pushback or retribution from the offender and family. Evidence suggests that victim–survivors will be at higher risk of being coerced or manipulated into not reporting violence because the offender would be compulsorily imprisoned. We need to ensure the victim–survivors have the culturally safe supports that they need to safely report violence and get access to justice and the care that they deserve. From what I have learnt and understood, mandatory sentencing will not achieve that. That is my concern.

I am concerned that rather than listening to experts and people with lived experience to tackle this crisis, this government is content to let the issue get worse. I urge the government to shift its focus away from imprisonment and towards rehabilitation, prevention and support.

The second element of this Bill that I have concerns about are the changes to the assessment of victims' compensation. The Bill proposes that non-legally qualified people will be able to assess victims' compensation claims, although I saw there was an amendment this morning to that, but it still seemed rather broad in terms of the qualification of someone who can make that decision. Victims' compensation assessments require assessment of complex legal issues and, as such, it is essential they are conducted by appropriate legally trained professionals. Incorrect or inconsistent applications of the law have real and lasting impacts on people's lives. It is essential that these processes are efficient; however, this cannot come at the expense of the quality and integrity of decisions. Once again, we need to listen to people in the sector who highlighted in their submissions a number of approaches that would help to streamline this process without negatively impacting victim–survivors.

The final matter I draw attention to is the expansion of the requirements of the Crime Victims Services Unit to notify victims on the Victims Register when an offender has failed to comply with electronic monitoring conditions. I stand with the sector in supporting victim–survivors' access to information. I agree it is important, and I am glad to see that, but the submissions stated that there is a need for the government to ensure that the service is sufficiently resourced to maintain contact with and support those on the Victims Register.

I also join the call of the NT women's legal services to ensure the delivery of the Victims Register is trauma informed so that the information sharing does not trigger or retraumatise victim–survivors. We need to ensure that this reform is implemented alongside specialist DFSV services to support victim–survivors to get the information they are entitled to in a way that is safe and trauma informed.

I ask the government to take a cautious and evidence-informed approach to this issue. I call on this government not to rush through this Bill today; instead, review and consider the evidence provided by the sector to the scrutiny committee, and amend the Bill accordingly.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I support an approach to family violence that includes good consultation with our communities, elders and leaders so that we can work together to address the tragedy

of violence within families. I have said these things before in the Chamber, and I will say them again. We must draw from our communities and domestic violence service workers what solutions will bring real change.

I have said clearly that domestic violence is unlawful as part of our Yolngu law and balanda law. We must work together to address this problem. In remote communities we need our elders and leaders, men and women, to be part of these solutions. We need decision-making power and our right to self-determination. When I stand in every parliament session and talk about *raypirri* camps and peacekeepers, I am talking about preventing family violence with culturally appropriate interventions that should bring long-lasting harmony.

We must have domestic violence orders, and they need to include clan leaders from each of the parties so that we can set the terms and conditions to help a victim be safe. Sometimes police and balanda involvement do not set the best conditions, as they do not include the extended family in a conference so that the clans can work together to bring safety.

Traditionally, male and female ceremonies have brought education to our young people about respectful relationships, marriage and building strong families. This education is inbuilt to our law, but today young people may not get this teaching, and they are marrying and becoming parents very young. We are seeing young and uneducated couples who need more support and culturally appropriate information about how to be respectful. This is what *raypirri* camps and peacekeeping is all about.

The boys' circumcision ceremony when they are about nine or 10 years old is the beginning of these education processes. The sounds of the clap sticks, the singing, the paintings on skin and the feathers that the boys wear are the artefacts of law. It is these things that a child wears that remind him of the learning, self-discipline and looking after kin and country. This is the beginning of the law that teaches a boy who is becoming a young man about respectful relationships.

These teachings also happen for the young women with their female elders. These teachings have been part of our culture, so I am upset and frustrated when I hear people say that Aboriginal culture causes violence. Family violence is not part of our culture. Elders and leaders do not want violence in our communities.

The balanda solutions in our remote communities are not working. DVOs, courts and prison terms do not help to heal the deep problems in our communities. They are like a bandaid that allows a sore to fester and spread infection underneath.

We need to find better solutions to help women and families who need protection and ensure that the solutions are long-lasting so that the perpetrators are taken into a culturally appropriate program that is about rehabilitation and healing. For the perpetrators who have a problem with drugs and alcohol, we need to have culturally appropriate programs that are about drug rehabilitation on country. We need elders and leaders running these programs. When these things are not working, we can move perpetrators away from the victim, out of the community and onto country elsewhere and bring peace through separation if there is no other solution. Leaders and elders have many ways of managing these problems. We have to be part of the solution, working with families for real outcomes.

Family violence is not part of our culture, but we have been disempowered to take action against it because we are no longer the authority. Police, courts and jails have become the authority in our communities. This means we rarely get rehabilitation and healing because intervention does not connect with our law. Our remote elders and communities need the government to understand that *raypirri* camps, Yolngu mediators, peacekeepers and our ceremonies of law run by male and female elders should be a priority of this government if it wants to see healing and harmony in our communities.

I note that all the submissions to the scrutiny committee do not agree with this Bill. These are the service experts and their advice is being ignored, and they acknowledge that our leaders are also being ignored. CAAFLU and NAAFLS stated in their submission:

> *We wish to express our disappointment regarding the lack of meaningful consultation and the limited timeframe provided to respond to …*

This Bill:

> *… We are particularly concerned that the Bill fails to adequately include or reflect the voices of Aboriginal women, their families, communities, or ACCOs working in the DFSV sector.*

Submission 13 from the Northern Territory Women Lawyers' Association, the Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory and the Law Society Northern Territory stated:

> *The Bill has been developed without adequate consultation from sector experts, it is inconsistent with the findings of the 2024 NT Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of four Aboriginal Women due to domestic violence, and fails to address social determinants and root causes of DFV including inadequate housing, food insecurity, and insufficient access to culturally safe services.*

There are many more submissions that raise similar concerns, including the issue that mandatory sentencing may be damaging in these cases, because it does not include community or rehabilitation and can make the victim less safe.

I also have grave concerns about the incarceration of Aboriginal people in a failing jail system that is causing a high level of trauma.

This Bill is not supported widely across the community. I am unsure why the government continues to change the law. This Bill does not bring changes that will help our communities; rather, it will contribute to the problems. Until the government starts listening to communities and service providers, these problems will only get worse. The government does not seem to care that there will be more victims and harm.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, much has been said about domestic, family and sexual violence. The minister has spoken many times about the challenges and the hard work she has been doing, working with key stakeholders in the sector.

It is a key priority of our government to put in place proactive measures to respond to and prevent domestic, family and sexual violence, and these reforms will ensure victims can be notified when an offender breaches various orders. This is another election commitment that our government is delivering on to reduce crime, keep our community safe, reduce the financial burden on the economy and support our Territory lifestyle, whereby Territorians can live and feel safe in their own homes, at their workplace and in the community. These reforms are another strong step forward to ensure the safety of victims is strengthened and that offenders who do not comply with their mandated orders are faced with consequences.

Domestic violence grew out of control under eight years of Labor, which removed mandatory sentencing for domestic violence offences. Under our new mandatory sentencing regime, the court must sentence an offender to an actual term of imprisonment when an offender breaches an existing DVO and harm or threat of harm was involved against the victim, an offender breaches their DVO and has a prior breach of a DVO, or when an offender has repeatedly breached their DVO in a short time—28 days.

Our changes have also expanded the Victims Register to ensure that more information is shared with victims about their offenders. Previously, the Crime Victims Services Unit, which manages the Victims Register, could provide information about a victim's offender only when the offender was sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

Victims should have the right to be notified if their offender removes or cuts their electronic monitoring device, does not show up to parole orders or meet conditions or does not comply with a mandated intensive community correction order. Victims should have more rights and transparency. They have endured enough in just becoming a victim. Our government, by making these changes, will at least provide increased peace of mind and trust in being safe.

Offenders have no more excuses, chances or people to blame but themselves. We are here today to stop violence before it begins.

Sadly, the Northern Territory has the highest reported rates of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia, particularly against Aboriginal women and children. Under the previous government we saw an increase of 81% in domestic violence-related offences.

We have also modernised the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act* and, as a result, the victims of crime levy will increase, which means more money will be available to be used for victims' services.

The coronial inquiries into DV deaths of Territory women found that, according to the NT Police Force, there was a 117% increase in the number of domestic and family violence calls in the past decade. Since the beginning of 2025 three more women are reported to have been killed by a partner or ex-partner in domestic and family violence-related circumstances in the Territory.

Last year in Katherine four women lost their lives to domestic violence. These ladies were someone's mother, sister, aunty or friend. They were four ladies who had their lives cut short by the actions of another through domestic violence.

A key priority of our government is preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. I am sure we can all agree that no Territorian should be subjected to any form of domestic or family violence. It is unacceptable.

During my time as the Member for Katherine we have spoken often about domestic violence issues and how to better support programs. To do this we need whole-of-government coordination and investment in primary prevention, early intervention, response, recovery, healing and systemic enablers. It was good to hear the Member for Gwoja and the Leader of the Opposition talking about that support.

I also bring to your attention that one of the main contributing factors to homelessness in our nation is as a result of domestic and family violence, with nearly 30% of individuals who are at risk stating this as their primary reason for seeking help.

Help is what we need to provide these women and families experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence—help that is offered selflessly by our own Territorians like the new outreach worker program at the Yilli short-stay accommodation and homelessness facility located at Batten Road. Hope is what our government is committed to delivering, providing more funding for remote women's safe houses, and hope for those in their time of desperate need towards a better future, which includes providing Aboriginal employment, pathways to a better life and pathways to recovery.

Violence against women in the NT has an alarming and unacceptably high rate. We are committed to investing an additional $36m per year ongoing from 2025–26 to address funding shortfalls and build a more sustainable domestic, family and sexual violence service system. The minister has spoken about this in each parliament sittings.

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments have signed a new national partnership agreement which will see an additional $6.635m for domestic, family and sexual violence responses to be delivered over the next five years. In addition, a further $53m from the Australian Government will be received by the Northern Territory over the next five years for remote women's safe houses through the NTRAI program.

Our government is committed to continued and additional investment in service and programs that work to prevent and address domestic, family and sexual violence. Prevention programs stop violence before it begins.

As the Minister for Education and Training, I know that prevention in the early years is paramount to making change. We need to educate our future young Territorians, which is why I am committed to ensuring there are programs in our schools to make certain this happens. I note that the Member for Gwoja spoke about some of the programs in schools.

The following programs are directly related to primary prevention of domestic violence and in use across educational settings in the Northern Territory:

- Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum, developed by the SA department, is currently being implemented by 21 NT government schools, with 45 trainers across schools and corporate education systems

- Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships in conjunction with Building Respectful Relationships learning materials developed by the Victorian Department of Education

- the Love Bites and Love Bites Junior programs delivered by the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

- Girls Can Boys Can developed by Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs

- in Tennant Creek there is Talking Respect developed by It's Time we Talked and Women's Safety Services of Central Australia.

I ask everyone here whether they have asked their son or daughter what sort of person they want to be. Have they had those conversations with their child, niece or nephew, making them think about their aspirations from an early age, who they are and who they want to become? Being a good, kind human is what we want for everyone, and it needs to start at home.

Our government will invest in the services and programs that will make a difference. We will make these known to Territorians to give them hope, keep them safe and create future pathways to continue their lives. That is unlike the previous Labor government, which consistently decreased funding to the office of domestic, family and sexual violence reduction and was not transparent in how funding was allocated.

How positive and uplifting it is to know that the domestic, family and sexual violence worker outreach program has helped 27 victim–survivors since it started in October 2024. That is 27 Territorians who asked for and were provided with help through our government. This service alone is making a difference in the lives of Territorians, providing personalised care and helping Territorians move towards safer, sustainable and long-term housing solutions.

As the Member for Katherine I am committed to ensuring that our community is supported and equipped with facilities and services to work towards preventing and addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. I have met with staff of the women's crisis facility that has 25 beds available. For the past two years this centre has been full, at times accessing rooms in hotels to stem the overflow. In the past financial year 239 women had to be turned away because of capacity constraints. With demand so high, the centre has been forced to prioritise victims who have been physically harmed. We need to think about that.

A 19-year-old woman walked into the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre for help years ago when Jo Gamble was there. Jo is no longer there. Jo said that the person who walked in asking for help had said her partner pushed her. The staff remember feeling excited that someone had come in and acknowledged that it was not okay behaviour. It is not okay to have been stabbed, have black eyes or have been beaten with a weapon—whether it be a metal pole or a fist. None of this is okay. None of these actions should be tolerated or accepted as normal behaviour by any woman or man. If that same 19-year-old walked into the women's crisis centre today, Jo told me—while she was there; I note that there is a new manager now—she would likely be turned away because the centre does not have the space. That is a shame.

The NT has the worst domestic and family violence rates in Australia, with an intimate partner homicide rate seven times that of the national average. Service providers in Katherine say that the domestic violence crisis has reached new heights. It has led to frontline services sounding the alarm about the safety of women in Katherine and renewing calls for an injection of funding.

The average woman stays in the centre for about 10 days, but some women stay for months if they do not have a safe exit option. Service providers say that the lack of short-term accommodation options in Katherine mean women are often faced with difficult choices when they are released from the shelter. I note that the shelter has plans for expansion. I welcome that and look forward to seeing it.

I look forward to the minister's work in this area and to programs like Circuit Breaker expanding and making meaningful change in the prevention space, starting from the ground up and investing in prevention.

Ms CAHILL (Prevention of Domestic Violence): Madam Speaker, I support these amendments to strengthen our laws to protect victims of domestic, family and sexual violence.

First I will address the Member for Nightcliff's comments that she had never seen any member of the CLP at a domestic violence rally or event prior to the election. I did not know the Member for Nightcliff before parliament. I would have no idea whether she was at any event I attended in the 30 years I have lived in the Territory, because I had no idea who she was. For her to make such a derogatory sweeping statement about what I may or may not have done in this space in a personal capacity is highly offensive, and I expect my colleagues will feel the same way. She also has zero information about what I did before I lived here. I hope she is wise enough to retract that statement.

At this point in history, after eight long years of a failed Labor government, domestic violence is out of control in our community because those on the other side failed to make any meaningful change in this space.

The Member for Gwoja spoke about legislative reform undertaken during his term in government. Legislative reform without funding to progress reforms, however, is simply words on paper. Those opposite had eight years to make a commitment to provide ongoing funding to this sector, and they did not.

The Finocchiaro CLP government stepped up where those on the other side failed to do so and committed record baseline funding of $36m per year. This funding is directed towards the areas of highest impact and supports innovation, providing critical emergency shelter, legal support and culturally appropriate services for victim–survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. It strengthens the capacity of frontline service providers to meet urgent and ongoing needs.

The Leader of the Opposition stated that the Finocchiaro government's commitment to record baseline funding of $36m per year is not enough. Where was Labor's commitment to dedicated ongoing funding to provide support in this space? If those on the other side were so passionate about addressing the scourge of domestic, family and sexual violence, why did they fail to provide ongoing funding to critical frontline crisis services? Why were 21 non-government organisations providing critical frontline services, such as legal services and crisis support, funded to only the end of June 2025?

I was pleased to hear the Member for Gwoja call those who blame their behaviour on alcohol cowards, because he is right; alcohol does not cause bad behaviour. What causes bad behaviour is growing up in an environment where violence is used as a method of communication, where communities fail to ensure there are consequences in place for such behaviour and where rather than calling out such behaviour, a blind eye is turned because it is too hard. We will not see a change in this space until each member of every community in the Territory stands up and says, 'No more', and holds to account those who turn to violence in their relationships. It will also mean that every dollar that we have to spend in this space achieves results.

The Member for Gwoja spoke about men's behaviour change programs and their importance. He is right; changing behaviour is key, but he did not speak of the importance of getting those programs right and making sure that they are achieving outcomes that result in changed behaviour in our community. In other words, he did not provide any detail about the outcomes of those programs.

I have done work in this space and found that, sadly, men's behaviour change programs, some of which have been in place for more than a decade, are not delivering the change in behaviour that is their goal. One program had only 147 attendees out of 1,000 referrals over an eight-year period complete the program. Of those who completed the program, more than half have reoffended. Although it is fantastic that, albeit, a small proportion of those completing the program did not reoffend, given the small number who could be counted as a success, clearly those programs require review given the quantum of funding allocated.

It is reassuring to hear those on the other side speak in support of components of the amendments, particularly those in regard to victims' rights and compensation. However, I am truly at a loss to understand why those on the other side do not want to see the people who pose a risk of immediate harm to a victim put behind bars. If a DVO is not worth the paper it is written on because there is no consequence for breaching that DVO, what point is there in issuing it?

In November 2022 those on the other side repealed mandatory sentencing for breach of domestic violence orders because, according to them, protecting perpetrators is more important than protecting victims and the community as a whole. Mandatory sentencing puts a consequence, a deterrent, in place to let perpetrators know that they will have to answer for their actions.

Those on the other side would also have us believe that there is no evidence that minimum mandatory sentencing does not make victims safer, but the statistics speak for themselves. For the period December 2021 to November 2022, when minimum mandatory sentencing for breach of DVOs was in place, although the number was still horrendously high, there were 6,453 domestic assaults recorded in the NT. In the 12 months following the repeal of minimum mandatory sentencing for breach of DVOs, removing the consequence for this heinous behaviour, reported domestic violence assaults increased to 7,827. Clearly, the experts who claim that reintroducing this consequence will escalate harm have not done their homework.

Those on the other side constantly talk about consultation. The Leader of the Opposition constantly claims our CLP government is not listening to our community or to our frontline service providers, but this could not be further from the truth. I have travelled from Darwin to Alice, Katherine and Tennant Creek to Nhulunbuy and to the Tiwi Islands, speaking with frontline service providers and the community. In all, in the few short months I have held this portfolio, I have consulted with about 50 service providers encompassing crisis response and prevention initiatives.

I note the Member for Nightcliff claimed that she knows people I have not spoken to; maybe we have not been able to coordinate a meeting time, they have not reached out or I do not know they exist. If the member would like to let me know who they are, I will be more than happy to add them to the list of 50 organisations and people I have spoken to.

Those organisations and community members told me that we need to change our approach and focus on root causes as well as crisis response. We need to show our young people a better way and that violence is not the answer.

The opposition members say that we are not listening to the experts. We are listening, but we may not always agree—such is democracy. The experts do not have a responsibility to keep the community safe, but we do. Experts have the luxury of being ideological; we have a responsibility to the community. We listen to all sides of the argument, but we are here at the request of the people of the Northern Territory and our responsibility is to them.

The Leader of the Opposition also claims we are struggling to talk about the recommendations from the coronial inquiry into the tragic death of four Aboriginal women. We are not. In looking to the recommendations we have consulted broadly across government and the sector to make sure we get the response right. We will not be a reactive government making assumptions; we all know what is said about people who make assumptions. We will look to ensure that funding is allocated where it will achieve the best possible outcome for the victims of domestic violence and our community as a whole.

Clearly those on the other side are selective in their commitment to a bipartisan approach. Proposals to do things differently are put forward, and every time they are rejected. Circuit Breaker is a perfect example of that. Those on the other side would have us believe that this wraparound program that is now in place—through which 145 young people and their families have been supported to take a better path before they come before the justice system, supporting them to return to school, providing referrals to support programs to work to reduce domestic violence happening in their homes and showing them that violence is not the answer—is the same as the glorified taxi service they operated; it is not.

Although I appreciate it is early days, in Alice Springs where Circuit Breaker commenced there has been an 11% decrease in domestic assaults year on year in February 2025 and a 10% decrease in March 2025. In Palmerston, an area where domestic violence rose exponentially under the previous Labor government, there has been a 14% decrease year on year in February 2025 and 11% in March 2025. The only new factor in this story is Circuit Breaker. To suggest that Circuit Breaker, which addresses the root causes of domestic violence, is not a domestic violence program is irresponsible and devalues the incredible work of the frontline workers in that program, whom I have had the privilege of joining on their nightly patrols in Alice Springs on two occasions.

Those opposite talk about post-release services. The fact is that once a perpetrator has completed their time and been released from prison, you cannot compel them to continue any form of behaviour change program or ongoing skills training. Changing adult behaviour takes more than doing a limited course and then being sent away. To change behaviour people need ongoing support over time, which those on the other side would have known if they had listened to the sector and not just made announcements to appear to be doing something. Our CLP government, on the other hand, is working to identify how we can deliver interventions at the point of charge, supporting victims and alleged perpetrators to change behaviour, because that is where we can make the difference.

Labor did not put community safety first; instead, a lack of safety grew out of control under eight years of Labor government when those on the other side, who removed mandatory sentencing for domestic violence offences, failed to hear the voices of our community members who were screaming, ‘Enough is enough’.

Every Territorian has the right to feel safe, and sentencing repeat offenders who breach a DVO will keep people safe. These amendments are critical to working to protect victims of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank members for their contributions and their support of this Bill.

I thank the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for its careful consideration of the Bill and its report that I received on 29 April 2025. I am pleased to see that the committee has recommended that the Bill be passed with amendments, and I will discuss those recommendations and the amendments further in my summing up.

I am proud to have introduced, and now oversee the passage of, this Bill. These amendments will introduce crucial changes to hold DV offenders to account, protect DV victims and provide additional funding and support to DV victims specifically and victims of crime generally.

Under Labor the Northern Territory became the jurisdiction with the highest rates of domestic violence in Australia, with an intimate partner homicide rate seven times higher than the national average. The CLP made a commitment before the 2024 election to reduce crime and address community safety, and this Bill is a step towards achieving that commitment with respect to domestic and family violence.

Domestic violence offending remains high in the Territory. It is a matter of grave concern, particularly for vulnerable members of our community. Therefore, as part of the development of this important legislation, our government listened to the community and victims who were crying out for strong government action in light of women being bashed and killed by their partners.

As part of the consultation process, our government sent this Bill to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, which received extensive submissions. We thank everyone for taking the time to provide their input on the Bill.

All committee recommendations are broadly supported by our government subject to minor variations. Recommendation 1 is that the Bill be passed with the amendments proposed.

Recommendation 2 proposes that the approved financial assistance form lodgement process and any associated policy or guidance materials be reviewed to ensure the process is easy to navigate, flexible, simple and accessible for those who face English and digital literacy barriers or digital accessibility challenges. This recommendation will be addressed operationally by the Crime Victims Services Unit of the Attorney-General's Department. It is intended that any new application form lodgement process will be included in a community of practice project, which the Crime Victims Services Unit intends to commence in 2025 and which will encourage collaborative support for victims of violent crimes.

Recommendation 3 proposes that section 24 be amended to provide that the director must not appoint a person to be an assessor for the victims financial assistance scheme unless the person has the skills, qualifications, training and experience to properly perform the role. Our government supports this recommendation, excluding the reference to qualifications. Consultation with the Crime Victims Services Unit confirmed that there is no requirement for the word 'qualifications' because there is no formal requirement for qualifications for the role of assessor in the future. This has not watered down the training requirements, which is the crux of the committee's recommendation, and I will propose those requirements are included by way of Assembly amendment.

The final recommendation, recommendation 4, is that the explanatory statement be amended to clarify the policy intent of the amendments to section 24 and explain fully the extent of the proposed amendments to section 24. We are further amending section 24 by Assembly amendment.

I will propose an amendment to correct a drafting error in the commencement clause, which is clause 2. The Assembly amendment will amend the incorrect reference to section 21 to correctly read 'section 14'. Section 14 amends section 61 of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* with respect to the imposition of the victims of crime levy. The amendment changes monetary amounts to revenue units. It is appropriate this amendment commence on 1 July 2025, the start of the financial year. The Assembly amendment will ensure the correct section, which is section 14, commences on 1 July 2025 rather than on assent like the rest of the Bill.

The Legislative Scrutiny Committee recommended that the Bill be passed with a further amendment to section 24 of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* which is aimed at ensuring that assessors are appropriately trained to perform their role. I will be proposing an amendment of that nature during the Bill's consideration in detail stage. The new provision will include a requirement that the director may, in writing, appoint a person to be an assessor for the financial assistance scheme if the director is satisfied that the person has the appropriate skills, training and experience to perform the functions of an assessor.

The committee also recommended the explanatory statement be amended to clarify the policy intent of the amendments to section 24 and to explain the full extent of the proposed amendments. It is common practice for the explanatory statement to mirror the Bill which was originally introduced into the Legislative Assembly, and ordinarily if a clause is amended by an Assembly amendment the explanatory statement is not updated.

Clause 13 amends section 24 of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006.* Section 24 provides for the appointment of assessors for the purpose of conducting assessments of applications for financial assistance. Currently, assessors must be appointed by the minister and must be a lawyer. The director can also be appointed as an assessor.

Clause 13 is primarily aimed at removing the requirement that a victim of crime assessor be a lawyer. The new provision specifies the persons who are considered assessors for the financial assistance scheme. These will still include the Director of the Crime Victims Services Unit; a person authorised under the *Law Officers Act 1978* to act in the name of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory generally, which means the lawyers within the Office of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory; and a person appointed by the Director of the Crime Victims Services Unit under subsection (2).

Subsection (2), as amended by the Assembly amendment, will allow the Director of the Crime Victims Services Unit to appoint a person, in writing, to be an assessor for the financial assistance scheme if the director is satisfied that the person has the appropriate skills, training and experience to perform the functions of an assessor. The requirement that assessors are lawyers has been removed. The requirement that additional assessors are appointed by the minister has also been removed. The director may now appoint assessors, provided they are satisfied that the person has the skills, training and experience to perform the role.

These amendments to section 24 of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* will broaden the scope of available assessors, allowing flexibility within the Crime Victims Services Unit to address variations in the number of claims at any one time.

The crux of the Legislative Scrutiny Committee's recommendation is that the assessors satisfy necessary training requirements, and this is addressed by the Assembly amendment.

Domestic and family violence grew out of control under eight years of Labor, which removed mandatory sentencing for domestic violence offences and put the rights of victims beneath the rights of offenders. The reintroduction of mandatory sentencing is a clear indication of our commitment to addressing domestic and family violence. Examples of how these new mandatory sentencing laws will work in practice are as follows.

When an offender has a DVO placed on them and they proceed to text or call the victim or turn up at the victim's house, either in a single day or over the course of a few days or weeks, those multiple DVO breaches will be brought before the court and the offender will be sentenced to actual imprisonment. This will ensure that they understand the court takes these orders seriously; the offender will get the message. In this example, that offender now has a history of breaching their DVO. If they breach their DVO again, they are captured by mandatory sentencing and are once again required to serve a term of actual imprisonment and will face an even longer time in prison. If an offender breaches their DVO and threatens to harm the victim or causes harm to the victim, they face a maximum sentence of five years' actual imprisonment.

With the passing of these new laws, the Northern Territory will have the strongest and most robust mandatory sentencing domestic and family violence laws in the nation. These new laws will ensure offenders are put behind bars. When the offender is behind bars, the victim is safe.

Criticisms from the opposition are that mandatory sentencing is not an evidence-based approach to deterring DV offending; mandatory sentencing does not work; and deterrence from crime through punishment does not work. However, data suggests otherwise. In a study produced by the Western Australian Law Reform Commission, which looked at the effectiveness of Western Australian mandatory sentencing laws for certain property crime offences, the data shows a 40% reduction in car theft and a 30% decrease in break-ins. Clearly that is working.

A study produced by Dr Ben Vollaard in the Netherlands titled, Preventing Crime through Selective Incapacitation, tracked criminal laws implemented in the Netherlands that allowed for significantly longer prison sentences—up to 10 times the usual duration—for offenders with a history of multiple offences. The study found that cities that applied the law experienced a 25% reduction in theft rates, with the most intensive applications resulting in an up to 40% decrease. This is evidence that punishing offenders leads to a decrease in crime.

Our government understands that DV is often shaped by many complex factors like trauma, substance abuse, poverty and emotional and mental health issues. Under our mandatory sentencing laws, if an offender breaches a DVO they will receive a term of actual imprisonment. That sentence of imprisonment can include an intensive community correction order, which can mandate that an offender undertakes behaviour programs and rehabilitation.

This is why we have given the court the tools to send high-risk and repeat offenders to prison where they can engage in programs when inside and once out as part of their sentence. They will continue to be required to engage in programs by the court and intensively case managed to reduce risk of offending and risk to the victim. With this approach, we have balanced our consequences with rehabilitation.

This is in addition to the funding allocation to the Circuit Breaker Program which includes $6.6m ongoing which will tackle these root causes, $12.9m to boost school attendance through the school attendance officer program and $3m allocated to the school-based police program.

I heard members talk about payback and the risk of offenders reoffending on release. I refute the idea that we cannot hold offenders accountable for their actions because they may reoffend. The truth is they are already reoffending. What the opposition is saying is, 'Do not hold violent offenders accountable because that will make them angrier for the inconvenience of having to be held accountable and go to prison'. This is not a criticism that I take seriously. We will not be dictated to by these violent offenders and keep these vulnerable women in a culture of silence through violence.

Ms Uibo interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Ms BOOTHBY: This type of criticism was sadly put forward by many. To them I say that they may need to re-evaluate their outlook on this issue because recommending that we do not punish offenders because they might then hurt their victims more will allow victims to be held at ransom by violent thugs. We will not allow that to happen.

If the offender is behind bars the victim cannot be hurt and has the opportunity to be in a better situation and seek help and support. The logic is simple: if the offender is behind bars the victim is safe. Our increased support of victims' services and support will ensure victims are safe, even when the offender is released …

Ms Uibo interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, please be quiet.

Ms BOOTHBY: Our government is ensuring that the court has the tools to send high-risk and repeat DV offenders to prison, but that is just one part. We have invested more in offender programs in our short time in government than Labor did over eight years.

Through Corrections we have focused on offender rehabilitation and engagement through the family violence program when in custody. We have seen 103 completions of this program, which is more than when Labor was in government.

In addition, we have seen much greater engagement in the RAGE program, a six-month intensive domestic and family violence program, with 41 completions versus 12 when Labor was in government over the same time.

We know what also keeps victims safe is when they are armed with more knowledge about their offender, not less knowledge. This is why our Bill will expand the type of information that the Victims Register can received from the Crime Victims Services Unit. Before our amendment, the information made available to the Victims Register was only in relation to an offender who is sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Our amendment to the Act expands its application and removes the reference to a term of imprisonment, ensuring it will also apply to sentences which do not result in imprisonment. Importantly, it will also apply to breaches of orders. This means that when an offender breaches their parole or a suspended sentence which might include an electronic monitoring condition that information can be shared with the victim who can then take additional precautions and is not left in the dark.

We are also making offenders pay by increasing the levy for guilty offenders up to 40% to bolster funds for victims' services. These amendments will also cover victims of non-domestic violence-related crimes.

I thank all the members for their response and contributions in this debate.

I also thank all the first responders, especially the police, ambulance officers, first aid officers and all the hardworking people in the domestic and family violence space. These are the people on the front line of this issue, and they deserve our acknowledgement.

I thank the Attorney-General's Department for its work on this important Bill.

I will respond to a couple of comments made by members during this debate. I remind the Labor opposition and the Leader of the Opposition specifically—who opposed mandatory sentencing and smugly pretended that they hold all the truth as to what works and what does not—that they had eight years to apply their approach to this issue and left the Territory with the highest rates of domestic violence in Australia. The Territory's intimate partner homicide rate is seven times higher than the national average, yet they still pretend they have all the answers. It is ridiculous. Unfortunately, it seems that Labor and the Leader of the Opposition remain committed to protecting ideology more than lives, which is why we are in this mess.

The Leader of the Opposition has no credibility on this argument. She can pretend she has the evidence; however, the evidence we have is that under her government, on her watch, DV exploded in the Northern Territory.

I thank the Member for Goyder who rightly pointed out that for years Labor spoke in soft words and used soft hands when dealing with crime and domestic violence. As he stated, police data shows that over the last decade there was a 117% increase in domestic violence-related calls. That is a failure of Labor, which clearly lost control of the issue. Labor loved to talk in vague terms about its evidence-based approach but offered nothing.

The member also pointed out the Pareto principle of criminal offenders and evidence which shows that the percentage of high-risk criminal offenders in a community is generally very small, typically estimated to be between 1% and 5% of the population. By targeting this small percentage of repeat high-risk DV offenders, which our laws are designed to do, our mandatory sentencing laws will naturally reduce crime and provide a much-needed circuit breaker for the victim to get to a safer position away from the offender.

The Member for Gwoja stated that mandatory sentencing does not work because the offender may be sent to prison for only seven or 14 days which is not enough time to engage with programs. This is why we do not have a minimum of seven or 14 days. We provide the court with the tools to hold these offenders accountable. We also included an increase of the maximum sentence to five years for the most serious DV breaches. Our investment in Corrections and behaviour programs will ensure we get the offenders the treatment they require.

The Member for Nightcliff made an impassioned address to the Chamber. I am sorry to hear how she was a victim of domestic violence; that is awful. However, I did not appreciate her assumption that no-one else in this Chamber has ever experienced what she has or knows what it is like to go through it. That is making an assumption and judgement call. She does not know the members in this Chamber intimately, so she does not know who has been through what. I think she should keep those kinds of remarks to herself.

The Member for Mulka talked about peacekeepers. I enjoyed his contribution because I have been to the Community Justice Centre, and people talked about the Member for Johnston having done work out there. Those kinds of program are great, and they are federally funded. I believe that there is an allocation of money going towards the Community Justice Centre. It does some great work. We should keep fighting for that funding, which will help those communities to interact with each other to prevent …

Ms Uibo interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, please refrain from talking or chatting. You are in the Chamber; this is a professional context, and we do not want to hear ongoing commentary from the sideline.

Ms BOOTHBY: This morning when the Leader of the Opposition gave her contribution we respectfully sat and listened. It is rude, and I thank you for pulling it up.

I thank the Members for Drysdale, Blain and Katherine, who is also our Education minister. She spoke at length about some of the shelters in her community, how well they work and how she looks forward to seeing them get extra support.

The Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence continually talks about all the work she is doing in that prevention space. I believe she even mentioned the changes in the statistics when Labor removed mandatory sentencing. When Labor removed it there was an exponential increase in number, which goes to show that the argument that mandatory sentencing does not work is preposterous.

I heard some members say—I apologise for not remembering who they were—that mandatory sentencing will not keep the community safe. I reject that outright. The logic is simple. If the offender is in prison the offender cannot hurt the victim, and the victim has time to get into a better position out of harm's way.

It is obvious that in relation to mandatory sentencing we will agree to disagree. The Labor opposition and some of the crossbenchers come at it from a position of ideology, but I approach it from the position of saving lives.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 2:

Ms BOOTHBY: I move the amendment to clause 2, which will omit all references to 21, and insert 14. This clause sets out how the amendment Act will be commenced. Other than section 14, commencement will be on the day after the Administrator's assent to this Act is declared. Section 14 commences on 1 July 2025.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 3 and 4, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 5:

Mr PAECH: In your closing speech you referred to evidence and data. Can you confirm which evidence and data made the government take the position of introducing mandatory sentencing?

Ms BOOTHBY: The evidence is from looking at the crime statistics, the number of victims and the fact that our domestic and family violence perpetrators have not been dealt with over a long time. This legislation has been brought in to deal with that.

Mr PAECH: I seek to confirm that your dataset is perception based. Is there no quantitative or qualitative data that has been undertaken by the Attorney-General's Department to indicate that the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing will drive down the Northern Territory's crime statistics in this space?

Ms BOOTHBY: The crime statistics data—your data from when you removed mandatory sentencing—points to the fact that there were more offences after mandatory sentencing was removed, so there is data and evidence to show you why we are bringing it back.

Mr PAECH: Is there no comprehensive individualised data that can monitor whether the removal of mandatory sentencing in the 2022 legislation is comparable with the legislation now? Has nothing been commissioned to determine that and look at those statistics? Are you just basing this analysis on the whole-of-crime?

Ms BOOTHBY: Those crime stats are specific to domestic violence, so that data is irrefutable; it is evidence that is there …

Mr PAECH: Whereabouts does it highlight the mandatory sentencing proponent of those crime statistics?

Ms BOOTHBY: There are domestic violence crime statistics that show what they were before mandatory sentencing was repealed and how they went up.

I have answered the question, and it does not specifically go to the clause either.

Mr PAECH: I am seeking clarification of whether the government's position is based on what you referenced, being data from Western Australia and the Netherlands, not the Northern Territory.

Ms BOOTHBY: They were reports that I referred to based on the incapacitation of people and how it is dealt with—whether they are criminals or not.

Mr PAECH: As we have all spoken about, your minister said that domestic and family violence crime stats will rise when people feel comfortable to report, so there should in fact be an increase.

You spoke about the provision of minimum and maximum terms of imprisonment. There is no minimum term of imprisonment, so someone could be sentenced to prison for one day or a period of up to five years; is that correct?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: The judiciary, under these changes, could send someone to prison for a day; is that correct?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Section 78CB of the *Sentencing Act 1995* is about terms of imprisonment. Can the court look at only prison and not an alternative-to-custody facility?

Ms BOOTHBY: A person can receive a term of imprisonment in the community, such as a community order, which potentially could be an alternative to custody or an intensive community correction order.

Mr PAECH: When someone is before the court and the judge looks at a term of imprisonment, under section 78CB of the *Sentencing Act*, the term of imprisonment could be a work order or an enforced Corrections order, or someone could be sentenced to an alternative-to-custody facility. It would not necessarily be the correctional centre in Darwin, Alice Springs, Batchelor or Barkly; it could be other examples.

Ms BOOTHBY: It could be, but there would be some strict conditions with that sentence.

Mr PAECH: The work to repeal mandatory sentencing was undertaken by the Northern Territory Law Reform Committee. Was it consulted on the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing for this legislation?

Ms BOOTHBY: No.

J DAVIS: Can you explain how this amendment will ensure that misidentified victims will not be imprisoned?

Ms BOOTHBY: Under the last government, this was an issue that was picked up. Now early in the piece there are mechanisms in place to ensure that misidentification does not occur.

J DAVIS: Are you saying that there is no misidentification of victims?

Ms BOOTHBY: The process they use is that …

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; relevance to the clause. We are talking about opinions here. We need to stay relevant to the clause, which is about mandatory …

Mr PAECH: The Attorney-General is a smart woman. She can answer for herself.

Mr MALEY: Shut up!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop that language. Withdraw that comment, Deputy Chief Minister.

Mr MALEY: I withdraw that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I take the point. Member for Johnston, we are talking about clause 5, which is about mandatory sentencing for contravention of DVOs. It is up to the minister if she wishes to take the question.

Ms BOOTHBY: Everyone is right; it does not go to the clause.

However, my understanding is that there used to be a problem with misidentification. That was picked up in a previous term of government and a lot of work has been put into that, so it happens quite early in the piece instead of at the order time or the sentencing time.

J DAVIS: Are you confident that misidentified victims will not be imprisoned under this mandatory sentencing law?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! You cannot ask for an opinion. It is not relevant to the clause.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Again, I will give the minister the option to take the question.

J DAVIS: I am happy to reword it.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is hypothetical and subjective. It could happen with any kind of case, potentially; however, our courts undertake a thorough process to ensure that everybody has the right identification.

J DAVIS: Can you outline what rehabilitation programs people imprisoned under this Act will have access to?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; relevance to the clause.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I take your point, and I have reminded the Member for Johnston that this is clause 5.

The Assembly divided:

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

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6:

Mr PAECH: Clause 6 deals with the transitional matters for the Domestic and Family Violence and Victims Legislation Amendment Act 2025. Upon the commencement of this legislation will there be a process in which all current matters before the court will be dealt with if active before that?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Are we still at clause 5?

Mr PAECH: No, we are on clause 6.

The question was about the matters that are currently before the court. Passage of this legislation will come. Will those matters be dealt with under the pre-existing conditions?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Mr PAECH: When you say yes, will any person who has been charged and has a court date set be under the new conditions if they have not appeared before court yet, or will they be under the old conditions?

Ms BOOTHBY: Section 122 will apply only in relation to the sentencing of an offender for an offence committed after the commencement.

Mr PAECH: Will all matters that currently have been charged by police be dealt with under the legislation as it is today? Following that, will all matters, once the Bill has been passed and gazetted, be under the reintroduction of mandatory sentencing provisions?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

The Assembly divided:

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

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

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 12, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 13:

Ms BOOTHBY: I move the amendment to clause 13(2) to replace proposed section 24(2) of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* with the amended version, which will insert:

> The Director may, in writing, appoint a person to be an assessor for the financial assistance scheme if the Director is satisfied that the person has the appropriate skills, training and experience to perform the functions of an assessor.

Ms UIBO: Attorney-General, thank you for the amendment you circulated this morning, which you just read out.

Why are you removing the requirement for a legal qualification?

Ms BOOTHBY: There will still be lawyers of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory. It makes it easier for the director to appoint other people who are appropriately skilled, trained or have experience in assessing.

Ms UIBO: Who is eligible to become an assessor and are there specific criteria to be eligible?

Ms BOOTHBY: This amendment addresses that specific question.

Ms UIBO: Can I confirm if there was a reference? The copy of the amendment I have does not have criteria.

Ms BOOTHBY: It says:

> *… if the Director is satisfied that the person has the appropriate skills, training and experience to perform the functions of an assessor.*

They are the criteria.

Ms UIBO: What are the actual assessor criteria? Obviously, someone needs to be satisfied for a person to be granted to be an assessor. What will the director base that satisfaction on?

Ms BOOTHBY: I feel like I have answered it. I point out that this was a recommendation from the scrutiny committee. I agreed with the recommendation and decided to amend that particular part of the Act.

Ms UIBO: There are still no criteria set out, because I did not see the scrutiny committee produce criteria for the director to grant an assessor.

Ms BOOTHBY: The director can apply the criteria based on the appropriate skills, training and experience to perform those functions. The director can make that call.

Ms UIBO: I do not want to go around in circles or waste anyone's time, but are there criteria that we can look at for future reference?

Ms BOOTHBY: We will not legislate that criteria. It will be up to the director to make whatever operational decisions they want.

Ms UIBO: In case someone wanted to become an assessor, where would they find that to know that they have the opportunity to apply to be eligible?

Ms BOOTHBY: They could contact the Director of the Crime Victims Services Unit.

Ms UIBO: Could a mate then be appointed because someone is satisfactory or are there set criteria? How will that be available to the public?

Ms BOOTHBY: This would be a person employed by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory. I am not sure what you are getting at, but I have answered the question.

Ms UIBO: It was that the legal qualification is now removed, and obviously to have a legal qualification a person would need a law degree to then be an assessor. I am trying to understand how would an assessor be considered satisfactory if there are no criteria? There is no legal requirement—no law degree required—so what are the criteria for someone to be an assessor?

Ms BOOTHBY: For clarity to help answer this question, those CVSU officers are well trained and sometimes they are more proficient in the area of victims of crime, financial assistance and assessments than many lawyers. It is appropriate that they are made eligible to be appointed assessors.

Ms UIBO: Would they just need to talk to the director to be considered eligible?

Ms BOOTHBY: That would be part of the recruitment process.

Ms UIBO: This will be the last time that I will ask it. When there is a recruitment process, there are often criteria set to find someone satisfactory or not satisfactory. How would someone then become satisfactory if there are no criteria for that recruitment process to the director?

Ms BOOTHBY: That will be part of what the director does in their day-to-day work. It is not in legislation, and I will not dictate to that director how people should and should not apply. All the other stuff is set out in legislation, which is the minimum.

Ms UIBO: What training will people undergo, given the complexity of some of the decisions they will be making? For example, will this include interpreting legislation and weighing evidence, because there are no criteria now for that legal requirement through the amendment?

Ms BOOTHBY: That would be up to the director. It is an administrative function that they would work through.

Ms UIBO: How will someone be monitored to ensure they are performing as expected in the assessor role?

Ms BOOTHBY: They would report to the director and the director would manage their performance like any director would of their staff.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 13, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 14:

Ms UIBO: Who have you consulted with about the imposition of the levy?

Ms BOOTHBY: This moves it from the percentages to the dollar figure in revenue units. This is in line with today's monetary—it has not been reviewed in a long time. It is well overdue to be looked at. We have CPI, inflation and all the rest. That is why this decision was made to increase it.

Ms UIBO: We understand from the briefing by the Attorney-General's Department that there will be a significant increase. Can you confirm what that increase is for the penalty in the conversion?

Ms BOOTHBY: Based on our calculations, it is about 40%.

Ms UIBO: What would that be in dollar figures?

Ms BOOTHBY: I do not have a total because it would depend on the type of cases and how many are going through. As an example, I could talk about the revenue units—200 revenue units, which equals about $290, has moved up from $200. I can go through a list of them, if you wish, if you want to write them down:

- 150 revenue units, equal to $217.50, up from $150
- 50 revenue units, equal to $72.50, up from $50
- 1,000 revenue units, equal to $1,450, up from $1,000
- 40 revenue units, equal to $58, up from $40.

Ms UIBO: Will these revenue units then convert to the specialist services supporting victims of crime?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; we are talking about relevance—going from money to a percentage, not about where that money will go.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will let the minister decide whether she will answer.

Ms UIBO: It is about supporting victims, Deputy Chief Minister. You would think you would want to hear the answer.

Ms BOOTHBY: We have put $15m in the budget towards victims' services. Of course, the money that we generate from this levy would go towards them.

Ms UIBO: Would this then increase the pool for victims' services so that more victims of crime could access better services?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; it is not relevant to the clause. We are talking about converting monetary amounts to revenue units, not where that money will be spent.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I take the point of order. We need to be relevant to the clause, but I will leave it to the minister's discretion. If she does not want to answer it, that is fine.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is the intention of that fund.

Ms UIBO: It is great to hear that. Hopefully, the Deputy Chief Minister appreciates your work.

Ms BOOTHBY: He does.

Ms UIBO: The next question is about victim–survivors. What other changes do you foresee with the scheme, because we know there are other services that could also happen with some of the work that you have been doing?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; we are talking about clause 14, which converts monetary amounts to revenue units, not about what other schemes may be provided.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I take your point of order.

Ms UIBO: If she wants to answer, she can. Let her go; it is her Bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are there any further questions?

Ms UIBO: Is there no answer?

Ms BOOTHBY: It does not go to the clause.

Clause 14 agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

WATER AMENDMENT (ABORIGINAL WATER RESERVES) BILL
Serial 21

Continued from 27 March 2025.

Mr BURGOYNE (Water Resources): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, the Labor opposition will always support measures that encourage economic growth for the benefit of Aboriginal Territorians and traditional owners. However, in a rerun of the sacred sites legislation passed by the CLP government last week, we have another piece of legislation before the House that impacts Aboriginal people while cutting them off and out of the conversation.

The government claims it is doing this for the benefit of Aboriginal people, but it is increasingly difficult to believe that is its agenda when Aboriginal landowners and their representative bodies have not been consulted. This is a government that does things to Aboriginal people, not for them or with them.

The significance of water to Aboriginal Territorians cannot be underestimated culturally, socially and economically. Those in government would have you believe that this is amazing legislation that will unlock the economic potential of Aboriginal water reserves. Like so much of what the CLP does, it leaves more questions than answers. It is difficult to get to the bottom of why the government chose to tinker with these specific water amendments, rather than consider them in the broader context of much-needed water reform for the Territory.

We asked questions in our briefing on this Bill, and we received no answers. There is no sense of why the government plucked these changes out of the air, or why they are such a priority that the government cannot take time to speak with Aboriginal people before forging on with them.

Water security is a critical issue for all Territorians, and it is time this government committed to making it one of its priorities, but it needs to do so in a considered meaningful way, taking the community along with it.

Late last year we moved a motion calling on the CLP to commit to and continue to deliver the implementation of priority actions identified in the Territory Water Plan. We called on the CLP to recognise the Northern Territory's first whole-of-government strategic water security plan, developed by the former Labor government following comprehensive community and industry consultation.

When we saw what was happening in the Murray–Darling regarding the overuse of water, we acted. We worked with experts, talked with the mining and agriculture sectors, looked at the science and evidence and consulted with land councils and the public, so we could develop policies and legislation that work within a solid governance framework. These policies and legislation would maximise the economic benefits of our water resources, but not at the expense of our environment, wildlife, Aboriginal lands and waters or the Territory's future water sustainability.

Of course, the CLP government ignored our motion and continues to ignore all that good work, because it is not interested in listening, consulting, walking with the community or progressing the Territory in a meaningful way.

This Bill is a case in point. It is another slap in the face to Aboriginal self-determination and another piecemeal bit of legislation that this government is rushing through without justification. Presumably, it is to make the government look busy and hide the fact it does not have a vision for water security and refuses to build on the mountain of work already done in this space.

Like the sacred sites amendment Bill, this legislation takes away the voices and choices of Aboriginal traditional owners.

Aboriginal water reserves are an important economic opportunity for Aboriginal Territorians in water plan areas. Setting aside a portion of water for economic purposes allows Aboriginal people to effectively rent that water to third parties. Currently, this legislation requires consent to access the reserve prescribed by regulations.

Up until this point, land councils had been working with the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment to specify the process for obtaining consent from Aboriginal people to apply for water in an Aboriginal water reserve. That work was well underway, but there was a sticking point where the government was seeking to require only eligible Aboriginal landholders to give consent, rather than the landholders whose country would be affected. Those issues were being worked through and a clear process established, whereby land councils could undertake consultation and determine consent.

Fundamentally, the issue of consent is at the heart of these changes. The government is seeking to remove that consent and the process for obtaining it. By putting that decision into the hands of the water controller, another unelected bureaucrat just like the Territory Coordinator, the land councils have been cut out of the process. Regulations prescribing consent to access Aboriginal water reserves have been scrapped.

Effectively, the water controller now has discretion to determine who eligible Aboriginal people are for the purposes of granting a water extraction licence to use an Aboriginal water reserve, regardless of whether they have given free, prior and informed consent. The water controller will be able to do this without any checks and balances or cultural guidance—shameful.

These amendments effectively sweep aside the thousands of years of knowledge from family groups, the cultural significance and the history of country. This legislation sweeps aside the clear and appropriate consent processes that have been developed in line with Aboriginal tradition under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. It is a further erosion of Aboriginal land rights by stealth, bit by bit, amendment by amendment. It is another sneaky move from a sneaky government.

Land councils hold the knowledge with their members and understand the connections between communities, nations and community groups. That is the way they share their knowledge and their waterways. They have existing relationships and understand culture and law. Erasing them from consultation and consent processes runs the risk of creating conflict between Aboriginal community groups, Aboriginal groups and the government when people do not agree or have not been consulted about licence decisions that affect their country.

Effectively, if an Aboriginal person or family group is not eligible by the government's criteria—the government is determining who is eligible and who is not and perhaps who is black and who is not black enough. The government does this, allowing people not to get a say on what happens to their water on their country.

It does not take into account the consent of family groups downstream who may have a cultural or law connection to the flowing water down to their traditional lands but who will lose out to the economic benefit of another family group upstream because they have been granted a water licence. In my beautiful home, the Western Desert, a number of communities and family groups draw from the same aquifers. Who will the water controller give a licence to? How will they make a decision without first consulting and getting consent?

The CLP government has again rushed through legislation that gives power to an unelected official to make big, impactful decisions for Territorians without transparency or accountability and without the right guidance and resources to appropriately determine who an Aboriginal person or who—if an invested third party—has genuinely been given consent by landholders to apply for a licence.

This amendment is a slap in the face to Aboriginal Territorians, which is starting to be a running theme for this government. It is not a true collaboration between government and Aboriginal Territorians to find genuine partnerships and pathways to self-determination.

This amendment will cause more inequality for Aboriginal Territorians, create more conflict between family groups and determine Aboriginal land and water borders by government standards not cultural laws. It disregards the importance of culture in policies impacting Aboriginal people and makes it easier for Aboriginal Territorians to be exploited by well-funded influential and invested third parties. It is legislation not made in the interests of or in collaboration with Aboriginal people. If those in government sent this Bill to a scrutiny committee or spoke to Aboriginal people about it, they would understand that, but they are not interested.

The minister rushed through the water allocation plans without speaking to those impacted. He abolished the water advisory group committees. He slashed funding for water resources in the budget. These actions are reminiscent of the Giles government. They are the damage that was caused when the government changed the water allocations and the water policies, including the way it eroded community trust in allocation of water licences.

I wonder whether government members are aware of the case of the CLP candidate Tina MacFarlane. Ms MacFarlane was granted a water licence for 5,800 megalitres a year by the Giles government. It was more than she could use given the number of bores on her family's Stylo Station near Mataranka. This is the type of decision-making on water licences that we have come to expect from the CLP—no accountability or integrity. While Giles and his cronies were being cavalier with water for their mates, they were also busy stripping back water rights for Aboriginal people, scrapping the previous government's strategic Indigenous water reserve policy as soon as they came to government. Here we are again with the CLP members doing what they do—it is in their DNA—eroding the rights of Aboriginal people when it comes to water.

This lot is not game enough to scrap the Aboriginal water reserves altogether, but it is denying Aboriginal people their right to be part of the decision-making processes regarding water extraction licences on their land—Aboriginal land. If the government was genuinely interested in helping Aboriginal Territorians use their water reserves for economic development, it would:

- continue to work with the Territory's four land councils to ensure free, prior and informed consent in line with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act
- ensure Aboriginal Territorians were not at risk of exploitation from third parties
- not ignore the wishes of Territorians
- demonstrate some regard for the important connection between country, language, land and culture for Aboriginal Territorians
- start by doing something that might make a difference by implementing the Territory Water Plan, ensuring we are managing our water resources for the benefit of all Territorians, not our mates, so that we can protect our environment and address the mounting pressures from climate change impacts.

The Labor opposition will always support legislation that encourages economic growth and self-determination for Aboriginal Territorians and traditional owners, but it must be done in consultation with Aboriginal Territorians and traditional owners. It is beyond belief that this government continues to do things to Territorians not with Territorians.

This legislation has been rushed. Last week the CLP government watered down the Northern Territory sacred sites laws. The biggest connection to many sacred sites in the Northern Territory is water. Water sustains so many of the unique ecosystems on Aboriginal land. Many sacred sites are living and breathing. They rely on important resources like water to survive. Soakages, bores, rivers are trees are all living, breathing matters that need water to survive. Many of those sites are connected. Many of the aquifers in the Northern Territory have a unique connection to Aboriginal people and their places of significance, and this legislation does not take that into consideration.

This legislation does not recognise that the Northern Territory was leading the way when it came to strategic Aboriginal water reserves within the national Closing the Gap agreement. It was ignored. This agreement was recognised by all jurisdictions across the country, but yet again we have seen this government bring in legislation that erodes the voices and processes for Aboriginal people to have a say and give consent. We have heard from this government time and again about the importance of consent. We agree; consent in any way, shape or form is imperative. It is crucial. When we are talking about consent in other areas, such as sexual violence or domestic violence, we all say that consent matters. Consent matters for Aboriginal Territorians when it comes to strategic Aboriginal water reserves. They must be allowed to have the conversations.

This government is trying to pick apart Aboriginal people and communities and manipulate the processes so that it can pick and choose and work out who it can get to say yes to get a project over the line and not allow the rightful people to be involved, have their say and be recognised. It shows that this government is terrified of the Territory's land councils, because it is shutting them out of an important process. They are recognised under Commonwealth law in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Government has a duty to support Aboriginal people's self-determination, economic development and social advancement. This government says, 'We are so scared of the land councils and dealing with Aboriginal people in their communities that we want to erode this and determine who is eligible'. Newsflash—in Aboriginal culture traditional owners are all eligible; you cannot pick and choose who you negotiate with. Under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the land trust, they are all recognised, and they should be recognised as the rightful people to speak for country.

We come from unique places in the Northern Territory where water is precious. Water is life. You only have to look at the southern region of the Northern Territory where we get water from underground—grounds water—to see that water is connected. Yes, there are multiple aquifers, but they are significant in size and span many communities and many different language groups, and they all must be involved. We cannot say, 'We will only speak to this community here, and 50 kilometres away, where the map tells us it is the same aquifer, we will not talk to them because this project is only happening in this community', but that is effectively what we are doing with this legislation. This government is choosing to ignore the science, saying that it only wants to do this project in community X, so it will only speak with that community. Although the aquifer spans far and wide, the government will not talk to other people about it. That will have consequences for the other communities on the aquifers if it is not managed correctly.

The department has undertaken a huge volume of work on water. Some places in the Northern Territory are over-allocated. In the southern region we do not get recharge at the rate the Top End does. If you take more than we are getting as recharge, you are effectively mining water. We need to make sure decisions are not made in isolation and remember the importance. Every remote Aboriginal community is connected. Everyone is related to each other. Everyone has strong cultural links and family connections. Aboriginal people do not just stay in one community. You may have an elder who lives in another community but can speak for that part of country because of their *tjukurpa* (Dreaming) story—their inherent connection to that place.

We do not support this Bill because it is vague about free, prior and informed consent. It is concerning that the term we are hearing is 'eligible'—an eligible blackfella is what this government is saying. Who is that? If I do not live in my community anymore, am I not eligible? If I am not recognised by an agency, am I not eligible? These are questions that our community will want answered. Who is eligible, and who is not? Why would you not leave the measures in place that require people to work with traditional owners and the land councils who have the expertise and knowledge?

Every delegate elected to the Territory's four land councils is elected by their community—Aboriginal people elected by Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities to represent their communities and their footprint. That is what the land councils do. When their delegates speak, they speak on behalf of the Aboriginal land trusts and Aboriginal Territorians living in their regions, so why not work with the land councils? What are you so afraid of? Why would we not work with them? There has been a volume of work.

Let us be clear that there is a narrative being painted that Aboriginal people, my countrymen, for some reason do not want economic development. We want economic development and for our families to have jobs in remote communities, whether it is in agriculture, horticulture or pastoralism or working for a community service or government agency. Aboriginal people want jobs, wages, entitlements, superannuation and all these things. However, they do not want a continual process that erodes the importance of country, hurts country and damages the landscape, and there is no remediation plan or they have never been involved in the free, prior and consent processes. We acknowledge that there is work to be done. We want economic development—100%—but that cannot come at the cost of eroding voices in this conversation, because those voices matter. Our remote communities matter.

Each of us has a unique connection to water, and we need to manage water properly. We all need water every day. We need to ensure that every person has access to safe drinking water. At the time of the last election the Department of Health was in the process of drafting a safe drinking water Act. We urge the CLP government to pick up that work and to implement the Territory Water Plan.

These are important things, but so far all we have seen is a government following the processes of the previous CLP administration. We know where that left the CLP—as a one-term government. It might be beneficial for the Environment minister, the person whose portfolio responsibility is supposed to be defending the environment, to remember that, but he defunds environmental groups, scraps water allocation committees, gets rid of water allocation plans, makes it easier for mates to get jobs …

Mr BURGOYNE: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; the Member for Gwoja should confirm—or withdraw—what water allocation plan has been removed.

Madam SPEAKER: It is not a point of order. You can address that in your closing speech.

Mr PAECH: It looks like the most green-credentialled member of this government is uncomfortable about his own track record. Let us be clear: the good people of Braitling are disappointed in the Member for Braitling. He erodes things time and again. He has gotten rid of committees, which did important work on water allocation, and environment group funding. He said he is proud of that. He has branded every Territorian who cares about the environment. The so-called Environment minister, who is supposed to care about the environment, is continually eroding that work—to benefit who? Not the good people of Braitling and every Territorian, but a select few. That is what he is doing, and he feels uncomfortable about it.

The environment is important to many people and we know how disappointed they are with the minister. We have heard it time and again, and we continue to hear it.

Minister Josh Burgoyne has rushed through water allocation plans without speaking to the people who have been impacted. He abolished the water advisory committees. He slashed funding for water resources in this budget. We have seen his track record on respecting the views and wishes of Aboriginal Territorians regarding the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act. We are in parliament debating this Bill with which he thinks that

he and his government can determine who an eligible Aboriginal person is for the purposes of this legislation. That is disgraceful.

That is what we get under the CLP. Not one Aboriginal Member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly is in the CLP. The CLP failed to consult with Aboriginal Territorians, shut out the land councils in regard to this important process and does not listen to statutory bodies, such as AAPA, which raised concerns about sacred sites and water. The CLP ignored everyone.

I look forward to the minister telling us who is an eligible person. For me, an Aboriginal person, traditional owners are recognised under Commonwealth law and should not be shut out. He should think about that as he does this.

Everything is connected. Water is not in isolation. Our rivers run far and wide through the Northern Territory, and our aquifers run for hundreds of kilometres under the ground; they are all connected. You cannot take thousands of litres of water out of one community and expect that not to have an impact on a surrounding community or sacred site just because you made that decision and consulted with a particular community. It is wrong. How does the minister justify that communities are being excluded from this process? The government says, 'We do not want to do development in that community; we want to do it here', but the water is connected. The aquifer in the desert does not get the recharge. When you are pulling thousands of litres out of the rivers in the Big Rivers region that has unintended consequences on the rest of those unique ecosystems. That is what we need to be talking about, but we are not.

This was an opportunity for the CLP to do wholesale important reform on how water is allocated, implement the water allocation plan and not cut money out of the budget. That is what we should be discussing, but we are not.

I acknowledge that the minister for Environment has not cut any water from the water allocations or scrapped those plans yet. We encourage him not to do that.

There needs to be a far and wide consultation process. This government is allergic to consultation because it will not talk to people about it. We did not even get to take this legislation to the scrutiny committee to ask people to put in a submission. I could almost argue that this government is worse than the Giles government because at least the Giles government consulted a bit more extensively than this one. Shutting out voices and not allowing people to put in a submission on this Bill is disgraceful.

Many people from across the country will be looking at this change and thinking, 'What the hell is going on in the Northern Territory's Indigenous affairs space?' The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will have to go to the Closing the Gap meetings and justify watered-down protections for sacred sites. He will have to say, 'We have not funded the Aboriginal Justice Agreement properly and now we are picking and choosing who is an eligible Aboriginal person for the purposes of water investment, but she's right, mate; we care.'

Actions speak louder than the CLP's promises. It is not delivering. The actions of this government speak for themselves. This CLP government is not interested in empowering and elevating the voices of Aboriginal Territorians. It is evident in the legislation in front of us.

To any Territorian who cares about the environment and who has been involved in important movements the Environment minister says, with the Northern Territory Chief Minister, 'Go back to where you came from'. I am sorry, but where do people like Eric Fejo go? They are from here; they care about the environment and water. They do not have anywhere to go; their people have been here for thousands of years. People who have chosen to call the Territory home are allowed to be passionate about water and the environment. They deserve to have their voices heard, not be disrespected by the government saying, 'Go back to where you came from', and not have the Environment minister say that standing up for and speaking about the environment is environmental lawfare. No, that is called passion, believing in something, standing by your conviction and standing up for the environment because she cannot do it herself.

This is the important thing that we need to be talking about 100%. This is crucial. Continually disrespecting people for standing up for the environment is not right. The Environment minister is a part of the government that got rid of the climate change portfolio. We rarely hear this government talk about climate change or what it means. The CLP says, 'It is happening anyway; we just need to adapt to it.' That is not right.

Parliament has the power to change the trajectory of our climate in the Northern Territory and invest in mechanisms that can make life better for so many of us. That is what we need to be talking about. This is short-sighted. This is about making money quickly to make the Territory's economic narrative look better for

a short time. What do we do when we have no water? What do we do when we cannot drink the water? What do we do when remote communities are running out of water? We will have to spend more money on drilling deeper bores, bringing in water or filtering water. None of that has been spoken about.

It is beyond belief that this government is again doing things to Territorians and not with them. We do not support this legislation. It is ill-conceived, piecemeal, excludes Aboriginal people from important decisions and lacks any type of vision or strategic direction for the Northern Territory in regard to one of the most important resources that sustains life for all of us.

I cannot and will not support this Bill.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I support the Water Amendment (Aboriginal Water Reserves) Bill 2025.

The Member for Gwoja might be an astronaut, because I am not sure he was on our planet during his speech. The hypocrisy from the Member for Gwoja beggars belief. On one hand he spoke about economic development in Aboriginal communities, and on the other hand he spoke against Aboriginal people and communities being able to utilise their Aboriginal water reserve for their own economic development.

The Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve Policy Framework effectively is not being changed. A lot of work was done on it back in the day so that Aboriginal people could have access to their water reserve. It clarifies who is an eligible person and who has the right to speak for the water. All that work was done many years ago with targeted stakeholder consultation in conjunction with the land councils.

When Labor developed the legislation in support of the Aboriginal water reserve it failed to make clear how people in the bush who have control over their water reserve can access it. There are 60,000 megalitres of water available in the Aboriginal water reserve across the Territory, yet zero megalitres have been activated since that was put in place.

The Member for Gwoja says that water will be ripped out and no water will be left in aquifers for communities. That is a fallacy, and it is farcical. He is misleading Territorians because that is not true. The consultation and work were done many years ago to determine how much water is in the aquifer, how much is allowed to be used and how much is put in reserve for Aboriginal people. This was done in such a way to ensure those aquifers remain healthy. Only a certain amount of water is allowed to be taken out for irrigation, industry or whatever else it happens to be. There is a certain amount, as we know, put in reserve for Aboriginal people, and there is a heap kept back in reserve to keep the aquifer and the country healthy. That is not being changed.

The Member for Gwoja confessed that the CLP is not removing any water allocations, because that was untrue. We are giving Aboriginal people the opportunity to access their water reserves, as is their right.

The legislation was so convoluted and complicated and required so much work that, to date, no Aboriginal person has been able to access their Aboriginal water reserve for anything. If a community decided it wanted to put in a garden and received the section 19 lease through the land council and did all the work, it would still find it difficult—nearly impossible—to access the water reserve to develop that infrastructure. That is such a waste, because there is a strategic Aboriginal water reserve that can empower people in the bush.

We are not taking away people's right to consult or work with the land councils. If the Member for Gwoja read the brief and looked at the legislation he would know that people in the bush can still utilise the land council to do the negotiation in regard to their Aboriginal water reserve if they so wish.

If it is identified, as part of the previous work done through the framework and other documents, that a family group or a custodian group living in an area is responsible for that piece of land and there is a water reserve under that piece of land, they will have the ability to access it much more easily, which they have not been able to do before. Labor had the opportunity in government to amend and fix this, but it chose not to.

Today we are doing the heavy lifting and hard work to give people in communities and the bush the opportunity, if they want, to access their Aboriginal water reserve in a much easier manner. If they do not want to use their water reserve, they can trade it, sell it or do what they like with it because it is their water reserve. It is not mine or the government's; it is that Aboriginal person's water reserve, and they should have the right to choose what they do with it.

The one thing they cannot do is overuse it. The Aboriginal water reserve is put on a specific piece of land to ensure that the aquifer is not abused or overused. Even if they choose to trade or sell their water reserve, or

create an industry and use it themselves to develop a business model with agriculture or whatever it might be, they still cannot use more than what is in the reserve.

We are stepping up and taking action so that we can get water flowing in those Aboriginal communities. The Act in its current form is ambiguous and poses operational challenges which have been a barrier to water use and trading for so many years it is not funny. The Labor government did nothing about it. In effect, it left behind Aboriginal people in the bush by not actioning this earlier. Labor was happy to kick the can down the road and not do the hard yards and make tough decisions so that Aboriginal people in the bush could access their own asset that sits as water under the ground. We have recognised the issue because people in the bush have spoken to us about it. They know they cannot access it because they have tried through the land councils, but it is so convoluted they have been unable to do so. That is why it is no wonder Aboriginal Territorians have not seen a drop of water from their own Aboriginal water reserves.

I commend the Member for Braitling for bringing this to the House and making these all-important changes, because the people I represent in the bush will get the opportunity, should they wish, to access their water reserves to do with as they wish and not be told by the land council who might be eligible. That work has been done. We know the people who are responsible for those pieces of land, and they now have the choice to determine what they do with their water reserve.

They may choose to keep it and not do anything with it; that is their right. They may choose to create their own business or industry using that water reserve; good on them. I wish them all the best and will do anything I can to help them. They may wish to trade it and utilise it to create economic wealth for themselves, their families and their communities.

As the Treasurer of the Northern Territory I am throwing my weight behind this amendment Bill because it helps to rebuild our economy and build a future for Aboriginal people. It will start to create the economic drivers and wealth in the bush, which has been lacking for many years.

In other jurisdictions governments buy back water licences at a steep cost to provide water for Aboriginal economic development. We have Aboriginal people who have their own water resources, and they can use them as they see fit. With this change in legislation we are turning on the tap for 60,000 megalitres at no cost to Aboriginal Territorians so they can access that water for their benefit as they desire. They can choose to work with the land councils if they so desire and they can choose not to if they so desire. It is their choice, and that is a choice that has been difficult for them or taken away with the way the legislation previously sat.

By unlocking the Aboriginal water reserves the CLP government is rebuilding our economy strategically, and it works to rebuild our economy across the Territory for all Territorians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Water empowers communities and helps build our economies. The one thing that the Member for Gwoja and I might agree on is that water is needed in the bush, and we need to make sure that everybody has access to it.

The changes to this Act do not jeopardise our water reserves or our aquifers because we are not changing the allocations. We are allowing people in the bush to access what is rightfully theirs which they had difficulty doing under the previous Act and the previous government.

Labor's lack of economic vision led to the downfall of Territory Labor. We are making these important changes to empower people to utilise their assets to generate their own economic wealth for their benefit. Labor members like to grandstand about being for the bush, but when they were in power they failed to unlock this critical resource. Labor members could not lead economic development for Territorians even if they tried.

When this Bill passes, Aboriginal people will be able to access their water, develop their own future and have a say in how that happens. By amending the *Water Act 1992* the CLP is taking action to streamline access to the Aboriginal water reserve for Aboriginal Territorians, finally putting the 60,000 megalitres to use and rebuilding an economy that every Territorian is a part of.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly, and I thank the minister for Environment for bringing it to the House because this will provide real outcomes for Aboriginal people in the bush by enabling them to access a resource that rightfully is theirs that they have been unable to access.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I heard the government say that this Bill will help Aboriginal people to access their water reserves for economic development, but I do not believe that there has been any consultation for these changes. If the government's idea is to make things easier for Aboriginal people, come and ask Aboriginal communities what will make this process easier instead of bringing changes without consultation.

I believe that the government wants to make it easy for industry to negotiate an agreement with Aboriginal people, so it has taken out of the legislation the need for consent, which should be free, prior and informed consent; the need for land councils to be involved as the funded bodies that are legislated to protect Aboriginal interests; and the need to consult via regulations that have been developed over years with the land councils to create a strong consultation practice. Instead, the government has inserted that agreements can be made with whomever the controller is satisfied are the eligible Aboriginal people, and this will be the only thing that is required.

This creates a situation where Aboriginal people may be left to negotiate complicated agreements with big business about water without legal or other support. It also allows these agreements to be made with the wrong people because the controller may get it wrong, or agreements may be made without consensus because only one part of the Aboriginal group or one person in the Aboriginal group creates an agreement. As long as the controller is satisfied—that is the only test that this Bill requires, which is dangerous.

This Bill strips Aboriginal people of protections. For the minister to state that this Bill is about helping Aboriginal people shows a clear mistake. This Bill strongly undermines traditional decision-making and has potential to create pressure and disagreements for Aboriginal people about the water allocation.

For Aboriginal people, water is much more than economic gain. We have the same responsibility to water as we have to land. We have a spiritual connection with water, and we know that the interrupted flow of water can create grave issues for everyone. In this instance, all parties who have a connection to the country and water must be part of any decision-making about that water. That may slow down business processes, but it it important that it is done the right way.

The fact is that the fast-paced way of ripping resources and water out of the ground has led us to this point of considerable environmental damage and climate change. If we slow down and do things the right way, we will be able to protect the natural resources that we have left and protect the people who have the responsibility and obligations to care for country.

First Nations knowledge should be listened to and respected in this place, not torn apart as though it is red tape and nothing else. On Yolngu country traditional and current decision-making processes about land and water require a number of clans that are responsible for that country to reach consensus and, at the least, be heard. These are the *Mari-Guthera*, *Yapa-Waku* and *Yothi-Yindi* clans, which all have responsibility for country and water.

The functions of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act that recognise and uphold these traditions should be used in all other legislation, including this Bill. However, this Bill appears to be in conflict with the Land Rights Act.

I do not support this Bill. The government should be more honest about the Bill's intentions. Aboriginal people are not a political football. The same as with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and sacred sites laws, we have protections to ensure that free, prior and informed consent is provided and that proper consultation processes are followed. That should be respected by this government and upheld across all legislation; instead, the government is trying to remove these protections and pretend that it is helping Aboriginal people.

I am aware that the land councils are concerned that the Bill will give too much discretion to the water controller without the checks and balances, guidance or resources to accurately and appropriately determine who eligible Aboriginal people are and whether they have given free, prior and informed consent. Informed consent is important because it reduces the risk of exploitation of eligible Aboriginal landholders. If consent is sought from the right people, it will avoid the significant risk of conflict between Aboriginal groups and the NT Government if people are aggrieved by licence decisions that affect their country.

I share these concerns with the land councils and believe that this is another Bill that should be withdrawn. The government has no mandate from the people this Bill affects. It has decided not to engage in proper consultation and is changing laws in a way that may harm First Nations people.

I will explain Aboriginal leaders and their authority. We have always talked about working together, listening to authorities in the case of this land and sacred sites that come through. Let me say a word to the parliament or the King's palace: there are leaders who are entitled to work democratically for their party. It is a democratic system. I am saying that this is the same way our Yolngu leaders run governance, yet we have just been walked over. I make that clear.

Yolngu leaders are the *dalkarra djirrikay*, the people who are democratically called. The Pope and King have been given powers and authorities. You have your authorities. Our Yolngu nations are authorities, and we

need to be listened to. Whether it is the CLP government, a Labor government or whatever, I point out that we have the same authority and need to be approached at a higher level. People need to come and talk to our leaders and elders. Although the parliament here is creating all the laws, come and look for the senior elders and leaders in our communities. We have the authority to talk.

That is how the system of Yolngu and balanda parliament needs to work together. If we work together and listen to one another, we will create a pathway for us all to live in harmony. We can create pathways that are safe and where everyone is happy. That is why I first came to the Chamber to tell the government, 'Excuse me, there is something wrong. We are being manipulated and walked over.' You need to listen. We want to work with people. I want to come and work with people in the Chamber to create things.

Our governance system in Yolngu law does not fight over who will be the winner. All clan groups work together to create a pathway; according to this clan's pathway and that according to that party over there and the party over here, we all work together. If that is how you want to do it in your community over this way or in your area over that way, we will all work together so that you are pleased over there and you are pleased over here—happy. Instead of trying to run everyone from one power—that is why I do not agree—our system of governance is made so that we all agree with one another. That is how you do it over there. One size does not fit all.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is deeply disappointing, once again, to see the CLP government making decisions on behalf of Aboriginal communities without consultation, support or partnership.

Water is sacred; it is more than just a means to economic development, and these amendments fail to recognise this. The changes to section 22C in particular limit how water is classified, treating it as static, divorced from its relationship to and impact on distant lands and ecosystems. This narrow framing can have serious implications. People downstream, or those not directly connected to a body of water, could and probably will suffer consequences without any power to prevent it.

It is well recognised that significant progress is still needed in water law reform across Australia. The Australian Human Rights Commission has called for a strengthening of these laws, stating:

> *Indigenous rights in water are not adequately recognised by Australian law and policy. This is largely because Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives of water and its management differ greatly. This creates difficulties as non-Indigenous laws and management plans separate land from water and generally regard water as a resource available for economic gain. As water is predominantly considered only for its consumptive value, its use and regulation is limited and restricted by governments to industries or individuals willing to pay the highest price. This affects Indigenous access and usage.*

However, in this Assembly at a time when there are calls for the strengthening of these laws, this government is seeking to reduce protections. The Northern and Central Land Councils have described these changes as 'an anti-democratic regime pursuing economic development at any cost'.

The CLP continues to claim it is working with land councils. It suggests that these changes are merely removing arduous box-ticking exercises from water licence processes under the Aboriginal water reserves. The CLP government tries to reassure us that in practice land councils may still be consulted, but if this were truly the case, why have the Northern and Central Land Councils released the following public statement? I will read it in full, because it is important that this Assembly hears the entirety of their critique and that it is put on the record:

> *This government cannot be trusted.*
>
> *Its latest attack on water rights is a bill designed to rip Aboriginal water reserves out of Aboriginal hands.*
>
> *These reserves are small portions of water set aside in water allocation plans for Aboriginal people to use for trade or economic development.*
>
> *Combined with the imposition of an all-powerful, unelected Territory co-ordinator, the assault on sacred sites protection and the removal of Territorians' rights to seek merits review of government decisions, this proposal demolishes the integrity of the Territory government.*

We had worked in good faith with the previous Labor government to make Aboriginal water reserves work for our people.

We had agreed a process with the NT Division of Water Resources for negotiating informed consent which was about to go to cabinet before last year's election.

As with all land council processes, it would have given certainty to developers that the right people have been consulted and guaranteed that approved projects won't land them in court.

Last week, and again without consultation with traditional owners, the Country Liberal Party government scrapped this in favour of another rushed bill that will create great uncertainty.

The bill removes traditional owners from decisions about the Aboriginal water reserves and hands that power to the Territory water controller.

This bureaucrat would decide who is an 'eligible' Aboriginal person to apply for water in the reserve or whether 'eligible' Aboriginal people have given consent.

It is completely unclear how he would do this.

What is clear is that the government aims to sideline the NT land councils that were set up with the sole mandate to support Aboriginal decision-making and which have a successful record of facilitating consensus and informed consent across groups that creates certainty.

Its proposed bill exposes developers to legal challenges and loss of their social license.

It undermines Aboriginal people's hard-won collective rights and decision-making practices, threatens community harmony and removes guardrails against exploitation and corruption.

The scrapping of the standard democratic process of third-party merits reviews has removed the right of any Territorian to check that government decision-making is of an acceptable standard.

Third-party merits reviews hold governments accountable to all citizens, not just wealthy investors.

The obscenity of this government acting like this Bill is for the betterment of opportunity for Aboriginal people, when the land councils write a response like that, is absurd. No-one is falling for it. Where is the integrity and good faith leadership of this CLP government? Where is its commitment to representing all people across the Territory, not just its wealthy pastoralist mates?

These changes remove the requirement to not only consult with land councils but also obtain consent from Aboriginal custodians. The amendments to section 71BA do exactly this. Instead of requiring consent, they require the controller only to be satisfied that:

(a) the applicant for the licence is an eligible Aboriginal person for the eligible land in respect of which the Aboriginal water reserve applies; or

(b) the applicant for the licence has obtained the agreement of the eligible Aboriginal people for the eligible land in respect of which the Aboriginal water reserve applies to apply for the licence.

Just as we saw last week with the Aboriginal sacred sites legislation changes, this government is eroding the core tenet of land rights—consent. Without proper consultation with land councils or communities, the controller could easily determine that the satisfaction threshold has been met. There is no direction on what form this agreement must take or whether it must involve consent at all. Proper consent means that it is free, prior and informed; freely given without coercion; obtained before any work commences; and based on a clear understanding of the implications in a culturally appropriate manner.

Alongside this, there is no clarity on how eligible people will be identified. It appears that the responsibility is left entirely to the applicant and the controller. The land councils exist precisely to ensure these processes are fair, the right people are consulted and that there is proper compensation and protection for Aboriginal people. Where is that protection now? Together with the changes to section 22C, this means that Aboriginal communities most affected by water licences might not be consulted nor be required to give their consent.

The guiding regulations that were in development and intended to support the fair operation of Aboriginal water allocations have been scrapped. These have been years in the making, involving extensive negotiation and stakeholder engagement. These regulations were essential to ensuring that licences could be granted equitably. Now all that work is down the drain.

The CLP argues that these amendments are necessary because no licences have yet been issued under Aboriginal water reserves. Although this is true, it is only because the current Act requires compliance with regulations that have not yet been finalised. If the government was genuinely committed to Aboriginal economic development it would have prioritised finalising these recommendations, not discarding them.

Let us be honest: these amendments are designed to make it easier for big industry, agriculturalists and pastoralists which already consume a disproportionate share of our water to access even more. Now they can do so without consulting land councils or gaining consent from the rightful custodians.

The Act and its associated regulations were never about red tape; it was about recognising the far-reaching impact of water allocations for not only licence holders but also entire communities. These changes remove those protections.

I remind the Assembly that these changes are not happening in isolation. The removal of third-party merits reviews are deeply connected to these amendments. Under section 71BA(b), the controller may grant a licence if satisfied the applicant has obtained agreement from the eligible Aboriginal people. With the removal of third-party merits reviews only the applicant can seek review of the controller's decision, not the community that is affected. I remind you that the applicant is not the traditional custodians; it is a third party which is gaining access to this water. This means that if the controller is unaware of critical information, that information cannot be brought into consideration in court through judicial review. This is a profound failure of accountability.

I will address the fundamental science of groundwater in the Northern Territory and why these amendments are so dangerous, particularly in our arid regions, because they are designed not for genuine use by Aboriginal people but for mass extraction by the government's mates in big industry.

In the Northern Territory 90% of our water supply comes from groundwater. This is not just a statistic; it is the lifeblood of our communities and ecosystems. Our groundwater comes from rain that seeps into underground water storage called aquifers, which eventually flows into rivers, lakes and oceans. The science is clear on how these systems work. In arid zones, like much of the Territory, watertables recharge extremely slowly due to limited rainfall and high evaporation rates. Current rules for the arid zone already permit extraction of up to 80% of an aquifer's total groundwater storage capacity over a century. This is already dangerously high—many scientists have spoken about this—and the impact of such extraction is, potentially, irreversible.

These amendments fail to recognise the interconnected nature of our water systems and the fragile balance that maintains them. Studies have found that the current rules governing groundwater licensing in areas without a water allocation plan are:

> *… poorly suited to protect ecological, Indigenous socio-cultural and other water use values.*

What happens when we over-extract from these aquifers? The scientific evidence paints a disturbing picture. Excessive groundwater withdrawals cause groundwater levels to decline, resulting in seawater intrusion, land subsidence, streamflow depletion and wells and bores running dry. These are not theoretical risks; they are documented realities happening globally and in Australia.

The NT is home to unique groundwater-dependent ecosystems; springs, riverbed seepages and patches of monsoon forest and other forests solely depend on groundwater to exist. Many of these forests rely on permanent spring-fed water to survive, particularly in the Top End. These ecosystems are incredibly vulnerable. Overuse of groundwater directly harms springs, soaks and rivers that depend on these underground water resources. Perhaps most concerning is that in arid zones it is simply not possible to avoid harm to groundwater-dependent ecosystems if most water stored in an aquifer is extracted. Such extraction inevitably reduces or stops groundwater flows to the surface environment. Once the damage is done, there is often no going back. The 100-year timeframe that applies under the arid zone rule effectively shifts the burden of harm into the future.

If new permits are issued to projects that deplete aquifers, long-term damage will be locked in. The rules that this government seeks to weaken will allow the depletion of substantial groundwater storage and risk the reduction or loss of groundwater flows to ecosystems and stygofauna habitat and reduce the throughflow of groundwater between different regions. These serious concerns are investigated in the peer-reviewed article

by Currell, Jackson and Ndehedehe titled ‘Risks in the current groundwater regulation approach in the Beetaloo region, Northern Territory, Australia’.

The challenge of determining sustainable extraction limits is recognised as one of the highest-ranked challenges by groundwater experts in Australia, yet this CLP government is eager to bypass science and consultation in favour of quick profits for its mates. We have seen what happens in the precious ecosystem of Mataranka, where the thermal pools in Roper River depend on healthy aquifers. A senior NT water bureaucrat has already warned that over-extraction threatens permanent flows to the Roper River. Is this government willing to risk these iconic natural wonders for short-term gain?

Water is not just a resource; it is a complex system that sustains life across the Territory. Our underground water needs to be managed with scientific understanding, deep respect and a commitment to sustainability for future generations. These amendments do the opposite.

The combination of inadequate evidence about Territory water resources and the silencing of Aboriginal stakeholders is fuelling chaos, conflict and growing inequality.

I close by saying that I am sorry to be a part of a system that continually undermines the principles of self-determination and consent. I am sorry that Aboriginal communities are having their rights attacked. We are letting them down in this Assembly.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, this government is seeking to amend the law that governs how water is reserved for Aboriginal people to use for economic development. We have heard that, once again, Aboriginal voices have been left out of this process. This Bill directly affects Aboriginal land, rights and futures, but where are their voices in the making of this law?

I will pause and share the perspective of the Ginytjirrang Mala, who remind us:

> *In the Yolngu world view, water is the giver of sacred knowledge, all ceremonies and lands. Whether it’s fresh or salt, travelling on or under the land, or in the sea, water is the source of all that is holy … talk about water must be ‘at the feet of the old people’ … There is ‘surface’ water and ‘inside’ water. The land carries it along an ‘inside’ path. And then it comes out as spring water in the sea. The salt water is on the surface and the fresh water is inside.*

This sacred relationship with water is not symbolic; it is law, governance and decision-making.

Here we are debating a Bill that again directly impacts on Aboriginal people’s land and law—in this case their water—without having meaningfully included Aboriginal people in its design. This is not consultation, partnership, respectful or good governance. Time and again in this parliament we have heard the rejection of the idea of consultation, unless, of course, it is related to voluntary assisted dying, the only policy discussed in this Chamber that has already been consulted on extensively.

We rarely talk about what true consultation means or why it matters. Consultation is not something we just do for the sake of it to make people feel nice or to appease oppositional groups. Consultation is about learning how to make our laws effective, efficient and ensuring that they do not harm people where they were intended to help them. Consultation is about finding out what works. If we do not consult we build dysfunctional laws, create headaches for everyone, open up long and exhaustive legal battles and, at times, harm people when that harm could have been avoided.

We have been told that the Bill’s intention is to improve economic opportunities for Aboriginal Territorians, but that aim is undercut by a dangerous omission. The Bill removes requirements for regulations that prescribe how consent must be obtained before issuing water licences under Aboriginal water reserves. It also removes the explicit role of land councils in ensuring that consent is given by the right people through the right processes, according to Aboriginal law and tradition. There are clear established pathways for gaining consent under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. That process exists for a reason because Aboriginal law, authority and governance matter.

How can the water controller possibly make informed fair decisions if there is no requirement to obtain consent from the correct Aboriginal legal body representing the relevant rights and interests? For this Bill to work as intended, if its true aim is to support Aboriginal economic empowerment and development, it must include a provision that requires written consent from the appropriate Aboriginal legal entity before any water licence is issued from the reserve.

There is no justification not to include this. It is not just an administrative detail; it is a matter of principle, process and respect. It is also about ensuring we have a system that works effectively. Without this, the Bill risks doing the opposite of what it claims.

If this consent process is not made explicit in law, I ask the minister how they will mitigate the following risks: that the water controller will seek consent from the wrong people, undermining Aboriginal law and risking conflict; non-exclusive native title holders will be excluded from decisions about water use on their country; traditional owners will be pressured to make decisions about lands that are not theirs to speak for; and that entire groups of affected Aboriginal people will be sidelined in the decision-making process.

I am curious how the water controller will do their job. What processes will they follow? What guidance will they have to determine whose consent is required or whether that consent was freely given?

I note that the *Water Act*, which covers Aboriginal water reserves, is a scheduled law under the *Territory Coordinator Act*. This amendment allows for the Territory Coordinator to take over decision-making about Aboriginal water reserve licences. As the Bill stands, the Territory Coordinator could override the water controller, seize full authority over the issuing of licences under the Aboriginal water reserve and determine consent, even against the clear wishes of traditional owners. That is not just a failure of process; it is a violation of Aboriginal self-determination and a serious and inappropriate further concentration of power in the hands of Stuart Knowles, the Territory Coordinator.

I remind this Chamber that this Bill requires consent only from owners of eligible land, which is narrowly defined in the *Water Act*. It does not require consent from Aboriginal landowners whose country will be affected by the water take. This may not be the same people. This is a fundamental flaw that threatens to create conflict, grievance and long-term legal uncertainty. Despite reassurances from departmental staff in our briefings that written consent would be sought from the correct landholding body, we must ask: why is this process not detailed in the Bill? Why are there not regulations? Why not make it law?

The intent behind Aboriginal water reserves is sound. Land councils broadly support the concept. They recognise that these reserves offer a limited but important opportunity for Aboriginal economic development on their own land with their own water, but they also raise a critical concern: how can Aboriginal people access economic benefits if water allocation plans are already unsustainable and damaging to country?

There is no empowerment in forcing people to choose between economic development and the destruction of their land. That is not choice; that is coercion. Water planning must be based on best-practice sustainability and must be done in collaboration with traditional owners. The protection of country must come first. Economic development cannot come at the cost of culture, ecology and sacred law.

If we are truly committed to creating certainty in development and robust regulatory frameworks, we must legislate for proper consultation and consent from the right people in the right way and at the right time. This Bill does not do that; it introduces confusion, strips back process, weakens oversight and fails to respect Aboriginal authority.

This is not a technical oversight; this is a serious moral and legislative failure. We cannot continue to legislate over Aboriginal people's lands and waters while ignoring their voices. We cannot build processes that allow powerful entities to override traditional owners. We cannot pretend that Aboriginal economic participation is being advanced when the very foundations of Aboriginal governance are being eroded. When we weaken a law, especially a law governing something as precious and finite as water, we do not just create loopholes; we send a message that rules, the process and consent do not matter.

Once it is gone, water does not come back. Once drained, rivers may not recover. The species, ecosystems and cultural lifeways that depend on our aquifers and waterways cannot be replaced.

I call on this government to amend this Bill, legislate clearly and transparently for written consent, consult with the right people and place Aboriginal decision-making at the heart of water governance on their country.

I also understand from talking with the land councils that there were significant regulations drafted and ready to enact, which would have stepped out exactly how consent was to be obtained. I understand that these regulations were consulted on extensively and would have addressed the issues preventing water access under the previous scheme. I do not understand why this government has chosen to throw out years of work to ensure the sustainability and equitability of access to water under Aboriginal water reserves, including consultation and input from downstream communities or communities sharing groundwater systems. It is beyond me.

It is not hard or too late to get this right, but it is urgent. The decisions we make today will shape the health of our land, communities, economy and democracy for generations to come. We must make the right decisions, and this is not the right decision.

Mr BURGOYNE (Water Resources)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank members for their contributions to this debate.

As we have discussed, the purpose of this Bill is to improve the efficiency and administration of the *Water Act* to and to ensure we can activate the water available in the Aboriginal water reserve.

This Northern Territory Government was elected on a clear mandate to rebuild the Territory's economy, and we are committed to rebuilding the economy through a range of reforms that provide a strong foundation for growth, with robust regulatory frameworks, world-class environmental protections and long-term certainty for business investment.

The introduction and successful passing of legislation for the Territory Coordinator and the removal of third-party merits review supports this commitment, and so does this Bill. Water is an enabler for economic development. We use it for agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, mining and onshore gas developments. If we are to grow our Territory, we need to ensure that the water made available for economic benefits is used.

There are about 60,000 megalitres in the Aboriginal water reserve across the Northern Territory available for economic development. However, to date, not one drop has been utilised. For too long access to the Aboriginal water reserve has been impeded by distractions caused by ambiguous legislation and because the former government was unable to find a solution to a problem of its own creation, because the former government did not implement its own policy. This Bill corrects that ambiguity to make water reserved for Aboriginal economic development available to those who are ready to start doing business in the Territory.

This Bill effectively does three things:

1. It makes clear land that is eligible for designation to an Aboriginal water reserve under a water allocation plan.

2. It removes the duplication of consultation processes already undertaken as part of the development of a water allocation plan, which have created distraction to the water allocation planning processes.

3. It removes the requirement to establish regulations that prescribe a class of people who give consent and the process that must be followed in determining consent, enabling eligible Aboriginal landowners the autonomy to determine who gives consent for a person to apply for a licence from the reserve.

We have heard many claims this evening, and I am sure many others have heard claims that this Bill removes traditional owners from decisions about Aboriginal water reserves. That is simply not true.

This Bill removes the government from prescribing a process and allows eligible Aboriginal people to apply their own decision-making frameworks to determine who makes an application for a licence. Government does not impose on any other individual group or company how it goes about deciding to apply for a water extraction licence. We will not do this for Aboriginal landowners. All eligible Aboriginal people will have the autonomy within their landownership group to decide how the water can be used and by whom, and to consult with whomever they wish, including potentially affected Aboriginal people.

Agreeing to this Bill means the Aboriginal water reserve can be activated now. It signals to businesses and Aboriginal people that they can apply for licences to support economic development of the Territory.

I acknowledge the comments made by members in response to this Bill. The Member for Gwoja spoke about consent. I make it clear that Aboriginal people were engaged in the development of the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve Policy before its inception in 2017—a policy established by the former Labor government that determines eligible Aboriginal landowners.

The *Water Act* defines an eligible Aboriginal person as well as eligible land. The amendments remove the need for government to prescribe a process and provide eligible landowners the autonomy to determine how and who gives consent for a person to apply for a licence from the reserve. The amendments enable eligible Aboriginal people to make agreements with whomever they wish, including consulting in the way that meets their cultural obligations.

Government does not impose on any other individual group or company how it goes about deciding, as I said earlier. This has been brought up many times about eligibility. Eligibility is not being changed, only the process by which Aboriginal landowners can give that. It is a shame that some seek to mislead others in the community about this.

Regarding consultation with land councils, Aboriginal landowners can still seek support from their respective land council. The Northern and Central Land Councils were informed of this Bill prior to introduction and following its introduction to discuss operation of the amendments.

In regard to abolishing water advisory groups, once a water allocation plan has been signed and declared, the advisory committee's role is considered complete. I think those opposite do not quite understand that.

The Member for Gwoja brought up the Murray–Darling Basin. Water is constantly used to spread fear and distrust about the state of natural resource management and decision-making in the Territory. Let us be clear that the Territory will not repeat the mistakes of the Murray–Darling Basin because our land tenure legislation and management rules are vastly different. Water risks in the Murray–Darling were caused by five jurisdictions delivering different management regimes granting water as an ownership entitlement. There is only one water manager in the Northern Territory—that is, the government, made up of experts and water professionals at the top of their fields, who have the resources, tools and systems to provide expert scientific advice which prioritise the environment first and foremost.

In regard to water allocation plans and water security, many mentioned the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan. That plan was in development for more than a decade, but more recently since 2017 when the committee was re-established. We rely on and trust the science for water allocation plans, and have focused resources to strengthen advisory committees to have greater Aboriginal involvement. Water security is a priority for this government, and we are continuing to deliver water infrastructure, remote engagement and improvements to water planning.

I thank the Members for Namatjira and Mulka for their contributions.

The Member for Mulka spoke about water being over-allocated. In the Territory our regulatory and policy settings are risk based and proportionate to the level of development. We have water resources available to allocate in the NT's water allocation plan areas after protective quantities of water are first set aside for the environment. It is all based on science.

The Member for Nightcliff also spoke about these amendments. The member raised issues in regard to section 22C. Once again, eligibility has not changed; it remains the same as it was when it was introduced in 2017 under the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve Policy Framework. This amendment Bill clarifies that designated land must have direct access to the water resource. In the NT water remains tied to land and cannot be separated.

In regard to issues raised about section 71BA, Aboriginal landowners will have the right to choose how they provide consent to apply for water under the Aboriginal water reserve. Government is not about dictating who Aboriginal people must consult with and how they give consent. Land councils can still be involved with designated Aboriginal people who want them to be, or require them to be in the case of land trusts.

I thank the Member for Johnston for her contribution.

I acknowledge the officers from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment in water resources who have contributed to the development of this Bill and those in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel who prepared the Bill.

I commend this 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:

Mr PAECH: In your summing-up speech you talked about working with land councils. Were Aboriginal governing bodies like AAPA and the Territory's four land councils involved in agreeing to amend the designation for eligible land for usage of Aboriginal water reserves?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will be clear that eligibility has not changed; it remains the same as when it was introduced in 2017 under the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve Policy Framework. That framework was consulted on widely …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! I am not talking about the eligibility of a person; I am talking about …

Mr MALEY: Let him answer the question.

Mr PAECH: Will you tell me to shut up again?

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Can we direct the questions through the Chair? No further interjections; let us move on.

Mr PAECH: I am seeking clarification. I am not asking about the particular requirements of an eligible person; I am asking about eligible land.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, I will let the minister finish his response, which he has only just started.

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause—which amends section 22C—makes explicit the criteria for designating eligible land based on the type of water resource being managed under a water allocation plan. It removes the requirement to specifically consult with land councils regarding the designation of eligible land.

Mr PAECH: Does the definition of 'surface water' include rivers, creeks and waterways that flow away from the immediately adjacent land?

Mr BURGOYNE: The watercourse must run through the eligible land or be directly adjacent to it.

Mr PAECH: Building on your answer, does the definition of 'groundwater' include rivers, creeks and waterways that the groundwater feeds into?

Mr BURGOYNE: No.

Mr PAECH: Can these new definitions lead to the reduction of an area allocated to an Aboriginal water reserve in the future drawing of borders for the water allocation plan?

Mr BURGOYNE: There are no changes to the borders in regard to the Aboriginal water management plans.

Mr PAECH: Will these new definitions of 'surface water' and 'groundwater' be used for government and the water controller to decide who is an eligible person regarding access to land and water on Aboriginal land?

Mr BURGOYNE: This clearly identifies the land that is eligible and, therefore, the landowners.

Mr PAECH: If two Aboriginal landholders share a river or a lake, who does the third party approach for a partnership to use the Aboriginal water reserve?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is already designated through the plan what size traditional Aboriginal landowners have. That would make up how much of the Aboriginal water reserve that person could access, depending on the size of their landholding and the percentage of the Aboriginal water reserve that they can either access or trade.

Mr PAECH: Given we are talking about the designation of eligible land for Aboriginal water reserves in water allocation plans and that the government has removed the merits review, if a third party engages and seeks approval from an Aboriginal person who is deemed eligible but there is another person in that community

who is of the same status and standing who opposes that water allocation being approved, what is the process to overcome that conflict?

Mr BURGOYNE: The policy framework sets out the eligibility for those people who need to be consulted in regard to water. If there is a dispute it goes to the independent water controller to assess whether there is consent in regard to that water resource being utilised by the Aboriginal people or being traded.

Mr PAECH: There could be more than one Aboriginal elder or leader in a community, so there could be an opposing view on a water allocation being granted. There is now not the need to consult with the land councils, so are you saying that would then need to be mediated and the determination would not be made by an Aboriginal person but by the Territory water controller?

Mr BURGOYNE: The water controller needs to be satisfied that an eligible person, as set out under the policy framework, has essentially agreed to and given permission for the water to be utilised. It is important to understand that the Aboriginal water reserve is made up of a portion of water that can be sustainably yielded from a water allocation plan.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind all members that this is clause 4, 'Section 22C amended (Designation of eligible land for Aboriginal water reserve in water allocation plan)'. I ask members to address the clause. If they are straying out of it, I will leave it up to the minister whether they choose to answer.

Mr PAECH: Water and land are connected to Aboriginal people, so it is relevant to ask, but I can continue those questions in clause 5.

Were land councils consulted about the removal of section 22C of the *Water Act* regarding the Aboriginal water reserves?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve Policy Framework was extensively consulted on. This is to ensure that we can enable the Aboriginal water reserve to be activated.

Mr PAECH: Have the government and appropriate departments worked on clarification of the regulation with land councils? Was an agreement reached before this amendment was put to the Assembly?

Mr BURGOYNE: Since coming to government we have made it clear that we want to activate and rebuild the Territory economy. As a minister, I went to the department to work through how we could enable that. A range of consultation had already occurred, and these amendments are to ensure that we can activate the Aboriginal water reserve across the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH: Will the land councils be replaced by another governing body that has the cultural knowledge of nations and language groups of the people who have Aboriginal water reserves?

Mr BURGOYNE: No-one is replacing anyone here. If eligible Aboriginal people seek to have their land councils involved in these processes, they can be.

Mr PAECH: Are there any examples where land councils have blocked the usage of Aboriginal water reserves for economic growth?

Mr BURGOYNE: This is about giving Aboriginal people the autonomy to ensure that if they wish to have the water that is tied to their land utilised under the Aboriginal water reserve, they can. If they seek to involve the land councils, they can as well.

Mr PAECH: Will land councils be able to give feedback to the water controller when it comes to granting a water licence from the Aboriginal reserves? If it is on Aboriginal land and under the Commonwealth Land Rights Act there are provisions for the land trust being entirely consulted.

Mr BURGOYNE: Land councils have equal opportunity to provide comment through established public consultation processes.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5:

Mr PAECH: Why has the word 'consent' been replaced with the word 'agreement' in the amendment?

Mr BURGOYNE: Agreement reflects the negotiated outcome that would arise between an eligible Aboriginal person and the third party when the eligible Aboriginal person—or Aboriginal people—provides consent for a third party to apply for a licence.

Mr PAECH: If the water controller cannot decide who is an eligible person or persons, is there an authority that can step in to make that decision?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is already prescribed who the eligible people are. What the water controller must essentially make the decision on is whether they give consent.

Mr PAECH: What is the process if there are disputes amongst eligible persons, there is no merits review, and those disputes will be indefinite?

Mr BURGOYNE: The controller must be satisfied that the eligible person, which is stipulated in the policy framework, has given consent. If there are conflicting views regarding that, if there are separate landholders, they will have separate entitlements under the water allocation plan regarding the Aboriginal water reserve.

Mr PAECH: Under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act there can be more than one eligible person; there could be persons. If there is an inability to reach a consensus, how is that then made about the definition?

Mr BURGOYNE: Regarding a land trust where multiple people are obviously involved, the water controller might need the seal of the land trust to be satisfied that the agreement has been made, that there is consent.

Mr PAECH: My family has a land trust. There is more than one person who is an eligible landholder or approver. If consensus is unable to be reached, will the water controller be able to make a determination and approve an allocation based on those negotiations?

Mr BURGOYNE: At the end of the day, the water controller has the ability to decide whether consent has been given. That is an important decision. Obviously, he will use his discretion regarding that. He will have to be satisfied that consent has been given.

Mr PAECH: Does there have to be unanimous consent from the eligible landholders?

Mr BURGOYNE: The water controller must be satisfied that consent has been given.

Mr PAECH: I understand that, but are you saying it does not have to be a unanimous decision when there is more than one eligible person?

Mr BURGOYNE: In the example of land trusts, land councils are involved in that decision-making process—it enables the conversation regarding that consent.

Mr PAECH: This can open up a space of ambiguity because there is nothing stopping a third party saying to a person, 'I will buy you a Toyota if you say yes to this', and then there are 20 other people who do not want that allocation. How can that process be avoided?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important that the independent water controller must be satisfied that consent has been given. Regarding land trusts where there are large groups of people, they will need to be confident that there is a consensus in regard to that before giving consent.

Mr PAECH: Is there a predetermined set of conditions of what the controller will act on in terms of consent?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment is developing guidance to assist the controller in their satisfaction that an application has come from the appropriate person and that there is consensus.

Mr PAECH: You said that it is developing guidelines. Will the guidelines be made public about the process or the criteria the water controller must consider when affirming that consent?

Mr BURGOYNE: The application form to access the Aboriginal water reserve will be the forward-facing public-facing document. At the end of the day someone must make a decision on this. The independent water controller set up by the previous government is there. He will have to now be satisfied that consent has been given. In 99% of cases there will be an eligible landholder. They will either agree or not agree to it. They will

be prescribed under the policy framework, and they will be eligible for a certain percentage of the Aboriginal water reserve in regard to their landholding.

Mr PAECH: I acknowledge the work of the Territory's water controller, but will the guidelines to demonstrate and determine the appropriate consent be made public?

Mr BURGOYNE: The application form will outline the eligibility criteria that people must meet and the evidence required for them to apply.

Mr PAECH: That is the eligibility to apply, but what process will the Territory water controller follow when considering awarding the appropriate consent?

Mr BURGOYNE: At the end of the day the water controller is guided by the *Water Act* and will ensure that he complies with all the regulations and guidance regarding when and how he makes his decisions.

Mr PAECH: For the purposes of this, there are no guidelines, and you are relying on the *Water Act* which may well not have consent around this issue.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important that the water controller is satisfied consent has been given. I will not dictate how the independent water controller decides that, but there will be guidance from the department, which has been working on the policy framework for strategic Aboriginal water reserves and eligible people to ensure that they can give consent so that the controller can then be satisfied.

Mr PAECH: You responded that the department will be developing guidance or guidelines. Will what it gives the Territory water controller be made public?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment is developing guidance to assist the controller in their satisfaction that the application has come from the appropriate person. That relates back to the policy framework and those eligible people.

Mr PAECH: Will that guidance be made public, because the public deserves to know that guidance for the criteria of approving the appropriate consent.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is to assist the water controller in making his decisions.

Mr PAECH: Will that not be made public?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am informed that it will.

Mr PAECH: Thank you for finally answering that question.

How will the water controller handle conflicts between Aboriginal landholders whose water may cross into each other's country?

Mr BURGOYNE: As part of the water allocation plans it is clearly defined as to who the eligible landholders are and how much of the Aboriginal water reserve, as a percentage of allocated water, they are entitled to. Some people will say, 'I'm just outside' or 'I'm just inside', but at the end of the day, in regard to eligible Aboriginal people, that is clearly defined. It has been worked through over a long time in regard to the policy framework and the strategic Aboriginal water reserve.

Mr PAECH: What is your definition of 'agreement' for the purposes of this legislation?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have answered that. The agreement reflects the negotiated outcome that would arise between the eligible Aboriginal person and the third party when the eligible Aboriginal person provides consent for a third party to apply for a licence.

Mr PAECH: Thank god for sticky notes, minister. I have no further questions.

J DAVIS: Can you clarify whether the Territory Coordinator can override the water controller and make decisions without having any consent from eligible Aboriginal people?

Mr BURGOYNE: That would be a matter for the Territory Coordinator in his Act, not in regard to the clause we are talking about now.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Mr BURGOYNE (Water Resources): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

The Assembly divided:

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

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

PAPER TABLED
Members' Quarterly Fuel Transaction Report, Quarter 1 – January to March 2025

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the Members' Quarterly Fuel Transaction Report, Quarter 1 – January to March 2025.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Ranger Programs in Northern Territory

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Arnhem as follows:

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance: investing in and supporting the work of rangers and ranger programs throughout the Territory.

The letter is signed by the Member for Arnhem. Is discussion supported? Discussion is supported.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, the Territory's natural environment is one of our greatest assets. Our Territory Labor opposition understands that a healthy environment creates ongoing permanent jobs.

The conservation of our land and sea across the Northern Territory and the beautiful country that we represent in this place is crucial for the health and wellbeing of Territorians and, of course, future Territorians. The provision of employment and economic opportunities on country for local communities is tied to the health of country. This is why the former Labor government supported Aboriginal Territorians by investing in important ranger programs to protect ancestral lands and seas, unlock economic and social potential on country and create jobs on country.

The former Labor government funded grants to support our hardworking Aboriginal rangers to access more opportunities to have the equipment, infrastructure projects and operational capacity to work on country and achieve meaningful conservation, economic and social outcomes.

There were also specific programs tied under the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program. These included the conservation of heritage rock art and opportunities to train rangers in a particular area and further study opportunities in land and sea management. Examples of what this meant in practical terms were the work on feral animal, pest and plant control; soil conservation; cultural heritage recording, like the rock art stories I mentioned and the protection of these sites; biodiversity and species monitoring and classification; as well as managing country burns.

The Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program delivered long-term economic, environmental and social development benefits. This model was continually recognised internationally as best practice for natural and cultural resource management. That was led in the Northern Territory.

When I was in government in August 2024 I proudly made the commitment on behalf of my Territory Labor team to invest $12m in Aboriginal Ranger Grants over the next four years if Labor was re-elected to government. Within hours, the then CLP shadow Treasurer—the current Treasurer—matched this $12m commitment. At the time, the CLP put out a statement which said in black and white, 'We will match this commitment for ranger funding'. That was prior to the 2024 election. Taking away all doubt, the CLP shadow minister for Parks and Rangers confirmed to the *Centralian Today* that an elected CLP government would match the election commitment originally made by Labor. I quote:

> *The CLP remains committed to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, and if elected, we will fully fund the program with $12 million over four years …*

That is what he said in his home town of Alice Springs (Mparntwe).

The *NT News* article by Fia Walsh, published on 13 September 2024, titled 'CLP election promises: What the new Northern Territory government promised to deliver' had a range of topics. I revisited that article and flicked to the part about the environment. It is quite interesting because there have been a few changes in the last nine months, particularly last week. The *NT News* reported these as the environment promises that the CLP made prior to the election and when it started its tenure in government tenure:

- *Release details of gas deal with Tamboran 'if they can'*
- *43 per cent emissions reduction target by 2030*
- *50 per cent renewable energy by 2030*
- *Net zero emissions by 2050*
- *Continue funding Aboriginal ranger programs $12m over the next four years*
- *Invest in recycled and grey water alternatives*
- *Expand the Living Water Smart Program*
- *More funding to community groups, Aboriginal rangers and local councils to reduce Gamba grass*
- *Defund the Environmental Defenders Office*

They were purely the environment commitments by the CLP when it came to government. From those dot points it is clear that there have been mistruths, misleading and broken election commitments by the CLP in nine short months of governing—a long nine months, from our perspective. These were the CLP's black-and-white commitments made to Territorians before they went to the polling booths in August 2024.

Territorians believed the CLP. Territorians believe that when you make an election commitment you should fulfil it and honour that promise. You do not lie to Territorians once you have their vote and are in government. It is a disgrace to win people's vote and then break the promise once you become the government. I will let Territorians decide about the CLP's horrible track record in just nine months of government. A promise is a test of character, and the CLP government has already failed that test multiple times. CLP members have shown that they will say anything to win votes and do anything to stay in power.

The CLP should stop pretending that the budget last week was purely about cleaning up Labor's mess, because the truth is it was about the CLP's lack of values and integrity. The CLP has already broken many

promises to Territorians. Its values are plainly seen by all across the Territory—self-interest over public service and politics over principle.

It is not only Territory Labor that is disgusted by the CLP's broken promise; we have been inundated by a huge amount of correspondence, calls, messages and concerns from people within our electorates and in organisations that tracked the key promises and commitments made by the CLP prior to the August election.

I will read out a couple of public statements, just in case the CLP thinks that Territorians are not looking at its budget and the election promises that have been broken. In his recent public statement Patrick O'Leary, CEO of Country Needs People, said:

> *Country Needs People and the entire ranger network are shocked by the NT Government's broken commitment to Aboriginal rangers … Cutting this funding—which has run successfully for many years—doesn't just affect one ranger, it impacts their whole community, and it breaks a promise to every Territorian.*
>
> *…*
>
> *Indigenous Ranger jobs are one of the most positive initiatives happening right around the Territory, and throughout most of remote Australia. Investing in people through creating local jobs is one of the huge benefits of this work …*
>
> *We have never at any time, with Liberal, Labor or other candidates at state or federal level, had a commitment made during an election to Indigenous Rangers, that was not then honoured by the government post-election.*

Thousands of Territorians were emailed the CLP commitment and, because the CLP lied, a misleading statement was sent to Territorians prior to the election.

We also saw a strong response from the Central Land Council Chair, Mr Warren Williams. The statement reads:

> *The CLP has betrayed our trust and puts jobs, cultural knowledge and land management at risk …*
>
> *…*
>
> *This is a slap in the face to the rangers who are out there managing country on the smell of an oily rag, protecting sacred sites and fighting fires in some of the most remote areas of the Territory …*
>
> *…*
>
> *This broken promise hits especially hard in communities where ranger jobs are among the few opportunities for meaningful, culturally appropriate work …*
>
> *It undermines decades of investment in local efforts to look after country.*
>
> *…*
>
> *Your fine words before the election about supporting the bush ring hollow when you turn your backs on one of the proven success stories in remote community development as soon as the election is over …*
>
> *Our rangers and the country they care for, deserve better. They will remember your backflip, as will voters.*

We also saw a strong statement by the Northern Land Council Chair, Mr Matthew Ryan, which reads:

> *After eight years of a program that has contributed to successful land and sea management, this government has revealed its plans to leave Aboriginal rangers behind.*
>
> *Our Aboriginal rangers are outraged at this broken promise, that puts both jobs and our ability to manage country at risk. This puts at risk the work of all those who rely on our lands and seas, including Territorians and visitors who are here to enjoy the Territory lifestyle.*

There is no doubt that the CLP has lied to Territorians with this broken promise. When CLP members took their oaths in government, they never had any intention of seeing this promise through. That is clear now,

unfortunately, nine months later. Every CLP minister who signed off on the budget book should hang their head in shame for this broken promise. Every CLP minister campaigned on restoring the Territory lifestyle, and now they are gutting one of the most successful programs in remote community development. What part of restoring our lifestyle includes ripping jobs off country and abandoning our environmental responsibilities?

This was not an accidental oversight; this was deliberate, and the CLP clearly lied to Territorians. It was a calculated decision to mislead voters. The dishonesty is what makes people so cranky about politicians. Every CLP minister knew that this promise was made to Territorians, and they have walked it back without a single consequence faced by anyone in their government. They did it hoping that no-one would notice the budget lines. Luckily, my team and I were out highlighting the books and raising the concern. That is not poor planning by the government; that is a con job.

CLP candidates looked voters in the eye, sent emails to communities and gave Territorians their word. The words now mean nothing, and every Territorian should be worried about what will be axed or broken next. The CLP can try to spin this any what it wants. CLP members can try to hide it in the budget papers, which we know did not work, but Territorians know the truth; they have been lied to by the CLP purely for political points and prior to the election. Now the CLP government is hoping that Territorians will forget, but I can assure everyone that Territorians will not forget.

Our Territory Labor team will always back our Aboriginal rangers because we know that looking after country is more than just policy and politics; it is about pride, purpose and protecting the Territory for our future generations. The CLP has turned its back on that legacy, and Territorians all over the NT will remember.

It seems like the CLP has taken a dislike to all ranger groups because it has dropped the ball on the Northern Territory's popular Junior Police Rangers program, which has been suspended due to issues regarding its self-insurance application. It beggars belief. How is blocking junior police rangers from serving the community restoring our lifestyle?

I acknowledge some of the great work that came under the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program. I will table the Independent Review of Program Outcomes Report which was done by the independent organisation Ninti One Ltd. This is a fulsome report, with 34 pages of work to assess independently the government money spent on the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program.

Madam Speaker, I seek leave to table the independent report.

Leave granted.

Ms UIBO: This independent report shows the real value of a few dollars in the grants program. The practicality of investment in Aboriginal ranger programs and the equipment to support work on country, as well as some of the initiatives like preserving and dating Aboriginal rock art on country and protecting sacred sites, have all been captured in that independent report. I hope anyone from the CLP government who has not bothered to look at it will read that tabled report because it shows the value of that small investment—it does not sound like a big amount when you think about the hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of the Northern Territory—of $12m over four years.

I acknowledge all the work of our rangers, from our Parks and Wildlife rangers to our Aboriginal rangers and, indeed, the great programs like the Junior Police Rangers. I acknowledge the rangers who support local government, our parks estate and our stunning landscapes across the Territory. Our Parks and Wildlife crew work across some of the most amazing and stunning national parks in the country—Litchfield, Nitmiluk and West MacDonnell—and the breathtaking Larapinta Trail.

I also acknowledge the amazing rangers who work across the Arnhem electorate, including the fantastic NT Government Parks and Wildlife rangers in my electorate who work at Nitmiluk and Elsey National Parks and the Jawoyn Rangers who work on country at Nitmiluk National Park and the surrounding region towards the communities of Manyallaluk, Barunga and Wugularr.

The Mimal Rangers, based at Weemol close to the community of Bulman, have been leading as an independent ranger group for over 25 years. The Mimal Rangers look after the Mimal IPA. They had a contract with NASA to collect space junk from the ELA space launch over the last couple of years.

The Yirralka Rangers work across the Laynhapuy homelands and the footprint that covers the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area.

The Mutjung Rangers near Gapuwiyak service the beautiful homelands in that region. They drafted their own healthy country plan for the Western Miyarrka area in north-east Arnhem Land.

The Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation (ASRAC) covers Donydji and Mirrngatja in my electorate and looks after the Arafura Swamp IPA.

The Numburindi land and sea rangers from Numbulwar share responsibility for the South East Arnhem Land IPA with the Yugul Mangi Rangers from Ngukurr and Urapunga communities.

I give a huge shout-out to the Anindilyakwa Land and Sea Rangers who work across the Groote Archipelago and cover the islands of Bickerton and Groote Eylandt.

Thank you all for your amazing work on country, whether you are a government ranger, a junior police ranger or a ranger in one of our 47 Aboriginal ranger groups—I think now 48—across the Northern Territory. Our Territory Labor opposition supports the work on country by all our rangers, whether they are black, white, brown or brindle rangers on whichever country they are looking after—their own or other people's country—for the important environmental protection of country. Our Labor team thanks you for your work, and we will not lie to you like the CLP did.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward for discussion this matter of public importance.

This government was elected on a clear mandate to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore our Territory lifestyle. We promised to put a stop to Labor's wasteful spending and unnecessary projects. We are delivering on our promise to ensure that taxpayers' funds are being spent responsibly and not on Labor's pet projects.

I can think of a few Labor pet projects, the money for which could have been spent a bit more wisely, like the shadeless shade structure—things like that did nothing for nobody—for $12m. We are talking about $12m, so I am trying to think of where $12m spent in the last couple of terms of government could have been reprioritised and better spent. Perhaps it is the $12m on a police station that the Labor government failed to staff. Perhaps it is the $12m on a grandstand that the former Chief Minister Michael Gunner brought in under his arm to Cabinet. Perhaps these are the sorts of things …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: I cannot think what this could possibly be, but what is the point of order?

Mr PAECH: Standing Order 25; relevance to subject. We are talking about the importance of rangers, not grandstands or shade structures. The importance of Indigenous rangers …

Madam SPEAKER: Take your seat, Member for Gwoja. The Opposition Leader had a certain amount of latitude in her speech; I will give the same benefit to the Member for Braitling.

Mr BURGOYNE: The Member for Gwoja would like us all to forget about these things. He would like us to forget that the $12m grandstand had an ICAC inquiry into it.

On this side we are holding the NT Government departments, programs and organisations that receive government funding to account. We are ensuring that they all have to account for how they spend taxpayers' funds and ensure that they are delivering real outcomes for the benefit of the Territory.

The former Labor government left the Northern Territory with over $11bn in debt and a broken budget. When we came to government last year, we inherited a string of underfunded programs and frontline services, with funding of up to $350m per year scheduled to cease across the budget in forward estimates. That is what we were left with—trying to find $350m. The former Labor government wrote cheques it simply could not cash; that is the reality of the situation it left us in. That is funding across the board.

We heard from the Treasurer over the last week about the full scale of the mess Labor left behind, with $350m of funding scheduled to cease and unfinished projects left in limbo. Take the previous government's infrastructure program, for example. The former government would announce all these brand-new infrastructure projects—record announcements. I remember hearing them ring out in the Chamber. However, the former Labor government did not provide enough funding to deliver them. That is the issue. It constantly

tricked Territorians into believing that projects were on the way, knowing full well there was no money to see them through.

There were stalled projects, unrealistic timelines and never-ending costs. The Tiger Brennan Drive overpass jumped from $61m to $160m, a $99.4m blowout. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Gallery of Australia in my home town of Alice Springs was originally budgeted for $150m but blew out to more than $300m before being rescoped by the CLP government. Where was the money coming from for that?

Ms Uibo: It is your job as a government to cater for your election commitments.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is like drawing up the plans to build a mansion when you can barely afford to pay your rent. It is Labor's lot to pledge grand promises to make things better and deliver nothing. Labor members know full well that we were heading towards a funding cliff.

We promised Territorians that we would reprioritise what Labor left behind and deliver on our promises to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle.

Mr Paech: Lies, lies, lies.

Mr BURGOYNE: We are fixing the mess that Labor left us in—a mess it left all Territorians in.

Mr Paech: 'Broken Promise' Burgoyne.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please!

Mr BURGOYNE: Last week this government delivered our first budget, a responsible and practical budget which puts victims of crime first, prioritises law and order and begins the long task of repairing Labor's mess.

Ms Uibo: And lies to Territorians about election commitments.

Mr BURGOYNE: We delivered a budget that restores confidence …

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; I am having a hard time hearing the minister.

Ms Uibo: You are not missing anything.

Madam SPEAKER: You just demonstrated to us all what the problem is; you are interjecting constantly. In all fairness, Opposition Leader, we all sat in silence listening to you give your speech. I think it is only respectful and decent that you do the same for the Member for Braitling, regardless of whether you agree with him. The member will be heard in silence respectfully.

Mr BURGOYNE: We delivered a budget that restores confidence and rebuilds the Territory.

Territorians made it clear last year that community safety is their number one priority, and we have backed that every day since being elected. That is why we have invested in the largest law and order budget in Territory history, with $1.5bn for police, Corrections and courts to provide them the people, infrastructure and support they need, which Labor never did in its eight years of wasteful government.

The fact this has been brought forward as a matter of public importance to rant and rave about financial management and fiscal responsibility—talk about contradiction. Those opposite could not organise a chook raffle at a chicken farm. This is yet another initiative that the former Labor government failed to consider in its forward estimates or future budget; it was another project with time-limited funding. Labor had zero dollars available for Aboriginal rangers moving forward—another false narrative to win Territorians over.

Territorians can be assured that Aboriginal ranger groups in the Northern Territory receive significant funding from the Commonwealth Government. They are also supported through philanthropic funding, fee-for-service work, land and sea management and resource development and revenue from carbon abatement projects and community-based commercial enterprises. This is how ranger groups were operating prior to the Labor government funding them. They can still access government work through targeted funding programs to do work in our national parks and on our waterways, rivers and coastline.

I have also been advised that the Australian Border Force has had discussions with land councils and ranger groups regarding a new partnership and funding arrangements to facilitate greater involvement of ranger

groups in surveillance across our north. There is a range of other ongoing and one-off funding programs at the state and Commonwealth level that support ranger groups across the north. This government is working with relevant agencies to look at how it can best support ranger groups into the future.

I remind members that Labor left us with more than $10bn in debt. This meant we had to make the tough necessary decisions to repair the budget and refocus our priorities. We are in this position because Labor spent its eight years in government setting poor priorities, over-promising and misleading Territorians about projects. This government is working hard every day to address the structural failings we inherited and fix the fundamentals so that the Territory can grow safely and sustainably. We are doing the hard work, and we are making responsible decisions for all Territorians.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I thank the Opposition Leader for bringing this matter of public importance to the Chamber.

In my budget speech I raised the concern that it looked like there was a cut to the rangers' funding. The notes attached to the budget paper said that this was due to time-limited funding; however, this funding was no more time limited than any other item in the budget. Every year the government decides what it wants to fund, and this year it is clear that the government is not providing the $12m over four years that is heavily relied on by the ranger programs.

As the government has talked about crime, I have talked about the need to address the underlying issues. I have talked about the neglect of the bush over decades and the neglect of our services, our schools and infrastructure on our lands.

This budget provides improvements for our schools. This began in January, with many remote schools having increased budgets, but there is little else in this budget for bush electorates.

One of the areas in the bush that works well, is successful and relies on Aboriginal knowledge is our rangers. This is one of the only spaces where governments have trusted our knowledge and our authority on country. Already, our rangers do not have enough money for the vast job of caring for country. They do the job of protecting country from invasive weeds and pests; continue to burn the country as the Dry Season allows; and patrol the waterways, roads and our expansive country. Many ranger groups provide services such as resourcing homeland centres and support what is happening in our homelands as well.

Every year when the tide turns, the plastic rubbish from the oceans wash up all along our beaches of north-east Arnhem Land. Volunteers go out weekly to remove the rubbish. We now see fishing vessels in our waters—sometimes illegally in the intertidal zones—but we do not have enough rangers who can patrol our waterways.

Labor changed the laws so that rangers could train and have greater powers, but how many rangers have been able to do the training? How many ranger programs have enough rangers to exercise these greater obligations and still do all the other work? There has been no increase in resourcing to go with increased authority.

This is an important matter, and I share the concerns of the opposition and crossbench members. Our rangers are important to the NT. They do important work with little funding, and they are critical to our community wellbeing. They set the example of what we have always done traditionally—caring for country. Every year, season by season, people move around looking after country; both rangers and TOs do these jobs.

The funding provided by the NT Government has helped to address different projects and provided much-needed capital items such as cars, boats and heavy equipment. These are necessary items for rangers. On country we rely on this support to ensure that our rangers can do the work that is needed.

One year, the Milingimbi rangers ran a project on Langarra Island (Howard Island) where they helped the community to address the problem of feral pigs. This included the rangers getting their firearms training and becoming qualified to shoot from a helicopter. This kind of training and skills development in jobs that are relevant and needed on country are important to our people.

I believe this funding has existed the whole time that I have been in parliament, and every year it is used to resource essential ranger work. Without this funding, our ranger groups will struggle to meet all the needs that we have; the rangers are already stretched, but this will increase the difficulty.

I am also worried about the message that it sends. When the government cuts the small amount of funding for our rangers it sends a message we are not important and that caring for country and waterways—the things that are vital to Aboriginal people—is not important. Our country is vital to our existence.

The ranger program is a place we celebrate traditional knowledge and continue to share the knowledge of our ancestors in a modern workplace. There are few genuine pathways to employment for our kids. This is one that truly exists. We understand it—it is a traditional role and a modern role—and it is much needed today. Therefore, it is incredibly disappointing to see these budget cuts because the NT Government contributes such a small amount, but it is symbolic of support for partnership and working together, and it makes a difference to the work that the rangers can do.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, this is a matter of profound importance to the Territory—that is, the crucial role of Indigenous ranger programs and the urgent need to properly fund and support this vital work.

For more than 65,000 years First Nations people have been the custodians of this land. The Indigenous ranger programs that we have today represent a modern continuation of this ancient tradition of caring for country, combining traditional knowledge with contemporary conservation practices to protect and manage our precious landscape.

Despite clear pre-election promises not to cut funding to Indigenous ranger programs, we now find zero funding allocated in the budget. This is not just a broken promise; it is a betrayal of trust to some of the most successful community programs we have ever seen in the Territory.

One of the first things I noticed in the budget was this cut to the ranger program. Even though there is a lot to be upset about in this recent CLP budget, I am probably most upset about this. These are programs that you honestly cannot fault. It beggars belief that the CLP would refuse to continue to support them.

Indigenous ranger programs represent one of the most successful initiatives in environmental management and Indigenous employment that this country has ever seen. Since 2007 when the programs were first federally funded through the Working on Country program they have created more than 2,100 jobs nationally in land and sea management, providing meaningful employment, training and career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

These programs deliver extraordinary outcomes across multiple domains. There are environmental benefits, with rangers at the forefront of addressing feral animal control, invasive weed management, fire management and threatened species protection. There are cultural benefits. The programs strengthen connection to country, maintain cultural knowledge and ensure that traditional practices continue to thrive. There are social benefits. These roles create pride, purpose and leadership within communities, with rangers serving as role models for young people. Then there are the economic benefits; studies have shown a return of approximately $3 for every $1 invested in ranger programs, representing exceptional value for the taxpayer.

Let me share something that makes this funding cut even more unconscionable. Australia's Indigenous ranger programs have been recognised internationally as a model of excellence. They are not just successful here; they are being replicated around the world from what we have done here.

Most notably, First Nations communities in Canada have adopted the Australian Indigenous ranger model. In 2012 Australian rangers visited Canada to share their experiences with several Indigenous groups there. This knowledge exchange inspired the development of the Indigenous Guardians program in Canada, with the Canadian Government announcing funding for this initiative in 2017.

The international recognition culminated in 2017 when Australia's Indigenous Protected Areas program and the Working on Country Indigenous Rangers Program received the future policy bronze award from the World Future Council in partnership with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. This award recognised the programs for their exceptional effectiveness in turning around environmental degradation across Australia.

It is against this backdrop of outstanding success and international recognition that I address the concerning situation regarding funding for Indigenous ranger programs in the Northern Territory. Before the NT election the CLP made a clear promise, which we all heard, to the people of the Northern Territory that it would not cut funding to Indigenous ranger programs. Now we find this commitment has been broken, with no funding allocated in the budget.

Here we stand with a government that promised to support these world-class programs, now claiming it is someone else's responsibility. The CLP government's attempt to shift the blame to the federal government is disingenuous and fails to acknowledge its own pre-election commitment. You promised not to cut funding; you have cut funding. Own it. At a time when we are facing unprecedented environmental challenges and

should be expanding these globally recognised programs, the government has instead chosen to abandon its financial support.

Let us be honest about what is happening here. This is not about fiscal responsibility; it is about priorities. The same government that can find money for its pet projects cannot find money for programs that have demonstrated extraordinary success and international recognition. I cannot believe that this government and the Environment minister can stand here with a straight face and say that they cannot afford to fund the ranger programs, but somehow can afford to give out hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate welfare, like the $180m to pay for roads for foreign-owned gas companies to use. It is a disgrace, and no-one is falling for it.

I highlight the false economy of cutting funding to these programs. Research commissioned by the federal government found that between 2009 and 2015, a government investment of $35m in Indigenous protected areas and ranger jobs generated social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes worth $96.5m. This represents extraordinary value and is one of the things I learnt in my environmental science degree recently at CDU. These are held up as models of peak achievement in terms of the value to community and cultural practice.

Meanwhile, spending on prisons in the Northern Territory continues to skyrocket. The contrast could not be more stark—cutting funding to programs that create employment, purpose and positive community outcomes while prison expenditure grows unchecked. The government cannot talk with any sincerity about wanting to offer employment opportunities and pathways for personal development to Aboriginal Territorians whilst also cutting this funding.

I call on the government to:

1. honour its pre-election promise and restore funding to Indigenous ranger programs across the Territory

2. recognise the international standing of these programs and the Territory's leadership role in their development

3. acknowledge the outstanding return on investment these programs deliver environmentally, culturally, socially and economically

4. work collaboratively with the federal government to expand, not contract, these vital initiatives.

Indigenous ranger programs represent the best of the Territory. They showcase our unique environmental and cultural heritage, provide meaningful employment in remote communities and have proven their effectiveness time and again. When the rest of the world is looking to us as a model to follow, surely we must recognise the value of what we have created and ensure its continued success.

Mr HOWE: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; it was muffled, but if it was used—the Member for Nightcliff referred to the CLP's 'racist budget', and I ask that she withdraw.

K McNAMARA: I did not say 'racist budget'.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Nightcliff, do you wish to respond?

K McNAMARA: Even if I did say it, I do not think he can tell me off for saying it, but that was not in my speech. I think it was 'disappointing budget' or something to that effect.

Madam SPEAKER: I did not hear it; we will check *Hansard*. I made a ruling in March that we would not be calling parties things like racist. We will check it and get back to you.

K McNAMARA: I searched my speech and I said, 'Upset about the recent CLP budget'.

Mr Howe: Madam Speaker, that is fine.

Madam SPEAKER: I accept your response, Member for Nightcliff. We will check it for the sake of being thorough. We do not always hear things clearly in this place, and sometimes we do not hear anything at all.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I support this matter of public importance and call out the government's broken promises to rangers in remote communities across the Northern Territory.

Ranger programs are among the Territory's great success stories. They create meaningful, culturally relevant work in some of the most remote parts of the Territory. These jobs are vital for the health of our roads, the strength of our community and the preservation of our cultural heritage.

Those opposite who represent bush electorates in this place—the Members for Barkly and Namatjira—know better than most that Aboriginal rangers are on the front line every day. Rangers manage fires, protect biodiversity, control feral pests and weeds, support border protection and biosecurity surveillance, care for sacred sites and reduce carbon emissions. Their work underpins the success of critical programs such as eradicating gamba grass and other invasive species. To put it plainly, these rangers deliver long-term environmental, economic and social development outcomes. They are internationally recognised as best-practice models in natural and cultural resource management.

For the mob out bush, these are not just jobs; they are careers to build pride, pass on their knowledge and empower entire communities. It is important that we continue to create and foster jobs in communities because it is one of the most effective ways to close the gap.

When Territory rangers succeed our environment is healthier, our culture is protected and all Territorians benefit. For all their proven success, Aboriginal ranger groups do it tough. Too often they are asked to deliver world-class land management on a shoestring budget by patching vehicles that should have been retired years ago, making do with outdated equipment and stretching every dollar. That is why real sustained investment matters. Dedicated funding is not just about dollars and cents; it is about backing the people who are doing the hard work and giving them the tools they need to do it safely and well.

That is why the previous government established the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program in 2017. It provided small grants to Aboriginal ranger groups for essential equipment, facilities and skill development and supported vital jobs on country. This was not an extravagant program, and it has enjoyed near universal support across the Territory.

An independent review commissioned by the NT Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security found that grants were delivering, in its words, substantial environmental, cultural and economic benefits with impacts extending beyond the immediate scope of the program. That makes this government's broken promise all the more devastating.

Before the last election the CLP made a clear commitment to the bush of $12m over four years for the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program; that is $3m a year for vital training, equipment and infrastructure. Then shadow minister for Parks and Rangers, Bill Yan, spoke to the *Centralian Today* in August and pledged:

> *The CLP remains committed to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, and if elected, we will fully fund the program …*

What happened? Within months of taking office the government turned its back on the Aboriginal rangers and walked away from its promise. The CLP ripped $12m out of the program that supports jobs, cultural knowledge and land management in some of the most remote corners of the Northern Territory.

This is not just a line item in a budget; it is a slap in the face to all Aboriginal ranger groups across the Territory and a blow to every community where ranger jobs are among the few pathways to meaningful work. These people are out there daily, often operating on the smell of an oily rag. They fight many fires, protect sacred sites, tackle gamba and buffel grass and reduce carbon emissions. They provide emergency assistance, support communities during natural disasters and serve as role models for young people, building skills, confidence, wellbeing and hope for the next generation. When you cut ranger funding, you cut jobs and undermine decades of investment in local leadership and caring for country. You send a clear message that when it comes to the Territory's future, the bush gets left behind. Do not take my word for it; listen to the land councils and the communities themselves.

The Central Land Council's Warren Williams said:

> *The CLP has betrayed our trust and puts jobs, cultural knowledge and land management at risk …*
>
> *…*
>
> *This is a slap in the face to the rangers …*
>
> *…*

Our rangers and the country they care for, deserve better.

Northern Land Council Chair, Matthew Ryan, said:

After eight years of a program that has contributed to successful land and sea management, this government has revealed its plans to leave Aboriginal rangers behind.

Our Aboriginal rangers are outraged at this broken promise, that puts both jobs and our ability to manage country at risk.

This move by the CLP stands in stark contrast to what is happening in other jurisdictions. In WA the re-elected government has boosted Aboriginal ranger grants to $20m, while the Queensland Government has increased funding to $24m with bipartisan support. Meanwhile in the Northern Territory we are going backwards.

It is not just the Aboriginal ranger programs feeling the pain under this government. The highly respected Junior Police Rangers program was suspended because the government did not secure basic insurance coverage. For 40 years this program has given Territory teens purpose, leadership skills and a sense of direction. Its sudden suspension leaves 70 young people in limbo with few real alternatives.

If we are serious about building a safer Territory and supporting better outcomes for our young people, we should invest in these programs and not let them collapse. These programs are not luxuries; they are the backbone of the Territory's conservation effort, tourism industry, youth engagement and community safety. Cutting them, neglecting them or allowing them to fall over is not just short-sighted; it is irresponsible.

While I am on my feet I acknowledge our fantastic Territory park rangers. NT Parks and Wildlife rangers are out on country every day working across our vast network of national parks and reserves, from Kakadu in my electorate to Litchfield, Nitmiluk and beyond. They keep our parks safe, maintain walking trails, respond to emergencies and protect some of Australia's most iconic landscapes. Park rangers are educators, cultural interpreters and first responders. They deserve proper support, resources and job security to continue their vital work. We will fight for that.

I join my colleagues in calling on the government to reinstate full funding for Aboriginal ranger programs, deliver the promised support and urgently fix the insurance debacle to get the junior ranger program back up and running. Supporting rangers is not only the right thing to do for the bush but also the smartest thing to do for the whole Territory.

Territorians are watching, and they will remember who stood up for these programs when it mattered most.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I thank the members who brought this matter of great public importance, the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, to the Chamber.

Both major political parties pledged $12m over four years to support Aboriginal ranger programs, and Independents and the Greens also supported it. This funding has now been removed, despite a clear election promise. People voted for this government believing that this was part of their policy. The mandate to govern must be maintained by fulfilling promises. Abrupt withdrawal of this funding breaks this promise, and it signals a lack of commitment to promises that have been made as well as to Indigenous-led initiatives that have proved effective in promoting employment, cultural preservation and community wellbeing.

We have heard quoted in this Chamber, and I have heard from many people outside this Chamber, that the then CLP shadow minister for Parks and Rangers, Bill Yan, said in the *Centralian Today* last year:

The CLP remains committed to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, and if elected, we will fully fund the program with $12 million over four years …

We often hear about the government's commitment to integrity. This decision raises serious questions about that commitment. How can the people of the Northern Territory trust this government if it fails to honour its public unconditional promises?

I believe in thinking the best of people until proven otherwise, so I first ask: was this an error, an oversight or a mistake? We are all human, and I recognise that the complex unenviable work of the government's first budget has a lot of moving parts to juggle.

If the answer is, ‘Yes, it is an oversight; we missed it’, that is okay. No-one will vote you out for one little mistake, and you are here for four years anyway. You can show the leadership, strength and integrity to acknowledge mistakes and fix them. It is easy; you can just say, ‘Yes, that was an error. We will seek to reverse it.’ Let us show the Northern Territory that this parliament gives and takes feedback and applies it sensibly.

If the answer is, ‘No, it was intentional’, then I and many people in the community want to know why. In the words of one community member who spoke to me, ‘Why, oh why, do the members of this parliament think it is a good idea to cut back on this funding?’ It is unbelievable that of all things this will be the one to be cut.

I will outline the reasons to support ranger programs, and we have heard from other members about that today. I am not an expert in this field, but I am lucky to have insights from my work and relationships with people over many years and have had the opportunity to talk with and learn from ranger friends across the Northern Territory. They told me that ranger programs benefit all of us through employment, conservation, land and sea management, local decision-making and education. Ranger programs directly contribute to what this government tells us are its top three agenda items: economic development; the Territory lifestyle; and crime prevention and community safety.

The Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program is one of the few sources of meaningful, culturally appropriate employment in remote communities. Ranger programs have supported more than 700 rangers across 100 communities nationwide, many based in the Northern Territory. It is not only income, but a sense of purpose and connection to land and culture. Skills, knowledge and relationships are recognised, valued and enhanced through training and serve the whole community.

The Central Land Council warns clearly that cutting funding to this program jeopardises these jobs and puts cultural knowledge and land management at risk, particularly in communities where ranger positions are among the few available job opportunities. Discontinuation of programs like the CDEP had previously led to significant drops in Indigenous employment in the Northern Territory, contributing to a range of social impacts. We should be looking at growing employment opportunities, not reducing them.

Ranger programs are proper jobs with skills, pay and recognition for doing something important and valuable for people, managing and caring for country, sharing culture, teaching others, painting about it, singing about it and showcasing it to a world that wants to learn from this 80,000-year-old continuous relationship between land, sea and people. This is one of the things the Territory has to offer us, the country and the world. It is one of the reasons I am here and am grateful to be here.

Ranger programs directly protect, preserve, maintain and enhance natural and cultural heritage values and spaces that we love as Territorians—our fisheries, wildlife, diverse habitats, biosecurity and biodiversity, clean water, air, shade and soil, which are the building blocks of the amenity, beauty, peace and resources that support our Territory lifestyle.

Indigenous rangers play a crucial role in protecting land and sea, including fire management, invasive species control and conservation of cultural heritage sites. They also reinforce cultural practices and community cohesion. Stopping funding for rangers risks environmental degradation, loss of cultural sites and diminishing community identity, as well as having a big impact on recreation and tourism.

Land and sea management ranger programs also play a key role in monitoring wildlife, assisting scientific research, combatting pests and tracking the spread of new invasive species. Additionally, rangers undertake controlled burns to prevent wildfires and reduce carbon emissions. Sustaining these programs is essential for the health, safety and prosperity of not only remote residents and communities, but all people and communities across the Northern Territory. Whether we are aware of it or not, all of us here directly benefit from the valued and incredible work of ranger groups. When we go camping, go bush, we enjoy unique landscapes because rangers are caring for them.

In 2023 we visited our son who lived in Arnhem Land and went fishing on his boat. The Treasurer might be pleased to hear that I caught my first fish then—a number of fish, in fact—and we cooked them on the fire and enjoyed them with friends and family. We shared that with the rangers who could tell us what was so special about that place.

Like many people, we walk our dog on the beach at Casuarina Coastal Reserve each week, which is full of shorebirds and unique plants; go hiking in Jawoyn and Arrernte country; regularly attend the Barunga Festival; and go camping in the West Macs or Davenports. We know we are on Aboriginal land. We know much of what takes place there. The natural infrastructure is cared for and maintained by rangers.

If these are not good enough reasons in their own right, it is worth noting that eroding community amenity can contribute to social disintegration and antisocial behaviour.

Rangers are often the most functional and productive groups in remote communities, providing leadership. They are often a go-to audience for consultation, program delivery, practical assistance and advice on sensitive matters. Local community members have a say in ranger groups, and they can directly contact these people who will listen, speak up and take action for them. It is local decision-making, which I know this government champions, at its best.

These are best-practice examples of the Territory leading the way, inspiring others, including those internationally, to model their programs on these initiatives.

I prefer to discuss benefits rather than feed the negative discourse, but the people who represent, manage, coordinate and work in ranger programs asked me to make special mention of the strong links between rangers and the government's favourite topic—crime and community safety.

Last week we heard the government express its intention to invest in grassroots prevention. For me, as a youth worker and then a mediator working on conflict management in the Northern Territory since 1997, I know how young people are shaped by the environment they grow up in, and I know what can strengthen community safety. Understanding how we can influence social systems to prevent alienation is the bread and butter of our government, and at each point in people's lives we can do something to make a difference. We can have good education and positive role models and offer meaningful work. This is exactly what the ranger program does.

When campaigning for the election, I doorknocked many people in my electorate who were concerned about community safety. They said that we need to invest in community and offer people who live in community what they need in order to stay there. This is an example of something that works incredibly well.

Maintaining connection, identity and pride of place keeps people living on country, connected with their kids and eating healthy bush food. It prevents chronic disease and teaches kids traditional values, as we heard from the Member for Mulka. Discipline flows, and they can grow up their young people with positive role models and pathways to employment with pride in place and self at much less risk of disengagement and getting involved in the criminal justice system.

It is a no-brainer. Ranger programs are an incredible investment, with a sustained long-term pay-off to create spaces that promote a sense of independence and pride in country and benefit all of us in the Northern Territory.

I continue to question this decision. Why would a government that wants to end crime cut funding to one of the few programs that is working? Why not find out what is working and water those seeds? Better still, why not use this learning and expand such programs to give more tailored work opportunities in the bush?

Not funding ranger programs damns the Northern Territory to a future that goes further down this road that none of us want to travel on—further from sustainable economies and the Territory lifestyle that we all champion—towards crime and lack of safety. I know the future I want for my grandchildren, my *mari*'s grandchildren and those of everyone in this Chamber and the people of Johnston who elected me.

I repeat the words of my ranger friend: why, oh why, do the members of this parliament think it is a good idea to cut back this funding? How could they do it when they promised they would not? I have no answer to that.

I ask the government to reverse this decision, honour its commitments and ensure that the ranger program and its incredible benefits to our community and the Northern Territory continue.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, this matter of public importance is about investing in ranger programs and supporting the work of rangers throughout the Northern Territory.

We talk a lot in this Assembly about how wonderful the Territory lifestyle is—weekends fishing on our rivers and coastline and camping along our beaches or in national parks, with a quick dip in the local waterhole. We talk about how our natural landscapes, extraordinary biodiversity and cultural heritage are major drawcards for tourism, a key pillar of economic growth. We talk about the importance of conservation and biosecurity, which can be undermined by feral animals and increased bushfire risks. It looks as though those opposite have forgotten that our wonderful parks do not take care of themselves because it is rangers across the Territory who do the vital job of protecting our environment to ensure generations can enjoy it.

Last week we saw this CLP government break a $12m election promise to sustain the Aboriginal ranger program, despite a commitment to deliver $3m annually over four years. This program helps ranger groups access new resources so that they can keep doing their important work in protecting country to ensure Territorians can enjoy it for generations to come. It was a promise that the Treasurer made to ranger groups across the Territory last year, stating:

> *The CLP remains committed to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, and if elected, we will fully fund the program with $12 million over four years …*

What a shame. Ranger groups were promised by this government the support they needed for training, equipment and infrastructure. Instead under this CLP government, they face uncertainty, undermining years of progress in environmental management, cultural preservation and economic empowerment.

Central Land Council Chair Warren Williams said:

> *The CLP has betrayed our trust and puts jobs, cultural knowledge and land management at risk …*

Northern Land Council Chair Matthew Ryan said:

> *After eight years of a program that has contributed to successful land and sea management, this government has revealed its plans to leave Aboriginal rangers behind.*
>
> *… that puts both jobs and our ability to manage country at risk. This puts at risk the work of all those who rely on our lands and seas, including Territorians and visitors who are here to enjoy the Territory lifestyle.*

Across the Territory, ranger groups are on the front line of conservation. As shadow minister for Parks and Wildlife, I acknowledge our rangers' hard work, which is extensive. They undertake fire, feral animal and weed control programs; organise and execute country camps and joint management boards and committees with their respective traditional owner partners; undertake crocodile surveys; and get parks open and ready each Wet Season, including maintaining every campground and walking trail. They undertake compliance activities, talk to visitors and give local advice while doing routine park patrols. They do this day-in, day-out and night-in, night-out, no matter the weather.

I acknowledge the outstanding ranger groups in my electorate of Daly, who will be greatly impacted by this government's budget cut. The Malak Malak Land and Water Management Rangers manage 30,000 hectares bordering the Daly River. They actively manage nationally significant weeds such as mimosa, salvinia, gamba and grader grass and have successfully reduced the area of weed infestation on this land.

The Malak Malak rangers also have a rescue program in place, which has been going for more than 10 years. This work is crucial to the critically endangered juvenile largetooth sawfish. It is one of a kind across the world. The Member for Nightcliff mentioned that we have leading programs that people from other jurisdictions across the world come to see. This is one example.

It is a partnership with the Malak Malak rangers, CDU and the Australian Marine Conservation Society. For those unaware of that program, during the Wet Season when the banks break in the Daly River a lot of those sawfish will be trapped in the floodplains when the water starts to recede. The rangers go out to rescue a lot of the sawfish and the pups, putting them back in the Daly River, because during the Dry Season those floodplains dry up.

The Malak Malak rangers need this funding. They apply for the $12m ranger grants to get equipment and netting to tag these sawfish so that they can monitor their location and activities. These sawfish are rare; they are found in one or two river systems across the north from Queensland to WA.

The pride it brings the Malak Malak rangers is incredible. Every time I go to Daly River, one of the rangers, Amos, talks to me about the importance of this program. He has invited me out a couple of times, but, unfortunately, I have not been able to get out because everyone wants to do it; all the researchers come up, so it is difficult to get a guernsey to go along. However, I have told him than when it is available, I would love to come out and see the work those rangers do to ensure we look after the critically endangered largetooth sawfish across northern Australia. I encourage everyone to look at that amazing program. This is the type of funding the rangers need to ensure that program continues.

In Wadeye the Thamarrurr Rangers employ about 20 local Indigenous staff and four non-Indigenous support staff. They are constantly looking for more funding, because people are coming to the door day-in and day-out, wanting to work with the Thamarrurr Rangers. They want to look after country, ensure their sacred sites are protected and speak their traditional language on their country.

A lot of people may not be aware, but there are roughly 22 clan groups in the Thamarrurr region. Most people live in Wadeye, but they are not necessarily speaking their traditional language; they speak Murrinh-Patha which is the language of the Kardu Diminin people. Enabling people to get out on their own country means that they can speak their traditional language on their own country, ensuring that those traditions, which have been around for thousands of years, are intact and passed down to our younger generation to ensure they know who they are.

I spoke to the Thamarrurr Development Corporation about this cut.

I was shocked that this was taken away. I remember CLP members using that as a line for a vote during the campaign last year. We had an MPI last week about the federal election, and members accused Labor of misconduct. It does not get any lower than misleading people for a vote. CLP candidates said that they would fund rangers because Aboriginal people out bush care about rangers because they protect country. Then in the CLP government's budget, the ranger program had been scrapped. You should all hang your heads in shame. I am pretty sure that most of you know the importance of ranger jobs on country.

The Thamarrurr Development Corporation said:

> *We are concerned about media reports that the CLP is withdrawing its commitment to provide $12 million over four years to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program.*
>
> *This program plays a vital role in supporting local jobs, youth engagement, and community-led work on Country. Cutting this funding directly contradicts the government's stated commitment to addressing the root causes of crime.*

I hear members talk about addressing the root causes of crime. The Thamarrurr Development Corporation oversees the ranger program in Wadeye and across the Thamarrurr region. The Thamarrurr Development Corporation said, 'Here is a program to help address youth crime, engage our young people in jobs and get our young people out on country to ensure that they are practising their culture and their language is strong', yet the CLP took that away from it. The Thamarrurr Development Corporation also said:

> *Employment and cultural programs on Country are among the most effective early intervention strategies. They provide purpose, connection, and opportunity—especially for young people.*
>
> *Removing this support undermines efforts to build safer, stronger communities.*
>
> *We are urgently writing to the Chief Minister to seek clarification on these reports.*

I will follow up with the Thamarrurr Development Corporation to see whether the Chief Minister writes back. A number of organisations have written to certain ministers and have not been acknowledged or had a response. The people of the Thamarrurr region, and in particular Wadeye, deeply care about this.

I talked about Malak Malak rangers, and I will go back to that. The Labor government had a program to ensure that Aboriginal rangers qualified to become fisheries inspectors. One of our first inspectors who qualified, I think it was in 2018, was the amazing Theresa Lemon. She was the first Aboriginal woman to pass that course. In Daly River I spoke to her about this. She told me how proud she is to share her country with visitors to Daly River. Maybe Minister Yan has met with her on the water, and she may have given him a lesson on where the sacred sites are. She has so much pride in it. She ensures that the regulations are followed on that river system, but also takes it as a way of educating people when they are doing the wrong thing. It gives traditional owners the opportunity to engage with boat users on the Daly River, and visitors will learn about the sacred Dreaming sites. Theresa is so proud, and the young people who look up to her want to follow in her footsteps. We should ensure that this continues.

The grant funding allows rangers to continue their important work and engage with the wider community. I ask the CLP members to reconsider that commitment. You made that promise; you looked people in the eye and said that funding will be there, but it has been cut. If you cannot recommit to that, I suggest you get out bush, look people in the eye again and tell them why you cannot fund that program.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, it gives me great honour to speak about the importance of rangers in the Northern Territory. Aboriginal people have been caring for country for 60,000 years. The rangers we see today in remote communities follow in the footsteps of their ancestors, protecting sites of significance and important landscapes for future generations to continue to enjoy and be part of important cultural practice.

We are here tonight because the CLP lied to Territorians. The CLP broke a promise. To all our countrymen, the CLP members have broken the promise to you that they would commit to $12m over four years to continue the grant program for Aboriginal rangers. What is worse is that the minister for Environment has broken another promise by saying that it was not factored into the costings. Someone has clearly lied tonight in parliament, because as part of the election process both major parties have to provide a pre-election fiscal outlook with their costings in it. The CLP's current Treasurer made that promise to Territorians. The CLP said that it was in its election budget, the fiscal outlook. Then the Member for Braitling said that the government did not have the money to do it. At the time of the election, were CLP members telling the truth? No, they were not.

Now, all our countrymen across the Northern Territory who are hardworking Aboriginal rangers are having an important grant program finish. Both political parties, Labor and the CLP, made a commitment that when the grant program finished—it was running for the last four years—it would be renewed. The CLP said, 'Yes, *ngurrju*, *palya*. *Wiya*, *lawa* now.' It lied. There is no more grant program for Aboriginal rangers in the Northern Territory.

The CLP government says that it wants our mob, our countrymen, to have jobs, but tonight we heard that it will not renew that program. The CLP government will let it end. When we are in need in the bush, rangers come to our aid, whether we are from remote communities, tourists, people visiting or businesses. When we are in times of need, nine times out of 10 it is a ranger group who comes to help. Whether it is helping to remove snakes, preparing firebreaks or responding to bushfires, rangers are always there. You can always count on a ranger. We cannot count on the CLP supporting rangers. The CLP members are tearing up agreements, saying, 'We will not honour it. We will not support you; we are not interested.' How can we support rangers when the CLP government cannot even honour a funding commitment that it made? It is a broken promise.

I am proud to be a bush member. I am proud of all the ranger groups in Gwoja, and there are many more in other electorates. There are about 47 ranger groups across the Northern Territory. They employ more than a thousand people in the bush. That is a thousand people who have a job and a thousand people who make community stronger. Those thousand people rely on these grants to buy critical infrastructure to support their roles in their communities. This process is taking that away. Tonight only one member from the government talked about rangers, and there is only 30 minutes left for this debate. That member could not even talk about the importance of rangers and pay respect to those rangers. He talked about everything else.

The Education minister cannot even talk about the junior ranger programs in remote schools that are being led by elders working with young kids, looking at how they can provide the lens of caring for country and learning at the same time. We hear nothing.

Numerous studies have been done on the importance of rangers in our community. These studies tell us that the return on investment is big. People are engaged, and they feel empowered and appreciated. That is the importance of ranger groups.

The first ranger groups in Central Australia started in about 2000. They have been in operation for 25 years, supporting local communities and investment in the protection of country. We have more than 20 jointly managed national parks across the Northern Territory where rangers provide a critical role in protecting country.

People out bush have heard about the ranger cuts in the budget and the broken promises of the CLP. They do not trust the CLP anymore. The people out bush said, 'The CLP said it would do it', and we had to say, 'Yes, but in the CLP's budget it has been cut'. I told them, 'We will try. We will tell the CLP that it should not break its promise.' Do you know what countrymen have been saying? They have said, 'Why does the CLP hate Aboriginal people in the bush? Why does the CLP not want to give grants to rangers? We are doing our job, working hard for our community. We go to ranger conferences and share knowledge. People all over the world want to copy us, but the CLP wants to take away our training, governance and grant programs.' People do not feel as though they are valued by this government because it has broken the promise.

I have travelled to ranger conferences, whether they were held by the NLC, the CLC or the Indigenous Desert Alliance. We know firsthand how important rangers are. We should be investing in them. This government can find money for the Attorney-General to put out a tender to do up her office, but it cannot find money to

support rangers, which is a commitment that the CLP had already made. This is a government that can find money to splash cash in and around our towns and cities, but it cannot find $12m over four years—$3m a year—to support people to care for country and to keep them in a stable job.

What is wrong with the government? This is an investment that continues to empower people. This government talks about trying to crack down on crime and reduce antisocial behaviour, but when it has a program in front of it that can actually change lives, it does not want to fund that program.

This flies in the face of transparency and accountability. This is a commitment that the CLP made. No-one has stopped the CLP government from honouring that commitment other than itself.

We have amazing rangers in the Parks and Wildlife Commission who do a fantastic job with croc management, managing joint parks and maintaining firebreaks. They are all unsung heroes. We need to acknowledge that.

We heard that the Junior Police Rangers program has issues with its insurance. This government could fix that matter tomorrow if it was serious about it. It took the Junior Police Rangers groups to talk to families and tell them that they could not continue. The government already knew about it, but it did not worry; the CLP thought it would be undone and unheard of. The government had to fix its own mistakes that would not have been an issue if it had helped provide the insurance for the program.

We are seeing an erosion of respect for the role of rangers in our communities, and it is appalling. To all the ranger groups across the Northern Territory, Labor sees you, hears you and will always back you.

This important grant program should not have been taken away. I hope Minister Josh Burgoyne, who claims to be a proud Central Australian, can go to the next CLC ranger camp, look that mob from the bush in the eyes and tell them how proud he was that he could not even bring himself to talk about rangers in this matter of public importance. He talked about everything else—and then cut the funding.

Tonight there was one speaker from the government on a matter of public importance valuing rangers. That is disgraceful. There are 17 members in the government, and only one of them had the guts and courage to talk about rangers. That is a shame. Where is the Treasurer, who claims to be a proud bush member and is the one who made the commitment to give ranger groups funding? He could not even talk about the importance of rangers. He cannot even recognise the amazing rangers in the electorate of Namatjira. Will the Member for Barkly talk about Aboriginal rangers and acknowledge the amazing work of rangers in the Barkly? The rangers who helped with the big Barkly bushfires are the same rangers who are about to miss out on an opportunity because there is no grant program anymore. That is what we are talking about tonight.

This will have a direct impact on our communities. People in the communities are sad and disappointed because they have been let down by the government. The CLP government claimed to be the government for all Territorians, yet actions speak louder than words. Its actions tell us and all of the bush that you do not really value us. That is what we are talking about tonight.

The Northern Territory is seen internationally as a leader when it comes to Indigenous rangers and land management practices. So many people look to the Northern Territory in this space, yet our own government cannot even value rangers and give them a scungy $12m after what it spends on everything else—billions of dollars making everything else flash and pretty in all the towns. This government cannot even give $12m—that is $3m a year—to the bush for ranger groups. That is terrible, yet you mob will all style up, taking photos of infrastructure in your electorates and of all these programs.

You want Aboriginal people to stand up and be leaders, so listen to them, give them the tools and give them the grants so that they can continue to grow and be respected in their communities. That is what they are calling for; it is what they want. Thank god we have strong leadership at the land councils, who stand up and call this stuff out. There is a petition going around, and to every countryman, please sign that petition. Send a message to this CLP, which does not think you matter, that you do matter, your voice matters and you will be seen. Sign the petition.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr MALEY (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak about a National Corrections Day event I attended with the Chief Minister. I acknowledge and celebrate National Corrections Day, a day dedicated to recognising the unwavering commitment and professionalism of those working in our correctional system.

Correctional staff play an essential role in ensuring community safety, rehabilitating offenders and shaping meaningful change in the lives of those in our custodial and community programs. Their work extends far beyond the prison walls, fostering innovation in rehabilitation and reintegration and making a lasting impact on individuals, families and our community.

On this special occasion, as Corrections minister I was proud to recognise the extraordinary dedication of staff who have reached significant milestones, with 10, 20, 30 and 40 years of commitment to Corrections in the Northern Territory. This enduring passion is a testament to the strength of our correctional workforce.

We honour the recipients of the 10-Year Long Service Medal: Warwick Greenwood; Alex Cox; Stephen Maxwell; Jude Chow; Anthony Higgins; Michael Smith; Corey Stagg; William Sun; Andrew Wray; Rhys Nicklin; Joanna Orchard; Libby Shaw; Dan Gilera; Peter Dagger; Keith Pratt; Gerald Griffin; Wayne Demos; Jack Kelly; Darren Kessell; and Jesse Palu.

For their dedication over 20 years we acknowledge the recipients of the Long Service Clasp: Michael Hall; Casa Schofield; Darren Purtell; Paul Mcconville; Gavin Hirchausen; Michael McPherson; Clayton Dash; Brian Nolan; and Adam Porter.

For an incredible 30 years of service we celebrate the recipients of the Long Service Clasp, Brian Leibhardt and Shane Secombe. Thirty years is certainly a milestone.

Furthermore, in Community Corrections, we commend the recipients of the 10-Year Service Medallion: John Morris; Tamara Redding; Neall Witham; and Alan Hodgkin.

I recognise the significant milestones within the broader Northern Territory Public Sector. The Chief Minister's Service Milestones acknowledge outstanding dedication to public service. They went to Karyn Russell and Shane Secombe for 30 years of service, and Liz Kern for an extraordinary 40 years of commitment to the public service.

In addition to the awards for dedicated service, recognition was made with awards and commendations to Toni Campbell; Juanita Jones; Samantha Lewis; Margo Allen; Maia Derrington; Graham Banks; Tamsin Cockayne; Martinho Tchong; Adam Neep; Elias Far Puello Matos; Dr Natalie Walker; Angela Hughes; and Sharon Kinraid.

Group commendations went to the Pink Line Team; Youth Detention Programs Team; the Elders Visiting Program; Food Services Team; the Berrimah Correctional Centre Commissioning Team; and the Offender Program Unit Team.

I particularly acknowledge the Berrimah Correctional Centre Commissioning Team because it effectively has brought online a prison in the last nine months. The old Berrimah Prison, as it was formerly known, was run-down, but that team has brought it up and it now has more than 400 beds, with more to come.

Extraordinary work was done there by not only the tradesmen coming in but also the inmates with the program cleaning up, painting, learning life skills, doing the gardening and having pride in purpose. I am told it was a good program for not only getting the work done but also giving the prisoners some purpose in learning trades and skills which they can use when they go out after they spending their time at the correctional centre.

Corrections staff's unwavering service is a testament to the expertise and dedication that strengthens our governance and public institutions. These groups and individuals went over and above with 10, 20, 30 and 40 years working in the public service.

Additionally, I commend the outstanding achievements of those who have pioneered innovative programs in both custodial and community settings, including juvenile justice. These initiatives provide vulnerable young people with pathways to rehabilitation and opportunity. These programs reflect the Northern Territory's dedication to progressive Corrections strategies that not only hold offenders accountable but also equip them with the tools to make a better future and break the cycle of reoffending.

To all the Corrections officers, program facilitators, case workers and support staff, your tireless efforts are deeply appreciated and have not gone unnoticed. The work you have done in the last nine months has been tremendous.

We know you were undervalued by the previous government. We are investing in the Corrections system to make sure not only the prisoners are safe but also the prison officers can work in a safe environment and get home safely.

You embody the principles of fairness and accountability, and we hope you celebrate together and take to heart that the community thanks you for your invaluable contribution. Let us continue to uphold the highest standards in Corrections and work towards a safer, fairer and more rehabilitative system for all.

Mrs HERSEY (Katherine): Mr Deputy Speaker, in the last few months the police, along with public housing safety officers, Kalano and the newly appointed Circuit Breaker team have been meeting in the town square at 7 pm from Thursday to Sunday to discuss their plan for nightly patrols. This is part of the early intervention initiatives in social order. It has been successful, with departments working together striving for a better Katherine. The Circuit Breaker team has seen 24 cases, and 17 of them have resulted in family responsibility agreements.

I thank Acting Commander Zhang and his team who do the best they can in keeping our community safe; the Housing inspectors for their passion in their work; people from Kalano for coming in and supporting the community that they too live in; and, lastly, the Circuit Breaker team which continues to do great work. This group in the last week has moved from the town square to the Woolworths shopping centre to be even more visible. The group's members are working hard together for community safety to address ongoing antisocial behaviour issues in Katherine.

I look forward to another group of 15 police recruits coming to Katherine soon in mid-June and supporting our hardworking police.

I give a big shout-out to that team which, Thursday to Sunday, get together and work well in assessing what needs to happen in the evenings to make sure the town remains safe.

On 1 May I was invited by Pip Gordon from the Banatjarl Strongbala Wimun Grup to say a few words on the opening of the group's Walk-In Talk-In Space, which opened yesterday in the Woolworths shopping centre. This great initiative happened with federal funding from PHN. It was great that the Health minister, Steve Edgington, could make it after attending another event in Katherine.

Lisa Mumbin, Chair of Jawoyn, said a few words, along with some of the elders, including Mavis, Joanne, Chiyo and Lazarus Manbulloo, who has been supported to run a men's program. This healing space for health and mental health has come to fruition from the hard work Pip and the ladies have put in over the last five years. The Banatjarl ladies started small and have grown, along with their hopes and aspirations, to expand on the great work they have been doing.

I have had a lot to do with the Banatjarl ladies since they started some five years ago, and they have been doing great work in the community over that time. They work quietly in the background—not putting themselves on social media talking about their great work—and it has been great to see this space in the Woolworths shopping centre come to fruition. I hope it makes a huge difference. Mavis and the other elders have also expanded into mentoring youths and looking after them when their parents have given up on them and they have seen a need to mentor, support, love and nourish these young girls.

I have watched Banatjarl grow over the last five years. The group has responded to families in crisis and supported families and people experiencing domestic violence. I look forward to watching the group continue to make a difference in young people's lives through mentoring, nurturing and loving these youths; taking them out to their property at King River; collecting pandanus for weaving, other bush foods and the colours they use for dyeing the pandanus; and passing on their culture, knowledge and stories to the young girls.

I congratulate acting CEO Darren Hepworth; general manager of social services Pip Gordon; Lisa Mumbin, Chair of the Jawoyn Board; the Banatjarl ladies; and Lazarus Manbulloo for seeing through their commitment and vision of working hard for our community and making a difference. Their commitment is our future, and together it was great to gather united to rebuild our future in Katherine.

Ms CAHILL (Port Darwin): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to recognise the achievements of some of the younger members of the Port Darwin community.

Congratulations to the recipients of my Larrakeyah Primary School citizenship awards: Amiar Islam for being a great leader and role model among his peers, representing our school values; and Aavya Mainali for displaying positive learning behaviours and always being kind to others.

I was delighted to be asked to join the Larrakeyah school community for the lower primary Easter Hat Parade. I selected a child from each year and awarded them a prize for their outstanding effort in designing and making their Easter hats. It was a tough job, but after much deliberation I am pleased to congratulate the following children for their outstanding designs. Well done to the winners: preschool, Zema Mekonen; transition, Grace Begue; Year 1, Shannan Mustera; and Year 2, Isheet Singh. I give a big shout-out to the overall winner of what was a very stylish and enthusiastically presented event, Riley Brown.

I congratulate local business owner Prabin Maharjan, the owner of Dukes Cafe and Eatery in Darwin. Prabin came to Australia as an international student from Nepal some 12 years ago. His decision to move to the Territory seven years ago to complete his learning journey allowed him to put his entrepreneurial spirit to good use in the city he has grown to love and calls home. Last week he celebrated three successful years as the owner of Dukes Cafe and Eatery, which, in his words, has been a journey of three years of brewing dreams, serving smiles and building community.

A well done shout-out goes to The Bookshop Darwin. I have previously mentioned the team's work with the 'pay it forward' campaign, but its success makes it deserving of another mention. The team at The Bookshop Darwin provided 21 young people with a $15 voucher in two weeks during the recent school holidays, but that initiative would not work without the support of the community more generally, so this is also a shout-out to all the people who have donated a $15 voucher to be gifted to a young person to introduce them to the joy of reading.

I congratulate Stacee Barnes who represented the NT in a boxing tournament in Sydney, King/Queen of the Ring, going on to win Queen of the Ring in her division. Stacee's story is particularly empowering as in 2018 she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Following her diagnosis and undergoing treatment, Stacee has advocated tirelessly to raise awareness of and fundraise for ovarian cancer. She is a legend, and I wish her well in her ongoing boxing career and her efforts in raising awareness of this deadly disease.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak about the Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival. The weekend before last, the Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival celebrated its 20th year of entertaining more than 10,000 Territorians and tourists with local acts, and we all had a ball. I thank the festival organisers and the committee for pulling off this monumental event and leaving everyone with memories of the incredible local talent that we are all so proud of.

A vibrant community festival open to all ages and free to the public, it is part of what makes up the Territory lifestyle. Stretching along two kilometres of my electorate's stunning foreshore, 11 stages were seamlessly organised and weaved into the stunning nature the Territory is known for. The interest to perform was outstanding this year. Organisers told me that they had the hard job of turning down artists since there was not enough room to host them, despite having 11 stages to work with. The Territory is burgeoning with creativity, and opportunities like Seabreeze are so essential.

Despite the sheer number of artists, the festival pays them all the $250 minimum award outlined by the Musicians Union of Australia. If a free festival of more than 100 performers can pay their artists enough, anyone can. Thanks, Seabreeze, for listening to our unions and supporting our local artists.

The talent and variety of these locals was astonishing. There were incredible trios, big bands and dance troupes from our schools, community groups, cultural groups, community choirs and interactive activities. It is amazing what comes out of the woodwork when you give people an opportunity to perform. A lot of the funding came from the Territory and federal governments, and I was delighted to use some of my electorate allowance to sponsor them also. This was all money well spent, and I hope everyone in this Chamber had an opportunity to see the talent.

If I had to pick a stand-out moment it would be the Irish tradfolk group, the seven-piece band named Enbarr, which took to the Banyan Stage on Friday, and everyone was enthralled. It was so good. There were about 500 people with linked arms doing Irish jigs and dancing with strangers; it was incredible. I even heard a young person say of the performance, 'Oh my god; this is even better than BASS.' Arnhem Land band Wild Honey blessed us with wonderful harmonies as they masterfully blended traditional Yolngu and Western music. I was personally stoked to see Sally Balfour, one of my favourite NT artists. Naming all the acts will take forever and I cannot do it, but I give credit and congratulations to all the other wonderful dancers, the poets, the school musicians and everyone who graced the stages.

The food was fantastic. I shout out to the Cambodian food van. It was the first time I had seen it. I do not know what was in that iced tea, but I am addicted; it was so good. Also Red Dog Donuts was frequently revisited over the weekend by me and my kids.

I got to continue the tradition of judging the sandcastle competition. In fact, I ran the entire thing because unfortunately Seabreeze was short-staffed. I was a little nervous about whether anyone would show up in the heat of the day, but—boy oh boy—there were people motivated and dedicated to the sandcastle competition. I was impressed with people's imagination and skills. There were plenty of sea creatures, including crocodiles decorated with shells and rocks. There were dugongs, manta rays and a boat. There were so many good entries that I left halfway through to buy more vouchers for the prizes because there were so many amazing groups that I did not feel as though I had enough prizes for them all.

Congratulations to Dane and Fimi for their incredible 3D model of their dog. It won Best Construction, and it looked exactly like their dog—seriously. Congratulations to Lisa and Lily for the Most Creative Award. They made an incredible octopus. Lily was buried in the sand being eaten by the octopus. It was amazing. Congratulations to Vivian, Annabelle and Amelia for Best Family Effort for their crocodile, Bert. They did that on their own without any parents. They, and the two runner-up groups, all won vouchers to local businesses.

The weekend was incredible, but I would be remiss to ignore the opportunity to talk about how festivals in Australia are dropping like flies. Major events have been cancelled, and our youths in communities are missing out on memories and friendships that earlier generations enjoyed. I implore the government to continue to fund community events like this across the Territory. As I said before, they are a fundamental part of the joy of the Territory lifestyle.

The Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival runs on the smell of an oily rag, with hundreds of dedicated volunteers and hours of unpaid overtime from the organisers. I could not possibly name everyone whose hard work contributed to pulling off this incredible festival, but I will at least thank some of the organisers who spent all weekend running around ensuring that things were running smoothly—Adam, Ahva, Angie, Bryn, Dan, Hayden, Jen, Lauren, Lulu, Serena and Legs—as well as the entire Seabreeze board. Well done, everyone.

I cannot wait for next year. Who knows? Maybe I will drag my old guitar out of the guitar case and join you on stage. Actually, no-one wants to hear a politician singing, so maybe I will not do that. I look forward to next year.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Mr Deputy Speaker, in the March sittings I made the decision, rightly or wrongly, to do additional public consultation on social media, even though I had already consulted with many Territorians on this topic in face-to-face conversation. My Facebook post was out of genuine interest to further understand how the wider community felt about the subject of mandatory sentencing for assaults against our frontline workers. The post stated:

'I am interested to hear all your thoughts on mandatory sentencing for assaults against our frontline workers. Frontline workers include police, teachers, doctors, nurses, Corrections officers, paramedics, firefighters, shop attendants et cetera.

'Like this post if you support mandatory sentencing. Write a comment—send me a message if you want to comment about this topic.'

I posted on my public and private Facebook pages, and within three hours of posting I received more than 70 messages from members of the public, colleagues, strangers, workers and acquaintances who were supportive of the updated legislation. I was overwhelmed by this response, and I talked about it in my adjournment speech that evening. I also stated that I might provide an update on the comments, likes and messages in the next sittings. True to my word, here I am.

I am aware that my role in this parliament opens me up for scrutiny on many levels; however, I did not sign up to receive the disgusting messages and threats from people who deliberately hide their identity, using fake names and profiles. They are keyboard warriors and faceless men and women who should be ashamed of themselves. My desire to interact with the wider community on this topic quickly faded, as I received a number of targeted, aggressive and personal attacks sent by private message from people who clearly did not support the legislation.

The way I see it is that it is a real catch 22. I hear from people in the community—I must say I agree with the sentiment—that they want leaders in this parliament with brains and integrity, but the role of a parliamentarian is so brutal that anyone with brains and integrity thinks twice before stepping up. Imagine what our politics could look like if the public and the media made it easier, not harder, for good people to be involved. Until

then, we might have to keep missing out on the best and the brightest because they are not foolish enough to enter into a career that will only see them being used as targets.

In keeping with my commitment to be open and transparent in my role in this Chamber, here are the true statistics following my aforementioned post on Facebook. I posted to both my public and personal pages to get as much coverage as possible. The results are as follows. On my electorate page I received four neutral comments, 26 comments against, 26 likes and five comments for. On my personal page I received one neutral comment, no comments against, 45 likes and 13 comments for. Between my two public Facebook accounts I received a total of five neutral comments, 26 comments against, 71 likes and 18 comments for.

In my last adjournment speech I admit it was remiss of me not to advise parliament of the number of people who had commented that they did not support mandatory sentencing for assaults on frontline workers. To ensure transparency I will restate that I received 26 comments that were clearly against mandatory sentencing for assaults on frontline workers, and I thank those who took the time to comment respectfully.

If you recall, my Facebook post also included the ability for people to send me a private message if that was how people wanted to voice their concern. I am glad that was an option because it is clear the fear of recrimination in the community for when people speak out is real for many Territorians, although it does not appear that this fear is around for those who swing to the left of the pendulum. You can take from that what you like. I received a total of 115 private messages over the hours and days following my post.

If you add the likes, the four comments and the private messages received from the community, then take away the 25 people who liked and commented—because we do not want to double dip—I count, for the purpose of this exercise, that 179 people reached out to me in support of mandatory sentencing for assaults on frontline workers.

As I previously stated, I am aware that my role in this parliament opens me up for scrutiny, but I stand by the fact that no-one in this Chamber signed up to receive the disgusting messages and threats from people who deliberately hide their identity using fake names and profiles. The messages were horrible, and every time I picked up my phone I noticed my increasing levels of anxiety. I am human; we all are. I have every right to protect myself and protect my family from this kind of abuse, so I made the decision to delete the post.

I can confidently say that the number of supportive messages I received privately overwhelmingly supported the implementation of this legislation. Some of the messages were extremely personal. I will not betray the confidence of the people who messaged me privately, but I have received approval to share one story sent to me by someone whose entire life is dedicated to kids in our schools. The message goes like this:

‘My life was threatened when I was in a principal role. I had to run and lock myself in an office after a father tried to assault me. He ended up smashing the office doors. He told me that he would be back, that he would kill me, that I was dead and that he would murder me. I could not sleep for weeks after, and I kept fearing that he would reappear at school. One day another dad walked into the office, and I got a flashback of the person who attacked me, which was really triggering.

‘I support mandatory sentencing for frontline workers because we cannot just skip work and stay away. We deal with hundreds of people and perform essential roles in the community. The father in question ended up locking his ex-wife in the boot of his car while she was pregnant with twins and assaulted her. He was put in prison for that.’

She sent me an update a couple of weeks ago and said:

‘I just thought I would let you know that the parent was sentenced today, and he was convicted and found guilty. He received a Community Corrections order of 12 months under the same conditions as a suspended sentence order.

‘Usually charges of this nature attract a term of imprisonment or mandatory community work orders; however, the judge found that there were exceptional circumstances considering the turmoil caused by his missing child.’

For your information and background, that day his son had walked home without permission and the father could not find him, so he decided he would assault and threaten to kill the principal. He kicked in the office doors.

From her perspective it seems to be that if a parent is upset, it is okay to assault somebody. She said:

‘I was innocent and simply at work doing my job and I was his victim that day, totally unexpected.’

Every day our frontline workers stand as a shield between chaos and order and between crisis and care. They are the backbone of our communities, the first to respond when disaster strikes and the last to leave when the dust settles, yet shockingly their reward for this courage is often violence, aggression and assault.

These are not just numbers; they are our neighbours, friends and family members—people who dedicate their lives to helping others—now living in fear for their own safety. As a government we are sending a clear message: assaulting a frontline worker is not just a crime against an individual, it is an attack on the very fabric of our society. That is why mandatory sentencing for assaults on frontline workers is not just justified; it is essential.

To those who argue against strong mandatory consequences for those who assault our frontline heroes, how much more suffering must we witness before you act? How many more lives must be shattered or workers attacked before you acknowledge that enough is enough? If you do not stand with us in protecting those who protect our community, then stand aside. The NT cannot afford hesitation or half measures. Our frontline workers and the people they serve deserve the strongest protection the law can provide. Let us be clear that in the Northern Territory violence against those who serve will never be tolerated, and justice will never be negotiable.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, Wednesday 30 April marked 50 years since South Vietnam surrendered to communist North Vietnam. This event marked the end of a devastating 20-year conflict that claimed millions of lives, including the lives of 521 Australians who served with courage and honour.

The fall of Saigon changed lives forever and resulted in a flood of refugees, with men, women and children leaving their place of birth in search of a safer life for them and their families. The first refugee boat to arrive in Darwin Harbour landed on 26 April 1976. On board were five young friends. It was skippered by Tac Tam Lam and his brother Lam Binh.

They were not sailors by trade; they taught themselves navigation as part of their escape plan. Their original map was nothing more than a page torn from a school atlas; although a better map was acquired later, it extended no further than Timor. They sailed the rest of the journey by dead reckoning. Their determination and courage is an incredible story of survival across 3,500 kilometres of treacherous seas to Darwin.

Tac Tam Lam, his brother Lam Binh and their three friends were greeted by immigration officials who boarded their boat in Darwin Harbour. Their arrival marked the beginning of a new chapter for not only them but also Australia. They sought permission to stay in Australia, and Darwin has been their home ever since.

After securing work on a construction site building new homes after Cyclone Tracy, Tac Tam Lam was given a visa and allowed to stay. For many years he worked multiple jobs, including in a takeaway shop, in a prawn factory and at the casino before becoming a restauranteur, all while starting what he calls his multicultural family, with his wife being born in Timor and his daughters born in Darwin.

Tac Tam Lam is now 69 years old, but his memories are still clear of the clandestine operation that he, his family and three friends embarked on in their perilous dash for freedom. The Lam family left Vietnam under the cover of darkness, armed with their school atlas map. It was a journey across Southeast Asia with stops in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Mr Lam's family stayed in Thailand, and he and his brother, along with their three friends, weathered a cyclone as they continued on through Malaysia and Singapore, aiming to reach America. It was an Australian fisherman who told the five to make the safer journey to Australia, which they did.

Nowadays Mr Lam has a good relationship with his former country, welcoming Vietnamese delegations, and has returned to Vietnam to promote tourism, but he is firmly settled here in Darwin with three generations of his family residing here.

The Northern Territory is one of Australia's most culturally diverse places. There are more than 100 nationalities and about 140 social, cultural and religious organisations. Migrants have contributed enormously to the Northern Territory's economy and culture, particularly our Asian migrants.

It is people like Tac Tam Lam and his beautiful family who make the Territory the rich, welcoming, culturally diverse place we all love. On behalf of the Assembly, I thank Mr Lam for his extraordinary courage, resilience and unwavering contribution to the Northern Territory. Thank you, Tac Tam Lam, for choosing Darwin as your forever home for you and your family.

Today I honour the extraordinary life and service of Flight Lieutenant Brian Winspear OAM, a proud veteran of the Royal Australian Air Force, a successful businessman and a cherished member of our national community. Brian passed away recently at the remarkable age of 104. He was one of the last veterans to experience the first Bombing of Darwin on 19 February 1942, a day forever etched in our nation's history.

Brian enlisted in 1939, donning the blue of the Royal Australian Air Force with a youthful spirit, joking later that he hoped it might impress the girls, but behind the humour was a man of immense courage who served as a gunner in one of the most dangerous roles in our Air Force. He saw combat, suffered loss and lived through the horrors of war with grace and humility.

On that fateful morning in 1942 as Japanese bombers and Zero fighters unleashed their fury on Darwin, Brian's aircraft was among the last to land. A second raid targeted the RAAF base, and Brian saw it all from a trench with his steel helmet on as 188 enemy aircraft destroyed ships, aircrafts and lives. That day 236 people were killed, 11 ships sunk and 30 aircraft destroyed. It was an attack that brought war to our own shores. Brian later guarded Hajime Toyoshima, the first Japanese prisoner of war captured on Australian soil and one of the leaders of the infamous Cowra breakout.

Recommended for officer training, Brian completed the war by flying patrols from New Guinea and around our coastline.

Brian Winspear did not rest on his laurels at the end of the war. He built a successful tourism business, Innkeepers, that spanned five states and employed many. In 1993 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his contributions to tourism and the community.

Notably, Brian was instrumental in ensuring the memory of his fallen comrades lived on. He personally lobbied for a memorial plaque on Darwin's Esplanade to honour those who served alongside him. He kept meticulous lists of those lost, refusing to let their sacrifices be forgotten. He later wrote about it all in *Tasmanians at War in the Air*, which he co-edited, and *My Back Seat War*. A regular and much-loved attendee at the 19 February commemoration each year for the anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin, Brian wore his old uniform with pride and was always willing to speak to the media and Territorians about his service, ensuring the next generations would never forget.

He is survived by six children, numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the enduring gratitude of our nation.

I place on the public record in *Hansard* our gratitude for Brian Winspear's service, resilience and lifelong contribution to Australia. His memory will remain a beacon of courage, honour and humble service.

Lest we forget.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, this week marks National Volunteer Week. This year's theme is Connecting Communities. I acknowledge the fantastic volunteers I have in my community and across the Territory. These people give up their time, their effort and their money in many cases just to make the world a better place. I shout out to the many wonderful volunteers and people in my electorate.

I give a shout-out to the people involved in Wildcare NT. Recently a bat was caught on a fence on my block. I called Wildcare NT. I looked at the bat, and it had big sharp claws. I said, 'Not today'. I rang the professionals, and within 10 minutes they were at my gate freeing the bat. I am not sure what happened to the bat after they took it to the vet, but in my heart it is out there free.

I have a lot of love for the Scouts organisation in the Northern Territory and across Australia. Scouts, especially in Humpty Doo, Howard Springs, Palmerston and all the way to Alice Springs, do fantastic work. The organisation is built on the back of volunteers, as parents give their time and effort to make sure that not only their kids have a great time but other kids do too. Gayle, if you are listening from Alice Springs, you are doing a fantastic job. Shane, you are doing a great job in Palmerston. Wayne, Ben and all the team at Humpty Doo and Evan at Howard Springs, you are doing a great job.

I also shout out to those who volunteer in more corporate-style roles on reserve boards, such as the Freds Pass recreation reserve board and the McMinns Lagoon board. Brian is probably not watching from home tonight, but I will make sure he gets a copy of this speech. People like Brian have dedicated more than 40 years of their life to making the world a better place.

There are quite a few different sporting organisations in my electorate, and they could not do without the dedicated people who coach, cook the sausages, cut up the oranges and set up for the day. The Member for Nelson loves his polocrosse team. The Palmerston, Litchfield, Howard Springs, Humpty Doo and Noonamah Polocrosse Clubs and the NT Polocrosse Association are filled with people who volunteer their time and energy to make sure that everyone can have a great time.

Freds Pass is home to many sports in the rural area, with the Darwin Quarter Horse Association; Darwin Dressage Club; Darwin Show Jumping Club; NT Show Horse; Freds Pass Positive Dog Training Club; Litchfield Football Club; Litchfield Bears; Noonamah Horse & Pony Club; Rural Athletics Centre; Southern Districts Cricket Club; Southern Districts Football Club; and, of course, the mighty Swampdogs. Each of these clubs is filled with people who dedicate their time and energy to make the world a better place, and I thank them for it.

We also have those volunteers who keep us safe, with a lot of wonderful volunteer fire brigades in the rural area. I give a shout-out to the Koolpinyah, Humpty Doo, Elizabeth Valley, Lambells Lagoon, Marrakai, Point Stuart, Acacia Hills, Manton, Virginia Bees Creek and Adelaide River fire brigades. Thank you for protecting the rural area.

I shout out to those who are involved with the community gardens. The Member for Braitling loves his community garden almost as much as I love mine in Humpty Doo. Without the tireless effort of volunteers these things would not exist.

We have school boards and fundraising committees and everything that is associated with them. This Friday, Humpty Doo Primary School has its sports day, and the SRC members are learning how to volunteer at a young age. They will be running a fundraiser for more sporting equipment. I look forward to popping down and saying hello.

There are other organisations in the rural area and across Darwin, Palmerston and the rest of the Territory, including the Lions Club, Rotary Club, Friends of Fogg Dam and Veterans Australia NT. There are quite a few other associations; I know I am forgetting a few, but their efforts are appreciated every day. Similarly, the Marrakai Progress Association—I love Marrakai and Corroboree—does fantastic work.

I thank every Territorian and Australian who volunteers their time, energy and effort just to make the world a better place. Your efforts are appreciated, and without you our society and community would not be the same.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, this evening I offer my condolences to the Adams family who lost their matriarch, Mona Polina Adams, on 2 May to be with her beloved late husband, Charlie Adams.

Mona was affectionally known to the Torres Strait, Aboriginal and wider Territory community as Aunty Mona. She was 97 years of age. Every week she would meet with her family in front of my office at the Hibiscus Shopping Centre where there would often be more than 30 family members sharing food and time with their matriarch. Mona's funeral, which I attended, was held last Friday at St Mary's Star of the Sea Cathedral in Smith Street. There must have been more than 1,000 people in attendance from across the Territory, and many travelled from Queensland.

Mona was born in Darwin on 28 September 1927. Her Chinese father was Thomas Lee Ying. Her mother, Basilia Angeles, was of European, Aboriginal and Filipino descent. Mona spent her toddler years living with her father's family who lived behind their shop in Chinatown with her seven siblings, Peter, Dolores, Primo, Martin, Thomasa, Margo and Gloria. She attended St Joseph's Catholic College, which later became St Mary's, up to Year 5.

The family had to be evacuated to Cairns as the Second World War was imminent. During her time in Cairns Mona met the love of her life, Charlie Adams, who was of Aboriginal, Torres Strait, Malayan and Indonesian descent. They were married on 8 July 1944. They began their family with their children, Isabelle, Lorraine, Mick and Maisie. In 1949 they moved to Darwin and shared a hut at the Parap camp with Mona's grandparents, Valeriano and Paulina Angeles, and their family.

Mona and Charlie were later allocated their own hut next door to Christodoulou's store in Luxton Street, Stuart Park. Whilst living there, their family increased with the birth of Tom, Rayo, Muscles, Fred, Sarina, Gina, JoAnn, Charlie and David—a total of 13 children.

Mona may have had very little funds in those days, especially raising her 13 children, but made them all attend school for education. Mona's home often became home for relatives and friends from Thursday Island who treated her with love and deep respect.

Mona worked at the old Darwin Hospital and later moved to Royal Darwin Hospital, which she enjoyed and where she made lots of wonderful long-term friends. After Cyclone Tracy the Adams family were evacuated to Cairns where Mona worked at Cairns Base Hospital. The advantage of living and working in Cairns was spending time with Charlie's large family who lived there also.

At the age of 50 Mona finally got her driver's licence, bought a car and chauffeured her husband and children. They would often go to the Evergreen Club, bingo at St Mary's Club, the Greek Hall and visit family who lived at the Kurringal Flats in Fannie Bay.

Mona loved to dance with her husband, and they renewed their wedding vows on their 50th golden wedding anniversary in 1994 before the passing of her beloved husband the following year. Since then, Mona had lost all her siblings and three of her sons also passed before her, but she continued to be the strong matriarch. Mona was always the first to arrive and the last to leave at family gatherings and parties, regardless of her age or health.

Mona looked forward to attending Sunday mass at St Martin de Porres church in Wanguri where she was also loved and respected by attendees and the congregation.

Many people could take a leaf out of Mona's book as she never said a bad thing about anyone and always looked for the good in people. Mona was highly respected in the community, devoted to her family and loyal to her friends.

Mona and her late husband had 13 children of their own and leave a legacy of 36 grandchildren, 61 great-grandchildren and more than 40 great-great-grandchildren.

Mona and her daughter Maisie co-wrote a book called *Mona's Memories*, a wonderful recollection of her beautiful life, published in 2020.

Mona Adams was a special true Territorian, and I know the family will miss her dearly. If they continue to meet at Hibiscus for their weekly family gatherings it will be hard, but she has left them with a wonderful legacy. I again convey my condolences to Mona's family.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs CARLSON: On a lighter note I wish to speak about the great community work by the Australian Vietnamese Family Association, led by president and founding member, Lan Ahn Dam, also known as Anna, and vice president, Khoa Nguyen, also known as Ben. They lead a fantastic community with a great committee and volunteers who want to see their members thrive.

Throughout the year this organisation not only hosts the wonderful new year celebration and one of the most-loved festivals, the Lantern Festival at the Waterfront, but also holds informative and impactful seminars and forums for the Vietnamese and the wider community. Earlier in the year I was fortunate to be a guest speaker at the association's International Women's Day event with other great leaders in the community. This event highlighted the long-term contributions the Vietnamese community make in the Territory.

A recent event run by the Australian Vietnamese Family Association was titled Résumé and Job Tips in Darwin. I attended that event, which was held on Saturday 13 April at Casuarina Library. This session gave attendees hints and tips on seeking employment in the Territory.

What was discovered is that most of the attendees meet the education selection criteria for most vacant positions advertised but often lacked confidence when applying and in the interview process. The seminar gave further advice and clarification from the three guest speakers, Mr Chris Mouat, Senior Director of Investment Engagement, Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations; Mr Tu Nguyen, Head Chef, Darwin Trailer Boat Club; and Mr An Vong, Integration Developer at Charles Darwin University. It was great to stay on after the session and speak to many of the attendees who provided feedback that the session was extremely helpful and gave them the confidence to look actively for employment in the workforce.

The association also recently held its NT Study and Transition Pathways event, and this week it will run its taxation wellbeing session.

I thank Anna, Ben and the committee at the Australian Vietnamese Family Association for providing great, accessible information sessions for the community.

I congratulate the Australia China Friendship Society; I have spoken previously in this House about their wonderful events. It held the annual Dragon Boat Festival on Sunday 27 April at Cullen Bay. It was such a wonderful event with the Members for Sanderson, Katherine, Karama and Port Darwin attending. The Members for Casuarina and Fannie Bay and I participated in the dragon boat racing. Mr Deputy Speaker, as you may have seen, we might have to stick to our day jobs, as our boat did not make it into the finals.

It was the evening before that the society held its Lotus Wind Concert with choir conductor, Shu-Cheen Yu, and musician Sam Hartley. Mr Deputy Speaker, you were there too. The concert was a wonderful event, and I look forward to many more.

I thank Shu Li and the committee of the Australia China Friendship Society for hosting two wonderful events.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Mr Deputy Speaker, this week, 19 to 25 May, is National Volunteer Week. It is an opportunity for every one of us to take a moment to stop, reflect, acknowledge and thank our volunteers across the Northern Territory for the phenomenal job they do every day. Volunteers hold so much of our community together. Without the hard work, commitment and passion of volunteers, so many of our events would not happen. I will acknowledge a number of important volunteer groups and community members who have done and continue to do a fantastic job.

Two important organisations, Volunteering Australia and Community First Development, do an outstanding job in supporting and coordinating a number of volunteer group initiatives across the Northern Territory.

My community of Mparntwe (Alice Springs) is a place of magic, with events such as the Tatts Finke Desert Race, Old Timers Fete, Central Australian Show Society Alice Springs Show, Bangtail Muster and Henley on Todd Regatta. These events and the Alice Springs Community Garden, Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Alice Springs Hospital Drover Volunteer Service, fabALICE Committee and Corrections Community Visitor Program all operate on the goodwill of our community volunteers. I thank them for that.

I thank the seniors who, when they find out that retirement is not all it is cracked up to be, re-engage in the community and continue to give back to the Northern Territory.

I thank the many community members who volunteer their time on not-for-profit boards, such as those in the DV space or for sports groups or community events. These volunteers make sure that we can have wonderful events in our community.

I highlight the Alice Springs Old Timers Fete. This event had not happened because of a shortage of volunteers, but there has been a great amount of interest and a number of passionate Central Australians have come together to ensure that the event can occur this year. I give them a big shout-out; from the bottom of my heart and those of many others in the community, thank you.

I thank the members of our wonderful, vibrant and bright multicultural community who, after a hard day's work, then do the hard work in their multicultural groups and associations, volunteering for hours so that we can have amazing multicultural festivals across the Northern Territory. I am slightly biased; I think that Central Australia has some of the biggest, boldest and best multicultural events. I am sure I will be challenged on that in the Chamber this evening. I acknowledge the work that goes into putting on these amazing events that honour our multicultural community.

There are other amazing events across the Territory. It would be remiss of me not to thank the volunteers who do all the work to put together the Gurindji Freedom Day Festival in the great electorate of Gwoja. Thank you for all the work you do. We will see volunteers working hard in a few weeks at the Barunga Festival in the Member for Arnhem's electorate. In the Member for Mulka's electorate there are all the volunteers who put in the hard work as part of the Garma Festival. I acknowledge that across the Tiwi everyone helps for the Tiwi grand final.

There is a number of volunteers in every electorate of the Northern Territory. I thank all the volunteers who work on our community gardens, in our organisational groups like the environment centre (ALEC) in Alice Springs and at the National Transport Hall of Fame in Alice Springs. They do a great job.

One of the most beautiful community volunteer groups in Alice Springs is the Drovers. Its members provide a wonderful service for families in Alice Springs Hospital. I know we should not pick individuals, but I will

highlight one champion in our local community who is amazing. Angelique Glasson is a true blue Central Australian whose every fibre of her being is about giving back to the local community. I have known Angelique for 15 or 20 years. She is an amazing Central Australian who is filled with kindness and love. I place on the record my thanks for all of her work.

I also thank our community members who volunteer in sport, whether it is for netball, football, basketball, hockey, tennis or any event. It is a hard job, particularly when they are umpiring and calling the shots on what goes where. Their resilience and commitment to come back or run the local canteen are appreciated.

One thing that the Territory does well is to have the spirit of the community come together and make great events happen. We get to talk about that this week, National Volunteer Week.

To all the volunteers out there, we see you, hear you, thank you and respect you. The community cannot go on without volunteers. To those who are thinking about it, we encourage you. It is great to donate a few hours of your time to get behind and support these events. As we have heard, these events cannot go on when we do not have volunteers.

I shout out to all the volunteers across the Northern Territory and all the organisations and businesses that support volunteers and the events they run. You are all champions. Thank you so much for the opportunity to place on the *Parliamentary Record* how well the Territory does because of the work of volunteers.

Happy National Volunteer Week. All local members will be keeping an eye out and following Volunteering Australia as it takes a moment to recognise and celebrate some of the Territory's champions.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): [By leave, the Member spoke in Tetum and self-interpreted in English.]

Mr Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Lia Finocchiaro MLA, I extend our sincere acknowledgements to the people of Timor-Leste on this special day celebrating the Restoration of Independence Day.

From 1974 to 1999 the people of Timor-Leste showed great strength and fortitude fighting the Indonesian occupation of their country and enduring a great struggle for their people, but now they can celebrate their country's liberty and rights. Today recognises the handing back of power and, importantly, the raising of the Timorese flag, symbolising the sovereignty and autonomy of Timor-Leste.

We, the people of the Northern Territory, look forward to our growing partnership, growth and opportunities together and what lies ahead for our great peoples.

I acknowledge all the Timorese Territorians and those Timorese who reside across Australia. I know the path to independence was long and brutal for the people of Timor. Many came here as refugees, having fled for safety, and many would have had families who were killed in the genocide that took place.

This is an important day; it is a day of celebration for the people of Timor-Leste for their long and hard-earned struggle for freedom and independence. We, the people of the Northern Territory, look forward to our growing relationship as our government aims to strengthen ties with the people of Timor-Leste.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will share some of the fantastic work happening at schools in my electorate of Casuarina. Local schools continue to go above and beyond, offering quality education, supporting students and building strong community spirit.

At the end of Term 1, I had the pleasure of visiting four schools in my electorate—Dripstone Middle School, Nakara Primary School, Henbury School and Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School—to present the Khoda Patel All Rounder Awards. These awards recognise students who not only do well in the classroom but also show leadership, kindness and commitment in every part of school life. These are students who give their best, support their peers, join in activities and lead by example. They are the kind of young people we should all be proud of.

The award recipients were from Dripstone Middle School, Hartley Methven and Carissa Foreman; from Nakara Primary School, Jewel Vallikkattil and Shin Aung; from Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School, Alex Javier and Ellie Murphy; and from Henbury School, Ayden-Lee McKinley and Lucy Lacco. I congratulate them for being positive role models in their schools. They have shown what it means to be well-rounded individuals, not just smart or talented but kind, dedicated and respectful.

I highlight a groundbreaking initiative at Dripstone Middle School, which is the launch of the CDU Dripstone Health Academy. This is the first of its kind in the Northern Territory and was developed in partnership with Charles Darwin University. The program helps students aged 14 and older learn more about health and the healthcare system. In their first session they were shown how to set up their own myGov accounts, a small but powerful step in helping them manage their own health services as they grow into young adults.

The health academy will continue with workshops at CDU's Casuarina campus, giving students a taste of careers in medicine and allied health. CDU students will also run sessions on mental health, healthy eating and physical activity—topics that are more important now than ever. This partnership shows what is possible when our schools and universities work together, preparing young people for the future, breaking down barriers and promoting health equity across our community.

Dripstone Middle School had a busy and inspiring term. One highlight was its involvement in the Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival, where students performed on the Banyan Stage. Their music and dance performances were lively and joyful and showcased the students' talents.

Behind every student performance is a dedicated team of staff. I thank Mr Webb, who worked hard behind the scenes, and Ms Kuo, who did a great job as the event's emcee.

In addition to performing, the school also presented an art display, including a large collaborative piece made of embossed metal showcasing sea life. It was created by students from all year levels. Individual artworks also showed the wide range of creativity at the school.

One stand-out moment was a powerful student-led performance of *Rise Up*, led by Keeva and supported by Kelsall, Carley, Calista and Brita. It was moving, powerful and a strong display of teamwork and confidence.

Dripstone has also been expanding learning in science and technology. Through the AVISTA program by Australian Remote Operations for Space and Earth students explored exciting careers in science, technology and engineering. These hands-on sessions help make STEM subjects come alive and plant the seeds for future careers.

For Mother's Day I had the chance to visit the school with my colleague Mrs Oly Carlson to support its community ambassadors. The students had prepared a gift stall filled with handmade items, including jewellery, planter pots and gift packs. Each item was made with care and pride. It was a great example of community spirit.

Dripstone is a school community that is nurturing well-rounded, confident and curious young people. From the arts and sciences to leadership and wellbeing, it is building up students for success in life, not just exams.

These are some of the great things happening in the Casuarina electorate. Although tonight I focused on Dripstone, I look forward to sharing more updates from our other wonderful schools in the coming months.

To the students, teachers, principals and support staff across Casuarina, thank you for your continued passion, hard work and care. You are helping shape the future of the Territory, one student at a time.

Mr BURGOYNE (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I will speak about a number of wonderful events that have occurred in my home town of Alice Springs recently.

The Braitling and Namatjira electorate offices combined to put on the Teddy Bears Picnic, this year raising funds for Alice Springs Family Daycare. It was wonderful to see hundreds of community members attend the event, along with numerous stallholders who ensured that the event could go ahead and be the success that it was.

The local YMCA came down with its large soccer dartboard. It is hard to imagine, but it is a three-metre-high and three-metre-wide dartboard that comes with soccer balls that stick when kicked. It was hours of entertainment for young ones who enjoyed attempting to hit the bullseye.

Local business Centre Soft Play, run by Georgia, kindly attended the event to ensure young children could enjoy its play equipment. I report that many young children had a ball, climbing and rolling around in the ball pit.

Julie was there with The Silver Brumby Coffee Caravan. MeeMa's Kitchen, Lolly & Craft Shop with Sylvanna entertained the children with her amazing arts and crafts. The baked goods were something that had to be seen to be believed.

Rowie Schulz from my office should be commended on her efforts to ensure the event could go ahead. It truly is a massive thing to put on a public event these days.

Local builder Blueprint Construction assisted with a temporary fence. Darren Burton builders then assisted in putting up the exterior fence with the local Man Walk group on the day helping with what we commonly call the playpen, the entertainment arena where kids can safely interact with the entertainment on the day and parents can keep a close eye on what is happening without having to worry about their kids running off.

Rex from the reptile centre came along and put on a reptile display that the kids loved. Alice Springs Family Daycare helped out with games for the children after the beginning of the event.

This culminated in the Teddy Bear parade. What a job it was to judge that.

I cooked pancakes for the masses, and the Treasurer's sausage sizzle was a hit as always.

Michelle Bell and many other volunteered their time on the day to ensure its success. Once again, I give a huge thank you to Rowie Schulz from my office, and David Koch, Ashley and Shane from the Member for Namatjira's office.

It was a wonderful event put on for the community with all money raised going towards a local community group to support the work of Alice Springs Family Daycare.

I also mention the Bangtail Muster. I thank the combined Rotary Clubs of Alice Springs, along with event organiser, Eli Melky, who ensured everyone was where they needed to be. This year was exceptionally special, with Lilly-Marie taking part in her first-ever Bangtail Muster, following in her mum and dad's footsteps. My mum often recalls me being on the back of a truck as a gumnut baby. To see Lilly-Marie dressed as a unicorn will be something I will never forget.

Thank you to the educators at Braitling Preschool—Ms Nikki, Ms Heleena and Ms Lilly—along with all the other mums and dads who came to assist on the morning. The Magic of Friendship was the theme for this year's event. It is the sort of wonderful event that reminds everyone in town why we choose to live in The Alice.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, today, 20 May, is World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day. The day is dedicated to raising awareness about autoimmune and inflammatory arthritis diseases, which are systemic conditions affecting multiple parts of the body.

The day was established in 2012 by the International Foundation for Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis to raise global awareness of these conditions and forms of arthritis like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, ankylosing spondylitis and juvenile idiopathic arthritis. The initiative arose from the recognition that these chronic and often debilitating conditions are frequently misunderstood, widely under-diagnosed and sometimes overshadowed by more familiar forms of arthritis like osteoarthritis.

The day serves as a global platform for patients, healthcare professionals and advocacy groups to come together, share resources and educate the public about the early signs, systemic nature and long-term impacts of autoimmune diseases. Through virtual events, social media campaigns and international collaboration, World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day has fostered a sense of solidarity within the global patient community, whilst advocating for improved diagnostics, access to care and increased research funding.

What are autoimmune diseases? First of all, autoimmune diseases are considered to be one of the least understood areas of medicine. Although scientists know of about 80 of these diseases, the exact causes and triggers of them remain largely elusive. This makes diagnosis, treatment and ultimately prevention of these conditions extremely challenging. Our lack of understanding is compounded by the fact that autoimmune diseases vary in their symptoms and diagnosis, and they lack definitive diagnostic tests. There is limited understanding of triggers, a focus on symptom management and under-recognition and a lack of awareness globally.

What we do know, in simple terms, is that autoimmune diseases impact the body by causing our immune systems to mistakenly attack our own body tissues and organs. Instead of protecting the body from harmful invaders like viruses and bacteria, the immune system targets cells, proteins or entire systems as if they were threats. This misdirected immune response can lead to chronic inflammation, tissue damage and impaired function of affected areas like joints, skin, nerves, glands and internal organs. Likewise, common impacts include debilitating fatigue and pain, particularly in the muscle and joints, skin rashes, digestive issues and hormonal imbalances. Over time these diseases can lead to permanent damage if they are not properly managed, potentially resulting in disability and/or life-threatening complications.

Equally significant and often under-recognised is the impact that these diseases can have on people's families. The chronic nature of these conditions means loved ones may need to take on caregiving roles, adapt their work schedules and provide emotional support, often over many years. This can place strain—as with many other conditions—on relationships, finances and the overall family wellbeing, particularly when people are affected by experiences such as unpredictable flare-ups and ongoing pain and fatigue. For families with young children and young adults, there may be additional stress in regard to schooling, social life and future independence. Partners, likewise, often report feelings of helplessness, burnout and anxiety as they try to support loved ones whilst maintaining household stability.

The cumulative effect can be a reduced quality of life for not just the patient but also the family unit as a whole. Support groups, flexible employment options and access to reliable healthcare and counselling are critical in helping families to manage the long-term impacts of diseases such as these. This is where the critical services of our healthcare providers become so pivotal.

In the NT health and hospital system an important role is played by a broad delivery of services to try to support autoimmune care. These institutions provide access to multidisciplinary teams comprising rheumatologists, immunologists, neurologists and allied health professionals, all of whom work collaboratively to offer comprehensive treatment in a difficult area. These services help to ensure that autoimmune healthcare is accessible to Territorians.

I thank our healthcare workers, clinicians and researchers for working on these difficult-to-pin-down diseases and their dedication to patients and advancing treatment options in this field. I thank them, not least, because I am the beneficiary of their efforts and because my late grandfather, Muhammad Nurul Huq OAM, whom I spoke about at length in my maiden speech, also was the beneficiary of their diligent work.

My grandfather, as I mentioned previously, was a prolific man but one whose working life was cut short by rheumatoid arthritis.

For the uninitiated, osteoarthritis is a degenerative condition where cartilage breaks down due to wear and tear on your body, often affecting larger joints like your hips and knees. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease, the likes of which I am speaking about today, where the immune system attacks the joints, primarily the synovial membrane, leading to inflammation and pain that can affect joints and smaller joints in the hands and feet.

I watched my grandfather's decline in mobility over many years, his increasing pain and the impact on my grandmother and family over many years. I watched him go through four knee replacements; each time they would come up with a novel material trying to solve the problem. He went from steel to plastic to titanium to carbon fibre, which was something of an ordeal in and of itself. The point I am making is that in his day there was less public awareness, less support, less sympathy and fewer treatment options available for autoimmune diseases, which are one of the vanguard areas for medical research in the modern era. I am glad that things are better in 2025 than they were in 1985 and 1995 for him in managing those conditions.

The other reason I mention this is that I too manage an autoimmune condition, which I mentioned in my maiden speech—myasthenia gravis. It is a random condition that no-one interesting or famous has except for the godfather of Indian cinema, Amitabh Bachchan. Indians frequently will recall exactly who he is and what the condition is. I am no Bollywood film star, as we all know, but we have in common the chronic autoimmune disorder where the immune system attacks neuromuscular junctions throughout our body, disrupting communication between nerves and muscles. This leads to fluctuating muscle weakness and fatigue which worsens with activity and improves with rest.

The disease can affect muscles controlling eyes, facial expression, chewing, swallowing and speaking. However, I am pleased to report, as you can all attest to, that although many in this House may have noticed me winking at them on a regular basis because of my variable vision, I clearly have not lost control of my capacity to speak. I probably will not be able to hit a cricket ball very well ever again, though.

In all seriousness, I thank all those who have helped me on my health journey, noting that it is only with the help of others that you can overcome the myriad challenges that life presents you. That includes, no less, the lovely people at RDH and within our neurology services.

Although there is no cure per se for my ailment, treatments such as medication, thymectomy—a complicated surgery which was performed successfully on a mouse some 80 years ago, so people continue that process—and blood transfusions help people like me to manage the symptoms of an autoimmune condition and lead relatively normal lives. On that note, I thank the staff at the day surgery clinic at RDH whom I periodically see for, as my friends euphemistically call it, an oil change.

I raise this tonight, in all seriousness, not for pity but to raise awareness and, moreover, to express gratitude and take a moment to appreciate our health system and modern medicine and perhaps also to be reminded that behind the scenes we are all struggling with the innumerate complexities of life. Gratitude sustains optimism, as I noted in my maiden speech, and it is a good outlook to have in general. Likewise, we all face trials and tribulations, and it is worth occasionally reinforcing in places like this and at times like this the importance of being kind and considerate to one another, even in our sometimes combative workplace.

With that sentiment in mind, I will continue to draw attention to the ever-increasingly obscure, such as World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day, and support awareness initiatives. It is important to shine a light on it not only in the abstract but also in terms of how these things impact us in our place and context. I encourage all of you likewise to do the same and to consider some of the ways in which the Northern Territory is part of a bigger ecosystem of a country and a world, sharing common challenges and predicaments.

On that note, thank you for your indulgence. Happy, in so far as it can be, World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day to everyone.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I will close the loop on some matters we have discussed in this Chamber, where we debate and pass Bills which become Acts in this wonderful Northern Territory of ours. This is important work. However, it is not so often that we get to evaluate, in almost real time, the effects that the Bills we pass have.

I draw attention to a decision of the Supreme Court in Alice Springs by His Honour Justice John Reeves in *The King v EM* [2025] NTSC 31, dated 9 May 2025. This decision deals directly with the two signature pieces of legislation of this Assembly. The first is Declan's law, which changed the presumption of bail, and the second is the *Bail Act* amendments that we passed on urgency recently.

I will read certain extracts. There is a lot that I will not read because there are matters to do with the offending, even though the offender is still on bail. I will not identify the offender, but the nature of the offending is not relevant to this discussion. What is relevant is that His Honour, when considering granting bail to this individual, was in the position that the defence and the prosecution appeared to be in favour of bail. He wrote in his decision:

> *Even though that was the agreed position of the parties, because …*

The defendant:

> *… had pleaded guilty to a very serious offence, I was not willing to act on it.*

He went on to discuss the effect of the amendments. He wrote:

> *In considering the matters in ss 24 and 24A, the amendments …*

Meaning the amendments that we passed recently:

> *… have made two important changes. First, the risk (if any) to the 'safety of the community' that would result if a person were released on bail is 'the paramount consideration' of the criteria prescribed by those provisions. A 'paramount consideration' is one that 'must be treated as the highest level of importance'.*

These are the words of a justice of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory:

> *Nonetheless, 'other considerations are not entirely excluded…[they]…are only subordinated'. Secondly, remanding a youth in custody is no longer to be considered as the option of last resort.*

The second step is mandated under s 7A … It occurs if an applicant for bail …

He goes on with some technical matters:

It requires the decision maker to consider, separately or 'in isolation from' the matters considered under the first step, whether they have 'a high degree of confidence' …

They are the key words:

… that the person will not, if released on bail, either commit a prescribed offence, or a serious violence offence, or otherwise endanger the safety of the community.

He goes on to say that the defendant's:

… offending was of a sexual nature, it was violent and it was very serious. Those features of it raise the obvious question as to what, if any, criminogenic and/or psychological factors influenced it.

I highlighted in my notes the next sentence:

Any proper assessment of the risk …

The defendant:

… poses to women in the Alice Springs community were he to be released on bail therefore, in my view, requires consideration of those factors.

This is key. He is considering the safety of the people and the women of Alice Springs in his decision, and he is linking it directly to our amendments.

He then goes on with some matters of psychological reports tendered by the defence and continues:

It follows that I do not have any evidence before me with respect to the criminogenic or psychological factors affecting …

The defendant's:

… offending such that I can make any proper assessment … Since that risk is the paramount consideration under s 24 of the Bail Act*, it necessarily follows that I do not consider that …*

The defendant:

… has discharged his onus to overcome the presumption prescribed by s 7A(2) of that Act.

That is the presumption against bail, which we on this side of the Chamber passed as part of Declan's law. He concludes:

For those reasons, I refused …

The defendant's:

… application for bail.

This decision dated 9 May is evidence that the two signature laws in regard to crime and bail are already working. I thank Justice John Reeves. He goes into great detail, laying out how the Act works and the various functions and lots of legal things that are far beyond my mortal knowledge. This is evidence that our laws are working and fulfilling their intended purpose by keeping Territorians and the women of the Northern Territory safe.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the events I attended within my electorate and across the broader Northern Territory community.

I hosted the Irish community in Darwin to celebrate St Patrick's Day at the great hall at Parliament House. I had the privilege to honour two community members, along with the Irish committee, Pat Murray and Tom Kiely.

Pat served as a member of the NT Irish Association committee from the time he and his wife, Chris, arrived in Darwin in the mid-1980s. To our knowledge, no member has served on the committee longer than Pat. He was affectionately known as 'the worker bee'. You could always rely on Pat to be there and to get stuck in, no matter what needed to be done.

Tom, who was also an NT Irish Association committee member, is better known for hosting the *Irish Hour* on a popular FM radio show broadcast out of CDU for several years, playing Irish CDs and interviewing entrants in the annual Darwin Rose Pageant, a number of visiting international Rose of Tralee winners and even the odd Irish Ambassador. He was also a member of the St Patrick's Race Day committee and organised a Gaelic mass each St Patrick's Day.

Congratulations to Pat Murray and Tom Kiely.

It is with great pride that I commend the remarkable achievement of Paul Davey, a Year 10 student who represented both the Northern Territory and Australia with distinction at the 2025 World Irish Dance Championships held in Belgium. Competing in the under-16 boys category, Paul secured an outstanding fourth place on the global stage, a result that reflects his immense talent, discipline, dedication and perseverance. His performance brings great pride to his school, community and, indeed, the entire Northern Territory.

I extend my sincere congratulations to Paul on this extraordinary accomplishment. He has proven himself a worthy ambassador of our region and a shining example of the excellence that young Territorians continue to demonstrate on the world stage.

On 5 April we celebrated Ugadi, also known as Yugadi, marking the first day of Chaitra and the beginning of a new era in the Hindu lunisolar calendar. This festival, deeply rooted in the rich cultural heritage of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, was a time of reflection, renewal and joyous celebration. With vibrant floral decorations and traditional delicacies lovingly prepared, we were all reminded of the enduring strength of our traditions and the timeless values they uphold.

On 6 April the Telangana Association of Darwin celebrated Sri Rama Navami, a significant occasion marking the birth of Lord Rama, an embodiment of virtue, courage and devotion. The celebrations were filled with devotion, traditional rituals and a strong sense of community spirit. The stage was beautifully adorned, hymns were sung in reverence and prayers were offered for peace and prosperity.

It was my great pleasure to welcome guests to Parliament House in celebration of 25 years of NT Youth Week on 7 April, an enduring testament to the vision, resilience and promise of Territory youths. This significant milestone not only recognised the remarkable achievements of young Territorians but also celebrated their indispensable role in shaping our collective future. I extended my warmest congratulations to the 2025 Youth Week Ambassadors whose leadership and commitment inspire us all. I also expressed heartfelt gratitude to our tireless youth service providers and the Office of Youth Affairs, particularly Ms Jemima Fernandes whose unwavering dedication and coordination brought this year's program to life.

On 8 April 2025 I had the opportunity to see the great work of Katherine YMCA through its engagement in Youth Week activities. There was the high energy of three-on-three basketball, indoor soccer, eight ball, a jumping castle for the enjoyment of the youths and haircuts for all.

It was a genuine pleasure to share morning tea with our remarkable senior citizens of Katherine on 9 April. These are the individuals whose contributions have laid the foundations of our communities and whose wisdom continues to enrich our lives. These gatherings are more than social occasions; they are opportunities to honour the legacy, resilience and enduring spirit of those who have shaped the Northern Territory across generations.

I also had the privilege of touring the Somerville Community Services facility in Katherine with Sinu. The work being undertaken there is nothing short of extraordinary. Somerville exemplifies the power of compassionate service, supporting Territorians through life's most challenging moments with dignity, care and unwavering commitment. I extend my sincere gratitude to all the staff and volunteers whose daily efforts make such a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

I was also pleased to meet with representatives from the Victoria Daly Regional Council whose work in developing sport programs in remote communities is commendable and essential. Their commitment to fostering inclusion, wellbeing and community cohesion through sport speaks volumes of their leadership and vision.

Collectively, these visits reaffirm the strength, compassion and determination that define our Territory and its people.

On 12 April I had the honour of attending the 2025 Korea Festival hosted by President Anna and Vice President Violet of the Korean Association in Australia NT. The event celebrated Korean culture and tradition, with Darwin's finest talents showcasing their artistry through a dynamic K-Pop showdown. I sincerely thanked the volunteers for their efforts, and look forward to next year's celebrations.

On 12 April I was privileged to attend the Muslim Community Forum: Empowering Youth and Women, hosted by President Mohammed Raziuddin and the executive board of UMNT. The forum provided a vital platform to highlight the contributions of young people and women, particularly in our remote and diverse communities. I commended UMNT's leadership and reaffirmed the Northern Territory Government's commitment to fostering inclusion, empowering youth and working alongside community organisations to build a stronger, fairer future.

I had the distinct privilege of attending the Vaisakhi celebrations on 13 April at Gurdwara in Marrara. It is a vibrant and profoundly significant occasion for the Sikh community. The festivities honoured the rich traditions, historical legacy and spiritual importance of Vaisakhi, commemorating the founding of the Khalsa. It was truly inspiring to witness the community unite in a spirit of devotion, harmony and joyous celebration. I extended my sincere commendation to the organisers and volunteers for their outstanding efforts in preserving and promoting this vital cultural heritage, which was impressively demonstrated through the martial arts displays, the prayer sessions and the sharing of Langar.

I had the great honour of attending the Khmer New Year Celebration on 13 April, a vibrant and joyous occasion that brought the community together in a spirit of unity and tradition. The festivities reflected the rich cultural heritage of the Cambodian people and the deep pride they have in their history and customs. I thoroughly enjoyed participating in the games and activities, which were conducted with great joy and spirited enthusiasm. I commended the organisers and volunteers for their dedication in making the event such a success and strengthening the bonds within our multicultural community.

On the same day I had the distinct privilege of joining the Nepali community to celebrate the arrival of the Nepali New Year 2082. The event was a splendid celebration, beautifully showcasing Nepal's rich cultural traditions, vibrant spirit and profound sense of community. I warmly commended the organisers and volunteers for their exemplary efforts in bringing together so many individuals in a joyous celebration of unity, heritage and hope.

I had the honour of hosting the Sikh community in the Main Hall of Parliament House to celebrate Vaisakhi on 15 April, commemorating the 326th anniversary of the creation of the Khalsa Panth. This vibrant and significant occasion marks the historic moment when the first five Sikhs were baptised and became the Khalsa, the pure ones. It was a joyous and inspiring celebration of faith, heritage and unity. I extend my sincere thanks to the hardworking and gracious Member for Fannie Bay, Laurie Zio, for so ably fulfilling the role of master of ceremonies for the Vaisakhi celebrations.

It gave me great pleasure to attend the Lanna Maha Songkran Premier Dinner, hosted by the NT Thai Association on 24 April. Thanks to Vice President Tou for curating an evening of distinguished cultural reflection, honouring the richness of Lanna heritage for the first time in such a setting. Songkran, with its rituals of renewal, ancestral reverence and intergenerational unity, conveyed enduring cultural wisdom. I commend the volunteers who made this evening possible and the wonderful success of the Thailand Grand Festival 2025 that continues to strengthen our multicultural bonds and illuminate our collective path forward.

After a decade-long hiatus, the Australia China Friendship Society proudly hosted the Darwin Arafura Dragon Boat Club's concert on 26 April, an event of both cultural significance and community celebration.

On 27 April 2025 I had the privilege of attending the Dragon Boat Festival at Cullen Bay to do the eye-dotting ceremony. Many of my colleagues participated in the Dragon Boat Festival with the community.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, an upcoming event in my electorate is the Barunga Festival 2025. For many years I have spoken in this House about the Barunga Festival, and this year it will be a jam-packed

program, no exception to any other year. It will be fantastic to see the Big Rivers region once again come alive with this iconic family-friendly event. It is recognised on the national festival calendar.

Barunga Festival boasts a long and proud tradition of celebrating Indigenous music, art, culture and sport. This much-loved Territory festival attracts more than 4,000 festivalgoers who celebrate together in the small community of Barunga, which usually has a population of about 360 people. Thanks to the generosity of the Barunga community and the Bagala traditional owners festivalgoers are welcome to camp in the community, which has become popular over the years. It saves people driving in and out of Katherine, Mataranka, Tindal or the other communities and townships close by, and it is a great way to enjoy the festival and the concert that goes late into the evening. Sometimes it is cold, so people get up to dance to stay warm.

The range of festival features include activities such as traditional Aboriginal dance, music performances, bush bands, art exhibitions, workshops, sports competitions, cultural talks, storytelling and bush medicine workshops. One of the festival's highlights is the sports and cultural program, which includes traditional sports such as spear throwing and tug of war, as well as modern sports such as football, softball and basketball.

The festival has played a significant role in promoting Aboriginal culture and raising awareness of Aboriginal issues across Australia, as well as promoting reconciliation. The work of the Bagala traditional owners and Jawoyn traditional owners is always exceptional. I thank them for their work in creating the program and obtaining the permissions required to have such a successful festival.

A big shout-out goes to Sprout, which is assisting the Bagala Aboriginal Corporation and the TOs with the organisation of this year's festival. The posters are out, and you can see the program online. It is a great family event on King's Birthday weekend.

Wherever people are in the Northern Territory—top, middle or bottom—there will always be something to do on King's Birthday weekend. In the Top End is the Greek GleNTi, Big Rivers has the Barunga Festival and in Central Australia—your neck of the woods, Madam Speaker—there is the Finke Desert Race. Of course, I am biased; please come to the Barunga Festival if you get a chance. Former colleagues of past Legislative Assemblies have often done both in the Top End, going to Barunga and GleNTi. Some crazy colleagues have done all three and gone to Finke, Barunga and GleNTi. I do not know whether I will ever get the chance to do all three in the one weekend, but the option is there for the mad festival and event goer.

I put on the record the great work of the Bagala shop. It is an independent community store, one of few in the Northern Territory. It had a strong presence during COVID in organising the difficult logistics of food security across the biosecurity zones in the Northern Territory.

Barunga Festival is probably one of the biggest weekends for the Bagala independent shop to prepare for, but it does a fantastic job. If you go to the Barunga Festival, please support the local shop. The profits all go back into the community. It has a great partnership with grocery providers to try to provide food at, if not lower than, town prices, particularly fruit and vegetables. You will always get great products there, but community members and anyone who is visiting and buying from shop will get the benefit of the cheap prices and quality products.

You can go to Barungafestival.com.au to check out the music and the program. Constituents from all over the Arnhem electorate attend the festival, play sport, compete in the festival and perform in the festival, particularly the Red Flag Dancers. My family from Numbulwar, the Nundhirribala clan of my mother, usually perform two nights at Barunga, as well as the Bagala TOs from that area. Whatever time of day you go, it is one of those festivals where you can do as little or as much as you want.

The junior rangers from the school do a community visit and a tour, so you pay a bit of money—it is fundraising for the Barunga School students—and they take you for a walking tour of the Barunga community. All the money goes back into the school for students' excursions and things for them to do later in the year. It is a wonderful initiative from the school that is included in the program.

Just last week there was a media release about Cassie Black leading the Barunga Next Top Model: Unearthed program at the festival. This will be the first time it has happened. It is exciting. I heard from the organiser today who asked me to spread the word far and wide, and I thought what better way to do that than in parliament.

The Barunga Festival is proud to announce the launch of a new talent discovery initiative, Barunga Next Top Model: Unearthed, led by renowned Tiwi Islands model and mentor Cassie Puruntatameri**,** professionally known as Cassie Black**.**

Cassie, a proud Tiwi woman, has built an impressive career on the global fashion stage, walking runways at Australian Fashion Week and international events in Europe. She was discovered on a Melbourne tram in 2017 by Perina Drummond of Jira Models, and in 2018 she made her runway debut walking for Melbourne Fashion Week. Cassie's journey from a remote community of fewer than 450 people to signing with Chadwick Models is nothing short of inspirational.

She is now bringing her expertise back to country, mentoring the next generation of Aboriginal fashion talent through the Barunga Next Top Model: Unearthed program. This first-of-its-kind initiative aims to provide Aboriginal youths with the skills, confidence, and cultural grounding to navigate the fashion industry. Cassie said:

> *This is about more than modelling, it's about cultural pride, self-expression, and opening doors for young people from remote communities who might not see themselves represented in fashion … I'm honoured to walk alongside them on this journey.*

Cassie has long been a champion for First Nations representation in fashion. In addition to her successful modelling career, she has facilitated workshops for emerging Indigenous talent and played a key mentoring role at events such as the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair and Country to Couture. Her advocacy for cultural safety and meaningful inclusion in the fashion industry has made her a respected figure among peers and aspiring models alike.

Barunga Next Top Model: Unearthed will be hosted as part of the Barunga Festival 2025, a celebrated event that brings together art, music, sport and cultural exchange in one of Australia's most vibrant remote communities. Models will participate in photoshoots with fashion photographers Dave Blake and Grace Fox, and will be modelling textiles and accessories from local art centres and fashion labels, including House of Darwin.

This program offers participants the chance to engage in hands-on mentoring sessions with Cassie, participate in runway training and gain a behind-the-scenes insight into the world of modelling. It represents a new chapter in the festival's dedication to celebrating and elevating First Nations culture and creativity. To find out more and to enter go to Barunga.com.au/next-top-model/.

It will be a jam-packed program. The Jawoyn Rangers help with a lot of festival support and preparation. The Banatjarl women, whom the Member for Katherine talked about, do bush medicine and art workshops there. I think there will be didgeridoo making as well. There will be fantastic information stalls; the Member for Arnhem's stall will be there.

It is a great way to listen, learn and support the services in regional and remote parts of the Northern Territory. It will engage community members from across the Northern Territory and visitors from the rest of the country and the world who find out about the festival. Some of them come back many years in a row.

It will be a great festival. A small warning—it is probably not as appropriate for you, Madam Speaker, as a Central Australian—that it was 15 degrees on the weekend in Katherine, which means this year's Barunga Festival in June will be cold. For the Darwin mob who are travelling down, please bring your warm jackets, trackpants, jumpers and sleeping bags. Even if you are there at night just to watch the concert it will be cold, but fantastic. Please be prepared and support the festival.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.