Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

15th Assembly



Parliamentary Record
Debates and Questions



Thursday 19 March 2026

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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Drysdale

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Member for Drysdale be granted leave of absence from the Chamber today due to medical reasons.

Motion agreed to.

Member for Gwoja

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

Motion agreed to.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENTS
Chief Parliamentary Counsel – Andrew Jones

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, Chief Parliamentary Counsel of the Northern Territory, Andrew Jones, is concluding in his role at the end of this sitting week.

Andrew has led the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for the past nine years. Since the 13th Assembly he has been an integral part of delivering legislative reform in the Northern Territory, having drafted or overseen the drafting of hundreds of pieces of legislation across all manner of topics. He has worked closely with ministers, government agencies and many members past and present.

Andrew is leaving us to head up the Parliamentary Counsel's Office in Western Australia. The Territory's loss will be WA's gain. On behalf of the Assembly, I thank Andrew for his service to the Territory and wish him all the very best in Western Australia.

Members: Hear, hear!

Flu Vaccinations

Madam SPEAKER: I remind honourable members, electorate officers and Parliament House staff of the complimentary 2026 influenza vaccinations available today between 11 am and 2 pm. Vaccinations are being administered in the liaison office which is off the Main Hall. Walk-ins are welcome; however, appointments are recommended for those who would like to secure their preferred time.

VISITORS
Berry Springs Primary School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of students from Year 5/6 at Berry Springs Primary School accompanied by their teachers.

It is lovely to see you. I wish you a warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL REPORT
Progress on Bail Reform in the Northern Territory

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I deliver a ministerial report on the progress on bail reform in the Northern Territory, notified on 18 March 2026.

Today is, sadly, the third anniversary of the tragic murder of 20-year-old bottle shop worker Declan Laverty, a promising young man who was fatally stabbed by a man who was out on bail for a violent prior offence.

I give Territorians an update on the progress of our government's game-changing Declan's law bail reforms and the legacy that Declan leaves behind.

I am sure all members join me in sending our thoughts and prayers to Declan's mother, Samara, and sister, Bridget, who I think might be watching this morning.

It is fair to say that Samara is one of the bravest, strongest women I have ever met. Her grief and anger drove her determination to see something done about the crime crisis that plagued the Territory. Labor's response to this tragedy was totally inadequate, as it was to the crime crisis that was destroying people's lives. For the community, Declan's murder was yet another example of Labor's failure to address that rampant crime we were seeing across the Territory.

In mid-2024 we announced from opposition our proposed bail reform package as Declan's law, and in August that year we released the details:

- presumption against bail for serious violent offences, whether or not a weapon was used
- presumption against bail for offences involving weapons, including improvised weapons
- presumption against bail for repeat offenders, defined as anyone with two or more convictions in the past two years
- reinstating breach of bail conditions as an offence for youths, reversing earlier reforms that had removed that penalty
- mandatory electronic monitoring for repeat offenders granted bail.

We have always been open with the community about our reforms, and our community supported them, because community safety comes first, as do people's rights to be safe and the rights of victims. No-one in the Northern Territory believes otherwise.

When we won the Northern Territory election in August 2024, Declan's law was one of the first legislative reforms we did, and we did that with Samara in the gallery with us. I thank her for that; it was a difficult day.

On 6 January last year Declan's law officially commenced. Let me be clear: we know that Declan's law is not the only answer, but it has been a tremendous step forward in making the Territory a safer place to live, work, visit and invest. It is an essential tool, and people are safer because of it. For too long under Labor, repeat offenders' rights were put above community safety, and Declan's death should never have happened. From day one we were determined that Declan's death would not be in vain, hence the legacy he leaves behind that we remember today.

In addition to bail reforms Declan's law also included better powers for police to prevent knife crime. I know Samara is passionate about this. These changes simplified the approval processes for the use of handheld knife scanners; expanded wanding powers in public places, including schools and public transport; and extended wanding authorisations from 12 hours to up to 72 hours. We cut the red tape that Labor had put in the way of police. They can wand more people and prevent crime from happening in the first place.

Sadly, in April last year our community was again rocked, this time by the death of beloved Nightcliff supermarket owner 71-year-old Mr Linford Feick. He was fatally stabbed while confronting a shoplifter. The 18-year-old offender was out on bail for other serious matters.

It was obvious to us that we needed to go further with Declan's law, so we did. I urgently recalled parliament to pass stricter bail legislation to implement a stronger presumption against bail for a wider set of offences and require a judge to be satisfied that an offender poses no risk before bail is granted through a double test.

Since the Declan's law changes came into effect nearly 20,000 people have been scanned by Northern Territory Police for weapons. That resulted in 296 dangerous weapons being seized, 36 people being arrested and three notices to appear. It will always go untold how many lives that saved, how may people were not victims and how many crimes were not perpetrated because of those proactive efforts of our police. I thank them for embracing Declan's law and moving forward with proactive high-visibility policing to keep people safe.

We also know that the bail reform has been working well. We are seeing positive results and have from the start. The number of people on remand has increased by 6.5%. We have delivered a 10.2% drop in the number of victims. Last year under the CLP there were 2,737 fewer Territorians victimised compared with the year before under Labor. Thousands of people were safer under a CLP government, and we have only just begun.

We recognise, and continually say, that there is much more work to do, and the community knows that as well. People stand with us on this issue. They can see the changes we made, the laws we passed and our commitment to this issue, police and Corrections because we have budgeted that change.

We have reinforced through laws and with leadership at the top that this is the most important priority for us. It was our number one priority on coming to government. I confirm at every opportunity that it remains our number one priority. Community safety must come above everything else because nothing good comes from a society that is plagued by crime. This is why our commitment to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle is so important. It starts with community safety and everything flourishes from there.

We have taken a range of other measures. Declan's law is one critical flagship part of what we have done to address crime across the Territory, but we have also implemented boot camps and have nearly finished building a remand centre for youths in Alice Springs. We have bail support accommodation and a new work camp in Katherine at CDU to get people in a better position to leave prison with the opportunity to get a job. We have mandatory minimum sentencing for assaults on frontline workers. We lowered the age of criminal responsibility. We increased our law and order personnel; I think we ended up with another 200 police last year and more than 200 Corrections officers, plus the G4S staff in support. We have more prosecutors and judges. We have supported the entire system, including Legal Aid with unprecedented, secure, long-term funding, which Labor failed to do.

The Opposition Leader was the Attorney-General and was in government for the last two terms. Labor did nothing.

We changed the length of time for banned drinker orders to give people who cause harm in our community more opportunity to be off the grog.

The crime statistics Territory-wide are looking promising. Let us compare January to December last year with January to December the year before. That is comparing a full CLP year with a full Labor year, using the same crime statistic calculations, the same SerPro system and the same people in AGD—those wonderful people who do all the statistical work—everything is the same. The only change is a different government with a better vision and a commitment to community safety. For the community that delivered house break-ins being down by 32%; commercial break-ins down by 28%; motor vehicle theft down by 15%; and assaults down by 6%.

A crime that increased 81% on Labor's watch is now down by 3% Territory-wide—that is, the scourge of domestic violence. In Alice Springs alone domestic violence is down by 16%. They are enormous numbers, yet those opposite continue to criticise us for our response to domestic and family violence. Their response to domestic and family violence increased that crime by 81%. It is people like Kumarn Rubuntja who paid the price for that, along with many other women.

Unlike Labor we will not sit idle; we will challenge the status quo. We put in place new measures. We have the courage to review what service providers are doing, whether they are delivering and whether that is money well spent. We will focus on outcomes, not just dollars, because Labor's measure of success was how much of a dollar figure it put next to something and not whether the program worked or had KPIs to measure how someone was meant to spend that money. Labor members governed by press release; as long as it was written on a piece of paper that went out to journalists, as far as they were concerned, the job was done. That could not be in starker contrast to our government, and I am proud of that.

This is our year of growth, certainty and security. We want to see downward pressure—that downward trend—on crime stats continue because it means people are safer. There is always more work to do, and we know we owe it to Declan and Linford to do it. We owe it to Territorians not to lose sight of this important job we have to do. So many people's lives were destroyed in the time under Labor. I think of international student Sifat, whose life was taken, and of baby Antonia, who took a terrible knock to the head in a terrifying ordeal for the Siguenza family, who have now left Alice Springs. The trail of destruction, trauma and carnage is enduring; it stays with people in one form or another. We are motivated every day to make sure that as few Territorians as possible go through that pain, suffering and trauma.

We thank Samara and Bridget; their sacrifice has led to something bigger, and Declan leaves a legacy.

This morning I went with the Attorney-General and the Member for Sanderson to Declan's memorial at his workplace where he was killed. We laid flowers and—Samara, if you are watching—I put a cute little green frog on the stone. We remember him. We thank Samara and Bridget for allowing us to make sure that

Declan's law is not only important for our community ongoing but also an important way to remember someone who should still be with us.

I move that the report be noted.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, today is a day to remember Declan Laverty, a young man whose life was full of promise and who was taken from us far too soon. He was murdered by a man who was out on bail with a knife. That was three years ago. Declan was more than a name in the news; he was a son, brother, colleague and friend. He had dreams, plans and a life to live. On that day we all felt the shock, grief and anger that comes with something so wrong and unfair.

Today we also remember Declan's friends and family, including his brave and courageous mum, Samara Laverty, and his sister, Bridget. I spoke to Samara a few days ago to check in with her and let her know that we would be talking about Declan in parliament today. I know you are watching, Samara, and I hope that Bridget joins you as well; you spoke about how you might do that together. I thank you for the courage you had three years ago which you continue to have today. I know how much work and advocacy you are doing not just in the Northern Territory but across Australia, the people you are meeting and the work you are doing to try to ensure that this does not happen to somebody else's family. I applaud and support you for all the work that you do.

Three years ago Declan's tragic murder mobilised Territorians, who were outraged, heartbroken and scared of what the Territory had become. Thousands of Territorians demanded change. The collective voices of families, friends, neighbours and everyday Territorians who came to the steps of Parliament House told the Labor government, 'Enough is enough', but it was the resolve and voice of heartbroken mother, Samara, which finally broke through the politics and the noise. It was the birthplace of Declan's law.

Declan's law is simple in purpose but profound in meaning. It says loud and clear that the safety of Territorians matters above all else. Declan's law was a promise that things would change. The tragic loss of that one young life would save many others.

The protections that the CLP government brought in during the first sittings, after being elected with a resounding landslide, was the start of Declan's law, and it continues. It was robust, comprehensive, hard and fast. We pushed through those laws on urgency in the first sitting deliberately to make sure that Territorians knew how serious we were about community safety and ensuring that Declan's tragic loss was not in vain.

I remind Territorians that several pieces of legislation were passed during that sitting, and there have been several more since that time, including legislation to:

- deal with the revolving door of bail, which we saw under Labor
- strengthen police powers to protect the community and hold repeat and serious offenders accountable
- strengthen bail for youths and adults, which Labor watered down
- bring back breach of bail as an offence
- create Declan's law, which expanded police powers to detect and respond to knife crime.

That huge piece of work was done to make sure that Territorians were safe.

Today is about Declan, because we are honouring his loss three years ago, but I will also mention a few other Territorians who tragically lost their lives at the hands of criminals. This includes Sifat, a Bangladeshi student who had his whole life ahead of him and came to the Northern Territory to study, far away from home and his family. He was tragically murdered. Mr Feick, the Nightcliff grocery owner, was tragically murdered at the front of his store whilst working. Antonia, the Siguenza baby, was assaulted in a horrific set of circumstances. You get a sense of the profound impact when people—like Samara and others who came in support of Sifat, Mr Feick and baby Antonia—come together and ask for action. That is what we have done.

In the first 12 months since Declan's law was created, and other law changes since, the number of people who have been refused bail has increased by 22%. That is fewer people out on the street after they have committed a crime, being able to cause more crime. There have been 20,000 people scanned and wanded by police, with 296 dangerous weapons seized; that is crime prevention. Those weapons are off the street.

Territory-wide, victims of crime have reduced by 10.2%, which is 2,737 fewer victims of crime under the CLP government compared with under the Labor government.

Across the Territory statistics are showing a downward trend. Robbery offences are down by 20%; residential break-ins are down by 32%; commercial break-ins are down by 28%; motor vehicle theft is down by 15%; and domestic violence, which is a scourge on our society and increased by 81% under Labor, is now down by 3%—a small number but a huge impact for Territorians.

Alice Springs had a hard run over the last few years and was in the headlines for all the wrong reasons; we are turning that around. In Alice Springs total offences against the person reduced by 23% and residential break-ins reduced by 40%.

These statistics represent real Territorians who were victims of crime, and that number is dropping. We have always said that there is more to do, and we will keep doing it. Territorians know by now that if something needs to change, we will be the government that changes it. We are not afraid to have the hard conversations and make the law changes.

For Declan and his family—his mother, Samara, and sister, Bridget—there is no law, reform or words we say that will bring back Declan, but we will never forget him. He is the human face of the years of crime crisis under Labor. He is also the human face behind the headlines; he was in the media across the nation. Today we remember him as being full of life and promise, and many people loved him. We remember the community voice and outrage that sparked action. People have the power to instil change, and we experienced that. For Samara, Bridget and all Territorians, we will stay the course. We know there is much more work to be done to reduce crime.

Declan's life was tragically cut short, but his legacy is long. We have passed laws and will bring forward reforms. He will always be in our hearts and in the heart of every Territorian because nobody should ever have to endure that loss. We will continue to ensure that there is certainty for victims. There are many changes in that space. There will be consequences for offenders and confidence in our justice system. We will have real outcomes for every Territorian and family who deserves to feel safe in their home, at work, on the streets and in their community. That is Declan Laverty's legacy.

Today we went to the Airport Tavern BWS where three years ago Declan's life was lost. The Chief Minister, the minister for People and I laid flowers, and we remembered. I think it was the Chief Minister who said to Declan, 'You're doing a really good job, mate', which was touching because he has changed so many Territorians' lives. The Chief Minister laid down a little frog as well, which was cute and fitting.

That is Declan's legacy. We will always remember him.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, Territory Labor stands firmly in support of community safety. In doing so we support measures that will have a lasting positive impact on Territorians and ensure that all our communities we represent in the 25 seats of this Assembly are treated with dignity and equity.

I acknowledge today is the anniversary of Declan Laverty's death and that the impact of his loss on his family and our community is ongoing.

It is also worth acknowledging that today is Close the Gap Day.

We need much more than punitive measures for long-lasting change for community safety in the Northern Territory. We need stronger investment in measures that improve community safety and prevent crime occurring in the first place. We need strong measures to support victims, families and communities to thrive. We need to focus on rehabilitation for offenders so that we can stop the cycle of offending.

Every Territorian deserves to be safe. My constituents of Arnhem agree that community safety is a serious concern for them, but we will not hear the CLP talk about them.

Legislative reform and punitive measures are only one element of community safety. The CLP has a one-track mind as it continues to focus on this one-trick pony. It will not create long-term change for the better. All the evidence points to that, but the CLP knows better than the experts.

If we want real and lasting improvement for all Territorians we need health, housing, education and employment services that support and meet the needs of our communities. Prevention, early intervention, accountability and rehabilitation are at the core of improving community safety. We have not seen nearly

enough investment in and focus on prevention, the community-led programs that should be the real driver of long-lasting change and the frontline services that do the hard day-to-day work on the ground across the Northern Territory.

The government could do much more to prevent more victims experiencing crime. Let us look at the measures in the preventive space that have been tried, tested and proven to work to reduce crime and improve community safety.

The CLP scrapped $4m from the Aboriginal Justice Agreement budget and has walked away from that agreement. Only five of the 20 Aboriginal law and justice groups are operating.

In my electorate of Arnhem we can look at the success of the Anindilyakwa cultural rehabilitation centre, a grassroots law and justice group at its best. The Territory deserves a government that is serious about community safety. Territorians want more investment in these services and partnering with communities, ensuring that culturally safe, place-based responses are available no matter where they live. Instead, we are seeing a failure by the CLP government to invest in the supports that will help to stabilise families, keep our children engaged in education and prevent people from entering the justice system in the first place.

We are still waiting to see that the CLP will ensure children and young people will get the help that they need to address their behaviours and learn from their mistakes. We know that diversion programs, especially out bush, on country and in our remote communities, have some of the biggest success rates. The CLP government cut funding for these important diversion programs. The CLP government also rejected funding for place-based programs, which work directly with victims, families and communities to address antisocial behaviours.

The CLP's youth diversion model was strongly rejected by stakeholders as lacking in measures that would increase community safety and lacking a foundation of evidence. That is from the community; people rejected the CLP government's plans and that model.

Danila Dilba Health Services unfortunately no longer operates to support Aboriginal children and young people in detention in Holtze; they no longer have access to culturally appropriate, comprehensive healthcare in detention. This is a failure through the lack of will by the government to listen to the experts in the field. The CLP terminated the contract for First Step residential youth justice providers. The CLP closed the purpose-built Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre, which I understand has recently reopened.

If our Territory is serious about reducing crime we must be serious about together addressing its causes, and that means backing our community, not overlooking it.

Territory Labor stands firmly for community safety. In doing so we support all the measures to make a long-lasting impact on fellow Territorians.

Our Labor team believes that improving the lives of all Territorians—from urban centres to regional centres, remote communities and our beautiful homelands—needs significant investment in housing reform, easing rental stress, increasing social housing stock and housing affordability.

Community-based support is essential to helping people with unmet health, disability, education and employment needs. This will drive lasting change. Culturally safe preventive and early intervention services and programs and accessible place-based service delivery assist Territorians to get the help they need before harm can occur or escalate. Community-based alternatives are more effective than incarceration and usually cost less, believe it or not; the evidence and experts say so, so we believe them. They are far more effective at repairing relationships and for true restorative justice.

There is an urgent need to build the workforce to improve health assessments and diagnoses in the community and, when in contact with the justice system, in a timely way to improve rehabilitation and lessen reoffending that causes the cycle in and out of the justice system.

Although legislation is important in holding DFSV perpetrators to account, it is not the only answer. Our Territory Labor team knows that legislation brings little comfort to women and children experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. Territorians need and deserve ongoing funding for a domestic, family and sexual violence co-responder model. The evidence is clear that our communities deserve a new approach to the police-led first response model, which is not having a positive impact in the long term in the Territory. Alternatively, the co-responder approach works, and our community has told us that this is what it wants. This approach keeps people safer, reduces harm in our community and puts care and dignity at the centre of the model.

Our Territory communities on the ground know what works best for them; they know the answers and want to be part of the solution in managing complex health and social challenges. Our Territory Labor team believes that our communities are the best people for the job when it comes to locally led solutions in the justice space.

The CLP failed to act on recommendations of the Northern Territory coronial into domestic, family and sexual violence. The CLP cut $6.5m from Dawn House and $3m from the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre, which is a shame; scrapped any commitment from the NT Government for local decision-making; abandoned the treaty process which began under Labor in 2018; and has almost no new funding for frontline community-led domestic, family and sexual violence prevention programs.

The CLP says that it is about community safety, but actions speak louder than words. A total of 18% of the $36m has been directed back into the government-run Circuit Breaker Program with no child specialist domestic, family and sexual violence component, no public data on outcomes and no documented theory of change. How are we supposed to believe that any of this investment or movement of money will make a change for community safety in the long run? We remain sceptical.

There are only two men's behaviour change programs for the 250,000-plus population of the Northern Territory. No new remote locations have been identified for a specialist co-responder service, and we do not even know whether the government is interested in doing any work in remote areas. The government's actions definitely speak louder than words when it does not go out bush and listen to the traditional owners, community leaders and service providers who deal with these complex issues at the coalface, particularly harm in our communities. Remote Territorians have the will and want to be a part of the solution when it comes to long-term community safety approaches and models.

Territorians deserve much more to be done to address the health and wellbeing needs of incarcerated Territorians, which is essential when we look at the evidence for rehabilitation. Our prison system is operating over capacity and that level of overcrowding places enormous strain on the Corrections officers, health staff and service providers working in our correctional facilities. This is not a long-lasting or sustainable solution for anyone. We know that prisoners are not getting access to essential health and therapeutic services that are critical for successful rehabilitation. A number of health and therapeutic support positions in youth detention are vacant.

We know that the majority of detainees are not successfully engaging in the Sentenced to a Skill program, alcohol and other drugs programs and therapeutic services that address domestic, family and sexual violence behaviours through education. Only 10% of the prison population will be supported this year to access work programs. What about the other 90%?

Ms Boothby: That is more than your programs.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Ms UIBO: I heard the Attorney-General. She should be ashamed that she is not doing more about justice, rehabilitation and investing in long-term community safety solutions.

What happens to the other 90% of the prison population? Do the maths. The CLP celebrates that there are 3,000 people locked up in Territory prisons and correctional services, but only 300—ladies and gentlemen, anyone listening out there—of them will have access to programs. What about the other 2,700 prisoners? There is no response, thinking, approaches or models that will deal with the majority, 90%, of people in correctional facilities in the Northern Territory. The CLP government should be ashamed that it is not doing more about community safety.

We know that locking up more people without the proper supports to turn their lives around does not make our community safer; in fact, it will do the opposite. It increases the likelihood of reoffending, drives long-term costs in our justice and health systems and undermines the social cohesion we want to see across all our communities in the Northern Territory.

Where is the investment for support services that work with children and families on their unmet health needs, unstable or unsafe housing, disengagement from education, involvement with child protection or experience with family violence? Where is the access to place-based culturally safe support services? Where is all that from the government? Crickets over there.

Where is the funding to support and grow our remote workforce? Where is the investment in the Territorians whom we all serve across the Northern Territory? Our remote communities, from Wadeye to Papunya in the Central Desert, are where the challenges are often greatest and the supports are often hardest to access.

Legal services are operating under considerable strain. Recently Legal Aid NT made the decision to cease legal representation for children as young as 10 due to budget cuts. Fancy that! The CLP lowered the age of criminal responsibility and now one of the legal services in the Northern Territory can no longer support access to justice for 10-year-olds due to cuts to its budget, which is controlled by the CLP. That is disgraceful. Legal services are operating under considerable strain caused by the CLP because it does not have a long-term solution. It is trying to do all the work that gets the headlines and glosses over things for a short time, but the hard work is investment in the long term as much as the short term, and the CLP is definitely short-sighted about that.

This ministerial report ultimately demonstrates that the CLP government is not focused on tackling the real drivers of crime or the issues impacting children, families and communities across the Territory. We see this clearly in the failure of the truancy program. This program is simply not delivering, and it reflects a government that is not serious about helping children and young people, as well as their families and carers, to overcome the real barriers that prevent them from engaging in school, whether it is housing instability, family circumstances or access to support services. School engagement is one of the strongest protective factors we have. When the government fails to get this right, the consequences flow into every other part of the system, particularly youth justice.

The CLP government continually fails to listen to and work with those on the front line, specifically the domestic, family and sexual violence prevention services; homelessness services and housing providers; and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that understand the needs of their communities better than anyone. These services are dealing with increasingly complex causes every day, yet they are not adequately supported or resourced to meet that demand.

The CLP government says that it is serious about community safety in the long run, but we know that its tough talk and short-term fixes will not add up to the long-term change we all want in the Northern Territory.

The CLP's utter disregard and disrespect for—the dropping of the ball—and the funding cuts to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement are appalling. This bipartisan agreement was signed off by Labor and the CLP, the two governing parties of the Northern Territory. CLP members should be ashamed. If they were really about community safety and long-term change, why didn't they make the Member for Barkly the Attorney-General? He actually cares, knows the challenges and has experience in this work; he did it for a lifetime in his profession. Why is he not the Attorney-General? He could drive something like the Aboriginal Justice Agreement for long-term community safety.

The decisions made by Lia Finocchiaro as the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory and the CLP leader show me that she is not about long-term change, working with Aboriginal leaders or investment in restorative justice in the NT; she is about tough talk, short-term fixes and bandaid solutions, not long-term investment.

We have asked the Attorney-General many times when and where she will visit our Aboriginal law and justice groups. We asked about the lack of investment in and the cutting of the budget for Aboriginal law and justice groups, which are locally led committees and groups in particular regions. Guess what? There are 73 Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The Labor government did the work to get five or six groups up and running, and we have not seen any of that from the CLP which has been in government for more than a year-and-a-half. Where is the work to increase the number of law and justice groups in the Northern Territory? These groups put the decision-making and emphasis on empowerment back into our communities to show real justice outcomes.

The Labor government introduced Community Courts, and we have seen that working in parts of the Northern Territory. God forbid the CLP decides to cut that and puts justice in the Territory back another three steps.

If 90% of men and 80% of women in our prisons are Aboriginal, where is the work from the bipartisan Aboriginal Justice Agreement? Is the CLP so small-minded and malicious that it cannot bring itself to have the investment and the respect of every person, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who has put their faith in that document to drive change in the Northern Territory for justice outcomes for the better when it comes to short, medium and long-term investment in justice. Where is that work? I did not hear a single bit of it in the Attorney-General's contribution to the ministerial report. She is the first law officer of the Northern Territory, so why is she not talking about the Aboriginal Justice Agreement?

There are 3,000 people in the Territory Corrections system. Let us do the maths and see how many of them are Aboriginal. Why is the Attorney-General continuously shirking her responsibility and not standing up against her leader to do her job as the first law officer of the Northern Territory and invest in our law and justice groups and Community Courts and make sure that our communities have more responsibility and empowerment for justice outcomes? Where is her work?

She could not even answer us last year when we asked her how many of the six law and justice groups she had bothered to visit? Only Groote—that is great; it is a beautiful part of the electorate for me, and I am happy. I remind the Attorney-General that it has the highest success rate because it is a locally led solution. If you want to replicate that you do not have to reinvent the past; do your homework, do your job, look at the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and invest in it properly so that we can have long-term community safety outcomes.

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

Motion agreed to; debate adjourned.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 50

Continued from 4 February 2026.

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

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, we support sensible reform, unlike what we saw earlier. This will be a change of tone—luckily for the CLP—because we believe that the Electrical Safety Amendment Bill reduces unnecessary red tape for small businesses.

We want to show that in parliament we can work together to do things. Small businesses are the backbone of the Territory economy, which we can all agree on.

Mr O'Gallagher: Hear, hear!

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Member for Karama.

When legislation can remove administrative burdens without compromising safety, it is worth supporting. The Labor opposition supports this Bill. Allowing electricians—excuse me; I will get it right.

Ms Boothby: You are on a roll.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Attorney-General, I am.

We support our electricians spending less time on paperwork—which is not everyone's favourite thing to do, believe it or not—so that they can be on the tools, which benefits industry and consumers. I acknowledge that the Member for Braitling is a former sparkie and the work that has been done to reduce the administrative burden for trades. This legislation will assist our tradespeople to focus on delivering important services across the NT while helping Territorians manage cost-of-living pressures.

Industry reforms must always be clearly defined, properly consulted on and supported by strong oversight mechanisms. Electrical safety legislation exists for a reason, and public safety always should remain the priority. Tradespeople need clarity so that they can understand exactly where the boundaries and the law sit so that they can concentrate on what they do best, being on the tools and doing what makes a big difference to our community. Good governance means ensuring legislation is practical, safe and supported by industry.

We should not stop at reducing red tape; we must also focus on growing the next generation of tradespeople. Australia and the Northern Territory are facing a shortage of skilled tradies. If we want to build homes, maintain infrastructure and grow the Territory economy we must train our workforce and attract people to live, invest and do business in the Territory.

The housing shortage in the Territory cannot be addressed without electricians, builders, plumbers and other skilled trades. Addressing the housing shortage requires a strong pipeline of trained tradespeople. Investment in apprentices, trainees, vocational education and trade pathways is essential to deliver more housing infrastructure.

Workforce development is particularly important in remote communities where access to tradespeople can be limited. Many residents living in government housing wait months for basic maintenance and repairs such as for leaking taps and small electrical fixes. This is why we need to ensure that there is a constant flow of skilled tradies in the NT.

This highlights the opportunity to rethink how our workforce capability is developed for our remote communities. When government housing projects are delivered in remote communities, there should be clear pathways to train and employ local residents alongside those construction projects. Training local people in basic trades and maintenance skills would allow communities to undertake small repairs themselves. This would reduce wait times for maintenance, lower the cost for government for those small jobs and create employment opportunities to support economic development in remote areas, keeping skills local.

The Albanese Labor government introduced fee-free TAFE, which provided thousands of free vocational training places across Australia, including in construction and electrical trades. The Commonwealth implemented the National Skills Agreement 2024–29, which funds vocational education, apprenticeships and workforce training across the country. Through initiatives such as the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF)—most people would have heard that acronym—and the National Housing Accord, the Commonwealth Government has linked housing construction targets with the need to grow the construction workforce across Australia.

The federal Labor government has also invested in TAFE centres of excellence to strengthen regional training and skills development. CDU (Charles Darwin University) and the Batchelor Institute have received training under this initiative.

The previous Labor government introduced the fee-free TAFE for Territory priority occupations program to support training in key industries, including construction and trades. The government expanded support for apprentices and trainees through the Territory's vocational education and training system, working with training providers and industry partners. Investments were made in Charles Darwin University trade training facilities and regional training programs to improve access to vocational education across the Northern Territory. From January 2023 to June 2024 there were 1,960 fee-free enrolments in the Northern Territory, with more than 1,040 being First Nations Australians. That is a great story.

Housing construction, investment, development and the maintenance of government housing all depend on our strong trades workforce. Continued investment in training, apprenticeships and employment pathways is needed to meet the Territory's workforce demands.

Our Labor team supports the reforms that reduce unnecessary red tape and help small businesses focus on the work they do best. Measures like this can help save time, reduce costs and allow tradespeople to spend more time on the tools, which means more things being fixed.

However, supporting small businesses must also go hand in hand with building the workforce that supports those industries. The Northern Territory needs more electricians, builders, plumbers and skilled tradespeople if we are serious about addressing the housing shortage and ensuring a good maintenance program for our infrastructure. This means investing in training, apprenticeships and employment pathways, including opportunities for people living in remote communities. Please do not forget our remote mob.

Supporting industry training is important for today, but building and continuing to support the trades workforce for tomorrow is essential if we want the Territory to grow.

I commend the legislation.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I just about fell off my chair before. I support the Bill to amend the *Electrical Safety Act 2022.* There must be a few foggy memories on the opposite side of the House. Even I had to google who the Attorney-General was on 29 March 2022, when Labor passed the original Bill and caused a whole heap of trouble. I will give you a hint, Madam Speaker: it was the Leader of the Opposition, who has just spoken, who did that Bill in the first place.

I am a former electrician, which the Leader of the Opposition rightly pointed out. I had to pull out my old speech because I had a number of issues with that Bill at that time. This is one of the few times that I can say that the issues which were raised then were found to be right. That legislation was overburdensome and led to additional paperwork, so we now have to amend the Act so that electricians in the Northern Territory can get on with the job of ensuring that their electrical work is safe.

I will go back over some of the main points when the legislation was initially passed because it is important to understand how we got here. When the original Bill was introduced in 2021 the then Attorney-General, the now Opposition Leader, said:

> *The overall purpose of the bill is directed at eliminating the human cost to individuals, families and the community of death, injury and destruction that can be caused by electricity. The purpose of the bill is to modernise the legislative framework for preventing persons from being killed or injured by electricity and preventing property from being destroyed or damaged by electricity.*

I agreed with that section of the then Attorney-General's speech.

It is important we acknowledge that a huge number of rules and regulations govern what can be done when we are conducting electrical work not only in the Northern Territory but also across Australia. AS/NZS 3000 is spoken of as the electricians' bible. It states where you can put power points; there are restrictions in regard to wet areas such as those in a bathroom or kitchen. This ensures that electrical work is safe for people to use in their everyday life. It is the bible we all work by, and it is important.

For those who do not understand what this Bill will achieve, a CoC (certificate of compliance) is issued to a client when someone conducts electrical work. Prior to 29 March 2022, for like-for-like work—I will speak about that shortly—generally a certificate of compliance did not have to be completed. As you can imagine, an electrician might go to 10 jobs throughout the day and conduct 10 bits of electrical work—everything from changing a light switch to the simple replacement of a power point which might be cracked or damaged. Obviously, we want to ensure that electrical work is compliant and safe to be utilised so that people are not electrocuted. Prior to 2022 that like-for-like replacement did not require a CoC.

When the original Bill was debated I spoke about the risks associated with people in offices, in ivory towers, making rules that they did not understand. They did not understand how that bible and the legislation would be interpreted by those working in the industry, and we were bang on.

After the legislation passed, WorkSafe did its job and read the changes to the legislation—I do not blame WorkSafe in any way; it interpreted the legislation exactly as I did sitting in this Chamber on 29 March 2022—and started requiring electricians to supply CoCs for each piece of work they did. That might not sound like much, but when I was an electrician there were jobs where filling out the paperwork took longer than the time taken to replace the power point or light switch. Guess what that meant? People on the ground, like Mary in Malak and Bob in Braitling, were being charged more. As legislators we always have to think about how the laws we put forward in this Chamber will impact on real Territorians.

I thank the Attorney-General and her department for putting forward a wonderful description of what this legislation does. What is a like-for-like electrical replacement? It is the replacement of a fitting or appliance in the same location as the old one and does not require alteration to the existing supply conductors or circuit protection. Such like-for-like replacements include replacing a double power point with another double power point, otherwise known as a 2 gang. If you were to replace a 2 gang with a 4 gang, which a lot of people like to do for their homes, especially in sheds—they say, 'Rather than having all these power boards and electrical leads, I will change a power point that might have two outlets to four'—it will not require a CoC, thanks to our Attorney-General, after these changes come into place.

It is wonderful to see common sense coming back to the Northern Territory, especially when it relates to these laws.

I highlight the importance of the consideration in detail process. For those sitting at home listening, quite often when we go through laws in this Chamber we have the consideration in detail process, during which opposition members, crossbench members and even members of the government can ask questions about the Bill to highlight the deficiencies or issues.

I distinctly remember in March 2022 standing on the other side of the Chamber, asking these very questions. At that time we were told that our concerns would not materialise. Today I am, unfortunately, speaking to an amendment Bill because those concerns were realised. Electricians came to us after these changes happened, saying that additional paperwork was occurring which was not meant to be captured under the legislation. That is an important part of what we are talking about. At the time the Labor government introduced its amendments, it did not believe that would change things. We raised our concerns, and those concerns were not heard. As a result it led to additional paperwork. Electricians had to fill out onerous paperwork, which was not intended. We raised those concerns in this Chamber and were told that this would

not happen, so it was not the intention of the Bill, but that is how it was interpreted by people working in the real world.

I thank the Attorney-General for fixing this legislation. For many people it might seem inconsequential, but people in the electrical industry across the Northern Territory interact with this every day. It will be welcomed by many in the industry. At a time when our government is cutting red tape and giving businesses certainty, this is 100% a legislative amendment that does that. I thank the Attorney-General for bringing it to parliament so that we can make those businesses' lives easier. We are getting out of the way of small business by cutting red tape and making improvements and efficiencies throughout the Northern Territory.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I love all the legislation this government brings. Sometimes a piece of legislation speaks to my heart, and this is one of those Bills. It is about ensuring the needs of Territorians are met and listening to the community.

We have responded where the previous government failed to listen. As the Member for Braitling said, the now Leader of the Opposition introduced the original Bill in 2021. The Labor government was told that it would have consequences, resulting in burdensome red tape and pressure being put on sparkies across the Territory. Labor said that it would be all right and would not have an impact. That goes to show that Labor members speak to the unions but not the tradies. They do not speak to the Territorians on the ground when they make their changes, but we do.

The Attorney-General, by first bringing in the exemption and now this legislation to enshrine that exemption, has been listening to Territorians. She listened to tradies across the Northern Territory, from Alice Springs to Katherine and my electorate, which is home to quite a large number of tradies. Tradies love the rural area; they have enough space for the shed, the workshop, the house, the pool and everything. It is a great place to live; I highly recommended if you are looking for somewhere else to live.

One of the first things the Attorney-General did was put in place the exemption, because if you are replacing a light switch with another light switch, a fan with another fan or a power point with another power point with no change to the underlying circuitry, why would another certificate of compliance need to be completed? It did not make sense.

We found that tradies were spending more time doing paperwork than real work, with no benefit to safety, regulation, compliance or any of that. It was purely because a decision was made in this Chamber without consulting those whom it would impact. Under the system brought in by the previous government, electricians had to complete paperwork in triplicate, lodge it with the regulator and keep records for up to 30 years, even for a simple job that takes 20 minutes.

Many of my friends have trades. I went to Taminmin, which is a great school known for producing some of the best tradies in the Territory. I am not a tradie; I do not pretend to be. I asked my sparkie mates, 'What does this mean?' When they explained to me that they spend more time filling in paperwork than doing some jobs, it seemed out of order. It did not make anyone safer; it just added costs which are passed on to Territorians because when a job takes an hour-and-a-half instead of an hour, they are billed for that. These costs are passed on to families, small businesses and the community and are likely passed on significantly to the government through infrastructure projects. That money is better off in Territorians' pockets, including families and small businesses.

These legislative changes will result in tradies spending more time working and less time doing paperwork, getting the Territory moving. We have a massive shortage of tradies in the Northern Territory. This means that more jobs can take place, easing a little the pressures and everlasting delays in trying to get someone out to fix something.

This is another reform that came from the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce, which we set up shortly after coming to government because we know that the best people to ask about cutting red tape and getting the Territory moving forward are the people who live it every day. It was a taskforce of industry people who have run businesses in the Northern Territory and knew what was going wrong.

We are seeing bit by bit the Northern Territory Government removing red tape while ensuring there is safety and underlying regulation. It is rewarding to be part of a government that listens to Territorians. When we hear people ask, 'Why do we have to do this?', instead of saying, 'Because that is the way it is', we think about it for a bit and decide whether it is necessary legislation for compliance or regulation.

The change that was brought in did not keep Territorians safer; it added more burdensome paperwork with no benefit to the Territory. If anything, it was a detriment.

In speaking to many sparkies across my electorate of Goyder and the Territory, I have yet to meet one who said, 'Do not do this'. Everyone I have spoken to—I am talking in the high dozens at this point—has said, 'This is a great change. Good on you, mate. Thank you.' I think a lot of them thought I did it personally. I am sometimes poor at correcting them that it is the fantastic work of the Attorney-General. I am yet to meet one who says, 'No, do not do this'. That speaks volumes about how common sense this change is. It is good policy. It removes the red tape that does not do anything except create problems. It supports our tradies to get on with the job; sparkies across the Territory to do more work and charge people slightly less, hopefully; and getting the entire Territory economy moving forward.

In this year of growth, certainty and security, this is part of that platform we have seen in the changes we made in this sittings and previous sittings. We will continue to implement the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce recommendations to ensure that across the Territory where red tape is not needed, we will cut it.

It is interesting that the Leader of the Opposition, the person who introduced this red tape, is proudly supporting this Bill and saying that it is time to cut the red tape. I cannot think of a good enough analogy for how much that made me smile, knowing that at least finally those opposite might have seen the light—that not everything they did when they were in power was good for the Territory. Hopefully, this is the start of the wave of change in the opposition, recognising that not everything they forced onto the Territory for eight years was good, because it did not help the economy or population grow or keep the Territory safe. I look forward to hearing any further contributions from the opposition on how great this Bill is because I firmly believe it is a great Bill.

I will speak quickly about what a like-for-like replacement is in a bit more detail. The Member for Braitling touched on it.

A like-for-like replacement is when you replace a fitting or appliance in the same location as the old one and it does not require alteration to the existing supply conductors or circuit protection. Examples include replacing a double power point with another double power point of a different brand; replacing an Edison screw oyster light with a new LED oyster light; replacing an old electric cooktop that has a mechanical dial operation with an electronically controlled cooktop; replacing an existing isolator with a larger or lockable isolator; and especially in the Top End—Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether it is the same in Alice Springs, although I know it gets warm down there—replacing a failed five-kilowatt air conditioner with another five-kilowatt air conditioner or one of lower capacity.

Most importantly, this applies only to like-for-like replacements. If someone is upgrading their air-conditioning system, installing a fan with a light where previously there was not one or changing how much power is drawn, they will still need a certificate of compliance for that work.

This means that when there is risk and there are changes the certificate work is still undertaken, but when there is very little to no risk, people no longer have to do that work.

The purpose of a certificate of compliance is to certify that the electrical work has been tested to be safe from electrical risk and it complies with the Act and relevant standards. It is a legal document that serves as a self-certification record of the electrical work and further acts as a warranty for consumers. A CoC confirms that electrical work was performed by a licensed professional and meets statutory safety requirements.

When there is no material change in the electrical risk associated with the work that is exempted within the scope of this Bill, there is no additional risk by not doing a certificate of compliance for a like-for-like replacement. There is no risk to Territorians from this exemption; it purely takes what should be a 15-minute job, instead of being half-an-hour with all the paperwork—I understand they could do it digitally, but it did not really work and is a bit messy still—back to being a 15-minute job so that the tradie can pack up their tools and go to the next job. They can do more in a day.

Some larger companies found that the equivalent man-hours required just to do the certificates of compliance for like-for-like replacements were two or three full-time positions a month. Those man-hours can now be reallocated to getting the Territory moving forward. There will be an awful lot of work, especially for sparkies, in flooded regions across the Territory where houses have been inundated up to the roof and everything has to be replaced. If this Bill means that there is slightly more availability for tradies to undertake that work, it is well worth it.

It is wonderful to be part of a government that consults and listens to the community and the people this legislation affects. The Attorney-General consulted extensively with electrical industry peak bodies, individual tradies, small businesses, sole traders and other people whom this change will impact directly. Time and again the Attorney-General heard, 'Thank you; this makes sense.' I have not heard of anyone saying, 'Do not do this', except potentially the unions because they would rather their members spend more time doing paperwork than work; they are living in their own la-la land.

I 100% commend this Bill and condemn those who brought in the original changes. They have now seen the CLP light and the fantastic work that the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce did to ensure we get rid of red tape.

Across Australia and the world politicians constantly talk about cutting red tape; we hear, 'Red tape this and red tape that'. However, in the Territory we are actually removing red tape and delivering for Territorians. For us cutting red tape is not just a fun slogan to say; it is a way of life. It is about ensuring that Territorians can get on with their jobs with the government having as little interference as possible, staying out of their lives.

We still have the underpinning safety regulations to make sure that work is compliant. There are minimum standards for sparkies' work, but, unfortunately, it does not prescribe that they pick up their cable ties, which is a common complaint about sparkies. If you have had them onsite you know that they never clean up the cable ties, but they do everything to the safety standards needed.

Again I 100% commend this Bill. Territorians can see how hard the CLP government is working to remove red tape and back them to get on with their jobs.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I will try to be concise, taking a leaf out of your own book. It is a pleasure to support the Electrical Safety Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 50.

Our government supports local business. I repeatedly say that our small to medium enterprises are the heart and soul of our economy. The Leader of the Opposition used the phrase 'backbone', which is good; her sentiments are in the right direction, so I give her credit for that. Our government is committed to creating a business environment that allows small to medium enterprises, the heart and soul of our economy, to thrive and grow. That includes removing unnecessary regulation that restricts their ability to do so and reduces their productivity.

We talk to and listen to businesses because they understand what the roadblocks are. Our Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce is a clear example of this listening. There are about 48 recommendations from the taskforce that this government has committed to implementing by mid-July, and this amendment is one of them. When we listen to businesses we also act; we do not just listen with a deaf ear. The Attorney-General can take a lot of credit for that.

The Member for Johnston is keen on consultation. In addition to our Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce, like the Member for Goyder, I reach out and talk to businesses in my electorate, including electricians, to get their direct feedback. That includes local electrician Nyell Crocker whose electrical and air-conditioning business is called The Cool Room.

This week Nyell installed a replacement fan in my house, so I have firsthand experience of this. While he was there I spoke to him by phone, and when he was booking to come in. I asked him, 'What do you think about this amendment Bill and getting rid of the need to do a certificate of compliance?' He said, 'Fantastic'. I asked him why. He said, 'It will free up my time. It will save me a lot of time during the day doing paperwork. In fact, Brian, I might be able to do one or more extra jobs during that day.' One or more extra jobs—that is productivity. Think of the extra customers who can get their jobs done a day or so earlier because he does not have to fill out all this paperwork. We need more of this.

He also looked a bit further ahead and said, 'I am also thinking of the work safety staff who have to help prepare the certificate of compliance. They do not have to waste their time on this anymore. They can focus on the real certificates of compliance required for new builds and so on; that is the important stuff.' That is productivity for not only his business but also the regulator. It is good, and that is why we support this.

Local business is important to me. I am about to put out my fifth newsletter; I am just finalising the draft. I have a lot of businesses in my electorate. I will hand-deliver my newsletter in Karama and Malak at the end of March and into April. I am still finalising the businesses that will be in it.

Businesses like the pharmacy, the Malak Supermarket, the hair salons, the nail places and NT Tyre Service all use electrical services and they can benefit from this productivity. If Nyell can come in and not have to

waste his time doing a certificate of compliance, it has a flow-on effect. We need more of that. I will have to see whether I can squeeze Nyell's company into this newsletter; if not, he will go into the next edition, because I promote local businesses.

I commend the Leader of the Opposition. From the start she said that she supports this Bill. That is fantastic. I give her full credit for that. Then I heard from the Member for Braitling that the Leader of the Opposition is the same person who introduced the restriction. It is typical of Labor to flip-flop. Luckily, this flip-flop is in the right direction; good on the Labor members.

I will speculate a little. Some changes are happening in the Labor Party with a new addition coming in. I wonder how that flip-flop will happen—maybe with the leadership. Who knows? If there happens to be a change of leadership in the Labor Party, will it be like for like? It better not be. Labor members had better get a certificate of compliance if they do.

VISITORS
Berry Springs Primary School

Madam SPEAKER: We have more children from the Berry Springs Primary School this morning in the gallery. On behalf of honourable members, I welcome you and hope you enjoy your time here. You look happy to be here. It is good to see.

Members: Hear, hear!

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank all the members who contributed to this important debate.

Hello to all the students from Berry Springs Primary School. Welcome to Parliament House. It is fantastic to have you here. Today we are talking about electricians and sparkies. Maybe some of your parents do that job or maybe when you grow up you would like to do that. Feel free to listen in, and let us know what you think.

This Bill is simple in its purpose, but it has an important impact. It establishes a permanent exemption from the requirement for electricians to issue a certificate of compliance for certain low-risk, like-for-like electrical work. It delivers on a clear recommendation of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce, and it forms part of our broader commitment to cut red tape, rebuild the economy and make the Northern Territory the best place to do business.

I will explain what that means in real life. Under the old system, if an electrician replaces a light fitting with an equivalent light fitting or swaps out a faulty oven for a new oven that does not require a change of wiring or load or circuit protection, they are required to complete a certificate of compliance. That means paperwork in triplicate, lodging documents with the electrical safety regulator and retaining records for up to 30 years.

For work that does not alter wiring and work where safety switches are already in place, that paperwork does not make the job any safer and it does not reduce risk. It increases the cost and frustration and takes tradies away from the next job. The cost does not disappear; it is passed on, of course, to customers—Territorians. It is passed on to the family replacing their hot water system, a pensioner needing a ceiling fan repaired before the Wet or a small cafe replacing a commercial appliance so that it can reopen the next morning.

This reform removes that unnecessary burden while keeping strong safety standards in place. The exemption applies only to low-risk, like-for-like work. If the wiring is altered, the load changes or circuit protection is modified, the certificate of compliance still applies. NT WorkSafe retains full compliance and enforcement powers.

Importantly, this reform has strong industry support. Owner of AJF Electrical, local Mr Allen Fanning, welcomed the reform. He said:

> *It might sound like a basic change, but this saves us from wasting time on paperwork which does not make routine work like changing appliances, fans or power points any safer if safety switches are already installed …*
>
> *It means we can spend more time on the job and building our business, saving customers money too.*

Members' contributions were well articulated. The Member for Braitling is a former sparkie. He knows exactly what it is like to have to be onsite doing jobs—most of the time he was on a roof somewhere, I think. It is hard work for our tradies. If we can save them a little time on the paperwork they have to do after they complete a job, it will mean a huge difference for them.

The Member for Goyder spoke about the sheer number of electricians and others he spoke to in his community when we introduced this legislation and how not one of them was against it. They were all supportive and thanked him. That is wonderful to hear because we genuinely wanted to get this right and listened to Territorians about what they were asking for.

I share with you all that when I introduced this legislation a couple of weeks ago, I was at the shopping centre on the weekend and one of our local sparkies who works out of Berrimah, I believe, came up to me and I got a big hug and kiss. He said, 'Thank you for bringing forward these reforms. It will make a huge difference.' He has a huge business employing lots of people. He is an award winner. I wonder whether anyone can guess who he is. I am proud of the fact that we have brought forward these changes to make a real difference.

Speaking of electricians, Member for Karama, there is young Nyell and his electrical business. It is important that he could speak to you and genuinely explain the savings that can be had for his business. He said that freeing up that time means he can probably do one or two extra jobs after finishing a previous job. That is huge for people. I have waited a long time for an electrician before. When you need them, you really need them. It is fantastic to hear that directly from Nyell. He mentioned that it frees up the regulator as well, which is huge. There is no point spending time doing paperwork for paperwork's sake; you want to make sure that it makes a real difference.

Thank you for those contributions. It shows that speaking to Territorians about the changes we make in this House really makes a big difference.

The fact that electricians can have more time on the tools and less time behind a desk means lower costs for customers. Of course, businesses have to on-charge; their time is money. Forwarding those costs can be a challenge for electricians, and then there is the productivity for those small businesses. There are 900 businesses that provide electrical work services across the Territory. That is literally thousands of tradies every day who are wiring homes, fitting out shops, upgrading schools, maintaining hospitals and helping to rebuild the economy.

It was interesting when the Member for Goyder touched on the fact that across the Territory, particularly in Katherine which is in the recovery phase after the floods, we need sparkies doing that work. Many homes and businesses were inundated with water, which means there could be live wires there and electrics that need to be looked at, fixed and checked to make sure they are safe enough for people to return to their businesses and homes. We do not want them doing paperwork for the sake of paperwork; we want them in communities like Katherine doing that important work.

Speaking of the 900 businesses across the Territory that do electrical work, when I became the Attorney-General one of the first things that happened was in regard to the law that the current Opposition Leader brought forward a couple of years ago when she was the Attorney-General. At that time electricians started to see the impact of having to do this extra paperwork. They wrote to the then Attorney-General, saying, 'Please do not make more paperwork; it is a cost to our business and Territorians. It does not make us any safer.' They were ignored by Labor. When I became Attorney-General I had a flurry of emails and phone calls. When I was out and about, people said, 'Please make this change. We have been asking for it. We did not think it was right when it was first introduced. It can be changed. It is simple; it does not make it unsafe.' We listened.

It was not just the electricians who were talking to us, and a few speakers mentioned this. The true catalyst, if you like, was when those electricians spoke to their industry group. The Chief Minister set up her Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce, which was made up of private sector businesspeople. The government asked the taskforce to let it know what could be changed to cut red tape and reduce the paperwork burden on business. We said, 'Speak to everybody and tell us what you need changed. Give us a big list, and we will change those things.'

The taskforce's Saying 'Yes' to Business report came out in May 2025. It is a lengthy report with lots of recommendations, letting us know exactly what needed to change. In principle, the government accepted most of those recommendations because we listened and said yes. Our agencies, led by the ministers, started making those changes.

The Chief Minister has promised that all those changes will be fully implemented by mid-July. We started to see that in the House this week, with a number of new pieces of legislation introduced which talk of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce. This Bill completes one of those pieces of work.

We are listening to the private sector and Territorians who work in this space—the people who know what it takes to do their work every day. We are a government that listens to what is needed and takes action to make that change.

We know that the economy will thrive from that; getting rid of unnecessary red tape means that businesses can be more productive, employ more people and grow our economy. Even a small business spending a couple of extra minutes a day on the tools instead of on paperwork makes a big difference over the year.

That taskforce was chaired by Mark Garraway, former President of the Property Council of Australia NT. I have heard Mark at a number of events. He and the Property Council have been vocal during the previous government's term and with us as well. I am proud to bring forward this legislation and, hopefully, have it passed. Thank you, Mark and all the people on the taskforce, for your work.

We have taken advice from that report. The taskforce identified 70 recommended actions to simplify approvals processes and remove barriers to investment. Sixty of those recommendations were fully accepted, and the work either has been done or is in the process of being done; 10 were accepted in principle, as there are nuances that have to be ironed out or further information is required from industry; and 48 recommendations have been fast-tracked within the first 12 months.

In 18 months our government has set a record for the number of pieces of legislation we have brought forward and the sheer volume and speed of our changes. This is because Territorians came to us before the election and after, through the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce, to tell us what they wanted, and we are making those changes. We are proud of that.

The taskforce was built around the six themes of modernising compliance requirements; reducing unnecessary regulatory touchpoints; enabling greater delegation and discretion; increasing regulatory certainty; driving system-wide improvements; and delivering effective regulatory stewardship.

This Bill sits squarely within that framework. It reduces unnecessary touchpoints and increases certainty for small business. It also allows our regulators to focus on higher-risk work, which is an important job.

I thank WorkSafe, which does a mountain of work in educating big and small businesses about what is needed to be safe and other regulatory requirements. WorkSafe has taken carriage of a large number of these recommendations, and I thank the WorkSafe staff for all their work in that space. We will meet the first 12-month deadline that we gave the regulator.

I thank the people who made submissions through the scrutiny committee process. Even though we received a lot of feedback in my office and from MLAs through their electorates, it was important to send the Bill to the scrutiny committee to get last-minute feedback from anyone else.

Master Electricians Australia, a peak industry association representing electrical contractors across the country, formally supported the amendment. It commended the Northern Territory Government for progressing the Bill promptly to implement practical improvements to certificate of compliance requirements for like-for-like replacements. It acknowledged the constructive consultation with WorkSafe NT and the regulator's responsiveness to industry concerns. Master Electricians Australia has been advocating for electrical contractors for more than 80 years, so I think it knows what it is doing. Master Electricians Australia is nationally recognised and the leading voice for industry. When an organisation of that standing and all the electricians in the Territory who came to us throughout that period say that it is right, we know we are on to something.

Territorians may remember that our goal is to cut red tape and approval timeframes by 50%. The work is monumental, and I do not think people fully understand that. Think about some of the work we have done, and more is to come.

We appointed the Territory Coordinator, which is the most significant reform for our economy that the Territory has ever seen. It will unlock huge projects and areas of development across the Territory. This will ensure red-tape creep will not come back.

We removed unnecessary third-party merits reviews because that caused so much cost and delays that it did not improve any outcomes; in fact, I would argue it made them a lot worse.

We digitised over 100 small business forms. Filling out paperwork for government is the most annoying thing as a business owner, especially a small business owner. They are the ones who work all day, looking after clients and customers. They start the paperwork, wages and any administrative things they have to do, including looking at what is happening the next day, after the kids have gone to bed. It is a late night for business owners, especially small business owners, so if we can remove a little of that time from their day by putting forms online and digitising them, that is huge.

We are measuring all this and mandating the outcomes. When we change something we make sure it is implemented fully and then we go back and check whether the reforms, cutting of red tape and reducing the number of forms and barriers are making a difference to businesses and Territorians. Those reports will be monitored by ministers and across Cabinet because we are serious about this. It is not just administration; it is true reform to change the Territory.

My legislation adds to the reform we are doing. Another important part of that reform is payroll tax for business and the economy. It was a huge piece of work. I remember being proud of our team when we took payroll tax to the election. People had been asking for a review of payroll tax for at least a decade; it had not been changed.

When we came to government and the Treasurer increased the payroll tax threshold to $2.5m—which is the best in the nation—it was exciting. It was exciting for people around the nation because they could look to the Territory as the place to do business, which is exactly what we want them to do. It was also exciting for our local businesses, especially those on that middle rung of the business ladder, because if they grow a little because the pressure of having to pay payroll tax has been relieved, it will make a huge impact on our economy. We want our economy to go forward and grow, not go backwards. That payroll tax reform was a huge piece of work, and a huge credit goes to the Treasurer for doing that.

I have spoken a lot about small businesses. I have done that deliberately because they make up about 99% of all businesses in the Northern Territory. That is a huge proportion of the economic makeup of the Northern Territory, so every bit of reform and change that we can make—whether it is in here or to regulations, agencies and processes to support those small businesses—makes a difference to our economy.

There is a number of key measures under our Rebuilding the Economy strategy to ensure we keep growing. We have met a couple of them. Even the news about CommSec reports—under Labor, every quarter we used to watch those reports come in and see that we were dead last on all accounts. That was shameful. Labor would not listen about the economy. I do not know what Labor members thought. It was almost like they were hoping and praying that the economy would get better, but that is not how the economy works. You need to change the framework, regulations and how you do business to give business certainty.

The work we have done in that space made a difference. The CommSec report states that we have gone from last to fourth place. That is a huge uptick, and it is all thanks to the work that our government is doing and the businesses that can see the light. They can see that we are listening to them and making changes.

We talked about crime this morning. Business owners saw the immediate actions we took to reduce crime. That made a big difference to their lives and businesses. They could not attract staff and get them to stay in the Territory.

We are trying to grow our population, so we have to work on crime. In our year of growth, certainty and security we are still working on crime and have more work to be done, but we have pivoted to rebuilding the economy. An important part of that is the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce.

I am grateful to the department staff who pulled this legislation together. I am grateful to the people on the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce and the businesses, industry groups and other people who contributed.

I also thank the WorkSafe staff, who are doing a mountain of work. Sometimes WorkSafe is tough to deal with because it is the regulator to make sure people are safe, but its staff also spend a lot of time educating businesses on prevention. I am grateful to WorkSafe for that.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

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

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

MOTION
Note Statement – The Year Ahead 2026

Continued from 18 March 2026.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, it seems so long ago that I wrote this speech, and so much water has been under the bridge—and over bridges, literally. A lot of things have been happening. It is only March and I feel like it is almost December; it has been such a year.

I will speak about the year ahead not only for my electorate of Katherine but also in my role as the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Early Childhood Education, outlining the opportunities before us as a government.

We will continue the important work of reducing crime, rebuilding our economy and restoring our beautiful lifestyle that Territorians know, value and love.

This year is about growth, certainty and security. First and foremost, every Territorian has a fundamental right to feel safe in their homes, workplaces and communities.

I acknowledge that today is the third anniversary of Declan's passing, which was a catalyst for many of the changes we made upon coming to government almost two years ago.

I am pleased to acknowledge the significant reduction in crime across the Territory and more specifically throughout the Big Rivers region. These results are due to the tireless work of NT Police and the success of Operation Ludlow over the Christmas period, led by Commander Terry Zhang. Housing, Circuit Breaker and Department of People, Sport and Culture teams worked with the police. All played a significant role in the strong results delivered over the Christmas holiday period in Katherine. Let me be clear that this does not mean the job is done. There is still much work to do, but the direction is right and the results are real.

Since the launch of Operation Ludlow II on 4 December 2025, antisocial behaviour has fallen by 33% from 637 incidents in previous years to 423 this year over the holiday period. That is a clear measurable improvement and, importantly, local business owners are telling me they feel safer as a result. This coordinated approach from Operation Ludlow II delivered strong outcomes in the eight weeks of that December–January period. There were 167 arrests; 32 summonses; 137 people taken into protective custody; 167 banned drinker orders; 188 licensed premises checks; 85 infringement notices; 642 litres of alcohol tipped out; and 10 drone flights targeting trouble hotspots. These results do not happen by accident; they are the product of strong policing, targeted operations and a government that is serious about community safety.

I thank the dedicated teams from Children and Families; NT Housing; Community Corrections; Education and Training; People, Sport and Culture; the Katherine Town Council; Kalano Community Association; and DTBAR. Reducing crime, restoring our lifestyle and rebuilding our economy requires a whole-of-government approach and a whole-of-community effort, and we saw that over that period.

The most recent stats show that alcohol-related assaults are down by 8%. The statistics over the last 12 months in Katherine show that burglaries—house break-ins—are down by 12% and commercial break-in offences are down by 27%. This is due to the consistent proactive policing approach across the Territory and in Katherine. Police do that hard work every day when they put on their uniforms.

Restoring our lifestyle also means celebrating who we are and where we come from. This year Katherine proudly celebrates its centenary—100 years since the establishment of our centre of the universe. It has certainly been the centre of everyone's universe recently. I hope we get cleaned up to put on an amazing party on 1 July this year.

Sitting at the crossroads of north, south, east and west, Katherine is the heart and soul of the outback. Our community is genuine, hardworking, kind and giving. From the natural beauty of Katherine Gorge to our strong community spirit, Katherine represents the best of the Territory lifestyle and continues to draw visitors from across Australia and the world.

The Katherine Town Council centenary advisory committee has planned a full calendar of historical exhibitions, cultural events and community celebrations throughout 2026. Highlights include the limited edition centenary numberplates featuring our iconic railway bridge, a new centenary logo designed by local artist Kim Maskell and a range of community gatherings to mark this important milestone in Territory history which will be centred on Territory Day, 1 July.

Katherine and Darwin will see the return of Exercise Pitch Black from 17 July to 7 August. This world-class biennial military exercise showcases the Northern Territory on the global stage. In 2024 we hosted 20 nations, and once again Territorians will see our strong partnerships, clear skies and unmistakeable Territory lifestyle on display. Everyone needs to get their earplugs ready, but in Katherine we love the F-35s. Yes, it may keep you up a little at night and it may be more difficult to get the baby to sleep, but get the earplugs out, everyone; there is freedom in that noise.

As part of our commitment to reduce crime we introduced police public safety officers, embedding former housing and public safety transport officers into the NT Police Force. This will strengthen the frontline presence, combat antisocial behaviour and improve conviction rates through enhanced investigative powers. A new squad of 24 officers have commenced their 18-week training program. This is a practical and positive step toward safer communities, which every Territorian deserves in our year of growth, certainty and security.

I acknowledge the outstanding work of staff who travelled from the Y in Darwin to support Katherine youth services through the holiday programs. They offered support through new ways—Back2School support, school holiday activities, Friday night drop-ins and the Katherine Regional Youth Group. I give a big shout-out to the Y Uptop, which did a fantastic job.

I attended a drop-in night and saw firsthand the impact the staff had, with kids engaged, having fun, watching movies, playing pool and table tennis, skating, sharing a hot meal and being safely transported home, thanks to Kalano Community Association. These programs are not just activities; they change lives.

I thank Ciara and Johnno who travelled from the Y Uptop to help, and all the police who gathered at the drop-in nights. You do not want the first time you see police to be on your doorstep or because you have done something wrong, so it was great to see them interacting with those youths on the drop-in nights.

Child safety remains a top priority for this government. My office has devised a plan off the back of the tragic death of Ebony Thompson. The Early Childhood Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan will ensure early childhood services meet and exceed national quality standards, particularly in health and safety. It is unacceptable for services to breach these standards, and regulators must do their due diligence.

I have said it before and will say it again: child safety is no accident. In fact, it is everyone's responsibility.

Under our Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan, we have set a target for all services to meet or exceed quality area 2 by 30 June this year. I am pleased to report that 90% had already achieved this by early March 2026. We are well on the way to blowing our figures out of the ballpark. Even more encouraging, the broader target of 85% of services meeting or exceeding in all seven quality areas by December 2026 has already been surpassed, with centres reaching 87% by March this year.

Having that focus on the early childhood teams and making sure that our compliance officers are going out to see centres has made a difference, as well as having more staff to do that role.

We have strengthened the regulator by increasing the number of authorised officers within QECNT and adding educators to support services that need additional assistance. This is about building capacity and capability across the sector.

When we came to government not a single fine or penalty had been issued in eight years. Our government has a plan, and we are delivering it. That is what a responsible government does.

I recently participated in a compliance check with QECNT officers at a Darwin centre. Our government is committed to lifting the quality and safety for our youngest and most vulnerable Territorians. We are not just talking about it; we are ensuring growth in the sector with more compliance staff, certainty by having all services reach all quality and safety measures by December 2026 and security for parents to know they can drop their little ones off to high-quality centres across the Territory.

I recently travelled to Adelaide to address the national agenda on pool fencing in early childhood centres, following the tragic and entirely avoidable death of 22-month-old Ebony Thompson. No family should ever endure such a loss. Our reforms also ensure accountability so that this never happens again to another family.

I am pleased to say that those national laws were passed and will be enacted. It was great to go there with my Chief of Staff, Chrissy, to Adelaide. It has been a year of compliance and making sure that all young Territorians are safe. It was quite an emotional and positive trip to Adelaide to talk to all the other Education ministers from around the nation and have the support of all of them. Jess Walsh, the Early Childhood minister, Jason Clare, the federal Education minister and all the ministers talked about the importance of child safety and managing, for the first time, to have something on the national agenda. We were pleased about that.

Those changes are game changers across the early childhood sector.

Rebuilding our economy means backing our …

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Katherine, we are approaching noon. Would you like to conclude your comments or come back later to conclude?

Mrs HERSEY: I will come back later; thank you, Madam Speaker.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

QUESTION TIME

Cyclone Narelle – Preparations

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Numbulwar residents are currently being evacuated to Darwin ahead of Cyclone Narelle impacting the Northern Territory, which is anticipated over the next few days. We thank the frontline staff and public service workers involved in supporting that significant operation to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Numbulwar residents, many of whom are my family.

Unfortunately, little information is being made available about preparations for other Territory communities likely to be impacted by the cyclone, including Groote Eylandt, Bickerton Island, Ngukurr, Borroloola, Katherine, Wugularr, Jilkminggan and Mataranka. Can you provide a comprehensive update on what is being done to support these communities and ensure they remain safe over the coming days?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the change of tack the Leader of the Opposition has taken this week compared with last week, but just because she does not have information does not mean the people impacted do not have information. That is an important distinction to make.

We have local emergency committees on the ground in every community Territory-wide. They have the information they need. An example of that was when I met with the women's committee of the Northern Land Council yesterday, the women from all the communities that might be impacted by the cyclone knew more than I did—phenomenal.

Please be careful in feeding a false narrative about information because it is just not true.

We know that Numbulwar residents are coming to Darwin. That process is happening. They will be at Nightcliff High School until Foskey empties. Then, if required, Numbulwar residents can go to Foskey. What happens with this cyclone will determine on how quickly people can get home.

Regarding all the other impacted communities, we have just done a massive press conference and answered this question. The bureau has issued a cyclone watch for all communities south of Nhulunbuy all the way through to Port McArthur. That includes Port McArthur, Borroloola, Numbulwar and Alyangula.

Let us remember this is highly operational; it is not me sitting around deciding who will go where in a cyclone. It is all run out of the emergency operations centre. The advice I have is that assessments have been done on all possibly affected communities, and they can shelter in place with food and medical supplies. We have surged police and other emergency services personnel into communities to be with people throughout this period and out the other side to assess the impact and do all the surveying work we do after an incident. For example, Borroloola has a brand-new shelter. Other communities have that capability for a Cat 5, which the Member for Gwoja was talking about yesterday. The new buildings are all to Cat 5 standard et cetera. Everyone else can bunker down in their communities.

All the local emergency committees are stood up, so people know. The community of Numbulwar was spoken to about being evacuated, so they knew. People from Daly and Palumpa have been spoken to about the transition to Batchelor. There is plenty of communication where it matters the most. That is important …

Ms Uibo: Not to me or anyone who can help support the efforts …

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Opposition Leader, you genuinely are a waste of time.

Ms Uibo: That is what you think, thanks.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Wanguri, what is your question?

Ms Uibo: Why don't you reply to my message I sent to you this morning?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, if you keep intervening I will put you on a warning.

Fuel Supply – Reliability

Mrs CARLSON to CHIEF MINISTER

The Northern Territory continues to play an important role in supporting the national response to Australia's fuel security challenges, particularly given our contribution to energy supply and exports. Can you update the Legislative Assembly on the outcome of this morning's National Cabinet meeting and outline how the Territory is contributing to ensuring reliable fuel supply during this period of global uncertainty?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Wanguri's community is keen to see a nationally coordinated approach to what is an issue affecting all Australians to varying degrees and impacting this country, and in response to what is a global situation.

National Cabinet met this morning. I thanked the Prime Minister for calling the National Cabinet and showing that strong leadership, making sure that as First Ministers and the Prime Minister we all come together and have a nationally consistent approach.

Coming out of National Cabinet the Prime Minister announced that we agreed to stand up a Fuel Supply Taskforce Coordinator. This is to be established by the Prime Minister, and membership will be someone from every state and territory. We put forward Jimmy Kiploks, Director of Defence, Emergency Management and Security in Chief Minister and Cabinet, as our nominee to this new taskforce, which will be led by Anthea Harris. Anthea Harris is the former CEO of the Australian Energy Regulator and the former Chief Executive Officer of the Energy Security Board. She was also Deputy Secretary of the Energy Group within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

This taskforce will be established under the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, so it has close oversight right from the top, under the Prime Minister's leadership. It will drive a coordinated response across all the states and territories, making sure that all states and territories are feeding in the unique and bespoke situations that we are in. It will be an important single point for fuel supply planning going forward. We are pleased to be a part of that and thank the federal government for the measures it has proactively taken.

I provided an update yesterday in Question Time and at my press conference not that long ago. I reconfirm that the Territory's supply is secure. We have not missed a shipment. Supply is not the issue. I know that the price is hurting people, but please do not take that out on the people working at our service stations. The gap has closed between the terminal gate price and the retail price, down to the 2c to 3c a litre mark.

The work that the ACCC is doing will continue to be important, but the collaboration between all states and territories is what will make the difference in us getting through this and coming out the other end stronger.

I thank the Member for Wanguri for the highly topical question. I again thank the Prime Minister for his foresight in establishing this and acting early; it will make a difference.

Port Keats Road – Upgrades

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

Wadeye residents came to Darwin and called on your government to honour the commitment to fund critical upgrades to Port Keats Road. At the time you said that the project was still on the books, but to date there has been no sign that the project is being progressed. Can you reassure the residents of Wadeye and Palumpa that funding for Port Keats Road has not been cut? Can you provide a timeline for when work on the road will start?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, that road is critical in supporting Palumpa. The specific piece of road that we are talking about connects Palumpa, Peppimenarti and Wadeye. Those supply routes …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The funding that I am talking about does not connect …

Madam SPEAKER: No; take your seat.

Mr Young: Why do you not understand the region?

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Daly, you are misusing points of order. I did not even give you the call, and you were talking.

Mr Young: He does not even know the region.

Madam SPEAKER: No. You are on a warning; Member for Daly, behave.

Mr YAN: I am talking about the specific piece of road and the funding that supports the connection between Peppimenarti, Palumpa and Wadeye, because that is critical. In events like we are having, to support and supply those communities we need good connectivity. With the road being dirt—I know the importance of that piece of road in particular—the only way to support those communities in times of inclement weather and serious wet weather like we are seeing now is through Wadeye and the barge landing because we cannot get trucks on that road.

It is on the infrastructure program, and has not been cut. The design work is 95% complete. We are making sure that we properly scope that piece of road so that we are ready to proceed when the funding is available. My understanding is that will be cashed and is set to proceed in late 2026 or early 2027. That is when it will go on the DLI program. We know that the funding from the Commonwealth is time limited, so we have to start that program soon.

That is one of the roads that are important across our regions. I understand the issues faced by many communities in times like these when roads are cut. That is why this week we committed $100m for our roads program to build things back better after flood events like this. We will be able to fix them and try to make them better to maintain connectivity to not only our remote communities but also our major supply routes, being the Stuart Highway …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I appreciate the minister answered one part of the question. There was another part to the question as to when the actual work for that road between Wadeye and Palumpa will start.

Madam SPEAKER: Correct; you asked for a timeline.

Mr YAN: I thought I made that reasonably clear; it will go on the program for 2027–28 because we have just done the 2026–27 program. There is only so much cash, Member for Daly, because sadly your government did not leave us with a lot; you left us with a huge program but not a lot of cash to deliver it. We had to

massage the program so that we could deliver those pieces along the timeline and make sure we have the cash to do it.

We have the $100m that is being managed by Ken Davies along with Minister Hersey to build back better after the flood recovery, and that will be critical as well.

Cyclone Narelle – Preparations

Dr RAHMAN to CHIEF MINISTER

Time is of the essence, so my question to you is equally direct: can you provide us an update, as appropriate, on the status of Cyclone Narelle and outline what preparations the NT Government is undertaking to ensure that communities, particularly those in remote areas, are kept safe, informed and supported?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, that is a fantastic question at a time when people have all eyes on the TV watching that cyclone looming. I know people in the Member for Fong Lim's community are concerned about the impact it could have on the Arnhem region. We are doing everything we can as a government to make sure they are well informed and supported to get through it. When we work together that is when the best results happen.

The Bureau of Meteorology—we heard a press conference a couple of hours ago—has issued a cyclone watch that goes from just south of Nhulunbuy, but not including Nhulunbuy, to Port McArthur and includes Borroloola, Numbulwar and Alyangula. All communities are well aware because our local emergency committees are on the ground. They are often led by police in communities but involve all the stakeholders and community leaders. That message is being pushed out, as I reconfirmed at the meeting I had with the women's committee of the Northern Land Council yesterday. Those women know well the situation coming towards them, and preparations are underway, including for people in communities who will not be evacuating and can bunker down at home—what the food footprint and the water looks like, surging in police resources to all these communities has already happened. Plenty of activity is happening.

The Australian Defence Force is supporting us to evacuate people from Numbulwar to Darwin over today and tomorrow. They will stay at Nightcliff High School temporarily and work through whether they move to Foskey or straight back home, which would be a perfect scenario for those community members who do not want to be relocating in the first place. There is plenty of activity happening.

We also have Palumpa evacuees moving to Batchelor Outdoor Education Centre from tomorrow, and from Monday people from Nauiyu who have been evacuated to Foskey will move to Batchelor Institute. That will provide more privacy and a much more home-like environment for people who are in it for the long haul.

We could expect the Daly River to rise depending on what Cyclone Narelle does. It is Category 5 in Queensland, but I reinforce that the BoM is predicting it to be Category 3 in the Northern Territory. People should stay connected to Secure NT. People know that this cyclone is coming. It is everyone's responsibility to prepare their families; have food, water, clothing and bedding; make plans for their pets; and stay connected to the latest information which is coming out to ensure that everyone is safe.

Aboriginal Justice Agreement – Funding

Mr YOUNG to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The national Closing the Gap framework relies on a long-term commitment to justice reforms and community partnership to reduce incarceration rates for Aboriginal Territorians and boost community safety. Has your government walked away from the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement, including defunding law and justice groups and Community Courts in remote communities which have a strong track record of reducing crime and antisocial behaviour? In this budget, will you commit to properly funding the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and ensuring this critical community safety initiative continues?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I want to be clear with Territorians that our government supports Closing the Gap, and we have done so much work in the short 18 months, compared with the eight long years of Labor, to try to bring back the horrific rates of all those measures.

I want to put an end to these myths and mistruths that we are cutting and have cut funding for programs, which Labor keeps saying we have done. We have not cut funding to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, alternatives to custody and the law and justice groups.

Mr Young: When will you get out on the ground?

Ms BOOTHBY: Let us be clear: Labor created these groups …

Mr Young: Meet the people.

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; the Member for Daly is on a warning, but he continues to interject while the Attorney-General is trying to answer the question.

Madam SPEAKER: He does continue to interject. I note that.

Ms BOOTHBY: That is because he does not like to hear the truth. His track record in government on this issue was appalling.

Those opposite come into this Chamber and accuse the government of defunding, which is not true. It was you who did not fund the law and justice groups. This morning the former Attorney-General, the current Leader of the Opposition, tried to …

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; I am trying to listen to the answer, but the Member for Barkly keeps interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, he was interjecting; isn't it interesting?

No-one is to interject for the rest of the answer given by the Attorney-General.

Ms BOOTHBY: Madam Speaker, you may remember that the Leader of the Opposition this morning said that the Labor government created 20 law and justice groups. Where are these 20 now? It is not true. The Labor government started to look at setting them all up, and it did not even happen. It put a funding cliff on the law and justice groups, so there was no more money. Labor did that, not the CLP.

The CLP believes in reducing crime by working with our Aboriginal communities and leaders. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is working on a framework to do that. He has done a lot of work in that space. He is an experienced member of remote communities. Do not pretend you know everything about Aboriginal communities just because you are from them. The Member for Barkly and every one of our other members do so much work in that space. You sit over there in your hypocrisy and you should have had the rates reducing already, but you did not do your job and are now looking to us to try to fix it for you.

Mr Young: Go back and read *Hansard*.

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

Cyclone Narelle – Numbulwar Evacuation

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES

Tropical Cyclone Narelle is sitting off the Queensland coast and is forecast to impact the Territory near Numbulwar. With the news last night that about 500 people are to be evacuated to Darwin as a precaution, Territorians want to know how this operation is being coordinated and what accommodation arrangements are in place. Can you update the Assembly on the evacuation of residents from that community?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Casuarina knows how important it is to keep Territorians safe no matter where they live across the Northern Territory. We are facing a significant weather event, and he understands that we must act to keep those people safe. We are acting early and quickly to make sure those Territorians are safe with the evacuation of Numbulwar well on its way because Tropical Cyclone Narelle is approaching the Territory coast.

This decision was made by the incident controller, the relevant government agencies and the ADF. I thank them for their support in helping the Northern Territory and community residents. I confirm that just over 30 vulnerable residents are on their way to touchdown in Darwin, with the remainder of the community being transported over the next 24 to 48 hours. A dedicated emergency staging centre has been stood up at Nightcliff High School, and evacuees will be accommodated at that school hall, which is separate from the school. There will be a temporary fence and security put in place to make sure there is minimal disruption for the students and classes at the high school.

As the Chief Minister said earlier, we will move the residents into Foskey if they need it. The plan will be to move them back home, but we have to wait for the cyclone to go through and assess the safety of their houses so that they can go back to a safe and secure location. I have spoken to some of these evacuees, and they are keen to go back and help clean up their community. It is important that we assist in getting them back to their community as soon as possible, but we have that plan with the staging arrangement at Nightcliff. The people at Foskey will be moving to Batchelor, then Foskey will be cleaned and tidied up and the evacuees will move into that area if required.

There is a plan to keep these Territorians safe. We consider all Territorians the same and equal, and we will keep them safe because that is the number one priority of our government.

We have also established a dedicated high-needs shelter at Batten Road to ensure that our most vulnerable residents receive the care and support they require in this troubling time. I have never been evacuated from a flood, but I was in Cyclone Tracy and I know how traumatic that was. We will make sure we wrap around and support those residents to get home and be safe and secure.

We want to ensure the Territorians move forward after this terrible event in Katherine as well as across the Territory. We are keen to support Territorians no matter where they are.

Closing the Gap

Mr YOUNG to CHIEF MINISTER

Your government has weakened sacred sites protections, scrapped treaty and local decision-making commitments, defunded law and justice groups and scrapped funding to essential infrastructure, like remote clinics and schools, cyclone shelters, barge landings and roads. How do these decisions do anything to help close the gap for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I might have spoken too soon about the change of tack from last week. It appears we are going straight back to race politics and division, because they know nothing else. It is extraordinary.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; the Chief Minister is making the imputation that we are turning this into race politics, when it is about closing the gap. It is not about race politics, and I ask her to retract. It has nothing to do with race politics; it is a genuine question about closing the gap, and it should be retracted.

Madam SPEAKER: For the sake of getting through this last Question Time of two weeks of heavy parliament, could you just withdraw that comment, Chief Minister, and continue.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I withdraw ‘race politics’; I continue with ‘division’.

It is 14 seconds in, and he has already interrupted me.

Mr Young: It is a policy decision.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: He is interrupting me again. He obviously does not want to hear the answer to the question.

Madam SPEAKER: Could you pause, please. No more points of order.

Mr Young: It is a policy decision; it is not division.

EXCLUSION OF MEMBER
Member for Daly

Madam SPEAKER: Please leave the Chamber for one hour, Member for Daly.

Mr Young: I will let all the land councils know.

Madam SPEAKER: No, do not argue with me as you go because it could get worse.

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The Member for Daly argued with you. I ask that he be named because he argued after you gave him a clear directive.

Madam SPEAKER: Deputy Chief Minister, no-one gets the say, apart from me. I will take your advice, but it will be my decision. I will not name him, but he will leave the Chamber for an hour in silence without any commentary from anyone else.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will explain why this is divisive—because it is untrue. When you come in here, loaded up and ready for a big gotcha Closing the Gap moment, you should at least be speaking the truth because all you do is incite fear and concern in people who desperately want to see change in this space.

The Attorney-General just clearly outlined that Labor did not bring online 20 law and justice groups; there is a handful of them at best. They were not well supported by the previous government, and they were cliff funded. That government saw no future for the handful of law and justice groups we have, let alone allocated any money for the additional 15-odd that it pretended it would have. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement was unfunded.

Everywhere we turned, whether it was the bush roads, the cyclone shelters or anything else, there were zero dollars allocated. The very people in the communities those opposite represent—they were more happy to pretend to their own people, some of the most vulnerable people in the Northern Territory; they were content as the local members, as Aboriginal people themselves, to stand up and pretend like they were taking action when they were not. It is criminal. It is absolutely disgusting politics.

Members interjecting.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 31; the imputations by the Chief Minister, who is bringing race into politics when there are simple questions about Closing the Gap targets. Will she stick to answering the question, rather than trying to impute to members of this Chamber because of our race?

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, everyone! I do not think there is an imputation. The question was specifically about Closing the Gap, which relates to Aboriginal people. The Chief Minister has the call. There will be no more points of order.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is okay if they impugn us, but it is not okay the other way round.

To my point, bush roads were unfunded. The bush roads that the Member for Daly so desperately wants to see had no funding attached to them. The Aboriginal Justice Agreement had no funding attached to it. The law and justice groups had no funding attached to them. Treaty was wound up by the Opposition Leader when she was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Attorney-General. She is the one who wound up treaty.

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, pause. Why are you standing, Opposition Leader?

Ms UIBO: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, Standing Order 1; in terms of adjudicating standing orders and having the ability as a member of parliament to raise a standing order. At the moment we are being silenced and are not even being recognised to raise a standing order, so I am standing because I have the standing orders. I will adhere to the processes of parliament, but I must be able to raise a standing order through adjudication by you of whether it is a valid standing order. I do not want to be silenced in this place.

Dr RAHMAN: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: No; sit down.

Opposition Leader, it is highly irregular that members of an opposition team stand up within seconds of each other and present multiple points of order. If you watch any parliament in the Commonwealth, in Australia if you watch the federal parliament, you will see that there are only so many points of order that can be raised.

I gave a decision on your last point of order. I disagreed with you. I asked that there be no more points of order, given that the Member for Daly raised points of order already in the Chief Minister's response and has been asked to leave. There is a point when points of order become disruptive, deliberately, to the ability of the minister to answer the question.

You can remain standing for as long as you like, but there will be no more points of order because I am being reasonable and I am acting consistently with how every Speaker responds to multiple and possibly sometimes vexatious points of order. I am not saying that the last one you presented was vexatious, but one of the reasons I sent the Member for Daly out was that he was becoming argumentative.

In the scheme of things I think you have had three points of order already. You can remain standing, but the Chief Minister will continue the answer in the 42 seconds she has remaining.

Ms UIBO: Madam Speaker, I respectfully disagree because under Standing Order 31, the imputation that the opposition is not doing our job because we are Aboriginal people—I would like a rush on the *Hansard*; I request that. The imputation was dismissed, and it is not a place of integrity when that type of imputation is being made by the so-called leader of the Northern Territory, Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro, about the race of fellow members of parliament. I disagree with that ruling, Madam Speaker. I think it is disgraceful of the Chief Minister.

Dr RAHMAN: A point of order, Madam Speaker! If the Opposition Leader wants to dissent from the ruling of the Chair, she should do so in writing …

Ms Uibo: I shall.

Dr RAHMAN: … which is the proper process in the standing orders.

Madam SPEAKER: Correct.

Dr RAHMAN: This is not a process that is adhered to in a normal parliament. I ask that you put this to an end and allow the Chief Minister to resume answering the question.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you. The Member for Fong Lim is correct; you have the opportunity to take up whatever measures you wish to take up.

Chief Minister, please continue.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Again, what we just saw from the Opposition Leader, claiming to have imputations against her, has derailed what I said and twisted my words in an attempt to do exactly what I called her out for doing.

Ms Uibo: You said, 'They as Aboriginal people'. Listen to yourself.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I reconfirm that it is Labor which scrapped all these things. Labor did not fund these things you are asking for. It is the CLP that is committed to doing what is necessary, and we have already seen that through our reducing-crime measures, with domestic violence down by 3% Territory-wide. We will continue to do the work, because that is what we promised people we would do.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: I will not put up with this anymore. The next person who says boo, interjects, makes a sound that is inappropriate or argues with me will be named.

NT Floods – Stage 2 Evacuation Arrangements

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES

With floods continuing to impact communities across the Daly region, including Nauiyu and Palumpa, many families remain displaced and now face a longer recovery period. The Finocchiaro CLP government has announced stage 2 evacuation arrangements to provide safer suitable accommodation and better access to services for affected residents. Can you update the Assembly on why these stage 2 arrangements are necessary; what support will be available for the evacuees being moved to Batchelor; and how the government is working with stakeholders to support families, children and communities through this tough time and the next phase of recovery?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we acknowledge that the families from those communities have already endured a significant disruption to their lives, especially during this flood event, which has been prolonged. This is the second one in a short space of time and, unfortunately, there may be a third one coming.

Because of these prolonged rain events, the recovery in those communities will take time. We acknowledge that being in a place like Foskey Pavilion is not appropriate for an extended period. That is why this government is moving to stage 2 evacuation arrangements so that evacuees have more appropriate medium-term accommodation, greater privacy and better day-to-day support while work continues to rebuild their communities and homes.

From Friday, the people from Palumpa, who are currently based at Marrara, will be transferred to the Batchelor Outdoor Education Centre. The Chief Minister and I visited those people, and they are doing it tough. It is time to get them into more secure and long-term accommodation, because their community will not be safe and secure for a long time, considering that another rain event is coming. Touch wood that rain goes through quickly and does not cause too much more damage.

Unfortunately, damage has been done. We have seen pictures and heard stories of water coming up to the roofs of those houses, so the damage to the houses in those communities will be substantial. We will move those people back as soon as possible. Some of the people from those communities want to get back and help with the cleanup. They want to get back to their community, where they live, and be involved. We will make sure that we support them in a safe and secure way.

Until then, the outdoor education centre at Batchelor has been stood up. It is ready to go and those people will move there. I have been to that centre; there is room, a kitchen and there are toilets. More facilities will be put in there, and it will be better than sleeping on stretchers on a basketball court floor. We will prepare these residents for an extended period. We do not know how long that will be, but I can assure residents and Territorians that we will move the residents back home as soon as we can.

Of course, we have to make sure that their houses are safe and secure. It is not only about the houses but also the pets and surrounding environment. That is where those people want to be. We will make sure we all do our damnedest to get them back home as soon as we can in their houses which are safe and secure.

Closing the Gap – Prison Work Program

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS

You have been spruiking your prison work program which, by your own admission, will be available to only about 350 prisoners; that is about 10% of all prisoners in the system. How do you expect to meet the Closing the Gap targets when you are failing to invest in or deliver rehabilitation or skills development programs for the majority of Aboriginal people in the prison system?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I do not know where the Member for Arafura gets the information for his question. That is incorrect. We are delivering programs across the prisons, whether it be in Katherine, Alice Springs or Darwin. We are making sure we deliver programs to help those inmates make better choices and become better citizens when they get out.

We have Sentenced to a Skill and people working in industry. Those sections were not operating under the previous Labor government. It neglected the Corrections system, and they were the first things to be shut down.

When I talk about industry, I am talking about the metalwork, woodwork, laundry and artwork they do. I have seen those, and they are amazing people working. They get up in the morning, go to a job and then go home. That in itself is rehabilitation; they are learning a routine and to get up in the morning and go to work. They enjoy going to work. In fact, I spoke to the laundry crew in Alice Springs the last time I was there, and I asked them, 'Do you enjoy this?' They said, 'We love it. We get there, we all work and we sing together.' They had a good time and were learning while there.

We have also just embarked on a skills work program. In the last year or so of their time in detention, prisoners will be paired up with people who will help them go out into the community. More importantly, for the next 12 to 18 months after, those people will wrap around them to make sure that they do not end up back in prison.

We are trying to break the cycle of reoffending. There is work and rehabilitation across all the prisons in the Northern Territory, not to mention the work parties. The work parties give prisoners a sense of purpose, wellbeing and belonging in the community by going out there and cleaning up after the flood events. In Alice Springs they are doing the sandbags; we are doing the same in Katherine.

Mrs Finocchiaro: They are doing seniors' lawns.

Mr MALEY: They are doing seniors' lawns as well. It is about giving a sense of purpose.

The rehabilitation is across the board. For the Member for Arafura to say that there are no rehabilitation programs is simply incorrect. Many of those prisoners do that.

I have not mentioned the education programs. I have been there and spoken to the people employed and the youth detainees. Some of them are going to school for the first time.

Remember that this rehabilitation does not start when they get locked up by the police; it should start at home. I am asking the community and families to act together and help all Territorians become better people. If you see someone you know—your cousin, brother or sister—going off the rails, go and support them and wrap around them before they end up in the justice system. This will be a concerted effort across the Northern Territory. The government is doing its job; it is up to everyone to band together and work to make sure that all Territorians are as safe as possible.

NT Floods – Disaster Relief Payments

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Members on this side care deeply about those affected by the floods. Can you update the Assembly on the delivery of disaster relief payments to Territorians impacted by recent flooding events and how the Finocchiaro CLP government is ensuring that support is reaching affected communities quickly? With severe weather forecast this weekend associated with Cyclone Narelle, what preparations are in place to support Territorians who may be impacted?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, from the start of what has been an incredibly challenging time for the Northern Territory, our Finocchiaro CLP government's focus has been getting support to those who need it as quickly as possible. Territorians affected by these floods do not need their situation exacerbated by wondering what support they can get. The team at the Department of Children and Families has literally been working overtime—very long shifts—making sure that this support is getting out as quickly as it can.

So far, we have supported more than 5,600 households across the Territory, with close to $5m in relief funding having been delivered already. This includes 5,174 households in Katherine, just over 300 households in the Acacia community and 116 households in Mataranka, which includes a number of Jilkminggan residents.

The flood assessments are still underway. That has created a bit of a challenge in access. We have put a system in place where people can give us a stat dec telling us what has happened in their house so that they do not have to wait for those assessments to be done and can access the relief payments. That has

made a big difference to making sure that people are not overly stressed in what is already an incredibly difficult situation.

We continue to go directly to communities. Today we have the team at Marrara Indoor Stadium working with the evacuees from Palumpa, getting their relief payments sorted. Tomorrow the team will be at Foskey helping the Daly River evacuees with their payments.

The Department of Children and Families has done an incredible job. It is practical hands-on work. It is incredibly stressful for everybody involved. I cannot speak highly enough of the effort that the team has put in, supported ably by our non-government organisations such as Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Vinnies has been out there helping evacuees, making sure they have spare clothing and anything extra that they might need as they are getting ready to get their lives back on track.

We heard the Chief Minister speak about the plans we have in place to relocate them to somewhere that is a little more comfortable and private as we work out how we get them back to their homes at the earliest possible opportunity.

We have also made it easy for people to apply for support payments through an online portal. I encourage everybody to use that portal because it will mean that the process can be done quickly with the least amount of challenge in getting there.

With Cyclone Narelle on the way, we are ready to go if we need to provide additional support to people in the community. We need to continue to band together as Territorians always do in times of crisis.

Elder Abuse

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

One in seven senior Territorians will experience elder abuse, whether through financial exploitation, physical abuse or neglect within family relationships. In early 2025 the Darwin Community Legal Service released Policy Directive: Older Persons' Abuse in the NT, which was endorsed by more than 20 stakeholders. It outlines clear reform that your office could undertake to prevent harm to older Territorians. To date, your office has not implemented any reforms to combat elder abuse, released an elder abuse strategy or convened a seniors ministerial council this year. Why have you failed to date to protect older Territorians who deserve to live with dignity unharmed?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, when it comes to senior abuse there are things happening in the community and things that we can do. That is a focus of the Department of People, Sport and Culture which oversees seniors policy.

The Northern Territory Government is committed to strengthening awareness and prevention of older person abuse and to improve the safety, wellbeing and inclusion of all senior Territorians.

In that question the Member for Arafura made an inference that my department is not doing anything to prevent senior abuse, which is incorrect. I need to inform this Chamber that the Older Persons' Abuse Grant Program is open for applications for funding of between $3,000 and $15,000 to support community-based activities, services, events and initiatives.

The Member for Arafura quoted some community organisations. These organisations are funded by the Northern Territory Government as advocacy services to make sure that this information comes to the government. It is great to see that work is happening.

Recently the national-level strategy was released.

One of the challenging things is that most senior abuse is from a close or nearby person or a family member, which makes it challenging because of the requirements of the evidence.

There are things that are happening in that space. There are avenues for things to be escalated to the police, and we are making sure that we are using all those avenues. It is a process; it is not an easy solution that we can have. In terms of that process moving forward we are working on a national strategy on how we can work together as a country in different jurisdictions.

In remote locations things can get more challenging. We cannot have resources equally allocated to all areas, so it all depends on how the information comes through. There are ways that things are taken in the current legislation that will prevent this.

I agree that there is no specific thing, such as a senior abuse taskforce or anything, because our jurisdiction is much smaller compared with other jurisdictions. We may not have the opportunity to have all the options available in our jurisdiction as they do in the larger jurisdictions, but we have funded advocacy services and we are getting information through them. We are making sure that we are providing the opportunity for people to be aware that this is an issue and for people to report this issue. It can be addressed in that manner.

Buffel Grass Weed Management Plan

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

Buffel grass is an important matter to many Territorians, and I understand that it has a broad range of views. It was declared a weed by the former Labor government on the eve of the 2024 election, leaving many in the lurch with what this actually meant for Territorians. Can you inform the Assembly how the Finocchiaro CLP government is getting on with the job of delivering a clear path forward for buffel grass management in the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, since becoming the minister for Environment, buffel grass is a matter that has been raised with me time and again for good reason. There is a broad range of views on buffel grass across the Northern Territory. It creates significant challenges relating to fire and environmental management, and it is an important feed source for pastoralists' cattle.

Today I have declared the finalised Buffel Grass Weed Management Plan 2026–2036. It is a 10-year plan because this government is getting on with the job of delivering and providing certainty for the community and our pastoral industry. This plan underwent extensive consultation. It received more than 200 submissions during the Have Your Say period, which I extended from four to eight weeks to ensure that there was ample opportunity for the community to have their say. I thank everyone who contributed throughout that process.

This plan is about getting the balance right. We have heard the community, and we have listened. For the pastoral industry, it is important as buffel grass is used to feed their livestock. If you are an environmentalist there were concerns about the industry-wide permit for the importation of seed, and we have heard those concerns loud and clear. This plan allows pastoralists to continue to manage buffel through grazing whilst there will be permits for any individual or business wanting to import buffel seed into the Northern Territory. We also understand the concerns regarding the impact of buffel grass on the environment such as its ability to fuel larger hotter fires and outcompete native species.

It is unrealistic to expect that buffel grass can be eradicated. One of my favourite TV shows on the weekend, *Landline*, touched on this matter where it was stated that this problem in many ways is bigger than all of us:

> *We can't aim to be eradicating it, but we need to be extremely strategic and coordinated …*

That is why this plan focuses on protecting priority conservation areas, including reserves and parks around the regions of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, and includes important measures to reduce further spread along transport corridors.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of all landowners to manage buffel grass on their properties with management strategies such as herbicide application, manual removal and ensuring good weed hygiene in conservation areas.

I thank the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment and the weed advisory committee for all their work throughout the development of this plan.

Buffel grass cannot be feasibly eradicated, and its management is no overnight fix. We acknowledge the work of those in the pastoral industry to manage buffel grass on their properties, along with the need that more needs to be done to manage this weed around our town and conservation areas into the future.

Kumanjayi White – Investigation Process

Mr GUYULA to CHIEF MINISTER

When the community called for an independent investigation to Kumanjayi White's tragic death the government said no. However, after NT Police presented its evidence to the DPP, New South Wales was asked to review the evidence. It is almost 10 months since Kumanjayi White's death. What is happening with this investigation? Should the New South Wales investigation have been introduced from the beginning as the independent investigation process?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Mulka asked me a question along the same lines last week. With any death in custody there is a formal process that happens, and those processes are underway. The Coroner is undertaking her important work and the police are doing their important work. I do not have an update for the Member for Mulka on where each of those independent processes are at, but once they come to their conclusion, they will be made public by the relevant authority.

Royal Darwin Hospital – Bed Capacity

J DAVIS to MINISTER for HEALTH

Our health system is under extreme pressure and the health staff do an incredible job every day, particularly in the current context. In an ongoing sense Royal Darwin Hospital is clearly over capacity. Wards are regularly over full. I understand that RDH is having to buy beds from Darwin Private Hospital just to cope. What funding is being put in and what work is being done to increase bed numbers at RDH? Will you add more beds to make sure that opening the 32-bed ward adds real capacity instead of just replacing beds currently bought from the private system?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I congratulate the Chief Minister who just a short time ago was in Canberra working with the Prime Minister to sign a new funding agreement for an additional $1bn over a five-year period. There has been a lot of discussion about the five-year agreement and the impact it will have on health services in the Northern Territory.

It is fair to say that our health system has clearly been under pressure for quite a long time. On coming into government we were faced with a situation where we had between a $200m and $300m deficit in the health system.

We have somewhat balanced the books regarding hospital funding, but we are significantly underfunded for aged care. On any given day in Darwin, Palmerston and particularly Alice Springs we have 60 to 80 aged-care patients bed blocked in our hospitals. Clearly that is an unsatisfactory situation. Our elderly people should be in proper aged-care facilities. They should not be in hospitals; they should be in more dignified premises for them where family can visit.

It costs the health system roughly $40m per year to deliver a service that the federal government is responsible for. On top of that, we are $95m short for primary healthcare in the Northern Territory. Again, the federal government is responsible for that; it is not paying what it should. CareFlight and patient retrievals in the Top End cost the Northern Territory Government roughly $50m a year. We are roughly $200m …

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I am asking specifically about additional beds: will the new 32-bed ward actually be an additional 32 beds, not double counting?

Mr EDGINGTON: I was getting to that. We are roughly $200m short to deliver services that the Commonwealth Government should be delivering. Yes, there will be a 32-bed ward; that is under construction. We are also delivering a new mental health patient facility at Royal Darwin Hospital. We expect that 32-bed ward to come online about the middle of the year. This government is fully funding the operational side of that new 32-bed facility.

NT Floods – Pastoral Rent Relief

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES

Agriculture is a major economic driver in the Northern Territory and a vital source of jobs and investment in our regions. The recent flooding events have badly impacted many parts of the Territory, including many of the areas I have lived and worked in, including the Barkly, Centre and Katherine regions and now the greater Darwin region. This has been terrible for not only our community but also our producers, farmers and stations. Today you announced pastoral rent relief for those who are facing hardship. Can you explain to the Assembly how this rent relief will assist pastoralists in need?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know how important this is to the Member for Fannie Bay. Pastoral rent relief is available to support the Territory pastoralists who are experiencing genuine hardship resulting from these floods. This week there has been a lot of discussion in this House about the evacuees.

I am glad to have this question about the pastoralists because they are one of the economic drivers of the Northern Territory. Last year 447,000 head of cattle were exported, an 18% increase on the number under the previous Labor government. We want to support the pastoralists as we move forward.

This is an existing relief system that we have made easier—more simplified—to allow pastoralists to explain the impacts of floods on their property to make sure that they get their support in a timely manner so that they can focus on keeping their operations up and running during this time. Their station might be flooded or the access road to their station may be flooded. This is another reason why the Chief Minister announced the $100m—to help that infrastructure and roads to these stations across the Northern Territory. We need to ensure that gets up and running.

This announcement comes at a time when we welcome hundreds of delegates to Darwin from the annual Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association conference, and we are hearing firsthand the problems they are facing. The extent of loss and damage resulting from these events has been widespread, and it seems like it will continue because a new cyclone is coming across. We heard that pastoralists have lost their stock, equipment and vehicles which they need for their livelihood.

This pastoral rent relief will support them. They will be able to apply for partial or entire rent relief, depending on their hardship and the impact. It will be on a case-by-case basis. They can apply for a short period or for the whole year, which, again, will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. It is another example of how this government is supporting pastoralists across the Northern Territory.

This will be available for those experiencing genuine hardship during circumstances outside their control such as flooding, which we know has affected large parts of the Northern Territory. This shows that we are support our regional economy and understand the pressures these producers face when severe weather disrupts their operations. Hardship can be damaged fences, loss of access or just the financial strain. This provides a two-tiered approach to ensure applications are assessed fairly and are based on individual circumstances. It is just another way we are supporting pastoralists and Territorians across the Northern Territory.

NT Floods – Public Housing Residents

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

These floods have had a significant impact on Territorians in our remote communities, with many people displaced from their homes. Some communities remain underwater and may do for some time. There is no doubt that these are distressing times for Territorians and can be financially stressful for the most vulnerable people. Can you share with the Assembly what the CLP government is doing to assist the public housing residents in the communities affected by the floods?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we all know people are suffering at the moment. We have communities evacuated and in shelters, and there is further risk of flooding in some areas.

The Northern Territory continues to face some of the most significant challenges in these unprecedented times, with flooding unfolding and rapidly changing conditions across multiple locations. I confirm that the

Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development continues to work closely with other agencies and emergency services to support communities through response and recovery. This includes assessing impacts on all public housing when staff can get to them.

The department has activated a temporary emergency rent pause for tenants affected by the February–March NT flood events and who are unable to access or safely live in their homes. If a tenant is evacuated from their dwelling, their public housing dwelling is inaccessible and/or the home is deemed to be unavailable due to flood impacts, they will be eligible for a two-week rent pause to ensure they are supported during these difficult times. Housing has assured me that if tenants are unable to return home due to accessibility, the rent pause will be extended until they can return home safely. Importantly, eligible tenants do not need to apply for the support; the appropriate rent pause will be applied automatically under regulation 5 of the Housing Regulations.

The department remains focused on supporting displaced residents, assessing damage as quickly as possible and helping affected public housing tenants. While the response is underway we continue to survey and assess conditions for entry to communities, followed by scoping of properties to ensure safety for everyone. The department will be in touch with tenants from Nauiyu, Palumpa, Wugularr, Jilkminggan, Imangara (Murray Downs) in my electorate and Katherine to advise them of the rent relief that will be applied.

We know how many Territorians are doing it tough, but the CLP government is committed to supporting people through the difficult days ahead. I encourage residents to continue to follow emergency service advice, official updates and public information on the Secure NT website and Facebook page.

We want Territorians to be safe and back home as soon as possible, but in the interim we can provide financial relief to those who are already facing difficult times. We are here to support all residents affected by this flooding event.

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

ANSWER TO QUESTION
Elder Abuse

Mr CHARLS (Youth, Seniors and Equality): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 115, I would like to add clarification to a question I answered earlier.

The Member for Arafura said, ‘To date, you have not convened the Minister’s Advisory Council for Senior Territorians’. I inform the Chamber that there was a seniors ministerial council meeting on 12 February this year.

MOTION
Note Statement – The Year Ahead 2026

Continued from earlier this day.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, rebuilding our economy means backing our tradies, the backbone of the Territory. This is why we have worked closely with CDU to relocate a new trade training centre from the CDU Rural Campus in Katherine to the Katherine township on Grevillea Road. That has the backing of the federal minister, Andrew Giles. This is an exciting move for Katherine. This is a game changer for the Big Rivers region. The facility will expand CDU TAFE’s capacity to deliver hands-on training in automotive, heavy diesel, plumbing and construction. Apprentices can train closer to home, employers can upskill locally and industry engagement across the region will continue to grow.

We are backing this with real cost-of-living relief. First-year apprentices and trainees can access workwear and gear bonuses of $300 to $1,000, and businesses in regional and remote communities can receive an additional $3,000 for every new apprentice or trainee they take on.

Education and training is vital to drive down, and address the root causes of, crime. Since coming to government we have introduced school attendance officers who work with families, reinforcing the fact that it is against the law not to send your child to school, and engage with communities. In 2025 more than 1,000 patrols resulted in 1,398 compliance notices and 292 fines. Of those, 679 compliance notices and 33 fines were revoked, meaning parents are listening and getting their children back to school. These are small steps, but they are slowly working.

Late last year I announced that school attendance officers now have powers to refer to income management parents who consistently failed to send their children to school. In Term 4 last year we referred 12 families, and the federal government accepted 11 of them. I thank the federal government for working constructively with us on this matter.

I make no apologies for wanting to get kids to school and holding parents to account for that. No parent has the right to deprive their child of an education.

While the frontline school attendance teams work with children and families, a range of new initiatives were introduced in NTG schools to keep kids engaged in the classroom, including boosting literacy and numeracy through explicit teaching; new trade technical colleges through the phasing out of middle schools; Aboriginal liaison officers in schools; $732m committed in the school funding model for 2026, which is $46m more than last year; keeping and attracting teachers by moving more teachers to permanent contracts; and getting school counsellors back in schools, not centralised in Darwin, like the previous government did.

Of course I cannot speak about school attendance without talking about Labor's hidden list, a lost generation of children it deliberately chose to ignore to try to make its attendance statistics look better. That hidden list, known as the intensive support roll, is a priority for our school attendance team. We must engage these children back in school or risk losing them to a life of crime. They require a separate area and support services wrapped around them to engage them back in school. It is no good having them go for two to five days and then fall through the cracks again.

We are giving teachers financial certainty by moving them off short-term contracts into permanent places so that they can have the confidence to put down roots in the Territory—and why wouldn't they, when they can get $50,000 from the government to build their first home?

I am proud to report that we went into 2026 with only 48 teacher vacancies across the Territory, which is down from the same time last year when there were 112. That is the lowest teacher vacancy number we have ever seen. This means that every child will have a teacher in front of them in every classroom.

Teachers tell me they are excited to live, work and build a future in the Territory, and they are proud to be part of a system that values explicit teaching and back-to-basics learning. With the extension of the home build program, we hope that some of those teachers will take up the $50,000 grant from the NT Government.

Our government has put school counsellors back where they belong in schools, unlike Labor, which centralised counsellors in the Mitchell Centre away from students. We understand that young people need face-to-face support when it matters most. Today we have 13 of 15 counsellors working across 14 schools, with recruitment ongoing.

I recently announced that all government schools will sing both verses of the national anthem. The national anthem instils national pride, which all children and families should feel about being Australian—you won the citizenship lottery by being Australian. Since that announcement I have been inundated with overwhelming support across the country for our initiative in this mandate. Since the media coverage I have received messages, cards and emails from all over Australia. In fact, Ned and Dorothy from New South Wales sent a card saying, 'Thank you for instilling values back in schools'. Neil and Liz Buszard from Victoria emailed:

'We would like to congratulate you on your announcement regarding our national anthem in schools. We currently have very few strong leaders in Australia, and we both respect someone who stands up for our country, not just verbally, but in a practical way. Well done!'

There is a line in the second verse of the national anthem, 'With courage let us all combine'. Leaders must have the courage and be brave to make decisions that others will not like. You need to have the courage to combine everyone together. I have that courage to know I have made the right decision to bring consistency to schools and for everyone to sing both verses loud and proud across our school assemblies.

It was great to go to Alice Springs not long after that announcement. The senior year kids at Braitling Primary School stood in front and belted out their rendition of the national anthem. It was great. I loved the fact that some of them even sang 'young and free' instead of 'one and free'. We know that changed quite a few years ago. Go them! It was fantastic.

Last, but not least, we remain committed to the ongoing funding of free swimming lessons for all our primary school-age children. I remember that last year the Labor Party members were keen to pick it apart and cast doubt—sounding like they were opposed to remote Aboriginal kids in their electorates participating in free

swimming lessons—telling us how hard it was for schools to come in. I am pleased to let them know that remote kids loved their excursions to come in for their swimming. A lot of work from the Education department went in to make this happen with the School of Sport Education NT.

I look forward to seeing all our primary school children this year in the water again. We started the year with the logistics of all schools doing their swimming lessons. In Alice Springs these lessons saved a life. A parent came in, extremely emotional, to share her story with Minister Burgoyne. That is just one life that was saved.

We are proud of our achievements in 2025. School went back with the $200 back-to-school vouchers. We heard concerns from parents, so we strengthened how they can be used. This year families can share the vouchers across their children. That voucher will be valid until Term 3 this year.

We announced we are going back to basics with the Boosting Literacy and Numeracy plan that has been rolled out across all schools this year through explicit teaching practices.

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

Motion agreed to.

Mrs HERSEY: We moved teachers from short-term contracts onto permanent contracts, and continue to do so this year.

We announced the build of a $110m special school at Palmerston to support families and the growing need for better education outcomes for those students with additional needs.

We are creating efficiencies by amalgamating the Teacher Registration Board and the NT Board of Studies. This will streamline processes and make sure we have teachers ready to teach without red tape whilst ensuring high-quality safety checks are in place.

We are supporting families to get their kids back to school with wraparound services by having counsellors back at the coalface, with on-the-ground support from our school attendance and engagement teams. We care that all kids deserve an education.

We are keeping little ones safe by holding service providers and our regulator accountable and transparent in our Early Childhood Safe Start, Strong Futures plan.

We are putting the Territory on the national agenda regarding pool fencing, ensuring that we are leading the discussion on entrapment and strangulation.

We make no apologies for instilling national pride in our schools. It is teaching kids to feel proud that they are Australian, not ashamed.

The year ahead is positive. Although we had a slight dip in the road in the last week or two, we will move on. Our government will continue working tirelessly to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the lifestyle that makes the Northern Territory such a special place to live, work, visit and invest. We will continue to grow our economy, to be certain to support families and to provide the security Territorians deserve in 2026, our year of growth, certainty and security. After all, Territorians deserve nothing less.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I support the Chief Minister's ministerial statement on the year ahead from the February sittings.

The Chief Minister outlined a clear vision for the Northern Territory, and it was built around three priorities: reducing crime; rebuilding the economy; and restoring our beautiful Territory lifestyle. These priorities reflect exactly what Territorians asked for when they elected the CLP government. Territorians wanted safer communities, stronger economic opportunities and the confidence to build their future here. As the Chief Minister said, 2025 was the year of action, and we are now in the growth period. It was a year when this government began that difficult but necessary work of turning around the Territory and laying strong foundations for our future. While progress is clear, there is more work to be done, and this government is getting on with the job.

The first and foremost priority of this government is reducing crime. When we came into office Territorians were deeply concerned about their safety, especially in Wanguri. Businesses were dealing with break-ins, families were dealing with antisocial behaviour and confidence was falling. For far too long Territorians felt

their concerns were dismissed by the Labor government, but this government took a different approach. We listened and acted. Within weeks we delivered the reducing-crime package, strengthening police powers and restoring community safety. We introduced stronger bail laws, backed police with their real powers and made it clear that victims come first.

The results are being seen across the Territory. The number of victims of crime has fallen by nearly 10%; that is more than 2,200 fewer victims. Commercial break-ins are down by 26%, and house break-ins are down by 30% across the Territory. These are not just statistics; they represent safer communities, businesses across our Territory that are protected and families spared from harm. This government is still getting on with that job.

In my electorate in Wanguri and across Leanyer and Muirhead, these improvements are being felt. These are family suburbs where people raise children, run their businesses and build their lives. Residents tell me that they are seeing an increased police presence, and they are happy with that; faster response times, which is what they asked for; and fewer incidents that once concerned them. That matters because when safety returns, confidence returns. There is more work to be done, but this government is continuing that work.

We must recognise the extraordinary work of our police and frontline workers. Reducing crime is not achieved by legislation alone; it is achieved by the men and women who serve every day on the front line. Our police, Corrections officers, youth justice workers and community organisations are doing an exceptional job and working hard, often unseen, under a lot of pressure and late at night. This government has backed them with stronger powers, increased resources and the best police pay deal in 20 years. Because of their dedication Territorians are safer, and they are safer in Wanguri. This Assembly should recognise their service and thank them for it.

This government is also tackling the root causes of crime through our justice reforms; school attendance, as reiterated by the minister for Education; the family responsibility agreements by Minister Cahill; rehabilitation programs; and early intervention. We are working to break cycles of offending. This is long-term difficult work, but it has to be done.

The second pillar of the government's plan is rebuilding the Territory's economy, and the results are clear. The Northern Territory has moved from last to fourth in the nation in the CommSec State of the States rankings. We lead the country in economic growth, population growth, housing finance and dwellings. We are forecast to deliver 6.8% economic growth, the strongest in the nation. This is the result from real reforms, removing payroll tax for small businesses, cutting red tape, simplifying procurement and fast-tracking approvals.

One of the strongest indicators of renewed confidence is the housing market. In Wanguri homes are selling in under 25 days and in Leanyer in less than three weeks. In fact, one home came up for sale in my street—which is rare because it is a great family street—and it sold that weekend because people want to move into our suburbs. In Muirhead there is stronger demand, and new families continue to move there. We are also seeing price stability, growth and stronger buyer demand. The rental yield for our investors is still at 5% to 6%. This tells us something important: families are choosing the Territory again, and they are also staying and putting down roots. They are building their future in our community. The reduction in crime has played a major role in restoring that confidence.

Economic recovery is also being seen in our local businesses. Across the Leanyer shopping centre and the Casuarina precinct, businesses are reporting increased foot traffic and renewed optimism.

I recognise the Hibiscus Day and Night Pharmacy, recently awarded Pharmacy of the Year. This business is an outstanding example of community service. Pharmacy staff provide healthcare support, advice and care to local residents every day. The pharmacy has continued to grow its workforce, creating jobs for Territorians. It is not just a business; it is a pillar of our community.

I also acknowledge Territory Butchers, which has expanded to include a bulk meat sale section. This initiative is helping families to manage cost-of-living pressures. It is practical, responsive and exactly what Territory businesses do best—support their community.

We must acknowledge the contrast. For years Territorians were told that crime was not as bad as they thought, businesses were told that break-ins were a part of doing business and families were told to accept this situation, but Territorians knew better. They voted for change. This government acted and crime is falling and confidence is returning. There is more work to be done, and this government is getting on with the job.

Before I conclude I will address the future of Nhulunbuy and the Gove region. There has been commentary about the transition underway. Let us be clear that this government is not walking away from Nhulunbuy; we are working with the community to secure its future, and we are doing it the right way.

The people of Nhulunbuy are not bystanders in this transition; they are the decision-makers. This is their community and their future, and this government respects that. We are supporting a community-led transition, ensuring local voices are heard and local leadership is empowered. At the same time, this government is providing support, working with industry and stakeholders, supporting economic diversification, ensuring essential services remain strong and backing long-term opportunities.

This is about long-term sustainability, not short-term fixes. Nhulunbuy has a strong future. It has a proud community, and with the right support it will continue to thrive. This government is committed to that outcome, as with all our work.

The Chief Minister's statement sets out a clear direction for the Northern Territory. Crime is falling, the economy is growing and confidence is returning. Families are buying homes again, businesses are investing again and communities are strengthening again. Importantly, Territorians can see a future, but we are not complacent; we know there is still more work to be done. We will continue to deliver because every Territorian deserves safety, every family deserves opportunity and every community deserves to thrive.

The Northern Territory is moving forward again, and this government is getting on with the job. To quote my husband, 'We are not here for music lessons', so we are continuing this job.

VISITORS
Member for Johnston's Family

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I acknowledge in the gallery this afternoon the Member for Johnston's mum, Dina, and her husband, Kit. Welcome to the Chamber. It is good to see you here.

Members: Hear, hear!

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I will speak about 2026 and our visions for it. One of the great joys and privileges of our role as elected representatives is to listen to those we represent about what matters to them. When I speak with people in Johnston and to Territorians more broadly at the markets, at schools and shops, at community events, in businesses, in workplaces and living rooms, they tell me clearly, thoughtfully and consistently what kind of Northern Territory they want in 2026 and beyond.

What they describe is not a fantasy; it is practical and achievable. What people want is grounded in their daily lives, their challenges and their hopes for their children and community. The truth is that what they want could all be made a reality tomorrow if we chose to listen, because that is our responsibility as elected leaders, and to work together to build the future that Territorians are asking for.

I am here to work with everyone in this Chamber. I listen to all the members and will work as hard as I can to be part of decision-making that delivers for every Territorian for the long term. What is often missing in this place is exactly that: the long-term view and the voices of all Territorians. Too many people feel unheard. This government has made no secret of saying that if you do not agree with it, you can leave. That is not how a democracy should work.

I know I am only one voice—that is made abundantly clear to me frequently in this Chamber—but I also know that I am not speaking alone. I am speaking on behalf of the many voices of my community, my electorate and the many people across the Territory who feel that they are not heard in this place. I know that is true because they tell me. Those voices deserve to be part of every decision that we make here.

We do not always agree in this Chamber. In fact, if everyone in the room agreed all the time, something would be very wrong. Strong outcomes come from robust discussion, scrutiny and genuinely listening to each other and our different perspectives. I have listened to the speeches about visions for 2026, and there is much that we have in common, but there are also important things that are missing.

Where is the long-term vision? Where is the willingness to look beyond the next election cycle, to invest in real prevention rather than crisis and to make decisions that may be hard now but will deliver better outcomes

for all Territorians in the year ahead? Where is the real plan for a Northern Territory that is here for all people, putting all people's needs first now and into the future?

This is what the people of Johnston and beyond talk to me about. I am here to tell you that this is what we can have in 2026 and into the future. What is it that people tell me they want? We have heard from other members in the Chamber as well about what people want; it is not always different.

First, they want safe, thriving communities. This government talks about safety a lot, but consistently misunderstands what creates it. The Territorians I speak to understand something that it seems this government has not grasped: you cannot arrest your way to safety, and you cannot incarcerate your way to safe communities. Safety is built through prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation and community-based solutions that address the causes of harm, not just the consequences.

Territorians want to know that we will never need another coronial inquiry into women who have been killed in terrible circumstances by their partners, and that the promised DV funding, which I welcome, is actually going where it is most needed—stopping harm before it happens and making sure women are protected and have a place to go when they have to flee unsafe situations. Territorians want to live in a place where women are safe, not one where they are seven times more likely to be killed than in the rest of Australia.

Territorians want justice systems that work fairly and equally in the long term and keep communities safe by investing in prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation and community-based solutions. They want justice systems that place integrity first, prioritising fair and just sentencing regardless of one's income, postcode or surname.

They know that endlessly expanding prisons and the police force does not deliver safety. The Productivity Commission's most recent report into government services makes this clear. Despite the highest police presence in the country, Territorians are feeling less safe than ever. We are borrowing safety from the future by over-relying on incarceration and underinvesting in what reduces harm. If we are serious about community safety in the long term, then we must stop doing what fails and start doing what works.

Territorians want health and education services that work. Our health workers are extraordinary people doing extraordinary work under extraordinary pressure, but people are still waiting for days to be seen at Royal Darwin Hospital. They are doubled up in emergency; remote clinics are under-resourced and understaffed; safe birthing options are inadequate; and the pay and conditions for our nurses, doctors and allied health workers are not good enough to keep them here. This is a retention crisis as much as a recruitment one. We bring people here and then we make it too hard for them to stay. We need to fix that, not with one-off bonuses, but with genuine investment in working conditions, proper housing support for health workers and pay that reflects the reality of living in the Territory.

They want an education system that is accessible, high-quality and responsive to the diverse needs of our children, urban and remote, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, children with disabilities and special needs and children doing it tough. They want a system that values teachers, works with families and recognises that children cannot learn if they are hungry, unsafe or living in overcrowded housing.

Territorians want a safe place to call home regardless of where they live or their income. When I ask people across every sector—justice, family violence, health, education and business—what would make the single biggest difference to the Territory, the answer is always the same: housing. Safe, affordable, appropriate housing underpins everything. It means children can have a good night's sleep and get to school in the morning; workers can have stable accommodation so they know they can stay here and build a life; young people can see a future in the place that they grew up in; women who are fleeing violence have a real choice to leave; and people can live in a place that does not make them sick and, in fact, enables them to be well.

When people lose income or the ability to work for all manner of reasons, they want the housing safety net to be less than 10 years' wait. Constituents call my office regularly to ask in exasperation, 'Why are there empty public housing properties lying in disrepair in Johnston and in many other communities while families are sleeping in severe overcrowding or people are forced to sleep rough because we cannot complete basic repairs on houses?' That is not a resources problem; that is a priority problem.

Half of my constituents in the Johnston electorate are renters. Every week I hear from people whose rent has gone up exponentially, who cannot find an affordable place to live, who are trapped in disputes about bond returns or who have been evicted with no reason given. We need basic protections, limits on rent increases, an end to no-grounds evictions, minimum standards and a fair system for bonds.

These are not radical ideas; they are the basics of a functioning housing system. Housing is the foundation on which every other social outcome depends, and until we treat it that way we will keep paying more in health, justice, family violence and lost productivity.

Territorians also tell me they want a government that they can trust to truly represent them no matter where they live, who they are or how much power they hold—a Territory where people feel seen, heard and respected. They want laws made carefully, based on evidence and shaped by genuine consultation. Territorians understand that governments must act, but they also know that strong democracy depends on scrutiny, transparency and respect for process. Good decisions are made better when communities are part of the team.

They want a Northern Territory where integrity comes first, there are no jobs for mates and no decisions are made behind closed doors. They want to know that the decisions and laws made in this Chamber are always putting their interests first.

They want public money spent wisely and fairly to reduce inequality, not entrench it. As we have talked about in this Chamber, almost 80% of our revenue comes from the Commonwealth, and that funding reflects the reality that our communities face higher costs and deeper structural challenges. Territorians want that money used where it was intended—strengthening communities, improving services and building opportunity for the future. They want a budget that they can trust, a people's budget that reflects the reality of life in the Territory and invests in housing and health, education and community-led services and that measures success by whether people's lives are improving not by GDP figures that can grow while people fall further behind. If the economy is growing but people are worse off, we are measuring the wrong things.

Above all, Territorians want leadership that works with them, listens, explains its decisions and understands its role is to look after everyone especially those who are doing it tough.

People tell me all the time that they want long-term wellbeing over short-term politics. They care deeply about this incredible place—as I am sure everyone does in this Chamber—that we are lucky to live in and they want decisions about water, land and development to be guided by evidence, respect for the First Peoples here and an understanding that some damage cannot be undone. They want to trust that development will be guided by evidence, genuine consultation, respect for Aboriginal land rights and by an honest accounting of what those long-term consequences are. They want to see the courage to say 'no'. Saying no when the public interest demands it is not a weakness; it is leadership.

Territorians want real progress on Closing the Gap built on partnership, trust and self-determination. Justice for Aboriginal Territorians is not a side issue; it is central to a just future for all of us in the Northern Territory.

Territorians want protection from harm, family violence, predatory gambling and alcohol companies. They want governments willing to put public health ahead of powerful interests. They want harm minimisation policies that recognise the real cost borne by families and communities, not the lobbying power of industries that profit from that harm.

We have choices to make today about what we want for tomorrow. We could spend public money wisely by funding prevention and early intervention as an absolute priority. Tomorrow we could stop subsidising big corporations and redirect those funds to services for everyday people, renters, families, small businesses, frontline services, community organisations and local jobs. Tomorrow we could reform public spending to address inefficiencies and money that is not working in the public interest.

The CLP will tell you that the things I describe are unrealistic and that housing, healthcare, prevention and integrity for all Territorians are somehow unaffordable luxuries. I want the people of Johnston and Territorians listening to sit with that for a moment. What kind of government things meeting the basic needs of its constituents is unrealistic? If it cannot meet your basic needs, whose needs is it meeting?

The resources, knowledge and the people who can make this happen exist in our health and education systems, Aboriginal communities, legal services, frontline services and community organisations. They have offered over and again to work with the government to make this real. What is missing is the political will to prioritise them over the interests of those who benefit most from the status quo.

The CLP's plan pays for yesterday's problems, which are there, but for those problems to repeat tomorrow. Investing in prisons instead of prevention, hospital admissions instead of housing and crisis response instead of care is a choice, and it is the wrong one. Tomorrow if this government chose to, we could stop that cycle. We have the ability to do all of that.

The choice before us in 2026 is clear. We can keep doing what we have always done and keep getting what we have always had or we could choose an alternative Territory where:

- every person has a safe home
- healthcare is accessible in the city and in remote communities at every stage of life
- communities are safe in the long term because we prevent harm, not simply respond to it
- integrity is the rule, not the exception
- education is universally properly resourced and valued
- the environment and water we depend on are protected for future generations
- Aboriginal self-determination is fully realised
- development that benefits the community is prioritised over development that destroys the community
- the budget serves people first and for the long term.

To my community of Johnston, this is not a fantasy; it is grounded in the conversations that we have every week at the markets, schools and front doors of your homes. You have told me clearly and consistently what kind of Territory you want, and I hear you. I will not stop making the case for it in this parliament because the Northern Territory belongs to all of us.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, 2026 is the year of growth, certainty and security—a year of focusing on reducing crime, building up the economy and restoring our wonderful Territory lifestyle. However, 2026 for me involves delivering for the rural area, a place that I call home and my favourite part of the Territory and the world.

In the past 18 months we already had a lot of wins in the rural area. I am proud to be a part of the government that is giving the rural area its fair share. There are the lights at Norbuilt Oval at Freds Pass Reserve, thanks to the Minister for People, Sport and Culture.

There is the commitment for duplication of the Arnhem Highway for which we will see design works go out for tender later this year, and next year or the year after, hopefully, begin construction which will save lives.

There is $20,000 gifted from the Department of Education and Training to Middle Point Primary School in my electorate. It is a lovely school of about 50 students. With the money that was allocated towards a sporting grant, it bought a new mower so that it can keep its sporting fields mowed and save money in the long run. The school also upgraded its trailer, so when it goes to Adelaide River Primary School for its annual sports carnivals and different events, it can tow all the sporting goods it needs.

This year we will see the new Humpty Doo Primary School kiss-and-go area, which residents and members of the rural community have been asking for, for nearly 10 years. This government is delivering. It would have been nice to deliver it about three months ago, but I understand work has been going on with Litchfield Council about the design, and that has nearly been resolved. I look forward to seeing it this Dry Season.

Much to the dismay, sometimes, of my ministerial colleagues I am a proud advocate for the rural area and I will never stop annoying them to make sure that my people get their fair share.

This year I will talk to the Chief Minister frequently in what I anticipate will be a large fire season in the rural area. With the unseasonally early and late Wet Season we are getting, with more rain on the way, we will have huge fire loads, especially in the rural area. I will be advocating to make sure that our volunteers and bushfire brigades have the tools they need to deal with those fires as they come.

Other than annoying my good friend the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries every day when I see him in the rural area, I will be advocating hard for my pastoralists, horticulturists and those in the agricultural industry to make sure that they are supported in these unprecedented times and that the government gets out of the way when needed so that they can get on with the job of feeding the nation.

I will be working hard with the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment to ensure that development in the rural area is in line with community expectations and done in a way that preserves our rural identity.

Madam Speaker, I do not know whether you have been looking at the real estate prices in the rural area for when you decide to come and live in my electorate, but it is a great place to live, have some space—you can have the shed, the pool and the animals; I can sort you out with a horse …

Mr Young: Will you keep them out of the house?

Mr MACKAY: We can sort out fencing too, Madam Speaker.

There has been an incredible demand for land from people who want to start their families in the rural area. We are seeing more subdivisions popping up all over the place, which allows younger families to buy a piece of land, put on a shed and a donga and build the house of their dreams over time. I will work with the minister to make sure that is done in a sustainable way that preserves the rural identity.

I will be working hard with the Minister for People, Sport and Culture to ensure that the rural area, especially Freds Pass Reserve, is well looked after, especially with sporting grants and support for sports.

The rural area is home to the largest AFL club in the Northern Territory, the largest rugby league club in the Northern Territory and all of the polocrosse in the Northern Territory. Although, in theory, there is a Palmerston polocrosse team, I am yet to meet any of its players who do not live in my electorate. It is a nice that they have a team called the Palmerston Polocrosse Club.

It is also home to, of course, the fantastic rugby union club, the Swampdogs.

There is the fantastic Rural Athletics club which gets a lot of young people, as well as adults and seniors. Gerry Wood was a big fan of participating in a lot of athletics. He is probably still faster than me. It is a great way of getting kids interested in running, hurdles, shot-put, discus and everything athletics. That is another great club that uses Freds Pass.

At Livingstone Recreation Reserve in the Member for Daly's electorate, I will make sure that the Litchfield Horse and Pony Club gets the support it needs to grow.

I will be working closely with and annoying the minister quite a lot this year to make sure that sport in the rural area is well supported.

I will be annoying the Minister for Infrastructure and Logistics to no end about roads this year. It is an issue across the Territory, but I will be fighting for the roads that I know the people in my electorate deserve to have safe access to. I will make sure that when funding becomes available we are near the top of that list because when I go for a drive down the Stuart Highway—the Member for Daly will have seen this—and the Arnhem Highway, which the Member for Arafura would have seen, especially in the rural area there is a plague of crosses on the side of the road for Territorians who lost their lives on our roads. On the way home to where I live in Lambells Lagoon I cannot count how many crosses of people I know which I drive past. The rural area has suffered that for a long time, and I will continue to advocate for improvements.

I will be annoying the minister for Education. I will probably give her a break while we are dealing with the unprecedented flooding in her home town, but I will be advocating for the schools in my electorate to get the support they need to continue to grow.

I will of course advocate for that new elusive rural high school that one day will be built. The rural area is continuing to grow. Sixty years ago Fannie Bay and Nightcliff used to be farmland. Howard Springs was where all the rural people moved to after the cyclone 50 years ago. Now they are moving out to Darwin River, Marrakai and Acacia because that is where the land is available. We have seen the population grow, and with that we will need somewhere to educate our kids. Taminmin has been at capacity for about 15 years. It is a great school and I highly recommend it. The Members for Wanguri and Nelson went there, as did I. It is either a testament to the school or a concern that everyone who goes there ends up in politics.

This year I will also be annoying the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations and the Attorney-General to make sure that all the red tape which gets in the way of our small businesses continues to be cut as part of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce recommendations. I know they do not need any prompting because they love making sure that our businesses have the tools they need and that the

government gets out of their way and lets them prosper. I will continue to advocate for the small businesses in my electorate, which is home to an awful lot of sole traders.

The Minister for Health does not get off for free this year. I will continue to advocate for rural health needs and the expansion of the Millie bus service in the rural area this year.

I have full confidence that this will be a fantastic and successful year for the rural area and the people of Goyder. I look forward to working with all 17 of my colleagues in this place, those across the Chamber and you, Madam Speaker, to ensure the rural area gets its fair share.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I support the year ahead statement delivered by our Chief Minister with a focus on growth, certainty and security. I will focus on the need for certainty.

I am proud to be a part of the united 17-member CLP team that over the last 18 months has restored and built confidence for Territorians in the future of our great Northern Territory. That unified and committed team brings much-needed certainty to my electorate following the uncertainty and neglect shown by the previous Gunner–Fyles–Lawler Labor government that oversaw skyrocketing crime and antisocial behaviour across our neighbourhoods, a plummeting economy, a time when many Territorians were looking to pack up and leave the Territory and our lifestyle being destroyed by over-regulation and unnecessary government interference in individuals' lives.

I deliberately highlight and reassure my electorate about this certainty in all my newsletters which I hand-deliver across my electorate. On that note, I am finalising my fifth newsletter which I will deliver over a three-week period to every street in Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, commencing at the end of March. As people can see, this is only the first draft, but I always have a photo of our unified team on the front page of my newsletter. This emphasises the collective certainty of this government to build a better Territory. People in my electorate appreciate seeing that in contrast to the rabble we have on the other side.

Let us look forward to what this government will do to maintain this certainty. We remain committed to staying the course on our election commitments to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore our Territory lifestyle. These are not throwaway mantras of the Labor Party; rather, they are the foundational election commitments of this united CLP government to Territorians. We hold that dear to our hearts.

Sure, we have made a good start over the last 18 months, but we know there is a lot more work to do and we do not underestimate how much there is to do. The multiple Bills passed or introduced by this government to the Assembly during these sittings, including the local government reform Bill passed on Tuesday this week, is clear evidence of how our government continues to work with high energy and momentum, rather than resting on the laurels of our significant achievements in the first 18 months of government.

I also remind the Chamber that the policy certainty provided by this government has seen the Northern Territory move from stone motherless last on the CommSec report to fourth in the nation. Believe me, we will all work hard to lift the Territory's rating even higher during the next couple of years. That policy certainty flows into providing certainty for private sector investment, which this government warmly welcomes and looks for.

That is in stark contrast to the uncertainty offered by the Labor opposition and crossbench which offer either half-hearted and confused support for or rejection of private sector investment, severely undermining investment confidence. Let us look at a couple of examples of Labor's incompetence. Be assured that if Labor, the Greens and Independents had formed a government of inertia and indecision in 2024, the Beetaloo Sub-basin and all the opportunities it offers would not have proceeded. Like other worthwhile real economic growth projects, it would have been consigned to the stone motherless last bin, as previously reflected in the CommSec report.

It is interesting that on the eve of the recent Nightcliff by-election, the incoming Labor MLA came out and indicated that despite eight years of conditional support for the Lee Point residential development, Labor had now withdrawn that support. I wonder why. It must have been an election. Whoopsadaisy! You can only imagine the detrimental impact on investor confidence that this sudden flip-flopping by Labor has. Labor does not know whether it is Arthur or Martha, so you can understand why the investment community would quiver with fear if it ever got re-elected. I say to the investment community: fear not because this CLP government will continue to deliver certainty and, like you, the wider Territory community respects this certainty.

Looking ahead, Territorians can be certain that this government will continue to work on issues of importance to them, including those living in my electorate of Karama. For my electorate, this includes significant public housing reform and legislative changes which I know the minister for Housing and his agency continue to

progress. I thank him for that. Public housing is a privilege, not a right. The majority of residents in Karama and Malak are demanding we enforce consequences for unacceptable criminal and antisocial behaviour associated with certain public housing tenancies—behaviour that is destroying our neighbourhoods.

As I flagged in my speech this morning on the Electrical Safety Amendment Bill, we will also look to continue to remove unnecessary government regulation that is impeding our local businesses and the lifestyle of law-abiding Territorians so that they can just get on with their lives. In that regard, we provide certainty to implement 48 recommendations of the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce by mid-July this year. Once again, it is action. We continue to do stuff; we have not stopped, and we have more to do. This part of our wider commitment to support the private sector and recognise its importance to the Territory economy is part of our DNA.

In going forward, we will continue with our task of budget repair and to create a vibrant and certain operating environment for our private sector.

I once quoted former Labor minister Ken Vowles on the Labor government's approach at the time to budget management. He said, and I remind you that he was talking about the previous Labor government:

> *… the Territory Government needed to revisit every election commitment and policy that would cost taxpayer dollars, prioritising ones that would bring in private investment and those that would have a return on investment.*

I agreed with what Mr Vowles said, particularly his recognition of the critical role that the private sector plays in rebuilding our economy. I am still shocked when I recall the statement that the Member for Johnston said in this Assembly:

> *… private investment never played a major role in the NT economy and the standard of living for most Territorians, and it never will.*

I totally disagree with her.

J Davis: It is true. Tell me how.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: She can keep saying it, but I disagree. Looking forward …

Mr Young: He has no evidence.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Labor also does not like the private sector. Let us record that and note it down, because I will bring that up many times.

Let me tell you what is certain. First and foremost, this united CLP team will stay the course and continue to deliver our commitments to growth, certainty and security. We will not be deterred by the side commentary bleatings and media stunts of a Labor opposition which is devoid of policy.

We will not cop inane and disingenuous criticism from the opposition and crossbenchers about lack of consultation, noting that it was the Labor government that got rid of the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, and it was this government that openly went to the last election promising to deliver bail and other reforms on urgency—reforms that Labor and crossbenchers voted against. They did not want the reforms or the consequences; they claimed consultation was the issue. What a load of crap. Although they say that they agree with consequences for bad behaviour, their actions show they never have the guts to implement them. The electorate knows this.

In regard to the never-ending call for more consultation and deferral of actual decision-making, I am reminded of the approach of one of my former colleagues in the former department of Business Mr Gareth James, who, sadly, passed away a couple of years ago. Gareth was a long-term professional public servant with a wildly wonderful Welsh sense of humour. When I headed up the trade and industry development division of the department of Business, Gareth headed up the Defence industry branch.

On Friday afternoons I would visit the 90-odd staff in the division and check how they were going. When chatting to Gareth one evening around 5.30, I noticed he had a little brown toy bear in his bookcase. I asked him about the bear. Gareth joyfully relayed that the bear's name was Widely. When I asked why, he said that every time people asked him who he had consulted with, he could put his hand on his heart and say, 'I have consulted Widely'—the little bear.

Taking a leaf out of Gareth's book, I now have a little brown toy echidna, which I will also call Widely. Whilst our team will continue to talk directly and extensively with residents and businesses in our electorates about our policies and decisions being made in government, which we have done—a classic example is talking to the electricians in the electorate about the recent Bill. For all our policies we go directly to the electorate. Just to satisfy the opposition and crossbench members, I will also consult Widely, just to say it to them. They do not know who they want to consult with, but I will be able to say that I have consulted Widely. That will be great. If anyone else wants to come and consult Widely, feel free.

Unlike Labor, we will not be a flip-flopping government; rather, we will offer certainty to Territorians to deliver a better future for them. I am privileged to be a part of our united CLP team.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I will be brief. My contribution to the year ahead statement will be a wish list, and I will put a couple of points across.

We will be watching the budget carefully and hoping that some of our communities and regions are funded adequately. In the past 18 months we have seen a huge reduction in funds to the Kakadu region in my electorate and clinics in Gunbalanya.

CMC staff have been pulled out of our regional and remote areas. Chief Minister and Cabinet staff have been based in communities for at least the last four years, informing community about what is happening and what government is bringing into communities. It would be handy to have someone in Maningrida now directing traffic in regard to the storms that are coming.

I will also talk about the lack of engagement. Some policies have been rushed and pushed through in this parliament in the last 18 months, like the sacred sites stuff, and we did not have the Northern Land Council, Tiwi Land Council, Anindilyakwa and the Gumatj people come to the table. It was hurtful for Aboriginal people to have that sort of stuff rushed through without consultation because that comes to the core of our identity.

I always talk about funding our remote and regional centres because when there is a lack of services in our communities and our regional hubs, people end up in main cities and towns like Katherine, Darwin or Alice Springs. It is stuff we take for granted like the MVR to register a car and clinics that focus on X-rays. People come to Darwin just for X-rays. That brings all their families to Darwin, especially when people are dealing with chronic illness. If a person who is sick is the part of the hierarchy of the family, part of Aboriginal culture is that everyone must travel to town and be with that person because they know that the end is coming.

I pick up on what the Member for Karama said about housing reform. I get a lot of calls from people being evicted from their homes around Karama and Palmerston. I am not too sure what happens next with these people. I might ask that question later when I have a briefing. Do they return home? Do they walk the streets and be homeless? Do they go on courses to make sure that they get back on track with how to look after Housing dwellings? I do not have answers for them, but I try to redirect them to the electorate offices of where they live, whether it is Karama or Blain.

The lack of engagement is a big issue that I talk about all the time. Our people on the ground in remote communities want to be a part of the solution. They want input into some of this government's decision-making. It is not rocket science. You are in government and in a position of leadership. They are Territorians. Listen to them and let them contribute. If you hit a brick wall, that is where discussions come in handy. Do not shift them aside, because it makes it wrong for the people and makes them frustrated. All these frustrations come out to us, the members from the bush.

A lot of legislation has been rushed over the past 18 months. Some of that was called for, but we wanted discussion and scrutiny for most of it. To be in government is to be scrutinised and answer the questions. The sacred sites legislation did not have scrutiny because apparently people scrutinised the Territory Coordinator Bill too heavily, so it rolled over into the sacred sites one a couple of months later. The NLC did not have a chance to tell that story.

Keep the services in the bush and the regional hubs so that people do not have to travel in and go out into the streets. There is a pub in almost every suburb in the northern suburbs. It is easy for them to have a beer then spill out into the parks. It affects all of us, because we drive past our parks, bus stops, the Palmerston depot, Karama shopping centre—all these places. I feel it too. I want people to stay home, but I know they are all here. This is excluding the flood mob who have recently come. This is the people who are wandering the streets.

We are not too sure about their return home with the Larrakia people as well. What happened with that program? I want to tell these people to get back to their home towns and communities, but I do not know where to direct them.

Mr Edgington: Larrakia.

Mr BROWN: Larrakia Nation—is that program still running? Okay; thank you, Indigenous affairs minister.

In closing, please look at the remote areas and try to get programs out there so that people do not have to come here, wreak havoc and make a bad name for us Indigenous people too. We want people to stay home. If you guys need any advice or help, come and reach out.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak quickly about my wonderful electorate of Daly, where many communities are suffering due to this flooding event.

There are wonderful things happening in my electorate. I will start with Wadeye. We are seeing fish traps going in there. The Thamarrurr Development Corporation, in partnership with the Thamarrurr Rangers, is looking at setting up a fishing industry and building fish traps at Old Mission, Fossil Head, Perrederr and different homelands around the Thamarrurr region.

Our first batch of mud crabs came to the Darwin market from Wadeye, which is a huge achievement for the Thamarrurr Development Corporation. I was lucky enough to be at the Darwin Fish Market to see the first batch of mud crabs come in. They went off the shelf pretty quickly; it took less than an hour. There were 15 to 20 crabs, from memory, and they sold quickly at the Darwin Fish Market.

We are looking at expanding that fishing enterprise in the Thamarrurr region.

Also the youth centre staff in Wadeye are doing amazing work with our young people, taking them out on country to practise culture with the old people. Our Thamarrurr Indigenous youth services provide that there, ensuring we engage with the young people from the Wadeye region. I invite the Youth minister to come and see that program; I am happy to take him there. It is a wonderful program. It needs more funding. There is a lot of local staff, from what I am told, and every day they have young people coming in and looking for work to see how they can help their community in Wadeye.

I invite Minister Jinson Charls to come and look at that program, because I believe we have not seen one CLP member of parliament come to Wadeye, even though the Attorney-General said a couple of weeks ago on radio, ‘Yes, a CLP member has come to Wadeye’. I was shocked to hear that, because I had not heard that a CLP member had come to Wadeye. I did the call around, and no-one had heard of it—unless they snuck in at night and walked out without speaking to anyone.

This is one of the largest Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, and not one minister has sat down with the people to talk with them in the 18 months since the CLP got into government. In Question Time the Attorney-General said that she is working with Aboriginal people from the region, yet she has not been to one of the largest Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, Wadeye. The Aboriginal Affairs minister has not even been to Wadeye once since coming to government. In fact, people have had to knock down his door just to get a meeting with the Aboriginal Affairs minister because he keeps pushing them off.

You are supposed to be a leader in the Northern Territory, and you cannot even get to Wadeye, one of the largest Aboriginal communities. I offered that support to you to come to Wadeye, but you just ignore the people of the region …

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! During the debate he should be directing through the Speaker, not lecturing me.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I agree, and I was just about to remind him of that.

Mr YOUNG: No problem. It has clearly hit a nerve because the Aboriginal Affairs minister, Steve Edgington, is quite concerned about this.

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker!

Mr YOUNG: It was through the Chair.

Mr EDGINGTON: He should not be naming people here; people should be referred to by their title.

Mr YOUNG: Mr Deputy Speaker, I said, 'Minister Steve Edgington'.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I heard you say 'minister'. Continue.

Mr YOUNG: The minister refuses to listen and tries to raise points of order rather than come to the region and listen to the people. It is concerning that members of this government continue to create this bluff that they are speaking to the people of the Northern Territory, yet they refuse to come to one of the largest communities in the Northern Territory.

A couple of weeks ago, residents of Pine Creek called me to say that they had heard their police station was closing down, yet we have a government that came in on an election commitment for community safety. I heard the Member for Karama put out his wish list and talk about community safety. You might be shocked to hear that the CLP government does not care about the residents of Pine Creek, because the CLP was going to shut down the police station. Now, we have heard that it is just a pop-up service, a part-time police station that will have police officers coming from Katherine to be stationed for a few hours. They do an amazing job, and the community knows that, but the community wants full-time police for the residents of Pine Creek and Kybrook and the surrounding pastoralists and farmers. More than 160 people signed a petition that was handed to me yesterday. I hope that in this upcoming budget the CLP government honours its commitment to community safety and ensures that the people of Pine Creek have the right to community safety like anyone else in the Northern Territory.

A massive flood event is happening across the Northern Territory, with many communities in my electorate impacted. We heard about the $100m allocated for the infrastructure bucket; I think it is being called that. Each electorate has its wish list, but we all acknowledge that it needs to be needs-based funding. I will not fight for the funding to be spent here or there. In these types of flooding events impacting people from Katherine, Daly River, Palumpa and Douglas Daly, we should not rush into this. We need a clear understanding of where the need is and that is where the funding should go; otherwise, it will blow out the budget and we will be looking for more money. Needs-based funding is always the way to go, especially for flooding events like these.

I pick up on the Member for Karama saying that housing is not a right; it is a privilege. I say to all the young people trying to buy their first home: it is a basic human right, no matter who you are. It is a basic human right for our teachers to have good housing and for our tradies who are building to own their house. It is a basic human right for anybody—it does not matter who you are—to have good and decent housing to support your family. I do not agree with the Member for Karama saying that it is a privilege only for those people in the top end of town. I speak to many young people, tradies, teachers and nurses who are struggling to buy a house. I speak to many people in remote communities and people in public housing in our urban centres who want good and decent housing. Housing is always a basic human right, and that is how we should all treat it. When we set policy we need to ensure that everybody has the right to good-quality housing. I will always back you: no matter what stage of life you are at everyone deserves housing.

I shout out to all our communities across the Daly region and thank them for their support this year. I look forward to getting out and meeting more of my constituents and organisations to hear about their priorities. The budget is coming up, and many people will put forward what they would like for their organisations, local governments, Aboriginal organisations and community organisations. It is something the government should be looking at as a whole. The electorate should not matter because, at the end of the day, we are all elected for the people. We should ensure that the funding is allocated on a needs basis.

I look forward to the Litchfield Art Exhibition this Saturday night. I look forward to it every year, supporting our local artists from the Litchfield and rural area. It is a wonderful event that the Litchfield Council put on every year. Many councillors and many members in this Chamber support it. I look forward to it.

The ukulele festival in Wagait Beach is on and off, depending on the committee. It is tricky for the volunteers, as it is everywhere, to come through for our ukulele festival. I will have to find out about that. I am meeting with the Cox Country Club board in the next few weeks. I look forward to meeting with it.

A member: Rosella.

Mr YOUNG: You have reminded me of the Rosella Festival. Many members opposite come to visit my beautiful electorate of Daly because they know it is the best electorate in the Northern Territory. That is something I look forward to in Adelaide River.

It is a beautiful festival run annually by many volunteers from Adelaide River, Batchelor and the region, including Rum Jungle. It is a wonderful festival of rural people from the region getting together, but it is not just our rural people; a lot of stallholders come from Darwin, Batchelor and even Katherine. Thousands of people go through the gates. It is held at the Adelaide River race track. It is a wonderful festival, and I always look for the rosella chilli jam. If you are ever there, get the rosella chilli jam. I stock up on it, as the rosellas run dry during the Wet Season. They start to flower during the Dry Season which is when people start to make rosella chilli jam. I love putting it with my sausages and mash, or a bit of steak or other meat. It is a wonderful condiment to add to your dinner.

We have seen the devastation from the floods running through Darwin River. Some of the roads that have been damaged are the responsibility of Litchfield Council. I hope that the government will work with Litchfield Council to look at where the damage is.

There will be a huge cost to many councils across the Northern Territory, particularly in my electorate of Daly. We will need to start fixing the roads.

I know the Treasurer was there only a couple weeks ago to look at the Darwin River pump station. He knows how bad the road is to get in from Darwin River up to the dam wall and the pump station. The Treasurer, now that he has seen what the road is like in Darwin River, may ensure that if an event like this happens again—it is likely to happen again due to the climate—people will have safe access to restore services for Darwin River Dam and the broader communities of Palmerston and Darwin.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Mr Deputy Speaker, the ministerial statement on the CLP government's plans for the year ahead is a great opportunity to speak about the priorities of our government for 2026.

We are taking strong practical steps to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the unique Territory lifestyle we all love and value. We promised 2025 would be a year of action, certainty and security. I am pleased to say we delivered that. This year will be anchored by growth, certainty and security: growth in our economy, workforce and population; certainty for our families in the Northern Territory; and security in our communities, jobs and way of life.

In my portfolios of Health; Mental Health; Alcohol Policy; Housing, Local Government and Community Development; Aboriginal Affairs; and Essential Services, I am focused on driving reform, delivering outcomes for the bush and driving growth in our regions. From delivering water security and housing in remote communities to investing in health and community-led councils, our focus is on safer communities, unlocking regional growth, supporting the delivery of critical services and a future full of opportunity to benefit all Territorians.

When it comes to health, as the Chief Minister said, lifestyle also means peace of mind. We are focused on health and wellbeing. The Chief Minister recently signed a landmark deal with the Prime Minister and state and territory leaders to deliver an additional $25bn for public hospitals, which includes an additional $1bn over the next five years for the Northern Territory. This five-year funding agreement locks in the single-largest contribution by the federal government to the Territory's hospitals. This represents a significant increase that will go a long way toward delivering better healthcare for Territorians.

We will continue to work with the federal government to improve our position, which has traditionally trailed behind the rest of the nation. We are still paying $200m for the things that the Commonwealth is directly responsible for; NT Health spends Territory dollars because those necessary services and facilities are not being provided by Canberra. The Northern Territory Government covers the cost of emergency aeromedical retrievals across the Top End and the operation of half the remote health clinics, whereas the Australian Government funds these services in other jurisdictions more than in the Northern Territory.

Under Labor, the Northern Territory's health budget had grown to regularly exceed $300m per annum, and that was left unaddressed. We addressed some of the shortfall left by Labor in the budget with $100m ongoing funding to ensure the NT Government's contribution to health services in the Territory is properly funded. Territorians deserve the best healthcare and that remains my priority.

I will correct a couple of things that the Opposition Leader said in her speech on health. She spoke about a student placement fee, and she should already know the answer, given it was her government that implemented this policy in the first place; this policy was raised in Labor's 2019 Budget. The implementation of the placement fee for students' clinical placements follows careful consideration and aligns with practices used in other Australian jurisdictions. It is a standard practice for public health systems to require education providers to contribute to the costs associated with clinical training. The CLP government is committed to supporting local workforce development and health training pathways and will always ensure clinical

placements are sustainable, well supported and accessible for students entering the Territory's health workforce. We recognise that today's students are tomorrow's nurses, midwives, allied health professional and health leaders.

The Opposition Leader spoke about health workers deserving better pay. She must have a short memory because what did Labor do when in government? I can tell you: Labor froze public sector wages. There was no wages growth. NT Health is working on staff recruitment and retention.

The Opposition Leader also spoke about how the Health KPIs are going. NT Health's KPIs are largely set against national standards and measures, providing a consistent benchmark for safety, quality and access across Australia. A quality improvement plan is being developed, but the trend for many KPIs is that they are improving compared with when the Opposition Leader was the Minister for Health. For example, the category 1 patients admitted within clinically recommended time KPI has improved to 77% from 75% in 2022–23 under Labor. The category 3 patients admitted within clinically recommended time KPI improved from 57% under Labor to 70% in 2024–25 under the CLP. There is more work to do, but the trend is heading the right way.

Later this year we will deliver the new $86.3m mental health unit, expanding critical care and recognising the importance of mental health. We committed $16m per year to operate the new 24-bed mental health unit at Royal Darwin Hospital, plus $500,000 for equipment in the 2025 Health budget. The new 32-bed ward is also being built and expected to open during our year of growth, certainty and security. These new units will enable Royal Darwin Hospital to improve patient care and safety, alleviate bed shortages and improve acute mental health service capacity. We are growing the number of beds in our health system in our year of growth. We will progress the RDH master plan for future health services.

We are also growing our Health workforce, another way to deliver our promise to restore our unique Territory lifestyle. We are boosting the Territory Health workforce with more than 200 new doctors this year and recording a strong uplift in trainee doctor retention. The new intake will support hospitals across the Territory, including the Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals, Katherine Hospital, Gove District Hospital, Alice Springs Hospital and Tennant Creek Hospital.

NT Health is also seeing encouraging signs that more doctors in training are choosing to continue their careers in the Territory. I am pleased that a large proportion of NT Health's Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospital doctor-in-training workforce is continuing from 2025 into 2026, with a retention rate of 78%, a significant increase on last year.

We are also strengthening frontline care with 72 graduate nurses and midwives joining the NT Health workforce in the first three months of this year, and there are more on the way. Every graduate nurse and midwife who chooses the Territory strengthens our healthcare system. That means better care for patients and helps build a sustainable Health workforce that keeps Territorians healthier. NT Health provides up to 300 graduate nursing and midwifery positions each year across the Territory. More graduate nurses and midwives will be on their way across the Territory over 2026.

We are strengthening access to quality healthcare and providing the certainty essential workers need to stay, settle and put down roots in the Territory.

In 2026 we will continue our free meningococcal B vaccinations for all infants under the age of two and adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19. Last year more than 18,000 free meningococcal B vaccines were administered, including 7,739 doses to adolescents. This is the legacy of baby Skylar, who lost her life to this deadly disease, protecting young Territorians from serious illness. We have invested $1m to fund the program, including a two-year catch-up initiative, and committed $500,000 annually for ongoing vaccinations for infants and Year 9 students. Students in Years 10 to 12 remain eligible until the end of 2026.

Territorians deserve confident in their healthcare system, particularly families relying on maternity services. Ensuring safe, accessible and reliable care for mothers and babies remains our priority. Darwin is the only capital city without private maternity services, following Healthscope's decision to pull the service and its subsequent administration.

Following Healthscope's announcement, the federal government undertook a process to ensure that the sale of Darwin Private Hospital would not see the Territory worse off. We have been clear that any new provider must return private maternity services to Darwin. We have renewed our call on the Albanese government to stop treating the issue as an afterthought. Territorians deserve the same certainty, stability and access to healthcare as every other Australian. I met with the receivers last month, and we continue to fight to restore

private maternity care and choice for Territory families. I also met with Minister Butler when interstate last month, after months of negotiations on funding to upgrade the RDH public maternity ward.

It was promising to see earlier this year the Prime Minister announce the appointment of Ozcare as the preferred operator for a new residential aged-care facility in the Top End. It is good to see Labor finally deliver on this promise to Territorians. We will be advocating for it to be built as soon as possible, but it will not be a silver bullet. Our government has committed land and headworks near Palmerston Regional Hospital to help get this much-needed facility moving.

Senior Territorians should be getting the dignified care they deserve in their later stages of life. The NT spends about $40m a year caring for elderly patients who cannot access aged-care places. The Commonwealth needs to come to the table to provide the Territory with that $40m per year, given aged care is a federal responsibility. I call on the opposition to support that call for $40m. I must say that the opposition has been silent on the call to cover the cost of aged care.

Increasing the NT pharmacy scope of practice and expanding health services for community pharmacists can provide additional care for Territorians. One of our election commitments was increasing the NT pharmacy scope of practice as part of the pharmacy reforms. We have delivered on making the services available at chemists cheaper and quicker. We are working diligently with the Pharmacy Guild on this. I look forward to delivering more for Territorians and will have more to say on this soon.

When it comes to public housing, 2026 will be a big year of cracking down on antisocial behaviour and failures to pay rent. Our new Tenant Accountability Policy Statement was released last month. The policy statement strengthens tenant accountability for basic responsibilities, which is to pay rent, look after the house and be a good neighbour. The new policy, plus our new police public safety officers, will make a significant improvement to the amenity and safety of public housing.

Thanks to our reforms in the greater Darwin region, 36 tenants who were constantly doing the wrong thing, like causing disturbances, have been evicted or handed back leases after termination action commenced. A further 100 actions have progressed through NTCAT. These strong actions make clear that when lease conditions are breached and neighbours are disrupted by bad or sometimes criminal behaviour, there will be consequences.

The CLP government has brought in clear rent compliance rules for all tenants and now prompt follow-up action is taken when arrears arise. Eighty-seven households have cleared their debt and are no longer in arrears due to agreements to pay, and I thank those tenants. Agreements to pay are reducing arrears for more than 1,100 households. We have extended the statute of limitations for debt recovery to ensure no more write-offs. Those opposite wrote off many tens of millions of dollars in rent, yet complain about the lack of funds to properly maintain public housing.

We have also tried new approaches, including seeking alcohol restrictions under the *Liquor Act* with the tenants' consent. Thirty-five homes have been declared alcohol restricted so far, including 12 without the tenants' consent.

We have increased our joint patrols with NT Police and partner agencies across greater Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. Those reforms from 2025 lay the groundwork for what comes next, with further reforms on the way.

I will speak on some of the housing issues previously raised by the opposition. In order to start to address the backlog we inherited from the previous government, the CLP government has allocated an additional $17m for urban public housing maintenance activities across the Northern Territory. This includes $7m specifically targeted to homes that are vacant and awaiting repairs. In Alice Springs this will enable the government to return up to 70 identified vacant dwellings to service by the end of June. The joint $4bn investment with the Australian Government for public housing in remote communities has already seen 300 new homes built in communities and town camps across the Northern Territory. It also includes $92m a year to support improved remote housing repairs and maintenance. As part of the Finocchiaro government's year of action, certainty and security we are proud to have delivered more homes for families in remote locations across the Territory. What a contrast to Labor's appalling record.

We recently passed amendments to the *Housing Act* to fix Labor's remote rent mess and provide certainty to remote communities on the remote rental framework. These amendments do no more than ensure the remote rental framework operates as always intended. The amendments are necessary to comply with the High Court's decision and fix Labor's mess. We are providing certainty to remote tenants, which Labor failed

to do. This will allow the government to temporarily set remote rent while we undertake significant consultation with remote communities, stakeholders and land councils to develop a remote rent framework that maintains fairness and equity and is in the best interests of all remote housing tenants. The government is providing security for remote tenants as the department will calculate the rent that tenants were liable to pay since the implementation of the remote rent framework and will repay amounts if tenants have been overcharged. Ultimately, this is just another Labor mess we are fixing.

We strengthened the banned drinker orders, extending them from seven days to 28 days following clear evidence from places like Katherine that targeted action reduces alcohol harm. Actions we have taken like these are delivering a safer stronger Territory. In 2026 we will stay the course. We will respond more to the BDR review and have more to say on alcohol management plans.

We have a strong reform agenda for local government in 2026. It was interesting to hear the Member for Arafura say that people want to be part of decision-making in remote areas. That is what we are doing, Member for Arafura; we are making sure that they have more of a say. Last year we passed the Local Government Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 which improved efficiency and transparency and strengthened effectiveness within the local government sector. We are committed to ensuring communities have a real voice at the local level so that they are not only empowered but also making community-led decisions.

Our government's empowering the bush agenda reforms and the priority of restoring the economy are supporting remote communities to strengthen self-determination through place-based governance models that improve access to services and build local leadership. Our empowering the bush agenda will ensure that the voices of communities, traditional owners, local authorities, Aboriginal organisations and other regional stakeholders are embedded from the outset. Structural changes under this reform will be progressed only when they are requested by communities and supported by robust consultation processes. All governance arrangements must demonstrate financial sustainability to ensure long-term viability and service continuity.

Over the last 12 months I have consulted with a broad range of community representatives and organisations across the Territory. As a result of this consultation, I have received many expressions of interest from community leaders and organisations that want to be part of the empowering the bush agenda.

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

Motion agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I have tasked the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development to conduct structured consultation with the community leaders and organisations that have expressed interest in participating. This will not be a one-size-fits-all approach. The establishment of community councils is not the only option on the table, and we will move at the pace of community to define the right arrangements in each place.

In my portfolios, especially in Health, remote Housing, Local Government, public Housing and Aboriginal Affairs, we laid strong foundations in 2025 and in 2026 have plans to improve services for Territorians and further improve community safety to restore our unique Territory lifestyle.

I will touch briefly on the Aboriginal Affairs Framework, and I will speak more about it in the next debate. Our government recently released the NT Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2026–2028. This framework recognises that safe communities are essential to restoring the Territory lifestyle. Aboriginal economic participation is central to rebuilding the Northern Territory economy. Strong cultures, governance and community foundations and amenities reduce social justice system pressures.

The framework identifies six interconnected priorities that guide government action:

1. creating safer communities through place-based preventive approaches, including diversion, rehabilitation and reintegration, and stronger local safety partnerships

2. empowering bush communities by supporting community-led decision-making, cultural authority and local governance to drive local priorities and change

3. creating jobs and business on country, embedding Aboriginal economic participation within the Territory's economic growth agenda, including through infrastructure, energy, mining, agriculture and tourism

4. boosting health, wellbeing and culture, recognising that culture, language and connection to country are essential to long-term wellbeing

5. building community foundations, particularly housing and infrastructure, as enablers of safety, health, education and economic participation

6. developing skills for the future, strengthening education, training and pathways from school to work so that Aboriginal Territorians can fully participate in the Territory's economic future.

I will leave it there and speak more about our Aboriginal Affairs policy in the next debate.

In the year ahead our government is focused on growth, certainty and security, and I am pleased to support this ministerial statement.

Motion agreed to; statement noted.

PAPERS TABLED
Legislative Assembly (Disclosure of Interests) Act 2008 – Statement of Registrable Interests

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the Legislative Assembly (Disclosure of Interests) Act 2008 Statement of Registrable Interests as at 3 March 2026.

Committee of Privileges Report on a Referral Regarding the Member for Nightcliff

Mr MALEY (Chair of Committee of Privileges): Mr Deputy Speaker, I table the Committee of Privileges report and minutes of proceedings relating to the referral to the committee regarding the Member for Nightcliff and the requirements of the Remuneration Tribunal Determination and the members' Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards.

The matter has been resolved by way of the Member for Nightcliff issuing an apology to the Assembly on 3 February.

I move that the report be noted.

Motion agreed to; report noted.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Closing the Gap

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Arafura as follows:

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance:

Acknowledging on Close the Gap Day the need to urgently improve outcomes against Closing the Gap targets.

The letter is signed by the Member for Arafura. Is discussion supported? Discussion is supported.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Mr Deputy Speaker, today's Closing the Gap report confirms what too many of our mob already know: the gap is not closing; it is getting worse in health, education, youth engagement and the number of adult and youth Aboriginal people in the justice system, to name a few. Across the country only four of the 19 Closing the Gap targets are on track, with seven going backwards in the Territory.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to carry a burden of disease 2.3 times higher than other Territorians. Life expectancy across the Territory remains at 65.6 years for Aboriginal men and for Aboriginal women it is going backwards to 69.4 years. The life expectancy of Aboriginal women is reducing; fewer mothers and grandmothers are seeing their children grow up.

Only 43.4% of Aboriginal Territorians are living in appropriately sized houses, meaning overcrowding and housing stress still remain a daily reality for thousands of families.

In justice the numbers are among the most heartbreaking. There are 4,166 Aboriginal Territorian adults in prison per 100,000 people. Up to 30 per 1,000 Aboriginal children are in out-of-home care, 11 times the rate of non-Indigenous children in the Territory. That figure speaks to deep systematic failures.

Early education is one of the most important foundations we can give our children to have the best possible start in life. The Northern Territory is the only place in the country where early education is going backwards.

These are not isolated statistics; they are direct results of a system that has not changed. The report makes clear that the issue is not a lack of solutions; it is the lack of structural reform and genuine partnership and the failure of governments to shift power to communities. Under Lia Finocchiaro and the CLP government we are seeing the opposite: a continuation of business-as-usual decisions that undermine community control and policies that risk entrenching disadvantage rather than addressing it.

Closing the Gap was never meant to be symbolic; it was meant to deliver real change, and Aboriginal Territorians deserve nothing less.

It has been 18 years since Closing the Gap was established to reduce inequality and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people. We are six years into the national agreement and many critical outcomes for Aboriginal children and families are worsening. We have come a long way, and Territory Labor supports this critical initiative to improve the lives of generations of Aboriginal children and Territorians, but there is a long way to go.

The Territory is one of the worst-performing jurisdictions with several key targets, including incarceration, youth detention, employment and early childhood outcomes, moving backwards. Business-as-usual approaches are failing to address systematic shortfalls. Reform is slow, and implementation is poor. We need stronger investment in community and community-controlled solutions. Genuine partnership with all levels of government is vital to actively improve the lives of all Aboriginal Territorians.

Access to culturally safe, stable and secure housing is essential to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The proportion of Aboriginal Territorian babies being born at a healthy birth weight is worsening. Poor maternal health access, remote service shortages and broader socioeconomic conditions remain key barriers. Life expectancy targets for Aboriginal Territorians are not on track, and for Aboriginal women in the NT, as mentioned earlier, it is worsening.

Persistent gaps in chronic disease, remote health access and social determinants, such as poor housing and food insecurity, continue to limit progress. Cost-of-living pressures impact the ability to access healthcare. Other factors are high supply chain costs and large distances, patient travel, limited remote specialist care, the stigma of accessing health services and the need for culturally safe options. The NT holds the lowest rate of people visiting a GP for standard consultations across Australia. The complexities of racism, stigma, oversurveillance and barriers to safe access for Aboriginal Territorians can lead to reduced engagement with clinics, GPs, specialists and hospitals because of fears of police or child protection involvement.

Accessible affordable specialists and culturally safe healthcare are a basic human right, which every Territorian needs so that they have the best opportunities in life. Whether you are living in Darwin, Tennant Creek, Borroloola or Laramba, access to healthcare, disability support, assessments or treatment is fundamental to living a better-quality life. Good-quality healthcare and the ability to reach the highest attainable health outcomes should not be restricted because of where you live. Your postcode should not determine your health. Proper health infrastructure and funding of services benefit everyone in the Territory.

Prioritising the health needs, aspirations and future of Aboriginal Territorians means working with the unique parameters of the NT—vast remote areas, dispersed populations and serious and chronic illnesses among vulnerable populations. We need stronger investment in place-based community-led solutions. We need workforce recruitment and capacity-building strategies that blend urban and remote skills.

Preventive and early healthcare is vital and a smart investment for future Territorians. Primary and preventive healthcare helps to create less pressure on tertiary healthcare responses, as Territorians are supported to reduce risk or treat early health issues before they develop to a level where chronic and complex management is required. Aboriginal women's healthcare support is vital to addressing intergenerational trauma and chronic health conditions.

Safe maternal, child and family health services are crucial for healthy mothers and babies. We know that higher rates of teenage pregnancy are associated with family histories of teenage pregnancy, unstable housing arrangements, socioeconomic disadvantage and sexual abuse in childhood. The CLP has failed

expectant mothers by removing choice. Under this government, women are flying interstate to have their babies.

The CLP government cut funding to critical health infrastructure in our regions, such as the $20m Gunbalanya health clinic. It cut the $12m allocated in the 2024–25 budget for land servicing and design of a new 120-bed residential aged-care facility. There has been limited progress on place-based health support in language, free from stigma, for mothers at every stage of pregnancy to help reduce FASD, misdiagnosis and assessment referrals.

The Commonwealth Labor government delivered 114 sites for culturally safe rheumatic heart care; supported 10 birthing on country initiatives; expanded the PBS co-payment program to provide a 61% reduction in expenses; completed 18 Aboriginal health infrastructure projects; committed to investing $144m for infrastructure improvements; and established eight Medicare urgent care clinics in communities like Ali Curung, Alyangula, Galiwinku, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Alice Springs, Palmerston and Wurrumiyanga.

Stable and secure housing is a key determinant of health and is essential to physical and mental wellbeing. Unmet housing need, severe overcrowding, rental stress and an unimpregnable housing market mean that the housing gap is growing. These concerns are more prominent for Aboriginal Territorians. The National Housing Supply and Affordability Council projects that the NT will reach just 31% of our housing accord targets. Severe overcrowding accounts for 76% of homelessness in the Territory. Waitlists for social housing applicants are between four and 10 years.

Homelessness and housing instability are associated with significantly higher rates of chronic illness, malnutrition, mental health issues and mortality, as well as increased exposure to violence and social isolation. These conditions also increase risk of disengagement with education and employment and can increase public system and cost-of-living pressures.

Inadequate progress for remote safe houses—only one FTE within DCF to support transition of funding. The CLP cut funding to infrastructure needed for these houses before transition occurs. It also cut $6.5m from Dawn House and $3m from the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre, with no consideration for funding needs or staff housing in remote locations either. There is no information in the DFSV strategy about the model, infrastructure or referral pathways to regional crisis accommodation shelters and supports for staff.

The Commonwealth Labor government built 260 homes for families; approved 583 concessional home loans under the Indigenous Home Ownership Program; allocated $75m to commence critical repairs and maintenance in remote communities; and provided free NBN and wi-fi, connecting 23 remote communities and 30 more on the way.

We need long-term investment in growing the Aboriginal community-controlled housing sector and equitable housing programs that work in urban and remote areas to support buyers and renters.

Access to safe, affordable and quality childcare is essential to set kids on the right path, particularly vulnerable kids, and to provide support to families. If we get things right for children from birth to five years we lay a foundation for each child to reach their full potential and support families.

Early years education and care should be designed and delivered to meet children's development and cultural needs. Early years education and care require dedicated, sustainable and needs-based funding that is adequate to deliver support and reasonable adjustments required for children with development concerns, health and wellbeing issues and disabilities, including those without a formal diagnosis.

The proportion of Aboriginal children developmentally on track in early schooling is not improving fast enough and has worsened. Across all assessment areas and year levels, the Territory was the jurisdiction with the highest proportion of students assessed as being at the 'needs additional support' level.

National progress towards increasing Year 12 completion rates is improving, but is not on track to meet the target. Remote schooling challenges and disengagement remain particularly significant barriers.

Investment in early childhood and care is not a priority for this CLP government. Studies have shown a return on investment for early childhood services is 103%, yet the CLP committed nothing.

In February 2025 the Commonwealth Labor government committed $842m over six years to deliver the NT Remote Aboriginal Investment, inclusive of funding up to 12 Aboriginal community-controlled family centres to provide coordinated solutions to complex issues relating to family safety and child development.

The previous Territory Labor government funded and built six child and family centres between 2020 and 2024; established six Connected Beginnings sites, which support Aboriginal children and families with improved access to early childhood, maternal and health services; and secured full funding for all our public schools in the Northern Territory.

The proportion of young Aboriginal Territorians engaged in employment and/or education has worsened. Every jurisdiction except the NT and SA has improved. Employment outcomes for Aboriginal people declined in the NT; the NT is the only jurisdiction to go backwards. Barriers faced by Aboriginal Territorians remain structural, with limited place-based opportunities and access to training compounded by other factors like remote housing, poverty and health and safety issues.

The previous NT Labor government secured the $155m National Skills Agreement deal for the NT to boost skills and opportunities and meet the workforce shortfall in critical sectors. Continued investment and support are needed to strengthen and grow the Aboriginal Territorian VET sector and workforce.

In 2022 the previous Labor government invested approximately $3.6m in early childhood education and care training.

The Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program is aimed at providing tailored and support pathways to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers and sustainable models of teaching in government schools in identified local communities.

Tough-on-crime policies and limited access to bail have increased Aboriginal Territorian incarceration rates. Ten-year-old Aboriginal children do not belong in jail. Youth justice policies that affect our most vulnerable children must be separated from politics. Irrespective of which political party holds office, we must hold a firm expectation that governments of the day make sound legal and policy decisions based on evidence consistent with human rights and minimum standards. The over-representation reflects a justice and legal system that fails to understand and value culture, lore and law.

The rate of Aboriginal children in youth detention is considered one of the most concerning indicators nationally. If we are to take CTG and reduce the over-representation of children in the criminal justice system seriously, we need to see the measures that protect and strengthen vulnerable families and communities. Ninety-two per cent of our children under youth justice supervision in the Territory identify as Aboriginal. We cannot ignore the systemic racism and failure in policies and law reform that must be acknowledged as a central feature in driving the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the youth justice system.

The gap remains significant for the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care. In the NT, Aboriginal children are 12 times more likely to be in care than a non-Aboriginal child. Evidence shows that children in residential out-of-home care are criminalised more frequently for behaviour that within a family setting would go unreported. We know that children with child protection experience are more likely to be at risk of exposure to the youth and adult justice systems. Fifty-three per cent of children in care live with disability.

Aboriginal children in the NT are at risk of justice involvement due to intergenerational trauma, adverse childhood experiences, neurodevelopmental impairment, overpolicing, racial profiling and mandatory sentencing, including compounded disadvantages like unstable housing which can reduce opportunities for bail or rehabilitation.

The CLP ignored 35 coronial recommendations and excluded them from the NT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy. While prison numbers in the NT have grown over the last 12 months, the CLP allocated just 3% of the Corrections budget to DV prevention and reduction programs. The CLP scrapped funding for evidence-based initiatives, programs and services—particularly under the AJA (Aboriginal Justice Agreement)—which have the potential to support crime reduction.

SNAICC CEO Catherine Liddle said:

> *… these results point to a lack of government follow-through, not a lack of solutions.*
>
> *…*
>
> *SNAICC is urging all levels of government to apply … commitment to areas where outcomes for children are worsening, especially in early childhood development, child protection and youth justice.*

In jurisdictions like the Northern Territory we are seeing the deliberate and calculated ignoring of national agreements they have signed up to.

… And it's the children who suffer the most from a lack of government commitment, action and frankly, care.

Closing the gap starts with our children and that means investing in quality, culturally strong early education and care, and systems that support families rather than continue cycles of removal and criminalisation.

Mr EDGINGTON (Aboriginal Affairs): Mr Deputy Speaker, I heard not one acknowledgement that Labor was in government for 19 of the last 25 years. All we heard is rambling about blaming the CLP.

Closing the gap is everybody's business. That is what we are getting on with. I will outline what we are doing regarding closing the gap. We will not be here picking on bits and pieces like Labor members just have, because that is all they want to do—come to the table today and blame somebody else for their failures over the last 25 years. That is where we are at. Labor members can talk about who did what and who did not. How about acknowledging the 19 years that Labor was in government and where it went wrong? Why does it not just get on with it and do the job that is needed?

We are committed to closing the gap. That is why we are investing in better access to education, healthcare, jobs and housing through initiatives shaped with and delivered by Aboriginal communities. We are also working in partnership with Aboriginal people to empower communities that want a greater say. This is creating opportunities for local community members to lead, contribute and have a more active role in community development and decision-making processes.

The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Aboriginal residents living in remote and very remote areas. It faces unique and complex challenges, particularly in relation to remoteness and service delivery. As a result the Territory faces the highest levels of disadvantage in the country. In comparison, nearly half of the First Nations population in Australian major cities reside in areas with easier and greater access to mainstream services, including healthcare, education and employment opportunities.

I will talk about the update the Productivity Commission released yesterday which reports progress against the national agreement.

The snapshot of the Northern Territory's progress against targets shows improvements in targets 5, 6, 9a, 12, 15a and 15b. These targets where we are seeing improvement include Aboriginal children attaining Year 12, which is great stuff; Aboriginal people completing a tertiary qualification; an increased number of Aboriginal people not living in overcrowded housing; and a reduction in the rate of children in out-of-home care. Target 15 relates to land and sea rights.

The snapshot of the Northern Territory's progress against targets shows declining performances against targets 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10 and 11. This is in areas like female life expectancy, early childhood education, youth engagement and employment. Much of this data from the Productivity Commission relates to past years, before our time in government.

As I said, we can talk about who was in government, but there is no acknowledgement from those on the other side about the time they spent in government.

The NT Government looks forward to the release of the sixth annual data compilation report scheduled for July 2026. The July 2026 update will inform a clearer picture of the Territory's progress against the national agreement. It is also important to consider that many of these issues will fluctuate in small degrees from year to year, but it is from a long-term and consistent approach to these issues that the most benefits will be derived.

The CLP government, with the support of the Commonwealth Government, is making major investments in remote services across the Territory. This includes the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment agreement (NTRAI), which commits $842.6m over six years to ensure communities have access to critical services.

There is major co-investment in critical areas such as the $4bn boost for remote housing, which will see up to 2,700 homes built over the next 10 years. In 2024–25 there were 222 homes completed in remote locations. This represented an increase on the 206 homes delivered in 2023–24. Over the next 10 years we

are aiming for about 270 homes per year. This co-investment is managed by the joint steering committee that includes the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, the four Northern Territory land councils and Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory.

As part of the Australian Government's Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program, the CLP government is contributing funding of $40m in 2025–26 and 2026–27 to deliver housing, municipal and essential services in 381 homelands and 18 non-leased town camps.

Health is working closely with Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations to empower remote communities with health services, including the transfer of Gunbalanya Health Centre to the Red Lily Health Board on 1 July 2025.

In addition, we are investing in programs and services that tackle the root cause of some of the most complex issues that children and families experience. These include programs such as school attendance and engagement officers; the Circuit Breaker Program; and our $36m annual investment in domestic, family and sexual violence prevention to improve the wellbeing and safety of all children, young people and families.

Under the CLP's five-pillar economic strategy for the Northern Territory, one of the five key priorities includes unlocking regional growth and strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal Territorians. We are committed to backing the development of the Beetaloo and creating the economic opportunities that come with it—more jobs for Territorians, stronger regional communities and long-term royalty revenue that will help fund essential services and infrastructure.

We are working with Aboriginal Peak Organisations (APONT), which includes the four land councils, on Closing the Gap initiatives. The NT Government is committed to addressing all targets of Closing the Gap and is continuing to work with its partners, Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory and the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, to develop the third Closing the Gap implementation plan with a range of actions to progress each target.

The implementation plan will detail how the Northern Territory in partnership will contribute to achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians. The implementation plan will be developed through the NT's Closing the Gap governance structure, led by the NT Executive Council on Aboriginal Affairs, which I co-chair, with APONT. It will have a strategic focus on delivering the greatest impact on the priority reform areas of the national agreement. The implementation plan is expected to be finalised and publicly released this year.

When it comes to empowering the bush, there is no question that momentum is growing. Communities and Aboriginal organisations are demanding real shared decision-making, stronger self-determination, culturally grounded governance and clear accountability for how services are delivered locally.

The council amalgamations on 1 July 2008 forced a one-size-fits-all system that in some areas has led to weakened community voice, limited service responsiveness and a disconnect between governance and cultural authority. As the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development, I have heard this message loud and clear for many years during my travels.

Many community members remember the days before super shires when communities were thriving, proud and progressive. These were days when local jobs were plenty and communities had a means to have their voices heard, with cultural authority at the centre of true local decision-making. Our government's empowering the bush reforms, alongside our priority to restore the economy, are focused on supporting remote communities and strengthening self-determination through place-based governance that reflects cultural authority, improves access to services and builds local leadership. It is about creating opportunities, pathways and a future for young people in remote communities. We are advancing this agenda at a time when there is broad recognition that in parts of the Territory existing local government structures are not delivering fair and equitable outcomes, particularly for some remote Aboriginal communities.

Our empowering the bush agenda will ensure the voices of communities, traditional owners, local authorities, Aboriginal organisations and other regional stakeholders are embedded from the outset. Engagement in community will re-examine the governance and structural foundations of local government and the NT Government's remote service delivery in the Northern Territory, without disrupting service continuity or undermining regional development objectives. As I have stated several times, structural changes under this reform will be progressed only when requested by communities and supported by robust engagement and consultation with Aboriginal people living in remote communities. All governance arrangements must demonstrate financial sustainability to ensure long-term viability and service continuity.

Over the past 12 months I have consulted with a broad range of community representatives and organisations across the Territory. As a result, I have received many expressions of interest from community leaders and organisations who want to be part of the empowering the bush agenda. I have tasked the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development to conduct structured consultation with those community leaders and organisations who have expressed an interest in participating. It will not be a one-size-fits-all approach. The establishment of community councils is not the only option on the table. We will move at a pace the community defines through the right arrangements in each place.

Through Health we are working closely with Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations to empower remote communities with healthcare services, including the transfer, as I said, of the Gunbalanya Health Centre to Red Lily on 1 July last year. That is a federal responsibility, I believe, and we would be happy to work with the feds to deliver a new NT Remote Aboriginal Investment partnership agreement.

The NT Government entered into a new $842.6m NT Remote Aboriginal Investment partnership agreement, signed by the Commonwealth Government, the Northern Territory Government and APONT. This agreement represents a practical approach to delivering our shared commitment to closing the gap in the Northern Territory. Importantly, it empowers bush communities to have a more active role in community development and decision-making processes.

Over three-quarters of the NT's Aboriginal population live in either remote or very remote areas. Their ability to access services which meet their diverse needs and are culturally responsive requires significant additional investment across regional and remote Northern Territory. The NT Government, Commonwealth Government and APONT have developed and agreed to the NTRAI partnership agreement as the governance and decision-making mechanism for the investment.

The overarching objective of the agreement is to enable substantive and enduring opportunities for self-determination for remote Aboriginal communities to improve life outcomes, with place-based delivery, transition to community control and building local workforce as focus areas. The funding has a focus on continued investment for the remote parts of the NT, ensuring the investment priorities maintain critical services, including remote policing, women's safe houses, the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, early childhood programs and predetermined preventive health programs. The NT Government is working with the agreement partners to determine the specific details of program deliverables that will build on the principles for investment and the four foundational pillars: being place based; transition to community control; building local workforce; and capital investment.

For too long we heard the previous government pushing the agenda of local decision-making. As I have said previously, we will honour all 20 existing local decision-making agreements with community organisations across the Territory in their varying stages of implementation. In addition, our empowering the bush reforms will enable communities and Aboriginal organisations to participate in authentic shared decision-making, greater self-determination, culturally legitimate governance and improved accountability and local service delivery. This aligns with the government priorities to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle.

Recently our government launched the NT Aboriginal Affairs Framework. The new NT Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2026–2028 sets a clear whole-of-government approach within the Northern Territory Government and its agencies to Aboriginal Affairs in the Northern Territory.

The framework outlines the Northern Territory Government's vision for improved outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians through the delivery of six strategic priorities: create safer communities; empower bush communities; create jobs and business on country; boost health, wellbeing and culture; build community foundations; and develop skills for the future. We will be:

- creating safer communities through place-based preventive approaches, including diversion, rehabilitation and reintegration, and stronger local safety partnerships

- empowering bush communities by supporting community-led decision-making, cultural authority and local governance to drive local priorities and change

- creating jobs and business on country by embedding Aboriginal economic participation within the Territory's economic growth agenda, including through infrastructure, energy, mining, agriculture and tourism

- boosting health, wellbeing and culture by recognising that culture, language and connection to country are essential to long-term wellbeing

- building community foundations, particularly housing and infrastructure as enablers of safety, health, education and economic participation

- developing skills for the future by strengthening education, training and pathways from school to work so that Aboriginal Territorians can fully participate in the Territory's economic future.

Together these priorities guide coordinated action to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians.

The framework is for the Northern Territory Government and provides guidance for our public sector agencies on how to integrate Aboriginal Affairs into the delivery of core business, operations, resourcing and accountability systems. The framework reinforces that Aboriginal Affairs is a shared responsibility and requires a coordinated system-wide effort across the NT Public Sector. This is a practical operating framework to improve consistency, effectiveness and outcomes across the NT Government as they relate to and impact on Aboriginal Affairs.

Agency staff at all levels will be familiarising themselves with the framework. It includes a practical how-to-use guide to support agencies in applying the framework to policy and program development and integrating Aboriginal Affairs priorities into core business, operations, resourcing and accountability systems.

The NTG Deputy CEO Coordination Committee will have ongoing oversight of the framework with support from the regional coordination committees, ensuring accountability and progress. The framework aligns with the Finocchiaro CLP government's three pillars of reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle and provides all NT Government agencies a single clear policy framework for Aboriginal Affairs.

Our government remains committed to maintaining and building on our relationships with the four Northern Territory land councils. This relationship is crucial to deliver our commitments to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle.

Our Rebuilding the Economy strategy has several land council-focused initiatives, one of which is establishing a whole-of-government strategic relationship with the land councils to progress economic development. Our government is working hard on this so that we can progress economic development for the benefit of all Territorians, including those in our remote regional areas. Under the CLP's economic strategy for the Northern Territory one of the five key priorities is unlocking regional growth and strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal Territorians.

As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, it is important to acknowledge the need to improve outcomes under Closing the Gap targets and we are working across government to do this. Our policy is about working together. It is about working across government with APONT, local government, the land councils and Aboriginal organisations to deliver our Aboriginal Affairs Framework so that we can work together to close the gap.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Arafura for bringing this matter of public importance to the Chamber. When I heard there was a ministerial report today, I thought it would be about Closing the Gap, given that today is National Close the Gap Day and Aboriginal people are losing their lives in enormous numbers through avoidable deaths connected to ongoing failures in the areas of health, education, justice and genuine partnerships between the government and Aboriginal people.

It is good that the minister brought the report on bail reform because it is an example of government policy that is damaging Aboriginal people. It is an example of this government not working to close the gap and only making it wider. The NT has performed the worst in the nation for progress on Closing the Gap targets and is instead going backwards in many areas.

The CLP has misunderstood what Closing the Gap is about. It thinks that it is about telling Aboriginal people what is right for us and pushing Aboriginal people out of sight with security guards and locking us up in jails. We have seen the enormous prison expansion because instead of dealing with the underlying issues, both governments—since I have been in this Chamber I have always called for the underlying issues that are impacting people in the NT to be dealt with—choose to push people away and lock them up.

Instead of listening to elders, leaders and communities about community-led solutions for these problems, the CLP is ignoring us. The CLP government has decided to build a prison industry as part of economy building. That prison industry brings jobs and employment to Darwin at the expense of Aboriginal people. Those resources should be going onto country and into community-led solutions so that our people can be employed and solving the problems for our people. The CLP has created a plan to keep the resources in Darwin, creating an industry that benefits when Aboriginal people do not succeed.

I am not saying that there should not be consequences for crime; serious crime must have serious consequences. We are asking the justice system to work with our justice systems to create partnerships so that justice can be properly restored with long-lasting effect. When people have broken the law there must be a strong response to bring justice, but that response must bring balance and create a better future for everyone.

When people go to jail they learn a culture of crime. They become jailbirds and grow pride in what they are doing. For this reason people must be taken onto country and managed away from the jail system. The jail system takes people away from their country and the places where they can heal, learn self-discipline and be rehabilitated. Our elders want to use the Commonwealth resources for Aboriginal disadvantage to create *raypirri* discipline camps on country. This is where our people should be—not locked up and forgotten in jails, but with their elders on country where real rehabilitation can take place.

This government is asking tourists and cruise ships to come to Darwin. It is creating a place where people look around and see a great life. The government says, 'Come here and enjoy life', but not everyone here is enjoying life. As we can see in the Closing the Gap data, our people are dying young with serious health issues. We are struggling with overcrowding, poverty and mental health issues. We can see the poor emotional health and spiritual health in our young people because they have seen their elders disempowered and their culture being belittled and ignored by government. These issues underlie the problems for our people. Many Aboriginal people in the NT feel deep pain. I feel deep pain about the way my people are being treated. This is what this CLP government is trying to sweep away and ignore.

The money for Aboriginal disadvantage is not being used to help us; it is being used against us and to lock us up. It should be coming to our communities, elders and leaders and be a part of shared decision-making.

Priority Reform One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is about shared decision-making and partnerships. Our community-led solutions should be resourced, but they are not. Throughout my time in parliament I have been calling for funding for peacekeepers in our communities and *raypirri* discipline camps for solving issues on country, but we have almost no support for this. There are only four established law and justice groups across the NT.

This government is failing to work with Aboriginal people. 'Closing the gap' is said a lot, and I often want to ask the government, 'Which gap are you trying to close?' I feel like Aboriginal people are over here and governments are over there. There is a big gap between us—which is only getting bigger—because we are operating in different spaces.

Through every government law, policy and institution there is a push for assimilation. Yesterday I said that we are not the problem and that we have come closer to the balanda culture.

I have learned balanda systems, customs and language. I stand here speaking English and wearing a tie. I learned how to properly use a knife and fork at the table during dinner. I learned how to make my bed so that it is ready for me at night; I still remember exactly how it should be done. I am an Aboriginal leader who has come closer to the balanda culture to learn and share.

My *mari* David Gulpilil and I are examples of Yolngu who were from the bush and came to the city. We both did this successfully from our ancestral country on the Arafura Swamp in north-east Arnhem Land to the city life. He became a famous actor, known throughout the world, living in many countries. I came to the university and the parliament. We were not assimilated; we retain the bush within us. It is who we are. This is what he showed on the stage, and this is what I have shown here in the parliament.

However, governments have refused to truly come closer …

Dr RAHMAN: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I do not wish to be rude, but the member's time expired a minute or so ago.

Madam SPEAKER: Your time has expired, Member for Mulka.

Ms Uibo: Well said.

Mr GUYULA: Yes, well said.

That is a message from Aboriginal culture and my language. We need to be better at listening to one another instead of saying, 'We know what is best for you'.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Arafura for bringing forward this matter of public importance.

We heard strongly from the Member for Mulka about some of the frustrations. I acknowledge some of that goes into our time as the former Labor government. It is not something that we hide from.

I heard the Member for Barkly say that there was no acknowledgement. Of course there are things we put in place in government and things that we could have done better. I hope that the CLP, in its time in government, adds value. It is hard for the Member for Barkly, quite frankly, because he is probably the only one of the 17 CLP members who is doing something and acknowledges that there are limitations, restrictions and challenges in Aboriginal Affairs in the Northern Territory. It also sounds like he is the only one over there who cares. One out of 17 means that probably nothing positive will be done in Aboriginal Affairs to move forward to close the gap.

The Member for Barkly spoke proudly of sitting as the Co-Chair of the Northern Territory Executive Council on Aboriginal Affairs, which Labor established. CLP members like taking credit for the things that are working that they are a part of now, but they do not acknowledge the work we did.

We were the first jurisdiction in the country to set up that co-chair model. The Northern Territory beat every other jurisdiction in Australia because we modelled the co-chaired council that the Member for Barkly sits on as the Aboriginal Affairs minister. Thank goodness the CLP government did not scrap that because it was the former Labor government's initiative, work and policy. We led the country, and I understand that other jurisdictions looked to mirror what the Northern Territory did. We focused on getting our Closing the Gap targets front and centre to drive policy in the Northern Territory.

We know that change takes time. Famously, the now Attorney-General asked, 'Doesn't the Labor government understand that generational change will take a generation?' Of course it takes a generation; we are unpicking decades of failed policy over multiple political cycles of multiple political parties. Something has to be done to move the Territory forward on closing the gap and leading in that space.

One-third of our population are Aboriginal Territorians. Do you know which jurisdiction has the next largest percentage? I will let the government members guess; they probably do not know or care. It is Tasmania; about 5% of Tasmanians are recognised and identify as Aboriginal Tasmanians. That is a big difference—30% of our population in the NT versus somewhere like Tassie. Interestingly, even though Tasmania is geographically different, it faces a lot of the same challenges. We have a lot of affinity with Tasmania being a small-population jurisdiction. It is on the other side of the country and it is an island, but it faces similar challenges with Aboriginal affairs, education and remote services. It is interesting in that respect.

We will not hear the CLP government talk about any of the positive hard work that was done.

The CLP government has given up on local decision-making. That is one of the biggest mistakes that the CLP has made in 18 months of so-called governing the Northern Territory.

For the last two weeks we heard how much the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and their team utterly disregard and disrespect Aboriginal leadership and voices when it comes to emergency management and preparedness for natural disasters and the severe weather events we are having.

We heard today, or it might have been yesterday morning—it all rolls into one—Northern Land Council Chairman Matthew Ryan speaking strongly about bringing people to the table and listening to their experience and knowledge. Aboriginal voices, leadership and communities want to have input and be empowered to help make decisions that affect them directly. Please listen and involve us. I am paraphrasing, but that is the crux of it all. Good on Matty Ryan for getting up and saying that and standing up to the government, because we know what happens to people when they stand up to the government; they are torn down, ignored, insulted and disrespected for any constructive work that they want to bring about.

What is driving the CLP government to make a difference and close the gap? Its ignorance and neglect in the Aboriginal Affairs space is shocking. Do you know what happens in a political cycle? It eventually ends. These four years that CLP members have at the helm is their chance to make a difference for the better. They have slapped that chance in the face and are ignoring all the work that has been done before. There will be consequences for the lack of initiatives, programs and policies to improve Aboriginal Affairs and Closing the Gap target outcomes.

Policy and budget decisions have shunned the work that was done in the past, including picking and choosing politically who deserves a new clinic in the Northern Territory. Any crappy clinic should be replaced. We did that as the former Labor government. We put up a bunch of different clinics that needed to be, in my mind, demolished and rebuilt. Guess where we picked one of the clinics? It was in Borroloola in the Member for Barkly's electorate. There was $20m for that clinic. We also recognised the desperately needed Gunbalanya health clinic in the Member for Arafura's electorate. Another $20m was allocated to that clinic. Guess which one the CLP scrapped in the May 2025 budget? It was the Gunbalanya clinic in the Labor Member for Arafura's electorate. Yes, of course; why would the government look at putting infrastructure in all electorates regardless of who holds the seat? The CLP kept the Borroloola one, which was initiated by the former Labor government, but scrapped the $20m for the clinic in Gunbalanya in the Arafura electorate. It is a disgrace.

Closing the Gap was started in the first place to close the health gap. The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in this country is 19 to 20 years less than that of their non-Indigenous counterparts, men and women. That was the original starting point for Closing the Gap.

I spent years teaching in Numbulwar. Every Close the Gap Day we not only celebrated the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders but also learned about and focused on what needed to be better, particularly for our young people's health. I had senior students at the time, and we focused on what health means to a young man or woman in a remote community like Numbulwar—which is currently being evacuated. We did that every year. I was proud to start that initiative when I was the senior teacher for secondary students at Numbulwar. We continued to do that for a couple of years while I was there, widening the awareness of what happens—in not just a remote sense but also an urban and regional sense—with health at the crux of it.

We have seen many more targets added to Closing the Gap, and there is a multifaceted approach to every one of those targets, education, health—which was one of the originals—and even water security and the environment, which has been added into the national Closing the Gap targets.

As the Member for Arafura outlined in his speech, more needs to be done, and justice is a huge concern for the Northern Territory. We have off-the-charts data for Aboriginal incarceration. Something is not working in our Northern Territory justice system. Something is not recognising all the determinants of social injustice.

We will not hear the CLP government talk about that. CLP members try not to acknowledge the truth and ignore it as though it will go away. They will just hide it for the next four years—how ridiculous. I heard a silly misquote that Labor said it established 20 law and justice groups. No, in the Aboriginal Justice Agreement it was agreed by an independent committee that the minimum would be 20 established law and justice groups. We did not get there, so we passed the baton onto the CLP who won government in August 2024.

Has the CLP increased that commitment in the bipartisan agreement from the five or six that were established? There may be five established and one that needs to be funded—it does not look like it will be funded under the CLP government—which is Yuendumu. Will we see an increase from the five established law and justice groups under the CLP? It has been in government for a year-and-a-half, so it could have at least funded one and got the numbers up. The CLP could seal the six or perhaps—God forbid—make seven or eight, or triple what Labor did in the first few years under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, but, no, nothing. It is as though the work is too hard, so they do not care. Perhaps because it is about Aboriginal justice itself that they show such disdain, disregard and lack of respect for the work of Aboriginal leadership.

Once again, Aboriginal leadership has been let down by government. Whether it is red or orange—they do not care what colour it is—Aboriginal leaders have been let down by the failure of the now CLP government to do what it said it would do in opposition and honour the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. It is disgraceful when people are promised something and that promise is broken once a team gets into government. It is a political hack, and it should stop. It should not be allowed to happen. When commitments are made before an election they should be honoured after the election.

Do not get me started on the Aboriginal rangers and the CLP lie to fund Aboriginal rangers for four years through the Aboriginal Ranger Grants, which is $12m. The CLP spent $7m buying a parcel of land, which was $2m over the asking price, but that is okay because that is where it wants to focus all its time and effort, not on the commitments that it made prior to the election.

We know the causes that can contribute to domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory. The CLP promised $100m as a matching commitment in August 2024 which it has reneged on. CLP members have cut and tried to change the narrative, but we will continue to call them out. That $100m was promised to the sector, and it has been shamefully cut out of the narrative—it has gone into oblivion—under the CLP

government. Labor promised it. The CLP ran off and said that it would match the $100m for the DV sector to try to get on top of the scourge of domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory, which unfortunately affects all of us in all our electorates. CLP members made that promise and broke it. They should hang their heads in shame.

In Aboriginal Affairs one would think that nothing is done. The Member for Barkly spoke about the NT Aboriginal Affairs Framework. That went through quietly. We looked for the framework last sittings, but it was not there. He said that the government had launched it. It was done quietly and without fanfare, almost as though the government does not want people to know that there is an Aboriginal Affairs Framework sitting somewhere with the CLP logo attached to it. It looks like a beautiful 12-page document with about 10 pages of writing. We will be looking at, because it is news to me that this framework was released. Every single second of any decision the CLP likes to put out a press release. CLP members do not like talking to the media, but they like to put out a piece of paper and expect everyone to find it on the NT Government website.

There is a long way to go, regardless of who is in power in the Northern Territory. One thing is for sure: Aboriginal Affairs and Closing the Gap targets will not advance for the better under the CLP because it is not committed and not genuine and it does not have respect for Aboriginal Territorians who have been here for thousands of years and making sure that Closing the Gap matters.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge Close the Gap Day and the need to do something about Closing the Gap targets. I thank the Member for Arafura for bringing on this matter of public importance.

The statistics speak for themselves; there is nothing challenging about this. It is all going backwards and has been for some time. By and large, it has been going backwards because there has not been much of plan or a commitment to this. It has been nothing much more than motherhood statements for a period and histrionics, as we have just witnessed.

I want to be angry about this situation and the plight of Indigenous people in the north of Australia in particular, but mostly I am just sad. Member for Mulka, I share your frustrations because the fact is that governments have been negligent for a long time.

People are dying. Statistics indicate that things are getting worse. Not for nothing, but without the histrionics, I could not agree more with my colleague the Member for Barkly. The government for the last 20 years did little to progress much of this agenda. It is absurd to put on the kind of performances we have just witnessed without taking some ownership of the lack of commitment to improve the material conditions of existence for Indigenous people in the north of Australia. I am, frankly speaking, insulted by the performance that the Leader of the Opposition just put on. The idea that one out of 17 of us in this room cares about Indigenous people is insulting. It is insulting to me personally.

Six years before the Closing the Gap targets, initiative or program was even put out, I was doing research out bush in the north of Australia on welfare state restructuring and its impact on Indigenous people. All the things that I wrote about then, albeit 24 years ago, I stand by to this day. They are not getting any better; they have been largely getting worse incrementally over time. That is because of a lack of genuine commitment to create opportunity in the north of Australia.

Pontificating about communities in the bush without ever having done a goddamn thing to create opportunity for people in the bush when you had the opportunity to do so is just hypocritical. Simply, that is what it is: hypocrisy.

Often in this place I talk about the architecture of opportunity. Public health, housing, education and infrastructure are the things that create the bedrock for opportunity, and always have in the north of Australia. I hate descending to this, but the Labor government did nothing on those things for the most part, substantively, for people out bush in particular, over the last 20 years. It is astonishing that you would beat your chest about it.

Let us talk about the statistics that are going in the wrong direction or how we might improve it, but, surely, at a certain point you have to own the problem and start talking about your prescription. What is your solution? What is your commitment to a policy position? I assure you, Leader of the Opposition, that nobody is looking to mirror what Territory Labor did on Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory over the last eight years. No jurisdiction is saying, ‘We will have some of what they are having’; that is a ridiculous thing to say. Something has to be done, so what will you do?

Here is the baseline proposition I put to all of you over and again: good luck fixing anything in the Northern Territory without more money or more people. Closing the Gap has become tired nomenclature; people are sick and tired of hearing about it. Their eyes glaze over. It does not mean anything real, except suddenly when there is an anniversary and we all get to give a speech about it and suddenly care in earnest to focus our efforts. That is not good enough. If you really want to create opportunity to close the gap—Closing the Gap is about empowering people and giving them opportunity again—the Northern Territory needs more money and more people.

Do you know who is working on more money and people for the Northern Territory? The new government. In 18 months the new government has done more to try to improve the problems of no money and no people than Labor did in the last eight years. It is Labor's sheer economic negligence and hypocrisy that has resulted in me being on this side of the House, frustrated by the ineptitude of governments past.

There is no magic money tree. We are saddled with crippling amounts of debt. We talked about it ad nauseam last week. I restrained myself from talking about it because there will be so much time to talk about it still. The point is that we are trying to go constructively forward. My learned colleague the Treasurer is dealing with the mother of all hospital passes in that regard. It is a budget that is deeply in debt. There is little to work with, and within that limited paradigm we will do what we can to restore an architecture of opportunity.

There are no viable economies in a lot of the bush in the north of Australia. Member for Mulka, you know that. You know things are shutting down and closing up. Opportunities are drying up. The fact is that economic empowerment will emancipate people in the bush.

What it will take is more money and more people; instead, what we get from the opposition, if you can call it that—this economically illiterate rabble that masquerade as an opposition—is talk about the magic money tree, asking, 'Why don't you do more of this or that?' It is because we are broke from your idiotic policy manoeuvres. Repeated failures to engage with actual policy work happened over a long period. What we had from the former government—I seldom descend to saying these kinds of things—was nothing but platitudes and press releases. That is what you got for a long time, not a genuine commitment to economic, let alone social, policy reform.

What, by contrast, is this government doing? As my colleague the Member for Barkly said at the outset of this matter of public importance, we are doing a lot of things which in totality are producing a quantifiable set of effects. One of the areas where we are having a genuinely positive effect—one of the things that really matters in the equation—is stabilising our rapidly declining population. I just said, 'Good luck fixing anything without more money or more people'.

Let us talk about numbers. Do you want to talk about data that then gets ignored? Let us look at the last two years' worth of quarterly data on population. There is a six-month lag time on population data. In the data from 13 June, which reflects the December 2023 quarter, population growth was under 1%—unbelievable. Year on year the estimated resident population growth was under 1%; it was 0.9% at that point. Three months later it was even worse, at 0.8%. Another three months later it was 0.8%. Three months later than that, in the last quarter of data under the last Labor government, it was 0.7%. We were not growing; we were demographically haemorrhaging, and with it nurses, doctors, teachers—whatever you might care to add. Without people and a viable workforce to support industry across any sector, let alone the public sector, good luck fixing anything in this place.

What happened in the first quarter of data when we took over? In the first quarter of data in December 2024, which is in the first six months reporting from when we came in—the September 2024 to December 2024 quarter—there was a 0.5% increase. Straightaway it was up to 1.2% population growth, year on year. That is what we achieved. Was that a blip or because of issuing too many student visas in one quarter? No. The next quarter it was 1.3% year-on-year population growth and the quarter after that had 1.3% population growth again. The ABS has released today's data, and it is 1.4%.

I am not saying that we are the fastest-growing anything in the country; I am saying that we are stabilising the ship that you were tanking. This government is committed to more money, people and opportunity because that will meaningfully do something about closing the gap.

They have all left. I cannot identify who is and who is not here. I withdraw that, Madam Speaker.

To the former Territory Labor government ministers who still reside in this House: take ownership for why you failed to meaningfully make any progress on Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory. I have sympathy for backbenchers and those new to the zoo on the opposition side. It is fair enough; you were just taking

orders and had to do what you had to do. However, you are now in charge and have an opportunity to do better.

The fact of the matter is that nobody on your side of politics thinks that you are credible because you demonstrate ignorance of economic matters. That is what matters to everybody, including—newsflash—Indigenous Territorians. They also want opportunity, continuity and a plan; they do not want just handouts. I stand by the work that I did 24 years ago saying exactly that. Read it at your leisure.

You wasted your time in government on boundless purple propaganda and other associated nonsense rather than doing the real policy work. That is what you did in the time that you had in government. What does real policy work look like? It can look like a range of things.

I have spoken already in this House about the work that I did in conjunction with the Minister for Health and the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population on trying to resuscitate the skilled refugee labour agreement, which the last government summarily buried because it was inconvenient for it to point out how bad population growth was. Although we could not resuscitate the program in its totality, in the time that I have been in government, under the auspices of my ministers, I have delivered new specialist nurses, new pharmacists working in our Corrections system and new population—real people who are physically here doing work, building the Territory and trying to close the gap. That is what it takes, doing the real policy work. Everything was done to try to bury that program. I do not know whether it will be resuscitated in the current feverish climate about mass immigration, but we need to have sensible conversations about our terms of engagement with the Commonwealth on migration, population and fiscal matters.

We are doing other things in that space as well. One of the most important factors that correlates with all the Closing the Gap metrics is healthcare workforce. The Minister for Health already pointed out what we are doing in that space. In addition, we have more ambitious plans in the background that we are focused on getting on with, trying to create more Commonwealth-supported places, train more local doctors and expand our healthcare workforce so that we have not just more doctors but also more allied healthcare workers, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists and midwives.

Part of that equation involves doing the stuff we have done—being tough on crime and trying to stabilise social dysfunction. That has resulted in some people choosing to stay. We clearly had social dysfunction and a significant crime problem. Has it all gone away? Nobody is saying that it has all gone away. No-one on our side is saying that it has all gone away. We know that there are problems all over the Territory in that regard still. It is the beginning of a journey.

The sheer hypocrisy of riding on a high horse, after all the time you have been in government, and blaming us for everything in the last 18 months we have been in government—has everything we have done worked out perfectly? No, it has not. Do we have time to do other things? Yes, we have plenty of time.

It is time that the opposition starts behaving like a real opposition and, frankly speaking, stops wasting our time in government with stunts and politicking. Genuinely focus on problem-solving, not on protesting, but on actual policy. That is what we will do on this side of the House.

A member interjecting.

Dr RAHMAN: Learned colleague, that is what I am telling you I do on my side of the House. I spend my time prosecuting the argument behind the scenes to do whatever I can to problem-solve for the sake of the constituency I represent and the Northern Territory writ large. That is what we should all be doing rather than just throwing tantrums.

We will spend our time on this side of the House focusing on problem-solving and policy because that is in the best interests of Territorians. Do you know who that includes? It includes Indigenous Territorians, Member for Mulka, who—I agree with you—deserve better than anyone has offered them in years of negligent governance.

On this sad anniversary I also note the Closing the Gap targets and that we can do better and we should do better. It is my earnest hope that this government will do better.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, we live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal people are dying earlier, locked up at unprecedented rates, living in overcrowded homes and being denied the education and health opportunities that non-Aboriginal Territorians take for granted. That is why we have Close the Gap Day—not as a report or a target list, but as a commitment to justice, equality and human dignity.

When I first heard about Closing the Gap in 2007, I never imagined that 19 years later I would be standing in this parliament talking about it and that we would have gone backwards, not forwards. Closing the Gap was established as a commitment to equality and a promise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would have the same opportunities for health, education, housing and justice as the rest of Australia.

I am not interested in the ongoing time wasting in this Chamber of assigning blame. I cannot believe people are using this opportunity to talk about—and do something about—this great tragedy facing the country to attack each other instead of getting on with what we all agree is a huge issue, particularly in the Territory.

I agree with the Member for Fong Lim that the time for tantrums in this Chamber is over. I do not care about you all shouting at each other; I care about the fact that one-third of our population, Aboriginal Territorians, have dramatically worse outcomes in health, justice, education and housing than non-Aboriginal Territorians and we are not doing enough about it.

We have already heard in this Chamber that the latest data is stark; the Northern Territory has the worst progress in Australia on Closing the Gap targets. We have gone backwards in seven key areas, including adult and youth imprisonment, child development, early childhood education and life expectancy. These are not numbers; they are people, families and communities whose daily lives are shaped by entrenched disadvantage. In the words of Donna Ah Chee, the CEO of AMSANT—APONT now—this data reflects the systemic disadvantage that Aboriginal Territorians face.

We are widening the gap, not closing it. As the jurisdiction with the highest proportion of Aboriginal Australians, this is unacceptable.

First, talk about this gap; why does it exist, why does it persist and why is it widening in the Northern Territory? Our government must stop pursuing policies that worsen inequality. I heard the Member for Fong Lim also say that the CLP government is doing the work to address this, so let us look at what this government has done.

Nerita Waight, the Acting Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, highlights that laws that refuse to raise the age of criminal responsibility—or, in fact, lower it as we have done here—impose harsher bail conditions and push ‘adult crime, adult time’ policies, all drive up incarceration rates, entrenching trauma and damage and harm to Aboriginal people.

When the CLP insists on passing draconian tough-on-crime laws against all evidence and despite the clear disproportionate effect it will have on Aboriginal Australians, it is entrenching trauma and disadvantage and widening the gap. When the CLP shuts down community control, makes policy decisions for Aboriginal communities without consultation and writes consultation out of laws, it is entrenching harm and disadvantage and widening the gap. When the CLP abuses urgency powers to shut down scrutiny and pass legislation that directly impacts and harms Aboriginal people, it is entrenching trauma and disadvantage and widening the gap.

When the government pursues evictions and punishment for public housing tenants—a vast majority of whom are Aboriginal—doxes addresses of vulnerable people and uses rhetoric like, which we heard in the Chamber today, ‘Housing is a privilege, not a right’, it fundamentally misunderstands the role that housing plays as a foundation for an equal and healthy society.

When the CLP refuses to support calls for Commonwealth oversight into the ongoing crisis of Indigenous deaths in custody, despite Aboriginal people being five times more likely to die in prison, it is contributing to widening the gap. When it scraps plans for a review into racism within the NT Police Force while the NT continues to lock up Aboriginal people at the highest rate in the country, it is widening the gap. This is the consequence of this legislative agenda.

The Closing the Gap agreement was never meant to be a tick-box exercise for governments reduced to an annual report or a list of completed actions. It was never meant to be, as the Member for Fong Lim said, ‘The tired old one day of the year when we say, “Here we are again”.’ It was meant to be a commitment to real structural change that should transform the day-to-day lives of Aboriginal people and communities in the Territory.

I have raised before in this Chamber that the GST needs-based funding we receive from the federal government is five times the funding per capita of most other jurisdictions. I note that we will be getting a bonus in our GST payments this year, so it will be interesting to see how the government chooses to spend that. We get that because there is a recognition of the acute need and high cost of delivering services in the

NT. This funding is meant to address inequality in access to services, including health services, but it is not going where it needs to. We can see that clearly when our Closing the Gap targets are going backwards. We cannot see it clearly when we ask for data about how that GST money is being spent because we are told that is not tracked, but the data on the outcomes gives us clear information.

If we want health inequality to improve in the Northern Territory we have to invest in healthcare. If we want housing inequality to improve, we have to invest in housing.

There is so much data. New data came out today, and we heard that in the NT less than half the national average of children are developmentally on track; 87% of homeless Territorians are Aboriginal; and more than half of remote community homes are overcrowded, with severely overcrowded dwellings. In the words of the CEO of AHNT, Leeanne Caton:

> *Housing is not just a roof over one's head; it is a determinant of life itself; it is a cultural anchor, a place for ceremony, language, and kinship. Critically, without good living conditions and fundamentals like access to water, the ability to wash, and a safe house, improving health is impossible. When housing policy ignores these dimensions, it perpetuates harm.*

We have already heard our prison statistics. We have per capita the most Indigenous people locked up in the world. On many given days 100% of young people locked up in the Territory are Aboriginal.

These are dramatically worse outcomes than anywhere else in Australia, and they are not accidents; they are the product of systemic and structural racism. Let me to talk about structural racism for a minute because I know it is a difficult term for some people in this Chamber. I note that I was told in Estimates it was a term that I cannot use, for reasons that I still do not understand. Structural racism is not about individual prejudice or telling people they are racist. It is about the systems, policies and institutions that produce these dramatically worse outcomes, even if no-one sets out to cause harm. I am sure there is no-one in this Chamber who believes that what is happening in the Territory for Aboriginal people is okay. We can see it clearly in health, education, housing and justice systems where Aboriginal people are consistently disadvantaged; it is visible in the statistics and the lived reality of communities. If we cannot talk about it, how can we address it?

I am sure no-one in this Chamber wants to see these statistics, and I look forward to hearing other members talk about it. There is something terribly wrong when we live in a country with so much wealth, yet Aboriginal people are dying, locked up, homeless and harmed at a rate so out of proportion with the rest of Australia and non-Aboriginal people. We must do everything we can to change this.

Closing the gap is not a theoretical exercise. We should not be rolling our eyes and saying, 'Here we are again'. It is a national commitment to justice, equality and human rights. It is about listening to community voices, following their lead and embedding self-determination into decision-making, just as we heard so clearly from the Member for Mulka. If we are serious about closing the gap, we must follow the voices of our communities and invest in the services they need, protect their rights and dismantle the systems that so clearly produce inequality.

Closing the Gap was never mean to be partisan or an opportunity for political parties to take pot shots at each other. It is a national commitment that requires governments, communities and leaders to work together. It is about the basic human rights of Aboriginal Territorians and Aboriginal people across Australia.

It has been said in this Chamber that the people of the Northern Territory do not need more reports. Aboriginal people do not need more meetings or more talk; they need action that improves lives today and every day after that. Children, families and elders deserve our best, and they deserve it now.

This gap will not close itself, and now we are not closing it; we are making it wider. We must act urgently, work together and stop widening disadvantage, because the time for talk is over and the time for action is now.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I will not go over all the Closing the Gap targets and reiterate what many people have already spoken about. We all understand that the gap is widening and the targets are not being met, unfortunately.

When we come to this House, it is disappointing to see the politicisation of our people again—Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

When I think of closing the gap, I think of our young people, our kids, who are out in the communities. I think of my nieces and nephew back home, where I am originally from in New South Wales. I have been lucky enough to be here for more than 14 years and live in some of the most beautiful parts of the country, like Wadeye. It has been a privilege.

What I have seen time and again over decades, whether in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia or the Northern Territory, is the inconsistency with policy over many governments, no matter what side you are on. We see it time and again, which has a huge impact on Aboriginal people's lives, because there is no consistency in the policies that governments bring forward to Aboriginal people.

Closing the Gap was established 19 years ago. It was supposed to bring consistency for all levels of government, whether it is Commonwealth, territory, state or local governments. Unfortunately, what we see is the politics coming into it from both sides.

When I go to Wadeye and speak to the Aboriginal organisations and when I speak with the Thamarrurr Development Corporation and sit with the young people to understand what they need to better their lives, it all comes back to their identity and who they are. They speak to me about being unable to get out on their country and not having access to their homelands because the roads have been deteriorated. I know it might feel like a motherhood statement, but that is the basis of who our people are, who we are—understanding your language and culture, having access to your country so that you can speak your language and practise your culture and understanding your Dreaming stories, songlines and dance.

Many young people speak to me about the reason we have many gaps within Wadeye itself. It is because our young people do not know who they are. They are not on their country, speaking their language or practising their culture. Instead we are investing all this money—if you want to go back to what the Member for Fong Lim spoke about—in these large communities when we should be investing it in our homelands to give people opportunities like jobs on country, which many people speak to me about. Having access to their homelands and having good housing on their homelands takes the pressures off Darwin and larger Aboriginal communities. Have a hard look and think about how governments can put in place long-term plans to ensure that happens.

I know that people in Wadeye worked on that. There was consultation, I think in 2023 or 2024, with all the clan groups about what they see the future of Wadeye looking like. That consultation was done with many of the old people out there. They said that we need access to our traditional lands, our homelands; otherwise, we will see this cycle, year on year, showing the gap is widening.

I will leave that with government members. I have always said that I invite people to come to my region to look at the homelands. I will happily organise meetings with Aboriginal corporations in Wadeye and to sit down with many of the old and young people to understand where we can improve people's lives. It comes back to people having their own identity.

I hear jabs from the other side such as, 'You guys did not do anything', and, 'You did not do this'. That is not true; work was done in that space with many communities. I have spoken many times about the community of Emu Point, a beautiful small homeland, where a local decision-making agreement was put together. I know there is a new strategy out by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, but let us face it: it is a similar approach. The principle is still there to work with Aboriginal people.

I hope he looks at that local decision-making agreement because that work has been done with traditional owners from those homelands. If you go back and reconsult with people, you will just waste their time. Use that agreement; take the credit for it. I really do not care, because it is about the people of the homelands and from the region. Look at that agreement and understand what the people put in it because it was done over a number of years to ensure that the aspirations of people from homelands were put in so that they could see a long-term future for the community.

You might ask what has happened with that agreement. I have been there previously and worked with them, but the first time I went there as a member of parliament was in 2021. The first thing that Margaret, Terry and Louise Sams told me was, 'We need our housing fixed. It has been deteriorating since the early 1990s.' We took the minister at the time, Chansey Paech. He literally walked through every house and looked at the housing. You could see that there had been no repairs and maintenance done since the early 1990s. They took us into a bathroom where there were leaks. The tap had been duct-taped; people had tried to fix it. The leak had deteriorated and gone into the wall, creating holes—you get the picture. The houses had deteriorated, but we committed through this agreement to upgrade and repair every house in Emu Point.

We also went through and understood how many people live in Emu Point to understand how many more new houses we needed to build. We figured out that four new houses needed to be built, so that has been done. Tick—four new houses built and all the houses are repaired.

There were also upgrades to the school at Emu Point. The committee at Emu Point was guiding the school on how it could implement in its curriculum some of the knowledge systems in Emu Point. We are seeing a high rate of school attendance in Emu Point. The last time I checked was when I was in government, but it was more than 90%. That is an example of an agreement that can work well.

I know I keep coming back to it, but, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, this is an important agreement from the community members of Emu Point. They are proud of that agreement with the Northern Territory Government. The reason it stretched out from 2022 to 2026 was—we know political cycles change every four years; that is a no-brainer—that we wanted a level of consistency to ensure that policy was aligned, no matter who got in. It did not matter whether it was Labor or you guys, as it is now; the point was to roll over into 2026 so that there was consistency, no matter who was in government.

I ask the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to look at that agreement because I believe it is expiring this year. I hope he can renew some of the commitments in the agreement. Many of the commitments have been done. He is also the Minister for Health, and one of the commitments is looking at setting up a health space at Emu Point. People there do not have somewhere private to get their health check-ups. Many people just do it on the balcony or inside their house. I encourage the Minister for Health to look into setting up a little donga or facility so that people can at least have dignity and privacy when visiting nurses do the health checks. It is all laid out in that agreement. Ranger groups are set out in the agreement as well, which the community was looking forward to setting up.

I will not go into the blame of each government. We know for decades there have been inconsistencies in policy towards Aboriginal people and the politicisation of Aboriginal people across Australia and the Northern Territory. We are seeing that now with the tough-on-crime agenda; deep down we know what that means. The government lowered the age of criminal responsibility to 10, but when we looked at the data, hardly any 11 or 10-year-old kids were in touch with the justice system. To use kids to try to win an election is appalling, and I hope you all reflect on that.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Arafura for bringing this matter of public importance to the Chamber. It is befitting for me to make sure we use the two hours to debate this matter.

I will talk about the Closing the Gap targets because when people hear ‘Closing the Gap’ it can be broad, so it is important to realise what the targets focus on.

The first target of Closing the Gap is that everyone enjoys long and healthy lives, which everybody in this Chamber and most decent human beings would agree is a noble goal. Unfortunately, there is still a large discrepancy between people in Australia, not just the Northern Territory, in the health outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The government is working towards fixing this.

The second target relates to health, which is that children are born healthy and strong. The target is:

> *By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight to 91 per cent.*

It is still below that number, and that is incredibly sad. That is why there are fantastic programs and fantastic midwives who travel across the Territory visiting families in community to ensure that they are given the best advice possible to deliver a healthy child.

Target 3 is children are engaged in high-quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years. The bilingual education and Families as First Teachers programs across the Northern Territory are successful, and the people involved in delivering those programs are passionate about ensuring that people can speak their language, learn their culture and develop. Part of it is making sure that children get to school, which our government, much to persistent criticism from those opposite, is trying to do with positive engagement with our attendance officers. These public servants across the Territory are doing a fantastic job engaging with families and trying to get children back on track and going to school. It has had mixed results across the Territory, but where it has been successful it has been very successful.

The fourth goal is that children thrive in their early years. This is:

> *… increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55 per cent.*

I would argue that aiming for a target of 55% is a low bar to set and it should be higher, because I believe every child should be on track. We should ensure that every child has their abilities and capabilities being nurtured and developed in their early years.

Target 5 is students achieve their full learning potential. I note that the Northern Territory is improving in this space. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attaining Year 12 or equivalent is going up in the Northern Territory. I pay full credit to the Clontarf academies across the Northern Territory that do a fantastic job, alongside the Stars academies for the female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in engaging kids. Last year I was privileged to watch the Clontarf graduation ceremony at Taminmin College. Of the 12 young men who made it through their NTCET, one of them, a fantastic young man, went to Melbourne to study physics of all things. There are fantastic programs keeping these kids engaged all the way through middle school and high school and getting Year 12 and into employment. I pay credit to the Clontarf academies, especially at Taminmin but also across the Territory, and the Stars academies for doing the same.

Target 6 is that students reach their full potential through further education pathways, which is:

> *… increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people … who have completed a tertiary qualification …*

My electorate is home to Taminmin College, which is well known for delivering high-quality certificates and tradie qualifications, and a significant proportion of Aboriginal people attend that school. In my little part of the Territory I know that it has been successful. Sanderson High School, in the Member for Sanderson's electorate, is delivering a lot of VET courses and helping people unlock their full potential, because not everyone is designed to sit down, read books and be good at maths and English; other people have different skills. I can change a tyre, barely, but I can also be good at maths sometimes.

J Davis: I can vouch for that.

Mr MACKAY: The Member for Johnston can vouch for my tyre-changing abilities, and it did not fall off.

Target 7 is youth are engaged in employment or education. It aims to increase the number of 15 to 24-year-olds who are in employment, education or training to 67%. It is interesting to me how people set these targets. I understand that they went for what they considered achievable numbers at the time, but to have one-third of people not in employment, education or training to as a target is disappointing. I believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to engage in education, further themselves and be a productive member of society by getting a job, buying a home and feeding their family.

Target 8 is to develop strong economic participation and development of people and their communities. We heard the Member for Daly speak today. I have a lot of love for TDC in Wadeye and the work it does in that area, especially with the aquaculture practices, sea rangers, mud crabs, fish traps and everything that is going on there. Hopefully, one day there will be full barramundi production ponds. It is about empowering people to make money on their own land, which I highly get behind.

Target 9 is people can secure appropriate affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need. Target 9a is:

> *… increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized housing … to 88 per cent.*

Target 9b is:

> *By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:*
>
> *i) within discrete Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard;*
>
> *ii) in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town …*

That is why our government is continuing to build houses in communities. I know that the Member for Barkly likes travelling around and he is good at taking photos, but the photos I love the most on his page are the ones of a new family getting a home. It is a touching moment when someone has something they can call their own. To have their own space is a massive relief for people. Our government is fully committed to building as many homes as possible in the bush and in general across the Northern Territory.

Targets 10 and 11 are related to Indigenous incarceration rates. I know pressure has been applied today in this Chamber because the rate of incarceration in the Northern Territory going up since the CLP came to government is seen as somewhat of a failure. I believe it is more of a success because those people who are incarcerated are not terrorising their communities. We know that the majority of victims in the Northern Territory, the highest proportion of people who are affected by crime, are Aboriginal women. If it means we have to lock up the men who beat them, I am happy with that.

Target 12 is children are not over-represented in the child protection system and target 13 is families and households are safe. That is why I am happy that we have had the first real reduction in domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory in a long time. Under the previous government we saw that rate continue to rise, and we are finally starting to turn that tide. There is a long way to go, and everyone should feel safe in their home, but I am happy that it is finally decreasing.

Target 14 is people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing. That particularly relates to the high rate of suicide in Indigenous people, but also there are Territorians across the rural area who are feeling isolated and lonely, especially when they are out of work; it is a horrible thing. We all need to get together to work on that one.

Target 15 is people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship. Target 16 is cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing. Target 17 is people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, it was with great sadness that I received notification last night via a Facebook post from the Wanderers Football Club about the passing of a wonderful Karama resident and a Wanderers Football Club legend, Mr Dean 'Whitey' White.

I quote from the Wanderers Football Club Facebook post:

> *It is with deep sadness that the Wanderers Football Club advises of the passing of Life Member and true club legend, Dean 'Whitey' White.*
>
> *Whitey was the embodiment of what it means to be a Wanderer. A devoted club man across multiple decades, he gave his time, energy, and heart to the club without ever seeking recognition or praise. His contribution wasn't just seen in games played or roles held, it was felt in the culture, spirit, and community he helped build.*
>
> *Whitey's name is quite literally part of our club's foundations, etched into the concrete slab of the clubhouse when they were built in the late 1980s/early 1990s a lasting reminder of the role he played in shaping Wanderers into what it is today.*
>
> *Beyond his on field achievements, Whitey's dedication to the club extended far beyond the boundary line. He was a constant presence around the club volunteering his time for decades as a water carrier, quietly supporting teams week in and week out.*
>
> *He was often the first to arrive and the last to leave, lending a hand wherever it was needed, whether that was cleaning the sheds, maintaining the clubrooms, or helping behind the scenes in ways that often went unseen but never unappreciated.*
>
> *Some of Whitey's on field accomplishments include:*
>
> *Wanderers Football Club Reserves Best & Fairest 1982–83, 1983–84, 1987–88, 1988–89*

Wanderers Football Club Reserves Best & Fairest Runner Up 1984–85 & 1985–86

Mitch Lee Medallist (NTFL Reserves Best & Fairest) 1987–88 & 1988–89

In 2024, the club proudly honoured Whitey's legacy by naming the Men's Premier League Reserves Best & Fairest medal after him. It was a fitting tribute to a player whose impact on the field was matched only by his humility and character off it.

Our hearts go out to all of Whitey's family, friends, and former teammates during this incredibly difficult time.

We will keep the Wanderers community updated with funeral arrangements as we come together to celebrate the life of a truly great and much loved man.

Rest in eternal peace Whitey

I shared that post on the Karama community site and with the Malak community site. This is what I wrote ahead of what I shared, because I knew Whitey. I had only met with him, I put up a photo, about two weeks ago. I knew him very well. I said:

'Rest in peace, Dean White "Whitey". Deepest condolences to Whitey's family and friends. I will miss him for our regular chats at Northlakes and Karama shops. I affectionately called him the unofficial mayor of Karama, as he kept me informed about key issues in the neighbourhood.'

It was constantly, may I say. This included issues with littering and empty glass bottles that he would voluntarily pick up as he rode around the streets of Karama and Malak on his pushbike. The number of times he sent me photos saying, 'Here is more litter, Brian. What are we going to do about it? How can we report this?' I would speak to Whitey all the time.

We also enjoyed chatting about football and his beloved Wanderers. He also had a passion for Port Adelaide Football Club. I kept reminding him I was a Collingwood supporter.

He also spoke about crabbing. He was a keen crab fisherman, and he loved all the fishing and other Territory lifestyle interests. He was a true Territorian in that regard. He was generous with his time, not only with those he knew in the football club. All the people around the shopping centres knew him, and I know he will be sadly missed, including by my dogs who I often take there for coffee.

On behalf of the residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, rest in peace, Whitey. We will miss you.

I seek leave to table the post from the Wanderers Football Club, which includes his photo.

Leave granted.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I will finish the last page of my speech, if I may, because it is important. I will pick it up from where I left it.

If governments could meet in the middle, come closer and understand how our culture and our way must also be central to systems for our communities, then we would close the gap in all areas. If the government could share information and decision-making in the middle-ground space we would begin to see improvements in our communities, but this has to be about self-determination and not assimilation.

Assimilation is the reason for the gap. We are not balanda people; we do not have balanda culture. We have a rich and strong Aboriginal culture. Today we are modern Yolngu people with our language, culture and law still intact, but it is at risk of being pulled apart by governments that see Aboriginal people as the problem and do not want to meet in the middle. We are not the problem.

I have come a long way with my experience in life. I have come closer to work with the balanda system. I have been an aircraft maintenance engineer working with MAF in Gove Peninsula. After that, whilst I was training, I took flying lessons with the Gove Aero Club, as it was then; I tried to fly aeroplanes. I proved to myself that I could stand in two worlds. I proved to myself and everyone that we can stand and walk together without me telling you what to do and without you telling us what to do. We stand ready to work in partnership and solve underlying issues and problems together until governments recognised that. We did that.

After that I went to Ballarat to do an aircraft overhaul in our workshops. We pulled one of the Cessna 172 aeroplanes; it was ready for service maintenance, and we worked on it. I was improving and working on it. We pulled the engine apart, stripped the paint and painted everything—all while I was studying to fly aeroplanes.

Since then, I was flying around and was sent on a solo flight from Ballarat down to Mount Gambier. I went through and came back no problem. I knew where everything was, reading all the instruments. I came back the next day; I had to do a final test flight. The test flight took me from Ballarat country to Melbourne, Tullamarine, to the international airport, through bomber country—bomber aircraft—and through general aviation to Geelong, back to Ballarat. No problem—I passed it. We can do it. I can do it.

I came back to Darwin and did some work around there. I had aeroplanes from aero club in Darwin, it used to be, and did some work around the country in other places. Since then, I went back. There used to be Darwin community college, before CDU was there. I learned to do arc welding while learning to be a fitter and turner. We talk about doctors, lawyers or whatever other education. That is what I proved: we can do that if we are given opportunity.

Fitter and turners did arc welding. Anyone who has had a go at welding an aluminium boat knows that it is hard to get through, but I did the proper job with actual steel with an arc welder. This is what we can do if we support one another, if we work together and if you give us opportunity, resourcing and funding. We can do it. When people say, 'These people rely on taxpayers' money'—no. We are not given opportunity. This is what I am asking for. We need to work together; we are justice people.

I have seen Indigenous electricians climb up around the mission camps like Milingimbi and Galiwinku. They work as electricians. Indigenous people brought timber from the bush and built houses there. We can do it as long as we come together, walk side by side and help one another. This crime, these break-ins—these people being called criminals in jails—it is not part of our culture. We are confused. Our people are confused, and they are ending up there.

We need to listen to one another. I come here as the Independent Member for Mulka in a space where, if we diplomatically sit and talk together, we will create things. We have the same human being brains. We can make sense of things if we learn about one another. I have gone far learning English and am a lecturer as well—a senior lecturer at Charles Darwin University. I have gone on the internet and taught people overseas in Japan about Yolngu Matha—and other places. This is what I want to show and why we should close the gap. I am showing you that if you please stand with us and walk with us, we will improve things for the better and live together in a way where we will all please one another.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, on Sunday 22 February I joined Scouts NT to celebrate Founder's Day, recognising the birthday of Lord Baden-Powell and celebrating the incredible impact that Scouting has on millions of lives across the world.

Close to home in the rural area is the base for the Howard Springs and Humpty Doo Scout groups which are producing great future leaders like current Scouts NT President, my good friend, Lachlan Casburn.

At the celebration, Don Lockley OAM spoke to today's Scouts about his 85 years of being involved in the Scouting movement. We also celebrated the Scouts Chief Commissioner for the NT, Adrian Williams, acknowledging his 25 years of scouting.

The dunk tank, cake and damper were huge hits with the kids, and everyone had a great time.

On 10 February 2026 Taminmin College announced its 2026 student leadership team. Congratulations to captains Piper-Jean and Bryony; vice captains Essence and Joseph; and student leaders on the SRC, John and Jowan.

I was pleased to meet some of these young leaders when they represented the college at the Bombing of Darwin commemorative service, alongside the members for Nelson and Wanguri who are former Taminmin students. It was a meaningful and poignant start to their captaincy. Having our future generations honour, respect and remember those who gave their tomorrows so that we can all live free today is important for the future of our country. I wish them well this year.

The Darwin Motocross Club is a great club, hosting many events across the rural area and celebrating all things motorbikes.

A successful round 1 of Thumpers was held at Darwin River Tavern. I believe a few cars got bogged on the way out there, with round 2 being postponed due to flooding in the area. It will now be held on 29 March and round 3 will be at Darwin River Tavern on 12 April.

I know many Territorians, including you, Mr Deputy Speaker, are looking forward to Kamfari on the May Day weekend coming up, on Cox Peninsula Road near the old mine. I look forward to seeing you there. It is a fantastic day out. Make sure you get in early, bring some shade, a chair and an esky and plan a ride home.

I pay tribute to the new committee that has come on board this year, with President, Luke Micaleff; Vice President, Jordan Firley; Secretary, Mikaylie Bellingham; and Treasurer, Nina Bower. Well done to the people who make all these events possible.

Tomorrow I will be at the Rural Garden Club, a mainstay of the rural area and a wholesome, worthwhile club. It is filled with many great Territorians with an incredible amount of knowledge.

Unfortunately, we have lost a few members over the past few months, including the ever-knowledgeable Patricia (Pat) Rasmussen. Pat was a beautiful human being, a former nurse turned green thumb whose impact can be seen in gardens across the Territory. Pat was a true Territory icon in Territory horticulture and an active member of many clubs, including the Rural Garden Club and Litchfield Orchid Club for nearly four decades. She had the most incredible knowledge of plants. You could show her a picture of a leaf, and she would tell you exactly how to plant it, how much water and sun it needed, and what to do to keep it alive.

Thank you, Pat, for everything you did and my sincere condolences to Jenny and the family and the Rural Garden Club for their loss. She is finally reunited with her pineapple growing partner in crime, Les.

Rest in peace, Pat.

We also lost a keen gardener in the late Helen Joan Ogden, who will also be sorely missed after passing away earlier this year on 15 January at the age of 82.

I also pay tribute to the committee that was elected earlier this year at the first meeting of the Rural Garden Club, with President Di Spicer, who in her time has raised thousands for the Cancer Council and does a tremendous job keeping the meetings on target. I also shout out to Vice President and Treasurer Sally Barlee and Secretary Anne Patton.

I look forward to another busy year of garden club visits with the Member for Nelson as we parade around the rural area from garden to garden, sharing advice and a cup of tea.

I shout out to the Murdie Brothers Motorsport team; they are wingless sprint car competitors, with Jayden and the team entering the 2026 season again. I make special mention of Jayden's dad, Trevor. One of my favourite things in this job is meeting people who have a passion—an utter devotion—for something I have never heard of before. The way Trevor speaks about sprint cars—he does not even drive them; he just builds them—is next level. He is one of the most supportive and passionate dads I have ever met. I wish them well in this season.

Mr MALEY (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I follow on from the Member for Goyder in acknowledging the passing of Pat Rasmussen.

I agree with the Member for Goyder that Pat had an incredible knowledge of plants. She has been in the rural area for a long time; her pineapples are legendary. You could describe a plant to Pat, and she knew what it was, how to care for it and what would make that plant grow. She had a photographic memory for plants, and that is something I do not have. I spoke to her at garden clubs and took her advice. She knew her way around the garden club and plants in general.

I pass on my sincere condolences to Jenny, the family and the Rural Garden Club for their loss. The garden club is a small club that goes around gardens in the rural area. I enjoy chatting to the ladies and gentlemen there, they are a combined fun bunch, and they know how to look after plants in the rural area.

Rest in peace, Pat.

Mr BURGOYNE (Braitling): Mr Deputy Speaker, I put on the *Parliamentary Record* a number of people who have sadly passed away recently in Alice Springs.

The funeral service for the late Alison Margaret Pyper will be held tomorrow at the chapel at the Garden Cemetery on Friday 20 March. One of the hard parts of this job is always being away from home, and tomorrow, whilst I will miss Alison's funeral, I give my most sincere condolences to her family and all her friends who will be in attendance celebrating her life. I will always fondly remember Alison dressing up and attending our seniors' lunch over the years. Her energy and enthusiasm will be sorely missed.

Rest in peace.

Another long-term local who passed away in January was the man behind Fawlty's Fine Foods in Alice Springs, Mr Brian David Rees. Brian was a strong, caring and deeply protective man who loved his family beyond measure. His most precious treasures were his children, David and Kathryn and his grandchildren Bailey, Tino and Jayden. Brian would do anything to ensure they always felt loved, safe and supported.

From the whole community in Alice Springs and many people who, over the years, knew Brian, his family and ate at their cafe in the Alice Plaza, my most sincere condolences to your family, and may he also rest in peace.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, I give a shout-out to a few things that happened last night.

The Palmerston Crocs Netball Club held their AGM last night at the netball facilities in my electorate of Blain, in Moulden. As I was serving in this Assembly, I could not attend, but I can report the president elected was Bronwyn Pinney, Vice President Tamara Clayton, Treasurer Justine Whittington, Secretary Annalee Slack and several parents became members. Thank you to the committee members. I look forward to catching you at your next committee meeting—when we do not have parliament sittings—and seeing you at the netball courts this season. Well done.

I also thank the parents and teachers at Rosebery Secondary School, which held its establishment school council AGM last night. A full council was elected; thank you to all the parents who signed on to be part of the first school council for Rosebery Secondary School. I look forward to seeing you at the next school council meeting.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak about something I just found out from people at Foskey Pavilion. It has been disappointing for many people from Daly River with the confusion regarding the messaging from the CLP government.

I was at Foskey this morning for a community meeting, and people understood that they were off to Batchelor on Monday. They are now being told that they are being taken to Batchelor tomorrow; a lot of people are concerned about the confusing messaging and are wondering why the CLP government has not been clear on when and where they will be moving. They also heard and are concerned that their payments will not be put through tomorrow because they will be moving to Batchelor.

I want to get this on the record to ensure the CLP government follows this up so that people who are already displaced can have some consistency. These people are unsure about where they will be and what their homes will look like over the next few months. It is not good enough that the CLP government continues to change tack, use flood victims and not be consistent. It does not understand how people are feeling in Daly River and Palumpa or show any empathy towards people who are already doing it tough.

Many people at Foskey Pavillion are feeling on edge already. What they continue to see from this government is inconsistency and lack of messaging from their supposed leaders on the other side. It is wearing thin for the people of Daly River. They have all acknowledged that staff are doing their best, but what the people of Daly River need now is some love, care and consistency on where their lives will be over the next few months.

I note the minister is here, and I hope she can answer those questions in the next adjournment so people can understand if they will be getting their flood relief payments tomorrow. Many people have been told they will not because they are heading to Batchelor. No reason has been given as to why they are heading off tomorrow, when they were told only earlier today that they would go on Monday. It is not good enough from this CLP government.

Ms CAHILL (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I stand to correct the record. This is an incredibly challenging situation for everybody. The people who are on the ground—the welfare organisations and the Department of Children and Families—are all working tirelessly to make sure that people who are impacted by this evacuation are managed as carefully and as sensitively as possible.

I am not sure where that information has come from; I am not saying that is not what the Member for Daly was told, but I want to clarify. The Daly River mob will be getting their payments, as I announced in parliament today, and they will be processed tomorrow. The opportunity to progress transfer to the new site over the weekend will be done in consultation with those people; they are much better accommodations. There has been miscommunication and misunderstanding, which is not unrealistic in this evolving situation compounded by preparations for the evacuation of Numbulwar. We need to move a lot of people, and there are a lot of moving parts. We have a lot of people trying hard to keep everyone as focused, calm and looked after as possible.

The Daly River mob will be getting their payments processed tomorrow, as indicated earlier. Palumpa mob had theirs processed today. The progression of moving people into a much better environment, a much more private and comfortable environment, will commence over the weekend.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I will talk about some of the wonderful businesses in Fong Lim, which are the real engines of sustainable growth in the Northern Territory. As many of you will have noticed, over the last many months I have spent time every day in businesses in Winnellie, Tipperary, Stuart Park and Woolner. I draw attention to some of the great businesses I have been to recently. They and their work are worth reflecting on, particularly as we move forward towards May and the budget and thinking about economic affairs.

I recently took a tip from the Treasurer and headed to Promotor Trailers in Winnellie, because I do not know anything about run-off season, but the people there sure do, and the Treasurer sure does as well. Michael and Alex Lo were good to show me around their operation, which is an amazing family business that has been around since 1968. It almost entirely runs on word of mouth; they basically do no publicising. They have an enormous facility where you can get your trailer serviced. That genuinely has a material impact on the Territory lifestyle. We talk about restoring the Territory lifestyle, so where will you go when your trailer is buggered if not to Promotor Trailers? Thank you to the guys at Promotor Trailers for showing me around and talking to me about the importance of the run-off and casting a lure at this time of year.

Just around the corner is Pauls Service Centre. Anthony McCourt showed me around; what a great local business. It has changed hands over time. Paul of Pauls Service Centre is no longer there; it has passed to Anthony and co. It is always busy. No matter when you go, there are queues out the door and cars everywhere. The team does quality service and quality work. They are not entirely an independent operation—they work in partnership with Repco these days—but they have a fantastic work ethic and great customer service. That is what it takes to be a small business that survives in perpetuity. They also have this fantastic, beautiful vintage car in-house, which everybody should take a look at. It has been a fixer-upper project of theirs for a long time. They cannot take it out often because when they do, basically everybody swarms it.

On 13 February I had the opportunity to pop by Besser cafe to celebrate its 10th birthday. Can you believe Besser cafe has been in Winnellie for 10 years? The truth is that the burgers really are better at Besser. They are genuinely great. I look forward to taking one for the team when the Chief Minister and I head out there in a couple of weeks' time for Coffee with a Cop. It tends to be the case that when I end up at Besser alongside the Chief Minister, I am the one in charge of eating the burgers. I look forward to doing that again. Jokes aside, it is a gem of a cafe. It is a wonderful place that is always busy. It is not just a hub for people in the Winnellie area; people come from all around to eat at Besser cafe. It is a great spot that I encourage you all to check out.

On this side of town, closer to where I am on a regular basis, in Tipperary Waters—part of Stuart Park, which is also part of my patch—many of you know that I spend a good deal of time in my alternative office at the Dinah Beach yacht club, partaking in the chicken wings and music.

Recently I had the opportunity to bring the Dinah Beach committee members to my office for something significant—the signing of a memorandum of cooperation for the Darwin to Banda yacht race. Some of you will remember the old Darwin to Ambon yacht race. It has not happened for a number of years because economic conditions have not been great. These guys have worked hard to coordinate with the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism, the Maluku Provincial Government and Australian Sailing to put on an event that will raise money for the Territory. It will raise our profile; it is great for Indonesia and great for us.

The race is in August, and I would love to participate. We have a break in parliamentary sittings when I could do it, but, sadly, I am a terrible sailor, so they will not have me on the boat to do anything other than be ship's cook. It is possible that I may yet be in charge of making sandwiches on one of the racing ships. Jokes aside, the economic multiplier effect of good businesses and organisations generates wealth and sustainable

economic growth. Rather than just chasing big white whales, the small fish actually feed the people. Good on you, Dinah Beach, for doing the work you do.

Speaking of things that are good to eat and small fish: Stuart Park, Yogi's Way. That guy has been putting in a shift for a long time in Stuart Park. Long before I was championing the Westralia Street shops, he was championing the Westralia Street shops, ensuring there is growth in that area and amenity so that people are attracted to the area. We have worked hard together over time not to just spruik his food and his restaurant, but also to make sure that the whole area has been cleaned up significantly.

I am excited that soon—it will happen in April, so I am announcing it prematurely—a brand-new Kurdish-Turkish kebab shop will open offering Turkish food and kebabs on the corner. It is bad for my waistline as it is directly across from my office. That is clearly where I will be holding most of my meetings now; it is even closer than Dinah Beach. Good on Bhairab Yogi for the work he does to promote growth and small business.

A much larger business much closer to my premises is the Buff Club. The Buff Club might look to a lot of you like a fixture that is unchanging and never really does much, with rusted-on barnacles at the bar. I tell you what: that place is also working hard to improve and grow. I met with Manager Jordan Jenkins the other day and with Natalie Reynolds again. They have ambitious plans to grow. They have been saving money for a long time. Watch this space because pretty soon the Buff Club will not be a one-storey building anymore. You know why they are interested in doing that? Because the Buff Club wants to expand on the best bit of residential and commercial real estate with the highest return on investment in the Northern Territory.

I have said it once, and I will say it a hundred times in this House until I am blue in the face: the Stuart Park high street redevelopment is our best bet for sustainable economic growth. That is why they are also jumping on the bandwagon. They anticipate putting on one storey, if not two—these things are all subject to a special AGM amongst other things, of course. The discussions have been openly had with their membership for a time, so I am comfortable talking about it today. I will support the Buff Club to make sure they can keep trading, doing their business and being supported by us and make sure they help with the reinvigoration of the Stuart Park area because that strip has the best prospects for gentrification, growth and creating blood flow through the CBD to grow Darwin city.

Another fixture on that strip, albeit a new one, is GYG. Many of us are familiar with it on the way home from these sittings. Trevor Hawker came in to see me again the other day because he has concerns, like all business owners and franchisees have had, about traffic management. He wants to see improved traffic flow and redevelopment of the Stuart Park high street, just like every other retailer, landowner, business owner and stakeholder up and down that strip. In that strip there is a KFC, Maccas, GYG, cafes, the Buff Club, Sexyland and God knows what else. It is a one-stop shop to shop to your heart's content. I am imploring you all to think seriously about how important it is for us to redevelop that area.

There are other areas that are not as prominent but are just as important. One of them is Woolner. The other day I had the opportunity to visit Ollie Howe and Cheata Ouch at Angkor Takeaway, which I think is the only standalone Cambodian restaurant in all of Darwin. They have a tiny hole-in-the-wall location and loyal clientele. They have been there for only three years, but they are growing. They are evidence that a small business can become a medium-sized business. When I was there the other day to talk with them, they were happy to share that things are going so well they are about to expand and open up a bricks-and-mortar restaurant to feed people beyond just their little cafe. Good on those guys for the work they do.

On the opposite side of the road in Woolner you have the other extreme. You have Asian-United Food Service (AUFS), the Lay franchise—Nelson Lay's emporium as it were. Every now and then a small business becomes a medium-sized business and then becomes an iconic big business that is super important to the Northern Territory, and that is what AUFS is. It is a pillar of the restaurant and catering community. Do you know how many other restaurants and catering businesses it supports in the Northern Territory? More than 500 catering and food operations get their food from that place. It was started by Nelson's brother Kivi Lay in 1976. They have about 120 employees now. They have 10,000 dry, chilled and frozen pallets inside that place. They are an integral part of our supply chain.

There is beautiful calligraphy inside, which evidences in Chinese calligraphy how Nelson's grandfather, father and himself are all part of that business. I asked Nelson when I was there to tell me what it says, and he said, 'This one contains my birthdate'. It is pertinent and serendipitous to point it out, because 20 March happens to be Nelson Lay's birthday. Tomorrow, to Nelson Lay, the head of the AUFS set-up, I say happy birthday.

To all the businesses of Fong Lim, you are the real engines of sustainable growth in the Territory. I salute you and will continue to support you.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the work of outgoing Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Andrew Jones. I agree wholeheartedly that WA's gain is the Northern Territory's loss. All the best to Mr Jones. I had the privilege and honour of seeing his work in the former Assembly in my work as the Attorney-General, leading a lot of legislative reform for the Northern Territory and seeing the work he has led with his team. I wish him all the best and look forward to seeing who will replace him.

I learned a lot even in opposition, particularly about private member's Bills, which I had not needed to engage with until my role as the Opposition Leader. All the best, Mr Jones. Good luck in Western Australia. My Labor team and I thank you for your work here in the Territory.

I speak tonight because I am still being shut out by the Chief Minister. I have asked direct questions wanting important answers, but continually—I do not know what it is—for some reason the questions that directly relate to my electorate and the important work that I have to do as a local member to provide that information to my constituents are being blocked. I have asked since last week for a direct briefing from the Chief Minister's office. There is still no reply many days later. I understand that everyone is busy, but usually you get some type of acknowledgement to say, 'Thanks, we got your request and will ensure we get onto that'.

I know everyone is busy, but I have a range of diverse questions and important concerns to raise for my electorate, first and foremost, and on behalf of people in and around Katherine. They are not questions I want to put on the public record tonight, because I believe they should be answered directly by the government.

Noting the Member for Katherine is the local member, the CLP should respond to that as a team. I have been denied that opportunity to date, but I can assure the people of Arnhem—who have raised those questions with me in a time of need, stress and anxiety—that I will continue to do my job. That is what I was elected to do. I will not be turned off doing my job; I will not be dismissed when attempting to find answers on behalf of my constituents, particularly those who have raised concerns in Katherine. Although it is not my electorate, it is my home town.

I will ensure their concerns are raised to the government. If the government chooses not to answer, I am sorry; I cannot control the government's lack of care or its negligence just because I am the person raising the concern. It has become evident that there is a personal issue between the Chief Minister and me.

I still stand here to be constructive, Chief Minister. I wrote messages to you saying I would be happy to support and add value where I can, but you cannot find it in your heart to swallow your pride, arrogance or whatever it is that is blocking you. If it is your hate or dismissal of me, I do not care; I just want direct answers so that I can give them to my constituents.

Tonight I will be sending it to the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and every minister who has a responsibility related to the requests that have been raised with me. I will be sending the name, topic and phone number of every issue that has been raised. It will be up to the government to contact those people individually. I will provide the correspondence directly to those individuals to show that I have raised those issues. It will be sitting with the government tonight. By hook or by crook, my responsibility will be fulfilled by raising those issues with the government. I cannot promise my constituents that they will get an answer at all, let alone a timely answer because I still do not get answers from the Chief Minister and her office.

It is important to raise this because when we were going through the global pandemic and the COVID crisis, I know for a fact that my former colleague spoke directly to Lia Finocchiaro as the former Opposition Leader and the Member for Katherine, Jo Hersey, to provide real-time updates when everyone was feeling anxious and worried about what was happening across the NT.

My former colleagues, when in the roles that they held, communicated direct updates to the opposition at the time. The former Member for Drysdale, Eva Lawler, offered to have the Member for Barkly travel with her on the government plane to his electorate which was facing a severe incident with fires. There was a non-political reach-out to say, 'This is your electorate, these are the people you represent and this is the emergency that they are going through. We will join together in a bipartisan manner to support the people of your electorate.'

I know that because the former Health minister Natasha Fyles would ring the Member for Katherine directly. She told me, 'Yes I have'. I said, 'What else is happening in Katherine, because I am a Katherine resident?'

She would let me know but she would go straight to tell the Member for Katherine, so she had the information to directly tell her constituents.

In time of stress, need and high anxiety and in emergencies, particularly what we are going through with these severe weather events, that is what leadership looks like and what it should look like. We know it can be done, but for some reason the CLP leader, Lia Finocchiaro, cannot find it within her role as Chief Minister to reach across and provide me with updates or even acknowledgement of the important questions.

In Question Time I asked about the Numbulwar evacuation. The first thing the Chief Minister did was attack me personally. I do not care at any other time—do what you want—but at least provide the dignity of a response to the people of Arnhem, Chief Minister. At the end, you defaulted to your un-stately way of life—what you used to do in opposition for eight years—calling me 'generally a waste of time'. That is disrespect for an important issue.

The Chief Minister knows that my family is from Numbulwar and that I represent it as the local member. When I messaged her this morning—because all last week she berated me, 'You should be messaging and calling me; you have my number'—guess what? The Chief Minister has never reached out to me. She has never shown leadership and said, 'By the way, Member for Arnhem, I know this is in your electorate' or 'By the way, Member for Arnhem, I know you live in Katherine. Is there something you want to do together to support the people in your home town?' No, not a single message from the Chief Minister.

Frankly, I do not give a damn whether she cares about me or my family, but I give a damn that she does not answer the questions that my constituents have asked me to raise. The 40 exchanges that I provided directly that were operational to the incident controller—that is where I was spending my efforts and hours of time on the phone, messaging to make sure I was getting the questions and responses that constituents were asking of me.

Yes, this week the Chief Minister made a big song and dance about it, so I started to message her. Did I receive responses to the text messages? No, because—for some reason—the Chief Minister thinks it is okay in times of crisis to cut out the local member, just because of my role and because I have asked questions that she either does not care about or does not want to answer.

We can tell from the berating under different circumstances throughout today where things have really put pressure on the Chief Minister and her CLP government. They started to talk about race politics. I think the most outstanding reply from the Chief Minister and her team today was the response to a question—just because we are Aboriginal people, for some reason we do not care or we should be doing a job that demands a better response. Guess what? The accountability and responsibility of answering those questions sits with the government.

If the Chief Minister and her team think it is okay to snidely comment and make personal attacks when constituents and businesses have asked us to get these answers for them, that shows their inability to lead and work in a bipartisan manner during emergencies like what we are seeing.

I will not be silenced; I will not stay quiet. I will continue to do my job for the people of Arnhem.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I honour the life of Bob Holt, a Territory racing icon, humble community hero and outback father, whose passing has deeply saddened Katherine and the wider Northern Territory communities.

Bob passed away on Saturday 21 February at Royal Darwin Hospital at the age of 84 following a tragic accident near Katherine. He is remembered not only for his extraordinary achievements in motorsport but for a lifetime of kindness and quiet generosity that transformed the lives of countless Territorians.

At 58, Bob was the oldest winner of the Australian Speedcar Championship in 1999. He had spent years racing, was a strong supporter of speedway and was much loved across the Australian and Northern Territory speedway community.

A trucker across the Top End, he earned the respect and affection of those who came across him. He was known for his reliability, work ethic and big heart. One of the most extraordinary examples of Bob's generosity was his support for the Humpty Dumpty Foundation, through which he made life-changing contributions to paediatric care in Katherine. Bob, a knockabout truckie, had already given two substantial donations of $10,000 each to the foundation for Katherine Hospital.

Then, out of the blue, he rang Paul Francis, founder and Chair of the Humpty Dumpty Foundation, saying he wanted to give 'a bit more to help the kids in Katherine'. When asked how much, Bob replied, 'Well, mate. How about $1m? Would that make a difference?' It certainly did.

His generosity transformed the lives of children and families in Katherine, funding vital medical equipment and services and leaving a legacy that will endure for generations. When asked about his generous donations, Bob with a smile in his 83-year-old voice said matter-of-factly, 'I don't want to die the richest man in the Katherine cemetery'.

He cared little for recognition; he simply cared about making a difference. What a difference he made. Bob Holt will forever be known as the kindest bloke in Katherine, a remarkable human being whose impact went far beyond motorsport or business. Despite his incredible achievements, Bob remained humble and grounded. He was a man who gave quietly, without expectation or recognition because he cared deeply about the community and its people.

Beyond his philanthropy, Bob was devoted to his family, respected by his peers and a guiding figure in motorsport and regional life. His work ethic, generosity and spirit made him an inspiration to all who knew him. On behalf of the Assembly, I extend sincere condolences to his wife, Judy; their children, Mark, Darren and Kim; six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren; and all those whose lives he touched and, indeed, saved.

Bob Holt will be greatly missed, but his extraordinary contributions to racing, the community and the children of Katherine will never be forgotten.

I believe the Territory has given Australia some amazing field hockey players, it could be said we punch well and truly above our weight per capita. That is the view also of born-and-raised Territorian Jeremy Hayward, a legend at 32 years old having recently played his 250th match in the FIH pro league. Jeremy told the *NT News*' Melanie Plane last year that the Territory is where his journey started. He said:

This is my origin, my people, my home …

Jeremy Hayward is proud to be a Territorian, and boy, are we proud of him. Jeremy's 250th cap was recorded in Hobart on 20 February in the Kookaburras' impressive three-to-one victory over Spain. This milestone places him amongst the most capped players in Australian men's hockey history, becoming the equal 12th highest capped Kookaburra of all time.

His journey has yielded a star-studded career, from his early days on Darwin hockey fields to the world stage, he has become a three-time Olympian, a World Cup silver medallist, a Commonwealth Games gold medallist and one of global hockey's most feared penalty corner specialists. He is the national captain and still finds time to sneak in playing with the Territory Stingers.

In 2023 he was also recognised locally, being named the Northern Territory Sportsperson of the Year for the second time after winning it previously in 2015. Jeremy Hayward is not just a cool commanding defender and respected leader on the field; he is a dedicated contributor to his home town and the sport he loves. I congratulate Jeremy on reaching 250 international appearances and thank him for his outstanding contribution to Australian hockey and to the Northern Territory.

It always amazes and comforts me to know there are achievers in our community who do not seek glory or even recognition. These quiet achievers are the backbone of the Northern Territory—the people we just happen to get to hear about and appreciate every now and then in forums like this.

In that spirit, I recognise the life of a remarkable Territorian, Mrs Joan Motter, who passed away on 6 February this year. Joan was one of these quiet but extraordinary Territorians whose life reflected the very best of our community. It was a life defined by service to others, devotion to family and a deep commitment to the place she called home.

She moved to the Northern Territory from Wagga Wagga in New South Wales in 1964, coming north with a sense of adventure and willingness to work hard. Not long after arriving, Joan began working for an Italian plumbing company where she met the man who would become her husband, John Motter. They married in 1965 and together built a life in the Territory grounded in family, service and community. Joan later joined the Northern Territory Police Force in the fingerprint section, contributing to careful and highly detailed investigative work that helps solve criminal cases.

Joan was something of a trailblazer. She worked as a technician in the police forensics lab before women were common on the front line. It was a role that required patience, precision and dedication—qualities that defined Joan throughout her life. For more than 20 years she provided impeccable service to the Northern Territory Police Force and the community. Joan and John went on to raise two daughters, Anthea and Narelle, and their family grew to include grandchildren, Dale, Hannah, Rachael and Kurk. Joan was an incredibly proud grandmother and later a loving great-grandmother to Isabelle and Sophie. She was especially proud when her grandson, Dale, followed in her footsteps in the public service and joined the Northern Territory Police Force where he serves as a detective with Strike Force Trident.

Service to others was central to who Joan was. She volunteered with the Salvation Army in many capacities before taking on the role as their financial manager for the Northern Territory. Her husband John also worked with the Salvation Army managing the Salvation Army nursing home and daycare centre.

Following John's passing in 1999, Joan stepped away from her former role to help care for her grandchildren. Even then, her commitment to community continued. Joan was known for the quiet kindness she shared with others. She crocheted hundreds of toys for babies and children in the Neonatal Intensive Care and paediatric units at Royal Darwin Hospital, bringing comfort to families during some of the most difficult times in their lives.

Joan Motter was deeply loved by her family and respected by all who knew her and remembered as a proud Territorians whose life was defined by generosity, service and love for others.

Vale, Joan Motter; thank you for your contribution to our community.

I was honoured to be a guest at the United Muslims of Northern Territory Interfaith Iftar dinner in February. It was a wonderful evening celebrating shared values and what binds us all as a community. Minister Robyn Cahill; the Member for Wanguri, Oly Carlson; the Member for Fannie Bay, Laurie Zio; and the Member for Fong Lim, Tanzil Rahman also attended and shared in the breaking of the fast during Ramadan.

The evening highlighted the Northern Territory's strength, diversity, openness and unity with faith leaders, community representatives and young people engaging in meaningful dialogue, mutual understanding and respect.

It was great to see strong youth leadership, which is a hallmark of UMNT, including masters of ceremony, Hamza Razi and Hajrah Kamran, whose presentation of children's calligraphy showcased the creativity and promise of the next generation.

I commend the United Muslims of Northern Territory for its continued leadership in promoting multiculturalism, youth engagement and community wellbeing throughout the Territory. Events such as this reaffirm that the Northern Territory is at its strongest when we come together, which was on display that night.

Congratulations to UMNT President Mohammed Raziuddin—everyone calls him Razi—the volunteers, organisers and all who attended for contributing to a warm and uplifting evening.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge a number of events I have attended over the past week across our community.

Harmony Week is in full swing, and Territorians are proudly celebrating the culture, stories and traditions that make our community strong. This year we are investing $80,000 to support events across the Northern Territory, from school and grassroots community celebrations to the Harmony celebration in Darwin and Big Day Out in Harmony in Alice Springs.

Just this evening I was honoured to host a Harmony Day reception at Parliament House alongside the Chief Minister and colleagues, welcoming hundreds of Territorians from diverse cultures and backgrounds. It was a powerful reminder of what makes our Territory unique. It was people coming together in respect and unity, celebrating a community where everyone belongs.

Last Saturday I was pleased to attend the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory's International Women's Day fashion show, an event that showcased culture, pride and strength of women across our community. I was delighted to join the Chief Minister, the Member for Wanguri, the Member for Casuarina, Member for Port Darwin and many other community leaders in celebrating this important occasion.

Over the weekend, the minister for Asian Relations and I joined the community at the Taiwanese Lantern Festival, Light up of Taiwan, marking a vibrant cultural celebration and the beginning of Harmony Week.

I thank Ms Yun-Ju Kan and the dedicated volunteers of the Taiwanese Community of the Northern Territory for bringing this event to life.

On Sunday I had the privilege of representing the Chief Minister, alongside the Member for Wanguri, at the Pakistan Association of the Northern Territory's International Women's Day and Ramadan Iftar Dinner. Held during the holy month of Ramadan, the evening reflected shared values of compassion, generosity and community whilst also recognising the leadership and contributions of Pakistani women. I acknowledge the Pakistan Association, led by Uzair Mir, for their ongoing work strengthening culture and connection in our Territory.

I turn to our vibrant arts community. The Portrait of a Senior Territorian Art Award returns in 2026 and is now in its 27th year. The much-loved award celebrates the seniors who have helped shaped our Territory, while supporting local artists to tell their stories. With more than $11,000 in prize money, I encourage Territorians to get involved. Entries close on 8 June 2026. I acknowledge the continued support of COTA NT for the Selfie with a Senior Award. Both these initiatives demonstrate the Finocchiaro government's commitment to two of my key portfolios, Arts and Seniors, both of which enrich the lives of people in our community every day.

In February I was pleased to attend the opening of 'Pasar Malam Night Market: Contemporary Printmaking from Indonesia and Australia' at the Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, along with the Member for Fannie Bay. I thank the artists, including Rudi Hermawan, and the team led by Chair Alastair Shields and Director Petrit Abazi for delivering such a compelling exhibition.

I attended the Exit Art exhibition at MAGNT, where I had the honour of presenting the NXT Gen Arts Grant Award to Austin Armstrong. Congratulations to all participating students and award recipients.

While in Alice Springs I connected with Duprada Dance Company and Artistic Director Lynne Hanton OAM, who continue to deliver outstanding work across the Territory. This is an amazing facility, and I am sure you know of it, Madam Speaker, as it would be the envy of any ballet dancer in the world.

At the end of February I officially opened the Phoenix exhibition at MAGNT, featuring the work of William Mackinnon, whose reflections on time spent with Aboriginal artists were both powerful and moving.

I acknowledge Ian Kew who is the chair of MAGNT, Adam Worrall and the MAGNT Board for their leadership in supporting the arts.

Importantly, we have announced the upgraded Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in Tennant Creek will reopen on 28 April following a $10m investment. This delivers a modern, culturally respectful space for the Warumungu people and supports economic and cultural outcomes in the Barkly region.

Most recently, I attended the opening night of *Genius* at Browns Mart, a sharp witty production that highlights the strength of our local theatre scene.

I turn to sports. The Finocchiaro CLP government is committed to investing in places Territorians come together to play, compete and connect. That is why I was proud to announce a $500,000 grant for Football NT to upgrade field lighting at Larrakia Park stadium.

Soccer—or as it is known around the world, football—has experienced significant growth in the Northern Territory and across Australia. The Territory has seen growth of 9% in the past year alone. We expect that growth to continue, particularly with the success of our national team, the Matildas, who this weekend contest yet another Asian Cup final against Japan.

The lighting upgrade at Larrakia Park will deliver safer playing conditions, improved training opportunities and a better experience for players, families and the entire community. Importantly, it will also position the Territory to host major fixtures, including international matches and Asian Cup qualifiers. This is not just about elite competition; it is about community.

Events like the Greek GleNTi challenge between arch rivals Olympic and Hellenic regularly fill the stadium and, for the first time, players can perform under appropriate lighting conditions. This investment will significantly enhance the Darwin soccer season, which kicked off a couple of weeks ago.

Having attended matches at Larrakia Park, I have seen firsthand the impact of inadequate lighting. It was clear to me that our football community deserved better. Following discussions with Football NT Chair Michael Bridge and CEO Jamie Monteith, it is evident this upgrade has been a priority for more than a decade, and this government is now delivering it.

The Finocchiaro CLP government is committed to ensuring Territorians have access to facilities that are safe, accessible and capable of supporting both grassroots participation and major events. By backing practical infrastructure upgrades like this, we are strengthening community sport and supporting our Territory lifestyle.

Football NT has confirmed it can deliver this project within the $500,000 investment, and we look forward to seeing Larrakia Park shine brighter than ever.

I wish the Matildas the very best this Saturday and extend my best wishes to all Territory football clubs and supporters for the 2026 season.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.