Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

15th Assembly



Parliamentary Record
Debates and Questions



Wednesday 13 May 2026

CONTENTS

VISITORS 4691
Attendees of Condolence Motion for Trish Crossin 4691
Good Shepherd Lutheran College 4691
CONDOLENCE MOTION 4691
Mrs Trish Crossin 4691
REORDER OF BUSINESS 4706
CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN LEGISLATION AMENDMENT 4706
(EVERY CHILD MATTERS) BILL 4706
Serial 67 4706
VISITORS 4711
Australian Defence Force – Headquarters Regional Force Surveillance Group 4711
NOTICES 4711
QUESTION TIME 4711
Emergency Call Centre Upgrade 4711
Beetaloo Sub-basin 4712
Emergency Response – Douglas Daly Region 4713
Federal Budget 2026–27 – Inflation and Investor Tax Settings 4714
Gunbalanya Health Clinic 4715
Federal Budget 2026–27 – Maternity Services 4715
Operation Home Safe 4716
Federal Budget 2026–27 – National Disability Insurance Scheme 4717
Budget 2026–27 – Yuendumu School Upgrades 4717
Kakadu National Park – Site Closures 4718
Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 4719
Jabiru Futures 4720
Victims Register – Release Notifications 4720
Phelp River Crossing Upgrade 4721
Phelp River Crossing Upgrade – Supplementary Question 4722
Budget 2026–27 – Fisheries Compliance Unit 4722
Public Sector – Frontline Worker Recruitment 4723
MOTION 4724
Cost of Airfares and Air Connectivity 4724
MOTION 4759
Central Australian Economy 4759
YOUTH JUSTICE AND CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT BILL 4760
Serial 66 4760
ATTORNEY-GENERAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT 4761
(BOARDS, COMMITTEES AND STATUTORY OFFICES) BILL 4761
Serial 65 4761
DISTINGUISHED VISITOR 4763
Honorary Consul-General of the Philippines 4763

CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 4763
Serial 68 4763
ADJOURNMENT 4764

Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

VISITORS
Attendees of Condolence Motion for Trish Crossin

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I welcome the people who are here to attend the condolence motion for Trish Crossin. I honour the attendance of dignitaries, Hon Jane Aagaard, Hon Natasha Fyles and Hon Eva Lawler. Welcome to the Chamber.

Members: Hear, hear!

Good Shepherd Lutheran College

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, we also have in the gallery Year 5 students from Good Shepherd Lutheran College, accompanied by their teachers. On behalf of honourable members, welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

CONDOLENCE MOTION
Mrs Trish Crossin

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I draw your attention to the passing of Mrs Trish Crossin, former Senator for the Northern Territory.

On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to the family and friends of Trish in the Chamber and galleries.

I remind honourable members that on completion of the debate I will ask members to stand in silence for one minute as a mark of respect.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly expresses its condolences to the family and friends of Mrs Trish Crossin.

Today we honour the life of Senator Trish Crossin, a woman whose contribution to the Northern Territory and its people will endure for generations to come. Trish dedicated her life to service through education, the union movement, the Parliament of Australia and the many community organisations and causes she supported throughout her life. There was always a common thread: a deep belief in people, fairness and making the lives of others better.

Her passing is a profound loss for the Northern Territory. This is because Trish was never just a politician. Her impact reached far beyond parliament and could be seen in classrooms, sporting clubs, advocacy organisations, community events and the lives of the many Territorians she encouraged, mentored and fought for over the decades of her life in public service.

Like many Territorians, Trish did not begin her life here. Born in Melbourne, she trained as a teacher before eventually making her way up north. What may once have been a move for work became a lifelong commitment to the Territory and its people. Trish embraced Territory life wholeheartedly and, in return, the Territory embraced her. Over time she became one of those people who helped define the modern Territory story, fiercely proud of this place, deeply invested in its future and committed to the people who call it home.

Long before entering politics, a life of advocacy and service was already taking shape. Teaching gave Trish a firsthand understanding of the power of education and the enormous responsibility carried by those who shape young people's lives. At the centre of that work was a simple belief that every young person deserved an opportunity, encouragement and the chance to succeed, regardless of where they come from. That belief never left Trish.

For Trish, education was never just about classrooms or curriculum; it was about confidence, opening doors and making sure that young people, particularly in the Northern Territory, felt that their future could be bigger than the circumstances they were born in. Those values carried naturally into her work at the National Tertiary Education Union, where she became a fierce advocate for workers and accessible education. Collective effort mattered deeply to Trish, as did the belief that progress has meaning only when ordinary people are brought along with it.

There was nothing performative about the way Trish approached advocacy; it was grounded in people's lives, struggles and aspirations. Conversations, listening and understanding how decisions affected ordinary Territorians mattered to Trish. All those values eventually led her into politics.

In 1998 Trish made history as the first woman from the Northern Territory elected to the Australian Senate. That moment mattered enormously not only because it was historic but also because of what it represented for Territory women and the Territory's identity itself. The Northern Territory is a long way from Canberra, not just geographically but in every way imaginable. Decisions are often made by people who do not truly understand this place because they have not experienced it firsthand. For the first time a Territory woman was representing this place in the national parliament—someone who understood its uniqueness, isolation, complexity and enormous potential.

What always stood out about Trish was that she never seemed interested in politics for the status or symbolism. Titles were never the point. Recognition was never the point. What mattered most was the opportunity to fight for the people Trish represented and to make sure that Territory voices were heard nationally. Trish carried the Territory with her every day she served in the Senate, away from home.

Throughout her parliamentary career, the causes closest to Trish were always clear: education; women; young people; sport; the arts; and First Nations communities. There was also fierce pride in the Territory.

People who knew Trish often spoke about how deeply she loved this place and how strongly she believed that Territory voices deserve to be heard and respected nationally. Trish understood that the Territory was often overlooked or misunderstood. She never allowed the people she represented to become an afterthought.

Her advocacy for Aboriginal Territorians was especially significant. There was a genuine understanding that the Northern Territory's identity and future are inseparable from the oldest continuing culture on Earth. Years were spent listening to communities, building relationships and advocating for outcomes that were grounded in dignity, respect and self-determination.

That work was not always easy—real advocacy rarely is—but Trish approached it with sincerity and a willingness to listen before speaking. We saw this in her work as a founding member of the Northern Territory Working Women's Centre and countless other organisations that benefited from her work, intellect and passion.

Young people remained another enduring focus of Trish's life. Whether through schools, sport, the arts or community organisations, Trish believed strongly in creating opportunities for young Territorians to thrive. There was a deep understanding that confidence and belonging can shape the trajectory of a young person's life.

Outside politics there was a strong connection to Territory community life, particularly sport. In the Northern Territory sport is far more than just competition. Sporting clubs are where lifelong friendships are formed, families spend their weekends together, young people find confidence and communities can come together regardless of background or circumstance. Trish understood that instinctively because she understood people instinctively.

One of the remarkable things about reflecting on Trish's life is the consistency of her values. Whether as a teacher, union advocate, senator, mentor or community leader, the same qualities were carried through every role—compassion, fairness, courage and an unwavering commitment to others.

Politics can be an unforgiving place, particularly for women willing to speak plainly. Advocacy and standing strong for something were the traits that Trish took into her political life, and she stood firmly by her beliefs. Trish did not seek the easy path; conviction mattered to her and so did standing up for what was right, even when it was difficult or came at a personal cost.

That strength inspired many people within our Labor movement and well beyond it. There are many people in public life today who benefited from her encouragement, mentorship and strong example. Many people may have never stepped forward had Trish not helped open the door first. That may well become one of the most enduring parts of her legacy: not simply the positions she held or the history she made, but the people she inspired along the way—the women who saw what was possible because Trish had done it first and the young Territorians who were encouraged because somebody believed in them.

My first personal interaction with Trish was when I was a member of the National Youth Roundtable in 2002, when I had the honour to interview Trish in her parliament office in Canberra. It was intimidating and exciting, and it still sticks in my mind.

People felt heard because Trish took the time to listen.

Importantly, her contribution to the Territory did not end with parliament. Public office was just one chapter in a much larger life of community service. Community organisations, advocacy work, mentoring and supporting causes she believed in remained an important part of Trish's life long after she left the Senate.

What made Trish so respected across the Territory is that people knew where she stood. People knew her commitment to the Territory was genuine. People knew she cared deeply about the lives of those around her. Authenticity like that matters in public office, especially in the Territory where people value honesty, connection and people who remain grounded no matter the position they hold.

For many Territorians Trish represented something important: a woman who broke barriers without ever making it about herself; a woman who carried herself with conviction and strength; and a woman who never lost sight of the people she entered public service to serve.

Beyond the milestones and achievements, beyond the history Trish made and the titles she held, it is the humanity of Trish Crossin that people will remember the most—the conversations, encouragement, advocacy and compassion and a sense that Trish genuinely wanted this place, the Northern Territory, to succeed.

The last time I spoke to Trish she was eager to see how I was going and offered her support and encouragement.

To Trish's husband, Mark; her four children, Amanda, Kate, Melinda and Paul; her family; her friends; former colleagues; our Labor family; and all who are mourning her loss, we extend our deepest condolences.

The Northern Territory is a better place because Trish Crossin called it home. Generations of Territorians will continue to benefit from the life of Trish Crossin—the life that she led for us in the Northern Territory, the barriers she broke and the work she dedicated herself to over many years of service to our community.

Vale, Senator Patricia Margaret Crossin AM. May your fighting spirit rest knowing that the Territory is a special place because you called it home.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I thank the Opposition Leader for bringing this motion to the Assembly to recognise the profound loss of someone who made a huge contribution to the Northern Territory and whose legacy will continue to endure.

It is with great sadness that I speak in this condolence motion to honour the life of Senator Trish Crossin. It is fair to say that Senator Crossin was well known for being tenacious. Growing up into my teenage years and having her as Senator for the Northern Territory, she was a well-known indelible figure in the political landscape of the Northern Territory. She was well known and well respected as someone who would take the fight to Canberra. That is a well-trodden path for Territory politics, but Trish being the first female representative in Canberra for the Northern Territory meant something bigger, more powerful and more important. She did that role with elegance and a tenacity that was admirable.

Trish was originally from Kensington in Melbourne. She studied at Mercy College and Deakin University, where she gained degrees in education, preceding her career as a teacher. I think perhaps her sternness came from her background as a teacher. Teachers tend to have that look about them, and Trish embodied that. I note that there are many former members of parliament who were teachers.

She taught in remote communities, particularly across Arnhem Land, and as a senior teacher at Yirrkala Bilingual School south of Nhulunbuy. That was her passion. During that time as a teacher she worked closely with members of the Yunupingu family and developed that strong and enduring deep-seated respect for Yolngu people and culture. It was that respect that went both ways, and she was much loved amongst Yolngu.

When she was first elected to parliament in 1998, she spoke to the Yolngu people in the Gumatj language, committing to that ongoing representation and advocacy for all people across the Territory, no matter how far away they were from Darwin, to be represented in Canberra and have their voice heard. She followed that speech with another address directly to her East Arnhem constituents as part of her valedictory speech when she left the parliament.

Senator Crossin was a passionate figure, and many areas that she focused on came to fruition. Probably one of her most enduring and proudest legacies will be the NT Working Women's Centre which continues to operate, going from strength to strength. I acknowledge the people in the gallery from the Working Women's Centre. That centre, thanks to Senator Crossin, has operated for more than 20 years, providing enormous service to Territory women in managing workplace issues and disputes and providing training, advice, advocacy and opportunity for Territory women. It has been incredibly important, and we have Senator Crossin to thank for that.

She also was a bit of a revhead, and that might not be what people remember her for. She lobbied for a $4.5m upgrade at the Hidden Valley Motor Sports Complex. That does not sound like much now, but at the time it was. Eventually she served as a director for the Australian National Drag Racing Association.

Following her career in politics, she became the Director of the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation. She was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2023 for her enormous service to the people of the Northern Territory.

As the first person to cut the path to Canberra for Territory women, she made it possible to have that aspiration and, as the Opposition Leader so eloquently put, for people to follow in her footsteps and have the opportunity to see and believe the future contribution they could make to the Northern Territory was possible.

When we look at Senator Crossin's life we see someone who was not bogged down by titles and accolades and what can be the trappings of political life. She will not be remembered for administering departments or leading her Caucus or any of those types of things; she will be remembered for being a passionate, determined, straight-up know-where-you-stand politician who put Territorians first, and she put the best interests of the Territory first every time. She was an absolute fighter, tenacious and would not back down when something needed to be done. There is a lot to be said for those qualities.

I extend my sincerest condolences to Mark and the entire Crossin family, who must be reeling from this sudden and tragic loss, and to all who mourn her. She was obviously a key figure and will continue to be a key a figure in the Labor Party, not just in the Northern Territory but also nationally. I extend my condolences to the Labor family. Most importantly, today is opportunity to put on the record her contribution. That is incredibly important, and I hope it brings some comfort to the family who understandably will be distraught at this time. This morning we come together across the political aisle to recognise a great human and a great Territorian. Condolences to Mark and the entire family.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I share my condolences and those of the Yolngu community with the family and friends of Trish Crossin.

Trish and Mark Crossin lived in Yirrkala in the early 1980s. They were teachers at the Yirrkala school. Mark played basketball and football. I knew him well, as we both played for the Djarrak football team. At that time I was working at the airport in Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula, which is why I played sports like Aussie Rules footy.

Trish became a senior teacher at the Yirrkala school. She worked with one of the senior leaders in Arnhem Land, my *ngapipi*, Mr Wali Wunungmurra, and other Yolngu teachers who gave her a good understanding of our Yolngu *rom*, our law, our culture and the importance of two-ways education. She was adopted into our Yolngu families.

In the 1980s Yirrkala school was a strong bilingual school with a strong bilingual support unit in Darwin. Beth Graham, Stephen Harris and a team of linguists in Darwin would visit all the bilingual schools. This followed a strong commitment to the homelands movement of the 1970s. This was a time of strong partnerships and commitment to bilingual education in the NT, and this shaped many teachers and their understanding of how bilingual education can provide successful outcomes for Aboriginal children.

Trish could see it because she was in the classroom. She saw Yolngu students making their leap from their first language, Yolngu Matha, to English. All these students still remember Mark and Trish today, and they have sent some words for the family.

My *yapa*, Wendy B Marika, sent this message:

> *Trish was my teacher in my early teenage years. She was loving and caring. A beautiful person who loved her class and made Yolngu children feel comfortable and safe. She was also fun. She was a* Manymak Mirithirr *Teacher!*

That is a very good teacher.

My *yapa,* Y Mununggurr, the Chairperson of Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, sent this message:

> *I am deeply saddened to hear the passing of Trish Crossin.*
>
> *Trish was a well-respected teacher. I remember the relationship she had with Yirrkala students (Yolngu students) way back in the 80s was built on warmth, encouragement, respect and trust and the care was abundant, not just for the students but also shared with the parents and the community of Yirrkala as a whole.*
>
> *When Trish and Mark left Yirrkala I remember all the students at Yirrkala school were very sad to see them leave.*
>
> *I was one of those students and I remember those days clearly.*
>
> *I will always remember and appreciate Mrs Crossin's teachings and that of Mark's. It has made me the person that I am today and I appreciate both of them.*
>
> *And to the Yirrkala School, Mrs Crossin was more than just a teacher because of her caring aura.*
>
> *Rest in Peace* marrkapmirr *'Mrs Crossin' til we meet again.*
>
> *I send my condolences to Mark and the family. We are thinking of you all during these difficult times.*
>
> *God Bless* bukmak.

Those were the word from my *yapa* in Garrthalala.

When Trish and Mark left Gove the community was sad to see them go, but they left with true hearts for the people. Unlike most politicians who speak about Aboriginal people without knowing us, Trish was a politician who had spent time living and working with our people. She had Yolngu family and friends, and she had knowledge of our law and culture. Trish carried this knowledge and understanding with her into politics.

In her opening speech to parliament in Canberra in 1998, she said:

> *My life in the Northern Territory began at Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula where I arrived in 1981 to teach. I would like to thank the Yolngu people in their own language.*

Trish then spoke in Yolngu Matha, taking our language into the federal parliament. She said:

> *Those words translated mean thank you for welcoming my family and I, for allowing us to live on your land and for the opportunity to understand your culture. I give a public undertaking to work hard to represent them and to continue to respect and acknowledge their rights.*

She remained true to her word; she was watching over us all the way through her time in politics. She advocated strongly for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service and continued to always advocate for strong education for our people.

In 2009 when the NT Government made changes to education that were damaging for bilingual schools and our communities, Trish stood by her knowledge and by our communities when she rose in the Chamber to say:

> *Language and culture go hand in hand. Language reflects culture and world view. The use of Aboriginal language in schools helps to reassure Indigenous students that their culture and their language is valued, and makes school a bit more of a welcoming place.*
>
> *…*
>
> *There is clear evidence that good bilingual programs can achieve results. Aboriginal people have made it amply clear that they value and want bilingual education.*

She also used this speech to mention my *yapa,* who sent her condolences. She said:

> *I have talked long and proudly of a significantly high achiever in Yirrkala in North-East Arnhem Land by the name of Y Mununggurr. She is now the CEO of Laynhapuy Homelands Association. You do not become a CEO unless you are competent in English, literacy and numeracy and in your own language. [She] is a product of bilingual education.*

These are the words that Trish spoke for Yolngu people in the parliament. She was authentic in speaking for us and taking our stories to the parliament. She was a true friend for Yolngu, without any hidden agenda. She set an example for all members of parliament, that we must stay true to the people we speak for and that we must speak where we see injustice. Trish was a bold and strong advocate for Aboriginal rights and bilingual education.

I send my condolences and those of the Yolngu community to Mark and the family and Trish's friends. She will always be remembered fondly in our hearts, and so will Mark.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I pay tribute to Trish Crossin. What a woman—a fierce Territorian, a passionate advocate, a true believer, a staunch union member and lover, and someone I was lucky enough to have known for my entire adult life and as a Young Labor member. For many of us, Trish was larger than life. She was one of those people who could walk in to a room and it immediately felt warmer, louder and somehow more hopeful all at once.

She loved the Northern Territory with every part of her being. She never missed an opportunity to talk up this place we all call home. Whether she was in Canberra, Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy or the bush, Trish always saw it as an opportunity for her to be an ambassador for the Territory. She wanted people to see its beauty, strength, culture and, at the heart of it, communities.

She was also deeply honest about the challenges we faced. Trish never looked away from the hard conversations. She fought hard for better education, better healthcare, stronger communities, women's rights, the rainbow community's rights and workers' rights. She made sure that people who were struggling were never left or forgotten.

When I think of Trish, I think of the many cups of tea we shared in Central Australia. Whether it was at the back of the old AIDS and Hepatitis Council, of which Trish was a staunch supporter; whether it was in the front yard of Warren Snowdon's place; or whether it was in the great outdoors at one of the amazing remote communities, the conversations were never short. The road trips through the remote communities were always full of life, laughs and good stories. She had a good sense of humour, a huge heart and, incredibly, the ability to make people feel seen and heard.

As a proud Central Australian, I can say that Trish Crossin was probably the senator who spent the most time outside of Darwin. She loved the regions, the bush and every Territorian.

Trish was instrumental in many things across the Northern Territory and nationally. She helped to establish the Working Women's Centre, and well after her time in the Northern Territory, she still backed people to support the centre. Whether it was on the board or advocating at federal and Territory levels, Trish was always there. She was a member and patron of countless organisations, a fierce board member and an advocate who worked tirelessly for causes she believed in, because that is who Trish was.

In Canberra she recognised something that others had overlooked—the importance of supporting families and women in parliament. Trish's work was instrumental in establishing the family and childcare centre at Parliament House. It was groundbreaking and reflected exactly who Trish was: someone who understood that if we truly want representative democracy, we must support the people who stand up to represent their community—our women.

Beyond all the titles and achievements, for those of us who knew her personally she was 'Trishie'. She was always smiling, caring and asking about people, including people in the bush, and encouraging others to keep going. She cared deeply about education, fairness, community and making sure that no-one was ever left behind.

Trish was a bipartisan politician. She never just denied the opposition when it had ideas. She might have occasionally allowed us to have a cheeky wine with the former Senator for the Northern Territory Nigel Scullion, but that is how we got things done. Trish recognised the need and importance to work together to put the Territory first. That is the woman we remember today—a proud Territorian, a fighter, a mentor, a friend and someone whose legacy will live on in the lives she changed and the path she created for others.

Trish was there for all of us. Those of who were born and grew up in the Northern Territory always got a signed card from Trish for our 18th, 21st, 50th and 60th birthdays because she valued the importance of communication with her communities.

To Mark and the family, thank you for sharing Trish with us. We are incredibly blessed and fortunate to have had Trish in our lives. The Northern Territory and the Australian Parliament are better places because of Trish.

Well after Trish left the Australian Parliament, she was here for Territory women. Every woman in Northern Territory Caucuses and the federal parliament was supported by Trish. Whether it was a subtle knock on the door by Trish in the Australian Senate, supporting and mentoring Malarndirri McCarthy or whether it was supporting the former Chief Minister and Member for Nightcliff Natasha Fyles, who worked for her during her years at university, Trish was there for Territory women because she saw their importance and recognised their strength and need to be supported.

The Member for Mulka spoke about the importance Trish held for Aboriginal language, law and culture. The words of the Gumatj first spoken in the Australian Parliament were by Senator Trish Crossin. Some of the last words of Senator Trish Crossin as she was leaving the Australian Parliament were in the Gumatj language. That is the woman we remember—a woman whose feet were firmly planted in the Northern Territory's soil and whose legacy and roots remain deeply connected to the Northern Territory. Whether it is in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy or the bush, Trish's legacy will always be remembered.

Today is an important opportunity to recognise that achievement and thank the Crossin family for sharing Senator Trish Crossin with us. I acknowledge everyone who is here. It is a demonstration of the commitment, passion and legacy of Senator Trish Crossin to see the people turning out today—the family, her colleagues, friends and the mighty unions. Everyone is here to show respect. We can often measure people by the numbers who turn out to pay their respects. Whether in the Northern Territory or in Victoria, that has been shown by the hundreds of people who have turned up to remember an incredible woman.

To all our family and colleagues in the Labor movement across Australia, thank you for coming and sharing your story. To Victorian Labor, you cannot claim Trishie; she is ours.

Rest easy, Trish Crossin. Rest easy, my old friend.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I will speak about my friend Trish Crossin. We have heard a lot so far about her history, career and politics, but I just knew Trish as my friend. I met her early in the time when I moved to the Northern Territory and not long after she won the position of Senator for the Northern Territory. Through my husband—who I am pleased to say is here—Professor Len Notaras, I met her at a function, which is where most people meet each other in the Northern Territory when they first get here. We clicked, and it was great.

I got to know her and get her support at the time I was working with the Australian Medical Association. It was my job to keep the Northern Territory Government honest—which is always a fun thing in the health arena—and Trish was helpful in providing insight and inroads into the federal government when we wanted to take a fight to Canberra, which we often did, particularly regarding Aboriginal health issues.

I got to know Trish over time. I loved having coffee with her and sharing a life with her. I truly admired this woman who had a young family, but had decided to fight for her Territory and stand up for what she believed was the most important thing—advancing the Territory on the national stage.

Over the years, as time progressed, I decided to put up my hand for politics. Trish's mentorship was, in no small part, one of the reasons I thought it would be good to have a go.

I ran for the seat of Wanguri in 2001, which is now occupied by my colleague Oly Carlson. Trish's home was my haven in those times because she lived in the electorate and she understood the battles of doorknocking and the challenges you face. Her door was always open to me, whether it was for a quick loo break or a sit down for a cup of tea or to say, 'Oh my god, I cannot believe what I saw in the house of the door I just knocked on'. She was always there for me.

Over the years we shared a passion for musicals, cooking, cakes and raising our young families. I truly valued the friendship that she gave. We had many wonderful dinner parties, get-togethers at Australia Day balls and gala balls in the old Mindil Beach Casino when it was the Cup Day ball. The thing I loved about Trish most

was that she was always just Trish; there was no pretension, no 'your politics is different from my politics', no judgement and nothing except love, care and support. Over the years we realised that there were more things that we shared in common. She was crazy about Lego which was a revelation to me. My son is crazy about Lego, so there was a common point of discussion. We also had a passion for New York. When I got the news that she had passed away on a flight returning from her dream trip, I thought she probably would think that was not a bad way to leave the world, although it was far, far too soon.

When she moved to Melbourne after leaving politics at the federal level but still being connected to the community and working hard, we did not see as much of each other as I would have liked, but there was always a phone call and her saying, 'If you are down here, let us catch up'. I was delighted to share the first King's Birthday Honours List in 2023 when Trish was awarded her AM. She was one of the first people to reach out to me and congratulate me on being awarded an OAM, so there was a mutual recognition fan club going on there.

Most importantly, what says the most about Trish Crossin is on the night of 24 August 2024, the first message I got to congratulate me on winning the seat of Port Darwin and for the win for our government was from Trish. She said, 'I know you will do a great job, and I cannot wait to see where your journey takes you'. That summed up to me the beauty of the woman. All she cared about was what was right for the Territory. She gave absolute support and passion to her friends.

She was dedicated to her family; she adored her children and loved her grandson with a passion that I do not think I have ever seen in any other circumstance. I think she was his second, or maybe first, mum and maybe not a grandma. She was so much there for that little boy, who is now a much older boy.

She adored Mark. Mark was her life. Outside of her passion for politics in the Northern Territory there was nothing that mattered more to her than Mark. There were many times when we shared the frustration of getting blokes to look after themselves. We had a cup of tea and shared a few stories, which I will not share in the parliament because my husband is sitting over there.

She was such a wonderful woman and so non-judgemental and passionate about the Territory. In the early days when I was not sure that the Territory was the place I wanted to call home, I credit her passion for the place we all now call home as convincing me that this was a place worth sticking around for, fighting for and being here.

I will miss her.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, sadly, I did not have the good fortune to know former NT Senator Trish Crossin, but I have learned much of her significant contribution to the lives of many in the NT and of the legacy for us of her considerable achievements.

I have been asked to say a few words by one of my constituents, Gillian Harrison, who, as a longtime friend and colleague of the Crossin family, has been invited to represent them here today. Gillian mourns a special and valued friend and colleague of more than 35 years; a frequent guest at the family table in Leanyer; and a fond friend of all her children, Paul, Melinda, Amanda and Kate, whom she watched and loved spending time with as they grew up from little kids.

Her friendship with Trish and her husband, Mark Crossin, was established through the union movement in the late 1980s through the ACTU and the NT Trades and Labor Council. They shared interesting and exciting times working on huge innovative Art and Working Life projects and the massive nationally renowned Darwin May Day celebrations from the late 1980s on. These were impressive inclusive community events, with many Darwin cultural groups and working families involved and attending. There were large numbers of participants and audience members.

One of the regular features was always the performance of great NT Aboriginal bands topping the bill, be it Blekbala Mujik, Warumpi Band, Letterstick Band, NT Express, Wairuk or others at May Day concerts on the Esplanade.

The famous inaugural street theatre May Day march in 1988 featured a stream of action through the city streets, with towering puppets in a re-enactment of the 1918 Darwin rebellion. In this rebellion an angry mob of workers and residents turned on the then government-appointed NT Administrator John Gilruth. He put everyone offside over several years, including barmaids, workers and many employers. Led by the union movement, 1,000 people marched on Government House, demanding his resignation. They then burnt an

effigy of Gilruth, who subsequently left town with his family under naval protection. To end the re-enactment march in 1988, a Gilruth puppet was also burned.

Trish was always there, contributing and working with the kids in tow.

Aside from the arts involvement, Trish made important, long-lasting and transformational contributions to workers in the NT through her various roles in the trade union movement. Many of these are not well known. As an organiser with the teachers' union, she fought for greater parental leave flexibility for Commonwealth teachers. As an industrial officer, she successfully fought for Indigenous teachers to be covered under an industrial award that ensured their pay and conditions were the same as that of non-Indigenous teachers.

Trish's family shared with Gillian that one of her proudest achievements during her time with the unions was as a migrant development officer for the then Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union of Australia, now known as the United Workers Union. Trish acted on behalf of the Clothing and Allied Trades Union, liaising with members employed at Darwin International Textiles and Henyang Holdings in Darwin's Trade Development Zone.

Through their workplace delegate, Amanda Diprose, Chinese workers advised that they were required to sign secretive labour contracts with Chinese local authorities in Chenzeng. These secret contracts included wages of 75c an hour, with fees for accommodation and food deducted from their pay. The accommodation provided was four workers per unit with shared beds on rotated work shifts. The contracts forbade workers from joining a union or a political party, as well as having relationships with non-Chinese partners or conceiving a child. If TDZ workers breached any provisions of their secret contracts, their parents and families in China would be punished.

Trish and Amanda fought to protect these workers, despite being regularly followed and intimidated by Chinese security staff on the road and having surveillance outside their homes and at Darwin Airport. The Hawke Labor government and then Minister Gerry Hand MP intervened to ensure that Australian standard wages and employment conditions were paid, and back paid, to 79 workers in those two companies. Eventually many of these workers were offered and accepted permanent citizenship status.

It was thanks to the tireless work of Trish Crossin, Amanda Diprose and others that one of the worst examples of wages and human rights exploitation in the NT was exposed.

Trish helped secure funding to establish the NT Working Women's Centre which, through its 30-year history, has helped thousands of NT working women in vulnerable, disadvantaged and low-paid positions. Trish was always there in support to help lobby for funding and promote the organisation. That is such a powerful legacy and valuable asset to the Northern Territory.

Gillian tells how Trish poached her from her first-ever permanent and well-paid job to become the centre's second coordinator in 1996 in politically turbulent and uncertain times with only a 12-month contract on offer.

Trish's support for women and campaigning for their rights and opportunities knew no bounds. She helped and mentored many. Just one example, passed on by Emcille Wills, is:

'Back in 2012 Trish Crossin hosted us in Canberra when I was a young woman lobbying for the ratification of a UN convention, alongside other young women leaders from many different cultures from across Australia through the Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance. I was the NT representative. It was also the first time my name was mentioned in adjournment.

'Trish was one of the first politicians who genuinely made me feel welcome in that space and helped me see that there is a place for multicultural voices in politics.'

Emcille is now the President of the Filipino Australian Association of the Northern Territory.

Vale, Trish Crossin.

Much loved and missed by her family and NT friends, some of whom are here, particularly her Yolngu family and communities who remained always so close to her heart—Trish was the first to speak Yolngu Matha in the federal parliament—the last thoughts from this NT Parliament House we send to them, *Marrkapmirr*.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this condolence motion for Trish Crossin to the Assembly to acknowledge not only her contribution as a Senator for the

Northern Territory but also her decades of advocacy and organising that came long before and long after her time in parliament.

We heard about her work for the NT Working Women's Centre, and I have a statement from it that I wish to read. I note, as has been said, that there are people in the Chamber from the long history of the Working Women's Centre and its president. I am reading this on your behalf:

'Tribute to Trish Crossin by the NT Working Women's Centre

'We fondly remember Trish Crossin, her inspiring foundational vision, passion and determination in supporting working women in the Northern Territory and women generally.

'Trish was a founding member of the Northern Territory Working Women's Centre, but she was much more to us. She was not just part of our history, but our 31-year journey. She was a trusted and consistent ally who would always go into bat for us when needed, generously offering her time, knowledge, wisdom and support, not to mention the funny stories that demonstrated her determination and courage to get things done, even when the odds were not in her favour—like why she believed working women's centres needed to exist and the role they play in supporting women through their workplace issues.

'She never deviated from this and this is why we came to be, driven by strong union women, advocates and feminists, determined to create a safe space for all women by women. Her mission was to ensure that women could walk through a door and for the service to be there for everybody regardless of their background and stage in their working life—one of Trish's many lasting legacies.

'We can see from all the tributes the impact she has had on many organisations and lives, not just ours.

'Trish was also on the governance committee for the establishment of the national body for working women's centres, Working Women's Centre Australia. From Working Women's Centre Australia, she did not accept vague assurances or half answers; she stayed, pressed and negotiated until working women's centres were properly funded because she knew how essential the service was for women across the Territory.

'To the Northern Territory Working Women's Centre, especially to our directors, she was a mentor and a lifelong friend. What was also clear was that Trish was a proud mama, often speaking highly and fondly of her children and family.

'Thank you for being part of our journey, Trish. We are extremely grateful and felt privileged to have you in our corner. We were definitely stronger for it. Thank you for allowing us to be part of your amazing journey.

'Our sincere wishes and condolences to Trish's husband, Mark, also part of our journey, and her children, grandchildren, family and friends. She will be greatly missed by the Northern Territory Working Women's Centre staff and management committee past and present.'

I am also honoured to have a history with the Working Women's Centre and Trish. As we heard, Trish was an amazing woman who did not suffer fools gladly and told them exactly what she thought. She often gave me advice and was helpful to me at various times in my life, when I knew nothing about how politics worked and tried to work out something.

I particularly remember a shameful time in our history when thousands of asylum seekers were locked up in Darwin. We were trying to support them, particularly the children, as best we could. Trish was helpful to me, but what sticks in my mind was when I said to her, 'I am thinking this is what I might do', and she said, 'Justine, that just will not work'. She was clear and helpful. Thank you, Trish.

I listened to some of her reflections on her early days with the Working Women's Centre, and what struck me was not just her determination but her clarity about why that work mattered so much. She spoke about seeing women in workplaces across the Territory undergoing immense stress and pressure because of the lack of understanding of the industrial relations system. Women were being harassed, bullied, underpaid or dismissed unfairly, often with nowhere safe or accessible to turn to for support. She spoke particularly about Aboriginal women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds who were struggling to know where to go. She understood something important, that justice on paper means little if people do not have the support, confidence or practical assistance to access it. As she said, 'It is a tough ask for you to stand up and question your boss and say, "You're not right. This is not fair. I won't accept that." You need somebody who can support you to do that.'

The idea that people deserve support, dignity and fairness at work sat at the centre of her life's work. The story of the Working Women's Centre says a lot about Trish Crossin. She described how she and others saw an ad for funding only days before applications closed. This was when working women's centres were first being established in Australia. In four days they pulled together a submission because they knew that Territory women needed somewhere to go. I heard her many times tell the story of wrestling with the fax machine at the final hour to get the submission in.

The Northern Territory Working Women's Centre, an amazing organisation, continues, and we have heard how much it is valued from across the floor of the Chamber. It had many fights to survive, and Trish was with it every time. She reflected on the fight that women in the Territory did not want to let it go because they understood that the centre was a part of people's rights in this town.

When we talk about people in public life we often focus on elections, titles and parliamentary careers, but often the most important contributions people make are the institutions they help build, the structures they help change, the doors they help open and the people they empower long after they have moved on. Trish Crossin understood that deeply. She said, 'If you walk away and you shut the door, where do people go, and where do women go?' Those words speak to Trish Crossin's broader philosophy of public life, that people deserve advocacy, fairness, someone to stand up for them and somewhere to turn to when systems fail them.

As we have heard, Trish also went on to serve as a Senator for the Northern Territory from 1998 to 2014, representing the Territory through years of significant national debate and advocating strongly on issues, including education, workplace rights, women's equality and social justice. She was always a fierce advocate for the Northern Territory. We will all remember her as someone who believed deeply in standing up for what was right and fighting hard for the issues she cared about.

Condolence motions remind us that behind every career, parliamentary or otherwise, is a whole life of work, contribution, relationships and conviction.

I extend my sincere condolences to Mark, Trish's children and all her family, friends and former colleagues and all those mourning her loss.

I acknowledge the legacy she leaves behind in the parliamentary records, workplaces, organisations, community and lives that she helped change for the better. That baton now sits with all of us who care about fairness, dignity and justice in our community.

Thank you, Trish, for the legacy you leave behind and for the inspiration to keep going.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank everybody who has made time to come here and be part of this condolence motion to remember Trish Crossin.

I usually give fairly structured forensic speeches, but I will take a leaf out of my old friend Trish Crossin's book and just relax and wing it, as she used to tell me more often than not.

Trish and I went back a long way. She was my kindergarten teacher at Karama Primary School, but not for long. We worked it out many years after the fact. When she was transitioning from Yirrkala she did a brief stint at Karama, where we crossed over.

We reconnected in 2002 when I was a university student doing data collection for research work on welfare reform in north Australia. I needed a way to speak to all the important people, as it were. That thesis was supervised by a guy called Bill Pritchard—now Professor Bill Pritchard—who worked briefly for Warren Snowdon. He got me in the door, and Carol Burke kindly introduced me to some people. A lot of that cast of characters—Carol Burke, Warren Snowdon, Marion Scrymgour, Jack Ah Kit, Denis Burke and Grant Tambling—all those people from that time helped me with that study, but nobody helped me more with it than Trish did.

Trish helped to facilitate introductions for me in the bush. Even though I had grown up in Darwin, I had not spent any time out in communities. I did not have a strong connection to Tangentyere or in the Barkly. She was great because she had such great street cred and people genuinely believed in her. She made introductions for me and helped me get out there and collect real data.

Trish went one better when she significantly championed that work of mine. Together, unexpectedly, we ended up using it to do some good. It was a surprise. It was my first real crack at doing something at research

level. You can get delusions of grandeur that suddenly everything you do will change the world or have a material impact. It was helpful. She championed that work which related to welfare stuff, Centrelink at the time and things that were being done to reform that space. Together we could change government policy to have more people in places like Barunga and Beswick and get more visitations from remote visiting teams. It was a great learning experience. It helped change service delivery and gave me delusions of grandeur. I thought, 'I can definitely do more of this and fix more problems'. Partly as a consequence, I left after that in the mid-2000s to do a PhD in the UK.

I came back a couple of years later on holidays in 2007. She was good at this kind of thing; I did not tell her I was back, but she figured out I was back. She had probably written a bunch of references for me and kept tabs on me because she was good at maintaining connections. I got a cold call. She invited me to her electorate office in Palmerston. Before I knew it, I had been hoodwinked into becoming an electorate officer for Trish Crossin for six months or so while I was on that break.

It was an interesting time. I learned a tonne at her knee. It was the lead-up to the Kevin 07 election. A lot of exciting changes were happening with the end of one era and moving into a different era. I cannot say that I contributed anything much to that office, but I learned a tonne. Actually, I contributed one thing. There was an internal staff pool to pick all the seats in the federal election; I managed to get 150 out of 150. It is the only time I have ever gotten anything right. I have no form for gambling at all. I learned a tonne. I was tempted while I was there. I thought, 'This is good. I have learned a lot. Maybe I would like to stay involved', but I went back to the UK. My trip back to the UK was short-lived because my father got cancer and I had to come back.

By this point Trish had been made Chair of the Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. She did not have a lawyer. I was not a lawyer, but I was the closest thing she could find at the time. Again, she tricked me and said, 'Why not come and work for me in parliament during the sittings?' It was too good an opportunity to turn down. I went and learned a tonne there. I was privileged to have a ringside seat to things like the Apology in February 2008.

I went there as a legal and research adviser. Technically, I was supposed to provide counsel, speechwriting and legal advice and to liaise with the Attorney-General and the Immigration minister's office and the office of the PM, but that is not what I learned there with her. I learned much more broadly than the tasks.

The first thing I learned was how important networks and relationships are. In the mornings Trish would send me off on little missions to have coffee with people all around the parliament. She would say, 'Today, I want you to go and talk to so-and-so in such-and-such office'. I did not see the utility in it at first; I did not understand what I was doing. However, with time I started to realise that getting things done in parliament is about building networks and relationships and finding out who is who in the zoo and that it is not just combative nonsense the whole time. Any of you who have been to Parliament House in Canberra will know that Aussies is the main coffee shop. For the most part I spent my time in there, but I learned a tonne in doing so.

On the flip side of that networks thing—this was brought up before—she taught me not to suffer fools. She was not about wasting time on people who would waste your time. She was not about people who were basically just yanking your chain. I was lucky because she wrote me a lot of references over the years. I remember almost every one of them had the same 'Tanzil does not suffer fools' and that kind of thing. It was something I learned from her.

Another thing I learned from her—as anyone who worked with Trish or has been proximate to her will know—was my efficient file management system. She would take pieces of paper, have a quick look at them, rip them up and put them in the bin. She would do that repeatedly. It was fantastic, and I learned to sticky tape a lot of things back together. I am now passing that on to other people who work alongside me.

On a more serious note, one of the things I saw is that you cannot be a senator for 15 years and have that sort of longevity without having great work–life balance. She was good at being devoted to her work and knowing when to switch on and when to switch off, and she was devoted to her family. One of the things that stays with me the most about the time I worked with her is how she always prioritised her family without ever being derelict in her duties and her job. I would go so far as to say that she was the best working mum I have ever worked for. I was impressed by how she juggled all her duties. She managed all the things that were happening with her—I think it is fair to say—at times chaotic kids; they were a real handful, but a great bunch. She prioritised family and work–life balance, and I think it was the key to her longevity in many ways. I will try, Trish, to do better on work–life balance.

The final and biggest thing I learned from working with her, probably more than anyone else in and around politics in this country or any other place, was that if you want to get anything done, you have to learn to work

across the aisle. You have to respect the game, but you have to fight clean wherever possible as well. She was good at that. I watched her do it for many years.

I watched her interactions with Grant Tambling behind the scenes; Grant was in the earlier phase from me, but they still maintained a working relationship. It was the same with Nigel Scullion. A lot of the things that they achieved in the parliament were about them banding together for team Territory. We are a small jurisdiction, and she knew that, and there was no way anyone would take her seriously in Canberra unless we got our ducks in a row. They were the standard bearers in that era for working together in parliament for the betterment of the Territory. I was grateful to learn up close and personal from her that lesson about getting things done by respecting the game.

I do not think I am telling tales out of school. In 2008 the late Graeme Lewis, who a lot of people in this room know and who had known me also since I was a kid, reached out to me asking me how I would like to go from Sanderson Primary and Sanderson High to trying to be the Member for Sanderson. The irony was at that time I was working for Trish. I told her about it. I said, 'I got this call. It was flattering. I am tempted. I think I would like to be involved in politics.' She came back to me with a counteroffer, saying, 'If you are interested, maybe you could have a tilt with us instead'.

A remarkable thing happened when she came back the next day and sat me down and said to me, 'Go back to Oxford. Finish your PhD. Politics will still be here. Education is a precious thing. You have the chance to get a special education. Go get your education and come back. If you want to make a contribution in the future, then do so.' I value that because she had the power of persuasion over me at that point to say, 'Run in this election; it will be great. Your life will be good'. That was great life advice, and I needed it from someone like her. She cared about people. She cared about her staff. She was one of the best bosses I have ever had.

One of the things I have not got across to you is how much fun she was. She was an incredibly fun person to work for. It was always a bit of a hoot and a bit chaotic, but it was always grounded in substance and sincerity as well.

She was gracious in providing me opportunity throughout my life from kindergarten onwards, and she was a longtime referee and supporter.

In 2024 when I finally decided to put up my hand, she was the first person on the Labor side to get in touch and say, 'Congratulations. I am glad you were preselected. Do good.' She said at the time, which I believe, that she was committed to good people being in politics. I do not think Robyn will mind me saying this. Trish said, 'I would like to see people like Robyn Cahill and you in parliament. It does not matter who you are representing.' There was a small part of her which probably was annoyed that she did not try harder in 2008 or 2012 to shoehorn me in on the other side. She was committed to good people being in politics and fighting for the Territory because she believed in the promise of the Territory. I think she believed in it right to the end. She always accepted and knew that I was more liberal democrat than comrade, but she did not mind. The key thing was that she wanted us to do good. She was always there with a lot of support in the background.

She kept tabs, as I said; she was good like that. In June last year I had the opportunity to go to Melbourne when I got a spot on the McKinnon Institute APL course. She rang to congratulate me, which was kind of her. Then she said, 'Come down and stay with us and visit'. I did not do any of that, and I deeply regret it.

I did not think she would pass at 70. I was shocked by the manner in which she passed away, and I am sad about it.

In the last conversation I had with her, which would have been about June last year, aside from all the care she showed towards me and what was happening here, as always she gushed effusively about her kids. She was so proud of her kids. She talked with such fondness about what they were all up to. I do not want to single out anyone, but at the same time I think she was proud that Kate was in federal parliament as well. That made her proud, right to the end.

To Mark, Mandy, Kate and Mel and Paul, her family and all the people who loved, knew, respected and cared for her, my condolences.

I will miss you, Trish. Vale, and thanks very much for being there for me.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, this condolence motion honours the life of Senator Trish Crossin, a Territorian who has made an extraordinary contribution to the Northern Territory as a teacher, parliamentarian and community supporter.

Today as we all remember Trish, I will speak about the legacy she left as an advocate and teacher, especially her work in Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land. This region held special significance for Trish. She described it as the place where life began for her in the Northern Territory. She arrived in 1981 to teach at the Yirrkala community school, a powerful place to begin one's journey in the Northern Territory.

Trish spoke of learning Yolngu life and discovering much about herself while living in Yirrkala. In her first speech to parliament Trish spoke in Gumatj, in Yolngu Matha, a first in Australian Parliament history. What a way to honour the Yolngu people. She truly demonstrated her thanks to the Yolngu people. She was grateful to live on their land and understand their culture.

At Yirrkala Trish worked with celebrated Territorians in education. This included Yalmay Yunupingu and Dr M Yunupingu AC. Within those relationships, Trish spoke of growing mutual respect. Their work changed students' lives and improved the education sector.

Teaching in the bush, particularly in remote areas, can be challenging, but any bush teacher will tell you that it is challenging but enormously rewarding. Teachers like Trish approach their work with unique passion and care, and for young Aboriginal Territorians that stays with them.

The other week I travelled to East Arnhem and ran into an old teacher of mine who taught me in Year 8 and is now at the Yirrkala school. I remember her vividly. In many ways, teachers offer kids' windows and gateways to the wider world beyond their community. It inspires them to go beyond their region and communities. I imagine this was how Trish taught. I say with certainty that Yolngu people would say this, 'I remember Trish, and I have a story about how she changed my life for the better'. The family can be incredibly proud of that. Small acts by a teacher can greatly impact a young Aboriginal Territorian's future, especially when they are from a remote community.

Trish was an incredible advocate for education in the Northern Territory. Whether in classrooms, curriculum or confidence, she focused on young people. She cared about what people could achieve through available pathways, because teachers like Trish support opportunities. She understood the importance of bilingual and bicultural education. It is educators like Trish who work every day to improve education and student lives in the Northern Territory.

To Mark; their four children, Amanda, Kate, Melinda and Paul; her family; her friends; her former colleagues; and all who are mourning her loss, I extend my deepest condolences. Her legacy and advocacy in education will not be forgotten and will be cherished for years to come.

Vale, Senator Patricia Margaret Crossin AM. *Marrkapmirr*.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I will share a few brief reflections about my experience of knowing and being supported by Trish Crossin.

As many have already said, Trish was an extraordinary woman. She was someone whose political, social and community legacy extend far beyond her time in the federal parliament. Her impact could be felt across community organisations, sporting groups, advocacy work, education and in the way she championed young Territorians and encouraged people to believe in the Territory.

That is where my story and reflections fit into this. I first met Trish approximately a decade ago. It came about through my late mother-in-law, Dr Mickey Dewar, who knew Trish through the Darwin community. At the time Trish was in Melbourne and Mickey said to me, 'You and Susannah keep talking about moving back to Darwin. If you want to talk to someone who has worked across so many different communities and causes in the Territory, you must have a coffee with Trish.' We did; we met in a small coffee shop in Kensington, Melbourne.

What struck me immediately was how generously she listened. I spoke about my hopes, aspirations, questions and uncertainties about whether Susannah and I should relocate to Darwin with our young family and try to build a life in the Territory. Trish was incredibly warm, positive and encouraging. She spoke about Darwin as a place full of opportunity. At that stage I did not have a job lined up and expressed my concerns about this to Trish. She said, 'Do not worry about that. Darwin is a place where opportunities come up for people who are willing to work hard.' She spoke passionately about community events, Territory sport, local organisations and the people who are quietly doing good work to make the Territory stronger.

What stayed with me most was something she said that day about home. She said that Darwin is the kind of place that makes every other place feel temporary because once you have lived here, Darwin becomes home. I have thought about that many times since, because I think that is what Trish carried with her everywhere she went. Even when life took her away from Darwin for longer periods, the Territory was always home for her.

Trish has always been a tremendous supporter of people to get involved and put up their hand to represent their local community, as we have heard today on a couple of occasions. One of the last messages I received from Trish was sharing how excited she was that I was running in the Nightcliff by-election. We reflected on how much things had changed since our first conversation 10 years ago and about our new life in Darwin. That was my experience with Trish; she was always there with a positive word and advice. She was a great champion for the future of the Territory.

I place on the record the reflections of former Chief Minister and Member for Nightcliff Natasha Fyles, who remembers Trish with great fondness. She is here with her father, Andrew. I quote:

'I remember the times in the late 1990s assisting Trish in her Parliament House office in Canberra whilst I was at university.

'Later, when I ran for parliament, she was very supportive, particularly to me as a woman with young children. Trish was involved with EMILY's List and mentored many women in the NT.

'My parents, Andrew and Cheryl, also pass on their thoughts to Mark and the family.'

The loss of Trish is deeply felt by so many across the Territory community. Although it is a great loss for all of us, it is immeasurable for her family and those closest to her.

Her legacy lives on in the countless community groups, organisations and advocacy spaces that she helped build, support and strengthen over so many years. More than that, it lives on in the people she represented and advocated for across all parts of Territory life with the same warmth and belief that she showed to me. She gave so much of herself to this place and its people. She is deeply missed.

I am thinking of her beloved family in their grief; you are in our thoughts and prayers.

Vale, Trish, a Territory icon.

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I too extend my condolences to the family and friends of Mrs Trish Crossin.

Our paths rarely crossed, but I deeply admired Trish from afar. She was strong and always struck me as an all-round good chick. That is the only way I can think of Trish. What I liked about her was she gave the message that she was not going anywhere and would just say it how it was. Even though we were on opposite sides of the political spectrum, I learned a lot from her. She was genuine and her consistency was fabulous. In a place like the Territory, which is changeable and sometimes pretty chaotic, Trish was a fixture. She was there, and I always loved her commentary and contribution.

The fact that she spent 15 years as a senator in the federal parliament meant 15 years she was away from her family. That is 15 years the kids and Mark did not get full access to her—an incredible sacrifice and contribution she made to the Northern Territory.

I deeply respect Trish; I always did.

For her to go so soon, so young, must be devastating for her family and friends. I convey my deepest sympathies to you all. It is absolutely heartbreaking, but she will never be forgotten—never.

Motion agreed to.

Members stood for one minute's silence as a sign of respect.

Madam SPEAKER: Vale, Trish Crossin. May you rest in peace.

I thank honourable members for their contributions to this motion. The Assembly will now suspend for morning tea for five minutes.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for attending today.

The Assembly suspended.

REORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 59, I move that Government Notice Number 4 have precedence over all government notices.

Motion agreed to.

CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (EVERY CHILD MATTERS) BILL
Serial 67

Ms CAHILL (Child Protection): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill entitled the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026, Serial 67—to be known as the Every Child Matters Bill—and table the explanatory statement.

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

The purpose of the Every Child Matters Bill is to amend the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* by introducing reforms that keep children safe, strengthen early intervention and support for families and hold parents accountable for meeting their children's needs. This will be achieved by:

- clarifying the principles of the Act to prioritise the safety, stability and the need for permanency for a child
- strengthening family responsibility agreements with clear escalation pathways to maximise parental involvement
- reintroducing family responsibility orders to support compliance and fortify parental accountability
- introducing a universal child placement principle so that all children benefit from clear placement and permanency guidance
- introducing a legislative framework and prescribed timeframes for proactive efforts to support early intervention and better decision-making
- strengthening children's access to independent legal representation in long-term child protection matters so their views are properly heard.

Additionally, this Bill introduces amendments to the working with children clearance, also known as the Ochre Card, to enhance child safety outcomes, reduce red tape for businesses, implement national reforms and improve the overall administrative efficiency of the scheme.

This Bill represents the culmination of more than a year of work and targeted consultation. At the heart of this Bill is the unequivocal principle that every child matters, that every child in the Northern Territory deserves to be safe, to live in a stable and secure environment with parents and family who are actively engaged in their lives.

There is no argument that the best place for a child to live and thrive is with family, and our government is committed to ensuring families are supported with access to services that enable them to meet their responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children. Where they struggle, our government will step in and support them. However, where children's needs continue to go unmet, where their safety is at risk, action must be taken to protect those children and our government will hold parents and families to account.

To support a safer Territory focused on strengthening families and protecting children, the Every Child Matters Bill introduces stronger parental accountability measures and ensures children in the statutory child protection system are treated fairly and consistently with their best interests paramount. It is in the best interests of the community as a whole to ensure families are supported to give children the best start in life, and no-one wants to see children enter the child protection system.

The reality is that for some children it is simply not safe to remain with family. In those circumstances where a child comes to the attention of the child protection system, it is critical that decisions remain focused on the child, with an emphasis on safety, stability and permanency.

I now turn to the key features of the Bill.

The *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* commenced in 2008. Over the years successive amendments have led to a confusing lengthy list of guiding principles, making the Act's decision-making framework complex to navigate, increasing the risk of inappropriate or inequitable decisions. This Bill clarifies the objectives and principles underpinning the Act, expanding the objects to include safety, long-term stability and security.

The best interest principle has been made the paramount concern and, critically, the Every Child Matters Bill makes it clear that all principles in the Act are subject to the best interests of the child, establishing a clear hierarchy for decision-makers in considering a child's best interests.

In determining what is in the best interests of the child, the new section 8 lists the matters to be considered and the priority in which each matter must be considered. For the first time, ensuring the safety of a child is included in those matters and is, in fact, the first matter that must be considered and satisfied.

Experience has shown that children achieve better and more enduring outcomes when they are involved in decisions about their lives. This Bill strengthens existing provisions and principles so that the wishes and views of the child must be taken into account when decisions are made, having regard to the child's maturity and understanding. This ensures children are genuinely heard and can express their views in matters affecting them. Research confirms that children who experience connectedness, stability and permanency are far more likely to form a strong sense of identity, have strong enduring relationships and achieve positive life outcomes.

The Every Child Matters Bill strengthens the focus on permanency and stability for children through the introduction of section 12B, Placement of children, a universal principle that applies to all children in the Territory, no matter their background. This principle ensures decision-makers prioritise a child's long-term safety, stability and sense of permanence in every placement decision, consistent with the child's best interests. It also requires decision-makers to support positive, trusting and nurturing relationships with people who are significant to the child, ensuring that every child receives the stability and connection they need to thrive.

By making all children subject to the child placement hierarchy, we are ensuring consistency across the statutory child protection system, and reinforcing that where it is safe to do so children should be placed with their families. With regard to Aboriginal children, section 12C provides for additional principles specific to the circumstances of Aboriginal children.

The new section 12D introduces proactive efforts into the child protection process. Proactive efforts involve practical and timely steps supported by law and policy to help keep a child safely with their family or, where a child has been placed into care, to support reunification. The Every Child Matters Bill establishes a clear duty for child protection workers to take proactive timely efforts to keep children safe while supporting families to stay together when it is safe and practicable to do so.

This reform shifts the focus for child practitioners and the chief executive officer of the department with responsibility for the Act from reacting to crises to providing stronger, earlier and more consistent support to children and families. These amendments also require the chief executive officer to demonstrate to the court that it has taken practical steps to prevent a child from being removed from their family and to support reunification.

By formalising a framework for proactive efforts in the Act there is increased accountability and transparency for the Department of Children and Families, supporting consistency in decision-making across the child protection system. Additionally, prescribing timeframes within the Act for the CEO to complete specified proactive efforts stabilises placements for children, increases transparency for families and holds the department to account.

Proactive efforts create a clear contemporary framework reinforcing the Bill's focus on the safety, stability and best interests of all children interacting with the child protection system. Legislating proactive efforts is long overdue and brings the Northern Territory into line with jurisdictions such as Queensland and New South Wales.

The Every Child Matters Bill strengthens the government's early intervention approach to supporting families by placing responsibility back on parents through improved family responsibility agreements and the reintroduction of family responsibility orders. These tools support parents early and promote accountability.

Family responsibility agreements will help parents connect with the support they need early and set clear expectations to keep children safe and on track. Family responsibility orders provide an escalation mechanism to be used where parents fail to take necessary steps to care for their children despite this support. Family responsibility agreements and orders will not replace child protection orders or statutory youth justice interventions; rather, they are another tool for child protection practitioners to support families and their children.

Part 2.1A moves family responsibility agreements from the *Youth Justice Act 2005* where they are currently placed to the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* and broadens and reframes the circumstances under which agreements can be made with families.

The current provisions in the *Youth Justice Act* only allow family responsibility agreements to be proposed where the youth has demonstrated behavioural problems which does not allow for parental behaviours or child wellbeing concerns to serve as triggers for support. This Bill will replace that requirement with a broader event-of-concern trigger, enabling earlier intervention that extends beyond youth justice concerns. Events of concern include the child exhibiting criminal or antisocial behaviour, the child not attending school and the presence of other wellbeing risk factors such as parents neglecting the child's basic needs or children found wandering unsupervised at night. These agreements will also connect families with support services with the goal of achieving lasting sustainable change.

This Bill reintroduces family responsibility orders, which were removed from the *Youth Justice Act 2005* in 2021, to address antisocial behaviours among children and youth. It provides a clear escalation pathway to support compliance and accountability for parents.

Where a parent has refused to engage or has not complied with a family responsibility agreement or in other circumstances where entering or attempting to enter an agreement is unsuccessful or inappropriate, child protection practitioners will be empowered to make an application to the Local Court for a family responsibility order. Police will also be empowered to make referrals to the Department of Children and Families where they are of the view that a family responsibility order may assist in addressing a youth's repeated engagement in antisocial behaviour.

Family responsibility orders can include directions similar to family responsibility agreements, such as requiring a parent to attend counselling or ensuring the child remains at their premises at night. However, these directions will carry the weight of a court order. Additional accountability measures may also be included in a family responsibility order, such as referrals to income management or applications to the Banned Drinker Register. This allows the order to be tailored to address an individual family's circumstances with mechanisms to both hold parents accountable and support them in addressing their child's wellbeing concerns.

Where a parent has not complied with an order, the order may be varied or replaced to include additional and escalating accountability mechanisms to support compliance and address relevant behaviours, with further noncompliance ultimately resulting in a child protection investigation or inquiry.

This Bill also strengthens permanency and stability for children by reducing the maximum duration of a short-term parental responsibility direction from two years to one year and by limiting these directions to a maximum of two. A second short-term parental responsibility direction may only be made if there is a high probability of reunification and the child's long-term stability would not be adversely affected.

By restricting repeated short-term child protection orders, the Bill promotes decisions that are firmly centred on the child's best interests, supporting stability, reducing harmful delays and prioritising long-term wellbeing over prolonged, unstable and temporary arrangements. Repeated short-term orders can leave children in perpetual cycles of instability, undermining secure attachments and allowing cases to drift without a clear and enduring outcome. By imposing a limit, the court and the Department of Children and Families are encouraged to act with greater urgency and accountability, prioritising timely permanency planning for children in the child protection system.

To support this focus on stability and permanency, this Bill also provides that carers with whom a child has been placed for at least eight months will have standing as parties to child protection proceedings. This ensures that the court can hear directly from those best placed to speak about the child's day-to-day care, attachments and need for stability.

Take for example the case of one child who entered care at just one year old due to neglect. Since then, this child's life has been marked by ongoing instability, including multiple care arrangements and repeated short-term protection orders. While reunification with the parents has remained the goal over many years, progress has been limited due to ongoing challenges, including periods of incarceration, instability and transience. As of early 2026, these circumstances remain largely unchanged. This young person is now 10 years old and has never had certainty or stability through a permanent care order.

Or the case of another young child who entered care at just three months of age due to neglect. Although they received steady care and attachment from their carer and reunification efforts made little progress, it took five years to secure a long-term protection order—instability that occurred during this child's crucial development years. This young person, now nearly an adult, continues to be cared for by their original carer.

These cases highlight how essential it is to make decisions within set timeframes to prevent extended uncertainty and promote permanent solutions that focus on a child's safety, stability and overall wellbeing.

This Bill recognises that while reunification is important it must be realistic and achievable within a timeframe that meets a child's developmental needs. By reducing prolonged uncertainty and encouraging earlier more decisive pathways to permanency, the Bill aims to ensure that children do not spend their formative years in limbo. Ultimately, it is about prioritising a child's right to safety, stability and a secure enduring home.

Children deserve a voice in decisions that affect their lives, particularly when these decisions relate to long-term child protection orders or permanency outcomes. The Every Child Matters Bill 2026, under amended section 143A, strengthens the existing provisions for the legal representation of children in care and protection proceedings.

This Bill ensures that children have access to independent legal representation when long-term parental responsibility directions or permanent care orders are being considered. By making this legal representation mandatory in significant proceedings, this Bill will strengthen the integrity of the process and ensure that decisions with lifelong consequences for a child are made with the benefit of a clear independent voice focused on the child's wishes and best interests. There is a sensible exemption to this requirement, but in limited circumstances where a matter needs to be heard on urgency and it is in the best interests of the child to progress in that manner.

Part 3 of the Every Child Matters Bill also delivers a suite of important reforms to strengthen the working with children clearance scheme in the Northern Territory. These reforms support alignment of the scheme provisions with the national reform agenda and ensure robust safeguards are in place so people who pose a threat to children's safety cannot avoid scrutiny.

The Bill reduces red tape for employers and supports the Territory's economy by extending the validity of a working with children clearance from two years to five years. A longer validity period reduces burdens on workers, volunteers and organisations without a material change to screening outcomes that mitigate risks to child safety.

Screening Assessment for Employment Northern Territory (SAFE NT) will continue to monitor individuals who are charged with or convicted of offences in the Northern Territory and are working towards cross-jurisdictional monitoring through recognised negative notices to ensure only suitable people hold an Ochre Card. People who already have a valid Ochre Card when the new law starts can keep using their current card until it expires. After it expires, workers and volunteers can apply to SAFE NT for a new card.

This Bill also clarifies the scope of child-related work by narrowing the definition to roles where contact with children is a usual and more than an incidental part of the job. Currently the definition of 'child-related work' is broad. It leads to absurd outcomes; for example, construction workers repairing the roof of Royal Darwin Hospital were required to hold an Ochre Card, despite working on the roof of the building with no direct or unsupervised contact with children.

This change aligns with the recommendations of the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It gives the community clearer guidance on who must hold an Ochre Card. It also addresses unreasonable situations created by the current broad definition.

This Bill removes the current discretion that allows the chief executive officer to allow a person to start or continue child-related employment before their Ochre Card application has been decided. This flexibility was originally introduced to help employers and applicants during the processing of an Ochre Card. It creates

unnecessary risk for the department in allowing people to work with children before their suitability has been fully assessed.

Employers and organisations will now have the discretion to allow a person who has applied for a clearance notice to commence child-related employment in the Northern Territory before they have been granted an Ochre Card, recognising that employers and organisations are best placed to oversee workplace practices.

New powers that allow SAFE NT to put an interim bar on persons—which means they cannot engage in child-related work while their applications are assessed—also mitigates potential risk to children.

The narrowing scope of the definition of 'child-related work', modifying of the existing exemptions and the extended validity period for Ochre Cards will be counterbalanced by other reforms to strengthen the integrity of the screening process in the Northern Territory, including the recently passed *Care and Protection of Children Amendment (Worker Screening) Act 2026*, which provides for mutual recognition of negative notices and the introduction of a suspension power by this Bill.

The Bill introduces a new suspension power for the screening authority, allowing it to temporarily suspend an Ochre Card when a person may pose an unacceptable risk of harm or exploitation to children. The suspension power applies in situations where a person has been charged but not yet convicted of a disqualifying offence or is the subject of an investigation for a disqualifying offence in the Northern Territory or another jurisdiction, mitigating an unacceptable risk by allowing the screening authority to suspend working with children clearance while matters of concern are investigated.

Finally, the Bill improves the efficiency and fairness of the screening system that supports the Ochre Card scheme by modernising how applications are managed.

To ensure new national reforms operate as intended, the Bill removes the requirement to review noncompliant Ochre Card applications when a request for further information is made and a response is not received within 30 days, allowing for SAFE NT to discontinue incomplete files without denying an application for an Ochre Card and focus on processing valid applications quickly. It is neither fair nor appropriate for an applicant to automatically receive a negative notice simply because they did not provide enough information for their application to proceed. A negative notice indicates a person poses an unacceptable risk to children and can affect their ability to work with children across jurisdictions. Allowing SAFE NT to close incomplete applications without issuing a refusal to grant an Ochre Card maintains procedural fairness and protects the integrity of the scheme.

Taken together, these reforms, as well as amendments to improve administrative practices within SAFE NT, modernise the working with children clearance scheme in the Northern Territory, reduce unnecessary administrative burden and ensure the regulatory effort is focused on what matters most—safeguarding children.

The Every Child Matters Bill also makes consequential amendments to the *Liquor Act 2019*, the *Education Act 2015*, the *Youth Justice Act 2005*, the Alcohol Harm Reduction Regulations 2017 and the Youth Justice Regulations 2006 to support the parental and family responsibility reforms. Further consequential amendments are also made to the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004* and the Care and Protection of Children (Screening) Regulations 2010 to support reforms to the Ochre Card scheme.

Strong families build strong communities. Where families are supported to function well and are held accountable, everyone benefits.

The Every Child Matters Bill ensures that above all else the safety and wellbeing of a child remains the paramount concern. The Every Child Matters Bill removes any ambiguity about what is considered important when it comes to protecting Territory children, that the need to ensure a child's safety supersedes all other considerations.

The introduction of proactive efforts to be completed within a prescribed time facilitates robust decision-making, accountability and transparency by the department and mitigates against delays in achieving the best possible outcome for a child at risk. The Every Child Matters Bill creates a framework to support timely decision-making by all parties involved. Most importantly, the Every Child Matters Bill ensures that the child who is at the centre of any and all decisions made under the Act has a voice and that voice will be heard.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

Ms CAHILL (Child Protection): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by 8 July 2026.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly suspended.

VISITORS
Australian Defence Force – Headquarters Regional Force Surveillance Group

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of ADF members from the Headquarters Regional Force Surveillance Group at Larrakeyah Barracks. On behalf of honourable members, welcome to the Chamber this afternoon.

Members: Hear, hear!

NOTICES

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall move that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly recommends the appointment of Mr Peter Shoyer as the Integrity and Ethics Commissioner and the appointment of Mr Bruce McClintock SC as the Integrity and Ethics Oversight Inspector, pursuant to sections 10(2) and 27(2) of the *Integrity and Ethics Commissioner Act 2025*.

QUESTION TIME

Emergency Call Centre Upgrade

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for POLICE

A year ago you made a fuss about more than $6m in upgrades to our emergency call centre. You said that it would give police and other frontline staff the tools to respond faster, smarter and stronger. Currently the median response time for emergency calls is more than 18 minutes. Close to half of all calls are being abandoned between midnight and 7 am. Meanwhile, the $6m for the call centre upgrades has been revoted in this year's budget. Clearly, our emergency frontline staff are having their calls abandoned by your government regarding this project.

Can you explain to frontline staff when this much-needed emergency call centre upgrade will be delivered and how it will impact our community if it is not?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I welcome a question from the Opposition Leader about law and order because if one thing is true, it is that is our number one priority.

The safety of Territorians and our community is our number one priority, which is why we have backed our police 100% of the way with the best pay deal in 20 years. We walked into parliament eight weeks after being elected and passed five pieces of legislation on urgency—mandatory sentencing for assaults on workers; breach of bail condition as an offence, strengthening bail laws so that we have the best bail laws in the country; wanding; knife crime; post and boast—you name it, we did it because our police deserve a legal framework that helps them to protect our community.

We have delivered a second record policing budget, on top of the record justice budget of $1.73bn. We have seen a huge increase in the police budget, of which important renovations to the JESCC are a critical part.

I find it interesting that the Opposition Leader phrases the $6m investment for the JESCC as making a song and dance about it. I think it is a pretty good thing and an important way to invest in our police force.

The JESCC component is a matter for police to work through. Something the Members for Braitling and Namatjira are passionate about and which is close to my heart is the 000 centre in Alice Springs. On top of the work we are doing in the JESCC, we have local call takers in Alice Springs answering calls. If you live in Alice Springs or the Barkly, you can be on the phone to someone who understands what you are talking

about and where it is and can provide that important response. We have language speakers as well. That has been an incredible trial we have been running for the JESCC …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; when will this much-needed $6m for the upgrade be spent on the call centre?

Madam SPEAKER: Chief Minister, you can answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As I said, these are all matters for police. There is nothing on my desk stopping this from happening. It is about how they want to do it. I know the design was being done. It is about scheduling the work. There is no problem at my end; police can spend $6m on upgrading the JESCC any minute they would like to. It is all a matter of how and when they execute that program of work and what they want to do.

We are incredibly focused on reducing crime because it is our number one priority. It is what we took to the election and what we believe wholeheartedly in. We had a huge response in terms of downward pressure on the crime statistics. Crime statistics come out again this Friday, so we are looking forward to seeing that data, but there are huge reductions across the board because reducing crime is our number one priority.

Beetaloo Sub-basin

Mr KERLE to CHIEF MINISTER

Ahead of the federal budget you made it clear that the Northern Territory was seeking certainty and stronger Commonwealth support in key areas, including ensuring that there would be no new tax on Beetaloo gas and securing further investment in critical infrastructure. You also spoke about the importance of the federal government working constructively with the Territory and backing team Territory priorities. Following last night's 2026–27 federal budget, including the decision not to introduce a gas tax, what does this mean for the Territory? What will it mean in practical terms for Territorians and communities across the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Blain's community understands how important the Beetaloo Sub-basin is to the future growth and development of the Northern Territory. You went to your community and told people three things. You said that we would focus on reducing crime, and we are doing that. You said that we would rebuild the Territory's economy, and the Beetaloo is a huge part of that future because the people of Blain, just like every other Territorian, deserve to have good, high-paying, skilled jobs now and into the future for our kids.

When the activists were kicking the ball around a gas tax, we were appalled, because the Territory is about to start producing gas for Australians in our backyard, and that all came under threat by the Greens–Labor activists, just like those opposite.

We fought hard to make sure that in last night's federal budget there would be no gas tax. Thank goodness the federal government listened, and with no help from the federal Labor members. We did not hear boo-ee or cooee from them about this issue, but the Territory team—the Territory CLP government—made sure that the federal government understood how destructive this would be at this time, and we were pleased to see that there was no gas tax in last night's budget.

Next week is the Australian Energy Producers Conference, which the Deputy Chief Minister and I will attend, like we did last year, because it is important to put Territory gas on the map. We will host a huge breakfast on Wednesday morning. About 160 proponents and players will be in the room for a Territory-led breakfast about the Beetaloo, showcasing the importance and the strength of the Beetaloo.

Any threat or risk to getting this development up and running will be bad for the Territory and Australians. We have a unique opportunity to position the Territory as the supplier of choice for all Australians, our allies and the region. The fuel crisis has brought into focus the importance of sovereignty, supply chains and making sure that as a country we are strong and can stand on our own, and the Beetaloo allows us to do that. It can underpin energy security for not only the Territory but also the entire nation, our allies and the region. It will create economic opportunities from not just the royalties that eventually will flow but also the jobs, investment and industry that can be created from a strong, secure, affordable supply of gas.

We are excited about the opportunity for the Beetaloo Sub-basin. At our Beetaloo breakfast on Wednesday we look forward to hosting proponents and showcasing the Northern Territory as we rebuild the economy.

Emergency Response – Douglas Daly Region

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for PUBLIC SERVICE

It took sustained media pressure to get the Chief Minister to finally visit the Daly River region a couple of weeks ago. Meanwhile residents in Nauiyu are still stuck in temporary accommodation in Batchelor and local businesses have been left struggling as your government dragged its feet. Why did it take you more than a month after the floodwaters receded to head to the Daly region? The ADF was ready and willing to help, so why was it not called in by your government to provide support to the communities of the Daly and Douglas Daly region?

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: You asked your question; you can now listen to the answer.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is disingenuous to say that we did not get there soon enough. The Chief Minister went as soon as her schedule allowed her. I have been on the ground in Nauiyu and Palumpa. I spoke about this last week and even last night in adjournment.

NTEX and FRM are working to clean up houses. The store will reopen between mid-May and the end of May; hopefully that will be next week. The health clinic will most likely be up and running next week.

I will go there again soon to speak to businesses, have a look and talk to the people along Wooliana Road who have been impacted. The Tourism minister will be with me to speak with them and work out how they are moving forward to get their tourism businesses back up and running.

When I was there the other week I went to the Catholic school. I went with Ken Davies, the director of flood recovery, to look at a site on top of the hill where the community can maybe move to. Power and a bore are already there. That area is flooded fairly frequently …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I appreciate the minister is answering a small part of my question about Nauiyu community, but the other part of the question was: why was the ADF not called in for the Day and Douglas Daly region?

Madam SPEAKER: The minister has plenty of time to answer that second part of your question.

Mrs HERSEY: I already answered some of that question. I said that there are workers on the ground. When I was there a couple of weeks ago, many people were working. The roads have not long been opened; they were in a terrible state of disrepair.

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Mrs HERSEY: It may not be the answer you like, mate.

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, take your seat.

Member for Daly, if it is relevance again, she still has a third of her time to answer to go.

Mr YOUNG: I want to bring it back. She is talking about Daly River, but there is another part. The Douglas Daly region is a different area, so she is not answering the question.

Madam SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The minister can answer the question in the order she likes. She still has a third of her answer left.

Mrs HERSEY: This government cares about everyone across the Territory. It does not matter whether they are flood-affected victims in Nauiyu, Palumpa, areas of Berry Springs, Beswick, Jilkminggan, Katherine or Alice Springs. The Member for Daly wants to know whether we care about people in the Territory. Our government is doing everything we can. We have put $100m towards the flood recovery fund for the people he is talking about.

Members interjecting.

Mrs HERSEY: I note the interjections constantly …

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. There was another section to it about the Douglas Daly region, which she has not answered. Why was the ADF not called in? She has not answered it at all.

Ms Uibo: It is an important part of the question.

Madam SPEAKER: She still has time to answer the question.

Mrs HERSEY: The important part of the question from the Member for Daly is that there are people working. People have worked hard to make sure they are moving the sand out of their businesses. In Nauiyu community there are plenty of workers making sure that the community gets back up and running. I look forward to going there soon.

Federal Budget 2026–27 – Inflation and Investor Tax Settings

Mrs CARLSON to TREASURER

The 2026–27 federal budget increases Commonwealth spending by more than $100bn over two years while the Reserve Bank has warned that public demand adds pressure to inflation. At the same time, federal Labor is shamefully changing investor tax settings in a way that pulls up the ladder from the next generation of Australians trying to build wealth, own assets and invest in their future. NT Labor responded to our responsible 2026–27 budget by arguing that government should spend even more money, despite the IMF warning only months ago that states and territories are borrowing too fast.

Can the Treasurer outline what the federal budget decisions mean for Territorians and how the Territory budget takes a more responsible approach to investment, cost pressures and the debt?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Wanguri understands this well. She was working with me as the assistant Treasurer and still works with me in a capacity. She understands how budgets work and what they mean to our communities.

The contrast between us and the federal government could not be clearer because the increase in Commonwealth spending of $102.7bn over two years represents a 14% increase. Our increase is only 9%. We are doing responsible work. This is at the same time the Reserve Bank has been clear that inflation is affected by total demand across the economy, including public demand. When governments keep spending at this scale it adds pressure to inflation.

When inflation stays high for longer, people in the Territory pay for that through their high mortgage, rent and business costs, which then have a ripple effect through the entire economy. That matters because the Territory feels those pressures more quickly. Our economy is a bit smaller and is affected by small changes faster. High interest rates make it harder for families for buy a home. High construction costs make it harder to deliver housing and infrastructure. High business costs drive up the cost of living and make it harder to hire employees, invest and grow your business.

The federal budget also sends the wrong message to investors. Labor's investor tax changes are unfair on the next generation. Luke Gosling said last night in a social media post that Labor is levelling the playing field. It is levelling all right; it is levelling the playing field flat. The federal government is taking billions of dollars off investors and giving just $5 per week back to everybody in tax relief.

Older Australians had access to longstanding tax settings that help them invest, build assets and secure their future. The federal government is taking that away from the new generation. Young generations of Territorians are having the ladder pulled up and out of their reach. They will be unable to invest in the same way that our parents and grandparents could.

The message from the federal government is that investors are greedy. Luke Gosling said that last night. The federal government does not want young people in the Territory to be able to invest. They will be unable to build wealth in the same way that we and our parents did.

The federal government needs to be ashamed of what it has done because its changes to the tax settings will have a long-term effect on young Territorians and our economic growth.

Gunbalanya Health Clinic

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for HEALTH

Last year you told residents of Gunbalanya that the $20m funding for their health clinic, which was cut by your government, would be restored. However, your budget shows no funding for the clinic and no mention of Gunbalanya at all. Why have you broken your promise to that community? When will you deliver the health clinic that you said residents would get?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Gunbalanya health clinic transitioned to the Red Lily Health Board on 1 July 2025, returning primary healthcare to the Aboriginal community control of Gunbalanya.

Our government has been working constantly on this. We are working across the board to ensure that Aboriginal community-controlled health services are delivering in their communities.

A couple of weeks ago I was at Mutitjulu with Congress to be a part of the opening of the new Mutitjulu health clinic which is being run by Congress.

Getting back to Gunbalanya, this was a significant and positive milestone for the community. I acknowledge the extensive work undertaken by NT Health, the Red Lily Health Board and frontline staff to ensure a safe and smooth transition of those services in the Gunbalanya community.

The former Labor government made lots of promises regarding the delivery of infrastructure across the Northern Territory. It is true that we cannot deliver a new Gunbalanya health centre; however, it simply wrong to suggest that nothing is being done at the existing clinic. The Gunbalanya health centre is an ageing facility, and the building issues are complex. Engineering consultants have been engaged to review and prioritise works to address work health and safety, staff safety and patient safety. The government has committed $1.8m to progress urgent repairs, maintenance and security improvements for that health clinic. These works will be delivered progressively through 2026, commencing in the Dry Season when site access is possible.

Mr BROWN: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. Minister, you promised last year that you would put it back in the budget papers. Why have you broken your promise?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, please continue.

Mr EDGINGTON: Our government officials continue to engage with site visits with key stakeholders, including the Red Lily Health Board. They occurred on 4 February and as recently as 10 April to review the scope of required works.

Labor promised to deliver a new health clinic at Gunbalanya as far back as 2020, so it had four years before it went to the 2024 election, but what did Labor members do? They put out lots of media releases and made lots of promises about capital infrastructure around the Territory. Gunbalanya was just one of many projects that were promised but never delivered by the Labor government.

Federal Budget 2026–27 – Maternity Services

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for HEALTH

The federal budget was released last night. The Labor government has once again failed to deliver key commitments, with broken promises on issues like capital gain, negative gearing and vital infrastructure. Territorians expect their fair share, particularly for essential health services.

We know you have had ongoing discussions with the Commonwealth about improving maternity services in the Territory, including upgrades to the maternity ward at Royal Darwin Hospital, as a result of Healthscope removing our private maternity services. Can you tell us what this federal Labor budget delivers for expectant families in the Northern Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Casuarina lives in the northern suburbs, so Royal Darwin Hospital is virtually on his doorstep.

We have been negotiating and communicating with the federal government for more than 12 months in terms of improving the maternity suite infrastructure at Royal Darwin Hospital.

The Member for Casuarina asked what is in the federal budget, so let me advise the Assembly what is in the budget: zero investment to upgrade maternity services in the Northern Territory.

Just over 12 months ago the federal Labor government invested in Tasmania and Central Coast maternity services, but there was nothing for the Northern Territory. In writing to the federal government, we initially asked for $35m. It wrote back to us, indicating that a $10m submission would be considered, but in last night's budget there was zero from the federal government.

As I said yesterday and have said for a long time, that mob on the other side, being the Labor Party, has been silent on this issue. Those opposite have been happy to sit on the sidelines and criticise the CLP Northern Territory Government. Where is Luke Gosling? Where are Labor members when it comes to advocating for the Northern Territory? This goes to show that Luke Gosling has no influence whatsoever in Canberra and neither has Territory Labor. The Opposition Leader recently spent I do not know how long in Canberra, and what she was talking about and doing is unknown, but it appears that she was not advocating for $10m to improve maternity services in the Territory.

The only similar sum I could find in the budget was the $13.6m the federal Labor government is giving to St George Illawarra Dragons. The federal government is pumping $13.6m into a rugby league team rather than helping to fund improvements to maternity services in the Territory.

Not only is there zero for maternity services, but we still need an extra $200m from the feds for aged care, primary healthcare and retrieval services in the Top End. We have been cut short by federal Labor, and it is just not good enough.

Operation Home Safe

Mr SMELT to MINISTER for POLICE

Recently, Operation Home Safe brought together the Northern Territory Police Force with the Public Order Response Unit, Larrakia Nation and housing, transit and education officers. This operation conducted high-visibility joint patrols and coordinated outreach services to deal with increases in antisocial behaviour and support vulnerable people. The benefits of this approach are clear and were positively received by the voters of Nightcliff during the recent by-election. When will the government fund and deliver this vital community safety service as an ongoing response and not just a one-off three-day operation?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, bless; he is only new. It is important to understand that police run operations and joint operations as a surge capacity to deal with an issue. To naively say that level of operation could be 24 hours a day, seven days a week—it is just not possible.

We have different taskforces. For example, the Fugitive Task Force specifically hunts down criminals who should be in jail. We have Strike Force Viper and many other strike forces such as Trident, and their job is to target property offending and youth offending. We have a number of different sections in our policing command—for example, the domestic and family violence team, the sexual violence team, crime—there is a whole range. When there is a particular situation we surge resources and agencies in to deal with those incidents. Agencies are always doing that work. When they come together it is powerful, but it is unsustainable as a long-term measure.

However, this is what we are doing. Under the CLP government, there are 101 more constables than there were under Labor. We will have 150 more in this budget, because we have delivered our second record policing budget. We will also put more than 100 police public safety officers this year through the college, building up to 212. We have additional Corrections officers, nurses and teachers. We have increased our front line across the board while reducing gross debt by 18%, because we delivered a budget for the everyday Territorian and have focused on what matters most to them.

I appreciate that your community saw the positive impact, Member for Nightcliff. It is great, and everyone loves it when police do a big operation.

We need to continue to grow our police force, which we have demonstrated we are doing, and part of that is because we have stemmed the tide of attrition. Under Labor, police were leaving the force in droves. We have turned that around and have some of the lowest attrition rates on record. This plus additional police and our biggest-ever budgets year on year mean that we are getting somewhere.

I would love to get to the point where an operation is business as usual, but with the state that Labor left the Territory in, we are far from delivering that. We will continue to back the men and women who pull on the blue uniform every day and leave their family to protect Territorians. We know the hard work they do.

At the end of the day, this is about personal responsibility and criminal behaviour. We will find a bed for you.

Federal Budget 2026–27 – National Disability Insurance Scheme

Mr HOWE to MINISTER for DISABILITY

Our disability community is facing deep uncertainty and anxiety, with the significant reform underway in this country. We have seen overnight a federal budget that relies on billions of dollars in savings from the NDIS. The disability community continues to be unsure what this means for their supports, independence and future. Can you update the Assembly of the impact the federal budget and proposed NDIS reforms will have on Territorians living with disability?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I have seen firsthand how the Member for Drysdale supports people with disability. Last year I saw the mother of a young person drop off a teenager to his electorate office before going shopping because I believe the family feels that it is the right place for a young person to be safe. It was great to see that direct support for people with disability.

In last night's federal budget there are NDIS reforms that the Northern Territory Government warmly welcomes—namely, targeting fraud, sharp practice and provider registration. However, I have received strong concerns from people with disability since the announcement from Minister Butler a few weeks ago.

I will add numbers for context. In 2020 there were 390,000 people under the NDIS scheme in Australia. That has grown to 760,000 people; it almost doubled in six years. The federal government target is by 2030—over the next four to five years—to bring that number down to 600,000 people. There will be significant growth over the next four years, and on top of that growth the federal government needs to bring down the number by 160,000 people.

In the Territory context, as I have updated this Assembly multiple times, one in eight people have a disability; more than 31,000 people have been identified with disability. Out of that, about 6,700 people are on the NDIS, which is just over 20%. That means of those 6,700 people, we most likely will see almost 1,200 to 1,300 people coming off the NDIS.

The federal government is talking a lot about the health budget and approving an additional $25bn, but it will also cut between $35bn and $37bn over the next four years. The federal government will invest $2m for Thriving Kids and $3m for foundational support. We can clearly see that the federal government is moving the Disability portfolio under the Health portfolio, cutting the disability sector and putting that money in the health sector. At the end of the day, the people who will come off the disability scheme will need to be looked after by the states and territories. The federal government is saying that it is giving all this money, but these people will come off their plans and we will need to care for them. I will attend the Disability ministers' meeting next week, and I will raise this as a strong issue for the Northern Territory.

Budget 2026–27 – Yuendumu School Upgrades

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

Yuendumu School is a fantastic school in Central Australia. Budget Paper No 4 shows a $3m Commonwealth revote for funding upgrades to Yuendumu School. Can you advise the Assembly what that $3m will deliver and when? Will the Northern Territory Government contribute any funds for upgrades at Yuendumu School?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this year we have a record budget of $1.73bn for education to deliver across the Territory. That is an increase of $65m from last year.

The funding for Yuendumu School is Commonwealth funding and external-source funding from CLC. That funding will be paid only when that project is delivered. One of the constraints is that the department has been working with the Granites mine, which is contributing some money. So far a design and master plan has been worked through, which is $650,000.

The upgrades were for outdoor areas—a playground, an amphitheatre, cultural gardens and a secure courtyard. This has been there since the previous government. Maybe the Member for Gwoja put this on as an election commitment in his dying days—go him. Anyway, we are following up on that. The department is working closely with the Granites mine, and I welcome that work.

Obviously, as time goes on things are a little more expensive. We have seen the cost of everything go up. That commitment is a little over budget from what was anticipated. The Granites mine is working with the department and CLC to come to an arrangement for delivering that project.

I will keep the Member for Gwoja updated on that project and let him know when that is happening.

We value education across the Territory. It does not matter where people are, there needs to be equity across education. The department and the government are working hard to make sure we do that.

Kakadu National Park – Site Closures

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for PARKS and WILDLIFE

Kakadu is one of the jewels of the Territory and an important part of our visitor economy. Following significant weather damage, parts of the park remain closed and access remains limited, including for many residents from my electorate of Karama who are keen to have their families and interstate visitors to fully experience Kakadu. At the recent national Tourism ministers' meeting, you raised the need for urgent attention and repairs, given the park is managed by the Commonwealth Government. After the federal Labor government budget last night, can you update Territorians on what action is required from the federal government to give operators certainty for the 2026 season?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, like all Territorians, the Member for Karama's constituents also love to go to our great national parks. He mentioned that Kakadu is a Commonwealth-managed park. That is true. I make it clear that it is a federal government responsibility.

Kakadu is one of the iconic places tourists visit. It is well known for being the home of *Crocodile Dundee*, which was filmed 40 years ago. It is also celebrated by the *New York Times* as one of the best places in the world to visit in 2026.

It has been hard recently. Significant weather events at Kakadu caused many of our great tourist attractions and parks to be closed. You are right, Member for Karama. When I was at the national Tourism ministers' meeting I made it clear that we need a lot of support to get those sites up and running. We need the parks team to look at it through a tourism lens and ensure that as much infrastructure as possible is fixed.

Gunlom Falls remains closed, as does Jim Jim. In fact, the map of Kakadu I am holding shows all these red sites; they are still closed. That is a big whack in the face for our tourists who want to visit Kakadu.

It is disappointing that Kakadu did not even rate a mention in last night's federal budget. There was nothing about the flood recovery we need for Kakadu. I have not heard Mr Gosling, the Member for Solomon, talk about Kakadu at all; nor the Member for Lingiari, and it is in her electorate so she should be fighting for it.

Nothing was mentioned in the federal budget whatsoever. After a few years of lobbying by our government and me, as the Tourism minister, this was the federal government's perfect opportunity to show that the Northern Territory is an amazing place and it would put its money towards opening Kakadu to ensure it is a great place for tourism.

We need tourists to visit the Territory, including Alice Springs and Uluru. There was no money in the budget for parks in Uluru and Limmen Bight, which is the big marine conservation area that we have been fighting for since before the election.

Unlike the Members for Solomon and Lingiari, the Labor senators and Territory Labor members, we will keep fighting for money to go into Kakadu so that tourists can enjoy it and to open up these red areas which should all be green. Kakadu is a great place for Australian and overseas tourists.

Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for CHILD PROTECTION

In the electorate of Fannie Bay I regularly talk and meet with families, carers, educators and community organisations. They all want better outcomes for our Territory children and stronger support for vulnerable families. Recent tragic outcomes involving Territory children have deeply affected communities across the Northern Territory, and it reinforces the importance of ensuring that we have a system that puts children's safety and wellbeing first.

Can you update the Assembly on the landmark legislative reforms introduced today under the Every Child Matters Bill; what they mean for the safety …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 1; that is pre-empting debate. The legislation has been introduced to the Assembly.

Madam SPEAKER: The advice I have received from the Clerk is that there are plenty of precedents to allow debate to focus on an issue that is coming up in debates or Bills in the future. This Bill will not be coming on for debate until at least July, I understand, so I will allow the question to be asked.

Mrs ZIO: Minister, can you update the Assembly on the landmark legislative reforms introduced today under the Every Child Matters Bill; what they mean for the safety, stability and permanency of Territory children; and how this government is ensuring the system is held to account?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the time and effort that the Member for Fannie Bay has taken when we have discussed the concerns of people in her electorate regarding children.

Focusing on what we talked about today—it is out in the public arena—it is about making sure that every child in the Territory matters and every child in the Territory is afforded the right to be safe and protected. Not debating the issue, just stating the plain facts, what we have done today is lift and elevate the need for child safety to be front and centre of every decision made with the child. Whether it is in the child protection space, dealing with children who are on the streets at 2 am or worrying about children who are not attending school, front and centre must be that they are in the best possible place, they are safe and we are supporting their families.

The family responsibility agreements being included in the legislation introduced today are something we have been using well under Circuit Breaker. We have had fantastic results. I spoke in parliament last week about a young person who was not going to school and was not engaged and whose family were so concerned about where he would end up that they engaged with the Circuit Breaker team and had a family responsibility agreement put in place. He is now attending school 80% of the time, which is an incredible turnaround, and he has a part-time job. That is what the legislation introduced today is all about—making sure that we give our children the best opportunity to be the best person they can be from childhood into adulthood; that they have security and a voice; and that we are listening.

We will make sure that the structure of the child protection system supports children in the way it is meant to, which is to keep them with their parents if possible; and, if it is not possible, to keep them connected, but at the same time make sure that they are safe.

We will give them a voice. It is important for children to have a voice in their futures and to be heard, which has been missing until the introduction of the legislation today.

The strong update message is: we are putting out there front and centre that every child matters, every child deserves to be safe and every child deserves security and stability in their life. I am convinced that is what we need to deliver.

Jabiru Futures

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

In an article in April, you were quoted as saying:

> *… the NT government has a firm commitment to the key deliverables for the future of Jabiru and Kakadu program and will continue to support the Mirarr vision for Jabiru …*

You ripped $35m out of Jabiru Futures in your last budget. This budget allocates only $338,000. The future of Jabiru Airport remains uncertain. Can you outline for the Mirarr people and the more than 6,000 people across the West Arnhem region how you can call this a firm commitment to their future?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago the Member for Arafura and I sat down together and talked about the future of the airstrip at Jabiru. I thank the Member for Arafura for raising those important points with me so that we could work through and discuss them together, and that is what we did.

We are working with the Commonwealth Government, Energy Resources of Australia and the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation and Jabiru town to continue supporting the Mirarr vision for Jabiru and the transition of the township of Jabiru from a mining support centre to a tourism and government service delivery hub. We are working through that, Member for Arafura.

In 2019 an MOU was signed, setting the shared intention of all parties to work together to support the transition of Jabiru and ensure commitments were met under the MOU in the timeframe necessary to achieve those shared goals.

Since 2019 the NT Government has delivered a significant program of work in Jabiru to support the town's transition and maintain its role as a regional centre in the Northern Territory. This included facilitating the construction of a hybrid power station; delivery of the new health centre; and upgrades to critical infrastructure such as a wastewater treatment facility, sewer network and power infrastructure. We have also provided a five-year guarantee of services to support continuity during the post-mining transition period.

Additional measures to support the community and economic stability have included assistance for local small business, delivery of the NBN rollout, improvements to mobile connectivity in Kakadu and provision of ERA electricity and airport subsidy grants.

Important tenure and planning outcomes have been progressed, including facilitating the declaration of Jabiru as an open town. Preparatory work for future infrastructure development has advanced, including the completion of the Bininj resource centre design and ongoing subdivision works.

Collectively, these initiatives represent a significant investment and support for a sustainable and equitable service which is aligned with Territory priorities.

The CLP remains committed to ensuring continuity of essential services, appropriate engagement and sustainable long-term outcomes for Jabiru. We will continue to support Jabiru. We are working to finalise an agreement to ensure that Jabiru Airport remains useable.

Victims Register – Release Notifications

J DAVIS to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

A constituent has contacted me with serious concerns about how release notifications are provided to victims through the Victims Register and Crime Victims Services Unit. Can you explain how victim risk information is used in practice to ensure that high-risk victims are given notifications on time? What safeguards exist to ensure that they are given enough time to undertake safety planning before an offender is released, not, as in this person's case, being notified only on the day of release?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this is a serious question about a serious matter. Obviously, I would like to help the member's constituent who has reached out to her to make sure that we can connect her constituent with the right services that are needed. I do not want to jump into anything specific without knowing the full situation of that case, and I do not want to specifically talk about it in the Chamber either.

However, what I will say about victims of crime is that we inherited a mess in victims' services across the spectrum. It has been a horrific ordeal to talk to victims and witnesses about what they are going through in the justice system. It is a serious matter.

I have taken on board a huge body of work to do with victims of crime to make sure that the services we offer—support, financial assistance and a raft of things—through the court system at every touchpoint will be better for them than it has been for a number of years.

Member for Johnston, if you could pass me that detail, it would be good.

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The question was not about that specific case; I understand we would not talk about that in parliament. It was: can you explain how victim risk information is used to ensure that notifications for high-risk victims are given? What safeguards exist to ensure they are given enough time to undertake safety planning before an offender is released?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, had you concluded your comments?

Ms BOOTHBY: Yes.

Madam SPEAKER: I am sorry, Member for Johnston, I realised that just as you started speaking.

Phelp River Crossing Upgrade

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

Last year you scrapped the $20m for the Phelp River crossing bridge on Numbulwar Road. This critical upgrade would have improved road safety, flood resilience, service provision and economic opportunity, particularly tourism, across the south-east Arnhem area. Why has the CLP government turned its back on this critical infrastructure? What do you say to the people of Numbulwar, Ngukurr, Urapunga, Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island who were relying on this upgrade which your government has scrapped?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked me this question last year when we went through the infrastructure program which was a mess. It was a basket case, and we had to clean it up.

The $5.3bn infrastructure program we inherited upon coming into government was mostly announcements and press releases; the stuff on that program was never funded. As I have said many times, there was $300m provided in Territory Labor's budget to deliver a more than $5bn program. You cannot do that. That $300m would have finished the Tiger Brennan overpass, the State Square art gallery and the Mandorah facilities across the harbour. It would have covered only those three projects, not the other $5bn worth on the program.

We had to make decisions about what we would deliver and how we would deliver it. Many decisions were made in relation to federal funding agreements for which we had commitments. This is tied funding, which has been agreed to by the Commonwealth in conjunction with the Northern Territory. There is quite a lot of it on that program. A lot of our infrastructure program for roads, buildings and housing has tied funding with the Commonwealth. That is the stuff we have to deliver.

If I went down Labor's road and followed its mantra, I would be announcing stuff, delivering stuff and borrowing more and more money. We know where that got Territory Labor.

I understand the frustrations of the people of Numbulwar. Sometimes in the Wet Season that area is flooded which makes it difficult to get in and out.

We knocked that project on the head when we cleaned up the infrastructure program because there was no federal funding attached to it. That was a Territory Labor-specific project; it would have funded the whole

thing itself. It was one of those Labor specials—one of those little projects that it was doing for itself all over the place.

I understand that the people of Numbulwar need this project done at some stage, and just because it has been taken off the program does not mean it will not happen. We may get to it when we find ourselves in a better financial position.

Typical of Labor, it announced the project with a dollar figure against it, but when it came to delivering that project, that money was nowhere near enough and it had to be revisited.

Phelp River Crossing Upgrade – Supplementary Question

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

Will you commit to—you did not last year—coming to Numbulwar community and explaining to people that the short answer to that big lengthy question would be no? Will you commit to going there and explaining your government's decision to the people of Numbulwar?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I do not think I committed last year to going to Numbulwar. The Leader of the Opposition might be trying to put words in my mouth because I do not remember making that commitment.

I know the area and that it is critical to access Numbulwar, along with many other communities. Numbulwar is one community of many across the Territory that needs access and has difficulty in the Wet Season, including Alpurrurulam and other Barkly communities. Communities across Arnhem Land also have issues.

It is not to say that this project is done and dusted. When we can afford it and can cost it properly to understand the true cost—not what Labor put up—of delivering that project, we may put it back on our program.

Budget 2026–27 – Fisheries Compliance Unit

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Territorians love their fishing. You and your family love going out in the harbour and on the water, sinking a line and catching fish. It is a true Territory experience. I have caught more fish than you, though.

We appreciate that our anglers do the right thing when they are out on the water. Can you update the Assembly on how new funding of $4m over two years for the Fisheries Compliance Unit helps enforce fishing rules and ensures the Territory remains the barra capital of the world and the best place to fish in Australia?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know how many people in the Member for Goyder's electorate go fishing in a boat or do land-based fishing.

We have a disciplined budget focused on reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our lifestyle. There can be no debate that lifestyle includes fishing.

I am pleased to announce funding of $4m over two years for the Fisheries Compliance Unit. This will allow enforcement of fishing rules in the Northern Territory. This compliance unit was funded by the Labor government, but it was cliffed. Labor set it up and then did not fund it. This is another example of cliff funding by the previous Labor government. It failed Territorians and failed to look after fisheries across the Northern Territory.

I have heard from key stakeholders such as AFANT and the Northern Territory Guided Fishing Industry Association that they want more compliance. Overwhelmingly, the anglers I speak to also see compliance as an important part of fishing in the Northern Territory. Our fishos do not like people going over the bag limit or catching small barramundi; they want to ensure that there are more fish for people in the future. Tomorrow's fishing starts today. That is why this budget unlocks $4m over two years for the Fisheries Compliance Unit.

Lifestyle is important. As the Member for Goyder said, I have been fishing with my family. It is about bonding, building relationships with your friends and the wellbeing of your mates. People go out to relax. They might have had a bad week at work, but they can go out with their friends to relax. It is about mental health and

wellbeing. My daughter goes out and she can now drive my boat on to the trailer. It is about self-confidence for young people. That is what lifestyle is all about.

This money will continue to fund our 10 compliance officers, who will:

- target patrols across the Northern Territory and protected areas
- enforce key fishery reforms, including those for barramundi and golden snapper which we are doing now
- improve catch reporting
- reduce malicious noncompliance
- make it easier for fishing guides to report
- conduct education programs to ensure people understand and know the rules for fishing
- coordinate with other agencies to keep Territorians safe when out on the water.

This will be a good point to move forward from because fishing and lifestyle are such a big thing. I have been out with the Fisheries Compliance Unit and give it a big shout-out. Those officers do a great job, and I thank them for the work they do.

Public Sector – Frontline Worker Recruitment

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for PUBLIC SERVICE

When the CLP came to government there was a frontline service recruitment and retention crisis fuelled by multiple incompetent Labor governments. It was a Labor government that froze public sector wages. An *NT News* article from as recently as 4 May this year consequently stated that unions:

> *… still did not see a trusted ally in the Labor opposition …*

We value our public service and remain committed to growing frontline services, as explicitly evidenced in our 2026–27 budget. Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government is growing our frontline services and how this is progressing?

Mr Paech: Keep him away from your scissors, please.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja! Come on; we are almost there.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I note that the Member for Fong Lim had his comments on the public service misconstrued by the Labor opposition this week.

Ms Uibo: We quoted him from *Hansard*.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mrs HERSEY: We on this side of the House will not cut the public service or give it a pay freeze. In fact, we value our public servants who work on the front line and across the Territory every day. We will not be like those opposite, who gave a pay freeze to all those frontline workers.

When we came to government, debt was almost $15bn, yet there were not enough public servants on the front line. What we have done since then, and through the budget the Treasurer handed down last week, is grow the front line of essential public servants by 3.9%.

We have an extra 102 assistant teachers, 97 classroom teachers and 11 senior teachers. For the first time in years, department staff were not deployed in front of a classroom. We had only 46 teacher vacancies; last year there were 117, so the department has a lot more teachers. We did not have to deploy them at huge expense across the Territory, which was a good thing. Working with those frontline workers in the classrooms

are ALOs, attendance officers and counsellors, all supporting families and making sure those children get to school.

Mr Paech: Thank you, Albo, for fully funding education.

Ms Uibo: Thanks Labor for supporting education.

Mrs HERSEY: I note the interjections from the Member for Gwoja and the Opposition Leader. They might want to listen to the answer to the question.

We have 101 extra police officers with a record police budget.

Ms Uibo: How is that going in Katherine?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, silence!

Mrs HERSEY: We value our frontline workers—101 police officers and 15 police auxiliaries. This is at the heart of our government's policy to build a safer and stronger Territory. In Corrections we have 83 staff. From July 2023 to March 2026 we have seen an increased headcount of 36%. We value those frontline workers who do an invaluable job in the Territory.

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

MOTION
Cost of Airfares and Air Connectivity

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly calls on the Finocchiaro CLP government to address the high cost of airfares as a priority to support the Territory's economic development and Territorians' liveability standards.

This is an important GBD motion because I think we can all acknowledge that airfares are well above what most people can afford.

My electorate covers from Wagait Beach down to Dundee, from Berry Springs all the way out to Pine Creek and across to the west to Wadeye, Daly River, Palumpa, Peppimenarti and the many homelands in the Thamarrurr region. We know that connectivity is everything to ensure that people in my electorate can access vital services, especially in Darwin.

A flight to Wadeye, for example, costs about $400 per person one way. A return trip to Wadeye is roughly $800 which, from my understanding, is more than it costs to fly to Alice Springs or interstate to Sydney, Adelaide or Perth. These are the real pressures that families in my electorate are feeling.

It also puts pressures on the services that need to go to communities such as Wadeye. Many allied health staff and other program workers go to Wadeye for a few days a week. Airfares eat into the budgets of the people delivering services to the people of Wadeye and the surrounding region.

Airfares in the Northern Territory are some of the most expensive in this country. This government recently spruiked multiple new airlines and flights, including with AirAsia. However, only 12 months later, AirAsia was already leaving the Territory.

Minister Cahill spent roughly $12,000 of taxpayers' money on a four-day holiday to promote a new flight and attract new investment opportunities. That included almost $8,000 in airfares. Less than a year later AirAsia pulled out of the Territory, scrapping its Darwin–Denpasar and Darwin–Kuala Lumpur services without notice.

Where has Minister Cahill been since then? Where was the outrage from Minister Cahill? I think I know where the outrage was; it was on the fifth floor when she walked out of her ministerial office. We know that Minister Cahill and Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro had a disagreement because Minister Cahill was going on these junkets. Maybe the anger was between each other rather than on where taxpayers' money was being spent.

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: I can hear them all over there, angry and upset. I have hit a nerve.

While Minister Cahill was flying her way out of the ministerial office, she should have been in public answering serious questions about where $12,000 of taxpayers' money had been spent. Instead, government members worried about doing reshuffles in their Cabinet.

We lost the Darwin–Denpasar and Darwin–Kuala Lumpur routes. All we heard from Minister Cahill was crickets. Why has she not explained to Territory taxpayers where this money went? Why did she subsidise AirAsia when it pulled out after one year?

Qantas has slashed flights between Darwin and the Gold Coast. These were vital connections to the South East Queensland coast, especially for many Territorians who have family on the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast is an area where many people retire. Madam Speaker, you may be familiar with that area, having grown up alongside the mighty Clarence River in Grafton. That is a popular area for many people to retire in. Many Territorians fly to the Gold Coast to visit their parents or grandparents who have retired there.

Many Northern Territory families holiday there to take their kids to Movie World and Dreamworld, have a break and show their kids a different part of the world. Many tourists from South East Queensland would come to the Northern Territory to enjoy this beautiful part of the world. I think the Daly region is the best part of the world. The Member for Goyder might disagree with me …

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: I will take the Daly any time of the week, because we have the beautiful Litchfield National Park and the might Daly River, where annually we have the national barramundi competition. The Treasurer is familiar with that national barramundi competition because last year in the week leading into the budget, the Treasurer was out there fishing …

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: I love that he was enjoying the Daly and trying to catch a barramundi, but it was concerning as it showed that he does not care about Territorians and his budget hand down because he was too busy fishing. I noticed last week when he handed down his budget that he looked a bit red on top—just saying—he looked a bit sunburnt. The question should be asked whether the Treasurer was also out fishing this year in the week leading into the budget.

Mr Mackay: He was getting out and about, meeting Territorians.

Mr Kerle: Maybe you should try it.

Mr YOUNG: I heard the interjection from the Member for Blain. I hope that one day he gets out to the great Daly electorate. I know he gets to Batchelor every now and then because his mum lives there. I have met her; she is a lovely lady. I have had the privilege of sitting with her at many of the seniors events we have in Batchelor. It is a shame that other members in his Caucus do not go to the Daly region.

We have a lot to offer, so it is vital that flights come to the Territory. We need confidence in the Northern Territory to ensure we can grow our tourism industry, especially on the back of the floods. I asked the flood recovery minister why it took her more than a month to get to the Daly region, where many tourist parks along Wooliana Road were flooded, in order to understand the damage done along that section of the river. There are tourist parks on the other side of Daly River that I know the minister did not get to. I have been speaking to those people regularly, and they were upset that they did not get a visit from their minister. Apart from Wooliana Road, other parks in the region have been damaged.

She could not even answer the question about why the ADF was not called in. We know that the ADF was ready to come in …

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! This motion is about airfares. I know the Member for Daly went on his junket and used the taxpayers' credit card to do that, but this is about airfares.

Madam SPEAKER: You are deviating from your point of order, Member for Nelson.

It is about travel and accessibility, so I will give you latitude, Member for Daly, but bring it back to that motion which is the theme.

Mr YOUNG: You are right; it is about accessibility. In the Daly region I saw roads washed off the bank, so there are concerns about access to a lot of those tourist parks. If the Deputy Chief Minister listened, he would know that I was talking about people having the confidence to fly into the Territory and know that they can go to those tourist parks.

I see the Member for Goyder and the Deputy Chief Minister laughing at the fact that tourist park operators …

Mr Maley: We are laughing at you.

Mr YOUNG: … are out there struggling …

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Mr YOUNG: They are laughing at the people who have lost everything, and that is a disgrace.

Madam SPEAKER: I want everyone to take their seat.

What I have witnessed in the last 10 minutes is rowdy behaviour; everyone is interjecting. There is baiting and lots of provocative statements being made. I suggest you sit in silence, listen to the Member for Daly and then you can have a turn at speaking to this motion.

Mr YOUNG: We need to ensure that there is confidence for tourists to come to the Northern Territory. Interstate travellers fly to the Northern Territory. It is disappointing that the Member for Goyder and the Deputy Chief Minister were laughing at people who had lost everything along Wooliana Road.

Mr Maley: We were laughing at you because you are irrelevant.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Nelson!

Mr YOUNG: Talking of baiting, the Deputy Chief Minister would know well—I think he mentioned it yesterday—that he prefers a lure to putting bait on a hook.

Why were those questions about getting in the ADF not answered? Interstate travellers who fly to the Northern Territory need to have confidence …

Mr EDGINGTON: A point of order, Madam Speaker! This is a motion about high airfares. He is talking about flood recovery. There is no relevance to what he is saying. He needs to get back to the motion that he put forward.

Madam SPEAKER: I agree, but with all these General Business motions a certain amount of latitude is given. Quite often these are long speeches, so as long as the member can bring it back to aviation and airfares and make it relevant to the motion he put forward, I am happy with that. Make it relevant or I will go on to the next speaker, Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: I believe it was relevant because I was talking about confidence in tourism in the Northern Territory and ensuring that people who want to travel, whether they are international or interstate travellers, can fly here to support our tourism operators. That is what I was talking about.

I do not know why the government wants to shut that down and are not back our tourism operators. I am not sure why the government does not see this as a matter of importance, because we see the trickle-down effect in the Northern Territory economy when international travellers fly in. We need to ensure that we have good flood recovery responses so that we can have confidence in our local economy and our tourism industry, including people along Wooliana Road, to ensure that tourist numbers are up in the Territory.

Another point we talk about in relation to connectivity, which many of my constituents, neighbours and residents talk to me about in Wagait Beach, is the construction of the new $85m Mandorah marine facility, which was committed to and started by the Territory Labor government, and the ribbon was cut by a Labor member. It was unfortunate the Treasurer did not come along, but he was invited. We had roughly 200 people at the opening.

Why is that important and linked to connectivity and airfares in the Northern Territory? It is because many residents from Belyuen and Wagait Beach now have a reliable ferry service to travel to Darwin. They are confident that the Mandorah ferry will run and they will be able to make their flight at Darwin Airport to fly overseas or interstate.

One resident, who I will not name, told me that she has specialist appointments in Melbourne. She used to drive to Darwin, which took an hour-and-a-half on Cox Peninsula Road, but since the Mandorah jetty has been built, she has the confidence to take the 15-minute ferry ride across the water and get to her flights and not worry about whether the ferry will be cancelled. Previously when the ferry docked in Mandorah, depending on the direction of the wind, and particularly if it was a north-easterly, the swell would come in at the old jetty as the ferry pulled up. It was quite dangerous and sometimes meant that the ferries had to be cancelled.

I am proud that the $85m Mandorah marine facility is complete. It means not only safer access for residents of Wagait Beach and Mandorah but also people who have flown in from interstate or internationally now have a reliable service from Darwin to Mandorah to go to the great Cox Country Club. Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not know whether you have been there, but it is a beautiful old iconic Territory pub. It is outdoors, under a banyan tree. It usually has live bands on the weekend. Many people come over to go to the Cox Country Club. That reliable ferry service has given confidence to the local club and the Airbnbs and holiday homes in the area. We see many people who have travelled from interstate coming to Mandorah and heading off to Wagait Beach to stay for a weekend or long weekend.

I think there must have been a bit of shame from the Treasurer because he had to put it in his budget books, but he could not attend the opening and did not get to cut the ribbon for the Mandorah marine facility. I do not know why the government did not send one of its other 17 members. It was a shame that none of them came over to open the Mandorah marine facility, but it was noted by the community. Many residents said how disappointed they were in the CLP government that not one member could come to celebrate a wonderful marine facility which will open up many opportunities for the great Cox Peninsula area.

I will wrap this up because many people want to talk to this important GBD motion. Overall, under this government, approximately 45,000 plane seats coming into the Territory have been lost, which is concerning. That has a trickle-down effect on the local economy, tourist parks and local cafes. It has a huge impact on many of the businesses across the Northern Territory. It is important that we give confidence to Territorians and ensure we do not see something like Minister Cahill flying for a four-day holiday and spending more than $12,000 of taxpayers' money only for the Darwin–Denpasar and Darwin–Kuala Lumpur services to be shut down within a year.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Mr Deputy Speaker, this is an important motion that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly calls on the Finocchiaro CLP government to address the high cost of airfares as a priority to support the Territory's economic development and Territorians' liveability standards.

This is an issue that has been a part of my work as the Member for Araluen since day one, and we all know why. Connectivity, being able to jump on a plane and go to where we want at relatively short notice, is imperative to us at certain times of our lives and in certain circumstances.

Over the years there have been several federal inquiries into this issue. For the most recent Senate inquiry, submissions closed in January 2026. The committee did its deliberations after that on the inquiry into the state of Australia's aviation sector and its ability to deliver reliable and affordable services to rural, regional and remote communities. It is a vexing issue that everyone in this Chamber has a responsibility to follow and fight for Territorians. It is our bread and butter, and we should all be writing submissions to these inquiries as they arise. No doubt, there will be more Senate inquiries and others on this issue. It is important to our quality of life and liveability in the Northern Territory.

I will read my submission to this most recent Senate inquiry:

> *I am the Independent Member for Araluen … representing the Alice Springs region and surrounding communities. Since first being elected in 2010, I have consistently advocated for the needs of Central Australia, a region where aviation connectivity is not a luxury but an essential lifeline.*
>
> *… I have witnessed firsthand how exorbitant airfares and diminishing service quality have impacted my constituents' ability to access essential services, conduct business, maintain family connections, and participate fully in Australian society.*
>
> *Alice Springs sits at the geographic heart of Australia, 1,500 kilometres from Darwin and Adelaide, and over 2,800 kilometres from Sydney and Melbourne. For my constituents, air travel is not optional—it is the only practical means of reaching major centres for specialist medical care, business meetings, family events, and education opportunities.*
>
> *…*

The cost of flying to and from Alice Springs has become prohibitive for many Central Australian families and businesses. The situation described by Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, where flying costs more than the destination, is not hyperbole. It is the lived reality for thousands of Territorians.

This submission addresses the urgent need for:

- *Greater transparency and regulation of airfare pricing in regional markets with limited competition*
- *Review of the fee and levy structure that disproportionately impacts regional airports and passengers*
- *Federal government intervention to ensure regional aviation remains viable and accessible*
- *Recognition that aviation connectivity is essential infrastructure for remote and regional Australia*

Key Issues Affecting Alice Springs and Central Australia

1. Exorbitant Airfares

The cost disparity between regional and metropolitan routes is stark and unjustifiable. My constituents regularly report:

- *Return flights Alice Springs to Adelaide or Melbourne costing $800–$1,500 or more*
- *Last-minute travel (often necessary for medical emergencies or family crises) costing upwards of $2,000 for a single person*
- *Families of four unable to afford to visit relatives in other states, leading to social isolation*
- *Small businesses unable to send staff to training or attend industry conferences due to travel costs*
- *Medical specialists refusing to visit Alice Springs due to high travel costs, forcing patients to travel instead*

…

2. Limited Competition and Market Concentration

- *Alice Springs is serviced by limited carriers, resulting in:*
- *Qantas/QantasLink dominance on most routes*
- *Limited Virgin Australia services*

In fact, Virgin cut its Alice Springs–Brisbane flights recently, restricting our options again:

- *Minimal competitive pressure to keep prices reasonable*
- *Route cancellations and schedule changes with little accountability to passengers*
- *No low-cost carrier services comparable to those available in metropolitan areas*

The recent announcement by Qantas to close its regional staff bases in several locations demonstrates the continued vulnerability of regional aviation services to corporate cost-cutting decisions made in distant boardrooms.

We are continually subjected to changes that Qantas makes to its scheduling, its staffing and the services it provides. We are at its mercy. This has been raised time and again. It is not a new issue; it is just the way it is, and nothing has changed in my many years of being a member of parliament. It is vital for each of us to put this stuff on the record. My submission continues:

3. Impact on Essential Services

High airfares directly impact:

Healthcare Access:

- *Patients avoiding or delaying specialist appointments in Adelaide or Darwin*
- *Families unable to accompany children or elderly relatives requiring medical treatment*
- *Mental health impacts of isolation when people cannot afford to maintain family connections*
- *Difficulty recruiting and retaining medical professionals in Alice Springs*

People do not like to feel isolated. They cannot get out. If they cannot afford to get out, they do not want to come to places like Alice Springs. It continues:

Economic Development:

- *Small businesses unable to compete with metropolitan competitors due to travel costs*
- *Tourism operators facing reduced visitor numbers as tourists avoid expensive 'last leg' flights to Alice Springs*
- *Difficulty attracting skilled workers when fly-in fly-out for family visits is prohibitively expensive*
- *Indigenous businesses and remote communities further disadvantaged by compounding travel costs*

Education:

- *University students from Alice Springs studying interstate facing additional thousands of dollars in travel costs*

These are our kids who want to study interstate, so we either stump up as parents or we do not see them:

- *Schools unable to afford to send students to interstate competitions or educational programs*

How often is each of us asked to give money to children and young people who want to attend interstate competitions or educational programs that their parents cannot afford? It is a constant strain and pressure on families who want to give their kids everything and the best, but simply cannot afford it. It continues:

- *Families separated when children must board in other cities for educational opportunities*

For bush kids and those living on pastoral properties, imagine the impost on those families:

4. Fee and Levy Structure

The current system of federally mandated security costs, aviation safety levies, and regulatory fees creates particular hardship for regional airports and passengers:

- *Security screening costs are the same whether an airport handles 100,000 or 10 million passengers*
- *Per-passenger cost recovery in low-volume markets results in higher charges*
- *Regional airports struggle to maintain infrastructure while keeping landing fees competitive*
- *These costs are inevitably passed on to passengers through higher ticket prices*

Alice Springs Airport, like many regional facilities, faces the challenge of maintaining infrastructure suitable for tourism and emergency services while operating on a much smaller passenger base than capital city airports.

I often think about how life was before 9/11, which triggered the immense security we see at airports. People might remember walking in to an airport years ago and not going through any screening. It was like walking into Woolies. In fact, it was probably not as onerous as walking into Woolworths. There was nothing; you could just stroll in and get on a plane with no security whatsoever. The world has changed. It continues:

5. Lack of Transparency in Pricing

…

Many jurisdictions have recognized that regional aviation connectivity requires government support and regulation:

- *European Union regulations on passenger rights and transparent pricing*

We should look at that because in Australia there is no such compulsion for aviation operators to look after passengers and customers in the same way as they do in the European Union:

- *United States Essential Air Service program subsidizing routes to remote communities*
- *Canadian Northern Air Stage program providing subsidized services*
- *New Zealand's commitment to maintaining regional air links as essential infrastructure*

Australia has an open market for aviation which is good when it is good, but when it does not work it lands an enormous impost on customers:

Australia's laissez-faire approach to regional aviation has failed remote communities. The market alone will not deliver affordable, reliable services to Alice Springs and similar regional centres.

Previous inquiry recommendations have not landed or gone anywhere:

The 2019 Senate inquiry into 'The operation, regulation and funding of air route service delivery to rural, regional and remote communities' made 14 recommendations.

That was seven years ago:

I am concerned that many of these remain unimplemented, including:

- *Recommendation 5: Review of fees, charges and taxes on regional aviation*
- *Recommendation 8: Consideration of subsidies for regional routes*
- *Recommendation 12: Improved consumer protections for regional air passengers*

The current inquiry provides an opportunity to revisit these recommendations and ensure meaningful action rather than further delay.

A Senate inquiry, such as the one I have been citing, is pretty much the same as a report from one of our parliamentary committees; it is only as good as the government or the members who want to pick it up and implement the recommendations. As we see in this place, most parliamentary committee recommendations are basically ignored, for a range of reasons.

The recommendations from my submission include:

1. Establish a Regional Aviation Affordability Program

The Federal Government should introduce subsidies or price caps for essential regional routes, similar to programs operating in comparable jurisdictions internationally. Alice Springs–Adelaide, Alice Springs–Darwin, and Alice Springs–capital city routes should be designated as essential services.

The cost of flying between Alice Springs and Darwin is hideous. My colleagues from Alice Springs and Central Australia are constantly on that flight. If we had to pay for it ourselves, we would probably look at getting another job; it is not affordable. The flip side of that is those flights are usually full of people employed by the Northern Territory and federal governments. They are all government workers, so governments are inadvertently paying to keep those services operating, particularly between Alice Springs and Darwin. When you get on the plane, you know everyone because they are public servants, members of parliament or people employed by government-funded organisations.

My recommendations continue:

2. Comprehensive Review of Fees and Levies

Conduct an immediate review of how security costs, aviation safety levies, and regulatory fees are recovered from regional airports and passengers, with a view to establishing a more equitable national cost-sharing model.

3. Mandate Pricing Transparency

Require airlines to clearly break down ticket prices showing:

- *Base airfare*
- *Fuel surcharges*
- *Government taxes and levies*
- *Airport charges*
- *Airline profit margin/booking fees*

I know some airlines do so, but not probably as comprehensively as that:

This would enable passengers to understand what drives regional airfare costs and hold both airlines and government accountable.

4. Strengthen Regional Aviation Regulation

The ACCC should be empowered to:

- *Monitor regional route pricing for evidence of price gouging*
- *Investigate complaints about sudden route cancellations or schedule changes*
- *Require minimum service standards on designated essential routes*
- *Ensure competitive neutrality where government subsidies are provided*

That sounds like what this government is doing with fuel pricing. It is the same sort of thing because it is a cost-of-living expense and an essential service that most of us have to use at some point, and it should be treated in a similar way.

My recommendations continue:

5. Protect Regional Airport Infrastructure

Establish a dedicated regional and remote airport infrastructure fund to ensure facilities remain safe and fit-for-purpose without requiring unsustainable landing fees that drive up ticket prices.

6. Implement Regional Air Passenger Bill of Rights

Extend consumer protections to include:

- *Compensation for cancelled flights or significant delays*
- *Protection against unreasonable last-minute price increases*
- *Guaranteed minimum service frequencies on essential routes*
- *Right to transparent pricing information*

7. Commit to Ongoing Parliamentary Oversight

This should not be the last inquiry into regional aviation. Parliament should commit to regular review of regional aviation affordability and service quality, with mandatory government responses to recommendations within specified timeframes.

As I said, it seems to be an ongoing part of my work to write these submissions. This is probably the third submission I have written to different inquiries on this topic. Nothing changes. Nothing seems to get better; in fact, in some ways it gets worse. I think Alice Springs has fewer flights and services coming in and out than it had 10 years ago. COVID changed everything, and I do not think we have fully bounced back to where we were all those years ago. I suspect that if Darwin has bounced back fully, it has only just done so. Having been in and out of Darwin Airport so often for so many years, I know that it took many years for it to get back to even close to pre-COVID business. People do not notice that and do not remember. Perhaps they were not around then. The impact of COVID was profound and a contributing factor to airfares.

My submission continues:

Conclusion

For too long, Territorians and other remote Australians have been told that market forces will deliver affordable aviation services. The evidence from Alice Springs demonstrates this faith in the market is misplaced.

When flying costs more than the destination, something is fundamentally wrong with the system. When families cannot afford to visit dying relatives, businesses cannot compete, when patients delay essential medical care—these are not merely economic inconveniences. They represent a failure of national policy.

Regional Australians do not expect to pay the same for air travel as Sydneysiders flying to Melbourne. But we do expect fairness, transparency and recognition that aviation connectivity is essential infrastructure for remote communities.

Central Australia has waited long enough. The Northern Territory has waited long enough. This inquiry must deliver meaningful reform, not more reports gathering dust.

I urge the Committee to recommend bold action that recognizes the unique needs of regional and remote Australia and ensures that all Australians, regardless of where they live, can access affordable, reliable air services.

The Federal Government must understand what life is really like in the Territory—and act accordingly.

That was my submission to the Senate inquiry into regional and remote aviation services that concluded fairly recently. I have not followed up on the recommendations of this Senate inquiry, primarily because I imagine they are no different from the previous inquiries.

This is an important topic, and I thank the opposition for bringing on the motion. We should talk about it regularly. It is not just up to the current CLP government to push, although it is its responsibility to do so at every opportunity. No doubt we will hear from the various ministers who have responsibility in this realm, telling us that is exactly what they have been doing—advocating to reduce airfares and ensure better services for Territorians. It is a responsibility for us all. I was the only Member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, I am pretty sure, who wrote a submission to this inquiry. I would like to be proven wrong …

Ms Uibo: I did too.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Already I am. Are there any other hands up? The Opposition Leader wrote a submission.

These sorts of things go unnoticed unless someone picks it up. I had a journalist ring me about it and ask a few questions.

We must keep chipping away because it is such a big issue. It is a cost-of-living issue, a liveability issue and an economic issue. It is part of what we do; it is our bread and butter, so get on board and keep hammering away.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, the failed Labor opposition came up with this motion a year ago. There are 39 items of General Business, and this is the best they could do.

I have great news for the new Member for Nightcliff; we have a bit of an update for you, which will be coming shortly from the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations.

I picked up on the Speaker's earlier ruling that any talk about airfares is fair game, so I remind all my friends in this place about Operation Jupiter. This was the ICAC investigation into the Labor travel rorts prior to the 2020 election. This included more than $40,000 of taxpayer-funded travel so that the Labor ministry could travel to remote electorates and campaign to make sure the Members for Arnhem and Gwoja could hold their seats—and Labor could lose Daly in the 2020 election.

Mr Edgington: They even came to the Barkly.

Mr MACKAY: Labor even had a crack at the great Member for Barkly's seat.

Labor members spent $40,000 of Territory taxpayers' money—including $15,000 on three flights during the caretaker period—on top of using Office of the Chief Minister staff for clearly outlined party political purposes, and they took no responsibility. There was good news, though. Coincidentally, days—or even hours—after the investigation came out, the then Chief Minister Michael Gunner decided to spend time with family and resigned, completely unrelated to that pending investigation. I think that is an incredible coincidence in how the universe works. I know he is the Member for Nightcliff's idol, but I highly recommend not getting involved in any travel rorts.

We spend a lot of time talking about roads, boats and everything used for transport in the Northern Territory, but one thing I have struggled with, and I do not often struggle, is that there are places in this report that I do not believe are in the Northern Territory. I will make sure I have the names right because I do not want to mispronounce them. I am pretty confident, but I am not 100% sure, that the Member for Daly spent Territory taxpayers' money on a fuel card in Ballina, Yamba, Noosa, Longreach, Mount Isa and Camooweal. Although I would love to see the Territory expand and take in all the north, I am pretty confident—$2,500 was spent on jerky, iced coffees and fuel to travel to New South Wales and Queensland—none of those towns are in the Territory.

Therefore, we will not be lectured on the best use of money by the failed Deputy Leader of the Opposition. He spent his time talking about reshuffles, ministries and who will be Chief Minister. I found it interesting that all he can focus on is his own leadership position. It is not about Territorians or the flood victims or the regional people who struggle to get flights. I am sympathetic. I used to work on the Tiwi Islands, and flights to and from there are expensive. Flights to Wadeye are $400. Flights to Groote Eylandt can be expensive. They get booked out and then you cannot travel. There are only so many seats on those planes. Instead of that, the Member for Daly spent a good amount of time talking about who is in charge and who is in what ministry. It made me wonder how long until we get that next sweet Labor leadership spill. It has been a while, and we are looking forward to the next one.

I cannot forget to mention the Member for Gwoja spent $700 driving to Adelaide between Boxing Day 2022 and 7 January 2023 because everyone knows Alice Springs picks up in the summer, and that is exactly when the Member for Gwoja decided to use a Territory taxpayer-funded fuel card to travel to Adelaide.

I go back to airfares and the fantastic work the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations has been doing in the past year since notice of this motion was given. In fact, she has been working hard and doing a fantastic job from the day we got elected. If the Member for Daly maybe once in a while listened to something said in this Chamber that was not about him, he would understand that work is happening and that the minister expresses her displeasure when airlines pull out of commitments. Instead, he played politics and talked about the ADF and this and that. He did not talk about airlines, and this is his motion. He chose this topic, or more accurately someone on the fourth floor picked it for him, brought it on and was ready to talk all about high airfares, Territory economic development and Territorians' liveability standards. However, he spent the entire time trying to rehash his failed questions from Question Time and talking about his future ministry position. He missed the mark.

The reality is that we pay high prices for flights. It is a fact of living in the Territory. It is not a fact we like, but that is the reality if we do not have the demand or the travel capacity, especially to remote communities where we cannot justify using massive planes.

We want more investment in the Territory. We could have seen incredible things, massive investments, for the Territory in last night's federal budget, but we did not. In the Territory budget we are upgrading remote airstrips; we are doing our part to improve connectivity so that better planes can land on those airstrips.

Instead of jumping on board and saying that we need to all come together and work on this—we could all be friends on this one—the Member for Daly decided to attack the CLP.

I am sorry your friends are not here anymore, mate. I am sorry that you are sitting in opposition and will probably never again feel what it is like to sit on this side of the House, but this is bigger than party politics. We need the Labor opposition to pick up the phone and ring their friends in Canberra. We need both sides to work together; instead, every time something happens, those opposite get on the radio and blame us for every business decision ever made. That might be because they do not understand business. As far as I am aware, no member of the Labor opposition has ever run a business. I can count about half the members on my side who have. Those opposite do not understand that government does not control every lever and that sometimes their friends in Canberra forget about the Territory.

We need their support. Pick up that sweet phone—we know the Member for Nightcliff has a direct relationship with the former Attorney-General—and say that we want cheap airfares. See what he can do for us, mate.

Just to let you know, Member for Nightcliff, I looked it up. When you are planning to go to the Victorian election in November, it will cost about $550 return. I am sure you can afford that now; just do not charge the Territory taxpayer or you will end up like your mates, the deputy leader and the Member for Gwoja, and get in trouble. We would hate to see that.

I look forward to hearing the minister talk about what this government has been doing to deliver for Territorians.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Daly for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It is almost an own goal because it gives me an opportunity to talk about all the work that has been done by our Finocchiaro CLP government to address the challenges we have in the Northern Territory because of the tyranny of the distances we have to travel. The reality for us is that we are an international flight away from just about everywhere else in the country. We are a small population. Although we are fierce and advocating for what we need, it is not translating at a federal level. Let us be honest: if anyone can make a difference in this area for us, it is the federal government.

Madam Speaker, you mentioned that you put in a submission to the inquiry that is running. There are actually two inquiries running. My department has put one into each of them. We have not heard anything back yet. There was an opportunity in the budget which has been handed down to recognise the challenges for regional Australia and regional airfares. Was there anything in the budget for that? I have been unable to find it.

Maybe the federal Treasurer should have looked at how he could invest to grow the economy in the Northern Territory and Australia as a whole, rather than punishing mum-and-dad investors by telling them that if they buy a house to secure their future they will be taxed to death on that investment if they purchase it after 1 July. That is shameful. The assumption that people who buy investment properties are wealthy people who are doing it to make a buck on someone else's back is not true, and the federal government should have done a little more homework.

The reality for us is that air connectivity is not just a nice-to-have; it is fundamental to our economic strength, social cohesion and ability to remain connected to the rest of Australia and the world. That is why we have been working hard ever since we came to government to improve connectivity and to persuade airlines that this is a place they need to look to and be involved in the exciting times that are happening in the Northern Territory and be part of our journey as the Northern Territory realises its full economic potential.

We have just under 1.4 million square kilometres with a small population of just over 264,000 people. Lots of the people who live in the Territory live remotely. That is why investment by the federal government in our regional airlines was the best thing it could have done to help drive the economy and job opportunities to ensure that our communities can stay connected.

Aviation connectivity is a lifeline—you mentioned it, Madam Speaker—for healthcare, education and emergency services. It is important that we have those systems in place. We are working hard to make sure that we do it.

One of the big challenges we have had over the past couple of years has been the cost of upgrading our international airport runways to Defence Force capability. That was not a problem for the Northern Territory; it was a problem for the federal government and the Defence department, but did they fully fund those upgrades? No, they did not. The consequence of that has been that we, as Territorians, travellers and tourists, had to pitch in a bit more than we otherwise should have. Perhaps the federal Treasurer could have given us a hand in that area in the budget last night, but the Territory seemed not to have been on his radar.

For working hard to get to where we need to be to improve connectivity, I give a shout-out to the team at the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations because it has been working incredibly hard. Every day the staff are talking to airlines, looking at opportunities to increase the number of routes and making sure that we can grow the routes we need so that our trade delegation capacity is improved to make the Territory's case on the international stage.

The team is also talking to international airlines which may be interested in taking advantage of the potential for cabotage into the Northern Territory where there are routes that do not exist. There are international airlines considering what they may be able to do. Fortunately, we can do that. We hope that some of those discussions will come to realisation over the next year or so.

The team is not only talking about connectivity but also delivering it. Its commitment to delivering real outcomes has been reflected in the results over the last year or so. There were six new aviation announcements.

One of the most exciting was when China Southern Airlines came back to Darwin. That opened up 200 destinations worldwide for Territorians, including Amsterdam, London, Paris, Madrid, Istanbul, Dubai and Kathmandu. I could go on, but I would probably want to jump on a plane and visit one of them if I did that.

One of the most recent announcements came from Aero Dili which will provide a service to Darwin twice weekly, with connections to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Denpasar, Fuzhou and Xiamen. These are great destinations to land in and have a little break before going on to other places.

We have had five Asian trade delegations to deepen the relationships that drive the outcomes here. The wins are not small; they are transformational for Territory connectivity and are driving real economic growth.

At the heart of the work we are doing is the Rebuilding Aviation Connectivity for the Economy (RACE) scheme. We love a good acronym. RACE provides matched funding to airports to support new airline routes, reducing the commercial risk of launching services into our market and giving airlines the certainty to commit. At the same time, we have built in accountability—if you make a commitment to a new route to the Northern Territory, we expect you will do it for a sufficient period so that route has time to take and we can rely on you in the future. This will help us compete with larger jurisdictions and build passenger volumes to secure those routes.

Strong aviation links underpin almost every part of our economy. The resources sector, including emerging projects in the Beetaloo Sub-basin, depend on moving specialised personnel and expertise efficiently across our remote locations.

Tourism depends on keeping the Territory connected to the significant majority of interstate visitors. When the *New York Times* says that we are the best place in Australia to visit, we need to make sure that when travellers from the United States land in Sydney or Melbourne they can get to the Northern Territory and have a true Australian experience. That is the work the team is undertaking.

As we pursue growth in energy, Defence, agriculture and advanced manufacturing, we need to attract and retain a skilled workforce. Making sure that those people know they can stay connected to family, friends and home is important. That is why we are working so hard to make sure that air travel is in place and affordable.

There is no question that if you leave booking your trip to the last minute, you will pay top dollar. If you plan ahead—you do not have to plan very far ahead; you can plan three or four weeks ahead—you can get a return airfare to any of the major capital cities in Australia for approximately the same price that I could get them about 15 years ago. They are not all that different.

We are facing challenges with the global situation which is impacting our fuel supplies, and airlines are suffering from that. We have seen some rationing of services, but that will resolve once the situation in the Middle East is resolved and those airlines will come back in full.

Structural influences create some of the challenges we are seeing. The industry refers to that situation as a thin route. I do not know whether we should take that as a compliment or an insult, but it basically means there are lower passenger volumes than in the major metropolitan markets, with smaller aircraft on limited schedules of one to three services a week. The fixed operating costs, like fuel, crew and maintenance, cannot be changed; they do not shrink just because the plane is smaller or is carrying fewer people. The fares reflect that reality.

There are some things happening. I know that routes into Alice Springs are of great interest to you, Madam Speaker. My colleagues the Members for Braitling and Namatjira constantly remind me that Alice Springs needs an uplift in that area. We have been working hard to get a route from Darwin to Alice Springs to Uluru, and we are getting traction there. It will be significant for the Northern Territory and Alice Springs if people who fly to Uluru have to stop in Alice Springs on the way. I hope to see that become reality in the not-too-distant future.

Some routes are seasonal, and that is a fact of our lives. That is okay. If we know that well ahead, we can plan and everybody will be prepared, which will support the long-term viability of those routes.

The global fuel price, which saw oil rise to about USD116 a barrel in March—the highest price since 2008 in the global financial crisis—is disrupting that supply chain, but we are optimistic that as the situation settles we will see a return to normal in the flight space. Madam Speaker, you made an observation that COVID really did a number on the Territory when it came to connectivity. We are hopeful that it will not take as long as it did after COVID for things to get back to whatever normal looks like.

Airport charges are a challenge for us. Darwin and Alice Springs had significant increases in recent years, reflecting the cost of maintaining and upgrading modern aviation infrastructure. We work closely with the Airport Development Group to see whether we can minimise that impact, particularly in the general aviation space because that is where connectivity to the regions comes from. We are committed to keeping that as affordable as possible.

Despite the pressures we are seeing, there are encouraging signs. Fares at the 30-day and 90-day booking windows are improving. I do not know whether anyone has caught on, but Qantas has a sale with fares starting from $159. If you have not seen it, get online and grab one before they go. This shows that increased competition and connectivity is starting to translate into real progress for Territorians and making connectivity more affordable and easier.

We will continue to advocate in this space, look for expanded networks and encourage competition. We are making sure we get national reform in the cabotage area so that we can maximise opportunities by encouraging international airlines to use the Northern Territory as their entry point into Australia.

We are pushing for national policy settings that recognise the unique circumstances of northern and remote Australia. Aviation connectivity here is not a commercial consideration; it is so much more than that. That is the story we have to tell our federal government colleagues because they need to understand that for everybody living in the Northern Territory. I hope those on the opposite side will join us as we advocate at the federal level to ensure the importance of keeping planes flying into the Northern Territory is understood.

The Finocchiaro CLP government's plan is clear: we will create a safer and stronger Northern Territory, a place where people want to live, work, invest and visit, and strong aviation connectivity is central to that plan. We are working every day to see that come to realisation.

In 18 months, backed by an outstanding department, with the securing of new aviation announcements we have forged new international connections. Through trade delegations in the Asian region we have opened the door for our Asian neighbours and their airlines to understand that the Territory is a departure point for them for many reasons, so if they join us in our journey of rebuilding our economy and ensuring we are the point of entry for security of energy and resources into Australia, we can back that with an increase in air connectivity.

We are focused on this and excited by the conversations we have been having and the new routes we have achieved. We are also excited that in a difficult environment, the impact of rescheduling across Australia has not been as significant in the Northern Territory as it has been in other areas of the country. We are encouraged by the continuing conversations we have with our major airlines of Qantas, Jetstar and Virgin. We will make sure people remember what the 'NT' in Qantas stands for and will continue to work with Jetstar and Virgin to ensure they understand that we are the departure point into the Asian region that they should be looking to. The opportunity that creates for the Northern Territory will be repaid to them tenfold.

This is what determination and focus looks like, and there is more to come. I wish I could tell you a bit more about some things that are almost there but not quite, but I do not want to spook those conversations. Rest assured, Alice Springs is front and centre of that conversation, as is Uluru. We recently had the official launch of the new Uluru–Kata Tjuta walk by the Tasmanian Walking Company. It is magnificent. We want to make sure the whole world has the opportunity to experience that walk. The best way for people to get there is to pop into Alice Springs before they head over to Uluru and experience that walk and then pop into

Alice Springs on the way home. We want to put that route in place so that the people in Alice Springs and the Territory as a whole benefit from that boost in our tourism and visitor population.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I am interested in talking about airline connectivity and getting airlines to the Territory. I know we have a great wish to have airlines going to every city out of Darwin, connecting us daily at cheap fares and at good times. That is what we would love, but it will not happen because it comes back to supply and demand. We have to recognise the critical size needed to drive some of these things. That does not mean we should not try, and we will, but the airline industry has a lot of vagaries. It comes and goes and is influenced by a range of global crises, including the global financial crisis, COVID and the current fuel crisis. All these things make commercial airlines change their minds about whether they come and go. They are running a business; they are not a charity. That is the environment we live in and the reality we have to deal with.

I have experience in government of getting different airlines to the Territory. It varies whether you are going for international or domestic airlines; regional airlines are another kettle of fish I want to talk about. We brought in Tiger Airways, with Paul Henderson at the time. That was a cheap version of Singapore Airlines. It took a long time, and everyone was competing to get it. We wanted the maintenance base, and that went to Avalon in Victoria. I think Lindsay Fox had a bit to do with all that. We had Tiger Airways coming in and out and were trying to get it to base its crews here. That comes and goes.

Jetstar used to fly internationally to Vietnam. I used it a couple of times to fly to Ho Chi Minh; it was fantastic. It was a new market. Everyone was going to Bali and, suddenly, we could do a direct flight from Darwin to Ho Chi Minh. Unfortunately, just as it was getting started—I always thought it was a growth area—COVID or the GFC knocked it out. That is the reality, and these things happen.

Domestically we had Bonza, and it was great. It used to go to the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast. I thought it was a good model, and a lot of people used it. Commercially, it could not afford to keep losing money and the shareholders would say no; we must appreciate that as we go forward.

Another international one was the Chinese airline, Donghai Airlines. We got that going and it was great, with direct links to Shenzhen. Then—bang!—COVID knocked it all out.

I know we are pursuing other airline links, and we have to market ourselves, but let us back to the reality of it; we need to grow our population. We have to get back to the basic economics of critical mass. Central to all that—we can talk about immigration and all those things—is growing the economy. We need to grow an economy where we can help support a bigger population, attracting more people to work and live here. If we do that, it will give us more critical mass, which then makes airline connectivity better. If we stay small, we suffer the consequences of being small. It is not just the Territory; Western Australia, northern Queensland and other places in regional Queensland suffer the same issues.

Let us look at some of the airline strategies that have been used. People used to complain about the back-of-the-clock ones, the 2 am flights, but there was a good reason for that. We were using underutilised aircraft that could not be used for Sydney and Melbourne flights because of the curfews in Sydney. Airlines could utilise their planes by getting up to Darwin and back into Sydney just before 6 am to then be the first flight to Melbourne. That made sense in some ways. The worst thing that could ever happen is the curfew out of Sydney lifting; we would be stuffed. You have to understand that airlines make operational decisions for a variety of reasons.

We need to grow the economy. I know I keep bringing out the plan, but if we address all three things in our plan, it will help grow the population which will improve our chances of better connectivity. Yes, we have to reduce crime because if we do not do that it will be harder to get people to come here. We have to rebuild the economy, and we have five key industry sectors—mining, gas, tourism, Defence and agriculture. We have solid plans to go forward on them, but we need to keep at it. We also have to restore our lifestyle.

As the assistant minister for the Attorney-General and her portfolios, particularly Tourism, I know that we need to grow our tourism visitation experience. We need quality experiences so that people come here. We could also then have cruise ships because the fly–cruise type of market would come. There is a range, and it is like a jigsaw of what you can get. We need to build up the demand—the pull—to say, 'Come to us'.

Years ago, federal governments used to own airlines like Qantas and TAA. They got out of that market and said that they could not keep losing money; they handed the airlines over to the private sector. That policy decision was made way back. I suggest that governments should stay out of the international airline space,

but regional airlines are different. When we saw Rex collapse even the federal government started to realise that those regional connections are critical.

The federal government plays a big part in this, and we need its help. I heard you, Madam Speaker, and others talk about critical links. Alice Springs–Darwin and a couple of other key routes across the Territory are important regional routes, so maybe we should lobby the federal government and say, 'You are looking out for New South Wales' regions, so how about looking after the Northern Territory's region? These are critical links.' I am not a big fan of government running operations, but sometimes it can step into a niche area where there is market failure. My advice is: stay away from subsidising international airlines and do not try to run your own bloody Qantas all the time, but help our regional airlines and even some of the general aviation links to our critical islands like the Tiwi Islands. These are local issues that we need to focus on. We need to work with the federal government and say, 'These are the areas we need to keep affordable because we want connectivity across the Territory'.

We need to boost our industries. The Beetaloo is a great example. If we tap into that and grow our market, it will give us much more critical mass to get other air links. That does not mean you do not do anything and just leave it; you have to go out to market because new opportunities will come up. They may come or they may fall, but you have to bring the opportunity to them and say, 'You are looking around for where you might start up next. Do not forget us. Come and have a look at us and see whether it can work.'

I think there is an opportunity out of Vietnam. There are a couple of Vietnamese airlines that can interconnect with flights to Bali or wherever. I see that opportunity, and I know that the minister is looking at various things. She mentioned Aero Dili and is looking at other opportunities. That is great; we have to keep up the efforts. We do not stop; we have to punch above our weight.

Always remember that it will come back to the basic economics. If we can grow our industry and employment bases and have people wanting to live in the Territory because they can make a career for themselves and raise their families here, that demand will be one of the best ways of securing more long-term air links and connectivity.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Daly for bringing on this motion. High airfares are a significant concern for the people of my electorate of Mulka, as they are for many regional places across the NT.

I encouraged individuals and businesses to make submissions to the Senate inquiry into Australia's aviation sector which closed on 27 February and the Productivity Commission inquiry into regional airfares which closed on 15 March. I made submissions to both these inquiries with the hope that we will see solutions and intervention that alleviate the pressures of high airfares for our communities. These Commonwealth inquiries have been running in some shape or form for the past eight years, but there have been no outcomes, so once again we are left with no option but to write endless submissions to ongoing inquiries. This has been a frustrating process for the people of my electorate who are looking for genuine solutions.

I hope that we will see real action from the Commonwealth Government, but there is also an important role for the Northern Territory Government to play. The Queensland Government provides a subsidy to remote residents. In the NT some airline routes have been subsidised, such as the milk run through the centre from Darwin to Alice Springs, stopping in Katherine and Tennant Creek, but for some reason the NT Government has refused to offer a subsidy scheme for remote residents elsewhere.

There is an ongoing focus on airfares from Darwin. This government has spent a lot of time working to attract airlines to Darwin to create cheaper flights overseas and interstate, but little work has been done to look at regional and remote communities and the airfare costs that impact our daily lives.

For residents living in Gove, last-minute flights are frequently more than $1,000 one way to Darwin. When a family of four needs to travel urgently for healthcare or a family emergency, it can cost $4,000 to fly one way to Darwin. Communities such as Galiwinku, Milingimbi and Ramingining have high-cost flights to Darwin. If I book a flight from Milingimbi to Darwin for tomorrow it will cost $1,100 one way. These costs are a major financial burden and are highly unaffordable for most people and families.

The cost of living in north-east Arnhem Land is already much higher than in urban centres like Darwin, and due to the current fuel costs, regional flights now have a fuel levy added. High airfares are another cost we are expected to accept because we live remotely, but affordable air travel is important for access to healthcare, education, work and family obligations. It is essential for the liveability of the region. Often the only road out of Gove, the Central Arnhem Highway, is too wet and cannot be driven on. This makes air

travel essential for our region. Residents living in homeland towns rely on charter flights, and when the roads are cut off it is important that essential supplies can be brought in at low cost.

Much more work is needed from the NT Government in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government to address the cost of remote air travel.

I want more investment by the aviation industry and government in local aviation training programs. Many people know that I trained to be a pilot and held a private pilot's licence. There are young people living in homeland towns who would also like this opportunity, and becoming a pilot should be an achievable pathway. It is also a practical pathway that will support local communities.

I strongly support this motion, and I thank the member for bringing it to the Assembly.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Daly for this GBD motion on airfares.

In the Wet Season more than half of my electorate is literally underwater. On top of that there are four islands and six communities on those islands, including Warruwi, Minjilang and the Tiwi Islands, so I am always flying. I would rather be driving, especially in the Wet Season when the storms are about in the afternoon. I have to look at my calendar and travel carefully.

In saying that, air travel and charters keep our communities running. That is our business. We get food and parts off the plane. We use the plane to get to other communities and major hubs. Chartered flights are sometimes unexpected, like for funerals (*bapurru*). That is an added cost to the family. The average family earnings in a remote community would be $800 or $900, and a chartered flight costs upwards of $3,000, especially from West Arnhem. This is why I emphasis so much that Jabiru Airport is an integral part to help people with the costs of travel in and out of major hubs.

For the 2024 election campaign, thank god it was in the Dry Season in August, most of my travel was done by road. I put a swag in the back of the car and all my hunting tools and go. There are more than 70 outstations past Jabiru.

Ms Uibo: I thought you were going to say 70 hunting tools.

Mr BROWN: No. There are 70 outstations and about six communities.

The way I develop rapport is I drive out there. There was a little mudslinging from the Member for Goyder in regard to costings. In March 2024 a candidate who ran against me, Yanja Thompson, flew there in a chopper. It is all declared. I was in my car travelling from outstation to outstation, but she visited the communities through a wealthy fella who lives in Fannie Bay. It was declared in the system that one day of hire cost $125,000.

Mr Mackay: It was not taxpayer funded.

Mr BROWN: That was not taxpayers' money, but when you have friends in high places, you do not need to drive. We are talking about the cost of airfares and flights. Good on her.

Members interjecting.

Mr BROWN: I might have to go to Fannie Bay and make friends with someone.

In the Wet Season we get most of our stuff off the plane and use planes for sending bodies out.

On top of that, Cahills Crossing has been closed since November. As a business, trying to grow in the Wet Season is difficult, including getting meat from Gunbalanya to Darwin. That is why I emphasise the importance of the Jabiru Airport.

I am always on the Member for Katherine's back about swimming lesson vouchers. I am not having a go; I am just saying that it costs an arm and a leg for community mob to come in and do the swimming lessons. This is just a train of thought: change it up; maybe provide iPads or colouring books instead of swimming lessons so that it does not cost an arm and a leg to use the voucher.

Like the Member for Port Darwin said, we all need to lobby the federal government for better fares.

Population growth plays a big part, but a one-way flight to Maningrida costs $800. I spoke about the average household income in remote communities, and the charters cost more than $3,000. Tiwi Islands is a different story because we have the ferry service. That is a different way for people to get home to the Tiwi Islands from Darwin. In Arnhem Land in the Wet Season there is only one way to go, and that is by plane.

We would be happy to lobby the federal government with the NT Government.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague the Member for Daly for bringing on this important motion. It is good to hear support for the importance of it.

Like you, Madam Speaker, I put in a submission for those inquiries. My submission specifically requested that committee members undertaking the joint parliamentary inquiry into airfares and connectivity come to the Northern Territory. In my submission I outlined a series of examples of what people pay for intra-Territory airfares and some of the interstate airfares, which you did as well in your contribution, Madam Speaker.

Similar to the Member for Arafura, I try to drive as much as I can in my electorate. In the Wet Season, specifically big Wet Seasons, a lot of my communities and homelands are often inaccessible via road, so we rely on air connectivity. There are not a lot of commercial routes for the remote parts of the Arnhem electorate, so we often rely on chartered aircraft when our electorate allowance can afford it.

There are some regular commercial routes across the Arnhem electorate. One is Darwin–Groote Eylandt. Most people know that Groote Eylandt is the home of the Angurugu and Umbakumba remote Aboriginal communities and the Alyangula township. Off Groote Eylandt is Bickerton Island, which has the remote community of Milyakburra. The Groote Eylandt archipelago is very expensive to travel to. There is only one commercial service provider, Airnorth, and sometimes those airfares are exorbitant. The cost can change close to the date of booking.

In my submission to the joint committee inquiry into airfares I outlined an example that one of my constituents provided. They needed to travel to a sudden family funeral. They went to book travel for the next day from Groote Eylandt to Darwin, and the airfare was $900 one way. I remember when you might have an $800 or $900 return fare from Darwin to Sydney. That is close to 4,000 kilometres one way, 8,000 kilometres return, and costs the same as a short one-hour-and-20-minute commercial flight from Darwin to Groote Eylandt.

Things are definitely out of whack. I agree with your words, Madam Speaker, that we all need to work together to put constant pressure on the powers that be and the commercial airlines. We have a responsibility to advocate for the Northern Territory, whether we are in government, in opposition, an Independent or a crossbencher so that everyone outside the Northern Territory understands what Territorians are facing.

Those who do business, those who provide services and those who put money into the Territory via tourism rely on air connectivity in many senses. It is an important service. Many of my constituents rely on air connectivity for medical evacuations, and the cost of that is exorbitant, which is why we have services like CareFlight and the Royal Flying Doctor Service in remote parts of Australia to deliver those critical health services and provide that connectivity. That is even before you get to visit your family, enjoy time off work or have special cultural, family and sorry business to attend. Air connectivity can make a difference to Territorians missing out on vital connections with family members, friends and colleagues and having the opportunity to holiday or bring people into the Territorians. It all adds up.

The Member for Mulka's electorate covers the Gove Peninsula. Some of the already high airfares to Nhulunbuy have increased. In 2014 Qantas dropped its air service to the township of Nhulunbuy, when Rio Tinto announced it would shut the refinery. It is in another state of closure until 2029. In places that are vital to the Territory's economy, social fabric and opportunity for growth, like Nhulunbuy and the region the Member for Mulka represents, these are critical days, weeks, months and years.

The Member for Arafura and I were there a couple of weeks ago. We missed the Member for Mulka because he was doing family business in Milingimbi, but we spoke to community members, businesses and service providers across Nhulunbuy township and Yirrkala. People are worried that they will lose flights to and from Nhulunbuy as the town starts to transition from being a fully-fledged mining town. We saw the example in 2014; Qantas no longer flies there. People are worried. I will check this detail with the Member for Mulka, but I understand that the Saturday service for Darwin to Nhulunbuy has been cancelled. Every bit hurts and every dollar pinches when it comes to connections for some of our beautiful and vital parts of the Territory. A domino effect can unfold because of that as well.

Keeping in mind the points that were brought to the Assembly by the Member for Daly, it goes even further into people's pockets when someone interstate chooses to fly, for example, from Sydney to Adelaide rather than Sydney to Alice Springs. That changes the tourism revenue coming into all parts of the Northern Territory.

I represent the Groote Archipelago. In that part of the Arnhem electorate there is Australia's richest mine with the royalties that come in from the South32 GEMCO manganese mine for Anindilyakwa people. It is a few years from transition compared with the Nhulunbuy township, but people are starting think about other ways to grow the economy in Groote Eylandt if we do not have the mine in the next 10 years. That reality is coming up quickly.

It is similar to what the Member for Arafura has said about Jabiru and the future of Kakadu as a hub. The airport is a huge stressor. It is due to be completed, handed over or demolished—whatever ends up being the decision—by October or November 2026. If that airstrip is closed, there will be a huge impost for not just the township but also all of Kakadu and the West Arnhem region. I hope that the NT Government is the coordinating piece, working with the Mirarr and the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, ERA and Rio Tinto and all the important organisations and corporations to look at medium and long-term solutions for Jabiru Airport.

Up until last year, many people in that area told us that the NT Government had walked away, sidelined it and became quiet in that space. I am comforted to hear that at the start of this year the government realised that the deadline for that airport is looming. Hopefully government members are getting their skates on and looking at options. I worked with the Member for Arafura in passing on different opportunities for the traditional owner group, the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, from the connections, networks and resources that we had previously in government.

I remain hopeful. I will support my teammate the Member for Arafura in that space, but it will be a big test for the future of Jabiru and Kakadu if that airport connection and commitment is not resolved in a timely fashion—in a matter of months.

That is a big part of what Nhulunbuy is going through now. Those conversations are happening a bit earlier, thankfully. Also, the future of Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island and the region of south-east Arnhem Land in my electorate, will be a big test. People always said that it would be 10 or 15 years away, but now it could be closer to six years away.

I have been meeting with the new Chief Executive Officer of the Anindilyakwa Land Council. He is passionate about his new role and has already started looking at a few suggestions that I made as the local member. I am impressed he actioned a few things that I brought to our first meeting at the start of the year, so I have a slight bit of comfort for the future of the Groote Archipelago if that beautiful part of the world starts to transition sooner. It will go through big changes in a few years, but the people there do not need to reinvent the wheel. They can learn from past mistakes and what has gone well and not so well in comparable townships like Jabiru and Nhulunbuy.

The opportunity for tourism in regional parts of my electorate would be invaluable for not just the dollar value but also the culture, language and environment if we had more connectivity.

Many people miss out on travelling to fellow communities, particularly in the Wet Season, because of cost, being unable to travel and not having a vehicle or a regular bus service in and out of their community. When funerals, sorry business and graduations come up or babies are born, often fellow Territorians miss out on a huge amount of personal connection because they do not have the infrastructure and support for air connectivity.

If there was a regular air transport service around the south-east and north-east Arnhem Land pocket, I guarantee that every seat would be filled on every service. As an example, Chartair has the mail service which is subsidised. It goes once a week out to a patch in my electorate. One of the most popular and well-utilised services is the mail plane on Monday. It goes from Tindal to Ngukurr community, Numbulwar, Milyakburra and Groote Eylandt. It turns around the same day from Groote Eylandt and goes back to Milyakburra, Numbulwar, Ngukurr and Katherine. People can connect and often stay the night in Katherine to either catch the bus or be picked up the next day to wherever they might be travelling, which often is Darwin. That is one of the cheapest ways to travel in the south-east Arnhem pocket. It is a reasonable price, about $150 one way on any of those legs, which is about the same as a nine-hour bus ride in the Dry Season.

Our remote electorates of Mulka, Arafura and Arnhem are all closely connected and culturally connected as well. If we had more services extended perhaps we could see regular flights from homelands to the larger

communities, especially when the roads are not accessible or people do not have a vehicle or a regular bus service.

I will keep advocating. We are in opposition and do not have any decision-making power, but we have put this as a motion before the Assembly.

My colleague the Member for Daly spoke at length about the challenges within the Territory and his electorate, as have other members. There is an opportunity for Southeast Asia to further connect to the Northern Territory, not just our capital Darwin. It would be great to hear about international visitors who come into Darwin having packages to go to Katherine and the Big Rivers region; Nhulunbuy, which is stunning; and over to Groote Eylandt for a weekend at the beautiful Groote Eylandt Lodge run by the Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Enterprises (GEBIE). Anyone who has been there knows that it is stunning. It would be great to work out tourism and connectivity packages so that people can fly from Darwin to Groote on a Friday afternoon with their family on an affordable airfare, spend two nights on Groote and fly back at lunchtime on a Sunday and be back in time to put the kids to bed and get everyone ready for school, work or day care the next day. They would have a weekend within the Territory at a reasonable and fair price, which would put that dollar value back in.

These are some of the things I have been talking about as a local member for many years. There are two opportunities to speak to inquiries on airfares that are happening nationally, and getting people to realise when they say it is $100 to fly from Sydney to Melbourne—or whatever it is; I do not know because I do not live there—that it can be up to $900 for a one-hour-and-20-minute flight between Darwin and Groote. With all of that happening, perhaps there will be an opportunity to cap airfares.

As an example, a few years ago when Qantas was winding down in Nhulunbuy, which the Member for Mulka represents, there were local airfares—you would have to show your driver's licence or other proof you live there—that were capped or subsidised. You could go to Darwin for a weekend and it would not cost you the same as for a government worker flying in and out to deliver services. More of those initiatives could support the growth of the Territory and viability and sustainability because people are not filling the seats. When flights looks like they are not being used we have the danger of airlines cutting those routes. We have seen downsizing, which we have asked questions about in the past.

One success story when Labor was in government was the Territory Aviation Attraction Scheme. I understand that it is a lot of work. We heard that from the Member for Port Darwin in her ministerial capacity.

We had a little lesson from the Member for Goyder about what it means to be fiscally responsible with travel. It would be great if he had mentioned that the Member for Brennan, in her role as the Tourism minister, spent $20,000 for a day trip to China. A lot of people in the Territory would probably dream of that money for a whole family's holidays for the year. They may save weeks, months and years to spend that type of money for a family trip or to go away in retirement, but in the midst of a fuel crisis we saw the minister for Tourism spend $20,000 for a day trip to China.

Did she end up with the three routes that she went off to advocate for? CLP members talk about transparency. When Labor was in government we put out all the travel and overseas airfares before a trip, not after. The Attorney-General did her trip after, but there has to be an outcome as well. Was it one route that was locked in? Was it the three that were apparently the focus of that trip? I am interested to see what that $20,000 day trip to China produced for the Northern Territory. Was it bang for buck? I do not believe so, but I would happily stand corrected if that is what the Attorney-General would like to do.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am keen to discuss and reflect on some of the major issues we have in the Territory regarding airfares and connectivity. I thank the Member for Daly for putting forward this discussion point.

The three key areas I will talk about are looking at business and industry impacts; impacts on tourism and the opportunities there; and workforce attraction and retention. These are all major issues that are not being adequately addressed.

We all know that lack of availability of flights and pricing of airfares are a major barrier to doing business in the NT. Although we have much more technology these days, the benefit of an in-person meeting, with that person-to-person interaction, makes a huge difference when negotiating deals and trying to attract investment, especially when you can take people around and show them the great attractions and facilities we have in the NT. We desperately need people to come here and do that in person.

The trouble we have is that a lot of air travel is at poor times. This results in people arriving at midnight or 1 am and having to leave the Territory at 1 am or 2 am. That is no way to attract investment and jobs and bring people to help grow the Territory. We cannot grow the Territory without a reliable, affordable and convenient air network.

We talk about being the gateway to Asia, but we have only four options to get out of Darwin. We may be the gateway, but there is no advantage if there is no plane at the gate to take us anywhere. This is a major barrier to doing business in the Territory. It has been highlighted in submissions to a number of inquiries, as other people have raised.

We have been reflecting on tourism in recent weeks. We talk about getting people out to Kakadu and Litchfield National Parks. In my electorate there was the Seabreeze Festival on the weekend. We have many fantastic events and attractions in the NT. Most importantly, these events and attractions and the tour operators that support them employ thousands of Territorians. It is a great part of our economy, and the government should be doing everything it can to support them.

We also know that there are many headwinds in the tourism sector. Fuel price issues are impacting our grey nomads coming up for this Dry Season. We know about the weather impacts. We had the floods and the damage to the Stuart Highway, with the lack of flood resilience on our national highway network. Interest rate rises are also impacting people's decisions about holidays, where they go, when they go and whether the family budget can afford it. That, of course, flows into the general cost of living. There is not a lot of room in people's budgets for taking holidays. When people are making decisions about what they will do and where they will go, if the prices are too high they simply will not come. That is why airfares and connectivity are crucial to this debate about how we grow the Territory and support a terrific tourism industry.

Workforce attraction and retention is the third greatest factor that is impacted by aviation costs and connectivity. We can agree that everyone in this House wants our Territory to grow. We want business to grow and investment across the board, from the top to the bottom of the NT. However, we cannot recruit and retain workers in the NT if people cannot travel here and, most importantly, to where they may have grown up or where their families live. People moving to the Territory want to know that they can visit family who may be elderly or sick. Kids growing up here who play sport want to participate in rep teams and travel interstate. People want to go on holidays, see family and attend funerals, but people will not move here if they do not have options for flight times and costs.

I know many people from my electorate of Nightcliff who moved here with jobs in the legal sector and health workforce who stayed only 12 months or two years. When I asked them about the time they had here and what they enjoyed most, almost to a tee they will say that they loved the experience, the community, getting out bush on the weekends, the lifestyle and the relaxed approach we enjoy here, but flights and connectivity is always mentioned as the top one or two reasons they made the decision to move back to the east coast or wherever they grew up. They found it hard to get back there when they needed to. Their family found it hard to visit them—for the grandparents to visit and for friends to come with their families. This has been a major impact on people's liveability and their ability to continue to live in the Territory with family across the country.

I looked up flights to Melbourne this weekend. Let us say something happened to your mother-in-law or your father and you needed to urgently dash back and help them out. It would cost you at least $700 to fly down this Friday night, and to come back on Sunday it would be more than $1,000. For one person we are talking about almost $2,000 to go on an urgent trip to see someone and help out family. That is not sustainable for the vast majority of people in our community.

We talk about people staying connected with their family interstate. If you wanted to fly down in the June school holidays or have someone fly from interstate and spend time here—take them out to our wonderful parks and attractions, have them spend money down the street in the CBD and on accommodation, be at the wharf and do all these great things—you would already need at least $1,000 per person for that return flight in June. That does not provide options for people to come and visit. Parents cannot bring their kids to the Territory to enjoy our great lifestyle. We can have all the marketing, attractions and investment in our parks, but if people cannot get here that investment will not make a return for our broader economy. It is unviable for friends and family to travel to the NT to visit.

There are many fantastic people who would love to be long-term Territorians—people like me who have family here or people who came up for a three or six-month contract and are here 40 years later—but we will not convert people to staying here and being part of our community if there are not options, connections and affordable flights to and from the Territory.

I will reference a couple of examples from the recent federal inquiry into regional aviation. Chamber NT described the Territory as facing structural aviation market failure. Its business survey found that airfare unaffordability was rated 8.9 out of 10 and more than 90% of respondents reported fare increases, with the median return airfare about $1,400 and the maximum $3,600. More than 96% of respondents supported some form of capped airfare scheme.

A resident from Alice Springs talked about their recent experience when they were paying between $800 and $1,000 one way between Alice Springs and Darwin. As the Speaker mentioned earlier, the price of travel between Darwin and Alice Springs is unaffordable for the everyday Territorians whom the government talks about so much. It is why there are mainly government people on those flights. The Member for Gwoja will talk more about that later this evening.

A doctor from Alice Springs Hospital reported the same issue, with healthcare workers in Central Australia being unable to maintain family and support networks. That results in high staff turnover and contributes to a lack of quality healthcare.

The CPSU also referenced high airfares directly affecting frontline staff across the public service. It also gave the example of flights between Darwin and Alice Springs limiting the Department of Children and Families' ability to fly in relief child protection workers to Alice Springs. It also talked about workers on Galiwinku facing costs of $2,000 for an extended weekend in Darwin.

An ADF member based in Darwin also made a submission and talked about his inability to maintain contact with friends and family interstate. He talked about the difficulty of recruiting and retaining Defence personnel in Darwin. How can we pitch to the federal government and get the investments we need in our Defence infrastructure if we cannot attract and retain Defence Force members in the NT?

The Darwin Fringe Festival also pointed out that high airfares are locking the Territory out of natural cultural life, with artists cancelling once they see how much it costs to travel to the Territory. Our Territory artists, particularly remote artists, also miss out on being able to perform and expand their careers because of these unaffordable travel costs.

We need a clear strategy and a plan for aviation attraction. I have read online about the rebuilding aviation connectivity strategy, but I have been unable to track down a hard copy of it. Hopefully, one of the government members can speak to that. That is what is missing. There is a lack of plan and vision, and it appears to be ad hoc reactions as issues emerge.

We need a thorough examination of all parts of the air industry supply chain. We need to review every aspect of it, bring all stakeholders around the table and construct a long-term plan to deal with the lack of connectivity and the cost of flights in and out of the Territory.

Many members—including you, Mr Deputy Speaker—have reflected that there is a lot more work to do. I think you made the point that we all agree this is a major issue. I hope the CLP government takes this up, does the work, brings people together and has a clear plan for the future. We need to enact that attraction for tourism, the workforce, business and industry; without that, we will not get the growth that we all rely on and need for future generations so that our kids can have jobs where they are proud to call home, seeing a future for themselves in the Territory.

Our future depends on these flight networks and connectivity. I thank the Member for Daly for bringing this to the attention of the Assembly.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Daly for this motion about airfares and connectivity because it affects us all. I come from Central Australia, and the Members for Braitling, Araluen and Barkly and I know the effects of connectivity in and out of the regions.

I need to address a few things that the Member for Daly started his contribution with. If you live in a glasshouse, you probably should not throw stones. If you tell a story, you have to get it right. There are a few things wrong with the Member for Daly's stories.

I will start off with his criticism of Minister Cahill when she went away for work. He called it a four-day holiday. I tell you what: I know how busy the minister is, and when she is away on those trips she does not have much spare time; it is go, go, go. She is working for the best interests of the Territory.

Let us step it back to when the Member for Daly went on holidays at Christmas in his car, with a government fuel card, charging fuel dollars back to Territory taxpayers on a holiday to Queensland and New South Wales. Although it was found to be within the rules, there were queries about how the rules were put forward by the previous Speaker. Just because a rule sort of says you can do it does not mean you should do it. That is something we will not forget.

Given we are talking about airfares, how about the previous Chief Minister? There was an inquiry into the use of charters during an election campaign, which was found not to pass the pub test. If the member wants to throw stones, he should be prepared to have them thrown back.

The Leader of the Opposition had a crack at the minister for Tourism for going to China to do important work to attract tourism and investment to the Territory. What about the previous minister Lauren Moss who spent $60,000 on a trip to New York for a UN conference? That was a fair bit of money.

Under Labor $336,000 was spent on ministerial travel between July 2023 and March 2024. That is a big number. Labor members need to be careful when criticising, because they have history in this space. Their spending, we know, was not appropriate.

Let us get on with the stories because that is the best part. I will correct a couple of things.

The Member for Daly spoke a lot about the Daly River. He knows that I like the Daly River; I spend a bit of time there and know a lot of people there. I was trying to work out the connection between the Daly River, airfares and connectivity. I can bring them together. I straightaway went to amphibious aircraft: would they be landing amphibious aircraft at the Daly River? Was that the strategy? It might have been.

The Member for Daly spoke of the national barramundi competition. If you are going to tell stories, Member for Daly, get your facts straight. It is called the Barra Nationals, and is run by the Palmerston Game Fishing Club. There is also the Barra Classic which is run by the Darwin Game Fishing Club. They are two events, and I do not think he has been to either of them. I know the organisers of those events, as I have a bit to do with them. I do not think he has been to those events because if he had he would probably realise the huge economic benefit they bring to the Daly region. That is where the link to airlines and air connectivity is, because a lot of people travel to those events. They attract up to 150 anglers and their families. Some of those people are locals, but quite a few are from interstate. Those events are big economic drivers for that region.

The Member for Daly loves to say that I was fishing there last year before the budget. Again, I need to set the story straight and get the facts right. I have been volunteering for the Darwin Game Fishing Club for 13 years at the Barra Classic, which is probably the biggest and most prestigious barramundi fishing event in the country; it is one of the most prestigious in the Territory. I have been volunteering there for a long time. Why do I volunteer? It is because this is a community event run by a community organisation that brings money and economic development to the Territory, specifically the Daly region.

The people who go to it stay at Woolianna or the Barra Resort with Stu and Marni. The event is hosted at Banyan Farm by Wally, Kerri and Russell Draper. Those people also go into the community to shop at the store, buy fuel and visit the pub for a meal. They also go to Merrepen Arts and pick up art to take home for their friends and families. The economic benefit for that region is big, which is why I volunteer. That is what people who value their communities and community events do. I have been a volunteer in a number of organisations throughout my life, and I will continue to support those clubs that benefit the Territory. That is where the air connectivity comes in, because all those people come for these events and drive our economy.

I am glad I had the opportunity to set the record straight because the Member for Daly tells a good story, it is not a bad one, but he must get the facts right. I hope to be back at Daly River this year to again volunteer and support that event. I know the value of that event and the economic benefit it brings to the Daly River region which will be desperate for that economic uptick after the floods this year. There will be people on planes or on the roads going to that event, and they all contribute to our economy.

Now that I have dealt with stories from the Member for Daly, I will talk about air connectivity and not just amphibious planes potentially landing on the Daly River.

We support air connectivity through our regions, and the milk run is key to the connection between Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. We support it. I have spoken ad nauseam about the cliff funding. The previous government failed to put any money in the budget to keep the milk run going. We had to scramble, find the money and keep that moving. We committed to the milk run because we know that connectivity through the regions matters.

The Territory is huge. We have a small population, and our community is widely dispersed across various regions. As the Member for Mulka rightly pointed out, in the Wet Season it is difficult to maintain connections. The only way to do that is via aircraft, so air connectivity, particularly in remote areas, is critical.

The federal government is doing an inquiry, although it is disappointing we did not see any money in the federal budget for regional connectivity specifically related to the Territory. The federal government put up $80m to bail out Rex, which went into receivership, to support regional operations and keep them going. Sadly, Rex does not come here, and we have seen no support for our regional airlines and connectivity.

The cost of airfares and charters to our remote regions is high. Our government is doing work on that. We know the cost of charters, and we are trying to make the best of it. Where government is chartering aircraft on a regular basis to do certain things, we are looking at whether there is a better way to do it. Can we increase the number of seats into and out of some communities at a better price? Treasury is looking at that because we know the value of providing additional seats at a cheaper price for people in our remote areas. If we are already paying for the charter, how can we best utilise it?

Minister Cahill spoke about cabotage, which has been on the table for some time. There is an opportunity for the federal government to assist the Northern Territory by improving our connections to capital cities and providing extra seats. That is a lever only the federal government can pull; we cannot, but we have advocated to the federal government on this for some time. There is support within certain sectors of industry to provide additional seats and connections from Darwin to other capital cities.

It is interesting to look at the drivers of airfare costs. There is no simple solution to this. One of the biggest factors is limited competition. There are only a few airlines connecting Darwin to other capital cities. When you do not have a lot of competition, prices go up. That is exacerbated in Central Australia because only one or two airlines fly from Alice Springs to capital cities. I believe Virgin is coming in and out now, and we have had additional carriers. When there is competition prices will go down, but eventually they go back up. When you do not have enough competition there is less fare discounting, fewer sales and the economic yield for those airlines is lower.

Minister Cahill touched on the term ‘thin routes’ which is about low passenger volumes. From my previous job in tourism and running bus fleets, I know that utilisation is key. If you had a vehicle sitting around not doing anything, you were losing money. Utilisation had to be optimal to maximise the return on your asset. The same goes for planes, and probably even more so. Thin routes have lower aircraft utilisation because the margins are not there, and there is less certainty in filling seats and fewer passengers. Of course, airlines have to recover those costs somehow, which effectively means higher fares.

I picked up on what the Member for Nightcliff said about airfares and when you have to book short term, they are higher. I know that, and I understand how that affects Territorians. It affected me this week when I helped a family member who has no option but to travel. Yes, those costs are high and, unfortunately, we have to deal with it. Airlines, through those utilisations and thin routes with not enough passengers, need to recover some of their costs.

We do not have a big mix of travel because of our small population and only two major centres having flights to capital cities. We seem to have more in Darwin and less in Alice Springs. That affects pricing. A lot of the travel in Central Australia is government workers, business travel and health travel; it does not have a high enough mix of family, tourism and community travel. Airlines know this. It is about demand. Airlines know that people must fly, so sometimes they take advantage, and there are higher prices.

We are isolated from the dense domestic networks, particularly the Top End. If you want to fly between Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, there is a lot of competition. They are dense networks with flights going every hour. The competition is higher and the cost of those flights are lower. Darwin does not have that network density, so in the logistics space, airlines have to position crews, aircraft and manage engineering remotely, which unfortunately drives up costs and that has an effect on pricing here.

I am not specifically defending the airlines’ pricing; I am just stating some of the reasons for those high costs.

Airport charges—the landing and terminal charges, passenger service charges and security costs—add to the total price of airfares. Our two largest airports, in Central Australia and here, are run by the same entity.

We see a reduction in price for seasonal demand in some respects. As demand goes up there is a reduction in costs somewhat, because the airlines can fill seats.

It will be interesting to see how fuel costs will affect our markets and what it will mean for our airfares. Jet fuel is more expensive here, along with diesel and petrol, because of our location. That is because we have a smaller market, supply chain constraints and import logistics which give us a high terminal gate. Fuel is a major cost at the end of the day. I believe it is 25% of the total cost for flights.

We lack low-cost carriers. We had Tiger and Bonza in Alice Springs. It is always great to have low-cost airlines because they force the major carriers to drop their prices. We do okay for a while, but, unfortunately, they have not hung around for long enough to start to drive that market price down. Minister Cahill is working to try to ensure there is more competition in the market so that prices will be pushed down.

I thank the Member for Daly for the opportunity to talk about airfares and connectivity. It is important across the Territory because if you need to get somewhere in a hurry, instead of eight to 10 hours of driving, you can get on a small plane, but those costs are high. We are working to try to drive down those costs. The government is trying to improve the way that we charter planes and looking at how we can assist communities longer term by doing it better so that the charter companies, the government and the communities all do okay. That will start to drive productivity and economic benefit to some of those communities. Thank you, Member for Daly, for bringing this motion to the Assembly; it is great to talk about it.

Hopefully, we will see changes and assistance from the Commonwealth, particularly from the federal government inquiry taking place.

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Madam Speaker, I make my contribution on this issue that has continued to affect Territorians over many decades from all walks of life—high airfares and the broader challenge of air connectivity to and from the Northern Territory.

I thank Minister Cahill for all the important work she has been doing to make sure we have connectivity within the small levers she can pull. I commend her for all the work.

Air connectivity is not just a tourism or business issue, and it is not only an inconvenience; for Territorians, air travel is often a necessity of life. Unlike people in many other Australian jurisdictions, we cannot drive a few hours to attend important events, access specialist services, visit family, participate in cultural obligations or take up sporting and educational opportunities interstate. The vast distances of the Northern Territory mean that aviation is a part of how we live, work and stay connected.

Through my various ministerial portfolios and community engagements, this concern is raised with me. Whether I am speaking with seniors, young people, sporting groups, veterans, multicultural organisations, artists or community leaders, the message is consistent: the cost of travel is becoming increasingly difficult for Territory families to afford.

However, I must say that I hear this concern particularly strongly from members of our multicultural community. The Northern Territory is proudly home to people from many cultures and backgrounds. Many came here to build a better future, contribute to our workforce and call the Territory home. They work in our hospitals, schools, businesses, aged-care facilities, hospitality venues and community organisations. For many of these families, maintaining connection with loved ones interstate and overseas is deeply important culturally, emotionally and socially.

Many members of the multicultural community have small family networks in the Territory. Their support systems are often spread across Australia or overseas. When airfares become unaffordable it impacts much more than travel plans; it means grandparents missing the birth of grandchildren, families unable to attend funerals or important cultural ceremonies, parents delaying visits to ageing relatives overseas and students and workers feeling isolated because travel costs keep them separated from family support.

This issue also affects our ability to attract and retain workers. Workforce attraction remains one of the biggest challenges facing the Territory. When people compare jurisdictions, the cost of living, connectivity and accessibility matter. If workers believe they will struggle to travel home or see family because of airfares it becomes harder for the Territory to compete.

This also impacts sports, arts and culture. Territory athletes often face significantly higher travel costs simply to participate in national competitions. Families already managing accommodation, registration and equipment costs are then hit with expensive airfares. The same applies to our arts and cultural sectors, where connectivity supports participation, performances, tourism and economic activity.

We all know that the Commonwealth Government is best placed to make meaningful changes in this space. It holds the strongest levers for national aviation policy, airline regulation, competition settings and broader connectivity initiatives, yet Territorians continue to feel overlooked. Although the Northern Territory Government continues to raise these concerns, many people in our community feel that not enough federal attention is being given to the unique challenges faced by remote and regional jurisdictions like ours.

That said, I acknowledge the efforts of the Northern Territory Government and Minister Cahill, who is responsible for continuing to advocate strongly for improved connectivity and greater aviation opportunities for the Territory. These efforts are important. Securing additional routes, strengthening airline partnerships, supporting major events and increasing visitation all play a role in improving long-term connectivity and creating strong demand into and out of the Territory.

Affordable and reliable aviation is essential to rebuilding our economy and restoring our Territory lifestyle. When airfares become excessively high, the impact flows across every part of Territory life—families, business, tourism, education, health, sports, arts and social connection.

Ultimately, this conversation is about fairness. Territorians should not feel isolated because of where they live, and the many multicultural families who contribute so much to the social, cultural and economic fabric of the Territory should not feel disconnected from loved ones because travel has become unaffordable. This issue matters to Territorians, and it deserves continued advocacy and national attention.

I have spoken to many individuals over the last few months who made the decision to visit their families overseas during the school term, because they, especially larger families, cannot afford to visit at Christmas when the cost of travel from Darwin and different parts of the Territory during the school holidays is astronomically high.

This is an opportunity for the opposition to raise options, but I did not hear any alternatives. If you want to solve the problem and there are options, it would be great to discuss that rather than just talk about the non-solutions proposed by the opposition.

Minister Yan delivered the budget this year, and the opposition has all the information there. If those opposite can come up with better options in terms of the budget, please come forward. I am sure Ministers Cahill and Yan will be happy to take that alternative if it is a better idea than what has been proposed in the budget.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, as a regional member it is important to make a contribution to this discussion on airfares. I have to fly up regularly for parliament. At the end of the day, I do not care whether it is the CLP government or the federal government, I just want cheaper airfares and more flights coming to Central Australia, because we need that. I acknowledge the work being done at the Commonwealth and Territory level. I plead with both levels of government to work together to get more flights into Central Australia because, god knows, we need it for the economy and to provide opportunities for Central Australians to have a holiday, visit family, go to medical appointments and all that stuff.

We heard from the Member for Mulka that it costs more for him to fly to Darwin than it does to fly from Sydney to Los Angeles. That is ridiculous. It costs more money on 24 May this year to fly from Adelaide to Darwin than it does from Adelaide to Bali. How does that stack up? It is cheaper to fly outside of the country, and further away, than it is to get to Darwin. These are the realities we live with every day.

Many people have spoken about it, and I do not think there is a right or wrong answer. We can all agree that we need to do more work as a parliament, lobbying together to do this.

It is a bit rich for airlines to increase their costs at Christmas and school holidays when they know families are trying to go away. We see it all the time; when Christmas is coming, suddenly the prices go up exponentially. The people in this parliament who will try to get away during the July school holidays will have to pay a higher price, as will other hardworking Territorians. There needs to be consumer watchdog reviews into the price gouging of people trying to get away.

I come from a big family, so we could never afford to fly every school and Christmas holidays; we had to drive. It was often to Adelaide or Darwin to visit family, but we never had the luxury of affording to fly because getting out of Alice Springs, whether for medical or family reasons, has always been an issue.

Upon reflection, I think that the death of aviation in Central Australia started in 2001 with the collapse of Ansett. Qantas and Ansett were rivals in Alice Springs. When Ansett fell on 14 September 2001 the then Commonwealth Government chose not to bail it out, effectively removing an active competitor from the

market. Yes, that competitor was trading insolvent or had gone into liquidation, but by not looking at a bailout and potentially a government-owned source or portion of that, Alice Springs was left with one major airline, being Qantas.

Qantas is a good trusted airline. I know, and probably the Member for Port Darwin does from travelling to try to attract more airlines, that when you see the red kangaroo in an international airport, you feel like you are at home. It is nostalgic; you love that airline because that is home. You are guaranteed safety on Qantas. However, we need to make sure that airfares are more competitive to enable Territorians to get on that red kangaroo for a holiday.

We had Bonza, Tiger and Jetstar. We still have Virgin in Alice Springs, but it does not offer the regular routes that it used to. It is not a seasonal issue anymore. From Alice Springs you cannot fly direct to Melbourne every day as you could have done 20 years ago. Qantas offers only a four-day-a-week flight to Melbourne. To fly out of Alice Springs to Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane or Perth costs on average anywhere between $500 and $1,000, depending on when you book and whether there is a sale. That is difficult for families, as we heard from members of this parliament, particularly if you have to go at the last minute.

We need to work on that. Before we even have those conversations about attracting additional airlines—Madam Speaker, as you and the Members for Braitling, Namatjira and Barkly would know—it is important that we do everything we can to make sure the airlines do not follow the path of giving us the crusty planes. Twenty years ago the planes coming in and out of Alice Springs were good quality and you had a good inflight meal and great service, but over time all the airlines have given Alice Springs the crusty planes. We are left with planes that are getting beyond the end of their lives and poor old Alice Springs, the poor cousin, is always left with, ‘This one will do for you’. I encourage all of us to be active in supporting and rallying behind this to ensure that good infrastructure comes to Alice Springs.

Qantas is Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services. Hudson Fysh Avenue is named after one of the founders of Qantas. In 2019 we put an investment on the table to try to attract Qantas’ second pilot training centre to Alice Springs because we wanted to attract people to Alice Springs and the Territory in general. I feel that Qantas should invest more in the Northern Territory and Central Australia because we are an iconic place.

There used to be a direct flight with Qantas from Alice Springs to Uluru. That was fantastic because people could come for the magic of the Rock; they could meet the local Anangu people, see and hear Uluru and then get on a plane and come to Alice Springs, spend their money in our local economy and see our beautiful and magical sites before getting on another plane to go wherever they wanted. That Alice Springs–Uluru flight was stopped. Uluru is an amazing place—it is part of my electorate, and I love it—but Qantas started flying direct to Uluru, which came at the price of flights to Alice Springs, and services started to be wound back.

Getting more airlines into the Territory is a complex job. The Member for Namatjira spoke about that earlier, and I agree with him. It is also about taxes and what airports are charging planes to land in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin. We need to have these conversations and look into this. There is important work going on.

I acknowledge that the milk run was re-established by a previous CLP government. The Member for Araluen may have been a part of that government. We were fortunate enough to continue that funding in government, and this government has continued it too. It is great because the Members for Katherine, Barkly and Arnhem sometimes have to go on the milk run. It is an important connector to make sure that intra-Territory travel is effective.

I hope that one day larger commercial planes will be able to land in Katherine because it has so much on offer. It is a great town and a beautiful place. There are amazing natural sites for people to visit.

We can all agree to work on and champion this together because it is important. It is a fine balancing act.

When more flights are on offer there are more people and more life in our communities. One of the biggest things people who come to the Territory struggle with is being so far from their home and family. Airfares make people consider whether they will stay because it is so expensive to get out of the Territory.

There are probably a few people in parliament who would remember that many years ago the public service used to offer one flight a year for people to get in and out of the Territory as part of the retention policy of the day. That has obviously changed. The population is slowly growing, but we should keep an open mind and

consider these sorts of initiatives when discussing aviation. A lot of work can and should be done to attract people.

The Territory has amazing tourism products; we are so lucky with our natural resources. How do we market that? I spoke with the Member for Port Darwin some time ago about seasonal flights and when it is not peak tourism season. Of course it is hard to get flights in the middle of summer in Central Australia, but in the busy tourism season, it is great to see planes filled with people coming to the Northern Territory.

I congratulate and thank the Member for Daly for bringing on the motion. I thank every member from every side of politics who has spoken about this. Everyone has a unique story about airlines and airfares.

The real issue is that there is a problem with the aviation system, structures and market in this country when it is cheaper to fly from Sydney to Los Angeles than it is to fly from Sydney to Alice Springs. We need to recognise that the market has failed the people in Alice Springs. What will the future look like? We need to make sure that we will not be in the position that it is ridiculously expensive for people to visit us or for us to get out of the Territory to visit our family, attend medical appointments and so forth.

The real killer is airfares. The poor old Territorian pays the price and cannot hop out of the Territory for a period or get their family here. My in-laws visited last May when I got married. For a family of four it was $7,000 return to get to Alice Springs to go home. That was for a short trip. When airfares are more expensive than the trip itself, you have to ask whether the system is working. No, it is not. What do we do? I do not have the answer, but we could come up with the solution together, not just in this place but also with the Commonwealth.

I pick up on your points, Madam Speaker, in your contribution, which was incredibly valuable. We need to look at the findings from the inquiry being undertaken. Hopefully it will not be a wasted inquiry and the recommendations will be real and meaningful. I hope that this entire parliament can get behind the inquiry's recommendations. If we have to do a remonstrance and go to Canberra to lobby for that, I am happy to do it. If I have to lobby the Commonwealth, I am happy to do it. If I have to continue to lobby the CLP for investment in airlines, I am happy to do that. We all need to look at what we can do to get more airlines to the Territory and make sure the airfares are affordable.

I acknowledge that there are great cabin crews across the Territory. They always greet the Central Australian members with a huge smile when we get on the plane. They know us by our first names—'G'day, Bill, Josh, Robyn, Chansey, Steve'. They know our families and ask us how we are doing. I am not having a go at them; I am just saying that we need to talk have the conversations.

It is incredibly disappointing when hardworking Territorians see the amount of money that airlines make every year, yet they still have to pay astronomical prices to visit their loved ones.

Am I hopeful that another entity will come to the Territory? Absolutely. I would love to see that. Anything we can do through Minister Cahill to attract Qantas to have facilities here would be great. It is a shame we did not get the pilot training centre. I think it ended up in Mackay.

We have tried to get flights from Darwin to China, Singapore and all these places. It is important to provide us with those opportunities, but we need to have those hard conversations.

This is an important motion. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. It is worthwhile for us to follow the journey of the federal inquiry and hear what people have to say. We want more airlines. Good luck to the CLP. Hopefully you can bring new airlines to the Territory. I will give you a big clap if you can do that and we can keep them in the Territory.

I do not know about my Central Australian colleagues, but I was excited when Bonza came to Alice Springs. I bought a ticket to fly and then I got a message that Bonza was not flying anymore. I feel sorry for all the effort that the then mayor, Matt Paterson, put into it, being on the tarmac wearing his budgie smugglers for Bonza, which did not last more than five minutes in Alice Springs—poor bugger.

We want more airlines coming to the Centre. It is great having airlines come in and out of Darwin, but do not forget that Alice Springs is the land of magic and has so much to showcase. If we can get more flights there it would be amazing. Fun fact: Alice Springs Airport is the largest airport by landmass in Australia, and I think it is in the top 100 worldwide, so it has plenty of land to build more runways and facilities.

Fortunately, we had the Asia-Pacific air storage during COVID, and it was impressive for kids to see those amazing huge jet planes.

Many kids never get to fly because it is so expensive. I remember taking a delegation of community mob—my family—to Canberra. They were in their twenties and had never been on a plane because they could not afford it. Airfares are a real thing in the Territory. I love our family and friends on the east coast, but they have no idea what they are talking about when they mention outrageously high prices for flights; we do. We need to make sure that every kid has the opportunity to fly on a plane to visit family, see new places and have experiences. Whether it is for a school excursion or family holiday, that can only be achieved if we put pressure on the airlines to reduce airfares.

In parliament a couple of weeks ago we spoke about China holding onto aviation fuel, which sent people globally into a fuel frenzy. We need to have conversations about that; maybe it is about aviation storage so that we do not have those issues in the future.

There were worthwhile contributions by all members; thank you. Let us keep an eye on these airfares.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I do not think I have ever said this: maybe the Member for Gwoja and I can be on a unity ticket because we are in agreeance on this one topic.

Madam SPEAKER: Wonders will never cease.

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely right, Madam Speaker.

I used to speak about this with the former Chair or boss of the Alice Springs Airport, Mr Dave Batic. He was an incredible man who cared about Alice Springs. It was such an important thing. The head of our airport in Alice Springs, who was involved in Rotary and community groups, like many people in our town felt the impact when Ayers Rock Airport opened and we lost 225,000 visitors a year to our beautiful town of Alice Springs.

I will speak on the airfares and air connectivity motion moved by the Member for Daly because it is such an important part of living in Central Australia and across the Northern Territory, as we have heard from other members this evening.

I will go back in time and speak about the history of Ayers Rock Airport and the impact it had on my home town of Alice Springs. Melanka Backpackers in Alice Springs was often chockers. I am fortunate enough, and I feel like I am old enough, to say that I remember going to Melanka. You used to literally stick to the floors when you went in there. It was not in any way, shape or form the flashiest place in Alice Springs, but that accommodation facility catered to a section of the community who wanted to come to Alice Springs on what was then cheaper airfares and stay in low-cost accommodation. Those people could spend their money on bus tours to Ayers Rock, on going to the West MacDonnell Ranges and on businesses in Alice Springs. It was a wonderful time in our town's history when you felt as though tourism in our town was pumping.

There is an old saying our town that sometimes on a Sunday afternoon you could fire a cannon down the Todd Mall and you would not hit a person. It is such a shame that people feel that way. We want to get Alice Springs humming in the way it used to, and air connectivity is a huge part of that.

The Finocchiaro CLP government and I have been trying to encourage members of our community—unfortunately, I always argue with my friends about this—not to drive five hours to Ayers Rock Airport to get a cheap fare to the east coast. Alice Springs locals do that, and I plead with them not to because they are essentially adding to the issues our town faces. The more people who drive all the way to Ayers Rock to get a cheap flight, the more flights airlines will put on for Ayers Rock and the fewer they will put on for Alice Springs. We have been seeing this issue for a long time.

The Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation recently put up Ayers Rock Airport and the Yulara resort for sale, and there is now a new owner. There was a missed opportunity. I have spoken with many federal counterparts about this. What we needed in Central Australia was to ensure as many flights as possible came into Alice Springs, not to the Rock. Then there would be connectivity and charter flights between Ayers Rock and Alice Springs.

Ayers Rock is one of the seven natural wonders of the world. I always have this argument with people, no matter where I travel. When I was fortunate on my honeymoon to go to Italy, I did not fly to Venice. I had to fly to Rome and I got on a little motorcycle and made my way up to Venice, which is one of the places you head to when you are in Italy.

Ms Uibo: You could have gone on your pushbike.

Mr BURGOYNE: I pick up on the interjection from the Leader of the Opposition. Absolutely I wish I had a pushbike to get there, but I was on two wheels—on a motorcycle.

There are many places around the world that you cannot fly to directly, but people will travel to get to them. Ayers Rock is one of those places. I know those opposite will agree that it is a special place. I am not big on airy-fairy mumbo jumbo, but when you travel to Ayers Rock (Uluru) and Kata Tjuta, there is something special in the air. I cannot explain it, but every time I travel there—I had the privilege of living and working in Mutitjulu for six months, building homes and wiring up houses as an electrician—there is something special about it. Therefore, I have confidence that even if they had to fly to little old Alice Springs and perhaps stay the night before getting a connecting flight to Ayers Rock, people would do it because of how special that place is. They would then realise how special Central Australia and all that we have to offer are.

I will continue to advocate to everyone who is willing to listen that we would much rather see benefit for 28,000 to 30,000 people in Alice Springs, and the broader Central Australian population of probably up to 50,000 people, from flights being directed through Alice Springs, as opposed to what is happening. With all the flights going to Ayers Rock, people are bypassing the other incredible areas in Central Australia.

It is no different from Darwin. People cannot fly directly to Litchfield, but they can fly to Darwin and stay at the hotels. I see it every morning as I am getting around at about 5 am and 6 am. They are getting on a bus for a Litchfield tour to see all the wonderful waterfalls.

I have been working with my Cabinet colleagues to see what levers we can pull to say, ‘Let us stop trying to benefit 200 people who might happen to live at the Rock. There are 50,000 who live in Central Australia or call Alice Springs home. People should travel through Alice Springs.’ There is more we can do with this, and I will continue to advocate strongly as a member of Cabinet and a resident of Alice Springs.

I was glad that the Member for Gwoja mentioned the milk run. It is a difficult run. Let us not beat around the bush: it receives government subsidies to operate, and without that subsidy it would be a question of whether the airlines would continue to run it. I thank the Treasurer, who I know has worked exceptionally hard to ensure that continues to operate.

Regional flights is a difficult space. The Members for Katherine and Barkly need to get to places in a timely manner. Many members who call Darwin home may not realise that just to come to parliament, the Member for Barkly spends the day driving to Alice Springs to catch a flight that then takes another however many hours to get here. It is the same on the way back. I feel fortunate that I live in Alice Springs where there are usually daily flights to Darwin, although that has become difficult with some flight cancellations. This means that instead of seeing my family on a Sunday night, I have to fly to Darwin on a Sunday evening. I miss out on Sunday night dinner because we have to be in Darwin for meetings and everything else that happens on a Monday. That is just life, and many other people are impacted far more than I am.

I was so glad to hear the Member for Gwoja speak about Qantas. I do not often speak about agreeing so much with the Member for Gwoja. Many people in Australia would not even realise that Qantas stands for Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services. Its history and roots are in this place. I can only imagine and hope Qantas understands the importance of that. I would almost say Qantas needs to understand that by having ‘Northern Territory’ in its name, it has to honour that history and ensure those living in the Northern Territory are not treated like second-class citizens and are afforded the same rights as those on the east coast with flights available at a decent rate to ensure we can get to where we need to go. That is important and often overlooked. I am sure that Qantas is proud of its history, but we must not let it forget. When I speak to representatives from Qantas, I always remind them of their heritage and try to get the best deal for the Northern Territory.

This motion goes to something that is often not spoken about. It calls on the government to address high airfares, but a lot is being done to address high airfares.

The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of the Northern Territory, which I give a big shout-out to this evening, has done a huge amount of work over a long time, lobbying the government for support. As soon as this conversation came up, I started looking on government websites for information about the distance education allowance. It is available for children who live in different zones based on distance from a primary school or education base, being zero to 150 kilometres; 151 to 250 kilometres; and 250-plus kilometres. There are student assistance scheme payment amounts that help students get to school. These families are the everyday Territorians we have been speaking about for the last two weeks. The distance education allowance starts at $1,280 if you live closer in zone 1 and the rates go all the way up to a boarding allowance when students having to travel interstate can receive up to $4,700 to assist with flights. The Isolated Children’s

Parents' Association fought for many years to ensure their children are not negatively impacted by living so far from major areas. The government continues to support them through these assistance schemes.

It is not often spoken about, so I thank the Member for Daly for bringing on this motion. It is not often I thank the Member for Daly, but I thank him because this is important. The Member for Daly, having many electors living in regional and remote areas, would understand. I cannot imagine how difficult it would be to get all the way in to travel to the east coast of Australia from Nauiyu and other areas that are often impacted by flooding.

The Member for Gwoja mentioned the exemplary service we receive on planes. The planes are a bit old and tired. A lot of people may not realise that they used to have 'Alliance' written on them; when Qantas bought a large share of Alliance, it essentially stickered over the old Alliance badge, put a Qantas one on there and refurbished some of the seating inside. They are old Alliance planes. I believe we predominantly fly on Embraer 100s between Alice Springs and Darwin. They are older planes, but they get us to where we need to go. There are lots of things that do not always work on them appropriately. It is important that we continue to strongly advocate to Qantas that we deserve to have newer planes. That will cut down on costs because the planes will use less fuel, enabling us to have cheaper airfares.

As the Member for Gwoja pointed out, the flight attendants work their backsides off. I thank Zalia, Beth, Jenny, Sandra and Sahara. They know us by our first names, ask after our families and look after us every time we fly. Recently they have been finding it difficult to get people to come to Darwin and take up those flight attendant jobs. I thank the hostesses and hosties from Queensland who have been covering shifts. I always notice them because they are a new face, and I ask them how long they are in Darwin for. They leave their families to come here to ensure we have that level of service. I can tell you now that I have had it happen to me. If there are too many people crook who would be working on that day, the flight does not go. That has happened in the past. They call up as many people as they can, but at the end of the day if no-one is available, that flight does not go. I thank all the incredible air hostesses who are constantly working between Alice and Darwin and the people who are often covering.

I lend my support for continuing advocacy to address high airfares. I support remote and regional Territorians, like those who are part of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) and who have advocated over a long period to get schemes to support their students to travel to school, whether it be in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin or interstate, should they choose—and that is the important thing. I will be honest: I wish that every Territorian student attended a boarding school in the Territory, but I understand that some families have a history of children travelling interstate to attend school and we need to support them to make the best decisions for their children as they see fit.

Thank you, Member for Daly. Thank you to all the other people, like the Treasurer, who contributed to this conversation that, once again, puts airfares at the front of everyone's mind.

I am frustrated and sick and tired of seeing small carriers come to the Territory that cannot make it work and then leave. We need to look at how we can get additional bums on seats into Alice Springs and Darwin because, at the end of the day, it is supply and demand. If we can increase the amount of demand coming into these areas, we will see an uplift in supply and then those planes will be fuller more of the time, which means the airlines will make more money and can bring down the cost. While they are flying often at a 75% or lower capacity, we will continue to see high airfares.

I will continue to do everything I can. Recently the Northern Territory Government supported the Tasmanian Walking Company to set up at Ayers Rock. That will bring more people into the Territory which is great, but instead of having them fly to the Rock directly, let us work—we are already doing as much as we can through the Tourism minister—to drive additional people to the Larapinta Trail. The more offerings we have, the more tourists will take up these opportunities. They will fly to the Territory and hopefully drive down airfares.

We will continue to increase the number of reasons for people to travel to the Territory to enjoy this beautiful place so that those who live here every day can benefit from lower airfares.

Thank you for allowing me to contribute to this and thank you to those from the other side for bringing it to the Assembly. I look forward to hearing the wrap-up speech and everything else we can do to continue to drive airfares lower.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am having a day of winging it when it comes to speeches. I had zero interest in speaking on this on the basis that, honestly, I do not know enough about it. I know that we do not have competitive airline pricing, and it is a massive economic problem. I can talk about how it affects our

population prospects until the cows come home. I got up to speak because, at the risk of being too kumbaya about it all, I am blown away by what I just heard across the Chamber—maybe not so much from the Member for Daly; that was a bit disappointing, but putting that to one side—because after the general flinging of mud to start with, we have moved onto something seriously important that maybe we can just grasp.

As I said, I am winging it today. Madam Speaker, I regret not making a submission to that same inquiry. I saw it at the time and thought, 'You came to this parliament with the capacity to make an economic contribution, and they are the things to do'. I already spend so much time prosecuting big-ticket arguments like that; it comes at a cost. It means time that I am not out there pounding the pavement in my electorate as well. I have tried to maintain a balance, but this is one that I let go through to the keeper. I thought, 'You know what'—I suspect a bit like yourself, Madam Speaker—'it will possibly be a damp squib and they will, frankly, do nothing interesting with that inquiry'. However, it was a real opportunity, and I give credit to you, Madam Speaker, and the Leader of the Opposition and the minister for making submissions to that inquiry.

I appreciated your contribution and what I heard from the others substantively about this, being things that I know about roughly in the ballpark. We know about all the failed airlines, the attempts to subsidise staff, the mayor in budgie smugglers and Bonza going bust. We have heard and seen this all before, but I could not believe the richness of what I just heard about the subject matter detail on this topic.

I find it genuinely remarkable that we have been unable to come up with a coordinated policy position. The remonstrance is not the worst idea in the world, but if we are to go and bang on the doors, maybe we should go with something a little more coordinated. The unity ticket today—goodness me. Pretty much all of what the Member for Gwoja said sounded bang on to me. The subject matter expertise was coming from all of you from Central Australia in particular.

It is pertinent. It is clear that Central Australia is economically collapsing and suffering and has not been looked after. It is actually costing the Northern Territory; there is no doubt about that. It is not just about banging on about your electorate; it is a serious problem for the whole Territory.

Why did I get up? What do I have to offer? I do not have a silver bullet. I wish I had thought about this properly and could say, 'Here are 10 policy options for silver bullets that we might pursue'. I have a suggestion in earnest for everyone in this House: it would appear that the same common public servant pool that we leverage from, the same idea makers in this space that we keep rely on in good faith, have only been able to get us so far on this one.

Aside from a little of the characteristic mudslinging about who spent what where and went to where on what fuel card and all that sort of stuff—put that to one side for a second and put on your serious thinking hat—this feels like one issue we could have a serious conversation about, and not just performatively or in parliament necessarily. This could be a standalone issue that we could have a real policy conversation about. Almost nothing happens in this parliament—it happens in other parliaments, sometimes in committees but also independently of that—when we find a genuine issue that people care enough about across party lines and are willing to put down tools on. We could have a serious think about how to put out a coordinated policy position.

It would appear that despite all our best efforts—we are making good efforts; I do not think Minister Cahill has done anything wrong in this space—we are still being screwed by the same bigger bullies and cycles and airline metrics that previous governments were as well. We all know that throwing infinite amounts of money at the problem will not fix it. We can dispense with that idea because we know that we will just get another flaky airline for god knows how long. Independent of the stuff that is happening at a government level, why can this not be an issue we have a serious policy conversation about?

In all the conversations we have had, all this stuff has been conflated in terms of real-world data, economic data, actors and stakeholders and policy approaches. We heard some wildcard solutions. I had not heard about the Qantas training centre option in Alice in the past. I have no idea what that involved or whether that is complete …

Ms Uibo: We came down to the last two.

Dr RAHMAN: I freely confess I did not know anything about it. I do not know whether it is a bonkers idea.

Can you all imagine for a fraction of a second what the Northern Territory populace would think of all 25 of us in this place if we managed to do one thing right on this issue? If we managed to find a way, somehow in a coordinated lobby and policy effort—having put together a forum to say, 'We seriously agree that this is

one issue we have all had a crack at and keep getting bullied by bigger players in the market, whether they are commercial or government players or federal government indifference to our plight', this is one issue we could rally on and create a structure around.

This is an out-and-out economic policy challenge. As I was listening, I wondered whether I could figure out how to crack this in 30 minutes or less. Then I thought, 'Don't be stupid. People have spent a long time thinking about this.' However, what people have not spent a long time doing is thinking about it together, in the same room with the same suite of information. There was so much agreement today, and most of what we heard was not defeatist. It was not a case of thinking this is too hard or impossible.

My gut instinct when I saw this motion was that it is a nice idea to have a bleat about this, but it is too hard. This is about straight-up economics—numbers, the price of fuel and passenger loads. A thin market aviation crisis problem is how it would be framed in economic parlance. Money will play a part in addressing this problem, but it requires a coordinated policy solution and more political capital than any one of us in this place has individually. Even when you have a thumping majority, like the Gunner government had, it could not parlay that into sufficient levels of cooperation and a durable policy solution. I have to figure that with all the conversations on energy resilience, security, transport, travel, aviation and making social cohesion a priority—frankly speaking, all the terrible press Alice has gotten, some unfairly over the last few years—this would have to be a smart policy challenge for us.

I have been lucky to participate in a couple of forums where, behind the scenes, people try to solve Australia's big problems and put down their weapons. They leave their weapons at the door, check their holsters and say, 'All right, we will take one day, guided by facilitators who have an idea of what they are talking about in this space, to help us troubleshoot a problem'. I have been in the rooms where that happens. It is amazing what can come out, but it cannot happen unless everybody agrees on terms. It is a bit like watching one of those *Braveheart*-like movies where all the warring clans have to come together and somehow leave all their pickaxes, swords and whatnot at the gate. Seriously, Member for Drysdale, you will have to leave your Viking helmet, pickaxe and sword at the gate for us to do this, and Member for Daly, you will have to do the same.

There is something significant here for you to all think about. I note that today marks the second instance of us resuscitating having parliamentary dinners under the auspices of the Speaker and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association—I think? Or not so much; sorry, I spoke out of turn. It is an opportunity for us to break bread together.

For a long time, for those listening at home who may be confused—I digress slightly—there was a time when this parliament, like every other parliament in Australia, had a members' dining room. The good thing about that is it forces all parliamentarians, whether on the same team or not, to break bread, have a chat and basically put down their weapons on their way in the door and talk about something. Here is the rub: in other parliaments across the country when people have to do that, a lot of the time it is pretty awkward at first, because you think, 'I hate that guy. What will I talk about with him?' However, you also think, 'That fish looks pretty good. I kind of fancy dinner.'

Here is my only policy suggestion for how to fix the airline crisis. I put it to anyone in this room who might be popping up for dinner tonight, our second of these events, to talk about airline connectivity with any of your peers. I will have a conversation with anybody who wants to talk about airline connectivity and how to lower prices. I will put down my tools and promise to sling no mud. I would like to talk about the economics of air connectivity with somebody tonight, because I cannot believe how little hostility there was, other than the initial predictable hostility. Having put that to one side, we are at a point where everybody seems to want to provide cheaper airfares because it might help reinvigorate economic prospects in the Centre and help skilled workers in Darwin to stick around longer in electorates like Nightcliff. It might result in a more sustainable workforce across lots of sectors, including the ones that we care about and are prioritising, like tourism—all of them, for that matter.

I was thinking through all the tools I had been taught for how to solve a policy problem. It starts by putting it all out there so that everyone has the same set of information. This issue is unique compared with other things that we talk about because for those things there are real winners and losers if you get to crack the problem. With this, everybody has tried hard with different things, but it has not gone the way we hoped it would go. I do not necessarily think that needs to be the case in perpetuity.

We seem to agree on a few common things. First of all, we are not the problem. That is one of the first things we seemed to agree on in everything I heard. The problem is airlines, economics, the federal government not giving two hoots about doing much in this space and multiple inquiries that pay lip-service on this issue. At least we have common ground to work with on this issue.

Think laterally for a second: what if this was the one thing we made serious headway on? We can do it on the basis of saying, 'Enough is enough. For all intents and purposes, we are doing a policy remonstrance. We are not throwing a tantrum; we had a good sit-down together and worked out that this parliament in order to be self-sustaining, this polity in order to emancipate itself and this place in order to have sustainable population and economic growth need better connectivity. We cannot do it because you are prohibiting us from doing so, and this is how we suggest to do it.' If we put the ball back in the court of the people who are the big baddies in this conversation, maybe we have a fighting chance of resolving some aspects of it.

It is easy to look at where this has failed time and again. I wish I had a sensible silver-bullet solution, but no-one does; we know that. If you think about the stakeholders in this space, surely by now the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure—and whoever is in there recycling this stuff—the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations or their predecessors have done this to death. Surely, they could use new stimulus in this space. I presume that every minister comes into this, one after the other, saying, 'Help me fix this problem', and the same handful of people are left with intractable impossible problems to fix. It would appear that we have a better shot at lobbying the federal government and the major players in the market space on this than those people or any single government would have.

I have nothing but good things to say about the on-ground service of people in the airline industry and the people who know our names when we go to check-in counters; we cannot take it out on them. Likewise, the people who try their hardest through the downstream side of it—tourism, marketing, airport development corporations and whoever else—are banging the drum to try to say that this is a place to visit.

It would appear that this is a well-identified policy challenge that everyone in this room seems to have agreed upon. Subsidies for providers alone have not done it; cabotage is an ongoing discussion which we can never seem to resolve; and there are fiscal constraints and issues about the infrastructure associated with the airport and the planes.

There is a policy problem-solving window. I got up because I did not want this to die on the notice paper until we choose to talk about it next time there is another airline collapse or we all get frustrated again because people have massively kicked off because—I do not know—whatever new externality basically screws the Northern Territory on connectivity, development or your relatives being able to visit. It does not seem fair.

I read yesterday from Sir David Attenborough's 1963 book that he wrote about the Northern Territory. Again, literally page 1 of that is him talking about this place being an airline pitstop and hub, and that is why it matters and people know it is here. That is built into our thinking on this place. In fact, now that I think about it, in COVID times, I could not believe that for the first time in my life I got a direct flight from London to Darwin. It was like all my Christmases came at once when I finally managed to get back in the country. It was London to Darwin direct, which was not a thing I thought would ever happen. Maybe it stopped in Singapore; I cannot remember. I do not think it did; I think it was direct.

The point is that this should, geographically speaking, be a proper airline pivot point. Alice Springs is the same. All that land is associated with Alice Springs Airport because both these places are meant to be pivot points for air travel in this country. Somewhere along the way, again probably with economic policy choices we made, we definitely dropped the ball. I do not know the full ins and outs of it, but there was a point when it was us or Cairns, and it became Cairns.

That is not set in stone or forever; we could probably still turn that around. I wonder what it would take in terms of serendipity and what we would have to cross over with, whether it would be major events, times of the year, specific market players or going back to this inquiry and saying, 'We have a follow-up. We see your submissions and your recommendations and find them to be unsatisfactory. Here is our counteroffer because we had a broader think about it and now we can see a way forward that is different.'

I am winging it. Apologies to anyone who is not enjoying it. I got up because I was encouraged by the fact that we seem to agree on wanting to solve a problem; nobody can seem to figure out how to solve it; and we can probably talk about it over dinner without all trying to kill one another and potentially come up with something. I learned a lot today about the airline policy problem that I did not know before, and that was by hearing about it from all of you as colleagues. I want to continue the conversation. It is an open offer: if anyone wants to talk about it with me, I would like to have a crack at this as a policy challenge because it is one thing we could work on without playing political games, for the betterment of everyone in the Northern Territory.

I thank the Member for Daly for bringing the motion to the Assembly. It has been useful for us to discuss it.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, last year when I was on the voluntary assisted dying committee with the Member for Daly we took charter flights all over the Territory.

Mr Young: Do not talk about that.

Mr KERLE: It was just that one flight where we nearly died. I will not mention the provider, but the pilot did an amazing job and saved our lives and got us back on the ground. The Member for Daly got off and said he was a bit worried to go with that provider because it has a bit of a funny record. We were flying along when the Member for Wanguri tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the engine. Oil was coming out everywhere. I tapped the pilot on the shoulder and pointed it out. The pilot was an absolute trooper. He did not say anything; he just quietly turned around, got on the radio and did all the things the pilots have to do appropriately at that time.

While we were doing that inquiry we had a look at the cost of flying to communities. It is not often I agree with those on the other side, but the price to fly to some communities is eye-watering. If you live there and want to get in and out of town, it is very expensive. The only other option is to drive. You have hundreds and hundreds of kilometres to travel, usually on dirt roads and paying exorbitant amounts of money for fuel.

That is a difficult economic problem to crack, given supply and demand. A rising tide lifts all boats. Ideally as the economy develops, more economic opportunities will make themselves known in communities and on country there will be more traffic, opportunities and charter companies and, ideally, regular commercial flights.

I flew to Galiwinku many years ago to visit a friend and his family. We took the skinny plane—or the cigar plane as they called it—from Darwin to Maningrida and then took a little Cessna charter from Maningrida to Galiwinku. I do not normally get motion sickness, but I got pretty close to it on that one. The plane was jumping up and down quite a bit.

As economic development moves forward and there are more opportunities, if there is regular commercial aviation to larger regional hubs on country, that will be good for tourism development and the locals.

Most of us in this House take advantage of commercial airfares to go down south, visit our loved ones and travel for work. A few of us have had to go to Melbourne for various parliamentary business over this term.

I remember being a child during the pilot strike. I think it was Ansett. The pilots decided they did not want to fly, so the government of the day allowed Singapore Airlines in to make up the difference. My mum was a teacher, so she used to get the biennial airfares. We would fly down to visit the grandparents. I got a little Singapore Airlines lapel pin, which unfortunately has been lost to the mists of time. The pilots let me go up the front in the cabin. It is important.

While I am on my feet, I honour someone who recently flew out of Darwin. The community engagement manager of Palmerston City Council has left. He had an opportunity at the Mount Isa Council, so he finished his last shift Friday afternoon and flew out Saturday lunchtime. Matthew McNamara, I thank you for the hard you did in your time at council. When I first met you I did not appreciate the sort of man you were, but over time you have definitely proven yourself. The fact that after your last day at work, you stayed until 11 pm coordinating, working with security and making sure all the patrons at the Palmerston Markets were safe, shows that you are a true man of integrity and character. You go above and beyond, and Palmerston is less for losing you. I hope you can come back one day, perhaps in another role at a higher level in Palmerston, because we appreciate everything you have done. We look forward to having you back.

As the economy develops, we hope that the price of airfares will come down. It would be great if old POTUS would stop causing all this global instability, driving up the price of fuel. It would be good to address the high cost of airfares, and developing the economy and growing the Territory is a great way to get there.

Mr YOUNG (Daly)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank everybody who spoke on this important GBD motion regarding airfares and air connectivity. It impacts all of us in some way or another, whether directly or indirectly. Overall, we agree that airfares in the Northern Territory are quite high.

I also thank everybody who put in a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into regional airfares. The Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of our team, put in a submission to ensure the commission knows where we stand as an opposition, ensuring that our voices and Territorians' voices are heard in this inquiry. We also encourage the inquiry to come to the Northern Territory to Darwin and Alice Springs to ensure that the commission members hear directly from Territorians so that they understand the cost associated with flying in the Northern Territory. Whether people fly from Darwin to Wadeye, Darwin to Nhulunbuy, Darwin to

Groote, Darwin to Tennant Creek or Darwin to Alice Springs, it costs a lot of money. Many families may be unable to afford to take their kids on holiday or visit friends and family members interstate or overseas.

I also thank the Member for Araluen for her submission to the federal government's inquiry and Minister Cahill for her submission.

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: I apologise for saying her name wrong. I thank the Member for Goyder for correcting me on that. I like to get people's names correct, so if I am saying someone's name wrong, please correct me; I will not take it personally. I have humility when it comes to saying people's names.

It is important for all of us to put submissions into the regional airfares inquiry to ensure that all voices, no matter where we sit on the political fence, are heard and will come out in the report. It will also put pressure on the federal government to come to the Northern Territory to hear directly from all our elected members and our constituents who may like to front the inquiry.

I thank all who spoke. I picked up that the Member for Fong Lim mentioned he was not going to speak this evening. After hearing everybody's contributions, it is encouraging that he felt the will to speak on this important motion to look at different ways we can reduce the cost of living, set policies and take a coordinated approach across the Chamber. I agree that one way to do that potentially is by setting up a select committee to look at how we can have cheaper airfares in the Northern Territory.

On that, I seek leave to amend the motion by omitting all words after 'that' and inserting the following words:

'this Assembly establishes a select committee to inquire into and report on the issue of airfares and air connectivity for Territorians, including the affordability, reliability and accessibility of air services across the Northern Territory.

'The committee is to comprise five members, being: three government members; one opposition member; and one crossbench member.

'The committee is to report to this Assembly by 22 October 2026.'

Leave not granted.

Mr YOUNG: What a shame. Tonight a member of the CLP government came up with a solution, to set up a select committee to take a bipartisan approach, which we had all agreed on. I felt that most people in this Chamber were speaking in a bipartisan way about looking at how we can lower airfares. I thought that putting forward a motion would be a way that everyone could agree, including the Member for Drysdale. I would have thought that members of this government would agree that airfares and air connectivity are an issue in the Northern Territory. We have all spoken about it.

I appreciated the Member for Fong Lim's contribution to the motion. He came up with a way to look at how we, as a Northern Territory parliament, can work together. The Member for Fong Lim always advocates for good governance and good practice in the Northern Territory.

I went with him and the Member for Wanguri to Melbourne for the legal and constitutional affairs conference, where we heard from all jurisdictions across Australia and New Zealand, looking at better practices and governance systems for our parliamentary systems and how we can establish better committees. In particular, one thing we spoke about a lot in Melbourne was how we can work together.

This was a practical solution that I agreed with the CLP Member for Fong Lim on. We could set up a select committee to look at airfares and air connectivity, yet his own government members shut it down. What a shame that is for the families having to pay high airfares across the Northern Territory and to every one of your constituents. To come in here and say that you care about Territorians and lowering the cost of airfares for Territorians—we have just seen every member of the CLP government bluffing their own constituents, because they do not care. They could have agreed that this committee could look at ways to work together across the Chamber to reduce airfares in the Northern Territory.

There is silence from those opposite, because they have been shamed and caught out that they do not care about lowering the cost of airfares for Territorians and their own constituents. They are making a mockery of

this place when they shut down a wonderful idea to establish a committee for us to work together to look at lowering airfares and at air connectivity in the Northern Territory. It is a shame on every CLP member.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION
Central Australian Economy

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that this Assembly calls on the Finocchiaro CLP government to work with the community and businesses of Alice Springs to develop a strong economic vision for the town to inspire and generate business confidence and certainty.

Noting there was criticism earlier about the timing of the previous motion, but how critical and still relevant, almost a year later, is this motion? We kept it on the notice paper, for the Member for Goyder's benefit, to say that this is still as relevant this year as it was when we placed it on the notice paper last year. The CLP government released its second budget last week and there is still no economic plan, no vision and no focus on delivery to grow the Territory economy. It is relevant and still pertinent to discuss this motion, put it to the Assembly and hopefully hear from CLP members about whether they have a vision for Central Australia and its economy. I doubt it because this was the CLP government's second chance to show Territorians that it is serious about the economy and will not leave behind our important regions, particularly Central Australia.

Sometimes we talk about Top Enders and Central Australians as though we are two different species, but we are all one Territory; we know that. We focused our analysis of the budget this year to be constructive and say that this is the opportunity for the government to lead on the economy. The CLP promised Territorians it would do that, and nearly two years later we are yet to see it done.

We talk about places that are special in the Territory like Alice Springs, the beating heart of the country. Alice Springs can claim the title, 'The Heart of the Country'. The budget delivered last week did not have a great infrastructure story for Central Australia. I would have loved to take this motion off the notice paper, but, unfortunately, it is still as relevant now as it was after the CLP's first budget. Central Australians are now being tasked by the CLP government to pick up the pieces and try to put together a tiny smattering of measures that will look like a economic growth strategy, but they have been asked to do it on their own because the CLP has not been in a position to lead on this.

It is probably even more disappointing—I was going to say embarrassing, but given the goodwill in the Chamber today I changed my wording and narrative—that the person who is leading the CLP's budget, the Treasurer, has let down his home town of Alice Springs and his home region of Central Australia by not having a master plan or an economic plan for Central Australia.

The government's budget papers show delays, the $341m opportunity that has been missed and the reduction of infrastructure out of everything that has been allocated. This is hitting Central Australians tough. Recently I spent a week there. The civil construction companies and businesses are worried. I sat across from quite a few who were worried that the pipeline of works is drying up. That is in not just Central Australia but also the rest of the Territory; however, Central Australia is the focus of this motion.

Roads, infrastructure and housing projects keep our small and medium businesses afloat and provide economic growth. These opportunities have all been sorely missed in the CLP's second budget. The fact that the majority of seats in Central Australia are held by CLP members makes it all the more disappointing. You can understand that the CLP does not want to fund things that are in Labor-held seats—we saw that clearly in last year's and this year's budget—because it is a malicious small-minded government, but you would expect to see something for Central Australia and Alice Springs to support the Treasurer's and the Member for Braitling's home town. We could have seen the things we love across the Territory supporting regional hubs, like Alice Springs, which is an important connector between the Top End and South Australia.

Believe you me, we will speak more about the opportunity that the CLP purposely and knowingly cut from Central Australia—that is, ATSIAGA. It had opportunities for jobs and the numbers—yes, we hear CLP members talk about the cost of that project, but the long-term vision to bring revenue into Central Australia and having opportunities to keep local, interstate and international tourists in Alice Springs and Central Australia for longer has been squandered. It will take many years before anything goes back into Central Australia. We talk about the winners and losers in the CLP government's second budget, and Central Australians have been the biggest losers, unfortunately.

Stable and affordable housing is critical for the social and economic growth of any region. The NT has six regions. Essential workers, cafe and hospitality workers and people working casual and part-time jobs keep our towns and communities running, but they are the ones losing out when the government does not have an economic plan for Central Australia.

We will continue to advocate for all regions across the Northern Territory, because there is no plan, vision or delivery from the CLP government to grow the Territory economy. The CLP promised this, and has failed in its second budget—it has only two left—to show that it is thinking about anything beyond the election cycle. Again, this will put the Territory backwards in the long run; it will not help us move forward together with the opportunities that could be afoot. The CLP is focused only on chasing headlines. It is not focused on doing the heavy lifting and the hard work of making sure there is a vision for Central Australia and the Territory economy.

Debate adjourned.

YOUTH JUSTICE AND CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 66

Mr MALEY (Corrections): Mr Deputy Speaker, I present a Bill entitled Youth Justice and Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 66, and table the explanatory statement.

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

This Bill makes targeted and practical amendments to the *Youth Justice Act 2005* and the Criminal Code to strengthen the operation of the youth justice system, enhance community safety and provide clear statutory authority for frontline police and youth justice staff while maintaining appropriate safeguards for children.

The amendments respond to operational experience across the youth justice system and are intended to improve clarity, consistency and effectiveness in areas where existing legislative arrangements have proven insufficient or uncertain.

The Bill has four key objectives. First, it introduces a protected interview framework for young people, including an urgent protected interview framework where there is a serious or urgent public safety concern.

Second, it establishes a clear statutory basis for intake and transfer facilities to support the safe and lawful reception and movement of detained young people.

Third, it clarifies and strengthens provisions relating to detention, escort, transfer and search powers under the *Youth Justice Act*.

Finally, it amends the Criminal Code to ensure that Corrections workers, staff who work within a prison or detention centre, directly responsible for the safety and security of prisoners and detainees are appropriately protected under assault offence provisions.

The Bill introduces new sections 17A and 17B into the *Youth Justice Act* to provide for protected interviews of youth. A protected interview allows police to invite a young person to participate in an interview for limited purposes, including assessing eligibility for diversion, identifying capacity or support needs, or obtaining information about an offence. Importantly, anything said by a young person during a protected interview is not admissible in any subsequent criminal or civil proceedings against that young person.

Before a protected interview takes place, police must inform the youth of their right to silence, their right to legal advice and their right to have a support person present. If the youth exercises their right to silence, the interview must not proceed.

The Bill also provides for urgent protected interviews where a police officer reasonably suspects that a youth has information relating to a serious or urgent matter concerning public safety. These provisions are carefully framed. They preserve fundamental rights while allowing police to obtain information necessary to protect the community or support early intervention without compromising a young person's legal position.

The Bill also makes related amendments to existing youth interview provisions to ensure clarity and consistency.

In addition, the Bill introduces a new provision allowing a youth who has been charged or detained to be temporarily held in a police station or watch house for up to 48 hours where it is not reasonably practicable

to transfer the youth immediately to a detention centre or intake and transfer facility. This provision reflects operational realities, particularly in remote and regional contexts, and it is tightly limited in scope and duration.

A significant component of this Bill is the insertion of Part 8A into the *Youth Justice Act* to establish a statutory framework for intake and transfer facilities. These facilities are intended to provide a place where detainees may be temporarily held while awaiting transfer to a detention centre or between facilities.

The Bill provides for ministerial approval of intake and transfer facilities, appointment and powers of superintendents, detainee welfare responsibilities and application of key youth justice provisions to these facilities. This framework ensures that young people who are held in intake and transfer facilities continue to benefit from established safeguards, standards and oversight powers.

The Bill also amends several provisions in the *Youth Justice Act* to clarify powers relating to the use of force, escorting detainees, searching detainees and transferring detainees between facilities. These amendments are technical in nature, but important in practice, ensuring that staff have a clear legal authority when carrying out their duties, and that detainee treatment remains lawful and consistent.

The Bill amends the Criminal Code to extend assault provisions to include Corrections workers, staff who work within a prison or detention centre, directly responsible for the safety and security of prisoners and detainees in correctional facilities. This change recognises the risk faced by staff working in custodial and detention environments and ensures that offences against them are appropriately recognised and deterred under criminal law.

The government acknowledges that this Bill engages human rights, including liberty, fair hearing rights and the rights of a child. Any limitations on those rights are reasonable, necessary and proportionate and are balanced by specific safeguards, including non-admissibility of protected interview statements, clear time limits on detention in police facilities, continued application of youth justice principles, and oversight and accountability.

This Bill strengthens legislative foundations of the Territory's youth justice system. It supports frontline workers, improves operational clarity, enhances community safety and maintains appropriate protection for young people.

I commend the Youth Justice and Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BOARDS, COMMITTEES AND STATUTORY OFFICES) BILL
Serial 65

Ms BOOTHBY(Attorney-General): Mr Deputy Speaker, I present a Bill titled Attorney-General Legislation Amendment (Boards, Committees and Statutory Offices) Bill 2026, Serial 65, and table the explanatory statement.

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

The purpose of the Attorney-General Legislation Amendment (Boards, Committees and Statutory Offices) Bill 2026 is to streamline the operation, functions and processes of boards and committees across the Attorney-General's portfolio. It will also deliver amendments to improve processes and clarity for the Public Trustee.

This Bill will improve overall efficiency and flexibility of government processes to align with broad government objectives, improved service responsiveness and public sector modernisation. One of the ways the Bill does this is by amending various pieces of legislation to abolish now redundant committees and merge their key functions within existing functions. This will ensure greater alignment and efficiency across various departments while maintaining transparency and accountability.

I will now turn to the specific amendments in the Bill.

Part 2 of the Bill amends the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* to abolish the Child Deaths Review and Prevention Committee. There is currently an overlap of these functions with the NT Coroner's office and this amendment will resolve this duplication and allow functions to be undertaken at the departmental level, enhancing governmental coordination and efficiency.

Part 3 of the Bill abolishes the Discipline Committee under the *Electrical Safety Act 2022* and merges its functions with the Electrical Safety Board while making corresponding amendments to the *Electrical Safety Act 2022* to facilitate this. Merging the roles of these two committees will allow the board more flexibility in responding to discipline matters and increase efficiencies without detracting from the functions performed by the committee.

Schedule 1 contains a number of minor and consequential amendments throughout the *Electrical Safety Act 2022* to accommodate the abolition of the Discipline Committee.

Part 4 of the Bill amends the *Health and Community Services Complaints Act 1998* to abolish the Health and Community Services Complaints Review Committee. This committee has a very narrow function of reviewing the process and procedures of the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission; however, it does not have the ability to review the decisions of the commission itself. Also given that it has not determined significant concern with the complaints process over time, its role is essentially obsolete. Despite the abolition of this committee, it should be noted that the existing complaints process will continue under the *Health and Community Services Complaints Act 1998*, reflecting the national approach. It should be further noted that there are still other review processes available regarding the delivery of relevant services, including through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

Following consultation with the Liquor Commission, a small amendment to the *Liquor Commission Act 2018* is proposed in Part 5 of the Bill. This amendment will allow for the Liquor Commission's chairperson to attend meetings virtually if they are outside the Northern Territory. This amendment is not aimed at providing for a chairperson to be normally residing outside the Territory, but is reflective of modern technological advancements and practice and will improve the Liquor Commission's flexibility and function.

Part 6 of the Bill amends the *Public Trustee Act 1979* to resolve reporting and timing issues, approve transparency, clarify the calculation method of levies and fees and ensure modern terminology.

First, the amendments will amend sections 18, 19 and 24C of the *Public Trustee Act 1979* to clarify and clearly set out the process for the annual auditing of common funds by the Auditor-General and subsequent annual report by the Public Trustee. Currently, the timelines and related requirements for this annual reporting process are uncertain, with the only reference to timeframe by an oblique reference to four months in section 24C of the *Public Trustee Act 1979*.

Section 24C is about providing information to investors in the common funds managed by the Public Trustee rather than about the annual reporting process itself. As well as being unclear, this reference appears to create an unrealistic timeframe for both the Auditor-General and the Public Trustee, given the number of preliminary steps in the reporting process required under this Act. The proposed amendments will address these issues and set out a more realistic and transparent process, providing greater clarity for all involved in the process. It should be noted that these amendments relate to reporting on the common funds which are established for the management and investment of estate and trust money under the control of the Public Trustee. Reporting on other more operational matters of the Public Trustee is undertaken separately through standard Northern Territory Government reporting in the annual report of the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee.

Part 6 also contains a number of other technical amendments, including amendments through the Act to clarify that levies and fees are inclusive of GST. These amendments were included after advice from the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Additionally there are numerous minor amendments to ensure consistency with modern terminology and drafting practice. For example, Schedule 2 to the Bill further amends the *Public Trustee Act 1979* to update the old-fashioned Roman numbering in the headings. It also changes references from 'Attorney-General' to 'Minister' in line with contemporary drafting practice to clearly tie administrative responsibility for the Act to the relevant minister under the Administrative Arrangements Order which can change over time.

The reforms in this Bill will streamline the number and functions of various Attorney-General's Department boards and committees, repealing obsolete and unnecessary bodies, resulting in greater clarity and flexibility in operation and allowing for improved efficiencies in performing the ongoing functions. It will remove red tape for the Public Trustee, increase transparency in its operations and clarify reporting requirements.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for report by 8 July 2026.

Motion agreed to.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Honorary Consul-General of the Philippines

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of His Honour John Rivas AM, Honorary-Consul General of the Philippines, and his wife, Mrs Edna Rivas, and their family and friends. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 68

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill titled Consumer Affairs and Essential Goods and Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 68, and table the explanatory statement.

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

The purpose of the Consumer Affairs and Essential Goods and Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 is to refine the operational frameworks within the Northern Territory to be used to minimise the impacts of the Middle East conflict on fuel supplies and prices, and to assist in the rollout of the Commonwealth's fuel security plan should the need arise.

Part 11 of the *Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading Act 1990* (CAFT Act) is amended to ensure the efficiency and effective administration of the MyFuel scheme for the publication of service station fuel prices by simplifying the scheme to encompass the regulation of fuel prices, allowing versatility as to what this may include to ensure that the scheme remains fit for purpose and can meet the needs of fuel retailers and the community.

As part of the enhancements to the scheme, which will now be set out fully in the Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading (Fuel Retailers) Regulations 2017, retailers will be able to provide more detailed advice to potential customers on the availability of their fuel supplies when reporting whether fuel is unavailable, including the reasons why fuel might not be available, and for how long.

Another enhancement is being made to the reporting framework to provide more flexibility to retailers who wish to reduce their prices during a reporting period. The government understands that these are difficult times for all Territorians and is striving to ensure that the impacts on both consumers and businesses are as minimal as possible.

The CAFT Act is also amended to transfer the offences in sections 188 and 189(2) of the CAFT Act in relation to fuel retailers to the regulations. This will place the offences with the requirements of the scheme, allowing for fuel retailers to have better visibility over their obligations and easier modification of the scheme itself, as may be necessary in the future.

The offence for selling fuel at a price other than that reported is being amended to provide that it is only an offence where a fuel retailer offers fuel for sale at a higher price than reported. This will ensure that where fuel retailers wish to lower their prices, there will be no impediments to this.

In relation to the *Essential Goods and Services Act 1981*, this Act was introduced over 40 years ago as a means to control and manage essential goods and services, including fuel, during periods of shortage.

According to Hon Paul Everingham AO, MLA, former Chief Minister of the NT, during his explanatory speech on introducing the Essential Goods and Services Bill back in August 1981, a previous fuel crisis caused by confrontation in the Middle East was one of the reasons for the development of this Act.

Under this Act, the Administrator has the power, by gazette notice, to declare a shortage where the provision, supply or distribution of a good or service is, or is likely to become, less than is sufficient for the reasonable requirements of a community.

Given that this power has not been exercised since it was introduced, and the NT now faces the emergence of a similar set of circumstances that saw the advent of this legislation in the first place, this government has reviewed it to ensure that it will provide Territorians with the assistance it was intended to provide.

To clarify the intention of this power and ensure that it may be effectively used, it is proposed that this power may be exercised to meet the reasonable functioning of a community, rather than the requirements. The reasonable requirements of a community are highly variable and by replacing this with the term 'functioning', the government is ensuring that during periods of shortage, all relevant considerations may be taken into account to ensure that powers may be exercised under this Act to meet the needs of any community as necessary, whether that be one of our small remote communities, a region or the NT as a whole, as required.

To assist in this, it is also proposed that the minister be given a power to request information from suppliers before or after a declaration, and the establishment of authorised officers to allow for the monitoring of goods and services in order to inform a declaration, and the ongoing monitoring of these goods and services during a shortage, as well as ensuring the compliance and enforcement of any requirements imposed during such a shortage.

The compliance and enforcement under this Act is relatedly intended to be enhanced by increasing the penalties from eight penalty units for an individual and 85 penalty units for a body corporate to 100 penalty units and 500 penalty units respectively. The daily penalties for a continuing offence will also be increased from $50 for an individual and four penalty units for a body corporate to five penalty units and 25 penalty units respectively. This will be supported by an infringement notice scheme that will be introduced in regulations on passage of the Bill.

This Bill is therefore intended to ensure the effective regulation, monitoring and distribution of goods and services, primarily relating to fuel supplies and prices currently.

I am pleased to commend this Bill to honourable members.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a first time.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I mark a moment of profound significance for not only the parliament but also the people of the Northern Territory and the enduring friendship between Australia and the Republic of the Philippines. I pay tribute to a truly distinguished Territorian, Januario John R Rivas AM as he marks his retirement from his role as Honorary Consul-General of the Philippines in Darwin, a position he has held with exceptional dedication since 2008. I acknowledge him and Edna and all the family and friends who are in the gallery to recognise this incredibly important milestone for the Northern Territory and in your lives.

Mr Rivas has been far more than a diplomatic representative; he has been a bridge between nations, strengthening ties, building trust and enriching the social and cultural fabric of the Northern Territory. His work has gone beyond formal duties, touching the lives of countless individuals, particularly within the vibrant and growing Filipino community that calls the Territory home.

Notably, Mr Rivas was the first Filipino to be appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia in 2016. This honour reflects his outstanding service to the Filipino community in the Northern Territory and his tireless efforts in fostering strong bilateral links between Australia and the Philippines across education, trade, business and sport.

Based in Darwin, he has been central to supporting the Filipino community for many decades. As a founding member of the Filipino Australian Association of the Northern Territory he has helped build a strong and united community. Beyond his official duties he has demonstrated remarkable generosity and compassion, organising initiatives such as book donation drives for underprivileged schools in the Philippines and providing guidance and support to families, workers and students navigating life in Australia.

Under his stewardship the relationship between the Northern Territory and the Philippines has not only endured but also flourished. He has worked tirelessly to promote mutual understanding and to ensure that

this relationship is not merely diplomatic but also deeply human, grounded in respect, shared values and genuine friendship.

Mr Rivas has been a steadfast advocate for multiculturalism and inclusion. Through cultural festivals, community events and partnerships he has brought the richness of Filipino heritage to the Territory, helping shape a more vibrant, cohesive and connected community.

No-one achieves such a legacy alone, and it is important to acknowledge the unwavering support of his wife, Edna Rivas, who has stood beside him throughout this entire journey. Her quiet strength, partnership and contribution to the community have been an integral part of John's success, and we extend our sincere appreciation to Edna as well.

Public service of this calibre is rare. It is defined not by titles but by integrity and not by visibility but by lasting impact. Mr Rivas has exemplified these qualities throughout his tenure.

As he steps into a well-deserved retirement, we recognise that his legacy will endure in the strong relationships he has built, the thriving Filipino community he has supported and the many lives that he has touched and made better.

On behalf of the Northern Territory Government and all Territorians, I extend our deepest gratitude to Mr and Mrs Rivas for their years of dedicated service. We thank you, John, for your leadership, generosity of spirit and unwavering commitment to fostering unity and understanding. To Mr Rivas, Edna and your family, we wish you all the very best for the wonderful years ahead. We know that Edna will have John at home doing all the washing, cleaning and ironing. He will be put to work, finally, at home. In all honesty, we wish you the most wonderful retirement, good health, happiness and knowledge that your work has made a lasting and meaningful difference to the Northern Territory.

I commend this tribute to the Assembly.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I also acknowledge and thank Mr John Rivas AM, the outgoing Philippine Honorary Consul-General to the Northern Territory, whose term formally ended yesterday. For almost two decades in that role and for more than half a century as a Territorian, Mr John Rivas has given extraordinary service to the Filipino community, the Northern Territory community and relationship building between Australia and the Philippines.

It is fitting that we mark this moment in this Chamber because Mr Rivas' contribution is not simply a personal story, nor only a community story; this is part of the Territory's story.

I will refer to you as Mr Rivas, as my former teacher. I am proud to be a student of yours, even though it was many years ago.

Mr Paech: You taught her well.

Ms UIBO: Let us hope so.

Mr Rivas, it is fitting that we mark your story here.

You and your wife, Edna, arrived in Darwin in the early 1970s and, like so many of our Territory migrant families, have made the Territory even stronger because you came here, worked hard, served others in your community, raised a family, built our community stronger and helped to shape this place we are all proud to call home.

Although choosing to settle in Darwin was surely one of the best decisions Mr Rivas ever made, I suspect it was probably only the second best. The first, perhaps, was his decision to pursue Edna. I understand that it took eight love letters to win Edna's heart. In this day and age, with text messages and emojis, that sort of commitment to true romance is something we should all admire. Those eight letters are the stuff of true love and what it is built on. It is clear that Mr Rivas' life of service has been strengthened every step of the way by Edna's love, support, partnership and encouragement.

Today we thank Mr Rivas, but we also thank Edna for her service to the community, because as many of us in this Chamber know, community service is supported by our families. The diplomatic service, of course, is at another level and is rarely carried by one person alone. Those great people are sustained by families, partners, friends, supporters and colleagues, who give their time quietly, patiently and behind the scenes.

Mr Rivas' formal title has been Honorary Consul-General, but his work has always gone far beyond a title. Mr Rivas has helped people navigate difficult systems. He has supported Filipino migrants as they settle in Australia. He has assisted families with consular matters, character references, legal and migration issues and the practical challenges that come with building a life in a new country.

Mr Rivas has promoted Filipino culture. He has helped build community organisations. He has supported education programs—teaching as well—including initiatives helping marginalised and underprivileged young people in the Philippines. Mr Rivas has strengthened links in sport, education, trade, business and people-to-people exchange, which is one of my favourites.

In 2016 Mr Rivas was recognised as a Member of the Order of Australia for his significant service to the Philippine community of the Northern Territory and to the bilateral relations between the Philippines and Australia. That recognition was richly and deeply deserved.

However, I suspect Mr Rivas would be the first to say that service is not about medals or titles; it is about people. It is about the newly arrived families who feel less alone because someone is there to welcome them. It is about the young person who sees a pathway because someone before them opened a door. It is about the community volunteer who keeps showing up time and again for their fellow community members, often without any thanks, because they know their work matters.

The Territory's relationship with the Philippines is deep and enduring. It is seen in our families, workplaces, churches, schools, sporting clubs, multicultural organisations and amazing neighbourhoods. Filipino Territorians are our nurses, teachers, carers, small business owners, construction workers, community leaders, artists, musicians, athletes, parents and volunteers. They are all a part of the social fabric of the Northern Territory, which we love and will fiercely protect.

These strong links did not happen by accident. They were built by people, families and leaders who understood that diplomacy is conducted in not only our meeting rooms but also our community. Sometimes diplomacy happens around our kitchen tables, in community halls, at cultural events, on sporting fields and in the quiet moments when someone's help for another person really matters. Mr and Mrs Rivas are key reasons why the Territory and the Philippines enjoy the strong social bonds we see today, and we thank you for that connection.

I acknowledge that parts of Mr Rivas' 17-year tenure involved working with Territory Labor governments and representatives. Mr Rivas, as a proud former student, on behalf of my Territory Labor team and colleagues in this Chamber and those before us, thank you. We sincerely thank you for your wise counsel, your commitment to our community and the many years you have given service to the Northern Territory. Your advice has been generous. Your advocacy has been steady.

Mr Rivas' commitment to our Filipino community has never wavered, and his love for the Territory has always been clear. Mr Rivas' work is truly patriotic in the best sense of the word, because it is grounded in service.

Your work has built bridges between peoples and nations. Your work, because it makes Australia stronger, has helped communities to feel seen, respected and included. Mr Rivas, the work you have done reminds us that the Territory is the best it can be when we are open, generous and connected to our region.

Mr and Mrs Rivas chose to call Australia home and, luckily for us, they chose Darwin and the Northern Territory, and we are all the better for it.

Mr Rivas, we thank you; you get an A+. Thank you, Mr Rivas, for your decades of service, leadership, counsel, humour, patience, example and wonderful stories you have been sharing for decades in the Territory. Thank you, Edna, for the love and support that has made Mr Rivas' service possible across our community.

On behalf of our Territory Labor team, and I am sure many Territorians across political divides, I wish Mr and Mrs Rivas every happiness in the next chapter. We are so lucky that John and Edna Rivas chose to call the Northern Territory home. I am lucky to be a former student. Congratulations on an esteemed career, and I look forward to seeing you around in your retirement. Well done, Mr Rivas.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, as a prelude to my discussion about John, I seek leave to table a summary of his life and service, penned by his loving wife, Edna.

Leave granted.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: I quote from it. I will do this first and then get into the serious stuff, John:

> *Januario John Rivas is a true Territorian whose life has been dedicated to service, education, leadership and family. For 17 years, he proudly served as the Philippine Honorary Consul General to the Northern Territory, strengthening the ties between the Filipino and Australian communities and becoming a respected and well-loved figure among Filipinos and Australians in the NT.*
>
> *A passionate educator for nearly 40 years, John Rivas devoted his teaching career to shaping minds, particularly in Senior Science education. Through his patience, wisdom and commitment, he inspired countless students to pursue learning with curiosity, discipline and confidence.*
>
> *Beyond his professional achievements, John Rivas has also been a pillar of the Filipino community. As President and Executive Member of the Filipino Australian Association of the Northern Territory Inc. for nearly 2 decades, he has tirelessly promoted unity, culture, friendship and support among families and community members. His leadership has helped strengthen the Filipino presence in the Territory and created lasting connections across generations.*
>
> *Above all, John Rivas is a devoted family man—a loving husband, proud father to four boys and cherished grandfather (Lolo) to 14 beautiful grandchildren.*

Who I met at his 80th birthday celebration. That was fantastic. Edna continues:

> *His greatest legacy is not only in his professional accomplishments but in the values of hard work, humility, kindness and community spirit that he continues to pass on to his family and everyone whose lives he touches.*
>
> *John Rivas' journey reflects a lifetime of dedication, compassion and service—a remarkable man whose contributions to education, community and family will always be deeply appreciated and remembered.*

I could not agree more. Well done, Edna; you saved me a lot of thinking about what I would say.

On a personal note, I have known John for close to 20 years. I became involved with him when I was in the government and subsequently in the Chamber of Commerce, when I partnered with my good friend Sean Mahoney, the CEO of the International College of Advanced Education. John and Sean were instrumental in developing a study, work, live program between the province of Negros Occidental in the Philippines and the Northern Territory that has resulted in 20 students coming to the Territory after getting a soft loan from the Filipino province. The Filipino government loans students money to study and live in the Northern Territory, and they can send money back. Some students go back to the Philippines; others have made lives in and become citizens of the Northern Territory. We want them to be in the Northern Territory.

That is a great relationship. He established it initially with former Governor Marañon, who has passed, and we have kept it going with Governor Lacson. Both those Governors have visited the Northern Territory on occasion and brought delegations. Our good colleague Tina Basa supported Governor Marañon and Governor Lacson. We had help with Attorney Ray Diaz up there currently.

I have been overseas with John more than 10 or 12 times, particularly with Sean. We have been to Manila, Bacolod, Cebu, Iloilo and Sagay. Bacolod is the capital of Negros Occidental. For all the students here from Negros Occidental, let us say, *Abanse Negrense*. It has been fantastic. The International College of Advanced Education and Alana Kaye College benefit from the vocational education training students coming here. That has been wonderful.

Travelling with John is difficult—interesting. We used to always have the phrase when we were going out anywhere: passport, wallet, phone. We would always be looking for something. Occasionally, one of us would leave one of those somewhere and we would be trying to chase down where it was. We had great travels.

Bacolod was fantastic because I like food and John definitely likes food. He introduced me to chicken inasal, which is a specialty dish in Bacolod. You can go to Salvatores where Sean Johnston does a version of it, and so do various other places, but Bacolod is the home of it. There are certain places you go where you get the real chicken, and you have to decide whether you will have the native chicken or the farmed chicken which is always a bit different. When you wash it down with Red Horse beer it does not matter. I had John and his friends over to my place and I cooked chicken inasal from scratch; the preparation of the sauce is the key part. I loved it; it was fantastic.

I should not say this, but John, Edna and I have had massages together. They were pretty happy; I do not know whether they were into that—no, they were good foot and remedial massages. I think it was in Bacolod. We had been working hard and thought we would go to a shopping centre. John and Edna knew a place where you could get nails done. We had an hour-and-a-half relaxing. When you try to relax he is still talking to you, so it is hard. John is interesting to talk to, as is Edna.

Another thing he has been interested in is promoting the science expo at Jingili Primary School; he has done that for many years. Sean and I have supported him in various ways and at different times. We put on food for students or anything we can do to show support. It shows his generosity and interest in science, which is fantastic. Part of that charity also goes back to when we went to the Philippines, he would organise to bring books or computers to donate to schools. He would hound us asking for books or spare computers, and we would load them up.

John, you are a pillar. Edna, you are also fantastic.

I had the pleasure of attending his 80th birthday function in January, where I met all his family. John also asked me to say a few words. You should have been at the party; the family were dressed up and sang. The older, middle and younger generations did different songs; there was so much family spirit. That is the joy that you bring to a lot of people. I know the students who come here from Negros go to your place and have a party. Sean has been there many times.

We have been blessed to have your help. John and Edna, thank you very much. You have advanced the relationship between not only the Northern Territory and the Philippines but also Australia and the Philippines. I believe we are coming up to the 80th anniversary celebration of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Australia and the Philippines. We may look at doing something later, as I know you and Edna have well-deserved trips to Bali. When we come back, we may celebrate that 80th anniversary in some way.

I think that when John was born, the decision was made to have diplomatic ties with Australia, so they sent him here. You match that same period, 80 and 80.

On behalf of the whole Assembly, we wish you and Edna all the best. To all the family, friends and colleagues, thank you very much.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I honour a remarkable Territorian, a respected diplomat, an educator, a community builder and a man whose contribution to the Northern Territory has helped shape the story of multicultural Darwin for more than half a century, Mr Januario John Rivas AM.

I acknowledge John's family and friends and members of the Filipino–Australian community who are present in the gallery this evening. Your presence here is a testament to the respect, affection and gratitude that so many people hold for John and the extraordinary life of service he has given to the Northern Territory and the Philippines.

This evening is not simply about marking a retirement; it is about recognising a legacy built not through seeking attention or recognition, but through decades of quiet service, generosity, advocacy and leadership.

John was initially appointed Consul ad honorem of the Republic of the Philippines in Darwin on 13 May 2008 and was promoted to Consul-General ad honorem on 9 March 2009. After almost two decades in that official role, he concluded his service yesterday, 12 May 2026.

To understand John Rivas' contribution, we must go back much further than 2008. We must go back to 1973, when a young Filipino teacher arrived in Darwin with his wife, part of a wave of skilled Filipino professionals recruited to Australia at a time when the country needed teachers, nurses and skilled workers willing to help build communities. Like so many migrants, John arrived carrying hope, uncertainty and opportunity in equal measure. The original offer was reportedly for a teaching role in Sydney, but Darwin offered double the salary, enough to convince the family to make the move north, and what a fortunate decision that turned out to be for the Northern Territory.

I can also vouch that especially when you are a migrant with family and in the early days are struggling, you look for that opportunity. He made the right decision, and we are honoured to have him here because although John may have come here as a teacher, he would go on to become one of the most significant community leaders in the history of the Filipino–Australian community in the Territory.

Darwin in the early 1970s was a different place—small, isolated, tropical, raw and still developing its identity—yet John and his family embraced this place and quickly immersed themselves in community life. They understood something important early on: preserving culture and building connection mattered deeply for migrant families establishing a new life in Australia.

In 1974 John helped establish what would become the Filipino Australian Association of the Northern Territory (FAANT). Importantly, the organisation evolved beyond simply being a Filipino association; it became an inclusive community organisation that welcomed Australian spouses, children and families of Filipino heritage—something that reflected John's belief in connection, inclusion and shared identity. As the association's first president, John worked tirelessly to promote Filipino culture and heritage throughout the Territory.

Today, multicultural festivals and cultural celebrations are common and widely embraced across the Territory, but in those early decades that work relied heavily on volunteers who were prepared to give up evenings, weekends and family time to build something bigger than themselves. John was one of those people. Importantly, he was motivated not by personal recognition but by service. That spirit of service would define his life.

One of John's most significant contributions was helping newly arrived Filipino migrants settle into life in Australia. For many families arriving in a new country, there are moments of fear, uncertainty and isolation. John became someone people could rely on. He helped migrants navigate systems and paperwork. He wrote references, provided visa recommendations, advocated for workers and families and helped connect people with employment and opportunity. Perhaps most importantly, he made people feel welcomed and valued.

Many people in the Filipino community will tell you the same thing: at some point in their lives when they needed help, guidance or reassurance, John Rivas was there, not because he had to be but because he genuinely cared. Over time, his home became more than just a residence; it became a place of support, advice, hospitality and reassurance for countless people finding their feet in the Territory. That contribution cannot truly be measured because the impact of helping one migrant family often extends across generations.

John's influence also extended well beyond community welfare. He played an important role in strengthening bilateral ties between the Northern Territory, Australia and the Philippines through education, sport, cultural exchange, business and trade relationships.

One of the standout examples of this was the Arafura Games. For many years, John and other Filipino community leaders worked tirelessly to support Philippine sporting contingents travelling to Darwin for the games. The Arafura Games represented far more than just sport; they represented friendship, diplomacy and regional connection across the Asia-Pacific. John and the Filipino community helped ensure that Filipino athletes arriving in Darwin felt welcomed, supported and connected to community during their time in the Territory. Many athletes were hosted in local homes, creating lifelong friendships and strengthening people-to-people ties between our nations. That is diplomacy at its best—not diplomacy confined to formal meetings and official functions, but diplomacy built through hospitality, trust, generosity and human connection.

John's contribution was formally recognised in 2016 when he became the first Filipino in Australia to be appointed a Member of the Order of Australia. That was an historic achievement. Importantly, it reflected exactly the values that the Order of Australia is intended to honour—not celebrity, wealth or status, but consistent, humble, selfless service over decades for the benefit of others. His recognition also represented something much larger. It acknowledged the extraordinary contribution Filipino–Australians have made to communities across the nation, particularly in the Northern Territory.

John helped elevate the visibility and reputation of Filipino professionals at a time when many were establishing careers in healthcare, education, hospitality, aged care, construction and business. He advocated strongly for opportunity, fairness and respect for Filipino workers and families and, in doing so, he helped strengthen the Territory itself.

I also acknowledge John's important role as a member of the Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs (MACMA) where his wisdom, experience and advocacy helped support a more inclusive and culturally connected Northern Territory. His advice was always grounded in lived experience. He understood both the opportunities and the challenges faced by migrant communities, because he had lived them himself.

Even now, at 80 years of age, John continues to encourage younger generations to step forward and lead. His message has consistently been about contribution, unity and responsibility. He has spoken openly about the pressures community leaders face in balancing careers, families and volunteer responsibilities. He reminds communities not to tear down volunteers, but to support them.

One of the values John often speaks about is *bayanihan*, the Filipino spirit of communal unity, cooperation and helping one another. In many ways, that single word perfectly captures John's life: helping one another, lifting one another and building community together. That spirit has helped shape the Filipino–Australian community in the Northern Territory for generations.

John also helped preserve and promote the historical connections between Filipino people and northern Australia, including the longstanding relationship between Filipino pearl divers and the Larrakia people. Those stories matter. They remind us that the connection between the Philippines and the Northern Territory is not recent; it is deeply woven into the history of northern Australia. John understood the importance of preserving those stories and ensuring that future generations recognise the depth of those connections.

Tonight, this parliament acknowledges not just a retirement, but an extraordinary life of contribution—a teacher, a mentor, a diplomat, a volunteer, a community advocate, a bridge between cultures and, above all else, a man who dedicated his life to helping others.

To John's family, thank you because people who give this much to the community do so with the support and sacrifice of those closest to them. Your support enabled John to support many others over many years.

To John, on behalf of the Northern Territory Government and the people of the Territory, thank you for your leadership, compassion and humility. Thank you for helping generations of Filipino migrants feel welcomed, respected and supported. Thank you for helping make the Northern Territory a stronger, kinder and more connected community. Your legacy will live on in not only official records or awards but also the lives of the countless people you helped along the way. We wish you continued good health, happiness and a long and fulfilling retirement surrounded by family, friends and the community who love and respect you so deeply.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I make a small contribution for John Rivas. Thank you to our guests for coming this evening.

I have known John since February 1997. It was the week I started at the Commonwealth Bank, and back then everybody—whether you were a public servant or other worker—would come in every Friday to collect their pay through their passbook. We still had passbooks then. The queue used to be out the door. John came in every fortnight to do his banking and pay his home loans. I used to be nervous counting money and filling out all the forms, because everything was manual and you had to balance every night; otherwise, you would be there finding every cent. John was always patient, waiting in the line talking to everybody and keeping them occupied so that nobody would get cranky.

He would come in, after working his long week at the school, with his passbook for his banking. You would have to also fill out the deposit form and the forms for home loans and do all your credits and debits to all the other accounts. It was manual back in the day. I was nervous and John always kept me calm and said, 'We will get through one at a time'. It was an inspiration to me. John did those manual transactions—people today probably do not understand and have financial literacy as good as John's is from doing those small tasks—and he inspired me that home ownership is important. He was dedicated to financially securing his family and himself for retirement. Each time we did the transactions, it would take a while—you were timed as well—but we would get through them. He would often talk about his family and say that he was doing it for his children as well and being an inspiration to them.

I went on to be a successful financial planner and through that I also met his wonderful friend Mary Duff, who is here today who was one of my beautiful clients. I did not know that they were friends. Mary trusted in John to also be one of her financial connections and advisers. She trusted John to also look after her and be her guide in that other financial journey. It was wonderful to know that they both are truly connected and are long-term friends.

To John and Edna, you are an inspiration. John continues to be an inspiration to me because he is learning, and has been for a long time. Not only is his heart with the Philippines but also it has transpired he is moving into the Indonesian connection. John travels regularly to Bali and has been learning the Indonesian language over many years. Each time I see John he tests his Indonesian on me and practises. He is better than me, to be quite honest. Earlier this evening he said some Indonesian words. He said it better than an Indonesian person does. John, you are an inspiration that at age 80 you are learning a new language and new culture, being connected to that country as well because you regularly travel there. I know you are taking another trip soon. Enjoy that trip.

John, when I first started considering being a candidate in the political world—you have known me for a long time—your wisdom over that journey inspired me and kept me connected to my community, so thank you very much.

I know John has not truly retired. Even though yesterday was his official last day, he was in my office today picking up donations for an event. He is still volunteering a lot of his time and giving back to his community.

John, congratulations on a wonderful journey and life in the Northern Territory. I am truly inspired by you, your family and all your friends. As you can see, you are connected to your community and a few people in my community too. That is good to know. I wish you all the best.

I think John was also part of the first Barrio. He created it with the Filipino community. Thank you for that because that is now an annual event.

John, thank you for your service to the Northern Territory and the education system. There are many students in the Northern Territory who have been successful people on their journey.

Edna, thank you very much for letting us have John in our lives.

Madam SPEAKER: As a mark of respect, I ask all members to stand.

Mr Rivas, we thank you, we honour you and we wish you all the best. On behalf of all honourable members of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, thank you, Mr and Mrs Rivas.

Ms BOOTHBY (Brennan): Madam Speaker, Satellite City BMX Club held a Mother's Day raffle on Friday 8 May. I give the club a special shout-out. This was in conjunction with its regular Friday night race and celebrated all the mums with a special Mother's Day raffle.

The Member for Blain went there to draw a few raffles, and I thank him for representing us. The first raffle prize was a Top End Chilly Co platter, won by Mia Chan. The second raffle prize was a Marmalade Hair voucher, a Pilates by Alex Hurt voucher and a box of chocolates, won by Paula Mellios. The third raffle prize was a Hanky Panky Cocktail Lounge voucher, a Palm Nail Salon voucher and a beautiful hamper donated by our Palmerston CLP team—the Members for Blain, Drysdale and Spillett and me—won by Alicia Querino.

I congratulate all the mothers who were spoilt on that special racing night and the recipients of those amazing prizes donated by amazing businesses and our CLP team. They also got to see the spectacle of children riding their bikes and loving the BMX track at Durack.

Legacy Northern Territory hosted a beautiful Mother's Day high tea event at the Palmerston Tavern on Saturday 9 May. Almost 100 guests were there, recognising the incredible contribution that Legacy continues to make in supporting the families of veterans across the Northern Territory. Legacy provides services to Australian Defence Force partners and children of those who gave their lives or health for our country. It provides essential social, financial and developmental support that those families depend on every day.

I thank the many Legatees, volunteers and staff members who helped to make this such a special event, and I recognise that Legacy provides support to families throughout the Territory, with Legatees based in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. I have a Legacy badge box in my electorate office at Palmerston Shopping Centre. If anyone wants to pop in to purchase a badge to help support Legacy and the wonderful work it does for the Defence community, please do.

It was fantastic to be joined at that special event at the Palmerston Tavern by the Member for Wanguri and our Administrator. We had a wonderful time getting to know the Legatees. We walked around the tables and heard their stories. It was nice to see them all get dressed up to have a wonderful lunch to celebrate Mother's Day and the work of Legacy.

The Mother's Day Classic was held on Mother's Day at East Point Reserve to raise money for breast cancer and ovarian cancer research. It was an amazing turnout; I reckon it was more than last year. The Member for Fannie Bay did the barbecue—the bacon, eggs and sausages—with amazing helpers from the Darwin and Casuarina Lions Clubs. The walkers and runners were hungry after the Mother's Day Classic, having walked and run around East Point first thing in the morning. Well done to all those people.

I was also joined by my colleague the Member for Port Darwin who was on the registration desk and handed out medals after the walk and run. The Member for Barkly participated in that walk. I am not sure whether he

ran or walked, but he did a great job. The photo I saw was of him walking with his family. It was five kilometres; well done. The Member for Wanguri and I also handed out medals. Then we went over to the barbecue to see whether we could help, but the volunteers had it under control. We had a nice time walking around, talking to everybody.

Well done to everyone who participated. The money raised was for breast cancer and ovarian cancer research. Everybody does a wonderful job. Thank you to all the volunteers and participants.

This Saturday, 16 May, there will be the Breast Cancer, Care & Connection Community Forum hosted by NT Breast Cancer Voice at Harry's Place in Tiwi. All the Palmerston MLAs—the Members for Blain, Drysdale, Spillett and I—have supported this event with the donation of a prize hamper. The forum explores cancer treatment and the often overlooked impacts on intimacy, relationships and wellbeing. Expert speakers at the event will cover the forum topics and provide the community with a place to connect with all those attending. I encourage everyone to jump online and check out that event.

I have been to NT Breast Cancer Voice events before, as have my colleagues. In fact, we have a lot of fun. At one event last year, the Members for Drysdale and Blain had a competition. They auctioned themselves and raised a lot of money for NT Breast Cancer Voice. I do not think anyone will be auctioning themselves at this event, but we have donated a hamper. I am sure it will be just as fun.

I am the proud patron of the Top End Gem & Mineral Club. The club is hosting its market day on Saturday 16 May from 9 am to 12 pm at Knuckey Lagoon. There will be polished gemstones of all kinds for purchase, as well as handcrafted gemstone jewellery.

The Top End Gem & Mineral Club is a fantastic organisation. Club members get together regularly to provide information. It is a great discussion platform for anyone who likes to fossick for gemstones, minerals and rocks in the Top End. It is also a place for amateur gemologists to showcase specimens from their collections and their jewellery creations using various lapidary crafts, which I have no idea about. Every time I go there, I learn something new. It is fascinating, and there is cool stuff you can purchase either for yourself or as a gift.

The club meets at the Knuckey Lagoon Recreation Reserve on Tuesday mornings until lunchtime and Wednesday evenings. On the first Wednesday of every month the club has a Rocks Are Fun For Kids children's group from 5 pm to 8 pm.

I thank Hugh Auckram, the club president and junior coordinator, for all his work to keep the club running smoothly, and all the volunteers and club members. The Member for Karama also loves to spend time at the Top End Gem & Mineral Club. It is in his electorate. He always tells me what is going on in case I miss it in the club's Facebook group.

I wish the Top End Gem & Mineral Club a great market day this Saturday coming. I give a special shout-out to all the club's committee members.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, almost a month ago I was lucky to attend the Anglicare annual couch surfing event. Other people in this Chamber go to it, and some were there this year.

This wonderful event has been going for 14 years. Young people decorate couches with messages and art and then have a race, running the couches through the middle of the park just over there. It is competitive and a lot of fun. It brings together young people, service providers, community leaders and decision-makers to talk, in a way that is accessible and a bit fun, about one of our most pressing problems—youth homelessness.

The couches were particularly beautiful this year. They often have wonderful messages on them. This year's messages included, 'Be mindful, be grateful, be positive, be true and be kind'; 'We are strong'; 'A home for all'; 'Homelessness is not a choice but a journey that many find themselves in'; and 'We are strong proud mums'.

The voices and experiences of young people whose lives are shaped by housing instability sit at the centre of this event. The design of the event is committed to making sure that young people are front and centre and their voices are heard loud and clear.

All homelessness, including youth homelessness, does not happen suddenly. For most young people it is the result of compounding pressures like overcrowded housing, family conflict, violence, mental health challenges and disconnection from education or community. Couch surfing is often an early and invisible stage of homelessness. By the time a young person is moving between friends' houses or sleeping rough, support systems have intervened too late.

The couch surfing event is directly aligned with the Northern Territory Homelessness Strategy's focus on stepping in early to try to keep young people safe, connected and supported. The event focuses on ensuring our attention is on prevention and intervention because that prevents long-term harm, keeps young people engaged in school and community and stops short-term instability from becoming lifelong disadvantage.

Youth homelessness in the Northern Territory is the responsibility of all of us. It cannot be addressed by any single organisation, government department or policy. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, more than 12 times the national average. Nearly half of all people experiencing homelessness here are under the age of 25. More than 3,000 people in the Northern Territory every night are experiencing homelessness. It is an extraordinary figure. The key drivers include things we talk about a lot in this Chamber and we are all familiar with, including family violence, poverty, mental health challenges and lack of affordable housing.

Last year's Anglicare NT rental affordability snapshot found only four rental properties across the Northern Territory that were affordable for households relying on income support. It is an impossible situation for people who do not have access to the resources needed to have safe housing.

Couch surfing is a fun event but, as I said, it also has a serious aspect. I was proud to wave off a couple of the couches—as did the new Member for Nightcliff—as they set off. It is always a little hairy because they are going in all directions. That is not how I broke my arm, but it could have been. The serious aspect of the event tries to make clear the situation that so many of our young people are in across the Territory and has clear calls for actions we can take.

The other thing we are always talking about in this Chamber is not rabbiting on about what the problems are, but what can we do to solve them. Anglicare, which coordinates that event, says that we need stronger coordination across services; clearer pathways for young people to access support; policies and programs that are informed by lived experience; real investment in prevention; services resourced to meet demand; more housing so that young people have a place to go; and leadership that acts with purpose and urgency.

Youth homelessness affects all of us. It undermines safety and young people's futures and, therefore, undermines our community's future. It places young people at increased risk of harm while weakening the social and economic fabric of our Territory as a whole.

I urge everyone in the Assembly to do whatever you can, in whatever way you can, to address this issue. I have known many people who had to couch surf because they had nowhere safe to go, which is a tragedy in a community and a country as wealthy as ours.

I thank Anglicare NT for the work it does to bring this issue to everyone's attention in a way that is fun, engaging and puts young people front and centre.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, on 30 April it was my pleasure to deputise for the minister for Education in my capacity as the assistant minister to speak at the Artificial Intelligence in Education Conference. It was the first time we have had something like that in the Northern Territory, and it could not have been more timely or important for us to start talking about how to wrap our heads around AI encroaching on everyday classroom teaching.

A range of people attended—not as many as I would have liked to have seen, truth be told—including significant people from our public schools, private school sector, independent schools and religious institutions. We had people from Larrakeyah Primary, Mother Teresa Catholic Primary, the School of Distance Education, Haileybury and CDU.

It was an important opportunity to discuss how we will improve educational outcomes in the Northern Territory by harnessing AI tools rather than staying in denial about them. I preface my remarks by saying that I have previously spoken about the importance of leaning in, rather than being in denial about all things AI related. A 2025 global study on trust in AI and attitudes towards it found that Australia was basically the place that was most worried and least excited about it—that is, we are risk-averse and worried about all sorts of things going wrong and not leaning in to try to utilise these technologies in a purposeful way.

Before speaking in some depth about what was said the other day, I draw out Larrakeyah Primary School as a fantastic primary school that took the initiative, under Principal Fathma Mauger and Assistant Principal Danni Mattiazzo, to create something it calls 'IntelliLearn'. The Member for Port Darwin, who is the local member, also referenced this in a speech recently. The school took an LLM, paid money to put a skin around it and gave it some parameters. It is being used for kids in Year 5 to help them write better and improve their vocabulary.

Kids are doing creative writing tasks within guardrails with AI technologies which are helping them make choices to improve sentence structure and describe things better, in essence, improving their written work.

The conference was a fantastic opportunity for educators to get together and learn what is happening in this space. Toddle representative Melissa O'Shea was there. Toddle is one of the workflow engines being used to try to utilise AI in teaching spaces and improve workflow, particularly where there are capacity deficits in teaching and/or change management or transitions are happening within school systems. That sounds familiar, given what we will experience in the Northern Territory. My old school, Sanderson High, was a middle school and is now back to being a high school. The Member for Nightcliff may be interested, with Nightcliff Middle soon becoming Nightcliff High and Dripstone too. These schools will need help to make smart transitions to ensure they are full-service full-suite schools providing educational offerings and outcomes for all their students.

On the other end of the spectrum, Andrew McGregor from Haileybury spoke on a panel of principals about what his school is doing to try to improve educational outcomes by utilising AI technologies. Haileybury is trying to do innovative work, and it is probably making a difference, as you can see reflected in its VCE results. I congratulate Haileybury for being forward thinking, unlike a lot of schools and educational institutions. Instead of saying, 'Do not touch these things; they will dumb you down', Haileybury is accepting that they are part of our modern landscape and we need to lean in to using them in a sensible way.

Andrew McGregor is a maths teacher. My dad was a maths teacher as well. I remember both of them telling me in different forms, 'I am a maths teacher. How many new ways can I be taught to teach maths?' However, it turns out that there are new ways and new technologies, and we need to lean into some of them.

Going to the substance of what I spoke about at the conference. I was pleased to represent Hon Jo Hersey, Minister for Education and Training. We were there to, in a sense, lay the foundations and the groundwork for government policy in this area.

The first thing to note was that our schools span vast distances across urban centres, regional towns and remote and very remote communities, as well as through distance education. We know about the diversity of our school bodies. We recognise the enormous potential of AI to enhance teaching and learning, but equally we are clear that the technology needs to support education, not drive it. The key point we wanted to get across was that human connection, professional judgement and cultural knowledge remain at the heart of learning in the Territory.

We discussed the Education ministers' framework for generative AI in schools from February 2023 and, likewise, the work the Department of Education and Training did late last year to create a generative AI policy aligning with its strategic plan, the national framework and the NT Government's AI ethics policies. Those policies reinforce that we want responsible and well-planned use of generative AI with strong safeguards for privacy, security and inclusivity.

We want opportunities in this space and for our teachers, as well as our students, to have the necessary professional development, training, tools and processes to meaningfully and positively use AI. Let me be clear, as I was on the day to the panel and the conference: AI is a support tool. This government wants teachers to remain in control and professional judgement to remain paramount because we recognise that there are challenges in this space. Protecting student data and privacy, ensuring age-appropriate use and managing bias, inaccuracies and varying levels of digital literacy are all important considerations when you are touching AI tools. The challenges are not unique to the NT, but they are amplified by our diversity. That is why we are taking a staged approach in this matter.

The government's priorities in this space are threefold and clear. The first is improved digital literacy so that we improve trust in our systems through helping students and teachers to understand not just how to use AI tools but also how AI works, its limitations and how to keep applying their own critical judgement.

Second is ethical implementation by ensuring that only low and medium-risk tools are approved and that these are supported by privacy and security assessments and, where appropriate, we run pilots to test that things are safe and have real educational value.

Third is partnerships with industry, universities, other jurisdictions and across government. Our government is already doing some of that in collaboration with the South Australian Department for Education on a pilot of EdChat, an AI tool specifically designed for safe use in schools. Hopefully, we will learn from that partnership and can work out what is suitable for use in Northern Territory public education settings.

Our vision is clear: we want students who can use digital tools safely, confidently and critically. We want communities who can trust that innovation is introduced responsibly with integrity and a focus on strengthening learning. We know that success means fair access to safe and appropriate tools, reducing the administrative load for educators and stronger learning support where it is needed the most. As a result, the government will continue to take a staged careful approach to evaluate some of the pilots I have discussed, listening to school feedback and refining our strategies to reflect the realities of education in the Northern Territory. AI will only strengthen education if it strengthens people. That is the government's guiding principle.

It is important to recognise that the world is moving fast on this front and we have to be on the ball or we will be in trouble soon. One of the places that moves slowest in terms of technology adoption in Australia is the High Court of Australia. A recent lecture delivered by Chief Justice Stephen Gageler to all the Justices of the Supreme Court of Japan pointed out—Attorney-General, this may be of interest to you—that the High Court is starting to use AI tools, approved officially. It has systems not to produce judgements but to do a lot of the preliminary work.

We will find increasingly that this will catch up with all of us in this House and in the education space in particular. It is important that we all have some connection to what is happening in the technology and artificial intelligence spaces. In terms of improving productivity in our society and educational outcomes for our kids, we will all have to become AI savvy going forward.

On that note, I thank the Assembly for its indulgence.

Mr SMELT (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I reflect on the works that are occurring on the Nightcliff Jetty.

The Nightcliff Jetty is an icon of Nightcliff, Rapid Creek and Coconut Grove, which I represent. It is a mecca for everyone in Darwin, people from across the Top End, tourists and locals. It is a place where families come to relax, have dinner, meet with friends and enjoy the sunset. Parents take their kids and teach them to fish, enjoy the view or exercise in our great environment.

Unfortunately, the Nightcliff Jetty has been in an ongoing state of decline. There has been rust, timber deterioration, delamination and section loss.

I spoke a lot about the iconic Nightcliff Jetty during the Nightcliff by-election; it became a key theme, and it gained a lot of traction and interest from our local community. Indeed, there was a strong outpouring of support for the upgrade and preservation of the Nightcliff Jetty.

Thus I was pleased—and somewhat surprised, I must admit—to receive the notice from the minister's office regarding the upgrade works for the Nightcliff Jetty. The works to improve user safety and extend the life of the structure include surface corrosion treatment; high-pressure water blasting of the walkway structure; removal of timber decking for high-pressure water blasting; installation of new timber decking; repairs and installation of handrails; installation of a new gate at the top of the steps at the jetty head; and installation of additional structural support where required.

I am pleased that all these works are happening so soon after the Nightcliff by-election. The only fly in the ointment was that there was only four days' notice to the community before the jetty was shut for works. This has caused concern in the local community. A number of issues were raised, including by stakeholders such as the Amateur Fishermen's Association NT. Losing access to the jetty for two months over the peak of the Dry Season, including school holidays, is a blow for locals and tourists who are keen to get out, use the jetty and enjoy their fishing. I will continue to follow the progress of the works and seek support from the minister to consider some form of access, especially over the school holidays, as proposed by AFANT.

This is a great development, and I am pleased to see that local advocacy during the Nightcliff by-election has been turned into action so quickly. Community fought for this, and together we made this happen. This is just the beginning for Nightcliff.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the amazing community organisations across the Casuarina electorate, including the staff and volunteers who put in so much work behind the scenes. We are lucky to have so many people in our community who are passionate about supporting others and making a difference every day.

I start by recognising Carpentaria and the participants involved in the Nailed It woodworking program. Each time I see the work coming out of that program, I am genuinely impressed by the talent, creativity and care that goes into each piece.

Recently the group came together to create a special ANZAC Day wreath. Every leaf and flower was carefully cut, sanded, engraved and painted by hand by the participants. The wreath was commissioned by the Northern Territory Public Guardian and Trustee and proudly presented to Public Guardian Beth Walker before being laid at the ANZAC Day commemoration at the Darwin Cenotaph. It was more than just a wreath; it was an example of teamwork, creativity and community spirit. Everyone involved should be incredibly proud of what they have achieved.

I also acknowledge the important work Carpentaria does for accessibility and inclusion at Territory events. A great example of this was the recent NRL game between the Dolphins and Panthers at TIO Stadium, where accessibility was clearly a real priority. There was an accessible viewing platform, sensory bags available for people who needed them, support through the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower initiative, an accessibility information booth and a Changing Places facility onsite. It was fantastic to see people of all abilities come along, enjoy the game and be a part of the atmosphere. That is exactly the kind of inclusive community we want to continue to build in the Northern Territory.

I acknowledge the great work being done by St John Ambulance Northern Territory. One of the positive things happening is a partnership with Charles Darwin University, which is helping to train and grow the local ambulance workforce. Already this year 14 CDU graduates have started with St John and another 41 final-year students will soon be ready to apply. It is great to see Territorians being trained locally and stepping straight into these important frontline roles.

I congratulate NT Young Achiever Awards finalist Josh Harrington. Josh's story stood out to me because his journey in health started when he was just nine years old through the St John youth program. Over the years he has built confidence, learned lifesaving skills and developed a real passion for helping people.

It is also fantastic that young people in the program can gain NTCET credit through their involvement.

This weekend I was pleased to support St John cadets, alongside Minister Charls and the Member for Wanguri, at their wake-a-thon fundraiser. The cadets stayed up through the night, raising money for the cadet program and Do It For Dolly Day. It was great to see so many young people giving their time and energy to support causes that matter to them.

I also recognise the wonderful work of Variety NT, which does so much to support Territory kids who are living with sickness, disadvantage or disability, helping them to build confidence, independence and connection in the community.

Coming up in June is the 2026 Variety NT Adventure Camp which will run during the Dry Season school holidays at Goanna Park Junior Police Rangers. The camp gives young people the chance to try new activities, make friends and just enjoy being kids in a safe and supportive environment. Of course, programs like this only happen because of volunteers. I encourage anyone who enjoys the outdoors and wants to give back to consider getting involved.

I acknowledge the important work of Carers NT. Carers NT provides support to unpaid carers across the Territory through counselling, respite services, advocacy and community programs. Recently, it hosted a free dementia cafe at Club Tropical Resort in Lee Point, creating a welcoming space for people living with dementia, their carers and families to come together, connect and access support.

I congratulate Terrun Maher who received the 2026 Northern Territory Government Young Carer's Award. At just 16 years old, Terrun spends up to 40 hours each week caring for his brother who lives with complex disabilities. On top of that, he is balancing school while managing his own autism and ADHD. Stories like Terrun's remind us of the quiet dedication, strength and compassion shown by so many young carers in the community.

To all organisations, staff and volunteers across Casuarina, thank you so much for the hard work that you put into our community. Thank you for everything you do every day. Whether it is supporting families, caring for vulnerable people, creating opportunity for young Territorians or helping people feel included and connected, your work makes a real difference. Your help makes our community stronger, kinder and more connected. For that, we are grateful.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.