Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

15th Assembly



Parliamentary Record
Debates and Questions



Tuesday 17 March 2026

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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Drysdale

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

Leave granted.

COMMISSION TO ADMINISTER OATHS AND AFFIRMATIONS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received from His Honour the Administrator an authorisation to administer to honourable members the oaths and affirmations of allegiance and of office. I table the commission. The Clerk will read the commission.

> Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978 *(Cth)*
> *Authorisation to Administer Oaths and Affirmations*
>
> *I, David Robert Connolly, Administrator of the Northern Territory of Australia, pursuant to section 13(7) of the* Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978 *of the Commonwealth, authorise Robyn Jane Lambley to administer oaths and affirmations under section 13(6) of the Act.*
>
> *David Connolly*
> *Administrator*
> *Dated 12 March 2026*

VISITORS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of students and teachers from Galiwinku as part of their week at the Michael Long Learning and Leadership Centre. Welcome to Parliament House.

I also advise of the presence in the gallery of students from Grade 6 at Haileybury Rendall School, accompanied by their teachers.

I further advise of the presence of electorate officers in the gallery who are participating in the Electorate Officer Forum. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to all of you.

It is nice to see so many people here today.

Members: Hear, hear!

CONDOLENCE MOTION
Mr Edward (Ted) Joseph Egan AO

Madam SPEAKER: I draw the attention of honourable members to the passing of Mr Ted Egan, former Administrator of the Northern Territory from 2003 to 2007. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to the family and friends of Mr Egan in the Chamber today.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly expresses its condolence to the family and friends of Mr Ted Egan. Today we move this motion of condolence to recognise and celebrate Edward Joseph Egan AO. His innings is over; his bat laid down.

Ted passed away on 4 December 2025 at the age of 93 after a life of extraordinary breadth, service and contribution to the Northern Territory and Australia.

I thank Ted's wife, Nerys; and his children, Greg, Margaret, Mark and Jacki, for trusting us to remember and record his contribution for future generations. I also thank Nerys, Greg and Margaret for being in attendance today, along with many others—Ted's close friends and people who admired him. Thank you to everyone who is here today.

On 17 February in Alice Springs, we held a state memorial for Ted following a private family funeral. The state memorial was grand, and Nerys was perched on the edge of her seat enjoying the near three hours of speeches, performances, videos, dances and photos that combined into the most fitting of farewells.

About 500 people were there to pay their respects and remember a mate. As the momentum of love and adoration grew over the course of the memorial, it culminated in the whole crowd, with Nerys leading the charge in every performance, standing and singing *This Land Australia*.

Ted was born on 6 July 1932 in Coburg, Victoria. He was born at home weighing 5.5 kilograms, an Irish Catholic who for all his childhood slept on the back porch, adjacent to the washhouse. His early years in Darwin were formative. He was involved in the local Australian Rules football game and played with the likes of the 'Flying Chinaman' Ronald Chin, and against the bloke who introduced himself as Bob Wilson.

Ted wrote:

> *He proceeded to give me a football lesson. He kicked six goals and Works (Ted's team) copped their first hiding. Bob and I later became good friends; he eventually changed his name to Robert Tudawali, as he became a famous film actor, first starring the classic 1955 film* Jedda*, followed by many other roles.*

Ted loved his sport and actively participated wherever and whenever he could. He was a daily Catholic communicant at the time and in 1952 he was instructed, not asked, by Bishop O'Loughlin to be a founder with Father Aubrey Collins of the St Mary's Football Club in Darwin. I acknowledge the presence of St Mary's football diehards over there in the corner.

The teams they fielded were a blend of local Indigenous—mainly Tiwi back then—and non-Indigenous players. To say they were successful was an understatement—although not as successful last weekend, not meaning to mention the war. There is always next season.

Ted was their first captain in 1952–53 and took the club to their first premiership in 1954–55. He remained a keen supporter of the club for the rest of his life. St Mary's Football Club is a powerhouse in Northern Territory football, a premiership juggernaut with 34 wins across 55 grand finals—part of Ted Egan's extensive legacy.

It was during his footy years that Ted came under the influence of a remarkable Tiwi man, Aloysius Puantulura. As Ted recounted:

> *The Tiwi run names together like that, so at first they called me 'Tidiganni'. A few years later Aloysius gave me my 'real' name, Murrumungajimirri. It will be on my tombstone.*

His affinity for and appreciation of Indigenous people was mutually felt.

From Borroloola to Yuendumu, from Maningrida to Groote Eylandt, he devoted himself to the people and communities of the Northern Territory.

As a patrol officer, teacher, superintendent, protector and later as a district officer, Ted saw the Territory at its most remote and its most resilient. He always stood up for the people he served.

He learned Indigenous languages not merely as an academic exercise but as a gesture of respect and curiosity. He recognised that to serve a community effectively, one must listen in its own language.

Through songs like *Gurindji Blues*, which he co-wrote with Vincent Lingiari, his service on the first Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and his historical writing, Ted helped bring national attention to the stories of land rights, justice and the long journey of reconciliation.

In many ways, his connections to Indigenous Territorians were personal whether it was through sport; as a patrol officer, a teacher or a bureaucrat; or through actions like saving a young David Gulpilil from drowning.

In Ted's words:

> *David reminded me that he was the 'drowning little kid' I had pulled out of the Liverpool River in 1957, his beautiful* Maradila: My Mother's Dreaming *adorns our living room wall. When he presented that painting to me he said, 'Thank you for saving my life.'*

Ted also spoke the language of everyman, and he used all mediums available to share the stories of the bush, the land, the real people of the Northern Territory and Australia and the unsung legends. In this regard he proved a prolific songwriter, recording more than 30 albums with many songs featuring his trusty 'Fosterphone'. Ted's musical career was extensive, to say the least, and it was on full display at the state memorial.

Ted was inspired by the stories of the outback, and he sought to ensure that those stories and the characters were not forgotten or dismissed. *The Shearers*, *The Aboriginals*, *The Overlanders*, *The Anzacs*, *The Convicts*—his *Faces of Australia* series is a unique collection of tributes and storytelling. Each song has a story behind it, mostly a piece of Australian history told in an entertaining and non-disparaging way. Of course, the iconic *The Drover's Boy* became another story through Ted and Nerys' efforts to get the song made into a feature film.

Through songs such as *The Drover's Boy* and *Gurindji Blues*, his books, broadcasts and decades of storytelling he gave voice to histories that might otherwise not have been told or even been forgotten. He helped Australians better understand the land, the people and the spirit of the north. Ted did not simply document history; he walked alongside it.

As Administrator of the Northern Territory from 2003 to 2007 Ted—and Nerys—brought a spirit of openness and hospitality to Government House that is still spoken of with great affection. They welcomed thousands of Territorians through their doors, not with formality alone but with a genuine warmth. Ted showed that leadership could be dignified and approachable and that public office could still be personal, human and connected to the very people it serves.

Open days at Government House would often include performances by local artists, sometimes including a song or two with Ted and Nerys. He had the rare gift of making people feel at ease, whether it was at an official function, a community gathering or simply sharing a quiet moment over a story and a song.

Ted was a National Living Treasure, Officer of the Order of Australia, distinguished author, musician, public servant and the 18th Administrator of the Northern Territory. He was awarded the National Folk Festival Lifetime Achievement Award and inducted into the Tamworth Country Music Festival's Hands of Fame. For more than half a century, Ted helped shape the cultural and civic life of the Northern Territory.

He was the epitome of someone who lived his life to the fullest—a humble man with incredible life experience. He was a gifted communicator and tireless advocate whose work preserved history and deepened Australia's understanding of the Northern Territory's stories. There are many more stories that speak to Ted's character and distinct sense of humour.

I had the privilege of visiting Sinkatinny Downs and spent time with Ted and Nerys in their cherished home, a place built with love and perseverance between 1983 and 1989. In an era that often moves too quickly, Ted reminded us to sit, listen and learn. Perhaps the greatest tribute we can offer is to carry that spirit forward.

The other great tribute Ted leaves is his beautiful family: his wife, Nerys; his four children, Greg, Margaret, Mark and Jacki; seven beloved grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren. Nerys was his soulmate from the time they met in 1981. She sang with him, worked with him and shared his wins and losses. She was his partner and his muse. They were companions for life. To Nerys he was not only a life companion but also a source of excitement, warmth and unwavering affection.

I could go on for hours. There are many stories to tell, and today in the Chamber we get that opportunity to put on the record his enormous contribution to the Northern Territory and to the many lives he touched and shaped. He was a leader shaped by service, not by status. He may not have been a Territorian by birth, but he most definitely was in heart and soul. We will all miss him deeply.

To his family, I thank you for sharing Ted with us so we had the opportunity to honour him. The saying goes, 'He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much'. By that measure, Ted Egan was very successful indeed. Thank you, Nerys, for letting us have this opportunity to honour him in such a special way. Our condolences to family and friends, and we look forward to all the speeches today. This is a true celebration of life, a life well lived and a man well loved. You should be incredibly proud. Thank you, Nerys.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I thank the Chief Minister for bringing forward the condolence motion to honour the life of Mr Ted Egan.

How do you describe a man like Ted Egan? He was a man whose life has touched many people in different ways. To some he was Ted Egan the writer, capturing characters and telling stories of the Northern Territory. To others he was a folk singer whose songs spoke honestly about the realities of life across the country. To his family he was a son, husband, dad, grandfather and great-grandfather.

Today I will speak about some of the moments in Mr Egan's life that have made him such a remarkable Territorian. Ted was not born in the Territory; he came here as a young man from Melbourne in 1949, looking for adventure. It was during his first adventure in the Territory that one of the most important chapters of his life happened.

As a young man, Ted was asked by Bishop O'Loughlin to help establish a new football club in Darwin: St Mary's Football Club. The idea was to encourage Aboriginal men to play in mainstream football at a time when this was not widely accepted or encouraged. It was a time when cultural divides were still real in Darwin, and the young Ted Egan was already helping bring people together. That alone says a great deal about his character and shows how remarkable he was.

Through St Mary's, Ted formed strong friendships with Tiwi men and began learning the language through song. That experience changed him and opened his eyes to the depth of Aboriginal culture, stories, history and connection to country. It set Ted on a path that would shape the rest of his life in the Territory.

Over the next 25 years, Ted worked alongside Aboriginal Territorians across the NT, supporting their voices and helping to ensure that their stories were heard. Ted was and continues to be a respected leader across our Aboriginal communities and the wider community in the Territory. One of the most powerful examples of this came during the Wave Hill Walk-off in 1966 when Vincent Lingiari and the Gurindji people walked off Wave Hill Station in protest against injustice. Mr Egan played an important role in linking Gurindji leaders with decision-makers in Canberra. Ted helped carry their message forward.

In between being a champion for Aboriginal Territorians and an advocate for everyday Territorians, Ted was a gifted songwriter and folk singer. Over his lifetime he produced more than 30 albums and wrote 17 books, sharing the stories of the Territory with the rest of the country and the world. Songs such as *Gurindji Blues* told the story of the Wave Hill Walk-off and helped bring national attention to the Gurindji people's fight for land rights. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, and I am sure Ted's music will be belted out across homes and communities in the Territory and across the country.

Through his music Ted did not just entertain; he educated. The role as an educator did not end in his music or the classroom; it stayed with him throughout his life and followed him into the next chapter of his public service. When Ted Egan took on the role of Administrator of the Northern Territory in 2003, it came as no surprise to those who knew him. By that time of his life, Ted had spent decades working in the public service and helping build relationships across the Territory. He was widely respected, considered a gentleman and was called a brother and friend to many Aboriginal Territorians from the Top End and Central Australia. This meant he was uniquely placed to represent the Northern Territory to the rest of the country and world.

As the Northern Territory Administrator, Mr Egan continued doing what he had always done: sharing the stories of the Territory; celebrating stories across the Territory; bringing people together; and representing this remarkable place with pride. When I was reading articles about Ted after he passed, there were many beautiful reflections from friends, families and colleagues who shared the memories of this remarkable man. There was one thing that kept appearing time and again—something that explains why Ted Egan was respected by those who knew him and Territorians more broadly. He listened to and learned from people, and he respected every one of their stories.

Even in later years of his life, Ted never stopped sharing the stories of this place that he loved so deeply. Through his music, writing and storytelling, he helped generations of Territorians and fellow Australians better understand the history of this place and the people and spirit of this land. Mr Egan may not have been born in the Territory, but he embodied the Territory spirit and what it truly means to be a great Territorian.

I get the opportunity on this special day to celebrate the life of Mr Egan, and I would like to share some words from Labor's first Chief Minister, Ms Clare Martin, who called Ted to let him know that he was Labor's pick for the Administrator.

These are words from Clare Martin. When the need for a new Administrator arose, Clare took her pick to her then Cabinet—including Jack Ah Kit, the person who first suggested Ted Egan—and the entire Cabinet unanimously backed the suggestion, recognising that he was the embodiment of all bits best of the Territory.

However, when Clare rang Ted to ask him if he would be open to her putting his name forward, he was on tour in New South Wales and his first reaction was to say no.

Clare said it was a response born out of modesty, that he did not see himself as fit for a vice-regal position. Clare convinced him to sleep on it, and the next day—perhaps with a bit of persuasion from Nerys—he agreed.

At one of his first press conferences he was asked what he would do with his beer carton, the suggestion being that playing a beer carton as a musical instrument was hardly a fitting thing for an Administrator to do. Of course we should guess what Ted's answer was. When he was out on official Administrator duties, Mr Egan left his beer carton behind, but he found a reasonable substitute. Instead of tapping on a beer carton, he would use a lectern and a mic on it, which gave a similar sound to a beer carton playing music.

Clare remembers that he might not have had his trusty beer carton, but throughout his time as the Northern Territory Administrator he still sang at many events, bringing much joy to all the people who attended. People would invite Mr Egan to sing. In fact, they loved having him belt out a tune. Whether it was for a small community gathering or a more formal event, he was never short of a song.

Clare Martin also recalls what an incredible team Ted and Nerys were. Nerys, a warm presence who hugged everyone she met, was Ted's secret weapon, and they were a formidable pair together.

I had the honour of growing up with Mr Egan's music; my parents were big fans. I remember the first time seeing him as the Territory Administrator and my dad say, 'Hey, that's Ted Egan.' I asked, 'Is he the musician?' Dad said, 'Yeah, but he's also the Administrator'. What a great story in the Territory to mark a remarkable life.

The last time I saw Mr Egan was in my electorate of Arnhem, in Mataranka. Ted and Nerys came to the Mataranka markets after the rodeo and, lo and behold, here is the former NT Administrator busking in the middle of Mataranka, with his little sheet down and getting a few coins in the middle of the markets. What a fantastic memory to have.

Our Labor opposition pass on our sincere condolences to his loving wife, Nerys, and his children, Greg, Marg, Mark and Jacki, and to Ted's grandchildren and great-grandchildren, on the passing of such a remarkable man, a family man, Territorian and music legend. We share in your heartbreak, but we will also smile and sing loudly when we remember the titan of a man who showed the world the very best of what the Territory looked like.

Vale, Mr Ted Egan.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I am proud to honour the life of a remarkable Territorian and former Administrator of the Northern Territory, Ted Egan AO, and to reflect on the profound respect shown to him at his state memorial. It is pleasing to have Nerys and Ted's family here today.

The state memorial was a fitting tribute to a man whose life was inseparable from the story of the Northern Territory, and it brought together family, friends, Aboriginal leaders, musicians, former colleagues and Territorians from all walks of life. It was a powerful reflection of the reach Ted's contribution has had in this place.

For me, it captured his personality, warmth, humour and humanity—qualities that so many people experienced when they met him. Ted had a remarkable ability to connect with people, make them feel welcome and leave them feeling that their stories mattered.

I can think of no better way to reflect on and celebrate the life and achievements of Ted than through what could be best described as a concert. The memorial captured the essence of Ted and his life through song and story. It was fitting because that was how Ted lived his life, telling the stories of the Territory and Territorians through music, writing and conversation. The songs performed at the memorial were not simply entertainment; they were pieces of history, reflections of lived experience and reminders of the people and events that shaped the Northern Territory.

Ted was, above all, a servant of the Territory. Arriving here as a young man and becoming a patrol officer, he built a life grounded in curiosity, respect and deep engagement with people of the bush. In those early years travelling across some of the most remote parts of the Territory, Ted gained an understanding of this

place that few people truly possess to this day. He did not simply work in remote communities; he listened, learned and formed lifelong friendships. Those experiences shaped him profoundly.

Like many Territorians who came before him and many who followed, Ted learned that the Territory reveals itself not through distance or observation, but through lived experience. It is through travelling the country, sitting down with people, listening to their stories and understanding their history that one truly comes to know the Territory. Ted embraced that journey wholeheartedly.

Those experiences went on to inform his work as an historian, author and songwriter. Ted believed strongly that the stories of the Northern Territory, particularly those of Aboriginal Territorians, needed to be preserved honestly and shared widely. He understood that the history of this place was complex and sometimes confronting but always important. Through his music and writing, Ted documented stories that might otherwise have been lost. He gave voice to people whose stories had too often gone unheard. Many Territorians will remember songs such as *Gurindji Blues*, which told the story of the Wave Hill Walk-off and the struggle of the Gurindji people for recognition and land rights. Through songs like that, Ted helped bring important chapters of the Territory's history to a wider audience.

He did not approach these stories as an outsider looking in, though; he approached them as someone who had built relationships, listened deeply and felt a responsibility to ensure that those stories were not forgotten. At his state memorial that commitment to truth-telling and cultural respect was front and centre. The tributes shared recognised not only his public roles but also the deep and enduring relationship he formed with Aboriginal communities across the Territory. His life's work in recording oral histories and advocating for recognition was remembered as not only an academic exercise but also a genuine partnership and respect. Those relationships were built over decades. They were grounded in trust, honesty and mutual respect.

Ted's contribution to the Territory took many forms over the course of his life, being a patrol officer, public servant, historian, songwriter, author and, ultimately, the Administrator of the Northern Territory. Few people have served this place in so many different ways. In each of those roles he carried the same values: humility; curiosity; and a deep respect for the people of the Territory.

In 2003 when Ted was appointed the Administrator of the Northern Territory it was recognition of decades of service and dedication. It was also recognition of the unique role he played in helping shape the cultural identity of the Northern Territory. As Administrator, Ted brought a warmth and approachability to Government House, along with his partner, Nerys. He understood that the position was not simply ceremonial and represented unity, continuity and service to all Territorians. He carried out those responsibilities with dignity until 2007, always mindful that he was there on behalf of the people. He approached the role not as a distant figure of authority, but as someone who remained deeply connected to our community.

Ted's state memorial reflected that same spirit. It was not simply a ceremony for a former office holder; it was a gathering for a Territorian whose life touched communities across generations. As I mentioned, music featured prominently at the ceremony, as it had throughout his life. This was entirely appropriate. Ted's storytelling was never confined to books or academic writing; it lived in song, shared memory and conversation. His music carried the stories of this place—stories of hardship, resilience, humour and humanity. Through his songs people were reminded of the Territory's past and the individuals who shaped it.

What stood out the most at the memorial was the breadth of respect shown for Ted. People from across the political divide, regions and cultures all came together to pay tribute. That kind of respect cannot be manufactured or demanded, it can only be earned.

Of course, Ted earned that through a lifetime of genuine engagement with people. He always sought out connection. He believed deeply the Northern Territory, in all its complexity, resilience and distinct identity. He understood that the Territory is unlike anywhere else in Australia and something we are all proud of. It is a place where people from many cultures come together, history is deeply felt and community matters. Ted loved the Territory, and the Territory loved him in return.

His appointment as an Officer of the Order of Australia recognised his contribution at the national level, but perhaps the most meaningful honour was the state memorial, the Territory pausing to say thank you. It was a moment for Territorians to reflect on the life of someone who had given so much to this place.

In this Chamber we often debate policy vigorously. Of course, that is our responsibility. We represent different communities and perspectives, and our debates can sometimes be robust, to say the least. However, today we stand together in recognising a life of service marked by authenticity, courage and compassion.

Ted Egan helped shape the Territory's cultural identity. He reminded us that understanding our past is essential to building our future. He demonstrated that leadership is strongest when it is grounded in humility and respect.

Ted's love for the Territory, in particular for Central Australia, was never in doubt. I recall many occasions when Ted used his depth of understanding and knowledge to provide insight and advice about our community. He had no qualms about providing that advice to me and making sure I acted upon it.

He had a remarkable ability to place events in historical context and to remind us that the Territory story is always evolving. Those conversations were generous, thoughtful and often filled with the humour that Ted was so well known for. They are memories I treasure to this day.

To Ted's family and loved ones, we extend our deepest condolences. We recognise that behind the public figure was a husband, father, friend and colleague. The outpouring of support at his state memorial was a testament to the esteem in which he was held by so many people.

Ted's legacy will endure in the historical record, the songs he wrote and the countless relationships he nurtures across this vast Territory. The Northern Territory is better for his life and richer for his contribution.

Vale, Ted Egan AO.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, towards the end, I will sing two lines from the songs he wrote in Galiwinku on Elcho Island when I was a boy.

I share my condolences to the family, friends and community of the Northern Territory as we remember Ted Egan.

Ted Egan was well known across Aboriginal communities and in Arnhem Land. I remember him coming to Elcho Island when I was a teenager. I remember seeing him playing music in the community and at school concerts. It was exciting to see him playing on the stage with Yolngu musicians. This was a time when Elvis, Cliff Richard, Slim Dusty and many more were becoming known in Yolngu communities, and this kind of music was amazing for Yolngu people. We then saw Ted and our people on the stage together doing the same thing. The third time I saw him he was singing in our language, and everyone was cheering and proud that he was learning about our language, music and culture.

When he arrived on Elcho Island, he sat down with the people and was interested in the music that local people were making. He wanted to be part of it. He wanted to collaborate and share music with the people. He was a man who wanted to live with the people, learning culture and language. He sang with top musicians who were part of Yolngu bands. He sang with my *waku*, Dick Munungu. Dick was a member of the Soft Sands band, which is a well-known band from Elcho Island that started in the 1970s. It started as a band that we call a string band, because it used a fishing line that was tied to wood as a drum, and Dick played acoustic guitar. It is one of the oldest bands established on Elcho Island.

I think it was because Ted had spent time in Aboriginal communities with the people—working in partnership and learning about who we really are and about the strengths of our community and our culture—that he became a champion for Aboriginal rights.

Ms Uibo: Hear, hear!

Mr GUYULA: *Yow.*

It was important for our people that he not only saw us as friends but also saw the injustices and stood with us to try to make things right.

Ted went on to become the Administrator of the Northern Territory. He was a good choice for the role because he was interested in people and wanted to learn about Aboriginal people from all over the Northern Territory. He was curious and thoughtful, caring and kind. These qualities qualified him to be a leader of the NT. He cared about all people, and he was standing as a leader for everyone in the NT.

In our Yolngu communities we really admired him and felt that he was a true friend, someone who could stand beside us and appreciate our culture and walk with us. He understood partnership and working together. He was a fair person who contributed to the world with kindness and generosity.

We will remember him fondly. His music and kindness has been imprinted on our lives and in our memories. They are memories of truly good times for our communities.

I will sing two lines of a lullaby song he sang:

Goodnight, little children
Time to go to bed
Goodnight, little children
Ooh-la-loo-la-loo-la
Ooh-la-loo-la-loo
Ooh-la-loo-la-loo-la
Goodnight little children
Time to go to bed

[The member sang in Yolngu Matha.]

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Braitling, that is a hard act to follow.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, it is. I will break into song halfway through, but I do not think it will be quite as beautiful as the Member for Mulka's.

Ted Egan AO was a true Territorian in every aspect of his life. He passed away at the age of 93 on 4 December 2025.

I acknowledge Ted's wife, Nerys; his four children, Greg, Margaret, Mark and Jacki; his seven beloved grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren. We thank Nerys, Greg and Margaret for being in attendance today, along with many other close friends of Ted.

Ted Egan was a man who rubbed shoulders with royalty and bus drivers alike. I was fortunate to know Ted personally. I had the pleasure of listening to him play the beer carton at Newcastle Waters and at many events over the years. He was probably more comfortable in a pub playing on the beer box than at the Ritz, but he would have never let you know.

On one memorable trip to the Mates of the Murranji meet-up, Ted was in attendance with his trusty beer box. The crowd that arrived were in the old pub at Newcastle Waters, and there Ted regaled the group with songs that spoke of droving cattle to Queensland:

Matt Savage, the boss drover, he'll take a mob over
Taking the bullocks to Queensland, aha!

He would sing, and everyone would listen or sing along with the songs they loved. Later that afternoon, as we made our way from Newcastle Waters to the Daly Waters Pub for a few refreshments, I pulled into the Hi-Way Inn. To my surprise, a Ted Egan box set sat at the counter of the roadhouse. I purchased it then and there, and after a memorable night, listened to that six-disc box set where Ted spoke about his life between songs. In the five hours to Darwin and in the 14 hours home, I really got to know Ted, listening to him explain the songs and how they came to be.

When I attended Ted's state memorial on 17 February it was a privilege to hear Ted's family members, friends, colleagues and fellow musicians share fond memories of his life. Ted was the definition of a true Territorian. He was a Territory legend who wore many hats and had a strong commitment to community.

I extend my sincere condolences and thoughts to Ted's family and everyone who is grieving his loss. Ted's legacy will live on for generations to come through the thousands of lives he touched over his many years of service to this great nation and the Northern Territory.

I feel lucky to have known him, even if for a fleeting moment of his incredible life.

Ted has left a lasting impact on the Territory and he will be greatly missed. Gone but never forgotten.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the passing of Ted Egan AO. Those who know Ted know he was a bloody good man.

Ted Egan spent most of his life in the Northern Territory. Ted Egan was not just someone who lived in the Territory; he belonged to it. For more than 70 years he helped tell stories of this place, the people, the land, the struggles and the moments which shaped Territorians as who we are today. When Ted first arrived in the Territory in the late 1940s as a young patrol officer, like many who came north he quickly discovered the Territory has a way of getting into your bones.

Through his work travelling across remote regions, Ted built a deep relationship with the people in the bush, particularly in Aboriginal communities. Those experiences shaped his understanding of this country and gave him a lifelong respect for the cultures and histories that have existed here for thousands of years. Ted was always strong in acknowledging country and spent much of his later life on the beautiful Arrernte country.

Ted believed strongly in the stories that mattered to the Territory and the stories that needed to be told honestly. Many Territorians remember Ted as a bush balladeer, travelling with his guitar and singing songs about Territory life. He captured songs with humour, hardship and the characters who make the north unique, but they were more than just songs; they were history. Ted used music and storytelling to make sure that stories from the bush, which otherwise might have faded away, never faded and were never forgotten.

He dedicated much of his life to documenting important chapters of the Territory's history. In particular, Ted helped bring wider recognition to the Gurindji story—our story and my story—of the Wave Hill Walk-off, one of the most important moments in the struggle for Aboriginal land rights in our country. Ted acknowledged these histories and that they were essential to truly understanding the Territory and its people.

We have heard that Ted was appointed the Administrator of the Northern Territory in 2003, but we have not heard and celebrated that he was the first Central Australian Administrator. In Ted, the Centre had a voice like never before. It was a fitting recognition of his life dedicated to public service, storytelling, music and the preservation of Territory history. During that time, Ted carried himself with humility and warmth. He never forgot the people he had met across the bush and the Territory and the communities which shaped his life.

Ted Egan helped Australians understand something that many Territorians know, that the Northern Territory is not just a place; it is a collection of songs, stories and culture—stories of resilience, culture and people who have lived on and cared for this land for thousands of years. Ted spent his life making sure those stories were heard.

On behalf of the Gwoja people, from the communities from Kalkarindji to the red heart of the nation in Mutitjulu, we express our condolences to Ted's family and friends. With his stories he has honoured our history and reminded us of this place, its cultural richness and incredibly vibrant diversity.

In 2002 I was fortunate to be part of the Year of the Outback celebrations and did the last camel train from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs. We walked camels for 540 kilometres over three weeks. Ted Egan was instrumental on the committee to establish that celebration to acknowledge the amazing contributions that our Afghan community members made to Central Australia. As you can appreciate, over the three weeks every night Ted did what he did best—brought people together. At night the campfires were glowing, the wine flowing and there was a beer carton or two. We sang about the bloody good drinkers from the Northern Territory and *The Drover's Boy*. Every night was a celebration and important recognition.

I grew up on Undoolya Road and lived next to an amazing Territorian, Morag McGrath. At night on the weekends, sometimes Ted and beautiful Nerys would pop over. There would be Scotty Balfour, Dave Evans, Bob Barford and Dave McCall, and I would hide in the corner of the yard because I could hear them singing and it was beautiful. I lived behind one of Ted's children—I think it was Mark—and Steven, Ted's grandson. I grew up in a household fortunate to hear the music of Ted Egan.

I grew up in the generation of the cassette. Not many young people would know what that is these days, but our school holidays were spent driving to Darwin, Katherine or Adelaide, and many times we played the Ted Egan cassette, and as kids we would be listening to *Arnhem Land Lullaby*, *The Urapunga Frog* or *Ride on Little Cowboy*. They were amazing stories.

I do not think there is a Territorian who cannot recall having an interaction with the giant that was and is Ted Egan. He has shaped the Territory to be a better place. He has led with honesty, humility, passion and commitment. As we have heard today, his memorial service in February this year in beautiful Alice Springs was a celebration of his life. It was truly remarkable to see the community come together to recognise how important he was.

I acknowledge an amazing contribution at that service by none other than an amazing Territory talent, Sally Balfour—Scotty and Ursula Balfour's beautiful daughter—who gave an amazing contribution and song at the service. It would be remiss not to acknowledge the mighty band Bloodwood at the funeral. It was amazing and beautiful to have Bob Barford, Scotty Balfour, Dave Evans, Dave McCall, Graham Peter, Barry Skipsey and Ross Muir all there to celebrate and acknowledge the contribution. Ninety-three years is an amazing number, and we reflect on how important those years have been.

I thank Nerys, Greg, Jacki, Mark and Marg for sharing Ted with us and for allowing him to do what he did, because he did it so well. We heard the stories from the Territory's former Chief Minister Clare Martin when we were at the funeral. Eva Lawler, Natasha Fyles and I went to dinner with Clare, and she was telling a story about ringing Ted. Clare said, 'I think he was on the road somewhere with Nerys when we spoke'. Clare said to Ted, 'I want you to be the Administrator', and Ted said, 'Oh no'. That was not the response she was hoping for, and she said, 'Why don't you sleep on it and speak to Nerys'. Fortunately, Ted thought about it and accepted the role, and he did an amazing job in that role.

I acknowledge and pass on my condolences, particularly from members of the communities of Daguragu and Kalkarindji, who—when we spoke about this—said, 'Let that poor bugger rest now. He done a lot of good work. He been a good voice for us and our people.' You can always measure the life and success of someone when you go out to the remote parts of the Territory and mention their name, and you are greeted with a smile and a story. That encapsulated Ted Egan—a storyteller, a musician.

Those of you who have been fortunate enough to make it out to Sinkatinny Downs, Ted and Nerys' beautiful property in the rural area of Connellan, Alice Springs, will know that place was and always will be filled with memories, love and excitement for the Territory, because Ted was one of the best ambassadors the Territory ever had and ever will have.

May he rest in peace, power and music.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I speak in probably a bit of a different way from what we have heard so far. We have heard what an amazing contribution this man made to our community and our Territory, but I want to talk about my personal story with Ted.

When I came to the Territory about three decades ago, I had no idea who Ted Egan was. His music was not something I encountered growing up in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Even though I was part of the music scene, I was more into rock and roll, jazz and musical theatre. I came to the Territory and people were talking about this incredible talent, Ted Egan, so I made it my business to find out a bit more about him. I listened to his music and songs, and as a fellow musician what struck me was just how wonderful a storyteller he was.

Having dabbled on occasion with trying to write songs and music, I knew how hard it was. Listening to his stories in his music and understanding what went into the creation of those beautiful works, I thought, 'I really need to meet this man'. I was fortunate over the next few years to bump into him from time to time at various events and places where he might pop up and perform. I got to see him perform, and what a joyous occasion it was whenever he was in the room.

Then I had the special opportunity, after he was appointed as Administrator, of meeting Ted and Nerys at Government House. I had, over the years, participated in and supported an event the Government House Foundation had run there called Kids' Fun Day. It was one day a year when Government House opened its doors to kids with special needs so that they could come and have a good time playing on fire engines, riding in police cars, going for Harley Davidson rides, checking out what was behind all the secret doors and, most importantly, getting to eat lots of food and drink lots of red cordial—which probably was not the best thing for the mums and dads, but the kids had the best time.

Every year there was a theme. The one that sticks in my mind the most in the more than a decade I did that event was the year that Ted and Nerys decided we should all be superheroes. Purely out of the necessity of being pretty much the only costume I could find, I went as Wonder Woman. We all had the best day. I got to spend some time at the end of the day, when all the kids were cleared out and we got to sit down and have our own glass of 'red cordial' and a party pie and sandwich, to chat with Nerys and Ted.

From that minute on, to Ted I was known as Wonder Woman. Whenever I met him going forward that was pretty much how the conversation would start, 'How are you going, Wonder Woman?' and it would progress from there.

Ted was one of those people who made you feel part of his life, whether you had known him for a moment or decades. I was forever grateful for having the opportunity to spend time with Ted. One of the things that I loved most about him was the dedication with which he took the time to get to know and understand people and hear their stories. When he found a story that he thought other people should know about, he turned it into song.

One of my great memories of the last few times that my husband, Len, and I had chats with Ted was when he was writing *Paragon Cafe* about a Kytherian migrant who opened a cafe called the Paragon Cafe in Wagga Wagga. Many people will not know, but my husband's family is from Kythera and his dad, George, had the Paragon Cafe in High Street in Maitland. Ted grilled Len about what that was like, what it meant and the Greek contribution to our community. I am pretty confident that there are not many country towns across Australia that did not have a Paragon Cafe that was owned by a Greek migrant. The story he told in that song was how important our multicultural society is and how long and deep those roots go.

I will be forever grateful to Ted for reminding us that it does not matter where we come from and what our story has been; it just matters where we will take it into the future. He was, without question, a man ahead of his time. He paved the way forward for us, and we cannot forget that.

One of my greatest regrets, Nerys, is in spite of the many invitations that were extended for Len and I to join you in your beautiful home in Alice Springs, we never quite got there because we were always too busy and too short of time to spend that extra moment travelling down to Alice to spend that time with people we cared very much about. It is a good reminder that even though we think that people will be there forever, sadly, that is not the case. I feel lucky that my journey crossed paths with Ted and Nerys.

Nerys, I extend my deepest condolences to you and your family, and to the world for what they have lost in his passing but what we have gained in the fact that he was here with us.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I feel great privilege in joining in this condolence motion for Ted Egan.

I acknowledge all those in the Chamber today who are feeling the loss of Ted most keenly—his wife and companion, Nerys, his children and all his friends and family.

As for anyone growing up in my generation in Australia, except for maybe the Member for Port Darwin, Ted Egan was a household name as a country music singer. As a young adult I started attending folk festivals, as I continue to this day. Although I am not a music maker—I promise not to sing; you will all be happy about that—it is an enduring joy for me to be surrounded by people making music and expressing their lived experiences through songs, poetry, dance and storytelling.

In the early 2000s our family regularly camped with other families at the Top Half Folk Festival, which was then held on alternate years at Mary River. Ted Egan held court as one of the founders and longstanding patrons of the festival. In those days it was very much a do-it-yourself festival—no big-name acts, only locals sharing stories, songs, poetry and meals. Ted was always at the centre, generously sharing his lived experience across the length and breadth of the Northern Territory and of its people in song, verse and tales.

It was only after a few years of living here that I understood the unique place in time and in the Territory which his music occupied. It was music that came from not only observation but also immersion in the front line of relations between the many cultures, communities and people of this place. It reflected his deep values of equality of all, respect for culture and commitment to making this a more just and fair society. He shared his views and stories with humility and warmth, reflection and the wistful charm of his poetic soul.

Ted was no stranger to a drink or two and some of his finest tales captured the misadventures of Territorians with alcohol. One year at the folk festival we were quietly amused when a group of children we were camped with spontaneously broke into one of Ted's catchier tunes, 'They've got some bloody good drinkers in the Northern Territory', and they walked through the festival singing that for the rest of it.

Ted made time to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds, even our little children, some of them babes in arms. He sought connection and common ground with everyone he met and he welcomed and amplified other voices, no matter their background, age or circumstance. His work on reconciliation is widely recognised. As the Administrator of the Northern Territory, he brought this warmth and humility to all his official and unofficial activities, continuing to play to his strengths as a storyteller and keen observer of the details of life in the bush, towns, deserts and the Top End. He did not stop when that job was over, but put his reflections and thoughts into a book, *Due Inheritance*, which I have here if anyone wants to read it. It proposed innovative approaches to solving some of the most tricky and persistent issues in the Northern

Territory. He set out his ideas clearly and without fear or favour. It was a shame that this book did not receive wider consideration and recognition.

Ted continued to attend the Top Half Folk Festival until only a couple of years ago, when he was no longer able to travel. I know that this year people will be gathering at Ross River in Central Australia for the next festival and be remembering Ted, his songs, stories, generosity and unique and enduring contribution to the Northern Territory.

Ted reminded us that leadership and influence are not only measured in office or power but also in the courage to listen, learn, connect, amplify others and leave a community stronger and more united than you found it.

Thank you, Ted, for everything you gave to the Northern Territory and to your family for sharing him with all of us.

Vale, Ted Egan. You are deeply missed.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I also pass on my condolences to Nerys and family and all his friends.

I got to know Ted first of all for a book which was called *Sitdown Up North*. It was a great book and a fantastic read, written in his early days. It relayed the story of when he and his mate Ronnie Smith as 17-year-olds arrived in Darwin around Easter time. They were heading to South America. Of course, nothing was open, so they were just living off a bit of bread. They were looking for a bit of casual work, and someone who took a liking to them told them they should go to a pub on a Friday evening and say hello to the people. This was the interview for the public service, because a lot of public service heads were there. The only question was, 'What sport do you play?' I think Ted said he played AFL or football, and he was sent to a department that had a strong football team. Ronnie Smith was a cricketer; he went to work at Transport and Works.

I mention Ronnie because I knew him when I first arrived in Darwin. I ran into him and a group of his mates at the golf course, and we got to play together. He was an old bookie. He used to run the bookie on the side and do all this other stuff. Ted knew all that too, might I say. We got to partner up every now and then, and they used to call us 'the rookie and the bookie'. At one stage I could play, but not so much now.

Having said that, when I had all these discussions with Ron, what you got out of it was that Ted was a leader. He was an educator. He was certainly a sportsperson—we have all the St Mary's people over here, Vic Ludwig and all the others. He was a raconteur, as we have heard from others. He was an entertainer—Nerys, you know that too. You used to sing together. I will talk more about that.

The main thing is he was a genuine Territorian. His heart was in the Territory. He was of the old school. He had a big live character and a great sense of humour.

Back when we had the railway—I am conscious that we have Barry Coulter in the audience, who played a big role in getting the railway built. Then we got into the operational phase; I pay tribute to Clare Martin in this regard as well. We had to get attention about the railway being up and going. I think in 2004 we ran one conference in Darwin; it was great. All the big people in business came.

We thought we had better do something different next time. I will say it was my idea. We came up with the concept to run a conference aboard the train, because *The Ghan* had just started, from Darwin to Alice Springs—which we did. We had about 240 businesspeople on that train, and we had a plenary session at Katherine cinema and another at the convention centre in Alice Springs, but in between there was a long journey, I can tell you.

We took Ted's advice—and I think Nerys might have been there, singing her Welsh songs. Ted said, 'Brian, let me give you a hint. It's the second day and night that will be the most fantastic.' He was absolutely right. On the first night, they were all trying to get on the train and figure out where they will sit. The second day and night, in between the plenary sessions—there were no mobile phones, so no coverage. There was plenty of that red cordial the Member for Port Darwin talked about—the adult red cordial was flowing—and plenty of cartons of beers, like the Member for Gwoja talked about. It was full of singing and entertainment, and Ted was front and centre. He was absolutely right. We had the most enjoyable journey.

He also said, 'When we get to Adelaide you'll have your sea legs'. You do get off the train and wobble for the next day or so.

He was fantastic, a true entertainer. This was getting networking happening. Ted was the best networker of all time. He brought everyone together, and when he made speeches everyone on the train felt special. He made them feel that way, which was fantastic.

I go back to my own mother who used to say, 'Brian, you're young now, but you'll come across a lot of people and they will pass on. The question you have to ask is: were you and everyone else better off for those people being in your life?' In terms of Hon Ted Egan, it is a resounding yes. We are much better off for knowing him.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, *pupuni japinari*. That is good morning in Tiwi. I thank the Chief Minister for bringing the condolence motion this morning in respect of the great man Ted Egan.

Where do I start with a man who has done absolutely everything in the Territory—travelling the depth, width and length of the Territory, speaking multiple languages as well? I want to talk about his involvement with Tiwi people and go down memory lane, when I was first at Wurrumiyanga. I am not too sure if it was a grand final or a festival, but all these elders were walking around with one white man in the middle. We were all like, 'Who's that?' He was speaking in Tiwi and replying to our Tiwi elders, Robert Tipungwuti and Hyacinth Tungutalum. I did not personally know him, but from that point on I needed to know what he was about. When I read a bit about him and got to know him, I realised he did a lot for Tiwi people and other Indigenous groups in the Territory.

He was a stalwart and learned language and culture. He lived in West Arnhem, East Arnhem, Borroloola and the desert. He worked on the Tiwis. In the 1950s he worked as a patrol officer, protector and advocate for Indigenous people in remote areas. He later served in the first Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and became an outspoken champion for land rights. He also participated in cultural preservation. In the 1970s he recorded singing and dancing of various cultures. There is a museum on the Tiwi Islands which has those recordings. They were amazing works.

His respect and friendship throughout the Territory was maintained throughout the years. I did not go to the funeral in Alice Springs, but our Tiwi leaders went and told me about it. If we had it our way, we would have a *Pukumani* ceremony with him on Tiwi Islands, but we had to go to the place he last lived.

He played a big role in St Mary's Football Club as one of the founding members. I did not play for St Mary's; I played for Palmerston. There were 34 premierships, 21 runners-up, 33 minor premiers and only one wooden spoon. They do not see the bottom much. Footy is now infused in our culture on the Tiwi Islands. We participate all over Australia. St Mary's footy club has produced some of the greatest Aboriginal players in the AFL, such as Maurice Rioli; Michael Long, who I acknowledge he is at the back of the room; Ronnie Burns for Geelong; Cyril and Daniel Rioli, premiership players; Ben Long; and Austin Wonaeamirri from my home town of Milikapiti.

I will touch on times when Ted saw talent in Indigenous players. On the Tiwi Islands we played football in the 1950s and did not participate in the bigger league in the Territory. I read an article from Sister Anne who said that they put together material to mimic a footy and played like that. It was Ted Egan who brought our players across and put them in a team to participate, and the rest is history.

I thank the family for letting Ted go to all the remote communities, learning languages and probably eating bush tucker—which I am keen on when I go to different areas. It was his fight for land rights and recognition of Aboriginal culture that has put us on the map, and I thank him for that.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Hon Barry Coulter

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of former Deputy Chief Minister Barry Coulter. On behalf of honourable members, welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam SPEAKER: I will contribute to this condolence motion brought on by the Chief Minister.

My dad loved Ted Egan. We are from Grafton. Dad was a bushie from the top of the Clarence River. Dad was born in 1932, the same year as Ted Egan. They were of the same vintage.

When I moved to Alice Springs in the early 1990s, dad was right onto it. When they came for their annual visit to Alice Springs from Grafton—all the way in the rig—I had to book in to see Ted Egan. The first time I saw him was at Chateau Hornsby, the old winery in Alice Springs. I thought, 'Oh my God, who is this dude playing a VB carton?' but I quickly got it. Ted also played at the Old Windmill, which is now the Alice Springs brewery. I totally got it and I became enthralled by his beautiful music.

The beautiful songs, *Sayonara Nakamura*, *The Drover's Boy*, *Urapunga Frog* and 'The Bloody Good Drinkers of the Northern Territory', have transfixed and thrilled Australians across the breadth and depth of this country for years. My father in Grafton loved Ted Egan. He had fans across Australia and I am sure across the world.

I pay my deepest respects to the talented, vivacious, very Welsh Nerys, who comes from the same part of Wales that my mother came from; and to Ted's four children, Greg, Marg, Mark and Jacki, who I worked with at the Alice Springs Hospital many years ago—it is nice to see Ray Egan here today as well—and the wider Egan family. I extend my sincerest condolences. There will never be another Ted Egan.

At this point in a condolence motion in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly we usually stand together in silence to reflect and remember, but I thought to myself, 'Silence? This is his last stage.' I contacted Nerys and asked, 'Silence or a song?' Nerys quickly got on to the lovely Sally Balfour, who is here this morning, and arranged for Sally to sing one of Ted's amazingly beautiful songs that we had a segue to earlier from the Member for Mulka very beautifully.

Welcome to Sally, who will sing the *Arnhem Land Lullaby*. Please enjoy this wonderful song. Sally's family, obviously, have been close to Ted and Nerys over the years. Scotty Balfour was a leading celebrity in Alice Springs for many years.

Ms BALFOUR: I am honoured to sing *Arnhem Land Lullaby*. Thank you, Nerys. I acknowledge that I am singing in Yolngu Matha and English on Larrakia country and pay my respects to First Nations people.

[Ms Balfour sang *Arnhem Land Lullaby*.]

Madam SPEAKER: Sally mentioned to me yesterday afternoon that she is releasing a recording of another one of Ted's songs, so I will indulge us all and ask her to sing one more song. This one is a special one. Sayonara, our beautiful Ted Egan.

[Ms Balfour sang *Sayonara Nakamura*.]

Madam SPEAKER: Thanks, Sally, that was beautiful.

Motion agreed to.

Madam SPEAKER: That concludes this condolence motion for Ted Egan this morning. I invite you all to join us for refreshments in the Main Hall.

The Assembly suspended.

VISITORS
Electorate Officers

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of electorate officers participating in the Electorate Officer Forum. On behalf of honourable members, I welcome you to the Chamber.

Members: Hear, hear!

NOTICES

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Police): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Firearms Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 61.

Mr MALEY (Mining and Energy): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Mineral Titles Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 56.

Mr MALEY (Mining and Energy): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Pipelines and Petroleum Legislation Amendment (Industry Development) Bill 2026, Serial 57.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Criminal Procedure Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 58.

Ms BOOTHBY (Tourism and Hospitality): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Liquor Legislation Amendment (Fast Track Approvals) Bill 2026, Serial 62.

Ms BOOTHBY (Racing): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Racing and Wagering Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 59.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next meeting day I shall present a Bill titled Heritage Amendment Bill 2026, Serial 60.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall move that this Assembly:

1. recognises that, as a unicameral parliament, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly has a heightened responsibility to ensure transparent, accountable and well-scrutinised lawmaking

2. notes that effective scrutiny requires adequate information and sufficient time for members and the public to consider legislation

3. notes that in all other unicameral parliaments in Australia all Bills are routinely referred to a relevant parliamentary committee for proper scrutiny, yet in the 15th Assembly, the vast majority of Bills have bypassed this essential review

4. calls for standing orders to be amended to align with minimum standard practice in other Australian unicameral parliaments to:

   (a) allow any member to refer a Bill to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee

   (b) require all Bills to be accompanied by full explanatory material outlining policy objectives, consultation undertaken, costs and key economic, social and community impacts.

5. refers this matter to the Standing Orders Committee to examine options to strengthen legislative scrutiny and report back to the Assembly by 30 August 2026.

PETITIONS
Petition No 21 – Protect the Wellbeing of All Residents by Addressing Problem Tenancies in the Northern Territory
and
Petition No 22 – Take Immediate Action Addressing Problem Tenancies to Protect the Wellbeing of All Residents

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I present petition number 21 from 171 petitioners and petition number 22 from 245 petitioners calling for the Northern Territory Government to protect the wellbeing of all residents by addressing problem tenancies. Both petitions bear the Clerk's certificate that they conform with the requirements of standing orders. I move that the petitions be read.

Motion agreed to; petitions read:

Petition Numbers 21 and 22, calling on the Northern Territory Government to protect the wellbeing of all residents by addressing problem tenancies in the Northern Territory.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I move that the petitions be referred to the Public Accounts Committee to consider whether the petitions should be debated.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTION TIME

NT Floods – Review

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

The scale and severity of these floods has been deeply confronting, and many communities face the long recovery. Our Labor opposition welcomes the recent announcement of support from Australian Defence Force personnel, which we advocated for over a week ago.

You have indicated that there will be a review of the flood response so the lessons from this event can be properly captured. Whilst I acknowledge there are still many flood-affected areas across the Territory, will you confirm that any inquiry will be independent, examine the response across all levels of government and allow affected community members to share their experiences?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader is right; we are still experiencing severe weather events across the Territory. I woke up this morning and the Todd River was flowing. We have a low pressure system, 34U, over Queensland that is expected to come into the gulf and develop into what could be a Category 3 cyclone. There is plenty of weather still around.

That is on top of the fact that most buildings in Daly River are underwater. A few communities can now move into the recovery phase, which has been an important point of difference today. Katherine, Beswick and Jilkminggan are moving into recovery, which means we can do repairs and make sure everyone is repatriated back home. There is plenty of work happening.

Of course, like with any event, we look at how we can do it better next time. That is important across everything you do in life.

Our teams are focused on delivery on the ground. Although some communities are moving to those more advanced stages of recovery, we are still very much in an operational environment. The Northern Territory Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services are out today with the bureau, providing as much information as is available to the community in relation to what we could anticipate from 34U.

All things come in good time, but right now we are preparing for 34U and continue to respond to the affected communities. We continue to provide support to the 500-odd people in evacuation centres and support our teams who are doing an incredible job on the ground in the weather events that are happening Territory-wide.

NT Floods – Recovery Fund

Mrs ZIO to CHIEF MINISTER

The Territory has recently been impacted by unprecedented flooding and severe weather—I am sure we are not out of the woods yet—causing significant damage to infrastructure and affecting communities across the region. Can you update the Assembly on what action the Finocchiaro CLP government has taken to support Territorians during this difficult time?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is great to have the Member for Fannie Bay as my assistant minister. She has been going through this with me as we work to support Territorians, and I thank her for that.

This morning I made a critical announcement with the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister Hersey in relation to our $100m flood fund. This is about flood recovery, and we recognise this $100m needs to be quarantined and spent on building better where we can and supporting infrastructure repairs as quickly as possible. To head that fund, so we have clear direction on what that money is being spent on, Ken Davies PSM is leading the charge. He will report to Minister Hersey as the responsible minister for the flood recovery fund.

That money will go to things like the Murray Downs Road; the pump at Darwin River which was inundated; checking whether the sewerage collapsed at Katherine hospital in the days following the flood; and flood mitigation works. Are there more things we can do so that we are better prepared next time to mitigate damage to communities? The reason I ask that is we had strong feedback in Katherine about how well the

levees were working at the start of the flood, and they just got overwhelmed due to the sheer scale and size of the floodwaters. We are looking at whether we could do more there and across the Territory.

This is significant funding; it gives certainty to people at a time when they need it most. They need to know we are backing this and will have the resources available to get the job done.

Mr Davies is in Katherine today with the recovery coordinator, because we have moved three communities to the recovery phase, so we have multiple emergency responses running. The Emergency Operations Centre is still running. The Territory Controller, who is the Police Commissioner, runs that emergency response. When communities move into recovery it becomes the recovery coordinator, which is the CEO of Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr Cercarelli and Mr Davies are in Katherine today, making sure we start work to assess the infrastructure needs across the Territory, and we will prioritise this funding so that we can provide an important response to Territorians no matter where they live. I reiterate that this is not a Katherine fund; it is a Territory-wide flood recovery fund because we are deeply committed, given the scale of the weather events. We were in Canberra yesterday, showing on the map the sheer breadth and nature of the floods that have affected Territorians.

This $100m will go a long way to making sure our infrastructure is ready.

NT Floods – Rent Pause

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

Can you advise whether the Territorians living in public housing impacted by the current flooding will have their rent paused for the period their homes were inundated with water? Will any rent pause be backdated to when people were evacuated from their communities due to the floodwaters?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this is a challenging time for public housing tenants and their families affected by flooding. That is why the Northern Territory Government, through our Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development, is working through an emergency rent pause for flood-affected public housing tenants.

The Northern Territory has faced significant flooding and rapidly changing conditions across multiple locations during February and March. The department is working closely with other agencies and emergency services to support communities through response and recovery. This includes assessing impacts to public housing and supporting tenants where properties have also been affected. As conditions continue to be monitored, the department is activating a temporary emergency rent pause for tenants affected by the February–March NT flood events who are unable to access or safely live in their homes as a result.

Importantly, eligible tenants do not need to apply for this support. The appropriate rent pause will be applied automatically for public housing tenants under regulation 5 of the Housing Regulations. This is to make sure tenants are supported for periods when they cannot safely access or live in their homes because of flooding.

The department remains focused on supporting displaced residents, assessing damage as quickly as possible and helping affected public housing tenants. While the response is underway, we continue to survey and assess conditions for entry back into communities followed by scoping of properties for safety. The department is committed to supporting Territorians through the days and weeks ahead.

Indicative timing for rollout of the emergency rent relief will be confirmed and published soon to provide certainty for eligible public housing tenants. The department will be in touch with tenants to advise them of the rent relief and how that is being applied. There is a two-week rent pause for tenants who have been affected by the current flooding events in Nauiyu, Palumpa, Wugularr, Jilkminggan and Katherine; a two-week rent pause for Nauiyu people who have been evacuated; and a rent pause for tenants in Murray Downs from 22 February 2026 until they can return home.

Residents should continue to follow emergency service advice for official updates and public information. Please continue to follow SecureNT.

I give a shout-out to the department staff who have been actively working on this very issue. We acknowledge the suffering and upheaval of many tenants in remote areas. We are working hard to ensure that they are not paying rent until they can go back into their home safe and healthy.

NT Floods – Low-risk Prisoner Support

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS

Following the recent floods in Katherine and surrounding communities, Territorians have again seen the importance of communities working together in the recovery and cleanup. Across the Territory, low-risk prisoners through a supervised community program assist the flood recovery while building skills and responsibility. Can you outline how these programs are supporting the Katherine flood cleanup and how they deliver benefits to local communities and to the prisoners' rehabilitation and reintegration?

Given the demonstrated value of this model in Katherine, can you advise what plans the government has for establishing a dedicated work camp or similar permanent program based in Katherine to support future community needs and ongoing prisoner rehabilitation?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Wanguri understands the importance of Territorians working together. She has been here a long time, and she knows how Territorians come together to support each other. These programs provide a valuable service to our communities. They also help prisoners build the skills, confidence and community connections they need to successfully adjust to life after release from prison. This week has been an excellent example of this in action.

Officers and prisoners from Darwin travelled to Katherine to assist with flood cleanup efforts. The work crews will be accommodated at the Katherine rural campus while they are in Katherine and soon a permanent Katherine work camp will be up and running there. That is a solid demonstration of our investment in both community safety and community regional support.

Tenders for refurbishing the Katherine rural campus have been released this week, paving the way for the Katherine work camp to be built and begin operating. Prisoners will play a key role in this refurbishment, working under the close supervision of skilled officers alongside the contractors. The Katherine work camp will be a genuine pathway for employment. It will create jobs and deliver major benefits to the region with community work parties at the core of its activities.

These parties are there now, working in the community like they did in Alice Springs when it flooded. Their work is valued by the community and shows why these programs matter. During recent weather events, including in Alice Springs and Daly River, prisoners have played a key role in the emergency response. They sandbagged critical sites, cleared debris and helped to set up evacuation sites in Darwin. Their efforts have significantly supported the protection of local communities and restoration of services in and around the Territory.

Equally important is what these programs do for the prisoners. Doing this trusted work in the community builds pride, routine, teamwork and responsibility. It allows the prisoners to develop work habits and communication skills that they can use when they are released; it gives them a sense of purpose. These are essential qualities in their rehabilitation to allow their successful return to community. Instead of being isolated, they stay connected with community and build the purpose I spoke about earlier. This connection is one of the strongest factors to reduce reoffending, which our government is focused on.

These programs change lives in the community and within the correctional system. The prisoners receive a real benefit, as does the community.

NT Floods – Jilkminggan

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER referred to MINISTER for CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Residents in Jilkminggan community were evacuated to Mataranka on 7 March, and the community was cut off with flooding. That was 10 days ago. The Mataranka town hall was stood up by the Roper Gulf Regional Council and Mataranka school through NTG. They were opened as emergency shelters, not evacuation centres, with families forced to buy their own tents. Many are still living outside on the ground, as we speak, without proper protection from the weather and elements over the past 10 days.

With a potential cyclone forecast for the gulf and Big Rivers region, what is the government's plan to ensure these families are evacuated to safe accommodation if the conditions worsen?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know this is in the Opposition Leader's electorate. The people of Jilkminggan have moved to recovery phase, and those residents began receiving their payments while they were at the Mataranka evacuation centre. We had the unpleasant surprise of the Salt Creek Bridge being impassable, which caused a delay in getting those community members home. We were not in a position to get people home earlier because of the bridge.

My understanding from the Treasurer is that we are expecting it to reopen today and we just need some eyes on the ground to make sure that is the case. We will then begin the work to get people home. They have already been receiving payments.

The Member for Katherine visited the people at the shelter a few days ago to look around and provide support. I think there are a couple of people camping, but from my information they have not been forced to. We recognise that people are in evacuation centres and shelters across the Territory. It is an imperfect situation, and we do not want to see anyone out of their home, but when there is extensive flooding Territory-wide, we have to make sure people are safe. There is no question that this comes at great discomfort and uprooting of people's lives. It does not matter whether you are from Jilkminggan, Beswick, Daly or Palumpa; this has been a huge impost on people's lives. It will continue to be like that as we move into the recovery phase.

I will pass to Minister Cahill because Children and Families is providing the welfare response through the Welfare Functional Group.

Ms CAHILL: Madam Speaker, I can clarify that in the initial evacuation period when we got the residents of Jilkminggan to safety, there was a small gap in providing them with what is necessary. I assure everyone in parliament that people were provided with what they required. Stretchers were shipped in for them. As the Chief Minister noted, some people opted to camp out, just as we had people evacuated to town who opted to stay in other places. That is entirely their decision. They are now planning for recovery and relocation to their homes.

NT Floods – Katherine Hospital Reopening

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for HEALTH

Much of the Top End has been hit hard by recent rain and flooding. Katherine Hospital had to be evacuated and patients were transferred to Darwin to ensure they continued to receive the care they needed. Last week you outlined to this Chamber the incredible work of our healthcare professionals who made that evacuation possible.

Getting Katherine Hospital's services back up and running has been a top priority because access to healthcare is vital for this community. Hospitals not only provide essential medical care but also are vital for community wellbeing and safety. I congratulate the Member for Katherine—who has been personally impacted by the floods—for caring and taking time to visit the staff of Katherine Hospital last week. Can you update Territorians on Katherine Hospital and its reopening?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to advise that Katherine Hospital reopened on Sunday, as the Finocchiaro CLP government continues to assist Katherine residents during the flood emergency.

All work health and safety inspections have occurred and the hospital has been assessed as safe to reopen in a staged approach. The staff at NT Health and Katherine Hospital have done an amazing job to get this facility back up and operating. The staged approach for reopening the hospital ensures patient safety is prioritised while managing staffing levels and effective clinical care.

The emergency department at Katherine Hospital is open. The temporary emergency department established at the St John Ambulance headquarters has now closed and all patients have been transferred. The Jack Rooney general medicine ward for patient care is open, initially with a limited bed capacity. The operating theatres are also open for all emergency procedures, while the medical day stay unit will recommence care from Monday. The team will contact patients to discuss their planned treatments.

Specialist outpatient appointments and elective surgeries scheduled during the flood event and for the week commencing 16 March 2026 have been cancelled and will be rescheduled. The Katherine Hospital team will continue to contact all affected patients to arrange the rescheduling of these appointments and surgeries. Inpatients evacuated from Katherine Hospital and relocated to Darwin hospital will be transferred to Katherine this week when it is clinically appropriate.

NT Health will continue to keep patients informed and updated. Our people at Katherine Hospital have been outstanding, not only managing health services but also at the front line assisting the incident management team. The work they have done in continuing to provide an emergency health service during a critical emergency event has been nothing short of amazing. Even while dealing with the flood damage to their own homes, Katherine Health staff have worked tirelessly to support the emergency response. Their dedication to Territorians during this difficult time is truly commendable. At the same time, they have gone above and beyond to get Katherine Hospital open again as soon as possible.

Whilst Katherine is reopening, our Darwin, Alice Springs and Palmerston hospitals are under extreme pressure. A code yellow has been called for Alice Springs this morning, and a code yellow for Darwin and Palmerston has just been issued. I encourage anybody out there, unless it is an emergency, please present to the urgent care clinics.

Fuel Prices

Mr BROWN to TREASURER

On ABC radio this morning you said that there were levers that the NT Government could pull to address skyrocketing fuel prices, but you needed evidence first. Fuel prices increased by 40c in just one day in Belyuen and Wagait. Today Territorians are having to fork out up to 287c per litre in Alice, 298c in Tennant Creek and 273c for diesel in Darwin. What more evidence do you need, and when will you actually pull those levers and do something to address this horrendous price gouging?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is an important question because increasing fuel prices affects everybody in this Chamber and every Territorian. What is more is that they affect Territorians outside the Darwin region. For those in regional and remote areas, prices are going through the roof.

I am happy to explain what we have done. We know what is driving up the fuel prices—the conflict in Iran—and ships coming out of the Strait of Hormuz are being affected, particularly through to our suppliers in Singapore and then getting those supplies to the Territory. That is driving up the terminal gate price. Unfortunately, I do not have any control over the terminal gate price. The terminal gate price is controlled by the producers and companies that insure those boats. I can tell you now after meeting with the federal Treasurer that he is looking at that along with the entire Commonwealth. They now have the evidence to show that some of the big producers may have taken advantage of consumers.

Today my understanding is that the federal Treasurer met with all the major fuel suppliers along with the ACCC to speak with them fairly sternly about some of the practices they were employing. In the Territory, we heard last week—I may have said it in this Chamber—that the prices were increasing. We understood what the terminal gate price was—we cannot control that—but there is a difference between the terminal gate price and the retail price. We are monitoring that through Treasury closely.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; specifically the question was what levers the Treasurer was looking to pull in regard to fuel prices.

Mr YAN: If I was not interrupted, I may have been able to get to my answer. I wrote to all the retailers last week advising them that we were monitoring the price difference between the terminal gate price and retail price. We know what the average is. We knew what it was before the conflict, and we saw what the average had become, and it was above what would normally be taking place. Immediately after writing to those retailers, we saw a drop in the retail price at the bowser. That was great for Darwin, but we still have not seen it out in the regions.

The week prior, when we first became aware of this, I wrote to the ACCC and said that I wanted it to have a close look at what retailers in the Northern Territory were doing.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; can the Treasurer confirm that the levers he is talking about is just writing to the retailers?

Madam SPEAKER: You can continue, minister.

Mr YAN: I thought I was explaining it reasonably well, but obviously not clearly enough. We wrote to the retailers and to the ACCC. I was in discussions yesterday with the federal Treasurer about what has happened with fuel prices. I have Treasury monitoring fuel prices daily, and it is reporting to me. From that I can make some decisions.

NT Floods – Support from Schools

Mr PATEL to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING

With many communities across the Northern Territory impacted by flooding, road closures and evacuations, schools have played an important role in supporting students, families and the broader community during this emergency weather event. In difficult circumstances such as this, our schools are often more than places of learning; they are trusted community hubs that provide stability, reassurance and practical support. Can you update the Assembly on the role that Territory schools played during this emergency and how the department worked with principals, staff and other agencies to support affected communities?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, to say it has been a week is an understatement.

What I can say is that everyone has worked well together in Katherine—the Education, Health and Housing departments and the police and emergency services. It is overwhelming how well everyone has worked together to stand up shelters and have people come into those shelters and be well looked after. In times like this it takes extremely broad shoulders. A lot of things have been said, but I know that the people in those shelters have been looked after as best they can be. When they needed extra blankets, like when I was there the other day, they were sourced.

My neighbours who are in their eighties were there. It was the third time that their house has gone under in a flood.

I give a big shout-out to all the staff from the Department of Education and Training working in those shelters. Whether it is here at Foskey Pavilion or in Katherine, they have worked tirelessly. We have seen the best of what our public service has to offer. As the Minister for Public Service I am extremely proud of the people we have in Katherine whom I have seen in the community making sure that everyone is looked after.

Although I have not been to Foskey Pavilion, other government members have been there. The Chief and Minister Cahill will go there this afternoon. The children in those centres will go to Moulden Primary School, Karama Primary School and St John’s school. I thank those schools for taking on those children.

Katherine High School, Casuarina Street school and MacFarlane school were stood up as shelters. MacFarlane acted as a medical hub for residents and the other schools had people sheltering in them. Their children were well looked after. Those shelters have been removed and school has gone back to normal.

The other day as the Minister for Education and Training I was talking to Telka, the principal at Mataranka School, about the services the school provides in its shelter. Opposition Leader, some people were in tents, but they were very happy; they had stretcher beds. The best thing there was when the produce came in and the ladies from Jilkminggan cooked that food for the rest of the people before the other supplies came in. Well done to them.

Road Upgrades – Central Australia

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

Marion Scrymgour delivers when it comes to roads funding in the Northern Territory. She has delivered record funding for roads.

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: We hear those opposite getting excited at the amount of investment Marion Scrymgour has delivered. Communities across the bush, including Papunya, Willowra, Kintore, Docker River, Imanpa and Santa Teresa, are all asking when their roads will be improved. Money has been given to you by the Commonwealth and the question is: will you deliver? Can you give us an update on when the Santa Teresa, Mereenie Loop and Imanpa roads will be sealed? Will all the other communities have their roads upgraded?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I recall that before the February sittings the Member for Gwoja wanted to ask me about this, but he never had the chance. It is good to talk about it today.

I must also thank Marion Scrymgour, the Member for Lingiari, for doing the work to get the money for those crucial roads for Central Australia. We are committed to delivering for those roads.

The funding was there under the previous government, but it struggled to get this rolling out the door. I tell you what—I am working pretty hard to make sure we get that money out the door and get these roads happening.

I will give an update on where we are at with some of these roads. Mereenie Loop is six packages: package 1 has been 100% designed, the cash is there and it is ready to go; and the section 2 to 6 designs are between 50% and 70% complete. The problem I currently have with Mereenie is I am waiting on land council approval to deliver package 1. It is difficult getting all the TOs together to get those approvals done for access to …

Members interjecting.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; I am hearing interjections. I just want to hear from the minister; he is telling me good news, so I want to continue to hear it.

Madam SPEAKER: I am not sure that it was overly rowdy, but I take your point. We will listen to the minister in silence.

Mr YAN: We are waiting to get those approvals on some section 19s for access to gravel and other bits and pieces for stage 1 of Mereenie. I want to get that delivered because it will start to deliver for communities out there and works for our tourism industry.

Santa Teresa has two packages left for two 20-kilometre stages. The first stage will be from Santa Teresa back towards town and then the last connecting stage. The difficulty delivering that has been getting everyone together to get the approvals to get that going. We only just got the final approvals from land councils in late December to start those packages, and that means the work can now start to get that tender out the door. One tender is already out the door, and that is to get the powerlines and water done to help with the road construction. It has to be realigned; we have to move some powerlines, and we will need water to do it. That work is underway.

I am hoping to see that tender released late this month or early next month. I want to see that work get going because, I can tell you, the people of Santa Teresa will hunt me down if I do not get that delivered. It is the biggest thing on their minds, and after the rain events of the last few weeks, we know why. They got stuck in community; I got graders out to fix the road, and it rained again. Then I got graders back out there, and it rained again.

Imanpa is in the planning process for upgrade. We are waiting on AAPA approvals and the department is working closely with the MacDonnell Regional Council to get that piece delivered. That will take a bit of time, but we are hoping to see it within the next two to three years.

Road Upgrades – Central Australia – Supplementary Question

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

Could you confirm whether Papunya road, Utju road, Willowra Road, Santa Teresa Road, the Sandover Highway and the Buchanan will be accessing the $100m commitment you made today to improve their roads?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I will answer the question the best I can because it is early days. As the Chief Minister stated, we put up the $100m to repair roads and, where we can, rebuild better. There is no point repairing something, then have it washed away in a couple of years.

Ken Davies will head up the group looking at that, along with Minister Hersey. They will look at roads across our network. I wish I could say that $100m could do everything, but it will not get us everything we want; we will have to prioritise certain parts on our critical freight and logistics networks. Ken Davies will do that work, looking at our entire road network, what has been damaged and where we need to spend that money to get the best value and maintain logistics networks, freight networks and access to our communities. He will make a decision on that and then forward it through for approval.

NT Floods – Road Network

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

I thank the Member for Gwoja for providing me such an amazing segue into my question and talking more about business in the Northern Territory and how the flooding events have impacted them.

Given the significant rainfall and flooding across the Northern Territory this Wet Season, many of us are concerned about the condition of the road network and the ability to move safely around the Northern Territory. Buses, freight operators and remote communities rely heavily on the Territory's highways to keep essential goods such as food, fuel and medical supplies moving. Can you update the Assembly on the current status of the Territory's road network, including any restrictions in place, and outline what actions the government and road crews are taking to monitor conditions, protect the network and ensure communities and industries are connected as soon as possible?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, roads affect all of us, whether we know it or not. If you live here in Darwin and get a bit bent out of shape by a few potholes here and there, trust me: when the Stuart Highway and rail network are out, we all suffer those consequences. This Wet Season has placed sustained pressure on our road network. The network is heavily saturated and there is further rainfall forecast.

Yesterday we were in meetings in Canberra with the federal Treasurer and Minister King. The meetings were about making sure critical infrastructure is supported and the Commonwealth understands the true scale of what is impacting us in the Territory. I think Canberra members understood to an extent, but only when we showed them on a map where there has been flooding—in Central Australia, east and west of Alice Springs, all the way up through the Barkly, into the Vic region, across the upper part of the Barkly in Borroloola and throughout the Top End—did they start to understand the full scale of the events we are suffering.

That means moving freight around and getting supplies to where they are needed in communities, regional areas and our major centres. Keeping freight moving is our top priority. We have weight restrictions currently in place on the Stuart, Barkly and Vic highways to protect the surface because it is quite sodden. Oversized and over-mass vehicles are temporarily restricted to reduce damage to the network. I take this opportunity to thank the DLI crews that are there at the moment.

From a briefing this morning, I believe we have 50 to 60 staff from DLI specifically dedicated to assessing our road networks. As I just mentioned to the Member for Gwoja, we have a road cut and damaged, so we get in there and fix it up, and all of a sudden—bang! It rains, we have another event and the road is cut.

Salt Creek is a good example, which the Chief Minister mentioned. We had reports that bridge was gone, so we got crews in and helicopters going out to assess that. We reopened that bridge today. That is amazing work from the teams on the ground. Some of them have not had a day off in five weeks because they have not only been dealing with the weather events in Central Australia but are also covering and helping out with the weather events in the Top End. My hat goes off to them.

It is critical to maintain the Stuart Highway, and the teams have been doing a great job. I must also thank the contractors working alongside everybody else to keep those critical networks open so that we can have food on our shelves. You can go to the supermarket to grab a couple of litres of milk, and then go about your normal day. A lot of people forget that there are a lot of people working to make that happen.

Written Questions Not Answered

J DAVIS to MINISTER for POLICE

In 2025 I submitted 15 written questions to your office. More than half remain unanswered, including several lodged in July last year. Under Standing Order 114, written questions are to be answered within 30 days. In line with that standing order, I also asked the Speaker to write to you seeking reasons for the delay, but I have not received a response.

These questions reflect concerns raised with me directly by my constituents on critical community safety issues, including pedestrian deaths, crime prevention, safer roads, domestic violence and firearm theft, to name a few. When these questions go unanswered it raises a broader concern about whether those voices are being heard and what the purpose of our standing orders are if they are not being observed. Can you explain why these questions were not responded to, and can you advise when my constituents can expect an answer?

ANSWER

Member for Johnston, I am happy to follow that up for you. I note the large volume of questions you put through, and some are better placed for Estimates. Obviously, every time you do this there is a resourcing demand created, but I will follow it up and get them to you.

NT Floods – Financial Relief

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Territorians across the Top End, Katherine, the Barkly and remote communities continue to face unprecedented flooding, with families displaced, homes damaged and essential services disrupted. The Finocchiaro CLP government has activated a major welfare response with record disaster relief payments now being delivered through the Welfare Functional Group. While evacuation centres in Darwin, Mataranka and Beswick continue to support displaced families, many others, including in the Darwin River region, are relying on rapid financial assistance to meet urgent needs.

Can you update the Assembly on the scale of payments being issued and how this welfare response is supporting Territorians in those regions?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this is such a challenging time for our community. I know that everybody is keen to ensure that Territorians impacted by this event are assisted in the best way possible as quickly as possible.

Before I go to the heart of the Member for Blain's question, I give recognition to the incredible team at the Department of Children and Families who have been working tirelessly over the past couple of weeks to make sure that people get help when they need it most. There are more than 100 people working in this space; most of them are from the Department of Children and Families working in conjunction with the departments of Housing, Education and Health and a number of NGOs. This is when the Territory is at its best, when everybody pitches in. I want it on the record that their work has been phenomenal.

We had an evolving situation in relation to the relief payments. We have learned along the way how we can do things better and more quickly. I can tell you today that 4,790 household family units had immediate relief payments approved, valued at $4.21m.

This is the largest response that we have ever had to deal with. It has created challenge and opportunity. One of the most recent opportunities that has been embraced and acted upon in a short space of time was how we could roll out the process online. I am delighted to say that after a quick response it is effective as of this afternoon. Credit to DCDD, which worked with the Department of Children and Families to get this online process in place so that people can put their application in online. Also, people who are very remote—for example, pastoralists who may be entitled to this—will also be able to have payments electronically, which is a first for the Territory in relation to relief. I give credit to everybody who has pitched in.

As I said, we had unprecedented flooding in a variety of areas. Coordinating this online process is making it a much easier, more transparent process for people to follow. I encourage everyone to keep track of the SecureNT website and keep an eye out for any new announcements in this space.

To reassure people, the areas that now have rollouts coming out are as follows: from 17 March, Jilkminggan residents can get payments; Palumpa on 19 March; and Nauiyu and Daly River from 20 March.

Tropical Cyclone Warning – Bush Residents

Mr BROWN to CHIEF MINISTER

The Bureau of Meteorology warns of a high chance of a tropical cyclone developing in the Gulf of Carpentaria on Saturday, then moving towards the East Arnhem and Big River regions, potentially impacting Groote Eylandt communities, Borroloola, Ngukurr and others. What is your government doing to prepare these communities to keep residents safe? In relation to interpreter services, what languages will be engaged? How will the messaging be delivered to ensure critical safety information reaches our mob in the bush?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this is an excellent question. The 34U storm system is moving into the gulf. It could develop into a cyclone and make landfall as early as Saturday. Every day this information is changing. Preparations are underway at the Emergency Operations Centre in regard to what that could look like and what our response will be.

Of course, communication on the ground is through local emergency committees. There are various tiers to emergency response and they all start on the ground with the local committees, which is local people. That is an important point to make. It happens consistently Territory-wide; it does not matter whether people are in a remote community, Alice Springs or anywhere in between, because the local emergency committee is where this starts. All the local intelligence, preparation and cultural understanding are in play by the people who live there. It is important. That feeds into the bigger system where we have the Territory Emergency Operations Centre.

The LECs are activated to make sure people on the ground are prepared and there is proper analysis. We have a critical goods team, for example, and they will be looking at what food and water is out there and, if there is none, how to get more in and those tactical, logistical situations. It looks at whether we have to evacuate people, when and how we do it and where they will go. Following on from that, it will looks at how we will look after, feed and shelter them. There are many steps to it.

As I mentioned in a response earlier, Commissioner Andy Warton has been doing media during this Question Time, going through a lot of the preparation for this weather event. There is a lot of focus on this, and we need to be as prepared as possible. The Territory is saturated, and it presents an entirely different risk profile from what we would ordinarily have if, for example, this was the first cyclone of the season.

I also note that today is eight years since Cyclone Marcus. These late cyclones happen from time to time, and we hope 34U finds somewhere else to terrorise because it is not welcome in the Territory. Unfortunately, Member for Arafura, I do not have the power to move the weather on, but I wish I could.

We will be prepared and will make sure people on the ground can have confidence and reassurance that those local emergency committees have the local footprint and intelligence, knowing the bespoke local needs because—I do not need to tell you—every community is different. It is important we factor that in.

NT Floods – Power and Water

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Power and Water has been putting in a tremendous effort over the last few weeks. We are all grateful for the work the Power and Water team did to bring Darwin River Dam pump station back online. I am glad to hear that all four pumps are now operating and that water storage has returned to normal levels. As we have heard extensively this afternoon, the government will continue to support Territorians while communities are actively facing or recovering from the floods. Can you update the Assembly on Power and Water's efforts in the flood-affected communities?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, as we speak, Power and Water teams are working hard in Katherine and across our remote communities to restore essential services to Territorians. Before I provide an update, I acknowledge the hardworking Power and Water staff and their contractors, who are doing some incredible work, because it is

a team effort when it comes to essential services. Power and Water and its contractors are on the ground doing what is needed to support Territorians and restore essential services. I thank them all.

I am advised that Power and Water is making good progress in Katherine to restore essential services to residents. As of 11 am, there are still 31 customers in Katherine without power.

A member: Down from 1,500.

Mr EDGINGTON: Down from 1,500; that is a good point.

Power and Water is reconnecting those remaining customers as certificates of compliance are received. Water continues to be supplied through the Katherine mains network, and I am happy to confirm that at approximately 7 pm on Friday the boil water alerts were lifted for Katherine, Beswick and Tindal. Work continues in restoring Katherine's sewer infrastructure, and crews are currently working on the underground sewer bypass on Giles Street as well as the Bicentennial Road burst sewer.

Work is continuing to restore essential services in remote communities. In Palumpa, damage assessments were undertaken on Sunday 15 March, and I am advised that floodwater remains too high to commence restoration work.

In Jilkminggan, additional water samples were collected yesterday for testing, and the results will be provided to the Department of Health for further assessment. A boil water notice remains in place at Jilkminggan at this stage.

In Beswick, the boil water alert was lifted last Friday. Power is being restored to customers in Beswick as certificates of compliance are received. In Daly River, flooding continues to delay the Power and Water response.

In my electorate in Murray Downs, water and wastewater services have been fully restored. Power has been restored to all but two properties, which are also awaiting certificates of compliance.

In closing, it is important to put on the record that the work of Power and Water staff and their contractors who are dealing with power, water and sewerage to support people in remote areas has been exceptional.

Central Arnhem Highway – Wet Season Closures

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

Last year the Central Arnhem Highway was closed for more than a month during the Wet Season and many homelands were cut off for weeks. What preparations have been made this year to ensure that the communities remain connected?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, a huge amount of work is going on in the background during these flood events for homelands and remote communities. All that communication is happening across the board to support communities and homelands. The Arnhem area that the Member for Mulka spoke about is important.

There have been severe weather events across the Northern Territory. In my electorate alone, communities and homelands have been cut off. Over time we have seen people unable to access those homelands due to the condition of the roads, particularly when they are affected by weather events. We are ensuring that homelands are being supported by their service providers. The providers that are funded through the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development are working, communicating with and providing support to the homelands.

This is important to me because, similar to the Mulka electorate, my electorate is particularly remote, being one of the largest electorates in the Northern Territory …

Mr Paech: Not the biggest.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is similar to the Gwoja and Mulka electorates. I think the three of us have some of the biggest electorates in the Northern Territory.

I reassure you that although many roads are cut off at the moment, we are communicating with people in those remote areas to ensure they are safe and provided with the essential services they need through the critical goods component of the Emergency Operations Centre.

Once there is an opportunity to make further assessments of the work that needs to be done in those remote areas, our teams will work with the service providers to identify the work needed to ensure that all those homelands are accessible in the future.

Member for Mulka, we will continue to have those conversations about service delivery. We want to ensure that there is access to health services, housing and all the services needed to support the people out there.

Cattle Industry

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT

The cattle industry is one of the Northern Territory's powerhouse industries, valued at well over $1bn each year and delivering real economic benefits for regional and remote communities. Under the Finocchiaro CLP government it recorded its strongest performance in more than a decade. Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government continues to secure the future of this incredibly important industry?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know the Member for Goyder has a pet steer himself.

The Finocchiaro CLP government knows how important the live export industry is to the Northern Territory. It is an industry we are proud to support. Yesterday I was at the Livestock Exporters Association (NTLEA) Berrimah Export Yards with my good friend, the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries to announce an expansion of the site. There is no better place to make this announcement than at the facility, boots on the ground, where the action happens and the industry gets the job done.

A two-hectare landlocked parcel has been sitting unused adjacent to the Berrimah Export Yards, and our government is allowing this space to now be activated to deliver real benefits to the NTLEA. The NTLEA has spoken about this land in the past, and we have delivered for the industry with this expansion. Our government is all about backing our cattle producers across the Northern Territory and delivering certainty for our live export industry.

I will speak about some of the benefits this expansion provides. A key aspect is that it will provide the additional space to enable the NTLEA to appropriately manage run-off from the site during rain events, which I often speak about with my Environment hat on. This will contribute to enhanced environmental protections at the yards and futureproofing of the facility going forward. This land transfer enables new biosecurity benefits, allowing the Northern Territory Government to access the facility in the event of a biosecurity emergency or significant animal welfare incident.

Strong biosecurity is central to protecting this important industry and enabling market access. Strong biosecurity plans and procedures strengthen the Territory's preparedness and response capability. The NTLEA will be able to hold cattle. Overall, this expansion will allow that site to expand and to grow into the future.

Our pastoralists are the backbone of our regional economy, with many of them being affected by recent flood events that have occurred across the Northern Territory. I have spoken to many of them directly, and my heart goes out to the families who have been impacted by rain and flooding through their homes.

During our year of growth, certainty and security we will continue to back our live export industry and support it as we drive the Northern Territory forward.

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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CODE OF CONDUCT AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL
Serial 54

Continued from 5 February 2026.

Mr EDGINGTON (Housing, Local Government and Community Development): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, councils play an incredibly important role in our community and deserve to be well supported by the Northern Territory Government. The work they do is deeply connected to the community, whether they are delivering roads, fixing footpaths and lighting, providing community services, keeping verges tidy, collecting rubbish or putting on local community events. Everything they do impacts individuals, families and communities across every aspect of their daily life. What we are hearing is that the councils are feeling unsupported by the CLP government. They feel their voices are not being heard, and they are not the only ones.

One of the biggest examples of the CLP turning its back on local councils is the way that it has quietly and without warning changed the regulated electricity tariff, making councils subject to the cost-reflective tariffs from 1 July. Effectively, this means a massive power price hike for every council in the Territory. It is money councils now need to find in their own budget, which should have been going towards roads, parks, footpaths, lighting, rubbish collection and the many other services they are expected to deliver. The CLP activated full stealth mode in applying this massive increase.

CLP members love to congratulate themselves by press releases and social media posts, but somehow they let this one fly under the radar. They dropped it and ran, and councils are scrambling to deal with the fallout and the hit on their budget. It is not just councils the CLP has done this to; it also ripped the power subsidies from schools and attempted to do it to large Territory households. This is a warning to every Territorian: the CLP cannot be trusted when it comes to power price hikes. It has done it before and will do it again—to councils and schools so far. Brace for households to be next.

Territorians expect governments to work together in their best interests, but those opposite have proven time and again how little value they place on working constructively and collaboratively to deliver good outcomes for all Territorians, not just some. The CLP is more than happy to throw councils under the bus at the first opportunity, particularly if it means deflecting criticism of its own performance, and it is more than happy to break promises to them.

Before the election the minister was in communities promising to replace shire councils and community-based councils. This is what he told anyone who would listen. It is in the CLP election commitment material, but since the election he has suddenly gone very quiet on this commitment. Why? Because it is a false, hollow and empty promise. He has no intention of delivering on it; he has no budget to deliver it. We know he has failed to get a single cent from his Cabinet colleagues to support the de-amalgamation.

Let me say that again: the CLP Cabinet ministers have refused to fund a commitment they made to the people of the Territory before the election. It is about time the CLP came clean to every council and every person they made this false commitment to. Minister Edgington needs to get out and apologise to every one of them because he cannot deliver it and he will not.

Like so much of what the CLP does, it is just words, spin over substance and image over action; it is a disgrace. What is also a disgrace is the way the CLP has introduced a Bill to parliament that contains a hidden bomb. The revised code of conduct framework is largely good. The CLP has taken long enough to get it to the parliament, but at least it finally did it.

I understand LGANT and councils are largely happy with it, but we will seek some amendments to it on their behalf. These are sensible amendments that will help to strengthen the Bill and better support councils. Those opposite often do not consult, but they did on this, which is great. It was only certain stakeholders, but at least they made some effort. This result is largely what LGANT and councils have been calling for: a framework that allows them to better deal with code of conduct breaches and bad behaviour that can be incredibly disruptive to councils as they try to get on with their business.

It is beyond belief the way Minister Edgington and the CLP has snuck in amendments for rate concessions that will cause difficulties for community housing providers. It is yet another example of this government looking after a few at the expense of the many, particularly Territorians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Not only do CLP members not seem to care about them, but they actively go out of their way to make life more difficult. Every Territorian, every family, deserves somewhere safe and decent to live.

When you talk about kids getting to school and adults getting the chance to build skills or take on work, having somewhere decent to live is fundamental to that. The CLP does not seem to get it. Its home owner grants are great for Territorians and interstaters who can afford to service a mortgage, but not all Territorians

can avail themselves of those, nor do they help many people outside Darwin or Palmerston, as the data clearly shows. There has been very little take-up outside those areas.

Instead of just governing for a few, this government needs to put equal focus on building our stock of social and affordable housing across the Territory; it is a critical piece of the housing puzzle. Instead we see the CLP abrogating its responsibility to provide adequate social and affordable housing for Territorians. It walked away from housing targets that would unlock federal government funding and ripped money out of public housing repairs and maintenance. It is an appalling policy. It puts people in precarious living circumstances, making it much harder for them to upskill or hold a decent job.

We live in a beautiful and prosperous part of the world. A government's job is to make sure everyone can make the most of that, not hold them down or drag them back.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I support this Bill, which represents another important step in strengthening the legislative framework that governs local government in the Northern Territory. It builds on the previous reforms and continues the work of ensuring that councils across our Territory have the governance structures, accountability mechanisms and legislative clarity they need to effectively serve their communities and do their job.

Local government plays a vital role in the functioning of our democracy. It is often the most underappreciated level of government in our democratic system. While this Assembly debates Territory-wide policy and legislation, it is local government that often deals with many of the practical everyday issues that shape the quality of life for Territorians.

A number of people in this Chamber have previously served on councils, including Madam Speaker, the Members for Gwoja, Karama and Barkly, and me. We know just how important it is for the interaction in our everyday lives.

Councils manage the roads people drive on every day, the parks families gather at, the libraries shared by our communities, the sporting facilities people train and play on, the garbage and waste services and other community infrastructure. Councils make decisions that affect the future of towns and communities. They provide programs and services that bring people together and strengthen the social fabric of our regions. For many Territorians the most direct interaction with government occurs not with the Territory or the Commonwealth, but with their local council.

It is the local government that people call when a road needs grading or a pothole fixed, when a park needs maintenance or a bench is broken, when a community facility needs to be improved or when local issues need to be addressed. In the Northern Territory our councils operate across vast distances, diverse communities and different economic circumstances. From regional centres to the metropolitan councils and remote communities, local government plays an important role in ensuring communities function effectively and remain connected.

Because of the proximity of local government to the community, councils are uniquely positioned to understand local priorities and respond to the needs of the people they represent. With that proximity comes responsibility. Councils hold positions of trust. They are entrusted with public resources, representing community interests and making decisions that shape the places that people call home.

That trust must be supported by good governance. Good governance is not simply a bureaucratic concept; it ensures that decisions are made in the best interests of the community, that public resources are used responsibly and that elected representatives remain accountable to the people who elected them. Strong governance ensures that decisions are made transparently, ethically and in the interests of the community. It ensures that councils operate effectively, disputes are resolved fairly and public confidence in local government is maintained.

When governance frameworks are strong, councils can focus on delivering services and improving their communities. When governance frameworks are weak or unclear, councils can become bogged down in internal disputes, uncertainty and processes that undermine the confidence in the institution of local government.

It is important to note that in the current framework, prior to this legislation coming through, it can take a single councillor on a council to completely disrupt the work of that council. We have seen it in the City of Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield and Coomalie—across the Territory. When councils become more focused on

their ego or their own personal politics rather than the community, without any recourse, the community suffers, as does confidence in local government.

There is a lovely Facebook group called the Humpty Doo and Rural Areas Community group; it is quite a large Facebook group in the rural area, and you can judge how well council is doing by the number of posts. If there are no posts and it is all quiet, that means council is doing a fantastic job. If there is a post every day about something, that means it is doing less of a great job. The community sentiment is there, so when there is peace and quiet—I used to joke when I was on council that no-one would ever ring you to tell you their road was perfect, they had a great commute to work and there was not a pothole in sight, but the moment there was pothole they would let you know.

Strong governance in local government is not simply about rules and procedures; it is about that trust between communities and their elected representatives, between the councillors and council staff and between councils and the broader system of government.

When people vote in a local government election they are placing their trust in individuals to represent them fairly, responsibly and ethically. When that trust is upheld communities thrive; however, when that trust is undermined by the actions of a few, confidence in local government can quickly erode.

Unfortunately, we have seen situations across the Territory and Australia where weak governance frameworks have allowed misconduct, dysfunction and disputes to escalate to the point that councils have become unable to effectively serve their communities and have been stood down. This is why the Territory must have strong mechanisms in place to support good governance and deal with misconduct when it occurs.

Local government is an incredibly diverse sector in the Northern Territory. Our councils range from the small remote councils serving dispersed communities across vast distances to larger regional and urban councils managing significant infrastructure and budgets. They operate under different circumstances but they all share the same fundamental responsibility to govern effectively and in the interests of their community. The legislative framework must recognise those differences while ensuring a consistent standard of governance across the Territory, which is what this Bill seeks to achieve. It is why a legislative framework that underpins local government must be continually reviewed and improved.

This Bill forms part of an ongoing program of reform designed to ensure the Northern Territory's local government legislation remains modern, effective and aligned with the best practice across Australia. It reflects consultation with the local government sector, LGANT and councils; engagement with stakeholders; and the practical experience gained since the introduction of the *Local Government Act 2019*. Importantly, this Bill recognises that local government is not static. The failures of the previous government's reforms are being and will continue to be addressed. This Bill introduces clearer processes, stronger oversight mechanisms and a modernised governance structure that will help councils operate more effectively and with greater confidence.

Before discussing those reforms in detail, it is important to acknowledge why the change is necessary. One of the key drivers behind the reforms in this Bill is the failure of the previous government's change to the code of conduct framework.

In 2019 the former Labor government introduced reforms that fundamentally weakened the code of conduct regime for local government councillors. These changes removed meaningful penalties and stripped the code of conduct framework of the enforcement mechanisms it previously had. In effect, these reforms left councils with a code of conduct that had expectations but few consequences. It created a system where breaches could be identified, but meaningful action was often difficult or impossible to take. It placed councils in the uncomfortable and often impractical position of having to investigate and adjudicate complaints about their own members without the necessary independent structures to support that process. Most importantly, it left many councils and communities frustrated by a system that simply did not have the tools required to effectively address misconduct.

A code of conduct without meaningful consequences is not a governance framework; it is merely a guideline. When rules exist without enforcement mechanisms, they fail to deliver accountability. Accountability is essential for maintaining public confidence in local government and the effectiveness of councils.

Across the Territory, councils found themselves dealing with complaints and disputes within a framework that lacked clarity, independence and effective enforcement options. Some complaints lingered unresolved, some became nearly impossible to navigate where they were up to in the process and, in most cases, the system

failed to deliver an outcome that restored community confidence in the council other than requesting councillors who breached the code of conduct to issue an apology and undertake some training.

The solution to every complaint was to undertake training and issue an apology. Basically, if a person did something wrong and breached the code of conduct, they were told they had done something wrong and needed to issue an apology and undertake training. If that person said they would not do that, they would have another breach of the code of conduct and be told that they must apologise twice and undertake two trainings. If the person again said that they would not do that, they would have to do three trainings and make three apologies. It kept going on; it was an endless loop of code of conduct breaches because there was no mechanism to remove the councillor, issue a financial penalty or have a consequence for those actions.

In the previous local government term, some councillors had more than 17 code of conduct complaints, and it became cyclical, whereas previously prior to these reforms, if you were to say a horrible word about someone else in a council meeting, it would cost you $2,500. There were consequences for actions.

Local government deserves better than that. Councillors deserve clear expectations and fair processes, and communities deserve to know that when misconduct occurs there are appropriate independent mechanisms to address it. This Bill recognises these shortcomings and seeks to correct them. It restores strength, accountability and independence to the code of conduct and complaints processes.

I will now talk about what is in the code of conduct for local government. It has been broken down from what used to be a 10-part piece, which we all had to sign at the beginning of the council term, into an easier-to-understand and detailed code of conduct. It is simple things like:

- A member must treat others with respect, courtesy and fairness.

- A member must not use offensive or derogatory language when referring to another person.

- A member must base decisions on relevant and factually correct information, make decisions based on merit in the public interest, and either read or be briefed on all agenda papers given to the member.

One of the councillors I served with, who I will not name—my favourite words when he would get up to speak would always be, ‘I haven’t read this, but’. Every meeting where they were about to make a decision or have an impassioned speech, he would always start with, ‘I haven’t read the paper, but’. That would now be a breach of the code of conduct, which I welcome.

It also states you must not repeatedly disrupt a meeting, which we have seen on councils. You must comply with the by-laws and standing orders relating to the meeting procedures. It is unclear whether there are actual penalties in the current system for constantly disrupting meetings and ignoring meeting procedures. I know some councils have by-laws that allow the mayor to kick people out of the chamber and ban people, but not all councils have that framework. This code of conduct makes it a lot easier for councils to manage behaviour within the council, set clear expectations and add penalties.

The code of conduct framework reforms represent the most significant part of this Bill. It introduces a tiered complaint system designed to ensure that matters are handled at an appropriate level depending on their seriousness. The lower-level complaints continue to be managed at the council level. This recognises that not every disagreement or behavioural issue requires escalation to external bodies. Council should be able to resolve minor matters locally where appropriate.

For more serious matters, it adds a new framework where complaints can be escalated to independent assessors who will be responsible for investigating allegations and determining whether misconduct has occurred. These assessors will be drawn from a pool of qualified individuals with experience in law, governance or public administration. Their role will be to independently assess complaints and determine appropriate action where breaches have occurred.

These reforms establish a code of conduct panel comprising three independent members, which will have the authority to hear cases of serious or gross misconduct and impose sanctions where appropriate. These sanctions may include monetary penalties, suspensions or recommendations for further action, which is an important piece that was lacking in the 2019 reforms. People are a lot more receptive to improving their behaviour when there is a direct monetary penalty, a suspension or an action rather than saying, ‘You must apologise and do training, and if you do not do that you must apologise twice’.

This will help resolve a lot of issues that councils have been facing since the 2019 reforms whereby one or two problematic councillors could constantly disrupt and detract—I have seen and heard of councillors forwarding it to the *NT News* every time there is a confidential briefing. They would CC everyone in, so they all knew they were doing it, knowing there would be no penalty other than to apologise and be asked not to do it again. This is a good step.

The independent structure of the complaints handling removes the inherent conflict that existed under the previous system, where councils were effectively required to judge the conduct of their own members, especially with codes of conduct between two councils, or the council and the mayor. It was often an annoyance where something may have been frivolous or minor, but there is then a personality clash in the room and it became hard to manage. Being able by default to flick it to an independent person removes councillors from the politics of council.

These reforms also introduce clearer definitions of misconduct, serious misconduct and gross misconduct and ensure there is clarity on the types of behaviour that breach the code of conduct. Sanctions under the new framework are guaranteed to reflect the seriousness of the behaviour; they range from reprimands and behavioural plans through to suspension or disqualification for the most serious cases.

The system is both fair and proportionate. It gives local governments the clarity and confidence they need to manage themselves, so hopefully we never again have to see a full council being sacked in the Northern Territory.

In addition to the strengthening of the code of conduct framework, this Bill introduces new governance support mechanisms designed to assist councils in managing their governance practices. One of these is the creation of the governance adviser role. A governance adviser can be appointed to provide guidance and support to councillors on governance matters. This role is intended to assist councils in improving their governance practices, strengthening procedures and ensuring compliance, and represents an early intervention mechanism. Rather than waiting for governance issues to escalate into major problems, councils will have access to expert advice and guidance that can help them address issues before they become serious.

It is similar to a financial controller, which has been used in councils in the Northern Territory. That has proven effective in addressing financial governance issues in the Northern Territory. The two roles together—the governance controller and the financial controller—provide a comprehensive response to governance challenges faced by councils.

This Bill provides clarity on the training requirements for council members and the time limits in which they have to complete that training. As of now, they are told they have to do training and they do not do it, they get a code of conduct ruling and are told to do the training again. It is cyclical. The Bill acknowledges that many councillors enter local government from diverse backgrounds and may not have prior experience in governance and public administration. Providing instructive training ensures the councils have the tools and knowledge they need to perform their roles and ensure they can be completed within a reasonable timeline, but it has to be completed.

Another important reform in this Bill relates to the superannuation agreements for elected members of local government councils. I believe it was up to the individual council to sort out a super or no super arrangement—often councillors will have other jobs and the mayors will sometimes be full-time depending on the council. Imagine someone who has been the mayor of, say, Alice Springs for eight to nine years. If they are not paying themselves, they are not receiving super. This represents a significant contribution of their time, career and energy, if they are working full-time. This Bill adds the ability for councils to pay its elected members superannuation. It is not compulsory, but it is up to each council to determine whether it wants to pay its elected members. It will also be up to individual councillors and mayors to decide whether they would like to receive superannuation. It may impact their other benefits or pension. I am a long way from looking at my superannuation and how it works, but apparently there are scenarios where people would prefer not to be paid super; that is their prerogative.

It acknowledges that local government councillors, mayors and the presidents of councils dedicate a significant amount of time and energy to serve their communities. While councillors are often not full-time politicians in the same way as members of this Assembly, their roles may often involve substantial responsibilities and commitments. Good councillors attend meetings, participate in committees, engage with residents, respond to community concerns and make good decisions that affect the direction of their communities. In many cases, particularly in smaller councils in regional areas, these responsibilities are undertaken alongside full-time employment, family commitments and other community roles.

This Bill introduces provisions to clarify the superannuation arrangements for council members, recognising that elected representatives at the local government level should have access to fair and consistent remuneration frameworks. Rather than imposing a rigid one-size-fits-all model across the Territory, this Bill retains the council resolution model, which allows councils to determine the appropriate arrangements and whether the council would like to opt into paying its elected members super. This approach recognises the reality of local government, with councils differing significantly in size, financial capacity and community expectations. A small remote council faces different circumstances from a large urban council.

Allowing councils to determine their own superannuation arrangements ensures that these decisions can reflect local circumstances while still operating within the broader legislative framework. These arrangements provide clarity, certainty and fairness for councillors across the Territory. They recognise that councillors are making a genuine contribution to public life and that remuneration frameworks should reflect contemporary standards. Ultimately, this reform is about recognising the value of those who step forward to represent their communities and local government and ensuring that the legislative framework supports them in doing so.

Local government is fundamental to the strength of our communities. Councils are responsible for delivering services, managing infrastructure and representing the interests of local residents. To perform that role effectively, they must operate within a legislative framework that supports strong governance, transparency and accountability.

The reforms contained in this Bill respond directly to the lessons learned from previous legislation, including the shortcomings of the code of conduct framework introduced by the previous Labor government—the framework that removed meaningful enforcement mechanisms and left councils with limited tools to address misconduct. This Bill corrects those failures. No longer can an entire council be held hostage by one problematic councillor, with the new powers to allow, after successful code of conduct complaints, an individual councillor to receive penalties or be suspended rather than an entire council being sacked.

This Bill introduces independent oversight, provides clearer governance mechanisms and support structures, strengthens the overall legislative framework that underpins the local government sector and will help ensure that councils across the Northern Territory continue to operate with integrity, transparency and accountability. Most importantly, it will help maintain the confidence of the communities these councillors serve and ensure that councils across the Northern Territory are a safe workplace and can manage issues as they arise.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, as we have heard and I am well aware, local government is the level of government closest to the people. It is where decisions that affect everyday life are made—roads, rubbish, parks, planning, community services and all the practical issues that shape the places where people live.

Many of the community concerns that come to me are local government issues. I recognise the councillors from the three different wards that my electorate of Johnston spans, who I am in frequent contact with when these issues arrive and thank them for their prompt attention to those issues. Many MLAs have served on local councils before coming to this Chamber and are deeply committed to local government and informed about how it works.

When councils work well, communities feel it. Services run smoothly, decisions are made transparently and people have confidence in the institutions that represent them. In many cases across the Territory local government has not always functioned as well as it should. There have been periods of instability, disputes and governance failures that have undermined confidence and, ultimately, affected the communities that councils serve.

Reforms that aim to strengthen those governance frameworks are important and necessary. The local government sector has been asking government for years to review the code of conduct framework, modernise it, improve it and reduce the psychosocial pressures that can arise when disputes escalate without clear processes. We have seen those pressures turn into real consequences in the Territory, with councils ending up in special administration, with elected members choosing not to recontest and CEOs stepping down.

The overhaul of this legislation is a welcome step in many respects. I know the intent of it is welcomed by people in the sector who have come to me about it. Clear standards of behaviour and fair processes for dealing with complaints are essential to building trust within councils and the communities they represent. In my old job, before I came to this job, I dealt with conflict every day. I know how important it is that standards are clear and complaints processes are fair, timely and transparent.

Good robust processes help resolve conflict early and prevent issues from escalating into deeper governance problems. It is wonderful to see the CLP government recognising the importance of strengthening this framework and the importance of accountability, clear consequences and mechanisms to address any breaches of the code of conduct. It would be strange if I did not comment on the fact that there is no appetite to do that here in this Chamber. It is very disappointing. If strong standards of behaviour matter for councillors, and they absolutely do, we should also be willing to apply that same commitment to integrity, accountability and clear strong processes and consequences in this Chamber.

It is disappointing that this second tranche of amendments to the legislation were not referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, but the first tranche was, which had much simpler changes. People told me that if there was referral to the committee it would have been a valuable opportunity to test some of the provisions in this Bill more carefully, identify any unintended consequences and strengthen the legislation before it came to the Assembly, which is exactly the purpose of the scrutiny committee.

I have said in this Chamber before that taking the time to properly scrutinise legislation does not slow down reform; it strengthens it. Cherrypicking which legislation is referred to the scrutiny committee does not serve the people of the Northern Territory, and it does not assist this parliament to do its job of making good law for all Territorians.

I have heard from people in the sector—people who this Bill is designed for—that while they welcome the intent of this Bill, there are concerns about some aspects that may create new pressures for councils rather than resolving existing ones. I heard the opposition say that it will move amendments today, and I will listen with interest.

The concerns highlighted to me include clarity about when the new framework will commence. Allowing a lengthy and uncertain commencement period risks creating confusion for councils and those responsible for administering the process.

There are questions about the independence and integrity within the complaints process itself. Given the relatively small pool of qualified individuals available to serve as independent assessors or panel members in the Territory, safeguards around conflicts of interest are essential to maintaining confidence in the system, and these are missing from this Bill.

Another issue relates to the proposed fees provision within the code of conduct process, so while the reforms themselves are broadly welcomed, I have been told that the fee arrangements were not discussed with the sector. People have said this arrangement poses a real risk for resource-constrained councils that may struggle to meet the costs associated with the complaints processes.

Without clarity and certainty around these costs, councils may find themselves forced to deal with matters internally, even when they are not properly equipped to do so. As we know, that is often the least appropriate way to deal with conflicts within a system. That has the potential to disrupt council operations and, ultimately, impact communities and the ratepayers that the councils serve. Not all councils are the same, and these concerns are particularly challenging for regional councils, which are often less well resourced and may face greater financial pressure in managing complaints processes.

I understand from my briefing that the CEO of the department may have discretion to waive or adjust fees at a point in time, but there is no assurance for councils from the outset. Without that certainty, councils cannot properly plan or budget for the potential costs associated with engaging with the code of conduct framework.

Issues have been raised in relation to timeliness. It is not enough to simply say that decisions should be made expediently. Complaints processes must have clear timeframes so that all parties involved have certainty about how long matters may take to resolve. Open-ended processes can leave individuals under a cloud for extended periods and can undermine confidence in the system and create further conflicts.

There have been sensible proposals that I know are welcomed to ensure that elected members receive superannuation contributions in line with standard workplace entitlements. Superannuation is a basic entitlement for workers across Australia. Elected members should not be treated differently. I appreciate the Member for Goyder outlining that all councils are different, but requiring councils to vote on whether they should receive superannuation creates an obvious conflict of interest which these changes do not address.

These reforms are important. We have heard that in the Chamber today and will continue to hear about it, I am sure. People in the local government sector have been asking for improvements to this framework for years so that they can get on with the job they are elected to do. We need to ensure that good governance

legislation is practical, fair and workable for the councils that will operate under it and that processes are clear, independent, timely and affordable for councils across the Territory, particularly regional councils with limited resources.

As I said at the beginning, and as we heard from other people, local government is the level of government closest to the people, and it is the people who suffer when local government is not working properly. Our focus must always be on ensuring that the legislation we debate and vote on is fair, practical and in the best interests of the communities we represent.

I support the intent of these reforms, but I note that if we truly want to ensure that we are doing the best we can for local government in the Northern Territory, we must listen to the sector to get all the details right.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to speak on this Bill because, as you know, I am a former City of Darwin councillor, and I remain a big supporter of local government. Some people say that it is the third level of government, but you could rightly say that it is the first level of government if you think about where it happens.

It is always hard to make a speech after the Member for Goyder, who is a former councillor. Once again, without even consulting with me, he has obviously read my notes and repeated what I was going to say. I do not know why; maybe we just think along the same lines. I will truncate my speech, but I must admit the structure of his speech is similar to what I would have said.

I think the Member for Johnston will agree with most of these sentiments. I am glad she has conditional support for the governance framework, and I know she has some concerns. I hear from other people that there is broad support for getting the governance right in councils. I am with the member on that.

Local government impacts directly on the lives of people in our community. I will just touch on some of the things the Member for Goyder said. What does council do? It looks after local roads and streetlighting. He is right; if there is a pothole people let you know, particularly if it is near a school. If there was a streetlight out they would let you know, and so they should. That is what they should do because these are council responsibilities, which goes to the heart and soul of where the community is; these are neighbourhood issues.

I can guarantee you that garbage collection and disposal are right up there on the list for many residents. When people's garbage is missed for pick up they get onto council straightaway and ask what is going on. I recall after Cyclone Fina that I had a bit of a go at the City of Darwin. We all need to reflect on how we can do things better. In the lead-up to that cyclone the council should have opened its gates so that it was easier for residents to get rid of their rubbish beforehand quickly. After the cyclone it also should have opened the gates so that people could dispose of the rubbish, and it should have worked with the Territory government at the same time. It is a big issue.

Parks and playgrounds are critical for neighbourhoods. People want to get out. They want their kids to go to playgrounds and enjoy them. That is part of the community, and people have community events there. It is a bit hard in the Wet Season, I must admit, particularly when the grass is overgrown. I am not having a go at councils; weather events prevent people from mowing.

You have to maintain these facilities. One of the worst issues is when there is litter and broken glass at playgrounds. Kids cannot play there because they are likely to stab their feet. It is important that councils take that work seriously, and they generally do.

The provision of libraries is critical across the whole community. I can say that the Karama library is a wonderful facility that brings in a lot of the community. Every Monday morning I go there and see the Knit and Natter group. There might be 30 or 40 senior citizens. They crochet wonderful quilts—I guess that is what you would call them—and donate them. It is also about getting people together to have a chat, check on their welfare and so on. It is a wonderful thing.

The Karama library does 3D printing. When young kids want to do experiments they do courses on 3D printing. This is what a community library is about. Libraries need support.

Another one is pet management and licensing. Yes, people have to get their dogs and cats registered and maybe sterilised. Dog noise complaints are a huge issue for councils, but it is important for the neighbourhood. There is a lot of work for councils.

Like many other councillors, when I was on the City of Darwin and Acting Lord Mayor at the time, I was privileged to oversee a citizenship ceremony. That, to me, is one of the most satisfying things you can ever do. You are doing it, obviously, on behalf of the federal government and the minister for Immigration. To oversee a citizenship ceremony and see new Territorians come on board, wanting to become Australian citizens—nothing to do with politics—is one of the best things you can be involved in on a council.

Regarding the code of conduct issues, I have to say that most councillors and councils do the right thing. They come on board, putting up their hands to serve, and that is fantastic. Occasionally there are some who go off the rails. We need to address that. That is what these reforms are about.

I will give the classic example I was involved in at the City of Darwin. Many people would know this because it was highly publicised. This was about the code of conduct revolving around one of our former councillors, Amye Un. There was fault on both sides; I am not having a go. The City of Darwin process for dealing with that was shambolic. I have never seen a process like that. One of the biggest claims against her at the time was that she used the rhetorical phrase, 'I will stab you in the front rather than the back.' People use that phrase often, but it was taken out of proportion. She put up some social media posts which I do not think were satisfactory.

I have never seen so many claims and counterclaims going between the Lord Mayor and a councillor and then operational staff and a councillor. This went on for more than 18 months. I guarantee that it was a standing item on almost every council meeting agenda. You should have seen the time it took up, be it in the open or confidential sessions. I could not believe it.

She ended up being barred from coming to council meetings but could join electronically. This same person, at the same time, could openly go to Parliament House and Government House, but she was not allowed into the council chambers. One of the funniest things—not funny, but disappointing—was because it was council land, she could not take her kids to the Darwin Show. Come on! This was an overstretch and a waste of resources. If we had the independent assessors in there, like we are proposing now, this would have been handled much better. That is why I am a big fan of what we are introducing, with independent assessment to make sure there are consequences.

The Member for Goyder talked about consequences. He also spoke about how the local government reforms were weakened in 2019. The modus operandi of the Labor government was all talk and no action. Labor members say that they agree with consequences, but the minute we try to bring in consequences it is thrown out. When we spoke about bail reform they rejected it. Even though you must have consequences for criminal behaviour and antisocial behaviour, the minute we tried to introduce it they refused and pushed it to the side saying we cannot do it.

I am concerned about that. We must move on, and there must be consequences for bad behaviour. If it is financial penalties, extra training or compulsory training, so be it. We are not trying to kick councillors; we are here to help and support them. Most councillors do the right thing and their intention is right. We are not penalising them; we are trying to bring in a resource to help them, and we need to do more of that.

One of the first things I did when I got on to the City of Darwin council after we had done our councillor training exercise and had different people telling us about governance, like independent experts from the outside—I asked them while I was going through the training whether it was appropriate for a council every four to five years to have an independent governance check, like a health check. I was not trying to say that there was a fault, as even after an independent governance check they may find that everything was going well and that council is doing a good job.

I put forward a motion to have that because it had been about four years since it had been done. It was voted down; however, I think there were about five who supported it. They were all the new councillors, including the new incoming Member for Nightcliff. In terms of strengthening governance in council, he and I are on the same page. It was the others who had been there for a long time who did not worry, and they kept their own system.

I had to keep saying that we were not trying to find fault; we were trying to make sure the organisation was going okay. Any company will do an independent assessment of itself every now and then to check. Boards will ask for an independent assessment to make sure that governance of their company is going well, as they should. They should not be afraid of it.

Regarding procurement issues, I am still critical of the City of Darwin because it reduced the local content weighting from 30% to 20%. That stayed with me, as I am a champion of local business. Local business

supports local employees and local families. That is what we should get behind. I do not know any other councils that did this; it is only the City of Darwin. I still do not know why, and I hope it rescinds the motion.

Procurement is important. I was concerned at times as there seemed to be a lot of contracts going to Queensland. I was worried that maybe there were relationships, but we could not test that as no-one was happy to do an independent assessment. If I had done that, I would have asked it to check that. Its delivery of services requires the responsible use of ratepayers' money; we must stay focused on that.

I am with everyone else and believe that superannuation should be an option for councils. A lot of them are part-time jobs, but we want to attract the best people to council, and offering superannuation as part of their package may be a way to get more people to put up their hands. I respect everyone who puts up their hand.

When I was on council, despite what people may allege, it was never Labor versus CLP on council. From my perspective, you judged every issue on its merits and that was the way you voted. The good thing about council is that you cannot abstain; you have to vote yes or no. I would tell people why I was voting yes or no, particularly if it was a significant issue. I would sometimes say, 'Unfortunately, I am fifty–fifty on this; I will listen to the debate and see whether people can convince me one way or the other.' That is the way I did everything on council.

I agree with most of what the Member for Johnston said. I think she alluded to the parliament not taking on board some of the suggestions in terms of governance. Councils do not have scrutiny committees—ours did not—or Estimates committees and privileges committees, so we have an existing framework that does not apply to councils. Therefore, that direct link did not flow with me. Having said that, I acknowledge the member's support for a good governance framework. That is good. The balance of what the member said about superannuation I am fully for, so I do not want to pull her down.

A number of former councillors are in this place, including the Members for Goyder, Barkly and Gwoja. He is fantastic—everyone …

Mr Mackay: And Madam Speaker.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Madam Speaker is a former councillor, too.

One advantage of being on council is that it can be a platform for coming to this Assembly. It is a platform that connects you with communities. You learn some of the processes and what can and cannot be achieved. It is not the only way; I am not suggesting that everyone has to be a councillor to come to parliament, but it is a good attribute to have because it shows you have connected with the community. I applaud everyone who does it, as it is not easy.

It is a bit like here. As an MLA or a councillor you can put in what you want. I found being on council satisfying. I was the member for Waters Ward, which covered Karama, Malak and about six neighbouring suburbs. It allowed me to connect with the community. I walked the streets when I was a councillor just as much as I do now as an MLA.

It is about learning to deal with the different levels of government. Ngaree Ah Kit was the former Member for Karama. As a councillor I would see her and say, 'I have heard of these issues about public housing. Can I advocate on behalf of these residents by taking it to you, because obviously it lies with you?' Likewise, if she heard of any issues about streetlighting, potholes and so on, she would tell people to speak to their local councillor, who could advocate on their behalf. I do the same; I am happy to refer council issues to councillors and have them take those issues forward.

Likewise, if they have Northern Territory Government issues they can come to me. We probably all refer stuff to the federal government through the local member, such as Luke Gosling, particularly issues to do with Centrelink payments and so on, which are in the federal government sphere. We all need to work together.

I fully support the Bill. It is great timing. We need to do it. I was privileged to be on council. I think it is a great vocation for anyone who takes it on. I am also privileged to be in this Assembly.

Mr EDGINGTON (Housing, Local Government and Community Development)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank the Members for Daly, Goyder, Johnston and Karama for their contributions to the debate on the Bill to amend the *Local Government Act 2019*, the Local Government (General) Regulations 2021 and the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2021.

This is the second tranche of reforms in a series of reviews and consideration of the Territory's local government legislation. The first tranche tackled some of the most pressing issues and laid the groundwork for the more comprehensive changes which are found within the Bill. The proposed changes in this Bill are designed to continue aligning local government systems with best practice nationwide. This will ensure that the local government sector can be more responsive and better suited to the needs of the communities.

I will touch on the contribution from each member. It was interesting to compare and contrast the contribution from the Member for Goyder with that from the Member for Daly. The Member for Goyder clearly articulated and represented his experience in the local government sector. That came across with his outline of the parts of the legislation he supports.

It became clear that the Member for Daly, unlike the Member for Gwoja, has never been in the local government sector. That came across in his contribution because all he wanted to do was criticise some of the work to develop this tranche of legislation and empower communities in the Northern Territory.

He made one statement that there was a false promise to establish new councils. It is interesting that he would say that because he obviously has a short memory. Upon coming into government we established the new Groote Archipelago Regional Council. The previous government did little work on local government …

Ms Uibo: Member for Barkly, you know that is not true.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please! Stop the interjections.

Mr EDGINGTON: We have teams on the ground consulting with communities about empowering them. Therefore, it was interesting to hear the Member for Daly's contribution. He tried to cloud the issues rather than focus on the good work with communities and the local government sector that is happening in the Barkly and across the Northern Territory.

I picked up on the Member for Johnston talking about the need for timeframes in dealing with complaints and investigations. I acknowledge her contribution on that issue, but I make it clear that complaints will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

There are risks in putting a timeframe on any complaint because somebody may not have an opportunity to contribute effectively to that complaint. A complaint is about getting to the truth of the matter; it is not about meeting timeframes. My expectation is that all complaints will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. Some might take a couple of weeks, some might take a couple of months, and there may be serious matters that involve other bodies such as the police. Therefore, putting a timeframe on an investigation would limit the opportunity to get to the truth of the matter. That is why the legislation is about dealing with matters as expeditiously as possible. There is an independent assessor and a code of conduct panel to get on with the job and do those investigations in a timely manner.

I thank the Member for Karama for his contribution. He is a former councillor who understands some of the issues that the local government sector faces. He pointed out some of the critical services that local government delivers such as roads, streetlighting and dealing with potholes. I know, having been a mayor, that councillors are at the grassroots level. They get phone calls if someone's bin has not been picked up, if the streetlight is not working or somebody has hit a pothole. They will know about it quickly through social media or a direct phone call to them. I give all of them the credit they deserve because they are on the front line. They are doing their best. The Member for Karama made a strong point that most councillors are doing the right thing. That is important to recognise as we deal with this legislation.

He said that this legislation is there to help councillors, and it is. There is a component of education and training for new councillors. We want to ensure that if councillors do the wrong thing, this legislation provides consequences that Labor took away in 2019. That is why we are here today. We had years under the previous Labor government, and even when I was a mayor one of the most critical areas constantly talked about was the code of conduct legislation put in place by the Labor government which provided no consequences for councillors who did the wrong thing on their council. It is a proud moment for this government to put in place legislation that will tackle the issues talked about by councillors.

There have been examples in the media and plenty of talk about it, but passing this legislation is an opportunity to get a fresh start for councillors who are doing all the hard work on the ground. The changes in this tranche of reform will focus on provisions related to clarification of rates exemptions, election notice requirements, superannuation equivalent payments for elected members, mandatory training of elected

members, clarification of council delegations, introduction of a governance controller and governance advisor, and a much-anticipated code of conduct framework.

The Bill introduces a modernised independently supported integrity framework; clearer governance and intervention mechanisms; strengthened accountability, procurement and delegation; centralised training standards; enhanced electoral transparency; and updated financial governance arrangements for the Northern Territory local government sector. The Bill will result in a strengthened and more independent code of conduct framework, clearer delegation and accountability settings, enhanced governance oversight mechanisms and greater consistency in training, electoral and financial arrangements.

Once the Bill is passed, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development will, in consultation with the local government sector, develop complementary materials such as ministerial guidelines and model policies to address procedural issues for the purposes of consistent application of the amended legislation.

Over the years through regular stakeholder engagements and the day-to-day oversight of the local government sector, deficiencies with the Act, general regulations and electoral regulations were identified, impacting the ability for the local government sector to effectively carry out its responsibilities and deliver services.

We have listened to the local government sector, all local government councils, LGANT and constituents of local government council areas and the public. We heard their frustrations and concerns that the existing framework had proven inconsistent and placed councils in difficult positions. We bring forward this Bill to address the issues identified within the code of conduct framework and other matters.

In 2024 the department engaged a third party to consult with the sector and inform the development of an improved framework. Last year the department engaged in additional sector consultation, publishing a series of three discussion papers, travelling across the Territory to participate in face-to-face consultations and receiving and considering written submissions prepared by interested stakeholders, including the NT Electoral Commission, the petroleum and pastoral industries and NT-based non-government organisations.

Consultation with the local government sector and relevant stakeholders has been extensive. We understand that these amendments to the *Local Government Act* are fundamental for streamlining operations for effective service delivery across the Northern Territory.

In March 2025 three discussion papers were published for public submission. On 1 May 2025 the department presented to delegates at the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory symposium in Katherine, then followed up with in-person public forums and consultations across the regional and remote councils.

On 20 May 2025 there was consultation at Gove with the East Arnhem Regional Council; on 21 May 2025 on the Tiwi Islands with the Tiwi Island Regional Council; on 23 May 2025 in Darwin with local government councils and mining and pastoral bodies; and from 26 to 30 May 2025 in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek with local government councils, mining and pastoral bodies, Central Desert Regional Council, MacDonnell Regional Council and the Barkly Regional Council.

On 3 July 2025 there was consultation in Katherine and Borroloola with the Katherine Town Council, the Roper Gulf Regional Council and the Victoria Daly Regional Council; 17 June 2025 at Jabiru with the West Arnhem Regional Council; and 23 June 2025 at Groote Eylandt with the Groote Archipelago Regional Council.

From June to July 2025 public submissions were received and taken into consideration. On 2 December 2025 the consultation version of the Bill was released to councils and LGANT. By 24 December 2025 written submissions and feedback were received.

Additionally, face-to-face and online consultations with all 18 councils and LGANT were conducted in December 2025. Furthermore, in January 2026 the department undertook further consultation with LGANT followed by a three-hour session with department representatives and me last month. This goes to show how much we value the feedback and advice from our local government sector. The following week I was fortunate enough to attend the LGANT board meeting where I could answer any inquiries and have a robust conversation with council members.

This Bill has responded to sector consultation by repealing the existing framework. The amendments introduced are a new tiered approach. Significantly, this Bill introduces two independent functions within the code of conduct framework—the independent assessor and the code of conduct panel. Further, a secretariat function is created to support these independent processes along with the reintroduction of sanctions. The sanctions are tiered and proportionate, which include reprimands and directions for minor matters, monetary penalties where appropriate and suspension in serious cases.

The framework ensures consequences and safeguards exist in a structured process. This will assist in protecting public trust in the local government sector and deterring poor conduct by elected members. In response to LGANT's clear position that it does not wish to assume responsibility for the independent assessor or the code of conduct panel, this Bill removes LGANT from the process entirely.

I want to be clear that councils retain responsibility for managing lower-level complaints. The Bill simply ensures that serious, complex and conflict matters can be escalated to independent decision-makers. The reform recognises that councils should not be respondent and adjudicator in serious misconduct matters. Independence enhances legitimacy; it does not diminish autonomy.

The new framework aligns with best practice nationwide by enabling the suspension or dismissal of one or more elected members on recommendation of the new code of conduct panel. We have approached this in a way that upholds the principles of fairness and democratic process.

Under the new framework, the power to suspend or disqualify an elected member for up to 12 months rests solely with an independent code of conduct panel. For any suspension or disqualification beyond 12 months, the decision will only be made by the minister, and only after receiving a formal recommendation from that same independent panel. This approach helps avoid placing an entire council under official management and the risk of dismissing all elected members, when the real issue is confined to just one or a few councillors. It ensures accountability falls where it truly belongs.

The principle here is that councils retain responsibility for managing code of conduct complaints unless escalation is necessary. Under a tiered approach, lower-level complaints will remain with each council to resolve in line with the framework as tier 1 and tier 2 matters. These complaints are intended to be handled in a way that is proportionate, collaborative and focused on building relationships within the council. Sanctions at this level include public apologies, mediation, behavioural plans, training and counselling. Maintaining this responsibility within council is critical for capacity building and good governance.

Turning to financial and remuneration amendments, this Bill inserts a new provision addressing superannuation arrangements for council members, amends provisions relating to exempt land public benefit concessions and makes associated definitional amendments. It will address a longstanding ambiguity regarding rates payable by charities and public benevolent institutions for the provision of social and affordable housing.

Currently, the Act exempts land used for non-commercial purposes by a public benevolent institution or charity from paying rates. However, its application to social and affordable housing providers has been unclear, leading to inconsistent council decisions and, at times, litigation. The Bill removes this uncertainty by creating a clear and consistent framework. It explicitly states that land used for the provision of social and affordable housing is not included in the general exemption. Instead, it establishes a new concessional rating category under Part 11.8 of the Act, meaning councils will continue to have full control over the range and use of concessions granted. Importantly, this change does not remove concessions on rate payments, rather it provides a structured and transparent process for councils to determine a concessional rate amount that reflects local circumstances.

I want to be clear that these amendments do not reduce rate revenue for councils where properties are owned by the Northern Territory Government. Where the government retains ownership of housing stock, including properties managed by community housing providers, the government will continue to meet its rating obligation in full.

In response to sector advocacy to encourage a more diverse range of community members to nominate for election to local government councils, the Bill introduces new provisions and enables councils to pay elected members an amount equivalent to a superannuation contribution. This amount is in addition to the current allowances and enables councils to provide an additional payment by passing a unanimous resolution.

Individual elected members may then opt in to receive the new superannuation payment by providing their nominated superannuation account. Individual elected members will have the choice to opt out—for example,

if they are retired and have already accessed their superannuation. In those circumstances, they simply do not provide their nominated superannuation account, as that is the only account into which the additional payment can be made.

As we are aware, councils differ significantly in financial capacity, size and community expectations. Therefore, the unanimous model allows each council to determine whether superannuation is appropriate for its context.

The Bill includes several miscellaneous amendments to modernise electoral processes and improve governance clarity. The Bill introduces amendments regarding published requirements for election notices to modernise communication practices and finalises the publishing amendments initiated in tranche 1. This shift enables the returning officer to determine the most appropriate publication method for each council area. It updates the electoral regulations with mandatory postal vote elections. When candidate statements are provided, the returning officer must promptly share accepted statements with the relevant council. These statements must then be published on both the Electoral Commission and council websites.

Further amendments were made to regulation 65 of the electoral regulations. In June, changes were introduced to modernise provisions for postal vote applications and electronic signatures.

This Bill now includes a small drafting correction that was omitted from the earlier amendments.

The Bill focuses on centralised training requirements for council members. It replaces the existing training provision and requires the CEO of the agency to determine training requirements for council members or classes of members. Failure to complete the training will now constitute a breach of the code of conduct and may result in sanctions. The determination will set out general training for all elected members as well as specialised courses for principal and deputy principal members.

Importantly, recognising the unique challenges of living in the Territory, the CEO will have the discretion to grant exemptions or extensions, such as with what we have recently experienced where flooding or other natural disasters or matters prevent a member from completing training through no fault of their own.

Following on from amendments made earlier this year, this Bill introduces the governance controller, a new oversight mechanism designed to provide targeted and effective support in circumstances arising under section 19C of the Act in relation to the creation of new councils, mergers and acquisitions. The governance controller will be responsible to review, monitor and evaluate the council's governance procedures and practices, ensuring compliance with applicable laws, advising the council on its governance responsibilities and the effectiveness of its governance arrangements. They will give directions in relation to the council's governance procedures, practices and the performance of its governance responsibilities.

The amendments aid in streamlining the process while balancing the need for transparency and accountability of the council. It does this by amending the categories of delegations under section 40 of the Act.

The Bill also includes consequential amendments to the general regulations. Clarifying the reporting obligations that must be presented to the council to maintain this balance will be determined by the council.

I also wish to highlight that after additional feedback and consultation with the local government sector after the Bill was introduced, the government intends to move several minor amendments during consideration in detail.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 2:

Mr YOUNG: When is the legislation expected to commence?

Mr EDGINGTON: We expect the legislation to be assented to and ready to commence on 1 July 2026.

Mr YOUNG: Can you confirm that the commencement date for Part 3 will also be 1 July 2026?

Mr EDGINGTON: We expect all Parts to commence on 1 July 2026.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 1 to clause 2(3), line 22, to omit '31 January 2028' and insert '1 July 2026' as the minister has stated.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: You stated that the Bill would commence on 1 July 2026, but you have still kept in the Bill that it will commence on 31 January 2028. Can you clarify why?

Mr EDGINGTON: I will read that for you, Member for Daly, as it appears you are having some difficulty understanding. It says:

> *If a provision of Part 3 or 4 does not commence before 31 January 2028, it commences on that day.*

I said that we expect all provisions to commence on 1 July. Subclause (3) gives a backup in case there is any delay. Our expectation is that it will commence on 1 July 2026.

Mr YOUNG: It is an expectation rather than putting it into the legislation. I just wanted that clarity.

Mr EDGINGTON: I think I have answered that question.

Clause 2 agreed to.

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

Clause 5:

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 1 to clause 5(3) to proposed subsection (3A)(b)(iii), line 24, to omit the word 'senior'.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: Why was the decision made to shift the responsibility and cost of penalising individual elected members for noncompletion of mandatory training onto councils?

Are we still on clause 5 or 6? Sorry, minister. I have stepped ahead of myself.

Clause 5, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 6:

Mr EDGINGTON: I move that clause 6, proposed section 45(3) be amended by omitting and inserting:

(3) A member of a council must complete a training requirement determined under subsection (1):

(a) within 6 months after the date of the determination; or

(b) if the requirement was determined before the member became a member of the council or a member of the class to which the requirement applies – within 6 months after becoming a member of the council or of the class, as the case requires.

Mr YOUNG: We thank the minister for making this amendment. We know there was pressure from the sector for this. It is great to see he has finally come to the table.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I want some clarification as this will be our second amendment. The other amendments were made by the minister. It will just go to our second amendment. It will still be amendment 4. I wanted to clarify that, as those two amendments were made.

I move amendment 4 to clause 6, proposed subsection 45(5)(b). After 'requirement', line 7, insert:

for a period of no more than 6 months

This amendment provides for a limited timeframe to ensure an untrained elected member who misses training due to approved circumstances does not make decisions as part of the council without completing training for an extended period.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 5 to clause 6, after proposed section 45(5), to insert:

(6) Despite subsection (5)(a), an exemption under that subsection may only be made by the CEO of the Agency on the basis of prior completion of a similar training requirement if:

(c) all members of a council have undertaken the similar training requirement; and

(d) the exemption relates to all members of the council.

This amendment inserts a subsection for the purpose of ensuring that exemptions to individual members should not be available on the grounds of previous completion. However, if the CEO of the agency determines that the council-provided training delivered meets that requirement all council members may be exempt.

Mr EDGINGTON: The amendment will not be agreed to.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 6 to clause 6, after proposed section 45, to insert:

45A Failure to complete training requirement

(1) If a member of a council fails to complete a training requirement as required under section 45, the CEO of the Agency must issue the member with a notice that includes the following:

(a) a statement that the member has failed to complete a training requirement;

(b) the details of the training requirement, including the date by which the member was supposed to have completed the requirement;

(c) a statement that failure to complete the training requirement may be a contravention of the code of conduct and that a complaint may be made under Division 4 in relation to that contravention;

(d) a statement that the member must complete the training requirement within the period specified in the notice and that failure to do so may lead to a complaint being made under Division 4.

(2) A copy of a notice issued under subsection (1) must also be given to:

(a) the CEO of the council of which the member is a member; and

(b) the other members of the council.

This amendment inserts section 45A for the purpose of when the agency CEO can issue a notice to a councillor who has failed to comply with the training requirements, reminding them of the training requirement, requesting that they complete the requirement within a specific period and warning them failure to complete is a breach of the code of conduct and a complaint may be made in relation to the member.

It also includes a provision that requires the notice be given to the other council members and the council CEO.

Mr EDGINGTON: The amendment is not agreed to.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 24, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 25:

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 3 to clause 25, proposed section 132A(2) and (3), to omit and insert …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, minister. I am just following the script here. Apparently, you have to go through in order, and the first amendment listed is from the Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: I will ask questions first, just so the minister knows they will be over a few of the sections. I will ask about proposed sections 121, 123, 125 and the others, then we will go back and move those amendments.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is fine.

Mr YOUNG: Who chooses the independent assessor? This is in proposed section 121.

Mr EDGINGTON: The minister appoints the independent assessors.

Mr YOUNG: What skills and experience will they be required to possess?

Mr EDGINGTON: As per the Bill, to be eligible to be appointed as an independent assessor a person must be a legal practitioner with at least five years' experience as a legal practitioner or a person with at least five years' experience in governance or public administration.

Mr YOUNG: Going back to saying the minister appoints the independent assessor, will there be a process or recommendations that come from the department to the minister to then sign off?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, there will.

Mr YOUNG: Do you know if those recommendations that will come from the department to you will be a number of independent assessors who may have applied for the role or will it just be one for you to sign off?

Mr EDGINGTON: As per the Bill, we will be establishing a pool of at least three persons as independent assessors, so I expect there will be options for the minister to consider.

J DAVIS: How will conflicts of interest among assessors and panel members be managed?

Mr EDGINGTON: Conflicts will be managed as per any conflict of interest. Anyone will be required to disclose if there is a conflict of interest before dealing with any matter.

J DAVIS: Will the minister be required to manage or terminate appointments where serious conflicts of interest arise?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes. Under proposed section 121(6), I may terminate the appointment of a person as an independent assessor for any incompetence or misbehaviour.

Mr YOUNG: Given the need for the highest standards of integrity, how will they be vetted, and who will be doing the vetting process if there is vetting in place?

Mr EDGINGTON: There will be a recruitment and selection process. All those applying would need to state their qualifications and their ability to carry out the responsibilities under that section.

Mr YOUNG: Given the nature of the work as a pseudo judge, how will they be indemnified against malicious complaints about their rulings or defamation claims?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think that relates to further in the clause at section proposed 127, Protection from liability.

Mr YOUNG: I turn to proposed sections 123 and 125, which deal with the code of conduct panel. Will there be a de-identified public register of complaints put to the IA and code of conduct panel?

Mr EDGINGTON: No.

Mr YOUNG: How many members are in the code of conduct panel pool?

Mr EDGINGTON: As per proposed section 123:

> *The Minister must, by appointment, establish a pool of at least 3 persons to be members of a code of conduct panel.*

Mr YOUNG: Just to clarify, will the minister pick the members?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, it will be a similar process to the independent assessors.

Mr YOUNG: Will there be recommendations from the department to you?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, those recommendations will come through and the appointment of those members will be made by the minister.

Mr YOUNG: What skills and experience will they be required to have?

Mr EDGINGTON: A legal practitioner with at least five years' experience, or a person with at least five years' experience in governance or public administration.

Mr YOUNG: How will you manage conflicts of interest?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not manage those. For conflicts of interests—for the code of conduct panel—the independent assessors will need to disclose if they have a conflict prior to engaging in any investigation.

Mr YOUNG: How will conflicts of interest be managed if there are recommended panel members put to you from the department and there is a conflict from those panel members to you? How will you manage that?

Mr EDGINGTON: Can you give me an example? I am not sure what you mean by that.

Mr YOUNG: If there is a recommendation from the department, through you to the minister, to recommend a member of that panel—you may know that person, or have dealt with them in the past through business, or you know them from your home town in Tennant Creek and have worked with them before—how will those conflicts be managed?

Mr EDGINGTON: Like any conflict of interest, I would need to disclose if there was a conflict and that conflict would be managed.

Mr YOUNG: The disclosure would be there, but would you still have the ability to select that person to be a panel member if it has been disclosed that there is a conflict?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think we are getting into a hypothetical. What I would say is that all appointments are made to a pool, not a specific panel. The actual selection for those to investigate a particular matter would be undertaken prior to that investigation.

Mr YOUNG: You said there was a pool of, for example, four people. If one of those people has a conflict of interest with you as the minister, would you still be able to select from that pool?

Mr EDGINGTON: I do not select a particular person to do an assessment or investigation. That part of the process is managed by the secretariat, which appoints the assessor or the code of conduct panel to look at a particular issue. All I do is appoint the pool of independent assessors or the pool for the code of conduct panel. The individual appointments to look at a particular matter are managed through the secretariat.

Mr YOUNG: If there is a conflict in the pool of independent assessors that you can appoint, how will that conflict be managed?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think you are getting into hypotheticals without a specific example.

Mr YOUNG: It is a likely scenario.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is not a likely scenario, and what you are putting to me is a hypothetical. I cannot guess what the conflict would be, but if there is a conflict the obligation will be on me as the minister to manage that conflict. Knowing somebody or knowing someone's name does not necessarily create a conflict. We would need to look at each individual case on its merits before there is a real or perceived conflict of interest.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: For clarification, minister, we have had this ruling before: hypotheticals can be raised during consideration in detail.

Mr YOUNG: That is correct, Chair.

If it is a real conflict how will it be managed? Can you answer that question? The Chair has outlined that we can ask hypothetical questions so that people understand how conflicts of interest will be managed by you if you are the person appointing people.

Mr EDGINGTON: Regarding all decisions that are made by ministers, if there was a conflict it may be likely that another minister may make the decision or appointment.

Mr YOUNG: That was not so hard to get to, was it?

How will you vet the panel, given it will be required to consider gross acts of misconduct or other serious allegations?

Mr EDGINGTON: All those expressing interest as an independent assessor or to be on the code of conduct panel will be assessed on their merits. The starting point for any independent assessors or code of conduct panel members is that they be a legal practitioner with at least five years' experience as a legal practitioner or a person with at least five years' experience in governance or public administration.

Mr YOUNG: Will it be able to hold hearings and compel witnesses?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, the code of conduct panel can interview, collect evidence, assess evidence and conduct hearings.

Mr YOUNG: Will the hearings for any given circumstances be public?

Mr EDGINGTON: No.

Mr YOUNG: You say that this will ward off vexatious claims; can you explain how?

Mr EDGINGTON: 'Vexatious' is a general term often used and interpreted. We will have guidelines to explain in more detail the interpretation of 'vexatious'.

J DAVIS: If there is a vexatious complaint, how will that be managed?

Mr EDGINGTON: Any frivolous or vexatious complaint can be dismissed or referred to an independent assessor for further assessment.

J DAVIS: If there is a vexatious complaint that is unsubstantiated, who will bear the cost of that complaint?

Mr EDGINGTON: It can be dismissed by the council at an early stage, so there would be no cost. If there is a choice to refer it to the independent assessor, as per all matters, costs will be considered by the CEO of the agency.

J DAVIS: What modelling was done on council's capacity to absorb the cost of complaints?

Mr EDGINGTON: The CEO of the agency will take into account each individual council's circumstances and make a judgement and assessment on the cases put to them.

J DAVIS: Is there any guidance given to CEOs on how to make those decisions and whether they might waive fees?

Mr EDGINGTON: The CEO we are talking about is the CEO of the agency, being the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development. It rests with the CEO of the agency to determine whether to charge or waive those fees.

J DAVIS: To clarify, does the CEO makes a decision about whether or not fees will be charged or waived, but the council pays the fees?

Mr EDGINGTON: There will be guidelines developed in regard to that, as per proposed section 128(3), which states:

> *The CEO of the Agency may, if the CEO of the Agency considers it appropriate, do any of the following in relation to a fee determined under subsection (1) …*

That is to either exempt, waive or refund that fee to the council.

J DAVIS: But if that decision is not made, will the cost rest with the council? The CEO makes that decision, but if they decide not to waive the fees, the cost sits with the council; is that correct?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is right. The CEO of the agency, under subsection (4), must publish a determination made under subsection (1) of the agency's website which relates to determining fees to be paid by council.

J DAVIS: To my earlier question, what modelling was done on councils' capacity to absorb these fees?

Mr EDGINGTON: Fees are already paid under the current legislation to LGANT, which is doing this type of work. There has been no particular modelling done as to whether a council has the ability to pay, but the CEO has the discretion to exempt, waive or refund fees.

J DAVIS: Under this model complaints and investigations will potentially be far more expensive than what has happened up until now. Has that been taken into account?

Mr EDGINGTON: There will be a guideline developed in relation to fees. What I would say is that there is no indication there would be a significant increase in fees. That modelling has not been done, but I can assure you we will not be price gouging anybody.

Mr YOUNG: Has a regulatory impact statement been prepared to outline the consideration of the economic and social impacts to councils and communities through this cost-shifting exercise?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: Do you consider that there is a heightened risk of psychosocial hazards in councils if they are not well resourced to handle code of conduct matters internally—or pay for an escalation to the process to the departments?

Mr EDGINGTON: No.

Mr YOUNG: While the CEO retains the discretion to exempt, waive or refund the fees, do you accept that councils are placed in an uncertain position with respect to payment of fees, given the lack of criteria in relation to exemptions? How can councils be expected to account for a plan for this expense?

Mr EDGINGTON: Each case will be considered on its merits, but we want to make sure that where a matter needs to be investigated, there is nothing hindering that investigation.

Mr YOUNG: We will go to section 132, 'Timeliness of determinations, decisions and actions'. Why has no timeframe been included with this reform?

Mr EDGINGTON: I answered that during my summing up. Perhaps you missed that, but when it comes to timeframes, as the legislation says, 'determinations and decisions made and actions taken under this part must be made and taken expeditiously'. I briefly spoke about timeframes; the timeframe should not hinder the ability to get to the truth.

J DAVIS: What maximum timeframe do you consider reasonable for addressing a complaint?

Mr EDGINGTON: It is difficult to put a maximum timeframe on any complaint without knowing the issues in relation to a particular complaint. As I said in my summing up, it may involve other agencies for serious or gross misconduct. It would be difficult to put a timeframe on an investigation.

Each complaint will be different and every one will potentially require witnesses to be interviewed, and we want to ensure there is procedural fairness. We want to ensure decisions are not being made unless everybody has an opportunity to contribute to that matter. It is about getting to the truth, not adhering to timeframes.

J DAVIS: I am glad to hear that. Is one year or two years reasonable?

Mr EDGINGTON: Which complaint are you talking about? Can you give me some particulars and I might be able to answer.

J DAVIS: A complaint which involves interviewing many witnesses, as you just outlined—would a year to resolve that complaint be reasonable?

Mr EDGINGTON: I cannot put any particular reasonableness on a complaint without knowing the facts, how many witnesses, their availability to give a statement or be interviewed and whether the respondent is available to respond to the matters being put to that person. Without the facts of a matter, I cannot answer that.

J DAVIS: Concerns about the fee shifting have been raised by the sector. Complaints that could go on for years will have a significant additional cost burden. I know that was in a previous clause, but it is one issue people have raised. Is there any protection for a complaint that is not addressed in a reasonable timeframe? Taking into account what you have said about every situation being different, if the CEO or council believes that it is not a reasonable timeframe, are there any protections?

Mr EDGINGTON: As I said, every complaint will be different. As the minister I have the ability to terminate the appointment of any person in the pool of members for the code of conduct panel for incompetence or misbehaviour. Failing to deal with a matter may constitute incompetence. Without seeing a particular matter, it is hard for me to make that judgement, but I have the ability to terminate the appointment if there is evidence of incompetence or misbehaviour by one of those panel members. My expectation is that every matter will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. It is difficult to put a timeframe on any complaint without knowing a particular matter.

J DAVIS: Were these concerns raised with you by people in the sector?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, they were. I gave them the same answer I gave you.

Mr YOUNG: Having this as an open-ended process will potentially result in delayed decisions and therefore defeat the purpose of these reforms. Do you agree?

Mr EDGINGTON: No, I do not.

Mr YOUNG: Can you give a reason why not?

Mr EDGINGTON: There is no open-ended process. In investigating or dealing with any complaint, the importance of the matter is to get to the truth and ensure there is procedural fairness and natural justice for all involved.

Mr YOUNG: I refer to proposed section 132A, Making complaint to CEO. Can you confirm what information requirements were considered for making a complaint to the CEO, other than it be made in writing?

Mr EDGINGTON: I think we are probably getting to the amendments in relation to dealing with those complaints.

Mr YOUNG: Will you make amendments to proposed section 132A?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind all members that you can ask the questions you wish, but I think we have 19 amendments to deal with.

Mr YOUNG: I was just clarifying which proposed section he is amending.

Will you make amendments to proposed section 132B as well? If not, I am happy to ask questions.

Mr EDGINGTON: We are.

Mr YOUNG: I will ask the question to make sure it is on the record. Why did you choose to have a dual process? This is for proposed section 132B, Making complaint to secretariat.

Mr EDGINGTON: Proposed section 132B provides that a person who believes that a member contravened the code of conduct may lodge a complaint with the secretariat in circumstances where the complaint involves more than one member or the principal member or deputy principal member, or the complaint alleges serious misconduct or gross misconduct. It gives that person the option to go directly to the secretariat.

J DAVIS: Is there a timeframe for referral to the independent assessor?

Mr EDGINGTON: Five days.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 7 to clause 25, proposed section 119. This will omit 'or 132B' from the definition of 'complainant' at line 13 for the purposes of a subsequent amendment.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 8 to clause 25, proposed section 121(6), after 'misbehaviour', line 14, to insert:

> , including a failure to identify or appropriately manage any conflict of interest that arises in the course of the person's work as an independent assessor

This amendment brings the section in line with council meeting procedures and other parts of the *Local Government Act* relating to the conflict of interests. Conflict of interest is a real risk, particularly with the potentially small pool of qualified people to take up these posts. It cannot be overlooked as it would undermine their independence and the legitimacy of the process.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 9 to clause 25, proposed section 123(6), after 'misbehaviour', line 17, to insert:

> , including a failure to identify or appropriately manage any conflict of interest that arises in the course of the person's work as a member of a code of conduct panel

This goes to what I spoke about previously to ensure the sector is in line with council meeting procedures and other parts of the *Local Government Act* relating to a conflict of interest. Conflict of interest is a real risk, particularly with the potentially small pool of qualified people to take up those posts. Again, it should not be overlooked as it would undermine the independence of this process.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 10 to clause 25, proposed section 128. This amendment omits proposed section 128 on the basis that further consultation and co-design with the sector is needed. I would hope that this would be agreed by you. I have heard you say many times that you are all about co-design and working with the sector. That is exactly what this goes to.

Mr EDGINGTON: The amendment is not agreed to. Yes, we will be co-designing it with the sector.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 11 to clause 25, proposed section 131(3), after 'the decision' on line 23 to insert 'within 28 days of the decision'.

The current provision does not include a timeframe for the handing down of a decision at the close of actions and proceedings. The amendment provides a level of certainty for parties to the complaint.

Mr EDGINGTON: The amendment is not agreed to. It does not provide any certainty; in fact, it may result in an unfair outcome for somebody.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 3 to clause 25, proposed section 132A(2) and (3) to omit and insert:

(2) A complaint to the CEO must:

(a) be in the approved form; and

(b) be accompanied by a statutory declaration made by the complainant verifying the information provided in the form.

(3) The CEO must refer a complaint that meets the requirements of subsection (2):

(a) to the council for consideration under section 132E; or

(b) if the CEO considers the alleged misconduct would be more appropriately investigated and resolved by an independent assessor – to an independent assessor.

(4) If the CEO decides to refer a complaint to an independent assessor under subsection (3)(b), the CEO must, within 5 days of making the decision:

(a) notify the secretariat; and

(b) give the secretariat all relevant materials related to the complaint.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I am making another amendment to the clause that has just been amended.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are checking, Member for Daly. Which amendment number are you talking about?

Mr YOUNG: Clause 25, proposed section 132A(2), amendment 12.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: My script says that opposition amendment 12 cannot be moved if government amendment 3 is passed, as it is inconsistent with Standing Order 158 …

Mr MALEY: Standing Order 158; no repetition.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: That is all right. It came from the sector, so we will let those people know the government blocked it again.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 4 to clause 25, proposed section 132B(2) and (3) to omit and insert:

(2) A complaint to the secretariat must:

(a) be in the approved form; and

(b) be accompanied by a statutory declaration made by the complainant verifying the information provided in the form.

J DAVIS: Can you outline what the approved form encompasses?

Mr EDGINGTON: The approved form has been recently uploaded. Section 132B in the Bill states:

(2) A complaint to the secretariat must be in the approved form and include the following information:

(a) the name and contact information of the complainant;

(b) the name or identity of the member who is the subject of the complaint;

(c) the grounds for the complaint;

(d) a summary of the facts relevant to the complaint;

(e) any other information prescribed by regulation.

(3) The complaint must be signed by the person making the complaint.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 5 to clause 25, proposed section 132B(4), line 25, to omit 'must refer a complaint received under this section' and insert:

must, within 5 days after receiving a complaint that meets the requirements of subsection (2), refer the complaint

Amendment agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 14 to clause 25 to omit proposed section 132D(2)(b) and insert:

(b) given to the CEO.

This is a subsequent amendment to the previous amendment omitting the word 'secretariat'.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 6 to clause 25, proposed section 132E(2)(b)(ii), line 30, to omit 'procedures.' and insert 'procedures; or'.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 7 to clause 25 after proposed section 132E(2)(b) to insert:

(c) the complaint is frivolous or vexatious.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 8 to clause 25, proposed section 132E(3), (4) and (5) to omit and insert:

(3) The council:

(a) must refer a complaint to an independent assessor if the council determines that the alleged misconduct would be more appropriately investigated and resolved by an independent assessor; and

(b) may refer a complaint to an independent assessor if it appears to the council to be frivolous or vexatious.

(4) If the council decides to refer a complaint to an independent assessor under subsection (3), the CEO must, within 5 days of the decision:

(a) notify the secretariat; and

(b) give the secretariat all relevant materials related to the complaint.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 9 to clause 25, proposed section 132G(4), line 24 to omit 'refers a complaint to an independent assessor under this section, the CEO must:' and insert:

decides to refer a complaint to an independent assessor under subsection (1)(f), the CEO must, within 5 days of the decision:

Amendment agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 10 to clause 25, proposed section 132H(1), after 'complaint under', line 5, to insert 'section 132A(3)(b) or'.

Mr YOUNG: I have other amendments to this clause for section 132H(1). Can I do that now or does it go through …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are following the script, so I am sticking with it unless there is good reason not to.

Mr YOUNG: I believe the amendments the minister has made to section 132H were different from the amendments I have for the same section.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: It comes down later. Depending on what the decision is, it could be as to whether yours is inconsistent. If we just follow through.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 11 to clause 25, proposed section 132H(1)(b)(ii), line 12, to omit 'Division 5 – the relevant materials provided by the CEO under section' and insert:

section 132A(3)(b) or Division 5 – the relevant materials provided by the CEO under section 132A(4),

Amendment agreed to.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: For the Member for Daly, in the script it says that opposition amendment 16 cannot be moved if government amendment 11 is passed.

Mr YOUNG: That is fine.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am making sure we are all on the same page.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 17 to clause 25, proposed section 132J(3)(a). This amendment removes the wording for the purposes of other amendments related.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON: I move amendment 12 to clause 25, proposed section 132J(3)(b), line 1, to omit 'by a council under section 132E(3) or 132G(1)(f) – refer the complaint back to' and insert:

to an independent assessor under section 132A(3)(b), 132E(3) or 132G(1)(f) – refer the complaint back to the relevant

Amendment agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 18 to clause 25, proposed section 132L(1) to omit and insert:

(1) If the secretariat receives notice of a referral of a complaint under section 132J(4) that requires a code of conduct panel, the secretariat must, within 5 days of receiving the notice of referral:

(a) establish a code of conduct panel to deal with the complaint; and

(b) provide the panel with the relevant materials provided to the secretariat under that section.

This is a subsequent amendment providing a new section to require that the code of conduct panel be established within five days, as the sector has noted that a timeframe is required so that it is not open-ended.

I believe you advised that your department will be considering the redrafting of this section as per LGANT's request. I would hope you would be making those amendments to this.

Mr EDGINGTON: No, the amendment is not accepted.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 25, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 26, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 27:

Mr YOUNG: Can you confirm that if a governance advisor is appointed they must maintain confidentiality to the council?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

Mr YOUNG: Can you confirm there is no fee structure for councils for a governance advisor and that the department covers the cost?

Mr EDGINGTON: I can confirm that there is no cost to the council.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 19 to clause 27, after proposed section 216A(1) to insert:

(1A) To be eligible to be appointed as a governance adviser, a person must be:

(a) a legal practitioner with at least 5 years' experience as a legal practitioner; or

(b) a person with at least 5 years' experience in governance or public administration.

This is a simple amendment establishing an eligibility criterion for the role similar to section 121(2), as called for by the local government sector.

Amendment not agreed to.

J DAVIS: What are the eligibility requirements for governance advisors?

Mr EDGINGTON: The role itself would be similar to a compliance role within the department, and it is likely that governance advisor would be a similar position.

J DAVIS: Are there no established criteria for that role?

Mr EDGINGTON: There are no specific criteria. We already have similar roles and responsibilities within the department.

Clause 27 agreed to.

Clauses 28 and 29, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 30:

Mr YOUNG: I have questions about proposed section 317A, Governance controller. The proposal received mixed responses from councils. Can you clarify the purpose of this role?

Mr EDGINGTON: The specific purpose of this role under section 19C is those mergers and acquisitions under the *Local Government Act* where it would be amalgamating or de-amalgamating a council.

J DAVIS: What are the trigger points for appointing a governance controller?

Mr EDGINGTON: This position would be used when there are particular issues during acquisitions or mergers. That person could be used where there is specific noncompliance, perhaps through one of the councils involved in the merger.

J DAVIS: How will overlap with the CEO's statutory role be avoided?

Mr EDGINGTON: The governance controller has specific power to intervene when a CEO has demonstrated noncompliance with the merger or acquisition.

J DAVIS: Will that trigger point be when the CEO has failed to perform their duties appropriately?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes.

J DAVIS: Can the same individual be appointed as a controller to multiple councils?

Mr EDGINGTON: Yes, the controller could be appointed across a number of councils.

J DAVIS: How will potential conflicts of interest be managed in that case?

Mr EDGINGTON: Like any conflict of interest, there would be disclosure requirements. Where there are conflicts of interest, they will need to be managed like any conflict of interest.

Mr YOUNG: I have a few questions for proposed section 317B, Financial and governance controller appointments. Why is the current amendment allowing for an individual to be appointed as a financial governance controller over two local government councils concurrently?

Mr EDGINGTON: It would be in that case that there is a merger or acquisition. There may well be two councils involved in that process.

Mr YOUNG: Do you believe a person undertaking this role over two local government councils presents a risk of conflict—for example, in the case of competitive tenders?

Mr EDGINGTON: Given that would happen during de-amalgamation, it would be unlikely that there would be any procurement activity underway at that point.

Mr YOUNG: You said unlikely, but it could occur. I am trying to understand whether you believe the person undertaking this role over two local government councils presents a risk of conflict, given the case of competitive tenders, and you have not completely dismissed it …

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; the Member for Daly is asking for his opinion or 'do you believe?' This is not relevant to the clause.

Mr YOUNG: Of course it is relevant to the clause.

Mr MALEY: He is asking for his opinion. He said, 'Do you believe?'

Mr YOUNG: If you do not want to answer a question about conflicts—the minister has the opportunity to answer the question …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will give the minister the option as to whether he takes the question.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am advised the governance controller does not make those operational decisions and that the CEO is responsible for managing procurement.

Mr YOUNG: That is it for me, thank you.

I move amendment 20 to clause 30, after proposed section 317A(2) to insert:

(2A) To be eligible to be appointed as a governance controller, a person must be:

(a) a legal practitioner with at least 5 years' experience as a legal practitioner; or

(b) a person with at least 5 years' experience in governance or public administration.

This is a simple amendment establishing eligibility criteria for the role similar to section 121(2), as called for by the local government sector.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 30 agreed to.

Clauses 31 to 37, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 38:

Mr MALEY: I move amendment 13 to clause 38, proposed Schedule 1A, clause 5(c), after 'read', line 29, to insert:

or be briefed on

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 38, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 39 and 40, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 41:

Mr YOUNG: Can you explain why payments of superannuation have not been made mandatory?

Mr EDGINGTON: They are decisions for the council.

Mr YOUNG: Why are the councils still required to resolve to pay themselves?

Mr EDGINGTON: These are decisions that, in my view, the councils are competent to make themselves.

Mr YOUNG: Has the sector raised the view that there may be a conflict of interest?

Mr MALEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 155; he is asking for his opinion.

Mr YOUNG: Has the sector raised this as a potential conflict of interest?

Mr MALEY: It is not to the clause.

Mr YOUNG: Of course it is to the clause. Read the clause.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will let the minister decide again.

Mr EDGINGTON: What was the question?

Mr YOUNG: Has the sector raised this as a potential conflict of interest?

Mr EDGINGTON: The sector has raised a number of issues and there has been quite a bit of discussion about superannuation. After considering all of the options put forward by the sector we have left the clause so that the councils have the ability to make a decision themselves. Councils make many decisions, including rate rises. There is no conflict in deciding a rate rise; there is no conflict in making a decision about superannuation.

Mr YOUNG: Okay, but has the sector directly raised with you …

Mr EDGINGTON: I have answered that.

Mr YOUNG: No, you did not answer it; you went more broadly. Has the sector raised this as a potential conflict of interest …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, I believe the minister has answered it.

Mr YOUNG: He said the sector had raised many issues; he did not specifically answer the question.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Daly, he has specifically addressed that one. He answered the question.

Mr YOUNG: He broadened it out, with respect.

Mr MALEY: Kick him out.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can we move on, please?

Mr YOUNG: You have to allow him to answer.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Daly, you have an amendment, if you wish.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 21 to clause 41 to omit proposed section 109A(1).

This amendment omits current subclause (1):

> *A council may, by unanimous resolution, decide to make superannuation contribution payments to its members.*

The payment of superannuation must be mandatory, while the provisions set out maintain an individual's right to opt out.

Amendment not agreed to.

Mr YOUNG: I move amendment 22 to clause 41, proposed section 109A(2), to omit 'if the council has passed a resolution under subsection (1)'.

Again, this is a subsequent amendment to the one above.

Mr EDGINGTON: The amendment is not agreed to.

Amendment not agreed to.

Clause 41 agreed to.

Clause 42:

Mr YOUNG: Where community housing providers own or lease properties, who owns the land?

Mr EDGINGTON: Leased properties from who? That might give me a better understanding.

Mr YOUNG: If there is a community housing provider that owns the infrastructure on that land, who owns that land?

Mr EDGINGTON: I would assume if a home were on land, they would probably own both.

Mr YOUNG: Not necessarily if it is leased out.

Mr EDGINGTON: I am not following you. You are talking about a house leased out or the land leased out?

Mr YOUNG: There would be instances where community housing providers may negotiate with government. They may own the infrastructure but not the land. Is that correct?

Mr EDGINGTON: I am not aware of those circumstances.

Mr PAECH: If I may, I think the question is: where the Territory government is the owner of the asset as public housing and it is transferred to community or social housing, the Territory government still holds the asset. Would they still be paying the rate?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: If the Territory government transferred the entire asset, as well as the ownership, would that then fall on the community housing provider?

Mr EDGINGTON: That is correct.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that clause 42 be agreed to.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 16	Noes 6
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Ms Cahill	Mr Guyula
Mrs Carlson	Mr Paech
Mr Charls	Ms Uibo
Mr Edgington	Mr Young
Mrs Finocchiaro	
Mrs Hersey	
Mr Kerle	
Mr Mackay	
Mr Maley	
Mr O'Gallagher	
Mr Patel	
Dr Rahman	
Mr Yan	
Mrs Zio	

Clause 42 agreed to.

Clauses 43 and 44, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

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

Bill agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON (Housing, Local Government and Community Development): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

PAPER TABLED
Government Response to Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory – Final Report

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I report that the government response to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee report, Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory – Final Report, was deemed tabled on 16 March 2026, pursuant to Standing Order 201.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Working Together to Better Prepare for Natural Disasters

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Arnhem as follows:

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance: working together to better prepare for natural disasters.

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

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, the whole Chamber would agree that it is topical to see what efforts we can further be constructive with to make sure that there are plans ahead of uncertain and unprecedented times and that those plans are well articulated and promoted across many types of media and communication platforms.

The Territory is experiencing our worst flooding events in decades. Thousands of Territorians have been and continue to be impacted. The flooding has inundated communities, pastoral properties, campgrounds, tourist accommodation, businesses and people's homes. It has impacted people's livelihoods.

Hundreds of millimetres of rain have fallen over the past few weeks across the Northern Territory, from Central Australia to the Barkly and the Big Rivers region, in parts of my electorate, as well as the Top End. In Katherine the river peaked at 19.2 metres on 7 March, the highest level since 1998. The Daly River at

Nauiyu is experiencing record flooding, with water well above the major flood threshold. It is expected to stay that way for the rest of the week.

People from Nauiyu and Palumpa had to be airlifted from their communities as the floodwaters took hold. In my electorate of Arnhem, 400 people in Jilkminggan self-evacuated to Mataranka, the closest township. Sixty people were assisted to evacuate, being transported by boat across the water as it had already started to rise along the riverbed and bridge. The people of Jilkminggan have been housed at two shelters, not evacuation centres, at the Mataranka town hall and Mataranka School.

Many more communities and properties have been affected. We hear more and more heartbreaking stories of personal loss and the loss of people's livelihoods. There have been incredible rescue operations from police, emergency service workers and others who have put their lives on the line to save Territorians and visitors. Sadly, many people have lost pets and livestock in these floods.

Katherine and Big Rivers residents are taking stock of the damage. In some parts people are starting the cleanup with support—officially starting today—activated by the Australian Defence Force. It will be long and difficult. We welcome the work and support of the Australian Defence Force, which our Labor opposition was calling for from the start of last week. A week later we have seen that come to fruition. We thank those men and women in uniform for their assistance with the recovery efforts across the Northern Territory.

I give a big shout-out to the people of Tindal RAAF Base in my electorate of Arnhem. I know they were keen, with many already volunteering last week. They could not do so in uniform, so they were out in their civvies volunteering because they love and respect the community and wanted to be part of the support and recovery. They did some of the prevention work happening last week, but now they can officially do that.

There is something about men and women in uniform that gives us a sense that we are not alone; we have people who are trained for those responses. Thankfully, personnel from RAAF Base Tindal can participate in the support of the region. I hope that will extend past Katherine to involve other flood-affected communities across Big Rivers.

Residents from communities like Palumpa and Daly are likely to be out of their homes for many weeks and perhaps even months to come. Jilkminggan residents remain stuck in Mataranka. There has been some clearing of water on the Roper Highway. I thank Minister Yan for the update yesterday about Salt Creek Bridge being cleared and assessed, and it is structurally sound to travel on. Unfortunately, Donkey Flats is a flooded part of the Roper Highway that remains uncertain. We are waiting for the water to go down before the people of Jilkminggan will have an opportunity to return home safely.

There has been a phenomenal amount of work with infrastructure. Power and Water Corporation staff have been assessing the community of Jilkminggan over the last few days, including over the weekend. They have been helicoptered in many times to assess homes. I think even Roper Gulf Regional Council staff were doing animal welfare checks, making sure the animals left behind were fed and looked after in this time of uncertainty.

I was alarmed by a question asked in Question Time of the Chief Minister, partly answered by the Minister for Children and Families, about the flood evacuation efforts for Jilkminggan. There is probably a misconception. I double-checked with the constituents I visited on Sunday that the tents were not provided by the government or the council; they were bought by community members because the town hall holds about 90 people standing, so there is not enough space for 400 community members.

At the school people have makeshift bedding on two classroom floors. Tents have been bought by Jilkminggan community members to house and shelter themselves on the basketball court at Mataranka School and the Roper Gulf sport rec shed, where the rodeo and big events are held. People have been using their own tents, sheltering in undercover areas and sleeping in the kitchen at the sport and rec area.

All across the community of Mataranka, including Mulggan town camp and the Mangarrayi ranger base, there are people from Jilkminggan spread out. Unfortunately, because of where people have moved, they may not be able to access the extra support of flood relief, which kicked in quite late in terms of self-sufficiency, catering and support for that number of people in a short amount of time.

I thank the people who stepped up, particularly the Mataranka School Principal. Part of her business and home was flooded. She could not get home to check on it because she was doing 12-hour shifts at the Mataranka shelter based at the school.

I give a big shout-out to the Sullivans at Cave Creek Station, who sent family members to look at the animals. They could rescue some of the animals from Des and Telka's property, which is part of their business, and safely return beautiful animals like pythons. It is not necessarily a job I would put up my hand for, but thankfully there are good people in the community who are brave and will do that work, because they love their community, their neighbours and the place they call home.

The residents of Darwin River are still working through the shock of the speed and severity of the flooding that impacted their community days ago, and some people have lost their home, which is heartbreaking. The assistance, support and care shown by police, emergency service workers and our support staff, with many volunteers and community members who have put their hands up to help fellow Territorians, has been nothing short of extraordinary.

It was incredibly welcome news that the Australian Defence Force will support the flood recovery efforts after the Chief Minister finally requested the assistance to do so in our regions. We anticipate it will be many months before some communities will be well and truly back on their feet.

We now have a potential cyclone, a tropical low, bearing down on the Territory. Some of our communities in East Arnhem from the Mulka electorate, my electorate and the top of the Barkly electorate will be nervous and will struggle with the impact of any type of rain depression or tropical low across the gulf with possible flooding impact. Communities that are already rained in for many months of the year are bracing themselves and getting nervous. I am already fielding calls from East Arnhem, particularly Numbulwar.

This MPI was brought on to focus on flood inquiry and learning lessons. Our Labor team has welcomed the Chief Minister's statement that there will be a review at the appropriate time about the events, what has unfolded and the lessons that can be brought forward in the future—perhaps the near future. This is important because we need to learn the lessons of the most recent flooding events across the Territory from the Centre to the Top End to ensure we can be better prepared next time. Unfortunately, mother nature will be the only one to tell us that.

We believe any review or inquiry should be done independently, at arm's length from government, so that all aspects of the response can be fully and objectively considered. This is not about finding faults with our incredible frontline officers and the people who have worked day-in and day-out, night and day—around the clock—to support local communities across the regions. They deserve our gratitude and respect for all they have done so far, what they continue to do today and what they will do into the next few weeks.

This is about ensuring that the systems, processes and procedures in place are as good, well prepared, thought-out and planned as they possibly can be. Any inquiry should also allow the voices of those impacted by these floods to be heard directly. People deserve to tell their stories and have their feedback recorded and considered if we are to truly learn from this event.

Across the Territory and the country we have been grappling with the reality of climate change and the increasing severity and regularity of disasters in Australia for many years. In 2024 alone there were at least 30 disasters across Australia, causing severe hardship and disruption to our fellow Australian communities. Every one of these events caused trauma, long-term health problems, financial distress, business impacts and challenges with employment and secure and safe housing. We are seeing that play out before our eyes across the Territory, with so many Territorians affected.

There has been significant work across the nation to address the growing threat of climate-induced natural disasters and the threat they pose to the wellbeing and security of communities. The Northern Territory has been part of this work, but it is critical that we continue to do all that we can to be better prepared when it comes to the inevitability of natural disasters in order to mitigate any risk that may pose.

We acknowledge the Chief Minister's commitment to provide $100m towards recovery efforts. It is critical that this funding is spent well on projects that deliver better, more weather resilient infrastructure for our communities, fellow Territorians and businesses. While $100m will go some way to support improved infrastructure, much more is required to ensure communities are made more resilient in the face of natural disasters. We will be watching closely and asking questions from the community members and businesses in our electorates about the actual support and investment in prevention, not just responses.

It is critical that we see a greater focus on preventive investment in preparedness across the Territory for extreme natural disasters. We know this will be a reality. The best way we can work together to support fellow Territorians is to make sure that we are doing work up-front to better safeguard communities before they are impacted by natural disasters.

Many communities and homelands in my electorate have been affected recently, so I have been checking in and following stories, particularly those feeding into questions and concerns through the incident controllers of the Arnhem electorate. Werenbun homeland on the road to Leliyn (Edith Falls) was cut off completely. There is no shop and about 12 houses in that little homeland. Luckily, it was just over a bit of a hill, so the houses did not get inundated with water, but people were isolated with no road access. They are about half-an-hour north of Katherine, and the only place they could get food was the kiosk at Edith Falls, which was cut off because the falls flooded, as well as Katherine.

The Member for Katherine had a phenomenal video that someone had obviously sent around of the flooding of the low and high bridges; both were completely under. I was shocked to see how much the vegetation had turned on its side when I was returning home to Katherine. It was visually impacting, let alone thinking about all the water that had gone through that area.

Manyallaluk community (Eva Valley) is on Central Arnhem Road. Whilst the community itself did not flood, it was isolated. The 34 kilometres of road onto the Central Arnhem Road is hairy at the best of times during the Wet Season, let alone with all the extra water from the flooding. Food security was a huge issue for Manyallaluk because there is no shop. It is the last community for me to continue advocating for a shop. A few times we have gotten close, but it has not quite landed yet.

I checked in with some people from Manyallaluk today. They also had an incident in the community and, unfortunately, because of all the flooding, it was the perfect storm of not getting the extra police and medical support that they needed until two days later. I am keeping in touch with people who are used to isolation, but when times are tough and people reach out, you know it must be serious in terms of community safety and wellbeing.

Wugularr (Beswick) was one of the first places anticipated to be flooded. The community was quite organised following the three or four floods in the last 10 years that I have been a local member. The bottom sub had people moved to the top sub. The bottom sub provides quite a few services, including the Sunrise clinic, the Roper Gulf Regional Council office, the Djilpin Arts centre, the aged-care centre operated by the council and the creche. The Nyirrunggulung-RISE CDP program head office is in the bottom sub too, as well as quite a few homes. People were evacuated to the top sub.

Thankfully, the investment in remote housing has made a huge difference for Wugularr community, so a lot of people stayed with family members. About 40 to 45 people accessed the evacuation centre that was set up at the school. It was called a ‘centre’, not a ‘shelter’, and received extra support. A big shout-out goes to Principal Stephen Hill and all the staff and community service providers who ran that centre at the school. They had numbers go down to about 20 or so, but the clinic was operating from the school, and people could access their medications and get out in time to move. A lot of extra training for service providers and community members is needed to ensure there is local talent and knowledge on the ground, as well as those extra resources that can be driven or flown in during times of emergency.

At Mataranka there are two businesses I thank amongst all the uncertainty. I thank Des Barritt and Telka, the Principal at Mataranka School, from the Little Roper Stockcamp for their time on Sunday, as well as Ben Moore and his team at Mataranka Homestead, who took me across to see the water levels. There is a great photo of Ben with his hand at the top bar at Mataranka Homestead. They have done a phenomenal amount of cleaning; they have been washing all the mud and had about four high-pressure cleaners.

Today in a question to the ministers about whether there is any support to assist tourism or small businesses we emphasised that the estimated costs for the cleanup are in the thousands. It would be great to hear—when the time is right—if there are any grants that can be accessed.

A huge shout-out goes to Ben and Des for their time. They were in good spirits, which gave me a bit of comfort, but I know it has been a lot of work. Ben’s team at the homestead included a few backpackers, who probably have never been through a flood, particularly those who come from some European countries. It was phenomenal. They made the front page of the *NT News* last week; there was a cracker of a photo of Ben and the team getting out cartons of beer and saving some of the stock.

Food security is a big issue in this, and I will continue to advocate for the people of Jilkminggan. People are stranded and unable to get home to places like Minyerri due to the long-term flooding of road infrastructure; that is why it is so important to invest in our roads. Other places, including Ngukurr, Urapunga and Numbulwar, may possibly be affected by other weather that is anticipated to come in across the gulf.

Questions will continue to be asked in good faith and on behalf of the people. In the process of ensuring that people are properly supported, I visited the evacuation centre at Foskey Pavilion yesterday. The evacuation centre resources compared with those in Mataranka and Jilkminggan are completely different. If there is a way to improve that work, I will be here as the local member to advocate for it.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I thank the Opposition Leader for bringing this matter of public importance at such an opportune time to talk about the flooding and what we can do to make things better in the future.

I am honoured to have been announced this morning as the lead for the $100m flood recovery fund, along with Ken Davies PSM, who has been appointed as the director-general to oversee the flood recovery. I am sure that my firsthand experience will be insightful for the work that we will do. Mr Ken Davies is a highly respected public servant; he has worked for both sides of government and has a lot of experience, and it will be great to do that work with him.

The flood recovery fund from the Finocchiaro CLP government will be prioritised for rebuilding roads like those in the community of Murray Downs; bridges, like the Salt Creek Bridge on the way to Jilkminggan; Darwin River Dam pumps; sewer breakdowns that we had in Katherine—if we did not have enough going on, we had broken sewer mains that we were dealing with—as well as the many roads across the Territory that need a lot of work.

That work will happen, and Ken will be out reviewing those areas across the Territory; it is not just about Katherine. We had unprecedented weather events this Wet Season. We all love a good Wet Season, but I am done with this one; it can go now.

The extent of flooding across the Territory is unprecedented, and a considerable amount of money will be needed to fix things, but the point of the recovery fund is to prioritise the infrastructure needed. It is about building back better where we can. It is no good building back the same as we had before; we must build the roads better and make our infrastructure better. For example, the flood levee in Katherine was built for a one-in-20-year flood. The levee was higher this time than it was in 2006, but it could go higher because it did a great job until the water went over the top.

In 36 years of living in Katherine we have dealt with our fair share of flooding. Not only Katherine this year but also Alice Springs has seen flooding. I cannot remember the last time the Todd River has flowed so often. I am sure you would know all about that, Madam Speaker. In such a short time there has been flooding across the Barkly, Murray Downs and Lake Nash. The Daly River community of Nauiyu has been displaced twice in the last month. I cannot imagine how those people are feeling. I reached out to Miriam-Rose to touch base and see how she was faring.

In recent years the community of Pigeon Hole has severely flooded and rebuilt in the same place, but we need to look at whether it is viable to rebuild those communities in the same places. I note there were conversations with elders about moving communities to higher ground when they flooded. That also brings in concerns for pastoralists and land councils, so a lot of conversations need to be had.

It did not seem that long ago that Timber Creek saw its share of flash flooding, with the hotel being underwater as well as town camps, and the Vic Highway cut off. Locals like Raine and Potter from Farrcombe Contracting of Timber Creek flew to Kununurra to get supplies for people in their town and other members of the community who had been isolated and were running short of food.

At the same time, we saw the Vic River Roadhouse, owned by Milton and Cristina Jones, have water up to the bar and the driveway scoured out so badly on the way in that you could just about lose a small car in it. Many years before, we saw the Victoria River bridge raised considerably higher from the original, yet still that bridge went under the water.

So many areas across the Territory have been flooded over my years here, and it is these events that see the Territory spirit shine through. Communities and towns rally together to help each other out. This brings strength to our towns, builds resilience and makes us stronger together. This is what we saw recently in Katherine.

Sandbags were put out across town in every business doorway in the main street by people like Ben Hockey and his team of volunteers. Ben has a garden maintenance business and a family, but he did not think twice about helping others. Residents in Katherine joined Ben's team, like Stephan and Lauren, who had been in town for only two weeks. Stephan has three jobs at Intersport, the Coffee Club and the Bodhi Bus. It is

incredible that someone who had literally been in town two weeks had three jobs and was still helping to sandbag businesses. Along the way, he was sending Nikki from the Coffee Club photos to let her know that her business was safe.

Those sandbags were filled at the NTES yards. A big shout-out and thanks go to Andrew from Allied Pickfords and Cassie Russell-Pell. They also did the sandbagging, putting them on the back of Andrew's truck and delivering them around town. I thank them also for sandbagging my office as well as Bendigo Bank next door. When they finished sandbagging the main street, they went door to door through the streets of town, and for anyone who wanted sandbags, they handed them out and helped them.

The community spirit and people coming together in times like this is remarkable. In Katherine people worked together to keep the community informed about the river height and goings-on in town due to flooding. Whether it was the sandbagging, shouting out for volunteers or letting people know the river heights and where the water was up to around town, it was Trent de With from Rod & Rifle and his brother, Brendan, from Territory Refrigeration and Air Conditioning, who rode their deadly treadlies around town, giving residents updates almost hourly throughout the day and into the night. They slept at the business and kept guard, not only over their business but for also flooding. I am sure one night Trent went out and did a midnight update, which I saw the next day.

All of us in Katherine were grateful for those updates. For some people, the updates were the highlight of the flood when things seemed grim. As I was incapacitated due to a very badly timed operation, Trent was sending me footage and keeping me up to date on different things that were going on.

In Katherine the flood mitigation put in was to cope with a one-in-20-year flood. What the gods did not tell us was that this weather event had water higher than in 2006. In review this could be looked at and the flood levee wall could potentially be raised higher. Until that point, you could see that flood mitigation was doing great work. When some of those aluminium borders came out, when Trent sent me a video and put them back in—because the water had gone over and they had floated out—you could see the water diverting. That flood mitigation really saved the town's main street area from the worst flooding; it could have been much worse.

I said it was higher than in 2006. At my house it was a foot higher and at the back about two feet higher than in 2006. We worked all day on Friday—I did not; my husband and family did—to move his many motorbikes, cars and everything onto the verandah. It looked like some sort of camp up there; it still does. They worked tirelessly to get everything up, never thinking that they would see that much water through the house.

On the Saturday I actually woke up at 3 am. I wheeled myself down to the front gate to have a look across the other side, only to see the water coming in. I went back to bed for a while and I got my son to take me for a drive around town in the morning. I could not believe in that hour-and-a-half from when we got back, he was driving into our yard through water that was halfway up his tyres. The rate the river was rising was incredible.

There was a mad dash to collect everything, because the police had come and said that they were closing the bridge and we had 30 minutes to get out. Everything was thrown in eskies, the dogs went in the back of the ute and we went to my daughter's place. Many residents of Katherine had their properties inundated, just like me.

Dave and Emma, down the road from me, had 1.75 metres through their house. They lived on the mezzanine above their shed and Dave's business with their two dogs and their two kids until two days later Hamish Crop came and saved them.

Luke and Nikki Asling lived behind them. They were actually high and dry on Riverbank Drive. Then they decided they would move a little more rural, to Fogarty Street behind me. They should have come and asked me. I would have said that area floods like anything in a big rain. Poor Luke, even a couple of days ago when I went to see him, he looked like a broken man. We did not need to exchange too many words; I knew how he felt. Two days ago they still had water in their house. He had to carry his wife out. She had an untimely operation as well.

I spoke to Alan Mole from Kalano, who had evacuated the members there and moved to the shelter. Also, the aged-care facility had been moved to higher ground. The resident Kalano pig did not make it, which was sad for that family. I think it was a Lazarus. That pig has been at Kalano for as long as I know. It was the biggest pig. The poor thing did not survive the flood. All those residents have been sheltering in shelters either at the high school or Casuarina Street. Fortunately for Alan, he said they have insurance, so that is

great for them. I see that today the ADF has been in helping them to clean up there as well. Kalano is such a great community where the members have pride in the place. It is always clean and tidy; the lawns are mowed. It looks amazing. It will take a long time to get back to that.

Many stories of food security came out as our town was cut off from the main town centre where we have only one supermarket. When Rinaldi, the manager of Woolworths, could get back in, he did a stellar job of making sure he got more diesel for the generator until the power came back on. He got the staff in, restocked the shelves, surveyed the store and opened as soon as practicable.

To be honest, every day has been a blur since then. The Chief Minister came down last Monday, and we went around and saw some of these people, and thanked Rinaldi. For people who have not been in a flood in town before, it is daunting and terrifying. You do not know where the water will stop. On Thursday we were told it would just be minor flooding and then we woke up Friday morning—some people were putting their feet out of bed and had water in their house. That is not minor flooding.

We also saw amazing joined forces of businesses in Katherine, like Jason Scatt Scadden from Town & Country Butchers, along with Bluehole, which is in the industrial area. Jason did not have any power, so all his meat got transferred to Bluehole, and they worked together as a team and served our community with meat.

We saw Alison and her son Jake from the Katherine Club cooking up a storm for volunteers. Fortunately, one of my staff came down, drove me around town for the week and helped me out immensely. A big shout-out goes to Zac, who did a lot for me over that week. He helped me deliver food that Alison and Jake cooked to the police, Health staff and NTES workers and volunteers.

We also saw Mayor Joanna Holden, as a community member, get out shoulder to shoulder with residents in town, cleaning up places. It is great to have a good council working together with government, including Thomas Manning from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet in Katherine as well as Commander Terry Zhang and all the heads of government departments in Katherine. I honestly could not be prouder of our community and how well people worked together in times of emergency.

For all of the working together, we have a resilient community, and our recovery has been that much better for it. Throughout the evacuation and rising waters, residents could attend the shelter at the high school under Nick Lovering and the dedicated educational staff and others there; with Casuarina Street Principal Nicolle Gadd; or at MacFarlane, which housed the medically vulnerable residents under Philip Russell. I do not think Philip went home. There were many people who stayed and did hours relentlessly, along with the Children and Families staff.

I met Matt, who came from SA Police and had been in the Territory for two weeks and was then sent to Katherine. He just could not believe the extent of the flooding and operation that was going on. A big shout-out goes to him through Minister Cahill. He did a fantastic job, as did all those workers. We saw pop-up schools at Clyde Fenton and Katherine South where students could go from the shelters or around town in a limited capacity.

We saw the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Heritage Church working throughout those shelters, supporting the people. There was a couple who were travelling from overseas and had gotten stuck in town. It was not quite the holiday they had planned, but they said that they were making the most of the relaxation. We had people like those from One Set Building crew and the Katherine Game Fishing Club who boated residents on Florina Road back and forth across the creek to get supplies to town. They were not just boating across one creek; there were two creeks up, so it was a bit of an episode to get to the rockhole side of the two creeks. A big shout-out goes to Chris Rowlands from Rowlands Quarries, Joshua Duncombe and Wade Hohn for supplying their tinnies for this service. I know how everyone loves their fishing here, and I think everyone loves their boats as well, so for people to lend their boats in situations like this is remarkable.

Trent was cooking up a storm on the barbecue, and when I went out there it was quite a party atmosphere. You would not have known there was too much going on. I remember that from the 1998 flood as well. When you are in those outlying areas of Katherine, most people who live out of town have at least a week's supply of groceries. My father-in-law could live a month without going to the shop, but he went back to the shop when it opened. I am not sure why; he probably could have fed the whole of Florina Road. People who have been in Katherine a long time stock up for the Wet Season. Bess Hart said that in November she always makes sure she has at least three weeks' food in her pantry.

Amazing things happened, like Emily Griffiths and Lachlan Mikic of St John driving through the floodwaters to deliver a baby girl, who is called Venice. Venice is surrounded by water, so I thought it was a fitting name.

Last Friday I went to Mataranka and spoke to Telka at Mataranka School. I spoke to David, the CEO of Roper Gulf, along with Cindy and Luke Haddow and the residents. I give a massive shout-out to Stevie from Jilkminggan who drives a school bus and works for Sunrise Health Service after hours. They were all happy to know that their dogs had been checked on and fed. They were all interested in how the Salt Creek Bridge looked. An engineer had been there that day to look at the bridge's structure, which was fine; it just needed a bit of work on the pavement.

It was great to talk to the residents. Yes, some of them were in tents. It was not their home, but they were all happy and they were fed. Before the supplies came in from Children and Families, the ladies from Jilkminggan were cooking up a storm for the rest of the residents.

I may finish my contribution in adjournment. Suffice to say, what does not kill you makes you stronger in the Territory, and our town of Katherine has come out more resilient, stronger and better for it.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, this is an important topic that we need to work together on.

Water is life, but when it is not properly managed or monitored it can take life. Across the Northern Territory floods and natural disasters are not new. Our communities, especially in the bush, have lived through it time and again. People are resilient. They know how to respond and how to look after each other. Recent events have shown us that we cannot rely on resilience alone; we must be better prepared. These events are becoming more frequent, unpredictable and severe.

I have been a member of parliament for almost 10 years, and every year I have heard that there is unprecedented rainfall or weather patterns. When they hit it is often our most vulnerable and remote communities that feel it first and hardest. Roads are cut off, supply chains are disrupted, families are isolated and essential services are stretched. That is why preparing for floods and natural disasters needs to be a shared responsibility. It is not just the role of government or emergency services; it requires all of us working together.

Governments, local councils, community organisations, industries and local people need better coordination and better communication. We need to make sure that warnings reach everyone, including people in regional and remote locations. They need to be in language and they need to make sense locally. I acknowledge that last night the weather warning for Central Australia on SecureNT's website went out in Western Arrernte, Arrernte, Pitjantjatjara and Luritja. It is important to communicate in the local language of the local area.

We need to invest in the basics, but not forget what worked in the past. Radio is still one of the most important ways to get the message out. We heard people saying that they got text messages from Clive Palmer to join a political party, so we can send text messages to advise people that there are issues or emergency notices. We all need to do better.

We need stronger roads, more reliable crossings, better drainage and infrastructure that can withstand heavy rain and flooding. Every time a road is cut off, it is not just an inconvenience; it affects food, health services, schools and livelihoods. We are seeing that already, with the Victoria Highway and Stuart Highway being cut off in sections. From time to time when we see significant rain, the railway is cut off. This has a significant impact on regional towns across the Territory.

We need to look at long-term planning and better land management, have better environmental understanding and make smarter decisions about where and how we build. Importantly, we must listen, because the people who know the conditions best are the people who live on the land. Aboriginal communities, rangers, local leaders and residents in our urban and regional centres all hold the knowledge that must be part of how we prepare for the future. If we are serious about building resilience, we must bring that knowledge into the centre of decision-making.

Preparing for natural disasters is not just about responding when things go wrong; it is about making sure we are ready before they happen. It is about reducing the risk, protecting lives and keeping communities connected. It is about fairness, because no Territorian should be left behind when disaster strikes, no matter how remote or regional they are. Let this be a lesson for us all: we prepare better when we work together; we respond better when we listen to each other; and we recover stronger when we stand together as one Territory. At the end of the day, that is what defines us as Territorians: looking after each other.

It is important to thank the emergency services personnel and the critical goods teams who have been doing the work across the Territory. I also acknowledge the Chief Minister. I have worked with her behind the scenes for updates on my communities and making sure they are well stocked. That is important, because this is people we are talking about and making sure they have access. I give credit where credit is due. I acknowledge that work.

We need to get better with how we look at road reports so that people can get home to their communities. I know people are scared at the moment because they are hearing about Cyclone Narelle, as it has now been called.

Madam SPEAKER: That is my mother-in-law's name.

Mr PAECH: Okay, wow.

I think there is some work to do, and we are chartering food around the Territory. That is a pretty significant movement of goods and services to stock food and fill shelves. This raises an important question, which the Member for Barkly will contribute to, because it is important for us in remote communities.

I do not care who or how we pay for it—whether we need the Territory and the Commonwealth to come together—but we need to look at how we store food in regional locations such as Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine as well as remote communities so that when people are cut off, they will have a stockpile of food secured and locked away, so we do not have to put enormous pressure on charter services to get those goods and services out.

No-one ever gets everything right, and there will be an inquiry—I acknowledge that. I am not saying this government got it completely wrong, and I am not saying that when we were in government we got it right. We have to look at this and work together.

I acknowledge the Member for Katherine as well; it is incredibly hard to share that story and relive the trauma. I have family, proud Katherinites, who have really struggled this week and felt an unlocked emotion and trauma, reliving that. There are certain smells that reignite the trauma with the floods. It is important to acknowledge—whether it is Katherine, Palumpa, Daly River, Kalkarindji, Daguragu, Nitjpurru (Pigeon Hole), Yarralin or Timber Creek—when these events happen, they always reignite a sense of anxiety and emotion. People will be heightened even if there is not a direct risk in their community. When a river starts rising, the emotions start rising and people start getting scared. We all have a role to try to keep people calm and de-escalate situations until we have all the information.

We need to look at flood mitigation work. The Member for Katherine spoke about how the levees worked to a degree and then it was too much. We need to look at that and at what flood mitigation looks like in the future. Also, we need to work as a parliament with the Commonwealth on what is called 'betterment', which is when something is damaged in a natural disaster, how we repair it so that it is better than it was before it was damaged to reduce further risk.

That is important, and it is the work we should be putting our focus on and energy into after the recovery efforts have ceased so that we can ensure the next time there is a flood of this magnitude, we are not seeing significant impacts like we are now. That is a huge volume of work, as well as working with our remote communities. These are unprecedented times, but they are becoming more regular.

What does that look like in the bush? We must look at how we are currently installing and setting up telecommunications, because floods keep washing lines away, people are getting cut off and they cannot access goods and services. We might need to look at where we can address some of these crossings so that we can try to provide all-weather access into some of these communities.

We cannot bituminise every road in the Northern Territory, but we need to look at providing major corridors for that connectivity. The Victoria Highway is a crucial corridor for getting goods and services into the Territory, as is the Stuart Highway. Getting people to the country in the Barkly region, the Barkly Tablelands, is important.

I do not often give acknowledgements to those on the opposite side, but I acknowledge that the minister for Housing today has made it clear that those affected by the floods, whose homes have been inundated and who cannot get back to their community, will not have to pay rent. That is only for communities where people's homes have been lost and destroyed.

There will be a significant effort regarding how we respond to this. There are places like Daly River and Nitjpurru (Pigeon Hole) which are susceptible to flooding because of where they are built, and we need to have a conversation about what good design looks like in the future. This may be an opportunity for the government to consider embedding and mandating planning laws and rules regarding height restrictions for homes to be elevated off the ground.

When we were in government we started in areas of Jilkminggan and Kalkarindji to lift the houses so that they were elevated on stilts and could withstand floodwaters. We did the same in Daguragu, where we had the homes lifted by roughly 1.2 metres. A flood came through one time, and it was okay, but the second time it was 1.5 metres.

I acknowledge that the weather is unpredictable, but we need to try as hard as we can to better respond, because we are starting to see a change in the weather patterns, with more intense rainfall and larger Wet Seasons. In Central Australia the rain that we had this year—the Members for Braitling, Namatjira, Araluen and Barkly might agree—was almost unprecedented. I do not think we have seen this since the 1990s. The level of rain is huge, so it raises serious questions.

Katherine and Alice Springs Hospitals are probably not built in the best locations when it comes to floods because Katherine is right on the river and Alice Springs is just a skip away from the river. As we look at planning, we need to ask: how do we try to mitigate the risk to those places where people go for medical treatment? It is important we do that work.

The Members for Katherine and Arnhem spoke about this: the one thing that truly shines every time we have a natural disaster is the spirit of Territorians to help one another. We will continue to hear these stories, and we need to celebrate the heroes who have been there in a time of need.

As a parliament, we need to investigate and understand what these events will do to insurance. What will people's premiums be in Katherine, parts of Alice Springs and regional and remote parts of the Territory? It will have a significant impact.

I talked to people this week whose house is on Barrett Drive in Alice Springs. They have just been told that next year their premium will be $25,000 per year to insure their house. That is on top of their mortgage repayments. Member for Katherine, I would hate to think how much that will be for people in Katherine who have already gone through so much.

If we can work as parliament on flood mitigation will that have a direct impact and reduce people's home and contents insurance premiums? We can try to drive change by delivering infrastructure investments that insurance companies can take into consideration to lower people's premiums, because some of these amounts are untenable. People will have to sell their houses or go without flood insurance, and that is devastating. We do not want that.

I acknowledge that the real heroes are the Territorians who stand up and show up in a time of need. I welcome any opportunity for us as a parliament to recognise, honour and commemorate the hard work that every Territorian has done in this time of need.

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, one thing is sure: natural disasters should not be political. When floods, cyclones or fires hit, communities care about safety, access and recovery, not politics.

As the Members for Gwoja and Katherine said, we Territorians understand resilience better than most Australians. We live with extreme weather, whether you are in the Top End or in the desert, and with isolation and long supply chains.

Preparing for disasters is not just about speeches or statements; it requires resilient infrastructure, practical planning and real investment. Most importantly, it requires governments willing to make hard decisions, not easy announcements.

One of the biggest challenges we face for disaster preparedness is the Territory's scale. The NT Government manages about 22,000 kilometres of roads. Nearly 70% of that network is unsealed and these roads are not optional infrastructure; they are not nice-to-haves; they are the lifelines of the Territory and our communities. When disasters hit, the condition of those roads determine several things—whether communities can stay connected, food and fuel can reach our towns and emergency services can get through should they need to.

We only need to look at what took place recently in Katherine. Both sides of the highway were cut on each side of the community and the airstrip was underwater. It became difficult to get people and emergency supplies in and out of that region.

Unlike most other jurisdictions, our infrastructure must service a vast geographical area, but we have only a small population base helping to fund it. We get criticism that we have not done the same as other states or territories, but they have much larger populations and taxation bases than we do. We do not have some of the resources that they have. Sadly, that is the Territory reality, which people interstate often struggle to fully grasp.

This is why the Chief Minister and I travelled to Canberra yesterday. As I said earlier, when people from interstate hear about the flood damage in the Territory and the widespread impacts, it can sometimes be underestimated. In fact, just this Wet Season it is estimated that more than 85% of the Northern Territory's road network has been impacted by weather events. Seventy roads across Central Australia alone are under restriction from rainfall in the last 48 hours. They are extraordinary figures.

Yesterday, with a big map of the Territory plonked in front of the Treasurer and the minister for Infrastructure, I showed them where the weather events were taking place across the Territory. It opened their eyes, because they had heard about the floods, had a bit of an idea of what was happening in Alice Springs and had heard about Katherine. We showed them on the map, 'Here is Alice Springs. Here is the Western Desert area out near Yuendumu, Papunya and those areas. On the eastern side, the Sandover and the Plenty Highways and up into the Barkly and Murray Downs are cut off.'

Then we moved to the Top End and showed them Daly, Palumpa, Vic River and, of course, back out onto the eastern side into the Roper River region. Showing them visibly the widespread impact gave them a far better understanding of what we are dealing with as a Territory today.

The Member for Gwoja understands these challenges pretty well. He supports governments working together to get outcomes on the ground and deliver for the bush. As I said, the damage is not concentrated in one area; it is spread across the Territory. It encompasses all our regional and remote networks. That is why securing Commonwealth support is critical. That is what I am doing. I am working hard to continue that forward.

This Wet Season, particularly up here, has been relentless. It has damaged buildings, homes and businesses. It damaged the livelihoods of Territorians.

The government's priority has been clear from the start. Keeping people safe is our number one priority. Some communities had to evacuate due to rising floodwaters and safety concerns. We will do that work where we have to. Evacuation arrangements were activated at several areas and these operations require significant coordination between police, emergency services, health services, local councils and community leaders. It has been a strong example of the Territory emergency response systems working together.

At the same time, the government moved quickly to ensure financial support reached affected Territorians. Disaster assistance payments have been activated to help families facing immediate hardship. As the Member for Port Darwin said, already more than 4,500 applications, totalling more than $4.09m, have been processed as at close of business yesterday. It is a mammoth effort to coordinate that and get money out the door to people who need it.

We know that 50 ADF personnel have been mobilised to assist with the cleanup in Katherine. It is great to see low-security prisoners from Darwin prison getting out with four Corrections officers to Katherine to provide assistance, just as they did in Alice Springs a few weeks back. It is this critical support, as communities begin the long recovery process ahead, that is needed.

We will also have a new weather system moving across the Top End. It is currently over Queensland. What was the name? Is it Narelle?

Madam SPEAKER: Narelle.

Mr YAN: It is Narelle, thank you. Narelle, although I like the name, I do not particularly want to see you come to the Territory.

This system, in all seriousness, could have further impacts across the Carpentaria, Katherine and Vic River regions—areas that are already under immense pressure. The low-pressure system leaning to the west of

the NT may influence an extended trough, increasing flooding risk across the Tanami, the upper Vic and potentially into the Barkly regions.

I also take this opportunity to talk about our road infrastructure response, which I mentioned during Question Time. The main things we have been focused on for our road recovery has been maintaining freight access, assessing damage as soon as practicable and beginning repairs as quickly as conditions allow. This has meant we have been getting out there. As I said, we have been getting on to roads because we know that communities have been cut off. The minute we can get crews out there with graders to fix the roads, they are out there doing it, only to have the rain to come through a week later and damage them again. That is heartbreaking.

The DLI teams with our contractors are getting out there. As I said, if need be, we get out there in helicopters to do these assessments to try to get these critical roads open. They are on the ground doing the emergency repairs. The Stuart Highway, our key freight lifeline, has been prioritised to make sure we keep essential goods moving, along with fuel.

We have issues with fuel at the moment, but I am happy to say I saw a tanker leaving the port today, which means it has been in and done its delivery in Darwin, and the Stuart Highway is open. I have checked with the large fuel retailers in Central Australia, and trucks are coming through from Darwin. When they could not get through due to the floods in Katherine there were trucks coming up from South Australia.

Today the Chief Minister announced our $100m flood recovery fund to be managed by Minister Hersey—I cannot think of anyone better to oversee that—along with Ken Davies. That fund will focus on rebuilding the infrastructure better and stronger, not simply replacing what was lost. I picked up on the comments from the Member for Gwoja. He said exactly that. It is one thing just to replace the infrastructure, but if we have the ability and government has the will, which we do, we should build it back better so that we are not having to come back repeatedly to replace that infrastructure.

At the end of the day—I go back to my Corrections days—everything that happens is a learning experience, and preparing for disasters means learning from them. Disaster repair in many ways is about infrastructure resilience. It is about roads designed to deal with extreme weather, bridges designed for extreme water flow, flood mitigation studies to inform decisions, community infrastructure and cyclone shelters capable of protecting entire towns, evacuation centres prepared when needed and communication centres operational. That is why infrastructure investment matters.

In the Vic River area the phone lines were cut because the phone cable was damaged in a flooded bridge, and it took many days to get in there to do those repairs. Telstra had to wait for the water to go down to get in and do those repairs. The bridge at Wycliffe Well—how many times have we seen that—is a great bridge. It goes across Wycliffe Creek, and the bridge is out of the water; it is great. The problem is that there is a floodway two kilometres from the bridge where the river flows, so you cannot get to the bridge.

The Member for Barkly knows all too well the end of Gilbert Swamp on the southern side. People did the work many years ago to strengthen Gilbert Swamp because it always flooded and you always got stuck. They did that work except at the southern end, where there is a floodway that they did not do. The road stays out of the water, the floodway goes under, and you cannot get on to the new section of the road. These are the simple things we need to fix, and this is what I am talking about when we say ‘build back better’. Good infrastructure matters.

Preparing for disaster also requires a strong economy. Resilient infrastructure is expensive. You cannot build 21st century infrastructure on a 20th century economy. That is why we are focused on rebuilding the economy. Every dollar generated through mining, energy, tourism, agriculture and Defence investment is a dollar that can be invested into infrastructure resilience. We have done the hard work leading into the 2026–27 budget. We made hard decisions to put the Territory on the right economic footing for the future. I am glad we did that work. If we had not done that work over the last months, we would be in a difficult position to stand up and say that we are putting $100m on the table to deal with flood recovery.

We have committed more than $2bn to roads and transport infrastructure across our vast road network in our infrastructure program for delivery into the future. These projects strengthen our freight corridors, enable economic growth in communities and improve flood resilience. We are on track to deliver the most kilometres of road sealing in the last decade, and that is saying something.

Preparing for disasters is not something any government can do alone. It requires collaboration between our government, the Commonwealth, local councils, industry, land councils, traditional owners and local

communities. This collaboration can be complex, but it is essential to delivering infrastructure that lasts and can benefit all Territorians.

I shout out to all the emergency services volunteers, police, nurses, doctors and everyone on the front line doing that work, particularly the team within DLI who are working for weeks on end, looking at our road network, doing those assessments and going with our contractors to the areas that need to be repaired to reopen our roads so that our people can get back to communities and get on with their daily lives.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, in the Northern Territory we have experienced more than 14 natural disasters in the last five years. That is far more than in the five years before that. Just this year we have already faced four disasters. Things are getting worse. We know it is not over yet. Daly River will be uninhabitable for months and rains continue to threaten the Centre and Katherine. Today we have been warned about another incoming cyclone. This is not normal. Here and now we live in a place of extreme climate. We are constantly lurching from recovery to recovery. We cannot keep pretending these events are rare. The climate crisis is here and the Northern Territory is on the front line.

My support and solidarity is with everyone impacted by these events, including people in this Chamber, with particular recognition of the Member for Katherine. I acknowledge all the extraordinary work being done on the ground by people.

'Resilience' is a word we hear a lot in this Chamber, particularly after the harrowing weeks the Northern Territory is still enduring. What does resilience mean if it is never followed by proper preparation? Working together to enhance disaster resilience means that every decision about infrastructure, planning and emergency preparedness must centre on the people of our communities, especially those in remote and vulnerable areas.

These extreme weather events are not a fluke; they are our new reality. The Northern Territory Government's own submission to a Senate inquiry acknowledged, over a decade ago, that temperatures are rising and rainfall and cyclone intensity are increasing. That was in 2013. We were warned 13 years ago, and that warning was already old news. These worsening disasters are hitting our communities and our pockets hard. A 2021 estimate put it at $156m every year. Keep in mind that we had 14 disasters in the five years since that study. The costs are going up, but it does not have to be like this.

For anyone who needs more clarity, even military leaders are worried about what is happening. The Australian Security Leaders Climate Group, a nonpartisan network of former senior military and intelligence leaders, says that climate change is accelerating and it is driven by burning fossil fuels. The UN Secretary-General has warned that humanity has crossed into a new era of global boiling. The CSIRO explains that global heating is made up of irreversible tipping points and those tipping points are coming faster than we thought. By continuing to burn fossil fuels we are supercharging our atmosphere. We are turning normal Wet Seasons into unprecedented catastrophes like these floods and making the Territory unliveable.

This is an emergency and the government must respond. If we continue down this path we are not just looking at more floods; we are looking at an existential threat to life in the Northern Territory. This is not hyperbole. According to the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group, the Northern Territory is walking directly into a furnace. These researchers have modelled that if we continue to dig up, export and burn fossil fuels at the rate we have been, within the next 40 years a significant proportion of northern Australia will be so hot that we will experience near unliveable conditions.

We are not talking about this happening in our children's lifetime anymore; we are talking about our own lifetime. The security experts warn that in 40 years, once northern Australia reaches these near unliveable conditions, people will be forced to leave. Essential services, infrastructure and the military bases we rely on for our national security will not be maintained.

The fossil fuel industry is not just harming our environment; it is literally destroying the liveability of the Northern Territory. You would think that a government faced with the reality of an unliveable Territory would do everything in its power to address the cause. Instead, it is handing billions of taxpayers' dollars to the gas industry.

The CLP has committed a staggering $355m in subsidies and public money to the fossil fuel industry and promised $4bn over the next few years. This does not even include the gas that the NT Government recently announced it will purchase from a controversial Beetaloo Sub-basin gas project. Let that sink in. While we debate how to respond to floods that have decimated Katherine and Daly River and are exacerbated by

climate change, this government is handing over billions of dollars to the industry that is supercharging those disasters. We are subsidising our own destruction.

The great lie peddled by the gas lobby and parroted by successive Northern Territory Governments is that we simply must frack the Territory to keep our economy afloat. After subsidies are paid, the gas industry provides no real financial benefit to the Territory. Let us look at the facts of this. The Territory is projected to pay out $355m in fossil fuel subsidies and other benefits like expensive roads and infrastructure this financial year alone and will get back only $346m in total across all mining and gas royalties and taxes.

In this Chamber we have heard over and again the Deputy Chief Minister saying, 'I love the gas industry' and 'Drill, baby, drill'. That is because he wants you to believe that we get $8m from the Northern Territory gas industry and that money keeps the lights on and runs the hospitals and police. Putting aside the fact that $8m would run Northern Territory hospitals for only two days, we do not even get that much from the gas industry. We pay the fossil fuel industry $355m and we get only $346m back. We effectively pay $9m to allow fossil fuel companies to dig up, sell and burn resources that we own, as Australians. We are not even giving it away for free; we are paying them to take it off us.

Here is the accounting trick. The government may tell you that these numbers are off. It might say, 'We do not pay $355m in subsidies'. The truth is the government disguises subsidies to the gas industry by funding roads and infrastructure used exclusively by fossil fuel companies. Together with traditional cold, hard cash subsidies, that makes up $355m.

Massive corporations like Santos and Origin paid zero dollars in gas royalties to the Northern Territory or the federal government for the gas they took from Northern Territory waters. I will say again, zero dollars. That is still a negative $9m to our taxpayers and free gas and billion-dollar profits to the gas industry.

I hear the government say, 'What about all the jobs?' Less than 1% of jobs in the Territory are in mining and gas. Many of those jobs are held by FIFO workers from interstate or overseas. In the future, the mid-range estimate for the Beetaloo Sub-basin is only 90 ongoing jobs. When you divide that by what we pay the gas industry, each gas job is costing taxpayers over $350,000. That simply does not pass the pub test.

We keep hearing from the government, 'Trust us, don't worry, the money is coming', but from where? In the best possible scenario, which is widely recognised will not eventuate, fracking in the Beetaloo Sub-basin will generate just $69m a year, less than 1% of the Northern Territory budget.

I have talked before about the fact that budgets are about choices, and every $1m handed to a multinational gas giant is $1m taken from our under-resourced hospitals, public schools and disaster recovery funds that Katherine, Beswick, Daly River and other communities across the Territory desperately need now, and we are getting nothing back.

It is a rort. It is not right and it has to stop. With $355m every year, or $4bn over the forward estimates, we could fundamentally transform how prepared this Territory is. We could fully fund emergency services and disaster mitigation multiple times over. We could invest in housing that is built to withstand floods and heat. We could upgrade roads so that communities are not cut off every Wet Season. We could strengthen early warning systems and local response capacity. With $4bn we could solve our housing crisis. That is what working together to prepare for disasters looks like.

The CLP is choosing to take hundreds of millions of dollars from our communities every year to subsidise the industries that are causing our disasters. I ask Territorians this, because the CLP will not: are you okay with that? If we truly want to enhance disaster resilience, work together and make sure our communities are not facing these disasters into the future, the solution does not lie in buying sandbags with one hand and funding the industries that cause the floodwaters to rise with the other.

To my fellow members and my fellow Territorians, it is time to grow up and put people first. You must immediately stop funding the destruction of the Northern Territory. Our home, lives and future depend on it.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, if we are to prepare for natural disasters, we need to work together. Absolutely we have seen many decades of disasters that have evolved over time in this beautiful country that we call home.

The reality is that we live in a country that today gives us the best possible beautiful lifestyle and tomorrow reminds us that we live in an environment that can turn on a dime. Over the last few weeks in the Northern Territory we have seen what that looks like—one wet day after another that we celebrated in the initial phases.

We had an early cyclone that created challenges for quite a few people, but we got through it. Then we celebrated the fact that we had the wettest Wet that we could remember for quite some time and then the rains just kept coming and coming.

We are in a situation that we have not faced before where we have flooding from the top of the Territory to the bottom of the Territory and more rain on the way. It has created havoc, crisis and distress. If we are to be prepared for that in the future we must work together, because that is the only way you can prepare for disaster.

I was interested to hear the Member for Johnston blame the current situation on the gas industry. It is a bit of a stretch and her extrapolation of what the gas industry is or is not doing indicates perhaps not enough information is flowing through. I would be happy to spend some time giving the Member for Johnston information about what those opportunities will provide for the Territory.

You are right, Member for Johnston; royalties do not give you much, but the opportunity that resource will give our Territory, country and region is transformational. It will create the opportunity to build industry and jobs, create networks of new hospitals and schools and grow our population. It will tell people that this is the place that they want to live, because the one thing that it will give us that we have not had is energy security that will keep the lights on and will supply security for the development of our Territory well into the future. We have all experienced blackouts from time to time; I know in my 30-odd years in the Territory I have had more than my fair share of blackouts.

You are right about us not getting much from the Santos of the world, because that is offshore gas. The difference between what is happening in the Beetaloo Sub-basin today and what has been happening across the country in other gas exploration and production, from the Territory's point of view, is that it is onshore gas. It is gas that we have the opportunity to maximise the flow from to attract business and industries that will help us get to net zero and develop opportunities for our children and grandchildren and opportunities to grow whole new towns and centres.

These opportunities, as the Member for Barkly likes to say, will see the land of opportunity, which is the Barkly region, go into the heart of Australia—which is Alice Springs and Katherine, the centre of the universe according to the Member for Katherine. These opportunities will be unsurpassed and will set us up for generations to come.

I hope the Member for Johnston takes the opportunity to reach out and have a coffee sometime; I would be happy to sit down and have a chat about the opportunities for us in the gas industry. As we embrace those opportunities we will see development for our Aboriginal communities, building of new infrastructure, funding of roads that we desperately need—particularly in the current situation—and infrastructure that will enable us to invest back into our hospitals, healthcare and the education system. Perhaps it will give us the opportunity to look beyond politics and work together so that we do not have to face the current situation again.

I have lived through more than my fair share of natural disasters. As a kid growing up, I got flooded out on a regular basis and have vivid memories as a child of having my bedroom furniture on 44-gallon drums. For one winter, they stayed there for the whole three months because every time we thought it was okay to put the furniture back on the floor where it belonged, the creek would rise again. We would then be headed out and isolated from our home as we waited for the waters to recede. My dad lived through the 1955 Maitland flood, which tore through the Hunter Valley, taking lives and destroying homes; it was unprecedented at that time.

I lived through the Newcastle earthquake, a natural disaster of proportions not seen before in our country. I almost lost my husband at the time and my son as I exited a building, only to have the awning crash down behind them. Natural disasters are things that we need to mitigate against and work to prevent, but in order to do that we need the resources. We need to fund the projects and have control over our own destiny.

I think what happens post a natural disaster—I saw it in Newcastle after the earthquake—is that for a long time there is a shellshock when it is impossible to understand where to go, how to fix things and where to move on. Sometimes, that shock pushes the reality of what happened into the background so that people get up and say, 'It will never happen again. It's okay, we don't need to worry much because it was a one-off thing.' We know in this country that is not true.

There are bushfires, floods and earthquakes; we have quite a few shakes in the Northern Territory also. What we need to do from this episode and what has happened in this moment in history is get up when the rain

stops and the waters recede and do things differently. Let us make sure that we approach things differently. Let us make sure that we can work together to get a resolution so that we do not see the population of Daly River having to be evacuated time and again. Let us make their homes secure and safe, find a better way to resolve it and look for the opportunities to improve the infrastructure so that we do not lose contact with the rest of the world. To achieve that we will have to work together.

We have seen evidence of that over the past couple of weeks, when people have come together in the most extraordinary of circumstances. We saw people working for government step up time and again to help their fellow Territorians. We have seen people in business put aside their own concerns about their family homes and their businesses to help their neighbours. Total strangers came to the Territory to help everybody who has been affected by these floods without even a second thought. The organisations like Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army are all standing up to be there for the people who have been displaced and impacted by this terrible situation.

I give a big shout-out to the effort that has been made and the work done by the Department of Children and Families staff who have been at the front and centre of the welfare response. They have been with those people who have been displaced. They have worked over the last couple of weeks across eight evacuation centres which, fortunately, is down to five as we gradually start to get people back into their homes.

It was fantastic news to hear that in the last 24 hours the last person in a Katherine evacuation centre had moved out of the centre and people are starting the recovery process in Katherine. It is a long road, but the fact that you are on that road is such an improvement on not knowing where you are headed tomorrow or what the next day will bring.

People can now access relief funding immediately through an online system that had been talked about on and off for the last five or six years, but when the immediate crisis passed it had kind of fallen into the background. Nobody thought, ‘You know how we said it would be great if we could do online applications and process payments while we were dealing with that emergency last week, why not deal with it now when we are not faced with an emergency before it happens the next time?’ In the world that we live in it is inevitable that there will be a next time. Sadly, that did not happen.

I give credit to the teams at the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. They said, ‘We need to do it now. We can do it right now and fix it.’ Within less than a week that is what they did. Today it went live. You can apply for your immediate relief payment online and if you are remote we will get the money to you through an electronic payment, which has never happened before.

Disaster brings revolution. Disaster brings opportunity in the wake of the horrendous events that people face. We can learn from that now and here in this period. When we face the next inevitable disaster we will be ready and prepared. It will not be the thing we forgot to do because we are suddenly relieved that the cyclone had passed or the bushfire did not engulf our town or the flood did not rise as high as we anticipated it would.

For those of you who have been in the Territory a long time, and I think most of the people in the Chamber have, you will remember the 1998 Katherine flood and thought it would never happen again. In 2006 it almost happened that badly again, but it was not quite as bad. In 2015 we had to move the Daly River mob into town and then just a few short weeks ago the same thing happened, and we thought it was okay. Everyone went home and a short time later, here we are back again.

We must work together and be a team if we are to prepare for this in the future. We must take the fight to Canberra. We must get the federal government to back us and make sure our national highways are as robust and strong as they can be. We want to know that our rail line will be secure. We need to know that no matter what, our food security is there.

Mentioning food security, I need to give a shout-out to the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations staff, who have been working overtime to make sure that they get supplies, including fuel, to our stores and communities that are isolated. I shout out to the volunteers, all the public sector people who have been pitching in to help with this, and to everyone in this Chamber who has vouched for and supported their communities, because this is where the Territory comes to the fore. This is who we are and what we do. When things go bad, we forget the politics, stand together, support each other and get each other back on track.

This MPI is one we should be striving for; we should be striving to work together to resolve what has been happening in our Territory over the last three to four weeks so it does not happen in this way again so that

next time we are faced with this type of situation—we hear Cyclone Narelle is coming our way—we say, 'That's okay; we've got this. We have it covered and know that everyone will be safe and secure.' We know we can stand together to achieve that goal.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Mr Deputy Speaker, Territorians are resilient people—across the Top End and down in Katherine, Jilkminggan and Daly River—but we have had the worst flooding event in decades. Hundreds of millimetres of rain have fallen in the past few weeks. In Katherine, the river peaked at 19.2 metres—the highest level since 1998.

In 1998 I went to Katherine two weeks after the floods to play a game of footy. It was not the best idea. All the mud was on the oval.

Daly River (Nauiyu) experienced record flooding, with the water well above major flood thresholds, and it is expected to stay that way for the rest of the week. The people of Palumpa say that they have never had a flood since their community was developed. About 60 people have been displaced from Jilkminggan, and six of them were trapped by floodwaters and had to be transported to Mataranka.

Many properties were affected as well in Darwin River and Batchelor, and there were reports of people not being able to get over Coomalie Creek. Member for Blain, there were a few hours when people could not cross the river, with a couple of family members still living down there.

In my electorate of Arafura, past Jabiru is flooded for six months of the year, every year. I kept a close eye on Gunbalanya and kept ringing the services there, but thankfully we have a good plain country system and the ocean close by, so everything flushes out.

I remember when I worked for the Northern Land Council. Every Wet Season and then in April and May, I used to drive up to check on the roads and help the police to do the roads report. Because there are 14 or 15 different creek crossings between Jabiru and Maningrida, we did not know what to expect. At every crossing we would make sure to check the depth, and some were ponds; they were new ecosystems and fishing holes. We would come across them, and they would take weeks to get patched up so that the road was good again for the Dry Season.

This is the type of thing we face in remote areas. Every year, we must check the roads and patch them up because they are not bituminised. That needs to happen with all the infrastructure as well; everything needs to be checked and bolstered. We have Telstra communication centres and towers that need to be checked, roads that need to be checked and gamba grass that needs to be cut down by the rangers.

A couple of years ago the Member for Barkly's region had a big bushfire. It is a holistic effort, and we need to look at all parts of the natural disaster cycle, the Dry Season and the Wet Season, to make the Territory a safer place. We have another cyclone coming, but hopefully it will take a different route.

I thank the Chief Minister and Treasurer for advocating on behalf of Territorians. We are on board and want to advocate with you. It is a huge effort. Ultimately, we want the CLP government to work with the federal government and, if you need us, we will come along and advocate on behalf of the people.

Mr EDGINGTON (Essential Services): Mr Deputy Speaker, as we are all aware, large areas of the Territory have recently been impacted by intense rainfall and widespread flooding. These conditions have created significant challenges for communities across the region and placed substantial pressure on our essential services, including our health system. For many Territorians the impacts have been immediate and deeply felt through disrupted services, damaged infrastructure and the uncertainty that often accompanies events of this scale. Despite these challenges the response from our frontline workers and the strength shown by our communities has been remarkable.

The flooding meant that Katherine Hospital had to be evacuated, with patients transferred to Darwin to ensure their care could continue safely. Last week I had the opportunity to update the Chamber on the incredible amount of work undertaken by our dedicated healthcare staff who coordinated and delivered the evacuation. Since then, a major focus has been on restoring hospital services for the Katherine community. Hospitals are central to the wellbeing of communities, providing not only critical medical services but also reassurance that care will be available when it is needed most.

I am pleased to advise that Katherine Hospital reopened on Sunday, representing an important milestone in the community's recovery from the recent flooding. Extensive safety checks and inspections were undertaken to ensure the facility could safely reopen through a staged and carefully managed approach. Thanks to the

dedication of NT Health staff and the Katherine Hospital team, essential services are once again being restored for the community. The emergency department is now operating from the hospital again and the temporary facility at the St John headquarters is now closed.

The Jack Rooney general medicine ward has reopened with limited bed capacity as services gradually expand. Operating theatres are available for emergency procedures, and the medical day stay unit has recommenced services with patients being contacted directly regarding their treatment. Outpatient appointments and elective procedures affected by the flooding will also be rescheduled in the coming weeks. Patients evacuated to Royal Darwin Hospital will begin returning to Katherine when it is clinically appropriate.

I thank all the Katherine health staff for their incredible commitment. Some of the staff also travelled to Darwin to support the patients who were evacuated from Katherine to Darwin. Many of the staff have been supporting the emergency response tirelessly, even while facing flood impacts in their own homes. Their dedication to caring for Territorians during this challenging period deserves our deepest appreciation.

I thank Trent from Rod & Rifle TackleWorld Katherine for helping share the message that Katherine Hospital was open again. Those who have been following social media would have seen Trent's ride, and if you followed his ride through Katherine Hospital you have seen and heard about all the incredible work going on there. I saw many updates from Trent which gave good examples of everyone pulling together during those most difficult times.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the staff, families and community members who stepped up during the emergency response. The dedication and professionalism shown throughout this event demonstrates the strength of all our Territory communities. It is through these collective efforts that communities are supported, protected and can recover.

As we know, extreme weather events challenge not only our health system but also place significant pressure on the infrastructure that communities rely on every day, including power, water and sewerage.

Power and Water had 54 people, including 20 specialists, doing urgent emergency repairs on the pumps at Darwin River Dam last week. They had to build the roads so that trucks could get through to start the repairs. Over the weekend Power and Water advised the four pumps were repaired and the pump station has been returned to the overhead power supply network. Repair works to the treatment and pump station buildings will continue with a focus on flood mitigation works as wet weather continues. Short-term measures include additional sandbagging to protect recent repair works, while longer-term mitigation will include the construction of an additional levee wall to protect pump station infrastructure during severe weather events.

In Katherine, hardworking crews have restored power to more than 2,800 properties. Crews have been working on fixing sewer issues. These works are affecting sewerage services to customers, and repairs are expected to take some time. Across all the affected communities our essential workers are working extremely hard to ensure services are restored as soon as possible when safe to do so.

Beswick has moved to the recovery phase, with services restored.

In Palumpa assessment of infrastructure confirmed that the power station remained dry. Palumpa was fully evacuated, with residents staying at the Marrara Indoor Stadium. I visited the Marrara Indoor Stadium to meet with families from the Palumpa community. Those families are being supported by volunteers from the Salvation Army and the Australian Red Cross. While I was there it was terrific to see activities underway and the organisations assisting and supporting families and young people. It was great to see Hoops 4 Health engaging with young people. Orange Sky Australia was onsite helping residents with laundry needs. It is a great example of people coming together during these difficult times.

At Marrara I saw Northern Territory Government staff, including interpreters from the AIS, which is part of my Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development. They are doing incredible work supporting the evacuees from Palumpa.

In Daly River where the river has peaked, and may be slowly receding, assessment of infrastructure will commence once access is safe and available into that community. We have seen the vision of the devastation with every building in that community inundated with water, right up to the roofline. Pictures I have seen through the media and social media show, in many cases, just the roof. Water and sewerage systems have been isolated and are not operational. The power station continues to supply some customers on Wooliana Road.

On the weekend, Mr Deputy Speaker, I also went to the Foskey Pavilion and it was great to see you there in your capacity as the Member for Karama and as the assistant minister for Housing. I know from talking to different families there, they are being supported by the Salvation Army and the Australian Red Cross. It was great to see Tejinder Singh there, also supporting families and providing some meals, fruit juices and those types of things to those families, showing the support and charity work he does in his community and at Foskey Pavilion.

We had the opportunity to talk to Northern Territory Government staff. I saw interpreters from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development. There were Aboriginal community police officers and Aboriginal liaison officers from the Northern Territory Police onsite working directly with those families and assisting and supporting them with inquiries, providing whatever support they could.

We know these are difficult times for all those families. Seeing firsthand the families from Palumpa and Daly River, it was good to let them know we are here to support them.

In Jilkminggan, power, water and sewerage systems are operational. Water quality testing is underway. The boil water alert remains in place.

In my electorate I note recovery work is underway at Murray Downs, where flooding caused significant damage to homes and community infrastructure. Water and wastewater services are fully restored at Murray Downs. Power is restored to all but two properties, which are awaiting certificates of compliance.

Housing assessment teams have been active on the ground, working diligently to identify properties impacted by the recent events wherever it is safe and feasible to do so. These efforts are critical to understanding the full extent of housing damage and ensuring the right support is delivered to those affected. Additional teams will be deployed to communities more recently impacted so that all affected households can be assessed and further assistance provided where required.

The government remains committed to supporting residents through the recovery process in restoring safe, secure housing as a priority. Damage assessments are ongoing and once it is safe to access properties, repairs will be prioritised so that tenants can return home as soon as possible. As I said in Question Time, we are working through an emergency rent pause for flood-affected public housing tenants. This is to make sure tenants are supported for periods where they cannot safely access or live in their home because of flood events. Our government remains focused on supporting displaced tenants and residents, assessing damage as quickly as possible and helping affected public housing tenants. While the response is underway we continue to survey and assess conditions for entry to communities, followed by scoping of properties for safety.

Our government is committed to supporting Territorians through the days and weeks ahead. As Territorians, we are no strangers to extreme weather events. They are part of the reality of living in the Territory, and they test not only our infrastructure but also our communities. It is for this reason that resilience and preparedness are built into our systems with strong planning and backup arrangements in place to support continuity of services. These measures ensure that even in the most challenging of circumstances, essential services can continue to operate and communities can be supported.

Government staff from not only my agencies in Health, Housing and Essential Services, but all agencies, including Emergency Services and Police; volunteers; all of the government departments; the Salvation Army; and the Red Cross have shown amazing Territory spirit and resilience in the face of these unprecedented weather events.

As Minister for Health; Essential Services; and Housing, Local Government and Community Development, I reassure everybody that I am committed to ensuring that these systems remain strong, effective and ready to respond whenever they are called upon.

Thank you to everybody involved. To the residents who have been affected by floods, we are here to support you. We are listening and will provide ongoing services until you can get back home.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Mr Deputy Speaker, I firstly thank our emergency services, police, volunteers, Aboriginal corporations and local governments across all the regions that have been impacted by the floods from the Top End of the Territory and now down into Central Australia and particularly in my electorate of Daly, which has been severely impacted by these floods, from Daly River to Darwin River, Palumpa, Douglas Daly and a couple of the homelands that have been impacted due to food security issues. The emergency services,

police and volunteers who have been out on the ground have done an amazing job. I have spoken to many people who have been doing that work to ensure the safety of all people, no matter where they are from.

The Member for Katherine has been in Katherine dealing with the floods, and it is heartbreaking to see what is going down in our regions. I spoke about this last week in the Chamber. Many of my good friends of more than a decade from Daly River have literally lost everything. I am speaking with them daily on phone calls at night and during the day, and the uncertainty is real. The uncertainty of not knowing when to go home is something I do not wish upon anyone. We are getting to a stage where people just want a plan to know what the next steps are. I think they know they are not getting home anytime soon, but they want to know if there will be supported accommodation.

While Foskey Pavilion is set up as well as it can be and the public service is doing well there, it cannot be a long-term solution over the next few months. It is not right or fair that people may have to sleep there for months, in a shelter amongst other families with children running around. There are more than 100 people at Foskey Pavilion alone, and I do not think it is right. I know the Member for Barkly has been out there, and I believe the Chief Minister and the Member for Port Darwin have been there. I had a couple of phone calls about that visit already from locals there. Mr Deputy Speaker, I know you have been there.

When you go there, put yourself in people's shoes and understand how you would feel knowing you had to stay there for a few months. We need to transition, and I will support you. I said publicly on my Facebook page that I support the Treasurer and the Chief Minister going to Canberra to meet with the federal Treasurer. I have my own statement calling on Kristy McBain from the federal government to come here because this is about the people, what happens next and how we get people home.

I pick up on some of the comments from the Member for Port Darwin. We know we cannot politicise this issue. We need to work together, and I am getting the sense that is what the government wants. I have reached out many times. I still have not had a phone call or received responses to those emails and concerns from the constituents. I am willing to work with the government to pass on concerns from my constituents; that is the role of the local member. We should not be worrying about what political party we sit with because, at the end of the day, it is about the people.

We still have a role in opposition to hold the government to account; that is the role of opposition. That is not politicising issues. If constituents are coming in with genuine concerns and we are passing them on to the government, that is not politicising issues; that is passing on constituent concerns. A good government would take on those concerns and be held accountable to ensure those processes are done better, because it is about the people. It is not about me or you; it is about how we can ensure that we respond to natural disasters better.

What we saw in Daly River was concerning. There were still 70 to 80 people left behind having to wade through water to get on a small boat and then cross over to Wooliana Road. I do not think anyone should have to wade through water not knowing if there are crocodiles. I have spoken to teachers and community members who had to do that. We need to understand how we can better tighten up those systems and response times to ensure that everyone feels safe.

The Member for Namatjira talked about how emergency services are stretched. There is an issue about how we get the ADF in earlier to assist so that we have more boots on the ground. At the end of the day, it is about people's safety, and I question why the ADF was not called in earlier when we knew there would be this widespread flooding event. We saw it in Katherine; we know it comes down the river and impacts Daly River. We need to understand why the ADF was not called earlier.

If it is a process issue for the federal government, we can deal with that. We need to work through how we activate more support for the Territory if that is the actual issue.

Mr Yan interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: I can hear the Member for Namatjira mumbling under his breath over there, but he should be looking at practical solutions to ensure that the safety of Territorians comes first. That is what we are all asking for here, and I look forward to the government reaching out to me to provide those updates.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, last week I had the opportunity to talk about one of the schools in my electorate, Sanderson High School. I spoke about its exciting transition from a middle school and some of the key leaders at that school.

I highlight one of the most exciting recent developments at the school, the refurbishment of a former classroom into a fully equipped hair salon training studio. This purpose-built facility now supports Year 10 students undertaking their Certificate II in Salon Assistant Hairdressing, which is a VET course. The new studio provides a professional, industry-standard learning environment where students can develop hands-on skills, build confidence and gain authentic workplace experience.

Currently 13 students are enrolled and progressing through this course. By Semester 2, students are expected to reach a suitable competency level to begin welcoming paying customers into the studio for treatments. This will be a tremendous milestone, allowing students to gain real-world experience while also serving members of the local community.

These developments demonstrate what is possible when we invest in our schools, listen to our communities and create pathways that recognise that success looks different for every student. The transition of Sanderson Middle School into a comprehensive high school, the delivery of the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training, the development of a specialist trade and technical college and the establishment of modern VET facilities like the new hair salon studio all point to a bright future for students in Sanderson.

I commend Rob McIntosh, the leadership team, staff, students and families for embracing this exciting new chapter. I look forward to the day in the not-too-distant future when we celebrate the first cohort of Year 12 graduates from Sanderson High School, young Territorians who will leave their school confident, capable and ready to contribute to the future of our Territory.

I congratulate a number of outstanding young leaders from schools across the Sanderson electorate who have recently been recognised by their school communities.

On Friday 6 March Wulagi Primary School held a special leadership assembly where student leaders proudly received their leadership badges. These badges represent not only achievement but also the responsibility to lead by example, support their peers and contribute positively to their school.

I congratulate the Wulagi Primary school captain: Natalie Todd; Christiane Sperti; Finlay Manley; and Francheska Dela Cruz. I acknowledge the house captains who will foster teamwork and school spirit throughout the year: for Pelican House, Quaden Holtze and Lucas Cole; for Jabiru House, Tegan Polak and Aiden Lindsay; and for Brolga House, Mason Whitney and Jace Seubert.

It was particularly heartening to see Christiane Sperti continue to be recognised in a leadership capacity. I had the privilege of presenting Christiane with the Anula Citizenship Award at last year's presentation assembly, and it is wonderful to see her leadership journey continue.

I also recognise the newly announced student leaders at Anula Primary School. At the end of 2025 the school announced its school captains, Sahara Walsh and Lauren Kim, and vice captains, Isabelle Sammut and Hadleigh Abbott.

Over the past few weeks, students have been submitting nominations for the Student Representative Council and delivering strong house captain speeches. Each class also nominated a student leader to join the Anula Student Leadership Team. These students will collaborate on student-led events and assemblies while modelling the Anula school values of responsibility, collaboration, respect, honesty and doing your best. They will also contribute to the Northern Territory Learning Commission team for Anula Primary School, ensuring student voices are part of shaping positive change within the school.

I congratulate the students who have been selected: Peyton Walsh; Jackson Walters; Ruby Tregaskis; Zara Horkins; Azarias Tariku; Ezra Ambrose; Saskia Wilson; Edith Greene; Imogen Camara; and Jack Dienelt. I wish all these young leaders every success as they step into their leadership roles this year.

Later this month, on Friday 27 March, I will have the pleasure of visiting Marrara Christian College to meet with its senior school captains and prefects to discuss the year ahead and what leadership means to them now and in the future. I acknowledge the student leadership team: Primary Captains Mia Mustin and Benedict Ukaegbu; Primary Vice Captains Angela Koh and Justus Weru; Senior Captains Demelza Gikopoulos and Cael Prosser; Senior Vice Captains Marilyn Gurruwiwi and Matilda Novinetz; and Secondary Prefects

Raquelle Kentish, Keziah Lyne, Matthew Riley, Joziah Gonzalez, Connor Lewis, Luke Harper, Justina Thompson, Caleb Francis, Chloe Cocker, Eva Andreou and Manu Sukani.

One of the first official duties these students will undertake is assisting with the organisation of the school's annual Anzac Day service, an important event that brings the school community together to reflect on the service and sacrifice of Australians. I look forward to attending this event.

I congratulate all these students and thank the principals, teachers and families who support them in their leadership journeys. These young Territorians are wonderful representatives of our community, and I wish them every success for the year ahead.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sunday will be World Water Day, and we are reminded of something simple but powerful: water is life. It is not a luxury; it is not an option; it is a basic human right.

In the Northern Territory the truth is that not everyone has access to safe reliable drinking water. In our towns and cities we turn on the tap and expect clean water to flow, but in many remote communities across Central Australia and the rest of the Territory this is not always what can happen. Families are dealing with water quality issues, ageing infrastructure and the uncertainty of what is coming out of the tap. It is not good enough.

I hear directly from communities. People are worried about their kids and the long-term health impacts. They ask a simple question: why is safe drinking water not guaranteed for everyone? Water inequality is real, and it disproportionately affects Aboriginal communities and people living on country. We cannot talk about closing the gap if we are not prepared to guarantee something as fundamental as clean water. That is why we must act.

We need strong and enforceable safe drinking water standards in the Northern Territory that apply to everyone no matter where they live. We need real investment in infrastructure, not just in Darwin but also across the bush, to make sure our communities have reliable systems that can withstand heat, floods and extreme weather.

We need a system that is fair, because currently there are serious questions about who pays and who benefits. Whether you are a household in the northern suburbs, a hardworking pastoralist or a mining company making millions from Territory resources, everyone should be contributing their fair share to our water and our future. That is why Territory Labor, when next elected to government, will introduce safe drinking water legislation to make sure that every Territorian, no matter where they live, can trust the water that comes out of the tap. Access to safe drinking water should never depend on your postcode. This is about responsibility, sustainability and fairness.

On World Water Day, it is not just about awareness; it is about action because every child in the Northern Territory deserves to grow up with safe drinking water. Every family deserves certainty, and every community deserves dignity. This World Water Day let us commit to doing better and delivering safe, reliable drinking water for every Territorian because when we look after our water, we look after our future.

The CLP government can and should choose to enact legislation that was being drafted by the previous government for a safe drinking water Act in the Territory. It can have a significant and positive impact on the lives of so many people across the Northern Territory.

Harmony Week is from 16 to 22 March, which is an opportunity to celebrate Australia's cultural diversity and promote inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging for everyone in the Territory. The theme is 'Everyone Belongs'. Centred on 21 March, the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the week features community events and encourages people to wear orange to show their support.

The purpose of Harmony Week is to promote and celebrate Australia's success as a multicultural country that is inclusive, respectful and celebrates belonging. As we celebrate this day, it is an important reminder for all of us to be kind to one another, our neighbours and new Australians.

I acknowledge the hundreds of new Australians who have recently had their citizenship ceremonies in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and the bush. I thank them for choosing to call home the Territory and Australia and for bringing their amazing cultures and traditions to help weave the future social fabric of this country and celebrate multicultural diversity in the Territory.

The Northern Territory is one of Australia's most multicultural places. It is wonderful to walk down any street of any major town or city in the Territory and hear languages that are spoken from thousands of years ago—languages that have come across the seas with our new Australians. They are celebrated and embraced.

While I talk about this, it is an important reminder to stand up for our fellow Australians when we see racism and discrimination and to call out bad behaviour and ensure we are not setting the standard of letting people be vilified. That is what we should continue to do.

I encourage people to participate in the Harmony events this week from 16 to 22 March and acknowledge 21 March, which is Harmony Day. It is an amazing festival to showcase who we are as a multicultural country.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I recognise the Darwin Symphony Orchestra's season opening concert, From Common Ground, which happened last Saturday 14 March. It was built as a concert of virtuosity, imagination and transformation. As someone who has been going to these things for 30-odd years, I can say it was breathtaking. It was one of the best concerts I have ever seen the orchestra do. There was a spontaneous standing ovation at the end because it was a phenomenal night, and a real credit to everyone involved.

The concert program was all about the idea of growth—which is serendipitous for the government—specifically based around a single idea and linking together by variation and transformation. Each of the composers involved had existing material, whether it was a single theme or a familiar form or melody from the past, reshaped in a highly personal way.

The concert opened with a wonderful work by the DSO's Composer in Residence, Netanela Mizrahi. Netanela is such an asset to the orchestra and Darwin musical community. Her work across Indigenous communities, immigration detention centres and palliative care led her to get a Churchill Fellowship in 2017. Some of her recent projects include *Gurrulwa Guligi*, an orchestral work commemorating the Cyclone Tracy 50th anniversary with Aunty Bilawara Lee, and last year *Wuyal's Journey* which was created with Banula Marika. That, I think, was the best thing I have seen the orchestra do—up until I saw this thing on Saturday, which was a different concept but one that blew everyone's minds.

Netanela's first work in the program was a clever composition. It was a palindrome—something that works backwards and forwards, such as a word like Parap. Musically, as someone who knows how difficult it is to compose and orchestrate music, it was amazing to hear the work she premiered that night. It was amazing stuff.

The concert went on with a showstopping Shostakovich *Theme and Variations in B-Flat Major*, which was performed by a visiting guest pianist, which I will come to in a second. In the second half there was another huge explosion of talent in four movements of Hindemith's 1943 *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes by Carl Maria von Weber*.

You just cannot put on these things without having a whole lot of people who are super talented and who come together and give up their time and talent to provide something for hundreds of Territorians. All those people in the orchestra work in the public service, healthcare system and education. They are here because that orchestra exists to help keep them here. Never forget that.

I draw attention to, above and beyond those first few things, the fact that the concert finished with Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43*, which was written in 1934 and is a set of 24 variations on a single idea based on the *24 Caprices for Solo Violin* by Niccolo Paganini, the violin virtuoso. The best-known section, variation 18, features an inversion which is super clever and famously well known beyond the concert hall. All of you would recognise it if you heard it. It is in films and video games—I think it is in Gran Turismo 6 at some point. It is piano concerto, though, in all but name.

It was an exhilarating showcase of virtuosity. The fireworks and pyrotechnics of Stefan Cassomenos, who was brought in as the piano soloist, was mind blowing. It is the kind of thing we are lucky to see live in Darwin to a packed house. Securing his talents is a great credit to the DSO board and artistic director, and we had Stefan Cassomenos back for a second time.

His work as virtuosity, and amazing as it was, was the icing. No matter how good it is, if you just eat icing in isolation it makes you a bit nauseous and sick. You need a cake to put it on. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure you will appreciate the metaphor. The importance of the cake cannot be underestimated. The cake is the Darwin Symphony Orchestra.

Mrs Zio: St Patrick's Day cake.

Dr RAHMAN: Yes, the St Patrick's cake next door—thank you, Member for Fannie Bay.

I recognise the musicians. By and large, they are all local musicians who are not necessarily all pro. They have day jobs and they give up their time and talents to provide this orchestra for all of us. I want to call out to them tonight because I have given many speeches about the orchestra and always name the people at the head of the organisation without actually specifying all the people. You will recognise a lot of these names as people in your community:

- First violin—Monica Curro; Tahli Elsner; Wan-Ling Chang; Fia Walsh; Aruna Shivam; Lachlan Spargo-Peattie; Zeke Llewellyn; Katharina Fehringer; Oberon; and Tara Murphy
- Second violin—Lucy Vallentine; Marissa Loh; Anna Ralph; Helen Humphreys; Sabine Gonelli; Sonya Bree; Toby Koeford; Belinda Gehlert; and Ben Koefoed
- Viola—Annette Anderson; Georgina Price; Mary Wheaton; Bridget McCullough; Cathy Shilton; and Rachael McMinn
- Cello—Stephanie Arnold; Amelia Noble; Maddison Sims; Greg Tuske; Jude Grove-Jones; Cathy Applegate; Richard Grainger; and Liz Clarkson
- Double bass—Phillip Waldron; Andrea Sitas; Sally Cutter; and Kathy Campbell
- Flute—Rozanne Mentzel; Kylie Simpson; and Clare Patterson
- Oboe—Jasper Ly; Alex Tsang; and Sarena Wegener
- Clarinet—Stephen Pevely; Natalie Chin; Nicholas Yates; and David Chin
- Bassoon—Rob Llewellyn; Alana Bryett; and Madeline Nickelson
- French horn—Noah Cass; Jethro Llewellyn; Jessie Spargo-Peattie; and Helen List
- Trumpet—David Pye; Jessica Anderson; and Angela Titmuss
- Trombone—Kabir Khera; Marcus Dhu; and Oliver Locos
- Tuba—David Parkin
- Harp—Erna Jarvis
- Percussion—Ingrid Purich; Amy Zhao; David Smith; and Anthony Sherwood.

That is not an insignificant number of musicians who give up their time and talent to provide the cake for all of us to eat on a regular basis in this town. I think it is absolutely worth commending them for all their efforts.

The orchestra has reached new heights under the new artistic director, Richard Mills. In addition to the orchestra's usual work on education and outreach in taking music to the Territory people and young artist programs working in coordination with CDU, there are moves afoot at the moment to rebuild the Darwin Youth Orchestra, which is a real gem that has been lost over years of government failing to look after it.

I will advocate vehemently for this over the next few months because the value of reinvigorating the historic strength of our public music education offering cannot be underestimated. There is literature and evidence that correlates and tells you that kids who learn music do better with teamwork, academic performance in STEM subjects, school attendance and social cohesion. It is comparable to the community value you get by investing in supporting sporting programs. It is a practical, high-impact investment in NT cultural and educational futures. Music education matters. The Darwin Youth Orchestra was a proven model all through the 1990s. That really needs renewal now to help us to help ourselves in the Territory.

My sincere gratitude to DSO Chair Claire Kilgariff and Vice Chair Heather Brown for helping to facilitate my participation. I eagerly anticipate the orchestra's next concert at the AANT Centre, where it will be doing

Island Song, which is all about French horns, on 9 May. Then it will have the movie hits concert, which is huge, for thousands of people in the Gardens amphitheatre on 27 June. I encourage you all to come to that.

I now draw attention to a different ensemble which also does phenomenal work that everybody should be paying attention to: the Darwin Beach Choir. On 6 March, they bill themselves—I love this—as a 'choir for the musical and tone deaf alike'. No sheet music, no judgement, no commitment, no preparation needed, just a fun and relaxing meeting. I met them most recently in Nightcliff at Flora's Temper. It was the most joyous event I have been to in months.

Not for nothing, I point out that it happened the day before the recent Nightcliff by-election. The room was packed with people in red shirts, blue shirts, green shirts and orange shirts; it was a real sign of social cohesion. I cannot say how moving it was to hang out with all those people and learn to sing a couple of Crowded House songs together as a group, as Territorians, as friends and as people who all share and care about this place.

My huge congratulations to Thalia Hewitt, who runs the Darwin Beach Choir, and her band of dedicated volunteers. The work that they do is a real demonstration of commitment to community and enhancing social cohesion in the Territory. I encourage everyone here to put aside your politics from time to time and join in with the Darwin Beach Choir when they next get together. It will fill your cup and make you feel proud to be Territorian. Remember, whatever our differences are politically, we are all human and here to try to make the Territory a better place.

Mr YAN (Namatjira): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is St Paddy's day, so I will bring a little light, laughter and humour into the Chamber this evening. Tonight is what I suspect to be the most enthusiastically observed cultural celebration on the Darwin calendar.

While St Patrick may have never set foot in the Territory, I have no doubt that if he did, he would have found himself comfortable in Darwin, particularly on 17 March. In Darwin, you do not just mark St Paddy's day; you embrace it. I am proud to be a part of that today.

Nowhere is it more evident than Shenannigans Irish Pub which, as many in this Chamber would know, has become something of a spiritual home for Territorians of all backgrounds on this day. Shenannigans is one of those great Darwin institutions. It is the kind of place where on St Paddy's day you will find people from every corner of the Territory and, indeed, the world coming together in a sea of green shirts, questionable Irish accents and an overwhelming sense of good humour. It is great to see such a good sense of humour in the times we are facing in the Territory.

Of course, no St Patrick's Day celebration would be complete without a few pints of Guinness—or perhaps more than a few, depending on how enthusiastic the celebrations become. I reference this morning's condolence motion for Ted Egan. He wrote that great song saying that Territorians are bloody good drinkers. That is probably on display at Shenannigans this evening.

What makes St Patrick's Day in Darwin so special is not just the celebration, but the way that it brings people together. You do not need to have Irish heritage to take part; on this day everyone is a little Irish. That is very much in the spirit of Darwin—inclusive, relaxed and always ready to celebrate.

Darwin has a long history of embarrassing—sorry, embracing. I would not say that the Irish were embarrassing, but they may embarrass themselves on the odd occasion, not that I have ever seen that. We embrace different cultures. St Paddy's day is a perfect example of that. It is a day when we see live music, laughter, dancing and a genuine sense of connection between people. It is also a day when the Territory's hospitality industry shines, with venues across Darwin putting on events, supporting local musos and creating the kind of atmosphere that keeps locals and visitors coming back year after year.

Of course, while there is plenty of fun to be had, it is also worth remembering that St Patrick's Day is a celebration of Irish heritage and the contributions of Irish people around the world, including in the Northern Territory. Irish Territorians past and present have contributed across many sectors, from construction and infrastructure to health, education, tourism and hospitality. While today might be a day for celebration, it is also an opportunity to acknowledge that contribution.

Let me be honest, you mob up here can celebrate it in your unique way, a little different from us Central Australians. It is perhaps less about solemn reflection and more about enjoying the moment. There is certainly nothing wrong with that; we need a little light in the world at the moment.

Events like St Paddy's day play an important role in building community. They bring people together, create shared experiences and remind us that even in a place as diverse as the Northern Territory, there are moments when everyone can come together and simply enjoy each other's company.

To everyone who has taken part in St Paddy's day celebrations across Darwin, whether at Shenannigans or another local venue or simply enjoying time with friends, I hope that this day has been enjoyable, memorable and, most importantly, safe.

Happy St Paddy's day, everybody.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.