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Debates and Questions



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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Katherine

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Member for Katherine be granted leave of absence from the Chamber today because of a medical condition and an ongoing emergency in Katherine.

Leave granted.

MINISTERIAL REPORT
Managing Labor's Debt Legacy

Mr YAN (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I deliver a ministerial report on managing Labor's debt legacy, notified on 11 March 2026. I move that the report be noted.

I provide a ministerial report on the work the CLP government is doing to manage Labor's debt legacy. Debt is not an abstract line in a budget paper, a debating point or a slogan for a media conference. Debt determines how much room a government has to keep funding schools, hospitals, police, Corrections, housing and roads before interest and past mistakes start taking their first cut. That is why this matters.

When a government weakens the balance sheet year after year it does not just leave behind a number; it leaves behind less freedom and flexibility and fewer choices for the Territory.

When we look honestly at the situation this government inherited, three distinct things stand out: Labor left the Territory with a lack of growth, certainty and security. Those three phrases explain the debt and the wider economic problems Territorians experienced over the past decade.

There was one area where Labor delivered growth: debt. When Labor came to office net debt was about $2.3bn. By 2023–24 the audit figure had risen to just over $9bn. By the time we inherited Labor's 2024–25 budget it was clear that the debt was projected to reach the $15bn debt ceiling by 2028–29. Labor created a $1.4bn budget black hole so that it did not have to front up and tell Territorians that it was on track to breach its self-imposed debt cap.

That is $1.4bn our government had to find to keep the lights on. We reinstated programs like the $120m NT Health base budget pressure funding, which ceased under Labor on 30 June 2025; $26.5m ceased on 30 June 2025 for domestic and family violence programs, which we have now funded ongoing in the budget at a higher amount; $19.3m which ceased on 30 June 2025 for a range of tourism initiatives, including marketing, business events and Aboriginal tourism industry development; $15m ceased on 30 June 2025 for youth justice accommodation facilities; and $9m ceased on 30 June 2025 for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement initiatives, law and justice groups, Community Court and community-based sentencing.

As a result of this, Labor's debt legacy was $10.5bn by the time it was thrown out of office. This raises a simple question: what did Territorians receive in return for this mountain of debt run up by Labor over eight years? When governments borrow money there is an important distinction; there is good debt and bad debt. Good debt builds productivity and infrastructure and supports economic growth; bad debt simply funds the gap between spending and revenue.

This is the point that goes to the heart of Labor's debt legacy. Across its term of office, Labor ran cumulative operating deficits of more than $4bn. That matters because operating deficits do not build roads, hospitals or schools or leave behind a productive asset that Territorians can see or use; they simply add to debt.

When net debt increases by more than $7bn, and $4bn of that increase is tied to cumulative operating deficits, Territorians are rightly entitled to ask a direct question: what did we get for it? What did Territorians receive for $7bn in extra debt? If a debt is taken on to build long-term infrastructure, people can see the result; they can drive on it, use it and point at it, but when billions are borrowed to cover the gap between day-to-day spending and day-to-day revenue, there is nothing to point to except a large interest bill and a weaker balance sheet. That is why this matters. It is why people ask the question and why Labor's record is so poor.

The Leader of the Opposition said that Territorians felt let down by Labor; that may be the most accurate thing she has ever said about Labor's economic record. A large share of the debt Labor added was not debt

for nation-building assets; it was debt used to front operating shortfalls, with no lasting return and no visible legacies. It left the next government with the bill without any benefit.

The operating results tell the story. During eight years in office Labor achieved an operating surplus only once. Every other year it finished in deficit. While debt continued to rise, the books almost never balanced. Labor delivered infrastructure projects over that period—no-one will deny that—but when Territorians look at the massive debt increase, they are entitled to expect strong results. They are entitled to expect a clear legacy of productive assets. Instead, too often, we saw delays, cost pressures, unfinished works and a balance sheet carrying more and more strain.

Labor has legacies such as the ship lift project mired in delays and cost blowouts; a half-finished art gallery, which was not even funded for its operations when completed; and an overpass that was $100m over budget. That is what happens when governments lose focus on economic growth. Instead of growing the economy Labor simply grew the debt. What makes it more serious is that Labor was warned. It commissioned reviews, received expert advice, accepted recommendations and set fiscal repair targets. After all that, Labor still left the Territory with a balance sheet under severe pressure.

This was not a problem Labor failed to notice; it was a problem it failed to fix. The first major commission came in 2019, the root-and-branch review. That review was supposed to identify savings across government, rationalise programs, reduce duplication, restrain growth in costs and contribute to repairing the budget. In other words, Labor acknowledged that the cost base had drifted too far and that the budget could not continue on the path that it was on.

Who can forget the events of 2019 when the Treasurer at the time, Nicole Manison, came out with debt projected to rise to $35bn, and debt kept rising? Deficits remained embedded, and the structural repair did not materialise even after all of that. The root-and-branch review did not become the turning point it was sold as.

Then came the fiscal strategy panel and the Langoulant review. This was not just a minor internal check-up; this was Labor's flagship budget repair process. That panel delivered 76 recommendations. Labor accepted an overwhelming majority and told Territorians that it had a credible plan to repair the budget. The reforms were meant to reduce expenditure materially over the decade and return the budget to balance by 2028–29.

Labor then went further in its own 2019 budget and said that the Territory was projected to achieve a fiscal surplus by 2027–28. How did that work out? Sadly, we all know. Let us be clear that Labor was not lacking advice. Labor was not lacking a roadmap; it was not lacking in warnings about what would happen if the Territory stayed on a business-as-usual path. The panel said that the Territory needed stronger budget discipline, clearer accountability, cultural change in spending control and a serious effort to restore fiscal sustainability. What happened? Those objectives slipped. The repair drifted, and by the 2024–25 budget Labor's own figures no longer had the Territory returning to fiscal surplus by 2027–28 or even by the panel's 2028–29 target.

The return to surplus slipped out to the 2029–30 budget, way out in the never-never. Net debt remained elevated. Debt ratios remained far above any prudent long-term benchmark. That is not what success looks like after years of claiming to have a plan to fix the budget. When you look at the implementation record the pattern is surprisingly the same. Labor liked to talk about accepted recommendations, but what mattered was delivery.

Several years later important reforms were still incomplete, diluted or simply not pursued in the form they were recommended. Then, when this effort failed to solve the deeper problem, Labor commissioned yet another major review, the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission. Yet again, here is that all-too-familiar pattern of another commission, blueprint and promise that this time the Territory would be transformed by strategy, reform and implementation. This review was broader than pure budget repair. It was about economic reconstruction, investment and growth, but the political patter was the same.

When one set of reviews failed to deliver the promised turnaround, the answer was another review. The root-and-branch review was meant to find savings; the fiscal strategy panel was meant to deliver structural repair; and TERC was meant to drive reconstruction and growth. Yet by the time Labor left office the Territory was carrying heavy deficits, high debt, a weak fiscal position and a forward profile that left the next government to confront those consequences. Review followed review, and announcement followed announcement. The core outcomes did not move where Labor said they would. This is the heart of the Labor debt legacy. It is not just that Labor borrowed more but that it borrowed more after acknowledging the problem, receiving expert advice and publicly committing to a series of repair objectives that it did not meet.

Labor's second failure was a lack of certainty. Economic growth depends on confidence. Businesses invest when they believe the policy environment is stable. Workers move when they believe opportunities exist. Investors commit capital when they believe the future is predicable. Under Labor deficits became routine, debt climbed and repair timetables slipped. Reform programs were repeatedly revised, rebadged or delayed. That does not create certainty; it creates hesitation and doubt. In a small economy such as ours, doubt is expensive. Investors and businesses ask a simple question: is this a place with stable economic settings? For too long under Labor the answer was a resounding no.

By the time this government came to office the Territory was facing excessive debt and a forward fiscal profile that required hard decisions to restore control. Borrowing requirements were escalating, and the Territory was on track to accumulate more debt without the certainty that comes from a disciplined and credible fiscal strategy. This government is determined to change that. We are restoring certainty through disciplined budgeting, clear fiscal strategy and policies that support long-term investment in the Territory economy.

Labor's third failure was security. When we came to office the Territory was dealing not only with fiscal problems but also a serious crime problem that was undermining community confidence across the Territory. Businesses were facing break-ins, and families were questioning whether their communities were safe. When community safety deteriorates, economic confidence deteriorates as well. A place that feels unsafe struggles to attract workers, families and investment. Restoring community safety is therefore not just a policing issue—we have always said this—it is an economic issue.

That is why restoring security across the Territory was one of this government's first priorities and remains a high priority. Security builds confidence, which supports investment and growth. This government has taken a different approach. Where Labor delivered a lack of growth, we are focused on economic growth. We understand that the Territory cannot repair its finances by squeezing a stagnant economy but by backing investment, enterprises and development and expanding the revenue base through more activity, not more tax.

Where Labor created uncertainty, we are restoring certainty and fiscal discipline. We are making the hard decisions and have been up-front about the scale of the repair task. We did not hide those program funding cliffs, and we were criticised by increasing the spend in our last budget. The reason we did that was, rather than trying to hide the true cost in the forward estimates of what it takes to do business in the Territory and what the government has to do to support our community, we put them in. Territorians and the government know the cost of doing business. We are not hiding those costs in the outer years; we need to know what they are so that we can have budget discipline and make sure that we do not go down the same road as Labor.

We have put in place a more disciplined framework for the future. Where Labor allowed community confidence to deteriorate, we are restoring security. Without security there is no lasting confidence, and without confidence there is no serious investment story for the Territory. There is evidence that the trajectory is changing. The 2025–26 Mid-Year Report showed revenue improvement from $10.042bn to $10.659bn and fiscal deficit improvement from $1.308bn to $961m. The numbers are going in the right direction. Net debt improved from $12.19bn to $11.712bn, which gives us money to do the things that we want to do. The net-debt-to-revenue ratio improved from 121% to 110%.

No-one on this side of the House is pretending that the repair task is easy; it is not. We are doing the hard work to make sure our fiscal trajectory is far different from that of the previous Labor government.

The Territory still faces a significant challenge, but the metrics are slowly improving. The direction is changing, and that is the result of a government that understands three simple priorities: growth; certainty; and security. They are the foundations of a stronger Territory economy and of responsible fiscal management.

The lessons of the past eight years are not complicated. You cannot spend your way around a structural problem, borrow your way to discipline or review your way to reform unless you are prepared to deliver it. Labor was warned. It accepted the advice, set targets and still failed to achieve the objectives it set for itself. This government will not make that mistake.

We will do the hard work, restore discipline and rebuild confidence. We will manage Labor's debt legacy in the interests of the Territory's future, because that is what good governments do. That is the task before us, and that is what we, the CLP government, will do.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, let us start with the obvious question: why are we even debating this today? The answer is simple: the government has nothing else to talk about. Actually, let me correct myself; CLP members are starting to show an interesting pattern where they are obsessed with talking about Labor rather than talking about the practical things that they will implement. We heard a lot of fluff and words from the Treasurer but nothing about a single piece of reform, policy or enabling infrastructure that will build the Territory's economy.

The new obsession is starting; maybe it is a 2026 obsession, which is great because we love talking about Labor values too. The CLP is in a spiralling pattern of, for any question or topic, rather than talking about what it is doing as a government, it is obsessed with talking about Labor. Today, and perhaps for the rest of this fortnight, the CLP's legislative agenda is thin. It is so empty that it has dragged in this ministerial statement to talk about Labor's so-called debt legacy just to fill the parliamentary program.

The Treasurer has been in the job for more than 18 months, yet the only substantial thing he has contributed to the parliament is a speech about the previous government—not a plan, reform or serious economic strategy, just another attempt to blame someone else.

The CLP Treasurer mentioned the government's 'different approach'. It is a different approach of not investing in what people want. You are definitely taking that approach, Treasurer. The irony of all this is that the Treasurer now holds the crown as the Treasurer who has presided over the highest debt of any Treasurer in the Northern Territory's history.

Talking about history, the Treasurer was anointed the shadow Treasurer in opposition so that he could shore up the leadership numbers for Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro. He was maybe the balancing number; there were only seven towards the end of the last term, so it was three versus four. Bill Yan got the shadow Treasurer role and—bang! He stuck on the Chief Minister's side and shored up her leadership, which is why he is the Treasurer today.

Judging from what we have seen so far Territorians should be worried. When the Treasurer handles the books even the crocs start saving for a rainy day. We have seen that the Treasurer is willing to tell fibs and make election commitments and then break those promises several months later in the first CLP budget. Key financial commitments that were promised to Territorians were scrapped—broken. That is the length the CLP will go to, saying, 'We will put up something nice and shiny that sounds great. Let us commit to $12m of funding over four years for the Aboriginal ranger program.' When the CLP got into government that election commitment did not mean jack. It scrapped that—'We lied to you, and we do not care about Aboriginal rangers. It was just a promise that looked good on paper before we got into government.'

CLP members should be ashamed for lying to Territorians, promising one thing and then changing their minds about what they will deliver upon getting into government. It is disgraceful.

Let us remember that one of the first things the Treasurer did when he took office was scrap the debt ceiling that was in place under the previous government. Those guardrails existed for a reason. They were discussed and recommended by an expert group, the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission, with many diverse economic leaders across the Territory. Those guardrails were there to impose discipline on government spending, but the Treasurer's approach was simple: remove the ceiling and hope that nobody notices. From the work I have done in the 18 months I have been in this job and since the first CLP budget in May 2025, I can tell you that people have noticed. The business community is extremely concerned because it signals that this CLP government intends to open the floodgates to unchecked spending.

The Treasurer's own midyear report shows that Territory debt under the CLP will rise by an additional $2bn over the forward estimates. Go check that, CLP members; make sure that you have done your homework as much as we have. We are now hearing that the next CLP budget may well crash through those limits that Labor put in as guardrails. This is why many businesses in the community are deeply alarmed. It is also the reason that the Treasurer has brought on this nonsense report. He is trying to deflect from the pain that he is about to inflict on Territorians in the May budget.

What does the CLP have to show for it? Nothing. There is not a single new project, no economic plan and no vision for the Territory. Perhaps we should not be surprised. As everybody in this place knows, the Treasurer went fishing days before the CLP's first budget, leaving it up to hardworking public servants to ensure everything was in check. That is how much he cared about the Territory economy, the budget and making sure that Territorians have an economic strategy for the future. He went fishing. Instead of sitting down and doing the hard work required to produce a serious debt-reduction strategy, the Treasurer packed his tacklebox. While Territorians needed a cost-of-living lifeline, the Treasurer seemed more interested in his

fishing line. Now he is casting off his responsibilities while reeling in more debt for Territorians. The only thing the Treasurer is balancing is excuses.

Let us look at the CLP's economic record so far. It created a Territory Coordinator with great fanfare and promised that he would unlock investment and create jobs.

Mr Kerle: Fixing your ship lift.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please.

Ms UIBO: I do not think the CLP backbenchers understand what the Territory Coordinator has done so far—nothing. He has not delivered a single job. No new projects have been delivered or focused on under the Territory Coordinator. The ship lift project was started under Labor. There is nothing new there.

The CLP government seemed to have so little confidence in the Treasurer that he did not even attend the Northern Territory Investment Summit. Imagine that! The Territory's so-called minister for the economy is considered so ineffective that he would add no value whatsoever to the Territory's own investment summit.

That is about it. The page is blank after that, yet somehow the CLP continues to have spiralling debt. We have heard lectures about fiscal responsibility from the Chief Minister—doesn't she love to lecture? Let us remember the Chief Minister's track record. The big economic solution of the team she represented in the past was selling TIO, a decision that left Territorians exposed to skyrocketing insurance costs. Then there was the sale of the Darwin Port, which upset many people, not just in the Territory and the country but also overseas. It was a billion-dollar mistake so catastrophic that the same people who supported it then now want the Commonwealth to buy it back. That is not economic management; it is economic vandalism.

Meanwhile, this Treasurer is building a reputation for not building but killing projects. Bill Yan, the Treasurer, will be remembered as the person who killed off the Alice Springs art gallery and stopped the Darwin State Square art gallery and tried to repurpose it, only to discover that the community and anybody putting in an expression of interest wanted it to remain an art gallery. Fancy that. Every EOI for the State Square gallery project has been about it remaining an art gallery. You could not make this stuff up.

What about the biggest issue facing Territorians—the cost of living? Ladies and gentlemen, did we hear in the Treasurer's 20-minute report about how the CLP will ease cost-of-living pressures for Territorians? Absolutely not. Even yesterday we heard the government backflip on fuel policy. There was no plan or reform, just another broken promise to Territorians. Power prices are at a record high, and insurance and fuel prices are rising. The Treasurer's response is to try to deflect attention by talking about the CLP's favourite subject, Labor.

Since the CLP keeps raising Labor's debt record, let us talk about the reality. Debt increased for two clear reasons. The first was massive GST cuts by the federal Coalition, which the Chief Minister supported when she backed her Coalition federal colleagues—shame! The second reason was COVID-19, a once-in-a-generation pandemic that required governments to step in to protect the lives and livelihoods of their fellow Territorians and Australians.

Remember, when Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro was the Opposition Leader she advocated to give away COVID-19 vaccinations to New South Wales. She said publicly on radio, 'Give away vaccinations meant for Territorians to New South Wales'. Thank goodness she was in opposition at the time because we would not have seen the outcomes of saved lives and livelihoods that we did when Labor was in government.

CLP members should answer simple questions: which Territorians would they have preferred to abandon? Which Territorians should have lost their jobs? Which businesses should have lost their livelihoods? Should they have picked lives over certainty so that the government could have saved a few dollars? Let us get them to answer that question today.

We have seen the same CLP values in a time of crisis with the disasters and severe weather events across the Northern Territory. The CLP shamefully picked and chose which Territorians deserved support and which do not. Thankfully, after days of questions in this place, the pressure and more national exposure, the federal government stepped up and offered disaster support and relief for the Territory.

Support for Central Australia, the Barkly and local government areas in the Big Rivers region was announced today after questions were asked yesterday. This will include support for people in my electorate in the

Roper Gulf region and people in the Member for Daly's electorate, with the West Daly and Vic Daly local government areas now officially being on the disaster relief record.

Thank you to Minister Kristy McBain for her work in that space. She is travelling to Katherine today. I look forward to hearing how that trip goes and what further support the federal Labor government will provide to the Northern Territory.

I will continue to ask—I am not above begging—the CLP government and the Chief Minister to swallow her pride, arrogance and ego and ask for Australian Defence Force assistance with the flood recovery, which will be completely stretched over the Northern Territory. Everyone here knows that; the catastrophic task ahead for many Territorians and visitors is no surprise. There are devastating stories in my electorate and home town. People have lost their livelihoods in distressing circumstances. Now is not the time to be arrogant; it is the time to ask for help and get the ADF in.

Defence personnel stand ready and capable, as I understand it, particularly in my electorate of Arnhem. RAAF Base Tindal has more than 500 personnel who could be deployed. If the Chief Minister could swallow her pride and ask for assistance I think they would be ready to go today. Let us hope that happens.

The federal government's support for local government areas has been expanded; that was in today's media release. That will not come out of Territorians' pockets; it will come out of Canberra's pocket, as it should, because this is a natural disaster. We are all aware of that. It is nobody's fault, but you will probably hear the CLP say that it was Labor's fault that it rained and flooded. That is how petty government members are.

Just ask for the support, please. If I need to beg, I will. Please get the Australian Defence Force to assist with relief for flooded areas across the Northern Territory. People are exhausted. The vicarious trauma is phenomenal. Please just ask for that support. That is what I am begging for.

At the end of the day this ministerial statement tells us that the Treasurer and his team have no economic strategy, credible debt plan, cost-of-living agenda or infrastructure pipeline to create jobs across the Northern Territory; they just have blame. If the Treasurer keeps running the Territory's finances the way he is now, someone should take the credit card off him and send him back on the boat to go fishing. The Treasurer is the Bill that the Territory cannot afford.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I am not sure why the Opposition Leader hates recreational fishing so much. Those opposite bring it up a lot. Recreational fishing brings a lot to the Territory economy, and sometimes people deserve a well-earned break; they are still on call, but they can go for a flick.

You would remember, Madam Speaker, that after the 2016 election when the CLP was justly wiped out of this parliament and left with two great members, the first thing Gary Higgins said was, 'Sorry. We lost the people's trust.' We still have not heard that from the Leader of the Opposition or her team.

When Labor came to government we left it with $2bn in debt. In 2023–24 the audited net debt was $9bn, an increase of about $6.7bn. The net-debt-to-revenue ratio rose from 35% to 108%. The worst thing about all the overspending is that $4bn of that increase in debt was associated with operating costs, not capital investment for the Territory's future. There was only one audited operating surplus in Labor's term; however, no fiscal balance surplus was ever achieved. The debt trajectory Labor left Territorians with and tried to lie about prior to the election was heading to about $15bn. There was a $1.4bn funding gap in the forward estimates at the change of government.

Instead of hiding these funding cliffs in the budget and the forward estimates, we have put them in there. We will fund Legal Aid into the future; we all know that. Why would we have a funding cliff? It does not make sense. Other programs with no ongoing funding that clearly need to be funded each year are now in the budget paper so that the true state of the Territory can be monitored. It is all well and good to say that next year we will have a $15bn surplus and all these wonderful estimates, but if the numbers are not real, then it is worth nothing.

We heard from the Leader of the Opposition—I do not even know how she got on to the floods, to be honest; she bounced around a bit—that the Territory Coordinator is not doing enough. A couple of months ago I was told by the Leader of the Opposition that the Territory Coordinator was basically the end of the Territory, but now he is not doing enough. Those opposite cannot help themselves; they cannot keep a consistent position. They should be loving the Territory Coordinator; he is working hard, might I add, declaring the first Territory development area.

I heard the Member for Johnston talk about a $20m office. With these projects we do this thing where people who live in the Territory get employed to do a job, and sometimes there is a big lead time, setting up, doing the business case and reports and going all the way through the process. Unfortunately, we pay our public servants. They are lovely, fantastic and hardworking people. When people complain about the cost of an office, it is not the cost of office parties and drinking—I am sure that happened under the previous government, but not under ours—it is the cost of employing Territorians and of somebody going to work and doing their 40 or 50 hours. Unfortunately, we do not live in the communist society that some people wish we did. We pay people for their labour.

It is important to note that Labor's biggest area of growth in the previous two terms was not the economy; it was the debt. When you have debt the unfortunate thing is that you have to pay it back. That means that every year we are spending somewhere to the tune of half-a-billion dollars—hopefully someone will correct me if I am way off; it was more than $1m a day last time I looked at it—in interest payments. That is not paying the principal, but interest payments.

Madam Speaker, I know you are a strong advocate for a new hospital in your part of the world; I would love my Humpty Doo hospital as well, but I do not think I will get that before you get yours. Let us say that an Alice Springs hospital costs $750m. We currently spend that in 18 months just servicing debt. It is $4bn of operational debt.

Those opposite can blame COVID, but the reality is that COVID hit in 2020; it did not hit in 2016, 2017 or 2018—maybe the last half a month in 2019—but there were four years when we were on that trajectory. They were haemorrhaging money. The systemic way they set up the Territory's finances from what they inherited put us on the trajectory to go to incredible levels of debt prior to COVID.

There is a massive flood recovery effort going on, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned. That will cost money, but we will not sit here in 2032 saying that the economy for the entire 13, 15 or 20 years that the CLP is in government this time is based on one year of response. We will not do that because it is clear deflection. Everything is to do with COVID and is a COVID problem. What about the four years before COVID or the two years after the clear recovery period? There are no excuses. It frustrates me because it is one of those mistakes that the Leader of the Opposition does not have to own; she could easily get up and say, 'Yes, mistakes were made; we spent more money than we had.'

The most disappointing thing about spending money Labor did not have is they would put program after program and project after project on the program, saying, 'We will build this. You will get a new health clinic here, a new police station and whatever you want. If you want a waterpark, you will get a waterpark, but we will never put money on it.'

Madam Speaker, if I gave you an unlimited credit card and said, 'Make it rain for Alice Springs', wouldn't you make it rain for Alice Springs? Wouldn't those opposite have made it rain in their communities and parts of the Territory? No, they frontloaded the Darwin suburbs, neglected the rural area and probably lied to the bush ministers and members of their Caucus. They did not deliver the projects they kept promising, saying, 'Next year'. We could have had a Labor government until 2050, and it would still be talking about the same projects. It was a consistent, constant lie.

For the Leader of the Opposition to talk again about the CLP—I will pay credit; we put the words 'Labor fiscal legacy', and it is. She talked about leadership numbers. It clearly shows that her number one priority in this place is securing her own position as Leader of the Opposition.

She said that this week's agenda had nothing interesting and that it was a light agenda. She does not care about:

- domestic violence murder victims and their families
- sparkies who are doing paperwork instead of real work
- taxidrivers and the industry—we are helping with legislation, such as red tape cutting mechanisms
- bail legislation—an important piece of our platform and keeping Territorians safe
- local government—those opposite do not support empowering the bush, which is why the minister for Local Government will bring forward tranche 2 of his code of conduct changes.

The local government is the first point of contact for many residents; we are seeing that now, with the Katherine Town Council being the first on the ground, then the NT Government and the feds. The local government is the closest to anyone. We think we are high and important in this place, but the reality is more people interact with their local park and rubbish pickup than anything we decide in this place. That is determined by their council.

If there is nothing interesting on the agenda and the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask for a pair arrangement for the week off, I am happy to give it to her next week. It is missing the mark to say that we have nothing on the agenda this fortnight and that the economy is not worthy of talking about in this place.

I look forward to hearing the contributions of the Labor Caucus, the crossbench and the 17-member united CLP team.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I will start with a few rebuttals to the Opposition Leader. I have spoken at length on this topic, and I will simply sum up the Opposition Leader's speech. You do not get to crash the car and then blame the mechanic for the Bill. I will leave it at that, as I have touched on it before.

The Opposition Leader said that there were no new projects. In my electorate we had an incredibly unsafe student drop-off area at Driver Primary School that had weekly near misses. For eight years the previous government said that it was on the program for an upgrade. One of the first things I did as the local member was drive the minister and his team from the fifth floor to the school to see how dangerous it was. Work is happening on that project, and it will open soon. That was a direct investment in child safety in Palmerston. I am proud that we delivered the project after the school had been told for eight years that it was on the program. We got it done.

I will talk about the use of the ADF, and I am speaking as a former captain in the Australian Army. The federal Cabinet makes the decision to use the ADF. I will not weigh in on that, as the people have given the power to Cabinet members, and they will use it. The ADF is a professional group of soldiers. They are warriors with a defined task, and when you use the ADF you massively impact national security. It will be for federal Cabinet to balance the risk. When you deploy one brigade, you take a huge amount of national security out of the equation. At a time when global threat levels are extremely high, I ask the Member for Daly and the Opposition Leader to temper those comments and expectations that deployment is a good thing. It will be a decision for federal Cabinet. I say that as a former professional soldier.

We do not ask, 'Will we deploy RDH doctors and nurses?' That is because we all understand that immediately there would be a huge flow-on implication. That is not a good idea; we need our health professionals doing health professional things. We also need soldiers doing soldier things. With the current global threat environment, I know about the training continuum and pressure they will be under, making sure they are prepared to respond appropriately.

I ask that when we talk about the ADF we do so in a mature way, as there are real implications and flow-on effects if it is utilised. If federal Cabinet utilises it, I will support that, but that is the decision for Cabinet and the Prime Minister to make.

I come back to the matter before us. Before entering this House I had my own business; I worked in construction. Managing the economy at a micro level was real in my day-to-day life; it was not a theoretical idea. I love the construction industry because we genuinely create. We create employment, which means people can create individual wealth; we create taxes—we pay the state to deliver services; and we create real productivity and tangible goods and services that benefit people.

I have a Bachelor of Business. I understand the principles that come with simple day-to-day business decisions. The beautiful thing about it is that it scales. It does not matter if you are a single parent living in Drysdale, the same rules apply as if you were the Treasurer of the Northern Territory. You have to live within your means and balance the books, and you do not borrow money to keep the lights on. That is something all my constituents understand. When they see a government like the previous government disobeying those natural laws of economic management, they understand things have gone awry. There are flow-on consequences.

Under the last government the people of Drysdale simply got poorer. That was the outcome. Even worse, the debt means that people my age—the average age in Drysdale is 34 years old, and I believe we are the youngest electorate in the Northern Territory; there might be one that is the same, but we are incredibly young—will be paying off that debt for the rest of their working life, and their children will probably inherit some of that debt. While it is being paid off, other things cannot be given.

I have said before that the government does not create; it takes with one hand, wraps it up—spending money while it wraps—and gives with the other. We all agree that there are essential things, but when governments take money from citizens and waste it on day-to-day operations, not investing as the people expect us to do, we deprive them of future investment in health or education.

These interest payments are robbing us, and will for quite a long time, of other investment that could have been created. That is the real sin of economic mismanagement.

It has been noted that the previous CLP government left a $2bn debt, which sat at about 35% debt to revenue income. Our government came in at 121%. To go from 35% to 121% in eight years is mind blowing. To put that in perspective, the US economy had that same trajectory. In 2007 at the start of the financial crisis the US sat at 35%, and by 2023–24 it sat between 105% and 108%. In that time it tried to rescue the largest economy in the world and prop up the global economy through the financial crisis and then again throughout the COVID era. We have the same level of debt, and the US economy is trying to—we can argue whether these decisions are correct; that is not what I am getting at. I am getting at the impact of a 35% to 121% debt.

In the NT what did we do with the huge debt increase? That is the real shame, because I cannot say, 'Thank you, Labor, for delivering 100 years of water security, energy security or the greatest health system in the country'. I cannot point to those things. I cannot point to anything in my electorate. That was a real shame, but this is the position that we have inherited.

I am pleased to report that the 121% figure has dropped to 110% during our time in government. We see movement on debt to revenue, and that is a promising sign. Payroll tax revenue is up by 10%. Own-source revenue is the key because we can only control what we can control.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the contributions. Territorians should remember that when the previous CLP government was in office, it made a series of decisions that permanently changed the Territory's economic landscape. Two of the most significant decisions were the sale of TIO and the lease of the Darwin Port. These were not small assets; they were Territory institutions built over generations. The Darwin Port is critical infrastructure and a strategic gateway for trade, Defence and economic development in the north.

TIO was more than just an insurer; it was a Territory-owned institution that supported local jobs, reinvested profits locally and played an important role in shaping our economy. The previous CLP government chose to sell these assets. It argued that it would build the budget position and reduce debt, but many Territorians felt at the time, and still feel today, that these decisions were about making the budget books look better in the short term rather than protecting the Territory's economic interests. When governments sell strategic assets they lose something permanent. They lose future revenue streams. They lose control over important infrastructure and reduce the Territory's ability to shape its own economic future, because once an asset like the Darwin Port or TIO is sold, we cannot easily get it back.

This brings us to an important point that is often oversimplified in politics: government debt. We often hear the claim that all debt is bad, that governments should never borrow money and that avoiding debt should always be a priority.

The reality is far more complex than that. Not all debt is bad. In fact, responsible governments sometimes need to borrow money to invest in the future and to keep the economy moving forward. We understand this in our lives. Families borrow money to buy a home; farmers borrow money to buy equipment; and businesses borrow money to expand business, create jobs and grow their business. They do this borrowing because, when done responsibly, it allows them to invest in something that will deliver benefits for many years to come.

The same principle applies to governments. Governments sometimes need to invest in major infrastructure, like roads, hospitals, schools, housing and energy systems. These are long-term assets that serve our communities for decades.

It would not make sense to expect today's taxpayers to pay the full cost for a hospital or major highway upgrade up-front when those assets will benefit generations of Territorians well into the future. Borrowing money allows governments to spend across time while delivering infrastructure our communities need today.

Infrastructure investment also supports the economy. When governments build roads, hospitals or homes they create jobs for local workers, contracts for local businesses and economic activity across the region. In times of economic uncertainty, governments play a role in investing. That is why economists often talk about

the importance of productive debt—borrowing funds for investments which strengthen the economy and improve community wellbeing.

Government debt must always be managed responsibly. Governments should never borrow money without a clear commitment of how it will use that in the long term; however, we should also avoid the mistake of treating all debt as if it is inherently bad, because when governments fail to invest communities fall behind, roads deteriorate, hospitals become overcrowded, schools struggle to keep up with growing populations and the long-term cost of fixing those problems becomes even greater. Responsible borrowing, when used to build infrastructure and support economic growth, is not, and should not be, a burden. It is an investment in jobs, in communities and in the future.

The real question is not whether governments should ever borrow; it is whether the money being borrowed is being invested wisely. The lesson from the past is clear: budgets should not be balanced by selling off the Territory's future but through responsible planning, smart investment and building a stronger economy for the long term.

I do not often agree with members opposite, but I acknowledge that one of the biggest challenges the Northern Territory has is population growth. The way to grow our economy is to grow the population. Whilst I might often disagree often with the Member for Fong Lim, I know that this is something he is genuinely passionate about. If we can grow the Territory's population, which is currently declining, we can grow our economic prosperity and opportunities. To do that you need to invest in infrastructure, programs and services to attract people to the Territory.

There is significant work. The Territory has always had its financial challenges. I am not saying for a moment that every government previously got it right or that this government will have it right or not. The Territory has structural issues that it needs to discuss with Canberra about legacy debt. When the Northern Territory was handed over and we got self-government the Territory inherited ageing infrastructure, roads, housing and institutions. Hospitals required significant investment, and there was never the investment from the Commonwealth to do that, so the Territory has always been behind.

Regardless of who has been in power, the real issue is that the Territory has always been shortchanged by Canberra regarding our infrastructure. There is a conversation we should all be having as a parliament, because as we continue we will always be behind because that gap has never been filled to fix the critical issue of the Territory's infrastructure legacy. We need to look at what that looks like.

The Territory has complex needs. We are not Sydney, Melbourne, Victoria or New South Wales—I am proud that we are not, because we are better than them. We have a dispersed population. When people talk about delivering regional and remote services they also talk about how much money we should get to do that.

I always talk about local government, and it does a great job. People on the east coast are whingeing about delivering local government services. I think the two people in this room who know the most about local government are me and the Local Government minister. We hear all the time this mob on the east coast banging on about delivering services for local government, and they say that they are remote. I have to say, 'Mate, Bendigo and Wollongong are not remote. Ali Curung and Kintore are remote, and the financial assistance we have does not allow us to deliver a quality job.'

There are real issues that we need to talk about on a national stage regarding the Territory's economic future. We should all do that together. We want people, because the more people spending money in the Territory, the more that we can invest and grow the Territory's economy.

How do we get more people to the Territory? How do we fix the legacy issues? How do we communicate that when the GST is looked at? WA, our cousins in the west, always cries that it needs more GST money, but we need more GST money because the need to deliver services in the Territory is greater than anywhere in the country, and the remoteness is greater than anywhere in the country, apart from WA. We need to have a conversation because whenever there is fluctuation in GST, there is a fluctuation in service delivery in the Territory. What does a budget compact look like in the Territory for the future? They are the conversations that I want to have. They are the conversations we all should be having because—it does not matter who is in government—the Territory will always suffer economically until we get that recipe right and have an honest conversation about what our economic future looks like.

We need to invest in important infrastructure and services so that we can keep people in the Territory moving forward and strong.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his report on the Territory's economy, but what we have heard today is a familiar line. It is important to unpick the budget myths perpetrated in this Chamber.

The Treasurer wants you to believe that running a deficit is the worst thing a government can do, but it is not true when the difference between spending more money and not is a hospital that functions and one that does not. Debt is not the most important consideration; the government's priorities are.

The Treasurer would have Territorians believe that debt is the central problem facing the Territory, but that framing is misleading. As we have just heard, every government operates with some level of debt. That is not unusual; it is how our modern public finance system works. Governments build infrastructure that lasts decades. They invest in hospitals, schools, roads and housing that serve multiple generations. Borrowing to fund these long-term assets is normal practice across the world and Australia, so the real question is not whether a government has debt; it is what that borrowing is used for and whether it improves the lives and the productivity of the people who pay for it.

Focusing on only the headline debt figure becomes a distraction from the more important conversation about priorities. Governments are here to look after people, maintain essential services and make decisions about the priorities of the public. We have a government that refuses to collect more revenue from its multinational offshore gas company friends, which we currently get zero dollars tax from; in fact, we pay for them to be here through subsidies. That revenue could shorten waitlists at RDH, provide public housing for specialists, pave some of the 75% of our roads that are unsealed, address public safety in sustainable ways and create more opportunities for young people who want to stay in the Territory.

Debt is not the problem; it is what the government decides is a priority to spend money on. I am not talking about major projects. We need essential services before major projects, not the other way round. My experience on the ship lift inquiry solidified that for me.

We need to remember that budgets are about choices. The next time you hear the Treasurer say that we cannot have nice things because of debt, remember that the government chooses what is important to spend our limited pot of money on. Debt, operating deficit, borrowing—none of this forces the government to subsidise the fossil fuel industry and not the hospital. That is a choice made on your behalf.

When we have an economy that measures success through the wellbeing of multinational companies and big industry rather than the wellbeing of making the Territory what it is, then we have a problem. If the economy is supposedly growing—meaning gross state product is growing—but Territorians are more stressed and tell us they feel more unsafe and are less able to afford basic essentials with inequality growing, then we are measuring the wrong things and rewarding the wrong priorities. Gross state product is not a useful measure for economic wellbeing.

The minister has given us the government's view of the economy—what he says is growth, certainty and security—but he cannot explain why Territorians are still struggling even when the economy is supposedly growing and where all our needs-based funding is going. The Northern Territory gets almost 80% of its funding from the federal government, including five times the rate of GST funding compared with most other states and territories, and we get that to address our complex needs and remoteness.

When I asked the Treasurer how that needs-based funding is being tracked to make sure it is addressing the need that it was intended to, the answer I got was, 'We don't track that'. Here is yet another issue worth talking about more than debt: where is all the money that is meant to address that need going?

For Territorians who are sick of hearing budgets and economic plans that differ only in the margins, whoever is in power, I am here to remind you that we do not have to settle for tinkering around the edges. We can create a budget that fundamentally improves Territorians' lives. I think we can have an alternative vision of a wellbeing economy that actually puts the needs of Territorians first, invests early to save later and refuses to funnel public money into the pockets of multinationals while families struggle to meet basic costs.

The truth is this: when people thrive, the economy thrives, and when people are struggling to survive, no spreadsheet can claim success.

A wellbeing economy starts with the simple shift that the purpose of a budget is to meet the basic needs of Territorians, not the needs of corporate boardrooms in Sydney, Delhi or Tokyo. We could have a people's budget that invests firstly in health, mental health, domestic violence prevention, frontline services, safe housing, homelessness services, renewable energy, local jobs, roads and community infrastructure that meet

the needs of the people in the Territory. These investments represent short-term costs but significant savings in the long term. They reduce hospital admissions, crime, homelessness, youth detention and long-term government spending.

Investing early is not just compassionate; it is economically responsible.

Too much of our budget is built on reaction rather than prevention and on subsidies for big corporations instead of support for normal, everyday people. That is not a strategy; that is committing to an ongoing cycle of crisis. Once again, the debate is focused on the past and on blame across the Chamber from party to party. I think we need to focus on the future. I believe we can build a budget for the Territory that is based on people's needs—a budget that says we need to put people first.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I thank the Treasurer for his ministerial report on managing Labor's debt legacy. Like him and the rest of our team, I am focused on our key priorities of growth, certainty and security. Let us look at each of these separately to understand the extent of the impact of Labor's debt legacy. In doing so, let us look forward to see how we will move on the serious task of budget repair, as we need it.

We have a clear indicator in the CommSec reports, as has been mentioned a number of times in this Chamber. Under this government the Northern Territory has moved from stone motherless last to fourth in the nation. When I say stone motherless last, I mean we were languishing in the last position for approximately three years under the previous Labor government. There was no attempt to lift us. It tried to hide the CommSec report and say, 'Do not pay any attention to it. Do not listen to the evidence. No, we do not want that; that goes against us.'

Within 18 months we have created a business environment—this is the key—where we are now fourth in the nation and, hopefully, this will improve further in the future. That is because we support the private sector and local business. We see them as being the key for growth, including all our small-to-medium business sectors across the Territory.

As outlined in our plan—I said this yesterday, but I will repeat it—we focused on supporting growth in five critical industries: tourism; Defence; agriculture; mining; and gas. I heard the Leader of the Opposition say that we had no plan; that is where we have been focusing our efforts.

Let me use gas as a clear example of the contrast between our government and the previous Labor government regarding economic growth. Under our government, the Beetaloo gas development is now underway and offering further significant local business and employment opportunities. We heard from the minister for Business about the opportunities there. We heard from the Member for Barkly because it is the land of opportunity there. Everyone is talking about the growth and how local businesses are getting involved.

Think about when our onshore gas industry was stymied by Labor's inertia and indecision. Shame on Labor. It just kicked the tin down the road. It could not make a decision and did not know whether it was Arthur or Martha. It was hopeless.

Despite the bleatings of the opposition members—I do not care what I hear from them—I know from talking to businesses firsthand that business confidence is growing in the Territory. I do not need to hear second-hand or third-hand from the Member for Johnston and others; I talk to businesses directly.

Certainty is another key focus of ours. As I said, business confidence is growing because we have moved on from the inertia and indecision of Labor. We unashamedly back local business. I can never forget this—I have it written down and will repeat it. How can I not refer to the speech made by the Member for Johnston, who denigrated the importance of the private sector, which highlights why the Independents and Labor drove our CommSec ratings down to stone motherless last. This is their approach. I will quote from the *Hansard* so I get this right from the Member for Johnston:

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

J Davis: It is true.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Well, doesn't that send a lot of confidence to the private sector? No, it does not.

She also said:

Major private development plays a minuscule role in the NT economy.

'Minuscule' is another one of her words.

J Davis: What percentage does it contribute?

Mr O'GALLAGHER: We continue to hear the interjections coming through.

Let me go back to gas. I heard the Member for Johnston say, 'There is no benefit in the offshore gas industry; we get no royalties.' Because it is offshore gas, those royalties go to the federal government. She even acknowledged that we get 80% of our funding from the federal government. It goes around in circles, but it comes back to us via those grants.

The Member for Johnston is trying to take away from Australia. She thinks that no-one is getting any benefit out of this. This is wrong. More importantly, it is the onshore gas projects like the Beetaloo where those royalties come to us. They will be own-source revenue. Maybe she should focus on growing our own-source revenue so that we do not have to stay wedded to the Commonwealth all the time, using its money. This is what we need to do. This is the only government that gets that.

Let us talk about security. The Treasurer said that the one thing Labor grew was debt. That is true, but it is not the only thing. Labor oversaw a skyrocketing growth in crime and antisocial behaviour across the Territory. That in itself sapped confidence out of the Territory, business sector and community. People were looking to pack up and leave. As I said yesterday, I never forget walking around the Karama shops the day after the election when there was a sudden change in optimism. People finally got rid of Labor, and they knew they had a government with a plan to make the Territory better. That is what we have focused on.

Those opposite keep saying that we have no plan, but I went through it yesterday. We have delivered what we said we would. Despite all the bleatings of the opposition, we went ahead and did it.

We did the bail reform. A lot of it was done on urgency. Why? It was because we told the electorate what we would do. If the one criticism we get from the opposition—they reckon it is also from the community—is for delivering what we promised the electorate, bring it on. I would welcome that because I put my hand on my heart—that is a badge of honour—and say that we delivered what we said we would, and that is what we need to do more of.

Various crime stats have been circulated by the Attorney-General. She mentioned yesterday that the number of victims of crime is down by 2,700, which is fantastic for community safety. We need more of this. I will look at broad stats. Comparing January to December 2025 with January to December 2024, so it is year on year, NT-wide robbery offences are down by 20%; total property offences are down by 12%; burglary, dwelling (house break-ins) are down by 32%; burglary, non-residential (commercial break-ins) are down by 27%; and motor vehicle theft and related offences are down by 15%.

The business community is saying that things are getting better. There is a lot more work to do; I am the first to acknowledge that. We have a lot more work to do on budget repair, growing the economy further—we have only just started—and keeping the focus on community safety.

In my electorate of Karama, as I have mentioned, we have to go harder on public housing reform; people are asking for that. We have plans to do that. I acknowledge the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development, and I am proud to be his assistant minister.

I do not know how many times I have to say this: we told people what we would do; we are doing it and will continue to do so. If people want to criticise us for that, go for your life. We do not promise the sky and deliver nothing; that is not in our DNA.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I reflect on the terrible financial legacy that the previous Labor government left Territorians. When we talk about that legacy there is one unavoidable truth: under Labor the Northern Territory did not see growth in our economy; we saw growth in terrible debt. Labor's biggest area of growth was not jobs for our families, private sector investment or economic confidence; it was debt.

When Labor came to office Territory debt was about $2bn. I remind people that the Treasurer at the time was the previous Member for Wanguri. By 2023–24 audited net debt had grown to just over $9bn. That is an

increase of roughly $6.7bn in just eight years. I previously worked for the Commonwealth Bank, and it made that kind of profit in just six months to reinvest in the business. This is not a rounding error; it is a terrible financial legacy. All Territorians are now living with the consequences of that terrible fiscal legacy.

The real issue is not just how much debt grew but also why it grew. Labor delivered only one audited operating surplus during its entire time in office—one, the lowest number of the single digits. Every other year the Territory ran at a deficit. Year after year, budget after budget, there was deficit after deficit. When deficits become normal, borrowing becomes normal, but that is not normal. That is what happened under Labor; it normalised deficit and borrowing. All Territorians are now paying the price. Members opposite do not like hearing that, but the numbers are not my opinion; they are the Territory's audited financial statements. Those numbers tell a clear story.

About $4bn of the increase in Territory debt was associated with operating deficits, not infrastructure, as the Member for Goyder reminded us. That means borrowing was used simply to cover day-to-day spending, not on long-term assets, economic capacity or infrastructure that drives our productivity. It was just the gap between spending and revenue, borrowing to keep the budget afloat and recover routine expenditure because the books did not balance.

Debt itself is not always a problem. As we all know, borrowing makes sense when it builds the future. It can support roads, ports, hospitals and schools for our children. Borrowing can strengthen the economy when it delivers lasting assets; however, borrowing simply to cover everyday spending is not responsible financial management. It is not investment; it is avoidance.

Under Labor debt became the substitute for economic growth. Strong economies support strong budgets. When an economy grows, government revenue grows with it. Growth expands and, just like the payroll tax base, it increases royalties, business activity and transaction volumes, as the Member for Karama said. Growth strengthens the Territory's GST capacity. That is how a healthy economy supports public finances. However, under Labor the economy did not grow strongly enough to support the scale of government. Instead of growing the economy to support the budget, Labor grew the debt. That is the reality members opposite do not like to be reminded of.

Another major failure of the previous government was its inability to grow the private sector. I commend the Member for Port Darwin who is doing magnificent work on that. Private enterprise is the engine of economic growth, and businesses create jobs. Businesses drive investment and expand the revenue base that funds our schools, hospitals and police.

Under Labor private sector confidence weakened and investment slowed. Government spending increasingly filled those gaps. Labor relied heavily on public spending supported by borrowing. That approach may create the illusion of activity in the short term, but in the long term it weakens fiscal resilience. Structural deficits become embedded, and debt continues to rise. That is what happened in the Northern Territory.

Territorians are entitled to ask the simple question: what did the Territory receive for nearly $7bn of additional debt? I am not sure; I think I am reading it in lemon juice, because there was nothing. What lasting economic strength was created? What productivity was delivered? What opportunity was built?

The reality is that too many projects under the previous government were characterised by delays, cost overruns and poor planning. Projects ran over budget and over time, and public confidence suffered. The previous government left the Territory with not only a debt problem but also a confidence problem.

Economic confidence rests on three foundations: certainty; security; and discipline. Businesses invest where governments demonstrate clear economic direction. Investors look for jurisdictions that show fiscal responsibility, and we are turning that around. Families choose to live where communities are safe and opportunities exist.

In places like Wanguri and the northern suburbs families expect safe communities, strong services and a government that manages the Territory's finances responsibly. When debt rises without economic growth it is local communities that feel the pressure. Communities like Wanguri depend on responsible budgeting to fund our schools, health services, police and community infrastructure.

This government has taken a fundamentally different approach, and that is why there is a new Treasurer. The CLP government has clear priorities to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle. Community safety and economic confidence go hand in hand. Businesses cannot invest where confidence is weak. Families cannot thrive where communities feel unsafe. Investors do not commit capital

where certainty is lacking. Restoring safety is therefore not just a law and order priority; it is an economic priority. Rebuilding the Territory economy is central to repairing finances for all Territorians. This government's strategy is simple: grow the economy, not just balance the sheet.

A stronger private sector reduces reliance on borrowing. A stronger investment pipeline creates jobs and opportunities for all Territorians. We are focused on attracting investment, expanding the private sector, developing the Territory's energy and resources sector and strengthening logistics and Defence opportunities. These are the foundations of long-term economic growth.

We are already seeing early signs that the trajectory is starting to change. The midyear budget review shows improvements across key indicators. Revenue has increased from approximately $10.04bn to $10.66bn. Member for Johnston, that might be a small increase, but it is an increase. The fiscal deficit has improved from about $1.3bn to approximately $961m. Net debt projections have improved, and the net-debt-to-revenue ratio has improved from 121% to 110%. In other words, revenue is improving, the deficit is reducing and debt is stabilising. This is what we want. This is what responsible financial management looks like, thanks to the Treasurer.

Repairing the Territory's finances will take time. The financial damage created over many years cannot be fixed overnight, but the direction is clear. Under Labor debt grew. Under this government the economy will grow. Members opposite may not like hearing that, but the facts remain: Labor normalised deficits, borrowing and debt. That is not fiscally responsible. This government is restoring discipline and confidence and rebuilding the Territory economy. The choice facing Territorians is simple. Labor grew the debt, and the CLP is growing the economy. That difference will define the Territory's future.

Mr EDGINGTON (Health): Madam Speaker, I thank the Treasurer for this ministerial report about managing Labor's debt legacy. This is extremely important for the CLP as, coming to government in 2024, we were faced with a debt tracking towards $15bn.

I will get facts on the table. The Territory's net debt was about $2bn when Labor came to office in 2016. By 2023–24 audited net debt was about $9.018bn. The audited 2016–17 net debt was approximately $2.271bn, so it was already growing straight after Labor came to government in 2016. The net-debt-to-revenue ratio rose from 35% in 2016–17 to 108% by 2023–24.

Labor achieved only one audited operating surplus in eight years. Every other year was an operating deficit. When broader fiscal balance was used, the Territory remained in deficit every year under Labor. Debt is not abstract; it reduces future budget flexibility. Rising debt means higher interest costs and fewer choices. Debt growth over time reflects structural deterioration, not a one-off event.

As we have heard, not all debt is bad; the issue is whether borrowing should fund productive assets or ongoing deficits. Too much of the Labor-era borrowing funded operating shortfalls rather than finished infrastructure.

We have heard examples of good debt and bad debt analysis, and we know that good debt is about borrowing for productive assets—things like roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, logistics and enabling infrastructure. Bad debt, as we know, is about borrowing to cover day-to-day operating expenses.

Looking at what we are faced with, the total increase in net debt over the Labor period was about $6.7bn. Importantly, analysis of the Territory financial statements indicates that about $4bn of that increase was driven by operating deficits. What did the Territory receive for nearly $7bn in added debt? When we came to government the debt included a structural budget deficit in the health system of about $300m. These are the issues that we faced coming to government.

I will discuss a number of projects because investment by Labor involved questionable investment decisions. There was little investment in community safety or critical infrastructure, and there was no plan for the economy. I said many times when I was in opposition that Labor had no plan. It genuinely had no idea, and that is what contributed to the debt that we are facing today.

There was no plan. Labor genuinely had no idea how to address community safety or the critical infrastructure shortage, and it had no idea how to grow the economy. That is why our focus is on reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring the Territory lifestyle. What did Labor spend money on, or what did it not spend money on that was critical?

I will touch on some things in my electorate because lots of promises were made about building a new health centre in Borroloola. That is what we are investing in; we committed $20m to build a new health centre in Borroloola. We are getting on with the job and putting our money where it is needed most.

Labor members have talked many times about investing in schools. Labor did not contribute to the upgrade of Alekarenge School, which I have spoken about many times in this parliament. That is a critical issue.

We talk about health, education and community safety, but there was also a longstanding commitment under Labor to invest in staff accommodation for nurses at Tennant Creek Hospital. That went on for six years while the debt was growing and wastage was occurring; Labor did not invest in critical infrastructure such as nurses' accommodation.

Even while growing the debt, Labor scrapped two Bushfires NT positions in Tennant Creek, and we saw the worst bushfires in the Barkly during August to October 2023. It left us without the resources on the ground in Tennant Creek facing a disaster with those bushfires. That is the type of investment it was making; it was investing in infrastructure that was not needed while scrapping important positions in my electorate. I was fuming when it scrapped those positions in 2020.

It did not invest in the youth justice facility in Tennant Creek. We finished that, as well as the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Cultural Centre in Tennant Creek. There is still $5.5m unaccounted for which was promised by Labor in 2018 for Turbocharging Tourism. Nobody has ever seen or heard of the promised $5.5m since.

The CLP had to come to government to finish the streetscaping project, even though it had been promised by Labor for six years.

Labor overspent more than $100m on a bridge on Tiger Brennan Drive. It built a police station at Nightcliff, which has been open between 8 am and 4.21 pm Monday to Friday ever since it was built at a cost of $12.7m. It invested in a grandstand at Fannie Bay. It overspent $14m on Garramilla Boulevard and spent $432,000 on a bus stop which it moved from Cavenagh Street to Smith Street and back again.

This was all complete budget mismanagement by Labor that contributed to the budget blowout we are facing today. We are facing the consequences of its mismanagement.

It spent $2.7m on an unshaded structure on Cavenagh Street. I do not know how many times I have spoken about that. It wasted $80,000 on a review of the unshaded structure on Cavenagh Street. It overspent on the Myilly Point playground by $2m. There was an overspend on the demolition of the Chan Building by $1m. It spent $220,000 on a renewables target report which was made public after an FOI request with every page redacted.

Labor had a tourism strategy called Boundless Possible; anyone who can remember that will know that Labor spent $40,000 to advertise that on a rocket being launched out of Queensland in November 2018. That tourism strategy has never been seen since.

It also spent $5,000 on a Christmas tree.

Yes, it delivered some infrastructure, but the results clearly did not match the scale of the total debt we have seen. Too many projects were delayed, unfinished or significantly more expensive than planned. There was too much borrowing on funded deficits rather than durable assets—things that would help to grow the Northern Territory economy.

Territorians can accept borrowing when they can point to clear outcomes. The problem is debt without matching value. Our government's emphasis is productive infrastructure and better financial discipline.

Labor delivered less growth, certainty and security. This government is focused on those things. Labor grew the debt; this government is trying to grow the economy. In my electorate alone we are supporting mining, the gas industry and agriculture. An ILUA was signed recently to grow the SunCable project in my electorate.

We are getting on with the job of trying to fix the mess that Labor left us.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, is it a little chilly in here today, or is that because we are talking about Labor's debt legacy? I am not quite sure. You might want to turn up the heat a little because the CLP is in control now, so it will get warmer for sure.

Between 2016 and 2024 Labor held government in the Northern Territory. Combined with the national Labor catastrophe under Prime Minister Albanese, our economy has been driven into the ground by reckless spending, soaring debt and chronic mismanagement—a litany of bad decisions by failed ministers and ideological obsessions that stifle growth not just in the Territory but nationwide.

Labor has left Territorian families and businesses struggling, with federal policies exacerbating our local woes through higher costs, regulatory burdens and missed opportunities. Today, under the Finocchiaro CLP government, we are delivering real results, the fastest economic growth in the nation and a clear path to recovery with targeted support, especially for small businesses, families and everyone in electorates such as Fannie Bay.

We are prioritising construction projects that are vital to unleashing jobs and housing, despite the budget black hole Labor bequeathed us. NT Labor ruled for 19 of the last 23 years, inheriting a post-INPEX boom but squandering it with disastrous calls such as the former Chief Minister Michael Gunner's lockdown extremes and election rorts; misusing taxpayer funds to fly ministers to remote polling days in 2020; and prompting ICAC probes that dragged on without resolution.

Eva Lawler, as Treasurer, oversaw an economy shrinking by 5.25%, yet lifted intervention-era alcohol bans which she later admitted was a catastrophic mistake, unleashing crime spikes. Her Cabinet reeled from integrity failures under Natasha Fyles, who resigned in disgrace. Labor left a net debt of more than $11bn, the highest per capita in Australia, racing to a $15bn debt ceiling—from vanity projects such as the Darwin Turf Club grandstand—while building approvals cratered and construction stalled amid its fiscal recklessness.

Labor's welfare-first policies fostered a culture where too many chose not to work, inflating our unemployment and slashing our GST share, as federal formulas penalised our low own-source revenue. We have seen GST drop before, and Labor's dependency trap made us vulnerable, starved of infrastructure funding.

NT Labor's soft-on-crime strategy, along with its history of misallocating funds, fuelled the worst national economy tag, with crime scaring tourism. Its mining tax echoed Canberra's resource grabs, delaying Beetaloo and Darwin Harbour.

Under Labor, scandals piled up, including Chansey Paech's shares in alcohol suppliers amid community harm, the CFMEU ditching Labor for poor leadership and Gunner's staffer rorts, all while productivity flatlined nationally.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fannie Bay, do not refer to members by their personal names.

Mrs ZIO: Sorry; I take it back—the Member for Gwoja.

CommSec nailed Labor's legacy as the weakest economy, with zero vision and Territorians footing the bill. From Fyles to Potter to the Member for Gwoja, Labor ministers' failures destroyed opportunities for all Territorians.

Elected in a landslide in August 2024, this Finocchiaro CLP government hit the ground running with our Rebuilding the Economy strategy, fixing Labor's messes for Fannie Bay small businesses, families and residents, while making construction a top priority to build homes, roads and jobs we desperately need.

We slashed approval delays by 50% via the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce, accelerating projects and housing precincts. We are saving Fannie Bay, Parap and Coconut Grove cafes and shops up to $55,000 yearly via payroll reform.

It is no easy task. Labor's $11bn-plus debt bomb and operating deficits mean every construction dollar must be hard-fought, redirecting waste from its pet projects to essentials like remote housing upgrades and urban land release in greater Darwin. This is vital for electorates such as Fannie Bay.

First home owner grants rose to $50,000 for Fannie Bay couples. HomeGrown Territory delivered $12.6m to 900-plus locals. Families gained childcare subsidies and school vouchers. There is a $1.5bn law and order strategy, with 146 new police. We are cutting crime to ensure that Territorians feel safe and we can grow the population. It is something that Labor did not care about and did nothing to improve.

Eighteen months later GSP is up by 6.8%, and we are at the top nationally; growth is at 10.2%; and population growth is up by 1.21% for the first time in so long. All these positives are boosting electorates such as

Fannie Bay and fuelling construction demand. Debt has slowed, and revenue is up by $369m. We have amazing CommSec results. Housing approvals are up by 15%, which is proof that our construction push is working despite Labor's legacy. It is amazing that those opposite cannot understand one simple fact: safer streets in the Territory will drive investment, from ship lifts to remote roads. If we can create a safer Territory, the people, investment and subsequent improvements will come.

Territorians will see that our best days are coming under a proactive, responsible and Territory-focused CLP government.

Mr KERLE (Kerle): Madam Speaker, the Member for Johnston loves to talk about how we do not get any royalties from gas. Member for Johnston, I suggest you talk to the federal government and the Member for Solomon, because it is the federal government's offshore gas which is reported in the media as not bringing in royalties. The federal government owns the royalties for anything that is offshore; the NT Government gets the royalties for anything onshore.

That is why we back the Beetaloo. Not only will it bring jobs and growth to the Territory, fuel our economy and keep the lights on in this wonderful building by keeping the gas flowing to Channel Island and being exported to bring real cash to the Territory, but we also get the royalties.

J Davis: How much, Member for Blain?

Mr KERLE: It will be coming.

Madam SPEAKER: Direct your comments through me, and no interjections.

Mr KERLE: We will be reporting the royalties in due course.

Member for Drysdale, I love your comments about crashing the car and blaming the mechanic for the bill, because that sums us the opposition's approach to our budget and eight long years of fiscal mismanagement. I was born in the 1980s and have lived through a few political cycles. In my observations, what always seems to happen is that Labor governments get in, run up the credit card bill and make a mess of things. The public then throw them out and the Coalition, in this case the CLP, comes in and fixes the budget, repairs the infrastructure and gets everything ticking along nicely. Then Labor gets back in, throws mud and has a nice, fat balance book to go spending again. Labor loves nothing more than promising to spend other people's money. That is what I have noticed.

The Leader of the Opposition commented on leasing the port. For the record, it is important to note that the former Opposition Leader, Hon Michael Gunner, was the Labor representative on the select committee into leasing the port. I am happy to be corrected. I do not think he submitted a dissenting report. My understanding is that he signed off on that report. Before the election, when he was on the committee, he was all for it. It was happy days in the lead-up to the election.

'The CLP sold the port' was Labor's favourite attack line. He understood that it was required. The port required significant investment to fully unleash its potential. He understood that, and on the committee he supported it, but then it became political, much like the opposition this week politicising the biggest natural disaster to hit the Territory in decades—'Why haven't you done this or that?' The Chief Minister has explained exactly what we are doing.

The Chief Minister is working 24 hours a day. The Treasurer is in the rain with the tradies, getting the pumps sorted out, the generators in place and things plugged in so that the good people of Darwin and Palmerston can rely on the water coming through the taps and get off the boil water alert.

A member: We are off.

Mr KERLE: Are we off? Happy days! We are off the boil water notice. I cannot wait to announce that to my constituents; they will be happy. My kids will be happy to be drinking from the bubbler again at school. We had to pack them bottles to go to school, which they were not happy about.

I love history because it informs us how we arrived at where we are. In 2016, when the then CLP government finished its term, the net debt was approximately $2bn. I hear different amounts, like $1.7m, in media reports, but at the end of its term debt was approximately $2bn. By the end of the financial year 2023–24, after eight years of Labor government, the audited net debt stood at approximately $9bn. That is an increase of almost $7bn over eight years. What do we have to show for it? A shadeless shade structure.

The Member for Barkly spoke about Boundless Possible; I was hoping to speak about that. What a joke that was—a grammatical misnomer that was apparently copied from another jurisdiction. Boundless Possible was meant to solve our population woes. As soon as Labor members launched that, it was like something out of *Utopia*. I can see them sitting there, planning the launch and deciding what they would do. 'Look at the video; it is amazing. We just need a tag to put in at the end.' *Utopia* was meant to be a comedy, not a documentary. I think the Gunner government was watching it for ideas and inspiration.

Project Sea Dragon saw millions of dollars spent on a road to nowhere. The ship lift—my goodness. The original plan for the ship lift was $100m as incentive for an equity stake for the private sector, and hopefully the federal government, to build a ship lift which would be a common-user facility to draw business to Darwin, but what did we end up with? An $800m giveaway to the private sector. I think the Chair of that committee said that it was the largest transfer from public to private funds in the history of the Territory, and we are locked into that contract. It was stated multiple times that if we try to cancel that contract, we would be liable for the amount.

In 2016 INPEX was winding down, and the Beetaloo was spooling up. People in Palmerston who were running businesses were busy in 2016, shipping oil and gas parts to the Beetaloo and supporting the drilling industry, getting everything ready. There was the change of government, Gunner came in and, as Labor loves to do if there is an industry it does not like, knocked it on the head and introduced the moratorium. How long was the gas industry dead for? It was three or four long years before Labor lifted the moratorium.

Finally, the former Chief Minister Natasha Fyles went to Canberra and spruiked the gas industry, but it was too late as the horse had bolted. The Labor Party thinks the private sector is like the public sector and it can turn business on and off. Labor said, 'We will stop the live export cattle trade. We will stop development of the Beetaloo and then introduce a moratorium to get some political run out of it. If we ever need it, we will turn it back on again.'

Labor does not understand that it is a supply chain. All the businesses along that supply chain feed each other and are actively working together. When you stop at a key point, you cut the chain, and that is the end of it. I know people whose business went under; they had subcontractors and truckies who were transporting the gear to the Barkly, then the subbies lost their contracts because there was nowhere to take it to. They had mortgages, and they were all stuck.

Michael Gunner scrapped the Beetaloo development in 2016. With a complete lack of economic vision in 2017, Labor had a series of talkfests that did not achieve anything. In 2018 Ken Vowles and other members of the Labor Caucus were concerned about the trajectory of the budget. They raised those issues in Cabinet. The result was that in December 2018 Michael Gunner jetted to New Zealand to have a holiday with his lovely wife. Then he trotted out the Treasurer, Nicole Manison, to face the music and dump the bad news.

Ken Vowles' email was leaked to the media; Gunner raced back from New Zealand. Territory debt? Not important. Trouble in the Caucus? He was on the next plane back. The next thing that happened was a Caucus meeting, and those three members were gone.

My final note is that Labor's record was not growth in output, productivity or certainty; it was growth in debt.

Motion agreed to; report noted.

The Assembly suspended.

QUESTION TIME

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, before we commence Question Time, in the absence of Minister Hersey, all questions relating to the minister's portfolios should be directed to the Deputy Chief Minister.

NT Floods – Media Conferences

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Territorians have raised concerns about the lack of clear and consistent communication from your government during the flood crisis. Across the countries leaders front up every day to provide comprehensive updates and to answer questions during events like we are experiencing—not just to film the odd video for Instagram likes.

Your mate, Premier Crisafulli, is doing daily media conferences about the Queensland floods. Territorians would like to know whether you will commit to do the same in the NT.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we are on day seven of a flood, and that is the best question that Labor has. She is worried about which media conferences I go to on what days, which tells me that she has reverted to undermining emergency services professionals.

It is one thing to see a political leader—of course, that is important, and I have fulfilled those roles—but it is another thing to make sure you are getting the information from our incident manager, northern commander, Commissioner of Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services and Chief Health Officer, given we have had a boil water alert and different issues that have been the focal point in the last two days.

I will not dignify this stupid question with an answer. If this is all the Leader of the Opposition has, then Territorians are left wondering.

NT Floods – Disaster Relief Payments

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

After intense pressure you finally announced that disaster relief payments will be extended to other Territory flood-affected residents. We welcome that; however, for some unknown reason the residents of Daly, Palumpa and a number of affected homelands are still missing out on financial relief despite being displaced from their homes and being evacuated. Can you explain why you are denying some fellow Territorians the same access to support that other Territorians have been granted?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, again, it is another ridiculous, divisive, race-based question fuelling the flame of division because she has nothing better to do.

I have stood in parliament for three days, done media just about every day and explained this, as has Minister Cahill on ABC radio and on Katie Woolf's program this morning. We had the federal minister in Katherine today explaining it, and there was a media release about it. Those opposite do not understand because they do not want to, because they want to drive a wedge between the community. That is all they know.

Opposition Leader, you could take a lesson out of the book of your colleagues who have taken an entirely different approach to this. There can be productive collaboration across this Chamber and genuine support for communities and information flow—and there is, but not from you.

You have not been to any of your communities. You have not been to Katherine throughout all this. You had not rung, texted or emailed me once, until I outed you, then you sent me two …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is a joke. She is more worried about what day I did a media conference or whether I did one. I am not sure what it is that she wants to do or what point she is trying to make other than to divide people.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; the question was specifically about Daly and Palumpa. These are questions we are fielding on behalf of Territorians. Can you explain why these Territorians cannot access the same support as other Territorians?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: My point is that this has been explained. Instead of peddling mistruths, misinformation, fear and division, you could tell your constituents the real answer. However, you are making a deliberate choice not to. While we have been cleaning up mud from people's homes, all you have done is throw it. You are contributing to the problem that only you created.

I will now pass to Minister Cahill, as Minister for Children and Families, who clearly this morning explained that there will be a sequential rollout. I ask Minister Cahill to please explain that for the 100,000th time.

Members interjecting.

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 20; no interruptions. We are on question two of the day; can we try to listen to the answers?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, you have not stopped talking since we commenced Question Time, so please show some respect.

Ms CAHILL: Madam Speaker, I explained this morning to the general public that, now that we have had the combined announcement from the Chief Minister and the federal government that relief payments can start to roll out, they are rolling out. Today the first lot of payments have been rolled out to the Murray Downs mob, who are heading back home because that is where the money will be needed. For all other communities it will be rolled out as we progress their relocation home.

NT Floods – Response

Mr PATEL to CHIEF MINISTER

It has nearly been one week since the flooding in Katherine and across the Big Rivers region impacted residents and communities. Since then we have witnessed historic flooding events across the Northern Territory, including in Central Australia, which experienced the same flooding just weeks ago.

Can you update the Assembly on how the CLP government, together with the broader community, has responded to this event, and the actions being taken to support affected residents in the recovery?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the member is right. Today is Thursday, so it marks nearly one week since this wide-scale flooding event occurred across the Top End. Last Thursday everyone went to bed; the Bureau of Meteorology was not expecting anything particularly significant overnight. On Friday morning we woke to the bureau information changing sharply. There had been significant rain in all the wrong places, and the weather event had turned; so did the emergency operation response. By Friday morning Katherine Hospital was evacuating more than 30 patients to other hospitals around the Territory and had stood up an emergency department at St John in Katherine in the industrial area. I flew to Katherine and saw the swelling river. I spoke to locals and police to understand the response that was to be provided.

I was joined by the Member for Katherine, who had just had foot surgery and was meant to be on bed rest with her foot up, but she was in the wheelchair making sure her community was safe. By Saturday Palumpa and Daly were evacuated. We had 18 helicopters and nine fixed wings evacuating about 600 people safely to Foskey Pavilion and Marrara. Foskey Pavilion and Marrara were stood up within a 24-hour period by the Department of Children and Families and others. On Saturday Katherine flooded. On Sunday morning Katherine people were facing the horror of waking up to widespread flood damage. It was the biggest flood they had seen since 2006.

That same day when Katherine flooded Jilkminggan had to be evacuated to Mataranka, where we stood up the shelter and provided safe haven to get people out of danger. By Sunday afternoon we turned on the disaster relief payments for people in Katherine who were starting the recovery phase as the river level subsided.

By Monday I was back there with the Member for Katherine whose own home had flooded. She was reliving the trauma of the 1998 flood, like so many others in her community. I was with her on the plane and brought the disaster relief funding payment cards and staff from the Department of Children and Families so that we could get it rolling out the next day. I brought with me the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, the Police Commissioner and the recovery team so that we could see what needed to be done.

We are supporting Palumpa and Daly, as well. On Monday afternoon there was flash flooding in Daly River, and the pump station broke down. It has been a big seven days. Water is back on; recovery is happening. I thank everyone for their response.

NT Floods – Disaster Relief Payments

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

As you are aware, Territorians across the Top End, Central and Barkly regions are facing some of the most severe and widespread flooding in our history. Communities are reliant on strong government coordination as they navigate this unprecedented natural disaster. The Department of Children and Families is leading a major welfare response supported by NGOs, local councils and partner agencies to keep people safe, supported and connected to essential services.

Can you update the Assembly on the actions the Finocchiaro CLP government is taking to support affected residents and specifically outline the activation of the disaster relief payments being rolled out in more detail, further to your earlier remarks?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, as a born-and-bred Territorian, the Member for Fong Lim has experienced the best and the worst of what the Territory has to offer. He has lived through several weather crises. Here we are with severe historic weather events occurring simultaneously across multiple regions. It is the most horrendous weather crisis that we have faced for quite some time. It is from the Top End to Central Australia, and our government's priority is the safety and wellbeing of Territorians.

I acknowledge the resilience of residents who have been displaced for days and, in some cases, weeks. I thank the extraordinary staff from the Department of Children and Families, Emergency Services, Police and the volunteers from a variety of organisations for everything they are doing to make sure that Territorians are safe, dry, fed and clothed and that they know there are people there on their side.

The Department of Children and Families is leading the welfare functional group, and there are more than 100 staff working across eight evacuation centres. They are making sure that about 1,000 evacuees have meals and essential supplies, that they are supported psychosocially and that their health, education and welfare needs are met. Our partners—including people with the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Vinnies, Orange Sky and others—are making sure people have access to schooling, medical care and vital moral support.

The immediate relief payments have already been delivered to 748 households in Katherine; that is about $750,000 that has made its way out the door into Territorians' pockets so that they can get re-established in their home and have food on the table when they need it. The immediate payments over time include relief support which is available for everyone—there is no means testing for that; everyone is entitled to that—of $611 per adult and $309 per child to a maximum of $1,537 per family to help with this personal hardship crisis that we are all facing.

Residents who cannot return to their home and require temporary assistance accommodation can also access a payment of just over $1,100. We get people relocated, making sure that as we get them on their way home, they have money in the bank so that they can actually stock up and be sure that when they get there they have all the supplies they need, that they are safe and secure and know that the Territory is behind them 100%.

Top End Memory Clinic – Funding

J DAVIS to MINISTER for HEALTH

I have been contacted by constituents who are carers and concerned about the future of the Northern Territory memory clinic, which provides critical support for people living with dementia and their families. I understand that from 1 July this year Commonwealth funding may reduce staffing at this clinic, including reducing the full-time doctor to a 0.5 FTE position and cutting nursing support. With current waiting times already at about six months, any reduction could seriously impact care.

Can you confirm whether these staffing reductions are expected to occur and, if so, what steps the Northern Territory Government will take to ensure that Territorians living with dementia and their carers do not lose access to these essential services?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I can advise that I have received correspondence from a Northern Territory resident and a media statement from the Council on the Ageing concerned about the ongoing funding for the Northern Territory memory service. I have referred these issues to the Department of Health for advice about the content and its accuracy and what is presented as a reduction in Commonwealth funding for dementia support in the Northern Territory.

The NT memory clinic plays a vital role in diagnosing and supporting people living with dementia and their carers across the Territory. The letter states that changes to the Commonwealth dementia program funding from 1 July 2026 are expected to significantly reduce staffing levels at the clinic. If what is presented is accurate—I note that I am awaiting advice on this matter—it would be extremely concerning that the reduction in Commonwealth funding would impact on some of our most vulnerable citizens who rely on these services.

Now that these matters have been brought to my attention I will carefully consider the department's advice about funding for these services to ensure that appropriate levels of support and treatment are available for those who receive medical care from the NT memory clinic, including the support of those in regional areas. The government wants to ensure that certainty can be provided to all patients who rely on these services. I will speak to those who have contacted me once that information is available. I will further respond to you, Member for Johnston, once we receive further advice.

We have just received an uplift in hospital funding, so it would be concerning to me if the Commonwealth is giving with one hand and taking with the other. We do not want to see that. We are already a further $200m short in funding from the federal government. We are paying for aged care, which is costing $40m a year and is a Commonwealth service. We are paying more than $50m a year for aeromedical services, and we are still $95m short for primary healthcare.

To hear what you have put to me today, Member for Johnston, that the Commonwealth is giving with one hand and taking with the other, is concerning. I will get back to you with further advice about this, and I thank you for the important question.

NT Floods – Essential Services

Mr O'GALLAGHER to MINISTER for ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Despite the continual divisive mudslinging from the Leader of the Opposition during this flood emergency, I thank you for your regular updates to the Chamber over the last two days on the status of the restoration works at Darwin River Dam as well as the restoration works currently underway to restore essential services to flood-impacted communities across the Territory.

Like many Territorians, I have been following official Power and Water posts and listening to updates provided through the media. Can you update the Assembly on the current status of the Darwin River Dam and the boil water alert? Can you provide the Assembly with information on the other restoration works occurring across the Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Karama has been keeping a close eye on these issues, just as our government has, and I will update the Assembly with the latest information.

As people would have seen, this morning while I was speaking in parliament I was contacted by the CEO of the Health department who advised that the Chief Health Officer had rescinded the boil water alert in the greater Darwin area. I thank Territorians for their patience while awaiting this advice.

I am also pleased to update the Assembly that, thanks to our hardworking Power and Water staff and contractors, two pumps at the Darwin River Dam pump station are now operational. Water supplied from the dam is now exceeding demand and is replenishing supply in the water network. As I touched on last night, this means that Power and Water has advised that Territorian households and businesses can resume their regular water use.

Over the next few days the re-establishment of the permanent electricity supply to replace the currently connected generators is the focus of all efforts at the dam site.

Power and Water continues not just to conduct work in Darwin but also work to restore essential services in Katherine and remote communities. In Katherine, Power and Water staff are continuing to work hard to restore power to residents. I am advised that just over 350 households are without power, which is down from approximately 1,200. These numbers will continue to decline as Power and Water targets individual reconnections. I am advised that crews are currently focused on areas in Katherine South where water has receded and access has been gained.

I have been advised that the high-voltage network in Katherine has been fully restored. All remaining customer power outages are the result of individual house isolation or areas where the supplying transformer has been isolated. As at the last update, approximately 600 premises in Katherine are impacted by sewerage issues. All pump stations are operational; however, there is additional damage to sewerage infrastructure. Works are currently underway to fix these issues.

Further works, planning and assessments continue at Daly River, Beswick, Palumpa, Jilkminggan and Binjari. I thank those on the front line and Power and Water for their continued efforts across the Territory. They have been on the front line day and night, working to support Territorians getting power back on. They are dealing with sewerage issues in Katherine as we speak, and we know what a difficult job that is.

I thank the Member for Karama for his question and, once again, thank you to all staff on the front line. It is appreciated.

AirAsia Flights

Ms UIBO to MINISTER for TRADE, BUSINESS and ASIAN RELATIONS

This is to a minister who can actually answer a question.

Less than a year ago you proudly stated:

> *The resumption of direct flights between Darwin and Bali by AirAsia is fantastic news for Territorians and visitors alike. AirAsia's strong reputation as a leading global great value carrier will instil confidence in both leisure and business travellers.*

Last week Territorians with AirAsia tickets to Bali and Kuala Lumpur were told without warning that their flights had been canned. When did you know that AirAsia had pulled the plug; why did you not warn Territorians earlier; and if you did not know, what does that say about your CLP government's ability to negotiate good deals for Territorians? How much taxpayer funding went to AirAsia for these services, and are you recuperating that funding from the provider?

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 109(2)(e); the format of question should not begin with insults. We are above that in this parliament. I would like the Speaker to make a ruling.

Ms Uibo: It was a compliment; she can answer the question.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, the point of order is not for you to respond. In this case, I will let it go through to the keeper. Just keep in mind that there are many questions within one question; there are five questions in there, which makes it difficult to answer.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I will take the compliment, but I also take offence at the indication that none of my colleagues can answer a question. I assure you that they are good at answering questions.

I was disappointed that I did not get this question on day one as I am keen to put on the record how I feel about AirAsia backing out and not keeping its commitment to keep the Territory connection to Bali. That was its commercial decision to make. There was zero funding support for that route, and AirAsia made the decision to come on a commercial basis. Less than a year later it turned around and said, 'Oops, we made a mistake and are not doing it'. It was disappointing, and AirAsia gave us 24 hours' notice. It let us know at 10.58 am on the day it started putting out notices that it was thinking of pulling flights.

We went into the mode of, 'Please do not do this; there are a lot of Territorians who have booked flights. Everyone has been supporting this route, which is an important connection for us. A weekend in Bali is something that many Territorians like to enjoy.' In spite of all our efforts and every attempt we made to

persuade AirAsia not to change that flight, it went ahead and did it anyway. To say that it is not on my Christmas card list anymore would be an understatement.

We were waiting and respected AirAsia's decision. As we negotiated with it to try to reverse that decision, AirAsia started notifying people that it was pulling the flight before it had finally confirmed to us what it would do. It asked us to embargo discussions on that. I wanted to go out red hot and say, 'This is not good enough. You made a commitment to Territorians. Families have booked holidays. This is not good enough; you cannot do this.' We respected that AirAsia would take some time to look at it, then it just started notifying people anyway, which was incredibly disappointing.

Do you know what? Good news this week is that Aero Dili has announced that as of May it will fly from Darwin to Dili. Guess what? Aero Dili has a connection to Bali. Now we have a twofer: a Territorian can spend a couple of days in beautiful Dili, enjoy the beaches, scuba diving and snorkelling, then hop on the plane to Bali to spend time there and then come home.

We are keeping our commitment to keep the Territory connected. We are working hard to make that happen. I am delighted to make the announcement about Aero Dili.

Economy

Mr MACKAY to TREASURER

A recent International Monetary Fund report warned of severe fiscal damage caused by high-spending states and territories. The report points the finger at irresponsible government spending and poor economic leadership, with the real threat of national intervention at stake if things do not improve. With a $1.4bn hole in the forward estimates and debt skyrocketing towards a $15bn ceiling, can the Treasurer update the Assembly on this blunt warning from the IMF, why the Territory is in this position and what the Finocchiaro CLP government is doing to restore our finances and keep our unique lifestyle safe?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the IMF for the international recognition of Labor's eight years of economic failure. Its report pulls no punches, pointing the finger at the surge in debt across states and territories, with smaller jurisdictions like ours particularly exposed.

This is the result of Labor's legacy in the Territory. Under captains Gunner, Fyles and Lawler, Territory finances were pillaged to prop up projects with little economic benefit to Territorians. They were spending like drunken sailors on vanity projects such as the two art galleries that Territorians are now paying back—luckily, we could pull one of those galleries; I would hate to see the position we would otherwise be in—and piling on debt that the private sector should have taken the lead on. No-one wanted to do business with the previous government except criminals negotiating their way back onto the streets. It was aimless leadership by a floundering Labor government adrift and going nowhere.

Ask any Territory fisho, and they will tell you that having a flashy boat and gear is meaningless unless you know the tides and water. That sums up Labor perfectly: all the gear and no idea.

When the Finocchiaro CLP government took over the helm it was a mess. The Territory was on track to smash through the self-imposed $15bn debt ceiling. We were taking on water with a $1.4bn hole in the forward estimates because of promises made with no money to back them up. The minute we got into government we took decisive action, and we had to. We started work straightaway to rebuild our economy. We reduced spending and reversed the disastrous trajectory that Labor put us on.

We are now seeing the results. We stabilised the books. We reduced the 2025–26 projected debt level by $479m; that is $479m less risk on the Territory's balance sheet. We maintained the Territory's Aa3 stable credit rating from Moody's. That was a big worry to me, and it should have been a big worry to Territorians because if Labor had its way that would have changed, which would have put us in a disastrous position.

Now we have a big green flag for investors to show that we know what we are doing. That stability was not inherited; it was earned through disciplined fiscal responsibility by the people on this side of the House. We are living within our fiscal means and delivering steady repair, a stronger economy and the lifestyle Territorians deserve rather than sending the Territory backwards.

Casuarina Bus Interchange

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for LOGISTICS and INFRASTRUCTURE

I recently rode the local bus network to the Casuarina interchange and heard firsthand from passengers and drivers just how anxious people are feeling about the changes. Bus drivers said that they are being forced to idle and queue in the side streets, creating visibility issues for motorists and adding to congestion. Bus drivers said that there is nowhere to have a break or use the toilet, and passengers are standing in the rain or baking in the sun because there is insufficient shade. There are no toilets for passengers at the interchange, and parents have expressed that they are worried their children are close to oncoming traffic. Local organisations have also said that the antisocial behaviour continues.

Can you advise whether the Member for Casuarina has informed you about this unacceptable situation and what you are doing to address these concerns for road users, bus drivers and pedestrians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak about the bus network and public transport across Darwin. The Member for Casuarina has spoken about this and is passionate about what happens in his electorate with the bus network.

We made the decision some time ago to close down the Casuarina interchange. It was done for good reasons. The antisocial behaviour and violence there was unprecedented. It was putting everybody at risk, including schoolkids, mums and dads, other kids and people going to the shopping centre. It was beyond belief what was happening there.

The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure has done a significant amount of work to look at how we restructure that area to reduce the antisocial behaviour and violence because of all the people congregating in that one area. The work was done to look at how buses move around that specific area, where the new bus stops will be and how the old interchange fits in with all that. I thank the team from DLI for the work they have done, because they have done a phenomenal job to get that done.

There were teething problems, and the Member for Casuarina rightly raised them with me. His local businesses were coming to him, and he was coming to me because he was getting the truth and passing it on to me to pass on to the department. Some other work was done alongside the City of Darwin to look at how those movements worked around Casuarina shopping centre and the old interchange.

The Member for Casuarina still comes to see me about different bits and pieces but, gladly, he is not specifically talking about what is happening at Casuarina shopping centre and the old interchange. We are now dealing with matters of school buses and how we move kids around in that ever-growing area of Casuarina. That is another piece of work we are doing.

I will try to answer what I can regarding the question about toilets. The City of Darwin has stepped up and is assisting because people are now using the toilets at the library, which is great. I thank the City of Darwin because it is chipping in and helping to deal with the issues at the interchange.

It is a big piece of work, and I am glad we have done it. We have solved a number of the problems at Casuarina. The next piece of work we are doing, and I have made the commitment to do, is the Palmerston interchange and that whole area, because there are issues there as well. The department will have some plans to me soon, and I look forward to updating the Assembly on what is happening there.

Barossa Aboriginal Future Fund

Mr KERLE to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY

We heard recently that the Barossa Aboriginal Future Fund (BAFF) will deliver free laundry facilities and job opportunities across the Northern Territory. The BAFF is investing $110m in remote and urban Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory through Santos and its joint venture partner, the Aboriginal Investment Group. Can you inform the Assembly as to the benefits of the mining and gas industries to Aboriginal Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Blain understands the importance of the gas and mining industry to the Northern Territory economy and to Aboriginal communities affected by it across the coast.

The gas and mining industry contributes to real outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians and remote communities through taxes, jobs and other payments to the NT, as well as investments to improve the socioeconomic outcomes and liveability of communities across the Northern Territory.

In fact, the Australian offshore gas industry pays a petroleum rent resource tax to the federal government. Have a guess roughly how much that is each year. In 2022–23 it was $1.4bn. This financial year just gone it is estimated to be roughly the same. That is money paid directly to the federal government, and we know the federal government helps us by topping up our economy. There is a direct benefit to the Northern Territory.

Another example of how the gas industry supports the Northern Territory is through the Barossa Aboriginal Future Fund. This was established on a voluntary basis by Santos and its joint ventures to share the benefits of the Barossa project with Northern Territory coastal Aboriginal people living around Darwin, the Tiwi Islands, West Arnhem, East Arnhem and the Victoria River district. Its purpose is to positively contribute to the Northern Territory communities around where Barossa sits up to Darwin through the Tiwis. It does this over and above the taxes and royalties it already pays to the government.

The fund will invest $110m over the term of the Barossa project to communities for homeland infrastructure and cultural activities that will improve health, education, housing, community resilience and laundries, as we just heard about. This will be a great outcome for Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory and the Top End. Santos and the Barossa are contributing not only to the federal money that comes to us but also to this fund, which is used for the Tiwi Islands and coastal Aboriginal communities. The Member for Arafura would know about this fund because it directly benefits people of his community.

I thank Barossa and Santos for doing what they do, making sure the Territory is a good place to work, investing real money into jobs, making the community safer and helping Aboriginal Territorians across the coastal part of the Territory.

Jabiru Airport

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

We are heading toward the middle of March, and this government is still silent on the future of the Jabiru Airport. With the road cut off at Mary River bridge near Bark Hut, this Wet Season is proving that an airport in the region is vital to keeping people connected with access to food, medicines and other essential items.

Regional and remote airstrip operations are an NT Government responsibility. You already ripped money from the Jabiru futures transition and the Gunbalanya Health Centre. Will you commit to saving the Jabiru Airport, or will you turn your back on the people of Kakadu and West Arnhem?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is an important question. With the mine closing at Jabiru, for the airport and all the other parts of that community things are changing significantly. We know the importance of the airport, because it is not just for the community; it also services tourism and other parts in that area.

Although the question was directed to me as the minister for Infrastructure, it actually sits with Minister Edgington, who has far more information and has been leading the negotiations on what is taking place there. I will hand to Minister Edgington to provide a response.

Mr EDGINGTON: It is an important matter to us. The future of Jabiru sits under the Housing, Local Government and Community Development portfolio. I encourage you to contact me at any time when there are issues.

The CLP government has been working with the Commonwealth, Energy Resources of Australia and the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation in Jabiru to transition the township of Jabiru from a mining support centre to a tourism and government service delivery hub.

To date, the future of Jabiru and Kakadu program has progressed with upgrades to power and sewerage and communications infrastructure, support for ongoing government essential services, the construction of the new health centre, the community development projects and establishment of a government and traditional owner corporation.

It goes without saying that the NT Government has a firm commitment to the key deliverables for the future of Jabiru and Kakadu program and will continue to support the Mirarr vision for Jabiru.

As part of the Ranger Mine Closure Plan published by ERA, Rio Tinto formally notified stakeholders of its intention to close and demolish the Jabiru Airport unless a third-party operator is found. I acknowledge that the closure of the airstrip poses a serious risk to service continuity, including freight logistics and emergency medical evacuations that are clearly essential for community wellbeing and regional resilience.

I recently met with the owner of Kakadu Air Services and GACJT to discuss the fundamental services and operations that utilise the airstrip. The impact extends well beyond transportation, significantly commercial enterprises and particularly the booming tourism industry. These negotiations are ongoing, Member for Arafura.

I am running out of time, but I am happy to brief you out of session.

Cruise Ship Season

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for TOURISM and HOSPITALITY

Can you update the Assembly on the current cruise ship season and its economic contribution to the Northern Territory? How is the government ensuring that cruises translate into real benefits for Darwin and the Top End, particularly during our shoulder and low seasons? How does this performance reflect renewed confidence and certainty in the Territory's visitor economy as we rebuild our economy?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, you know full well that tourism is one of our five key pillars to rebuild our economy. Cruise ships are critical to that, especially in our low season when traditionally tourists were not coming for our lovely weather; it would be the Wet Season.

We have had resounding success over the last year, with an increase of 13.3% to our economic outlook, which was monumental when compared with every other jurisdiction in Australia, which either flatlined or went backwards. We are proud of that. It has created 581 local jobs, which is fantastic for all of the Territorians who work in that industry.

We have 104 cruise ships scheduled; that means thousands of visitors filling our restaurants, pubs, cafes, souvenir shops in the mall and tours. We had *Queen Anne*, the biggest cruise ship to come in, on Sunday, and *Queen Mary II* is coming this Saturday, which coincides with the royal visit from King Frederik and Queen Mary of Denmark who are coming all the way to the Northern Territory. They will visit Uluru. It is exciting to have royalty in the Northern Territory.

Our own queen of Wanguri is excited to see the royals from Denmark here. Unfortunately, they are in between sittings so we cannot all get there. It is exciting.

I remind Territorians what our tourism and cruise ship seasons were like under Labor. It spent all of its time destroying the Territory; crime was going up, and the economy was going down. I remember clearly that when the city was in a crime crisis, we started to have reports of cruise ship captains saying to their passengers, 'Do not get off the boat and go to the mall'. We thought, 'Oh my goodness; this is awful.'

Do you know what the Labor Tourism minister said about that on radio? His response was, 'How about we negotiate with the cruise ships to get them to come to Darwin at different times of the day so that people who come off the ship are safe?' We all said, 'No way'. Labor was not even focusing on the real issue for Territorians, which is to reduce the crime.

It sounds pretty simple, but Labor was not focused on crime. The CLP government reduced crime, and the economy, cruise ship arrivals and tourist numbers are going up. We had an increase in visitor spending of 38%. Overnight stays increased by 28%. That is truly changing the way we do things in the Territory to make sure we can get people to come and visit. They love it, and guess what? They go back and tell the world.

Watch Houses – Custody Nurses

Mr GUYULA to MINISTER for POLICE

Since the tragic death of Kumanjayi Dempsey in the Tennant Creek watch house last year, what has been done to ensure that there are custody nurses on duty 24 hours a day across NT watch houses? Can you advise whether there is currently a nurse available at the Tennant Creek watch house every day and for how many hours a day?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the Member for Mulka's question. It is obviously important following Kumanjayi Dempsey's death.

There is a longstanding MOU, which existed well before we came to government, whereby Health provides a nurse in the Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine watch houses. In Tennant Creek there is a slightly different arrangement whereby nurses are made available from the hospital. As far as I am aware, nothing has changed. That MOU continues to stay in place.

Obviously, the Coroner is doing the work she has to do. Following her report, we will look at any recommendations.

Gray Oval – Upgrades

Mr HOWE to MINISTER for PEOPLE, SPORT and CULTURE

Gray Oval in my electorate is one of the busiest ovals in the Top End and home to the mighty Palmerston Rovers Football Club—a club built on community, commitment and a serious love for the game. Can you update the Assembly on how the Northern Territory Government is delivering its election commitment to upgrade Gray Oval so that it can be used more reliably throughout the year?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the hardworking member's new appointment as assistant minister for People, Sport and Culture.

While many Territorians are rightly focused on the emergency work taking place, there is also important work continuing in our suburbs and communities, including at local sporting ovals that bring together people week after week. One of those places is the Gray Oval in Palmerston.

Historically, wet weather has wreaked havoc on this facility. Poor drainage has often limited use of the fields, particularly during the Wet Season, despite the oval being one of the busiest football venues in the Top End.

Gray Oval is home to the mighty Palmerston Rovers Football Club. On any night of the week and most weekends during the Dry Season the grounds are full of players, families and supporters. It is a place where young Territorians develop their skills, friendships and love of sport. That is why this government is honouring its election commitment of $250,000 to support upgrades at Gray Oval. The commitment follows strong advocacy from the Members for Blain, Brennan, Drysdale and Spillett and reflects the Finocchiaro government's commitment to supporting grassroots sport across the Territory.

The funding will focus on key priorities identified through consultation with Football NT and the Palmerston Rovers Football Club. These priorities include rectifying the playing fields to improve drainage and usability, particularly for field 2, and ultimately reconfiguring change rooms to support growing participation and ensuring the facility better meets competition requirements.

I acknowledge the ongoing work of Byrne Haigh, President of the Palmerston Rovers Football Club, and the leadership of Football NT in helping to identify these priorities.

Importantly, this $250,000 investment is the first step to addressing some of the issues at Gray Oval. There have been many conversations between me, the President of Palmerston Rovers and other members of this Chamber. We are looking at how we can provide better support because it is one of the ovals that is utilised by the community throughout the year. We are supporting grassroots sport to provide the opportunity for

people to engage in activities and play soccer or football and remain connected with the community, making a meaningful contribution back to the community.

Once again, this clearly shows that this government is ensuring we are delivering the commitment that we made before the election, and we will continue to provide further updates in the future months.

Voluntary Assisted Dying Legislation

J DAVIS to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

I am contacted all the time by people in my electorate and beyond seeking an update on the introduction of VAD legislation in the NT. Some of these people have been fighting for this for decades, and for many of them time is running out.

Can you give Territorians a timeline and intentions for introducing VAD legislation to this parliament?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I have said in media throughout the year—specifically at the beginning of the year at a press conference to give Territorians an update—that the legislation is currently being drafted. I have worked with a number of people in the Chamber, including my colleagues and the Leader of the Opposition who I called and will have a meeting with. We will go through some of the things that we must address in the Bill because our intention is to bring this forward and get it passed. We want to make sure people understand what will be involved. That will be in the middle of the year, Member for Johnston. All the work is happening, and I am looking forward to it coming along.

Health Workforce – Graduate Nurses

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for HEALTH

I acknowledge that he has left now, but Colin Southam, an amazing paramedic, was sitting in the gallery previously—I think he had to leave—which segues into my question.

People in the Fannie Bay electorate have spoken to me about having a strong healthcare system and ensuring that Territorians have the best healthcare. It is an important part of restoring the unique Territory lifestyle. Attracting essential nursing staff is important to strengthen our health system. Territorians know that graduate nurses play a key role in delivering frontline services. They are vital to the strength and sustainability of the healthcare system. Their presence helps ease workforce shortages and ensures patients continue to receive safe, high-quality care.

Can you update the Assembly and Territorians on how we are growing our health workforce with more graduate nurses?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, all members on this side know how important it is to have good people on the front line. They are showing, as we speak, the work that they are doing on the front line across the board; they are doing a fantastic job.

I am thrilled that the Finocchiaro CLP government is boosting the Territory health workforce, with 72 graduate nurses and midwives joining the NT Health workforce in the first three months of this year, and there are more graduates on the way. Ensuring Territorians have the best healthcare is an important part of restoring our unique Territory lifestyle.

We said that 2026 will be our year of growth, certainty and security, and we are growing our health workforce. We are providing security and certainty to our health workforce to deliver better care and stronger frontline services for all Territorians.

Every graduate nurse and midwife who chooses the Territory strengthens our healthcare system. It means better care for patients and helps build a sustainable health workforce that keeps us healthier. NT Health provides up to 300 graduate nursing and midwifery positions each year across the Territory. More graduates will be on their way across the Territory over 2026. Forty-eight new graduate nurses and midwives will commence at Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston Regional Hospital. Four new graduate registered

nurses and one midwife started at the Katherine Hospital, with 24 new graduate nurses and midwives starting at Alice Springs Hospital.

I was recently there and met some of the graduates, and it was impressive to hear how keen they were to live and work in Alice Springs. Graduate nurses and midwives undertake an intensive orientation and workplace readiness program designed specifically to prepare and support their initial transition to employment. As part of their orientation graduate nurses and midwives will complete essential training requirements focused on the delivery of safe and high-quality patient-centred care.

Early last month I was pleased to announce that we are boosting the Territory health workforce with more than 200 new doctors. Under the CLP we have recorded a strong uplift in trainee doctor retention. A large proportion of NT Health's Royal Darwin and Palmerston hospitals doctor-in-training workforce is continuing from 2025. There is a 78% retention rate.

We are delivering on our commitment to restore the Territory lifestyle by strengthening access to quality healthcare and providing certainty for our essential workers to stay, settle and put down their roots in the Northern Territory.

Prison Officers – Industrial Action

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for AGRICULTURE and FISHERIES on behalf of MINISTER for PUBLIC SERVICE

This government's record on bargaining is now clear. When police officers stood up for fair pay and conditions the Chief Minister and the Minister for Public Service branded them greedy. Today the Corrections Commissioner accused hardworking prison officers in Central Australia of not acting in the public interest for taking lawful industrial action. Do you agree with the commissioner's attack on frontline prison officers? Why should any Territory worker believe that this government negotiates in good faith?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, we are proud and make no apologies for delivering the best pay deal to police in more than 20 years because it is important to reduce crime and keep the community safe. I give a big shout-out to all the police officers doing what they do day-in, day-out, walking towards danger and protecting the community.

There have been ongoing negotiations in relation to a range of government contracts. It is important to ensure that we continue to move forward in the best interests of not only the workers but also the community as a whole.

An offer of 3% over four years was made to Corrections officers on 5 March. The union came back with an offer, and there have been ongoing negotiations to try to resolve that matter.

We are dealing with an unprecedented flood event across the Northern Territory. We are moving to protect Territorians who are from Alice Springs, the Barkly, Katherine and the rural area. Now the prison officers are talking about taking protected industrial action. We should be focusing on the Territory as a whole and not just one small group. We need to ensure that we act in the best interests of all Territorians. It is not the right time to take industrial action. We should concentrate on making sure the most vulnerable people in our community are safe.

The Chief Minister is doing a wonderful job of dealing with that and leading the Territory, along with the Minister for Children and Families. This is about keeping the community safe.

I give a big shout-out to the prison officers because they do a great job. They have a difficult job with challenging situations, but is it the right time to take industrial action when we are facing this? That is a matter for other people to think about. I am just raising the question.

We will continue to negotiate with the union in good faith, but we will focus on what is in the best interests of the Northern Territory as a whole. We will keep the residents of Katherine safe. We will use the prisoners in work camps to help Katherine and Alice Springs.

This industrial action may directly affect the ability to help the residents of Katherine. Our government is focusing on people across the Northern Territory who have been affected by this tragic event, no matter

where they might be. Our thoughts are with all the people who have been displaced, including the children, mums and dads—everyone.

International Women's Day

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for YOUTH, SENIORS and EQUALITY

International Women's Day was held four days ago on Sunday 8 March and provided an opportunity not only to celebrate the achievements of women and girls but also to strengthen our community through action towards gender equality.

Can the minister update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government supported grassroots organisations across the Territory to deliver International Women's Day events and build stronger, more inclusive communities?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I acknowledge that International Women's Day was marked globally on 8 March. This is an important opportunity to celebrate the achievements of women and girls while recommitting to progress on gender equality.

The Finocchiaro CLP government is proud to support community-led action across the Northern Territory, investing more than $67,000 through the International Women's Day grants program to support 36 local initiatives across the Territory. These grants ranged from $500 to $3,000, enabling community organisations to design and deliver events that reflect the priorities of their communities. That includes initiatives to support young women in sport, digital skills development, cultural connection, leadership opportunities and the creation of safe and inclusive spaces. Importantly, many of these events also contribute to domestic, family and sexual violence prevention, recognising that promoting gender equality helps build a safer, stronger and more inclusive Territory.

The theme this year for the United Nations was, 'Rights, justice and action for all women and girls', highlighting the need for collective action to address the barriers that women and girls still face. Territorians saw and participated in events taking place across the Territory during the first week of March, including the Darwin International Women's Day walk delivered by the United Nations Association of Australia Northern Territory branch. Despite the rain, many came together for speeches, a CBD walk and a range of activities to celebrate women and promote equality.

On Sunday I was honoured to attend and give the opening remarks at the International Women's Day luncheon, which was hosted by the UNAA (NT) branch. This was the most well-attended luncheon event attended to date, with a larger venue being required.

I thank the Member for Fannie Bay and the Attorney-General for being there and supporting the event.

Ms Uibo: Hey, I was there too!

Mr CHARLS: Sorry, the Leader of the Opposition was there also, but tried to talk more about legislation and other things rather than the event and what people wanted to hear.

I was pleased to reconfirm the Northern Territory Public Sector's commitment to equality. Currently in our public sector, 63% of the workforce and almost 58% of senior management positions are filled by women. This is a great achievement for the Territory. One thing I have mentioned in the community many times and inform this Assembly is that I am proud to be a part of this 15th Assembly where the Speaker, Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition are all women showing leadership for the Territory.

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

COMMERCIAL PASSENGER (ROAD) TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (LICENSING) BILL
Serial 53

Continued from 5 February 2026.

Mr YAN (Logistics and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, from the outset, the Labor opposition supports this Bill and has no issues with it. It is a minor Bill in terms of the processes and is not adverse to the NT. We will support any sensible reforms, which are encompassed in this Bill. We believe it will reduce the unnecessary red tape for businesses to allow operators to focus on providing services rather than navigating administration. Where legislation can simplify processes, we will support that, and we believe this Bill is balanced in terms of maintaining safety standards, which is important, and it is a practical step forward for industry and consumers alike.

However, transport reforms must always ensure that public safety does remain the priority, particularly when vehicles are carrying paying passengers.

One point worth clarifying is whether extending licence durations affects vehicle inspection requirements, so if the minister could answer that in his wrap-up speech, that would be most appreciated.

Commercial passenger vehicles travel significantly across many distances in the Territory. Our Territory roads are our lifeline at times, and when we see commercial passenger vehicles carry members of the public every day, we want to ensure that strong roadworthiness and inspection standards are maintained, which will remain essential across the NT. We do not think that should ever lack priority.

Regarding the importance of transport connectivity across the Northern Territory, our road network is a lifeline for many Territorians. In many regional and remote communities, commercial passenger transport services are a vital link. Healthcare relies heavily on our road network, as does employment, airports, other essential services and places where access is further away from city and town centres.

For people living in the bush, reliable transport is not just a convenience; it is a lifeline. Territorians in urban areas who use safe and reliable transport networks may sometimes take it for granted if they are not aware of the challenges further from our centres. We believe that supporting transport operators while maintaining strong safety standards helps to ensure that services remain available to communities across the Northern Territory.

Reducing unnecessary red tape is important, but it must go hand in hand with maintaining safe, reliable transport services that keep Territorians connected, whether they live in our cities, regions or the bush and remote parts of the Northern Territory.

Road connectivity has been spoken about, and it has been a focus for the past week, particularly with the flooding happening across the Territory. Our road networks matter and are extremely important to Territorians who live and work off those networks. It is important to their livelihoods, particularly beef and cattle livestock transport on safe, reliable road networks to get to market. The Northern Territory is a huge exporter of beef and cattle from our Darwin Port. The further from town we get, the less bitumen there is.

It is important that the CLP government understands this because $1bn out of the infrastructure spend in the 2025 budget will have a significant impact; it already is in terms of the pipeline of works. Many small and medium businesses rely on tendering for those packages for the road network, particularly the further we get from town.

Aboriginal business enterprises have created more opportunity in this pipeline of works, employing people in local and remote communities as much as in regional and city centres to tender for that work. It is important to have the pipeline of work so businesses can plan for their future in the medium and long term.

Unfortunately, in relation to those road crews and structures, we are hearing more that work is not being put out by the government for those packages. We are seeing some stress from Territory businesses about what they can and cannot tender for if roadworks are culled. We saw the example where road and infrastructure tenders were confirmed in March 2025 but disappeared off the radar and were scrapped by the CLP come May when the first CLP budget was released.

You would expect the Member for Namatjira, being the Treasurer, has to look at the dollars, but he is also the Logistics and Infrastructure minister, so he must have a fight with himself about what infrastructure should be invested in to make our roads more resilient.

In my electorate we have seen deterioration in a small amount of time because huge bodies of water are flowing through the Big Rivers region. The impact on the structural integrity of some of the single-lane bitumen roads, particularly the Roper Highway in the Arnhem electorate, will be serious. Urgent major repairs are required to repair the Salt Creek bridge. I have asked many times about Jilkminggan, but I never had many

answers. Jilkminggan residents rely on that road to get back to their community. Lifting floodways, culverts, bridges—all of that infrastructure—is an investment in the future.

I can tell you that it is about $300 for a taxi from Katherine to Barunga and Beswick communities if you are going one way with your shopping. These are the types of things that people, particularly remote Territorians, deal with day-in, day-out if they do not have their own car or a reliable commercial passenger network like buses, minibuses and other modes of transport or a regular passenger transport (RPT) service. Parts of my electorate are serviced by what we call the mail plane, which is a once-a-week service to certain areas. That mail plane is restricted in weight and passenger numbers and, because it is the Wet Season, parts of my electorate have no road access for three to five months, depending on the Wet. Obviously, it is a big Wet this year, so those roads may not open until May, well and truly into the Dry Season.

Every bit costs, and we see the impact on people who cannot travel in and out of their remote communities, homelands and regional town centres to our major hubs like Alice Springs and Darwin. We will start to see more impact across the Northern Territory. General wear and tear on personal vehicles is something to take into account as much as commercial passenger vehicles.

I hope in its 2026–27 budget books the CLP reconsiders the cuts and devastating reduction of the important infrastructure pipeline and invests in infrastructure that will make a difference now and in the future. Of course, places like Numbulwar in my electorate get forgotten. It is probably because it is represented by a Labor member, so it will never see a single cent under the CLP government.

The Phelp River bridge was out to tender in March 2025, then it was cut out of the infrastructure tender project; it disappeared by May 2025 because of the budget. I will keep trying my best. It took many years of advocacy to get $20m for that bridge. That part of the Territory will have five months of isolation because the road does not have a bridge that can withstand the flash flooding and sustained volume of water that goes through in not only a normal Wet Season but also a Wet such as we have now.

Roads and investment from the government matter. Most people know—I will say it again—80% of roads funding in the Northern Territory is from the Commonwealth. We are asking the CLP to think about only 20% that it can invest in roads infrastructure so we might—God forbid—have more opportunity for commercial passenger vehicles to travel on those roads.

In the Dry Season, particularly in my electorate of Arnhem, we see commercial passenger vehicles like small buses. Outback Spirit travels on Central Arnhem Road all the way to Nhulunbuy. We would love to see it return to places like Gapuwiyak, which now has an outstanding, top-of-the-line, class-act arts centre at Lake Evella. It is a beautiful facility.

Having tourists coming in from Central Arnhem Road—which is predominantly a dirt road that is graded twice a year if we are lucky—in that last 24 kilometres to get to Gapuwiyak to stay, visit, spend money, buy local art, meet artists and hear the story from locals will create another opportunity for the local and tourism economy in remote parts of the Northern Territory.

Please do not think of the road networks as being isolated and merely a travel line. We need to also think of them for food security, health services support, tourism opportunities and livestock. There is significant work happening on Central Arnhem Road. Thanks to the former Labor government, that is starting to come to fruition. Thankfully that did not get cut; obviously someone knows someone in the government, so funding for that bit of road was not cut.

We will see more stability in the road network and more weather resilience for the big pastoral stations to get the livestock out. It is not just cattle, but donkeys and buffalo as well. We have water buffalo businesses. They rely on the road network.

This is an agreeable piece of legislation, but there are other more important areas to continue to link to opportunities. Whilst we agree with the small but important reform, we would like the CLP government to always keep in mind the bigger picture, particularly when it comes to the resilience of our Northern Territory road network so that we can see more operations, particularly commercial opportunities for passenger vehicles, on the Northern Territory road network.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I support the Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Legislation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2026.

As many people know, as former deputy CEO of the Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce, I remain a champion for our small-to-medium business sector which, I continue to say and publicly declare, has been the heart and soul of our economy. Those businesses employ a lot of people. A lot of them are small—some only employ two or three people—but across the board they employ a lot of Territorians and create a future. They take on apprentices; they do everything. They need our support. This government is fully committed to supporting our small-to-medium business sector. I am aware the minister for Business is here. She is doing a great job and has great plans to strengthen the business environment for the sector.

As I alluded to in my speech this morning when discussing the ministerial report on managing Labor's debt legacy, I was fully aware at that time of how the Labor government neglected our small and medium business sector. Labor created a business environment that was characterised by over-regulation, and businesses could not understand why. There was all this regulation stymying their ability to get on. It became a bureaucratic nightmare for businesses that they did not need.

I will give you an example from when I was acting CEO of the Chamber of Commerce. We used to do a regular business confidence survey every year. During the latter years of the Gunner government I did my final one. We used to do a comparison of what happened one year to the next. In my last year—I am trying to remember the actual date—the survey had a record response. Members are busy, and the Chamber is quite big; getting members to respond to a survey detailing how they are going, what their business is, what the big issues for them are and so on takes time.

Over a period of about two weeks, we got a record response of 624 businesses that took the time to fill out the form, respond and bring it back so we could collate it and put it in an organised survey. From recollection—I do not have it on me—one of the questions was, 'What is your confidence in the current government?' It was the Labor government. From the previous year, it had escalated to the point where 80% or 85% of businesses that responded were dissatisfied with the Labor government. Businesses sometimes complain, but it went from about 60% to 85%, which was a huge jump.

Businesses were sending a signal. They wanted to be heard. One of the reasons they kept saying was, 'You just keep putting too much red tape in front of us. You are stopping us. Not only that, but you also do not seem committed to supporting local business.'

They were concerned about local content, procurement and government seeming to go interstate to buy everything. It was not using locals. That was a real heart thing that came back to me. It was one reason that motivated me to stand in the 2020 election. I had continually spoken to and visited business owners, and I saw the tears in some of their eyes. They were shutting and had to lay off great employees. They were not laying off employees for the sake of it; they had to because business has to control its costs to survive, so they had to downsize. I saw the heartbreak. That motivated me.

I publicised the survey. That is what a membership organisation does; it represents its members and takes their views forward. We took those views to the government of the day, and that is what we should do. We also took it to the opposition and anyone who would listen. The response of the government of the day was the old modus operandi. Here we had a record survey that told us front and centre that businesses felt neglected, and what did Labor do? It ignored the message, tried to disparage me and the Chamber—shoot the messenger. That is the tactic.

We went there with data and said that we were happy to take government members to see the businesses to talk to them if they wanted—'Go and reconfirm what we are telling you'. But no; they did not want to do that.

Let us look at the contrast with this government. I congratulate this government on establishing and receiving a report from the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce. We have committed to delivering 48 of those taskforce recommendations by mid-July. What does that tell us? This is a clear example of a government that listens. It does not shoot the messenger.

We listen to the message from businesses. This taskforce is from the business sector itself. It is not government making up all these recommendations; it is the businesses consulting and bringing that message back to government. We said, 'We hear you', but more importantly, we act. Listening is one thing, but we are acting on the message.

There is a range of activity across this government in all different fields. The Attorney-General has certain actions happening. There is legislation coming up to streamline and make it easier for licensed electricians so that if they are doing routine work like replacing a power point—safety is all the same; they are licensed

electricians—they do not have to get a new compliance certificate. These seem like little things for some people, but it takes up time and slows down businesses. The cumulative effect of this can destroy businesses.

Looking at the Bill we have before us, I can see that is exactly what we are doing; we are streamlining it. We are giving businesses the opportunity to go to the MVR every three years instead of yearly and get it all done, if you choose. Sure, you have to pay in advance, but it is your choice. You have the flexibility; it is your business, and you decide what suits you best. That is what we do. We listen to and act for businesses because we know they are the heart and soul of our economy.

Another initiative by this government is payroll tax reductions—marvellous! Personally, I think payroll tax is an oxymoron; we should get rid of it. Why do you tax employers who are employing people? You want them to employ more, not less. We should be giving them incentives to employ more. This goes back to the question of own-source revenue; we cannot afford to get rid of it because of the debt legacy we inherited.

We are recognising that there are smaller companies that are impacted more than larger companies, and we need to make it easier. We have reduced the payroll tax threshold for small companies, but here is the wonderful conundrum: we are earning more in payroll tax and receiving more revenue even though we have lowered the rates. That tells us that they are employing more people, which is what we want. We are about generating employment for locals. I find that a tremendous scenario, and I congratulate the Treasurer for that initiative.

I am passionate about local content and procurement. Let us give our own businesses chances. We need to do it. The minister may have other initiatives later this year—I will not steal her thunder—but let us keep pushing along those things. Let us make it better for our local companies.

I referred this morning to our creation and support of critical industries like tourism, hospitality, Defence, mining and gas. People say, 'Don't do that'. We had a classic example yesterday when we were talking about the concessional loan at Tennant Creek, and the minister outlined how the developments in the Barkly—the land of opportunity—benefit local businesses. They are winning the contracts, including local Indigenous businesses, which should be celebrated. This is exactly what we want. We want to grow our businesses in the regions where they are. Let us get behind that and focus on creating a business environment that is conducive to business. It acknowledges the role of businesses in creating genuine employment. The government is there to support, not be the business itself. That is where I think we sometimes have a different philosophy from our counterparts on the other side.

I could go on about this; I take this seriously. We must continue to support our businesses. Anything we can do, I will be there championing them from day one. I will congratulate any measures we take that support local business.

Going back to local content—I know we have a new member coming in, and we will welcome him. I was on the council with him; he is a fantastic member. Do not get me wrong in any way, shape or form, but I have said publicly in this Chamber that I was on the Darwin City Council when it passed a motion to reduce its local content weighting from 30% to 20%. That, to me, went against the whole philosophy. I have said before that if there was one level of government that should have stood up for local business it should be local government. The Territory government's weighting remains at 30%, but the Darwin City Council dropped its down. Palmerston and others did not; they stayed supporting local business. I called a division on that. Only two councillors voted against it—me and Councillor Un. All the other councillors, including the new Member for Nightcliff coming in, voted to reduce it.

I will ask the new Member for Nightcliff where he stands in support of local business and whether he will argue for the same measures when he comes to this House for Territory-wide reform, because I will reject that in any shape or form.

I commend the Treasurer and our government on their commitment to supporting local business and creating an environment where businesses can thrive and grow. We talk about how we grow the economy; my one dream is if every small business could employ one extra person—that is all we want them to do—this economy would be thriving. Let us push for an environment that allows that to happen.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Karama for his incredibly strong advocacy for purchasing local. He truly has been an advocate for that the entire time I have known him personally and prior in his other public life on council. It is that kind of championing that brings certainty to local businesses. Having owned a local business, I know it is important to have voices pushing government to ensure that

locals benefit from local products. Member for Karama, I say a sincere thank you on behalf of the business community, the construction industry that I have come from, for being that advocate.

Taxidrivers have been severely forgotten about in this Chamber, and this CLP Finocchiaro government is turning that around. A lot of taxidrivers live in the community of Drysdale, and after knocking on doors and continuing to hear from them after we have formed a relationship, I noticed just how disenfranchised they felt politically. Our taxidrivers are incredibly hardworking individuals. We have drivers in the Northern Territory who have committed their entire working life towards this profession. They are professional, and they want to deliver a high-quality service to their clients.

Let us not forget the environment that our taxidrivers work in. Tonight, we will all go home and there will be taxidrivers on the roads working all through the night so that if someone needs a taxi—be it at 12 am, 3 am or 6 am—they can deliver for their clients. They will be working weekends and public holidays. When the rest of the population enjoys time with family and friends, taxidrivers are on the road working for the people of the Northern Territory. For that they have my utmost respect because it is a tough job in the Territory. They see the real Northern Territory, and we cannot deny that of any taxidriver. They see it all.

In Drysdale the taxidrivers see the shenanigans that go on late at night; the celebrations in people's lives; the hardships people suffer; heartbreak; alcohol abuse; drug abuse; and, unfortunately—it was said clearly to me—the increase in physical and verbal assaults and being spat on. All these horrendous actions were being perpetrated against our taxidrivers at shocking rates.

At the same time the advisory body had been shut down by the previous Labor government. It did not want to hear about any of those problems, and the taxidrivers were disempowered and disenfranchised.

Our government is here to rectify some issues that faced the industry. We came in with our law reform agenda to make sure that Territorians at work, especially our taxidrivers, can be safe and know that the law will protect them from the disgustingly high rate of assaults on workers in that industry.

Taxidrivers are small business owners and operators. As a previous small business owner and operator, I understand the things that go with that. Our taxidrivers will be on the road and earning, but they still have all the compliance obligations to deal with. They have to deal with overheads and cash flows, regulation, compliance, margins to ensure that they have a sustainable business, the employment matters that come with hiring staff and security requirements. There is a huge business burden that goes along with this industry, like any other.

The average Territorian will only see the interaction of when they call the taxi company call centre. Inside the call centre is all the management and organisation required for that. There are shift managers who coordinate everything and send out drivers across the network.

After all that, taxidrivers still have to do all the regular business activity whilst running a 24/7 operation. It is a huge task, and they play an important role in our community.

This Bill is small on paper, but it is an important step in the CLP government restoring certainty and rebuilding the trust that taxi workers across the NT have in government.

I spoke about a few things that our taxidrivers do. They play an important role in our community life. They get people home. That might seem like a trivial thing, but I am sure we have all had moments in life when we needed a taxi, be it waiting at the airport, getting back from work, when our car has broken down or we have had a few too many and need to get home. This is an important role that our taxidrivers fill.

They transport our seniors, and I want to spend some time on this point. Many of our seniors rely on the taxi industry. As the industry was being crushed under the previous government, a disabled senior told me that wait times for her to get a taxi to go shopping were up to three hours. She requires a disabled taxi to take her to the shops, but because the business environment had been so neglected and over-regulated, that was the reality. Why invest in a declining business environment? We want to grow confidence back in this sector so that when seniors and disabled constituents need a taxi, it is readily available and they can partake in all the normal aspects of life that they deserve to partake in.

We have heard from the minister for Tourism about the great boom we are seeing with cruise ships and the tourism industry, which we are dedicated to and want to get behind. All these changes we are making add up. We are reducing the burden throughout the NT business environment and seeing the flow-on to tourism, which will then see a flow-on in the taxi industry.

We want tourists to have an enjoyable experience in Darwin. Part of that experience is getting off the plane at the airport and having a taxi ready and waiting, then you are off to the city. Tourists can get off the cruise ship, come to Drysdale and see the Oasis Shopping Village, Palmerston Shopping Centre and Gateway. It plays an important role in the tourist experience. Having a healthy taxi industry with professional drivers delivering high-quality service has benefit, with tourists going back and telling their friends, 'You should go to Darwin; it was a great experience from go to whoa.'

It is all little pieces of the puzzle that our government understands and is trying to put together to increase our whole economy in the tourism sector. It is important to note that—especially in Darwin—we have this urban model structure where we are dispersed, and the simple fact is the vast majority of people require a mode of transport. We have this suburb model that is spread out. I am sure we all needed transport to come to parliament. How we did that will vary. For me it is a 30-minute drive. If I do not have a car, there are two alternative options: there is the Member for Blain, who has been bringing me in this week …

Ms Boothby: Hello?

Mr HOWE: Sorry, the Attorney-General has been taking me home each night—in a platonic way. Thank you.

Ms Boothby: I am not taking you tonight, now.

Mr HOWE: The only alternative is a taxi. That applies to everyone in the suburbs; if you need to get to work and your mode of usual transport is not available, a taxi is the only backup option. If the bus network is down or you miss it and need to get to work quickly, a taxi can be there for you.

Everyone in the Chamber can relate to this: you get great stories from a taxidriver. I want to touch on a couple of experiences I had with some taxidrivers recently. My beautiful wife, Alice, and our two beautiful girls got out of the airport and were greeted by a long-term—40 years on the road—Darwin taxidriver. He was such a gentleman. He got out of the car, took the bags, loaded them up, opened the door for Alice and the girls and reminded me that the regulations allow the girls to sit in there without car seats, which they think is the coolest thing ever. They had a great time. It was a great service. As a customer I was impressed by the service he provided, and that speaks to the long-term professionalism you get from a driver who has spent his entire working career in the industry. The level of professionalism is second to none. I thank him.

One of my most favourite stories from a taxidriver was when I had an incredible 40-minute ride with a former Soviet scuba diver. He had the most fascinating life. He escaped over the Berlin Wall in the early 1980s and found himself in Australia, but he told me of his first career as a Navy diver. I am a big scuba diver, and it was fascinating. He finished school and went to a doctor—this is how it was done—who told him what his career would be. He said that he would go to the Navy to be a scuba diver, and this was at the beginning of scuba diving. The death rate for his class was more than one in three because they were still learning about the bends and decompression illness. There was no knowledge of it. He said that they just sent them down and found out what happened.

That man has probably passed away now as he was quite old, and this was 25 years ago. It was an incredible moment to share with another human being—a taxidriver sharing his story.

I tip my hat to every NT taxidriver who ever got me home from Mitchell Street. There would be a few of them out there. My parents were always stressed once I hit the nightlife phase. As dad later told me, he could never sleep until he heard the taxi come home. There were times when—young people can be quite foolish—someone had too much to drink, but there would be a taxidriver willing to get us home safely, and you have trust in them. Even a young person in that vulnerable intoxicated state having the trust of a local taxidriver is incredibly important. It would not be easy being a taxidriver sometimes, so I say a real thank you to all of them for their hard work.

If you want to know what is happening in a town, you talk to a taxidriver because all day they are getting the real truth; they are hearing it all. I would say to any aspiring pollie, talk to a taxidriver and you will get a pretty good read on the mood of things on different topics and what people are saying. It is sage advice to know what the taxidrivers are hearing on the road.

They see everything and service so many different communities—from tourism and cruise ships—and they know the event calendar. On the taxi ride I had from the airport the taxidriver showed me in his calendar the entire year of events. He has every cruise ship coming to town and the time it arrives. He is genuinely pleased with the extra cruise ships coming in. He said it was great work. He has his whole year planned out and showed me every day. He was highly organised. He is a man trying to chase work and deliver good service

so that he can make money. There were events in there that I did not know about. I was like, 'Wow; that is happening?' It was interesting. You see an insight into a business and think, 'Wow!'

Defence members need taxis a lot. The Army ships you up, puts you on a plane, and says, 'You are going to Adelaide or Darwin for a week to do something'. You need taxis. They are great at servicing ADF personnel, so I thank them.

They experience the ups and down of the economy. They feel it deeply. When business is good and people are spending money, they are much more likely to get a taxi. When they are closing the wallet and business is tight, our taxidrivers feel that pressure a lot more. They see the ebbs and flows.

The taxi industry in the Northern Territory has been through massive change. We saw the introduction of rideshare services like Uber, which has had a hard impact on the industry. For me, it is the fact that Uber and rideshare services do not cater to our vulnerable people. They do not cater to our disabled or senior constituents, other vulnerable groups and people who do not have a phone. There are different payment options that a taxi company is willing to work with as well.

If we ignore the taxi industry and its model collapses, some of our most vulnerable will be without important services that keep them independent. We want to make sure that constituents across the board feel independence. Independence is empowerment. I am a huge believer in empowerment and being able to rely on yourself. That feeling of self-worth is important for anyone's dignity. It is an important part of this puzzle of making sure our taxi industry is healthy.

We have seen a massive change in technology throughout the industry. Yes, the change of technology has been through everything in our lives; however, it is important to note how much that industry has changed over the last 20 years with the increase in technology that is available and required due to regulations.

Rideshare services and Uber have created new expectations on the classic taxi industry. Being one of the younger members of the Chamber, even I remember my parents teaching me, 'Here is the taxi number. Call up a taxi' and booking a taxi in the old classic way. It is much less the way now. With the use of apps and technology, the expectations of the customer are quite different, and the industry had to adapt to that.

There is no doubt there is heavy regulation on the taxi industry. That is also why we are doing this. There are good and bad regulations. I will speak a bit more on that shortly. It is important to note that there is regulatory pressure. All businesses have a degree of regulatory pressure, so it is important we note that.

As part of that changing environment, it is important we acknowledge the financial hurt and also what was felt by many taxidrivers as a deep betrayal of trust by the former Labor government. In my electorate quite a lot of those drivers were lifetime Labor voters. With the way they felt they had been betrayed as an industry, they wanted to use their vote to send a message. That is why, as I said to them on their doorsteps, I will fight for their industry. I will keep pushing so that we can create a healthy taxi industry where drivers are safe—that was right up the top—and will not be assaulted by every second passenger who gets in and that they can run a profitable business and go home with a pay packet that is growing personal wealth to enjoy all the things they want to do, like go on a family holiday or enjoy retirement, especially for long-term taxidrivers who are looking at retirement ahead. These are important things for them.

There is the reality of the costs imposed on our taxi industry. For a small operator the list of vehicle costs is huge. We all know the costs of running a vehicle. These guys are driving around for 12 to 16 hours, racking up kilometres, and there is a heavy burden on the vehicle and the cost. There is insurance, and a big issue was the rise in insurance costs for the taxi operators. Why? Because they were having a rock thrown through their window every second night shift. When you have to replace your windows three times a week, it becomes frustrating on your premiums. I have made the link so many times, but these law reform measures are so important because of the flow-on effect.

The compliance requirements, every additional form and renewal or licence at the MVR is time and money for that business. Every layer government puts on a business is squeezing them, reducing the profit margin and making it more difficult for them to trade. We want to make it easy for them to trade whilst maintaining a safe environment for the consumer, being our constituents.

Yes, it is a simple first step, but it is an important step in signalling to the industry that we are looking for every little thing we can do to make their lives easier. If it means people do not have to spend time at the MVR—no matter what your political stripes are, you are not jumping up for a day at the MVR. People there do a great job, but it is not a place that brings excitement.

Previously we had the renewal of every three to 12 months. We are now introducing the options of 12, 24 and 36 months. It is a huge expansion, so if someone wants the certainty of a three-year licence, they will now have that option. You take what was an annual cost, and that same cost and impediment to the business can now be spread across three years. It is a huge saving. If we continue to extrapolate and cut more of this red tape, you see the flow-on impact, and it can make a difference over time.

This change will also apply to special function vehicle licences, which are currently at 12 months but will be extended to 12, 24 and 36 months. Essentially, this is less paperwork, more certainty and less time dealing with bureaucracy. I think everyone can get around that. I know personally, as a small business owner, one of my greatest frustrations was dealing with the bureaucratic paperwork, especially when you can tell it has been put together by people who are not from the industry. It is clear when you are doing business documentation and have to fill out forms that truly have nothing to do with the job you were doing. It is frustrating. Governments are good at creating and imposing that on business. Our CLP government is acting to reduce as much of that as possible. That is nothing but a good thing.

The Member for Karama spoke extensively about the benefits we are giving small and medium-sized businesses, which have a close place in my heart. My message is simple: let businesses trade. They will do the work. A profit-driven incentive will create entrepreneurs who will take problems that exist and come up with the most creative ways to fix it. That is the beautiful thing about the economy—what entrepreneur and business minds can come up with. The more you let them be, the more they will come up with solutions which would not happen within this Chamber. I am a huge believer that the pollies do not have all the answers. Businesses will solve the big problems; they will come up with innovative solutions that we could never dream of, and our constituents will be better off.

A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move an extension of time to continue my remarks.

Motion agreed to.

Members interjecting.

Mr HOWE: I note for the record that the Members for Gwoja and Johnston voted ‘no’ to me continuing to talk about the importance of the taxi industry and small and medium businesses.

J Davis: You have been talking for half an hour!

Mr HOWE: Member for Johnston, I will speak for more than half an hour because our taxidrivers deserve a government that will finally back them.

Mr Paech: Do it then and stop talking rubbish.

Mr HOWE: I note that the opposition and the Member for Johnston continue to try to attack me as we talk about the incredible benefits of the work taxidrivers do for our community. We can see why the taxi industry turned its back on Labor; listen to them tonight, interjecting on this.

J Davis: I am complaining about you, not taxidrivers.

Mr HOWE: I note that the interjections continue.

Let them trade, and remove the unnecessary red tape. It is important that we maintain safety throughout this because there are good regulations that protect the public, but bad and overburdensome regulations hurt the public through higher cost and lower services. We want to make sure those services continue. To the taxi industry that is providing an essential service, I continue to thank you and want to make sure the business environment is best for you.

On the topic of safety, it is important to note that the changes are simply to the licence time period. The safety checks remain, which are police checks, inspections and regulators—the minister can speak more to that as he has a deeper knowledge of the regulatory framework. It is important to note that the safety remains; we are just getting rid of the bad, overburdensome red tape.

It is a big ecosystem—we have buses, rideshares, tourism transport and charter vehicles—and the Territory needs a strong taxi industry as part of that ecosystem. As was proven tonight, it seems to be only our government that wants to support that.

To all the Territory taxidrivers, I personally thank and acknowledge your hard work. For those who stuck through some hard years, thank you for continuing to serve your customers, sticking it through and working with our government to ensure a better Northern Territory ahead. You keep the Territory moving, and the CLP Finocchiaro government thanks you.

The minister has done some other important work, including meeting with taxi owners and operators. I called the minister, asking him to meet with local Palmerston taxi owners and operators. Do you know what he did? He went and had meetings with them. He listened to all their issues and re-established the commercial passenger vehicle forum. After the disenfranchisement that we saw from our taxidrivers, the minister has ensured there is a body where they can consult and can get a unified message through to him and our government about the kind of environment they and their customers need.

I thank the minister for his work. I commend the change. Any cut to bureaucracy is fantastic. I again thank every taxidriver in the industry. Despite what others in this Chamber want to do, this CLP government will support you.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I clarify for everyone, going on from what happened yesterday when opposition members were seeking to table a document that was knocked back, Standing Order 69, 'Seeking leave of the Assembly', covers that:

> *A Member who has the call may seek the leave of the Assembly. Leave must be unanimous and granted without any dissent.*

There was objection, so that is why that was dissented. However, when the Member for Drysdale sought leave for extension, that was covered under Standing Order 43, because it is on motion:

> *On motion, determined without debate and agreed to by the Assembly, a Member may continue a speech interrupted by this Standing Order for one period of 10 additional minutes, except in the instances of:*
>
> *(1) a discussion of a Matter of Public Importance*
>
> *(2) any debate with a time limit of 10 minutes or less*
>
> *(3) a Censure Motion, or*
>
> *(4) a Motion expressing a Want of Confidence.*

That is decided on the majority of the Assembly, not by unanimous vote. That is why the member was granted an extension, even if there was objection. That is for the benefit of members. If you want to refer to Standing Orders 43 and 69, feel free.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Mr Deputy Speaker, there has been a lot of conversation on this Bill, so I will make my contribution relatively short. The Bill amends the *Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Act 1991* to extend the commercial passenger vehicle licence terms to a period of up to 36 months for initial applications and renewals. This is an increase from the current term of 12 months for the majority of commercial passenger vehicle licence classes.

There will be options for 12, 24 and 36 months, as the Member for Drysdale pointed out, to provide flexibility for operators. Stakeholders were consulted during the development, with the Saying 'Yes' to Business report developed by the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce. It is important to highlight that. This is part of our government's priority to get on with delivering for businesses.

The taxi industry is one of those businesses impacted. As a local resident and Member for Braitling in Alice Springs, I often interact with the taxi industry. I get taxis to the airport and home; I get them just about everywhere because it is a good way of getting around. I want to be clear with everyone in the Chamber that the issues faced in Darwin are different from the issues faced in Alice Springs. In Darwin there is Uber or rideshare; in Alice Springs there is not. We rely on taxis to get around when we cannot use our primary vehicle.

What has happened to me on many occasions is that the taxis are so busy—I hear this from the elderly as well and those who are disabled and require specialty taxi services—that we wait a long time to access those services. I have waited half-an-hour for a taxi.

To the taxidrivers of Alice Springs, I say we hear you and see you. I have heard loud and clear directly from the business owners and drivers who want to get their own licence. At the moment many of those drivers are subleasing those licences. We hear the need for additional licences in the community so that those drivers can have business now and into the future so that they can provide for their families and take leave at a time of their choosing throughout the year. This is an important thing for taxidrivers in Alice Springs.

It is wonderful to have this Bill and to highlight some of the issues it addresses. It will be good to work with the Treasurer, the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure, to fix some of these issues.

I wholeheartedly support this Bill and commend it to the Assembly.

Mr YAN (Logistics and Infrastructure)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate and for their support of this Bill. I am glad to see support across the Chamber because the Leader of the Opposition is right; this is about simplifying processes, putting in practical steps and, of course, making sure we support businesses and industry going forward.

I confirm, because the question was asked by the Leader of the Opposition, that this does not change vehicle inspections. That has not changed at all; the vehicle inspection regime—the CPV—remains in place as it stands. This only changes the licence periods for the industry.

This Bill is part of the Territory government's broader commitment to making it easier to do business in the Northern Territory. Members will recall that in November 2024 the government established the Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce to provide advice on how government can reduce the burden of regulation on business and industry and, most importantly, how we can cut timeframes for approval processes. The taskforce brought together experienced people from industry and government to identify practical reforms that would make a difference to businesses operating in the Territory.

One of the taskforce's recommendations highlighted the opportunity to extend licence renewal periods to reduce unnecessary touchpoints between business and government. This reform was considered across whole-of-government licensing arrangements, with several licence terms identified as suitable for extension across various industries. To put it simply, if business owners do not need to renew licences as frequently they spend less time filling out forms and dealing with administration and more time focused on running their business and prioritising service to their customers.

This Bill amends the *Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Act 1991* to deliver that outcome. Under the current Act commercial passenger vehicle licences are required for different types of vehicles being operated. This Bill will increase and standardise the licence terms for commercial passenger vehicle licence categories that currently have a maximum licence term of 12 months. Importantly, the amendment will introduce options for licence terms of 12, 24 or 36 months for initial applications and renewals. This includes vehicles such as taxis, private hire cars, rideshares, limousines, minibuses and other passenger transport services.

At present the majority of licences have validity periods ranging from three to 12 months. This means many operators are required to renew their licence every year, even when nothing about their business has changed. This change gives operators more flexibility and allows them to choose a longer licence period that suits their business needs. Short-term licence options will still be available where appropriate. This ensures flexibility remains within the system while providing the opportunity for operators to reduce the frequency of renewals if they wish.

Across the Northern Territory more than 2,250 commercial passenger vehicle licences have been issued. Although some licence categories, such as motor omnibus and tourist classification vehicles, already allow for a three-year licence term, this amendment will allow more than 1,400 other licences to consider extending their validity period. It is a practical change that removes unnecessary red tape while maintaining the integrity of the regulatory system. Importantly, these amendments do not change vehicle inspection requirements, safety or compliance standards; they remain the same. This means the Territory can reduce unnecessary administrative processes without compromising safety or regulatory oversight.

The benefits of these changes will also extend to government. Fewer licence renewals will reduce administrative workload and allow resources to be focused on more important regulatory and service delivery obligations.

I also note that the Legislative Scrutiny Committee has considered this Bill and recommended that it is passed by the Assembly. The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure will engage with the commercial passenger vehicle industry to support implementation of these changes. Relevant information, bulletins and application

forms on the department's website will be updated to ensure operators understand a new licence option is available to them.

This practical reform is another positive step under the CLP government to rebuild confidence and increase engagement with the commercial passenger vehicle industry. As we have heard this afternoon, this industry plays a vital role in keeping Territorians and visitors moving. From taxis, rideshare and private hire vehicles to small operators providing essential services in our communities, this sector is an important part of the Territory's transport network and our local economy.

For too long the industry told government it felt disconnected from decision-making and burdened by outdated regulatory arrangements. I personally prioritised meeting with industry operators and stakeholders directly to hear what their concerns were. Under this government we have taken a practical step to modernise the framework and re-engage directly with the sector.

Through the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 the CLP government delivered important reforms to strengthen commercial passenger vehicle regulation for making the system more responsive to industry. A key change was the abolition of the long defunct commercial passenger vehicle transport board. That board had not been functioning as originally intended and was no longer considered an effective way to engage with the industry. In its place we have established a more practical and contemporary approach to industry engagement.

The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure now hosts the NT Commercial Passenger Vehicle Review Advisory Forum each quarter, bringing together operators, peak bodies and other stakeholders to discuss emerging issues, share information and help shape policy development for the industry. The forum rotates between Darwin and Alice Springs to ensure a balanced approach, recognising different needs for different regions, which the Member for Braitling has spoken about. This ensures government hears directly from the people working on the front line of the industry, the drivers—the operators and businesses who understand the challenges and opportunities within this sector. This is about genuine engagement, and this is how governments work more effectively with industry.

Another important reform delivered by the CLP government has been improving safety and reducing fare evasion for taxidrivers. In December 2025 the government expanded the prepaid taxi fare arrangement so that pre-pay is now applied between 7 pm and 7 am seven days a week. This change is made directly in response to feedback from the industry, particularly from drivers who are experiencing fare evasion and safety concerns during late-night operations. By enabling drivers to request fares to be prepaid during these hours we are helping ensure drivers are paid for the work they do while also improving safety and reducing disputes.

Importantly, this reform supports the many drivers who work late nights and early mornings providing essential transport services to Territorians. The Territory was well behind the rest of the country in providing prepaid taxi fare options. These reforms bring us closer to national industry practice and deliver a better outcome for industry while also providing clear transparent fares for customers. These reforms demonstrate the CLP government's commitment to working with the industry, listening to its concerns and delivering practical improvements.

We are focused on creating a regulatory framework that is modern, responsive, fair and supports businesses while maintaining strong standards for passenger safety.

The commercial passenger industry deserves a government that listens and acts, and that is exactly what the CLP government is delivering. We will continue to engage with industry to identify practical improvements that support operators and passengers across the Territory. I thank the team from DLI and Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for developing and drafting this legislation. Their work has been invaluable, and I thank them for that.

This Bill represents a sensible and practical reform for the taxi industry in the Territory, and I will continue to work closely with it to further strengthen and grow the industry.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Mr YAN (Logistics and Infrastructure)(by leave): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

RESPONSE TO PETITION
Petition No 17 – Safety for Nightcliff Jetty Users

Mr DEPUTY CLERK: The following response has been received from the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries to petition number 17 praying for the safety of Nightcliff Jetty users:

Dear Mr Keith

Petition Number 17—Safety for Nightcliff Jetty Users—was referred to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) to seek advice as to the enforcement of the 150-meter exclusion zone for spearfishing around Nightcliff Jetty, and the action taken, or that will be taken, to address the concerns of petitioners.

Pursuant to Standing Order 123 I am required to provide a response to the petition by 17 March 2026.

Spearfishing is a selective and sustainable form of recreational fishing in the Northern Territory (NT) and is specifically regulated in accordance with the Fisheries Regulations 1992 (the Fisheries Regulations) which define a speargun as 'a device used in underwater fishing to propel spears, arrows or other projectiles and includes propulsion by means of rubber (commonly known as a Hawaiian sling), bows, compressed gas or explosive charges'.

The Fisheries Regulations prohibit a person being in possession of a loaded speargun outside of the open sea or within 150 metres of another person who is no part of their spearfishing group. The Fisheries Regulations are not definitive, but in line with other Australian jurisdictions, the requirement to be 150 meters from another person has been interpreted as 150 meters from another person in the water once the spearfishing guns have been loaded.

The possession, use and carriage of spearguns is otherwise specifically regulated in accordance with the Weapons Control Act 2001 *(the Act), which lists a speargun as a controlled weapon. The Act states that a person must not carry or use a controlled weapon without lawful excuse in a public place (section 7(1)). Lawful sport or recreation are listed as a lawful excuse which, in line with the Fisheries Regulations, includes spearfishing.*

Existing laws are designed to prevent unsafe interactions between spearfishers and other members of the public. To date, no evidence has been provided of any unsafe interactions between spearfishers and members of the public in the Nightcliff Jetty area or elsewhere in the NT. Furthermore, no breaches of spearfishing rules have been detected.

In response to concerns raised about spearfishing in the Nightcliff area, DAF in collaboration with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (DLI), has undertaken a range of actions. The Fisheries Compliance Unit (FCU) increased patrols in the Nightcliff area throughout 2025, engaging with multiple individuals and groups of spearfishers in the area, identifying all groups as being compliant and aware of regulatory requirements.

In August 2025 DAF and DLI jointly installed additional signage at the Nightcliff Jetty to clearly outline spearfishing rules. These actions have been formally communicated to the Member for Nightcliff on two occasions during the year.

While the petition demonstrated that 207 people (including several individuals residing outside the NT) are supportive of a ban, the petition does not provide evidence of any breaches of relevant legislation, nor of any actual safety risks either at the Nightcliff Jetty or elsewhere in the NT. To date, the concerns identified in the petition are theoretical and unsubstantiated.

FCU will continue to conduct compliance activities in the area throughout 2026, including a focus on regulatory education.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Maley

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Achieving Equality for Territory Women

Mr DEPUTY 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: achieving equality for Territory women.

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

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, the equality of Territory women is quite an important topic, with International Women's Day on Sunday. People throughout this Chamber would have been celebrating the achievements of women but also acknowledging the challenges in achieving true equality in the Northern Territory and the world when it comes to the barriers and out-of-proportion gendered violence that women experience across the globe.

The theme of International Women's Day this year was, 'Balance the Scales'. In the Territory women are leading in their communities, raising families, running businesses, working in essential services and keeping our community strong. Across our electorates, I am sure everyone in the Chamber sees day-in and day-out the work of our women leaders, business owners, health workers, teachers, volunteers, police and uniformed officers leading in their fields. That is not to limit all the professions, which I could not rattle off today.

I reflect on some of the achievements of women across the political spectrum, since I am a politician. It is pertinent to me professionally and personally. The last three Chief Ministers and last two Opposition Leaders in the Northern Territory have been women. When the Gunner Labor government was in, 50% of representation was women.

Our first majority-female federal government in Canberra has women making up 52% of the federal Labor Caucus. Three of our four Northern Territory federal representatives are women, with our very own Senator Malarndirri McCarthy; Marion Scrymgour, the Member for Lingiari; and CLP Senator Jacinta Price.

I acknowledge the work and challenges each of these women face in their roles. In Katherine, a town hit by flooding, there is Mayor Joanna Holden. Alice Springs was also recently affected by floods, where there is Mayor Asta Hill. It was her birthday the other day, so happy birthday, Mayor Hill. Close to Darwin in the satellite city of Palmerston is Mayor Athina Pascoe-Bell. There is NT Council of Social Service CEO, Sally Sievers; NT Shelter CEO, Annie Taylor; CEO of Aboriginal Housing NT, Leeanne Caton; CEO of SNAICC, Catherine Liddle; CEO of NAAFLS, Cindy Torrens; CEO of Children's Ground, Jane Vadiveloo; and CEO of Tennant Creek Mob, Jacqueline Bethel.

One of the more prominent in recent times—she recently left the role—with Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation was Ms Maree Corbo. The Member for Gwoja worked closely with her when we were in government and continues that good connection, even though Maree has left Central Australia.

I acknowledge and place on the record Ms Sarah Austin, who won Outstanding Contribution to Youth Work and Excellence in Harm Reduction at the NT AOD Awards.

I congratulate Ms Jiayao (Dorris) Lin from Pink Chopstix, Business Person of the Year 2025. That is a well-known restaurant at the Waterfront.

Some of our Blak Business Award winners are women and women's organisations, including Babbarra Women's Centre from Maningrida in the Arafura electorate and the Galiwinku Women's Space in the Mulka electorate. Ms Kattie Risk was one of the winners of the Blak Business Awards 2025 and gave one of the most phenomenal speeches I have heard in my life. Kattie had such a story to tell about the challenges and what keeps her going to see her business thrive. She is one of our few but mighty female truckies in the Northern Territory who has a business in that industry.

I also acknowledge Ms Ruth Palmer from the NT Property Council and Ms Cathy Simmonds, CEO of Hospitality NT.

We see women day-in and day-out stepping up to lead in not just their professional lives but also their communities and their families.

It is an important time to recognise how far we have come, acknowledging that there is much more to do. I place on the record some of the work focusing on better equality for women, making sure that there are opportunities and not barriers for women to thrive in the Northern Territory.

I am proud of some of the achievements when Labor was in government that focused on supporting women to thrive. These included the *Sex Industry Act 2019*, which decriminalised sex work and sex workers in the Northern Territory.

We brought in portable long service leave for community service workers, which predominantly focused on enabling people in our community service organisations to take their long service when they moved organisations. Unfortunately, this was scrapped last year by the CLP Minister for Public Service. This was a loss for women in the Northern Territory who predominantly work in community services, but we will continue to advocate for that.

The former Labor government introduced women's budget statements, which released the first Women in the Territory fact sheet about the budget and how it affects and supports women to thrive in the Northern Territory. We also introduced the first NT Gender Equality Action Plan 2022–2025.

We focused on improving access to safe, legal abortions for Northern Territory women in 2021 when the amendments were made in the *Termination of Pregnancy Law Reform Act.* We promoted and invested in women's sports initiative #ShePlaysNT and women-friendly infrastructure upgrades like at Marrara football stadium and Larrakia stadium, with improvements to the change rooms at the second oval.

We focused on ensuring that decisions regarding gender affirming care were the decisions of medical experts, doctors, patients and families. We expanded the anti-discrimination protections, including explicit protection for sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

Labor introduced the same-sex couple adoption rights. That was an emotional day when it passed. We legalised access to the morning after pill after the CLP had previously created obstructions in that space—again, providing women with choice, safety and the ability to make the best decisions for themselves, their bodies and what they needed. We provided that protection and privacy.

Some other things that have been happening in the Northern Territory to focus on better equality for women include:

- $70m to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence across the Northern Territory
- an additional $30m over two years to continue to expand and implement Action Plan 2 under the DFSV Reduction Framework
- $8.2m in continued funding for Back-to-School vouchers, helping families all over the Territory by ensuring the cost of getting back to school is not a barrier, particularly for mums and female carers
- $114,300 in grants to support project services and activities that promoted gender equality
- $92,000 in grants to support a range of organisations running events and activities to mark International Women's Day. The current CLP government offers only about $67,000, so that would be a great gender equity match—$92,000 versus $67,000. I am happy to be corrected if I have the wrong figure. I would love to hear if that is the figure and if you will increase it, because women are worth it
- $5.5m to subsidise childcare operators to reduce the cost of childcare for parents, taking the burden off families
- $45m for maternity services
- $31m for free mammograms so that women can check for early signs and reduce the risk of breast cancer
- $4m for Arnhem Land healthcare centres and outreach services specifically delivering women's programs.

Territory women are worth it, and everything we do led by the government of the day should be about equalising, improving and building opportunities for women so that they can thrive and there is better equity with women's rights and issues. It is about not just celebrating women in the good times but also

acknowledging the tough, challenging and complex times for 50% of the Territory's population. I was proud to list some amazing Territory women who are leading in their fields and professions.

The way we talk and act is also a huge part of what we need to do by example and in modelling in this place. We need to see more focus or perhaps attention by the CLP government on the NT Gender Equality Action Plan, which expired last year. I am not aware of any progress. I am happy to be corrected on the record, but there has been no progress under the CLP government on the release of a new gender equality strategy. I would like to see that.

A key area I am concerned about and would like to see addressed is gender-based violence. Women in the Territory are unfortunately statistically more likely to experience gender-based violence than male counterparts.

One thing that gets spoken about all around Australia is the pay equity gap between women and men. There are more workforces looking at how to recognise skills and close the pay gap between women and men in the workforce.

There is still inequitable access to healthcare and essential services in the Northern Territory. Our Labor team can offer constructive insight and support for any of that work, but we are not sure what the CLP government has planned in that space or if it has a plan. Again, we would be keen to understand more and support anything that will further promote female equity in healthcare.

There are some positives. The rural initiatives have been recognised nationally for Territory women. There are phenomenal women on our stations working in the pastoral industry or agricultural businesses, and we have seen national winners at conferences that focus specifically on rural women. There have been a lot of award winners from the Territory.

I understand from some former winners of those awards that they have started an alumni group where women who have been nominated nationally come together and encourage more rural women to apply and support other women to be nominated for those important awards. The awards recognise initiatives that help rural women in the bush, particularly the livestock and agribusiness fields I mentioned as well as seeing some of the economic drivers being women in industry. It is fantastic that is in our remit to celebrate what women can achieve in the Territory and that they are also connecting with women in a similar space from other jurisdictions. That is extremely important.

Justice is a huge concern for the Labor opposition, because eight in 10 women in Northern Territory prisons—80% of the female prison population—are Aboriginal women. This is an unbalanced reflection of the Territory when 50% of Territorians are women, and 30% of Territorians are Aboriginal, but 80% of the women's prison population are Aboriginal. This is a huge concern.

There is not a lot of differentiation from the CLP government about those justice initiatives. When Labor was in government, we started the first-ever Life Skills Camp in Alice Springs specifically for women in the prison system. There were positive numbers regarding reducing the reoffending of women who attended and participated in the Life Skills Camp in Alice Springs. It would be great to hear an update on how that is going. I had the honour as the former Attorney-General to officially open that facility and to continue to go back to see the annual data and success of that program. The investment in programs to have fewer women in our justice system and returning to our justice system is worth it. I would love to hear the CLP government's plans for investment to reduce the number of women, particularly Aboriginal women, who are in the justice system. We need to focus on the positive outcomes we want to see across the community and ensure that investment in justice, particularly preventive measures, continues. That is important.

I had the honour on the weekend to speak at the United Nations Association of Australia NT luncheon, which Minister Charls mentioned in Question Time. I acknowledged the celebratory milestones in the Northern Territory and mentioned some of our political milestones. The Chief Minister, the Speaker and I are all women; it is the first time we have had women in all three of those leadership roles in the Northern Territory. That happened in 2024, and it is a great story. Young girls and women across the Northern Territory can see that there is no barrier to women leading in politics or any field that they choose. There is no barrier to women leading at home with their families either.

In their communities women make a phenomenal contribution day-in and day-out to the Northern Territory. There are levers that the NT Government, federal government and local government can pull to support, build opportunities and remove barriers and challenges to women in leadership so that women can thrive in their sectors and communities. While the work has a long way to go and there are challenges, it is important

that all three tiers of government do everything possible to ensure that women in the Northern Territory thrive and achieve equity.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Mr Deputy Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the matter of public importance, achieving equality for Territory women. The pursuit of gender equality is not merely a social aspiration; it is a fundamental element of a just and orderly society and is essential to the strength of our democratic institutions.

Across the Northern Territory women are already making remarkable contributions in every sector of our society. From health and education to small business, agriculture, Defence, resources and government, Territory women are helping to shape the future of this place we are all proud to call home. We are also seeing more Territory women stepping forward as entrepreneurs, starting businesses, employing Territorians and contributing directly to the growth of our economy. Across Darwin, our regional centres and remote communities, women are building businesses in tourism, hospitality, professional services, retail and emerging industries, creating jobs, strengthening communities and helping drive the Territory's economic future.

Territory women do not wait for opportunity; they step forward and create it. About 72% of Territory women participate in the workforce, which is one of the highest rates in the country. That tells us something important about the Territory. This is a place where people have always been willing to roll up their sleeves and have a go, and Territory women are a big part of that story.

I recently had the opportunity to attend the launch of SEDA College's Northern Territory Construction and Trade Program. What stood out to me that day was the number of young Territory women choosing to take part in the program and pursue careers in construction and the trades, industries that historically have not always attracted strong female participation. These young women are learning practical skills, gaining real workplace experience and setting themselves up for apprenticeships and careers in industries that are critical to the Territory's future.

Programs like SEDA's show what is possible when education providers, industry and government work together to create real pathways to employment. They also send a powerful message to young women across the Territory that careers in construction, infrastructure and trades are not only possible; they are achievable. That is how equality and equity grows. It grows when the next generation sees opportunity where previous generations saw barriers. These young women will be part of the workforce that builds the Territory's next generation of infrastructure, industries and major projects.

Recently, when speaking at an International Women's Day event recognising women in the resources sector, I reflected on how far women have come in industries that historically did not always make room for them. The resources sector remains one of the Territory's most important economic drivers. In 2024–25 the value of Northern Territory mineral production reached $4.36bn, and there are currently 21 developing mining projects across the Territory with an estimated capital investment of $6.37m alongside nine major mines already in operation and several projects progressing through advanced feasibility.

We stand on the doorstep of the transformational opportunity that is the Beetaloo Sub-basin. Projects like these require engineers, environmental specialists, project managers, construction workers, tradespeople and logistics professionals. That means the next generation of Territory workers, including the young women now stepping forward through programs such as SEDA's, will have opportunities to build careers in industries that are shaping the Territory's future.

Women are increasingly stepping into these roles as engineers, geologists, project managers, operators, entrepreneurs and leaders. National data shows that female participation in the mining sector has reached approximately 25%. While it represents important progress, there is much more to do to support women into this sector. Because we believe their expertise, innovation and determination are critical to ensuring the success of the modern resources sector, we will do everything we can to facilitate that growth in that area.

Initiatives such as Women's Innovation Network NT are also helping strengthen pathways for women and girls into STEM disciplines—science, technology, engineering, the arts, mathematics and medicine. These fields will increasingly define the economy of the future and ensure women and girls see clear pathways into them as an important part of achieving lasting equality.

The success of leaders such as Mikaela Jade, founder of Indigital, demonstrates the transformative potential of combining cultural knowledge with technical innovation. Through her work, Indigenous Australians are

engaging with emerging digital platforms while preserving and sharing cultural heritage in new and powerful ways.

Equality is not simply about representation; it is about participation and ensuring women have real opportunities to contribute, lead and succeed. In the Territory we have always believed that opportunity matters more than limitation. Equality is not achieved by lowering expectations, but by opening doors. It is achieved when women have the chance to start businesses, grow enterprises, build careers and create jobs. Across the Territory we are seeing women do exactly that.

Women are starting businesses, leading companies and contributing to industries that are driving the Territory economy forward from tourism and hospitality to construction, agriculture and advanced manufacturing. Encouragingly, the Northern Territory has also seen strong progress in reducing the gender pay gap in recent years, reflecting the growing participation and leadership of women across our economy. That is the kind of equality Territorians believe in—equality built on opportunity, capability and the freedom to have a go and succeed. When women succeed in business, they do not just build their own futures; they help build the future of the Territory.

Economic opportunity is only one of the drivers for equality for Territory women. The foundation is also safety, dignity and respect. As the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence, I know we cannot speak honestly about gender equality without acknowledging the reality that too many women still experience violence in their relationships. Domestic, family and sexual violence remains one of the most serious challenges facing communities across the Territory. It undermines safety, confidence and opportunity. Preventing violence against women is, therefore, central to achieving true equality. That is why our government has invested $36m a year ongoing for as long as it takes to drive change in this space.

It is particularly effective when Aboriginal community-controlled organisations work alongside women and families. One such organisation is the NPY Women's Council based in Alice Springs. It provides domestic and family violence support and a range of community programs across the NPY Lands of Central Australia. The council has done important work through its gender equality strategy, recognising that safety, leadership and economic opportunity for women are closely connected.

For decades the NPY Women's Council has worked with women and families across some of the most remote communities in the country. Its work spans domestic and family violence services, legal support, social and emotional wellbeing programs and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal women. Its work is a reminder that the most effective solutions are those led by communities themselves.

There is no question the Northern Territory is unique. Our communities stretch from urban centres to regional towns, remote communities and homelands. Achieving equality for women requires approaches that reflect that diversity. Our responsibility as a government is to ensure every Territory woman has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of where she lives.

That is why the Northern Territory Government is currently developing the Northern Territory Government gender equality strategy 2026–2030, led by the Office of Gender Equality and Diversity. This strategy is intended not as a static statement of principle, but as a living framework that reflects the realities of Territory women's lives. It is being informed through broad engagement with community organisations, industry, advocacy groups and Territorians across our regions. The aim is to ensure that our approach to gender equality is practical, informed by lived experience and focused on delivering real outcomes.

The Northern Territory is fortunate to have strong female leadership across many sectors, including Madam Speaker. In this parliament we are led by Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro, whose leadership sends a powerful message to women and girls across the Territory about what is possible. Her leadership demonstrates clearly that women are not only participating in public life in the Territory; they are leading it. She is ably supported by my colleagues the Attorney-General, the Minister for Education and Training and the Members for Wanguri and Fannie Bay. They are strong, noisy women who are proud and loud.

Across government we also see women stepping into senior roles, leading departments, shaping policy and delivering services that Territorians rely on every day. Women now make up close to two-thirds of the Northern Territory Public Sector workforce. That means many of the essential services Territorians rely on every day—including many of the essential services delivered in response to the current flood crisis—in our hospitals, schools and across government agencies are being delivered by women.

In my Business portfolio, I have the privilege of working alongside a fierce female leadership team: Chief Executive of the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations, Hayley Richards; and Deputy Chief

Executive, Kelly Ralston. I also have the privilege of working alongside many strong women in the Department of Children and Families, including Karen Broadfoot, who has been ably helping us in the last couple of weeks as we start the response to this flood situation.

They are all examples that in the Northern Territory Public Sector, women are not waiting for a seat at the table; they are leading the departments that deliver the services Territorians rely on every day. These women and many others across government and the private sector are continuing to push past barriers that once seemed immovable.

For many years, people talked about women breaking the glass ceiling. In the Territory today women are doing more than breaking the ceiling; they are constructing the floors above and installing ladders to make the way forward easier for those who come behind them.

Representation matters. When young girls see women leading governments, running businesses, managing major projects and shaping policy, they begin to understand that those pathways are open to them too. The Northern Territory has always been defined by a willingness to do things differently. If something has not been done before, Territorians find a way to make it happen.

That determination and resilience are part of who we are, and Territory women embody that every day. They are teachers, nurses, small business owners, engineers, police officers and community leaders. They lead organisations, strengthen communities and are shaping the Territory's future. When Territory women succeed, the entire Territory benefits.

When we talk about equality we are talking about ensuring that every woman—young, old and every age in between—has the opportunity to be the best they can be, to take the journey they choose, to be financially independent and to live free from fear.

I acknowledge something that is rarely captured in reports, statistics or policy papers. Across the Northern Territory tonight there are women who have already finished a full day's work and have gone home to begin another shift. They are the planners of family life, the organisers of school notes and medical appointments, the overseers of homework and the ones making sure that groceries are in the fridge and the uniforms are clean for the morning. They keep track of birthdays, sports practice and the thousand small details that hold families together. They comfort children, support their partners and encourage friends. It is work that is rarely measured, but it is work that holds families and communities together. When we talk about achieving equality for Territory women, we are talking about recognising the full value of all those contributions made by Territory women.

When Territory women have opportunity and are safe and supported to lead and succeed, the whole Territory benefits. Territory women deserve an equal seat at the table, especially given, more often than not, they are the ones who built the table.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Mr Deputy Speaker, achieving equality for Territory women is an important matter for the parliament in recognition of International Women's Day last weekend, which celebrates the amazing contributions Territory women are making.

I speak about something that should never be controversial: equality for women. Territory women are strong. They are leaders in our communities, workplaces, families and in their own right. They are nurses caring for the sick; teachers educating our children; business owners creating opportunities; community leaders standing up for justice; and mothers, grandmothers, aunties and nieces holding families together.

Across the Territory we see women showing extraordinary strength and resilience every day. In our remote communities Aboriginal women have been the leaders of country for tens of thousands of years, caring for culture and knowledge and responsible for their communities. Despite all this strength and leadership, women are still asked to accept less safety, opportunity and support. That is not equality, and it is not good enough.

Equality for women is not just something that should be debated or delayed; it should be the foundation for every decision made in this parliament. When women are safe, supported and have equal opportunity, our entire society is stronger.

The reality is that too many Territory women face enormous challenges. Too many women are living with violence in their homes. Too many women cannot find safe housing when they need to escape dangerous situations. Too many women are working incredibly hard while juggling caring responsibilities, rising costs of

living and a lack of support. Too many women's organisations and frontline services are telling us the same thing: they are stretched, under-resourced and tired of not being listened to.

Equality requires more than speeches. It requires action, investment in services that protect women, governments to listen when women raise concerns and the political courage to change systems that historically left women behind.

We must also acknowledge the strength of women living in bush and remote communities. Across Central Australia and the Barkly, women carry an enormous responsibility every day, caring for our families and elders, raising children and holding communities together. Many of these women are doing this while facing real challenges such as limited housing, long distances to health services and fewer employment opportunities. Despite these challenges, they continue to lead with strength, resilience and care for their families and communities. If we are serious about equality for Territory women, we must ensure that women in the bush are not left behind and that their voices are heard when decisions are being made.

We must also honour the leadership of Aboriginal women across this amazing Territory. For generations Aboriginal women have been the backbone of their communities, protecting culture, raising children, caring for country and standing up for their people. They have been advocates, negotiators, teachers and leaders long before places like this parliament ever existed. Too often, Aboriginal women have been excluded from the decision-making tables that shape their communities, futures and bodies. If we are serious about equality in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal women must be consulted, listened to and heard as decision-makers. They must be respected, supported and empowered as leaders. When Aboriginal women lead, our communities and our future is stronger.

Unfortunately, what we have seen from the CLP government is a failure to deliver the kind of meaningful reform that Territory women deserve. We have seen missed opportunities for reform, a lack of investment in services that support women and, for far too long, little willingness to genuinely listen to the organisations and advocates who work every day, standing up and supporting women. Territory women are not asking for special treatment; they are asking for fairness, safety and a government that takes their voices seriously.

Some of the strongest leaders I have ever known in this Territory are women. They are women who have raised families, supported their communities and carried enormous responsibility, often without recognition. They are women who have shown resilience, compassion and courage each day. They did not wait for permission to lead; they simply stepped forward with their community's needs.

We need to elevate the voices of women because that is how we achieve equality. Territory women are speaking clearly and asking for safety, respect and meaningful reform. They deserve a government that will listen and act. Equality for Territory women is not just a favour; it is justice. Until every woman in the Northern Territory is safe, respected and given equal opportunity, our work in this place will never be finished.

We have heard contributions from people talking about and celebrating the amazing achievements of Territory women. I acknowledge the amazing contributions that Territory women have made. The Territory has always been a leader. The first female Chief Minister of the Northern Territory was Clare Martin. Our first female Supreme Court Judge was the Honourable Sally Thomas, who went on to become the first female Administrator of the Northern Territory. Marion Scrymgour was the first female to become the Member for Lingiari and the first female Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. Nova Peris was the first female Territorian to become an Olympian. Loraine Braham, the Independent Member for Braitling, was the first woman to become the Speaker of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. Ngaree Ah Kit was the first Aboriginal woman to become the Speaker of an Australian parliament. These are amazing achievements that came from the Northern Territory.

The heroes tonight are Territory women and the women's organisations across the Territory that stand up for women every day. Whether it is providing advocacy, justice services, access to safe and secure housing or accommodation or providing sanitary items for women, these organisations do an amazing job every day. We must recognise and celebrate that.

If we are serious about respecting women, when the government makes appointments for roles of high office, the judiciary, government agencies and departments and other roles in the Territory, it must appoint someone who respects and honours Territory women. That is how you show you care about Territory women. If you care about Territory women, people should not be elevated to positions if they do not support the aspirations and equality of women.

We heard contributions about this parliament. Historic Cabinet records and photos are released every Christmas. We are not quite there to see Cabinet photos representing the first woman to ever sit in Cabinet, but that day will come soon.

Women must be at decision-making table. Women cannot be on the menu; they need to be at the table. They need to be making decisions. They need to be shown that they can achieve whatever they want, and that is what we need to do in this place.

Tonight is an important opportunity. We have just celebrated International Women's Day. I thank all the amazing organisations that put together events across the Northern Territory. There was an amazing march in Darwin; the amazing women's futures forum in Alice Springs; and events across the Barkly, the Big Rivers region and out to Yirrkala and Nhulunbuy. There were events across the Territory. A huge shout-out goes to the staff in various agencies who worked to provide women's safety services and safe houses in those remote communities. It is important.

It is great to see that elevation and Territory women leading in the business space. Territory women can achieve in all areas. I love when you see Territory women leading. Whether it is in health, education, business, country or justice, every pillar of our society and community is made up of strong Territory women. It is great to see so many women across the Northern Territory taking on amazing roles. That is something we should all be proud of. I am proud to see that the number of women in the Northern Territory parliament has continued to grow. I was proud of being part of a previous government that had a majority of women form our Cabinet, and I hope to see that again in the future as time moves on.

I make this contribution as a man, but I like to think of myself as a strong feminist man for the movement. I believe that when it comes to health decisions, particularly regarding female reproductive rights, that is not the space for men to comment. Women should have full agency and control over their bodies, and that is what we need to continue. If you do not have a vagina, then you should keep your mouth shut when it comes to women's reproductive rights. Fair and simple—that is how it should always be. I stand by women regardless of where they sit on the political spectrum. These are decisions that men should not be involved in. They should listen to the voices of Territory women when it comes to those decisions.

This has been an important MPI. I thank everyone for their contributions. Let us continue to see more work by this entire parliament. Let us continue to see more members of this parliament at all of the women's rights rallies to elevate those voices and to honour Territory women appropriately now and into the future.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the opposition for bringing this matter of public importance in the week following International Women's Day. I rise to speak about difficult women—women who ask questions, challenge authority and refuse to stay silent when something is wrong. Throughout history, women who do these things have often been labelled 'difficult', but often these so-called difficult women are the ones who change the course of history.

The Northern Territory has always been shaped by difficult women who stand up for what is right even when it is unpopular; fight for justice, equality and the wellbeing of their communities; and who are told to sit down, be quiet or stay in their place and refuse.

There are so many women who fought long and hard for women in the Northern Territory. Many of these women quietly and often courageously do the work of showing up every day, often in tough circumstances. They are workers, farmers, rangers, teachers, nurses, carers, councillors, community leaders, artists, advocates, organisers, volunteers, scientists, public servants, tradies, entrepreneurs, mothers, daughters, sisters and aunties. They are the women running and working in small businesses, leading organisations, holding families together and standing beside their communities in times of crisis.

Women keep this Territory running, often without recognition and while carrying far more than their share. Just some of the difficult women that I have had the pleasure to know or be influenced by in the Northern Territory are Barb Shaw; Rachael Uebergang; Shirleen Campbell; Jayne Lloyd; Chay Brown; Larissa Ellis; Rhoda Dhurrkay; Bettina Danganbarr; Regina Bennett; Kirsty Howey; Penny Drysdale; Maree Corbo; Jo Gamble; Sally Sievers; Erica Gibson; Rosalie Kunoth-Monks; Leanne Liddle; Libby Armitage; Jo Lee; Sam Bowden; Caitlin Perry; Asta Hill; Dawn Lawrie; Sally Thomas; and I could go on. All these women and so many more have challenged expectations and spoken with courage. At times, each has been called difficult.

I recognise that today the Northern Territory has three women as our federal representatives. In our Northern Territory parliament we have women serving as our Chief Minister, the Leader of the Opposition

and the Speaker of this Assembly. That is something our Territory can be proud of, and it sends a powerful message to young girls across our communities that leadership belongs to them too.

However, only nine of the 25 members of our parliament are women, which is well below the average in Australian parliaments. We have seen leaders who have denigrated women, mocked domestic violence and date rape drugs and whom this government stands behind. When those attitudes are tolerated it sends a powerful message about what is considered acceptable. I hope we see a future where leaders draw a clear line and refuse to stand behind conduct that diminishes women. This sends a powerful message to young women and men.

Some people have said to me that days such as International Women's Day are a waste of time, but this is why they are not. This week we read about a global study by Ipsos for International Women's Day which found that approximately half of Australian men thought that things have gone far enough when it comes to giving women equal rights with men and most Australian men think men are being expected to do too much to support equality.

New data showed us that generation Z men—that is our children aged between 15 and 24 years—are now more likely than millennial or gen X men to endorse statements like, 'Men should earn the money' or, 'Men make better leaders'. Almost a third of these young men think that a wife should obey her husband. These young men are twice as likely as baby boomer men to have traditional views on decision-making, with just 13% of men in the older cohort agreeing that a wife should always obey her husband as opposed to a third of these younger men. Thirty-three per cent of these young men also said that a husband should have the final word on important decisions in a relationship; 60% said that men were expected to do too much work to support equality; and 21% said that a real woman should never initiate sex.

Recognising progress does not mean pretending the work is finished. These attitudes translate into horrific realities for many women, particularly women in the Northern Territory. Territory women continue to face the highest rates of domestic and family violence in Australia, and we talk about that often in this Chamber. It is three times higher than the rest of Australia. The rate of women being murdered in the Territory is seven times higher than the rest of Australia. This disproportionately affects Aboriginal women. Eighty per cent of women locked up in our prisons are Aboriginal.

The economic reality for women in the Northern Territory is stark. Nationally women earn about 15% less than men in full-time work, but in the NT the gap is even wider at about 22%. Women in remote communities face additional barriers because of distance, limited services and isolation.

Women in the Territory also face serious housing challenges. Nationally women are much more likely to experience rental stress and homelessness than men, and single older women are one of the fastest-growing groups facing housing insecurity. In the Northern Territory we have the highest rate of homelessness, overcrowding and inadequate housing in the nation, and women in the Territory experience homelessness rates 10% higher than men.

This is why we need difficult women, because they ask why these inequalities persist, why violence is allowed to continue and why systems designed to protect women often fail them. They fight for an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. They refuse to accept that these issues which affect all our lives are inevitable. Across the Territory there are women doing this work every day, running shelters, supporting families, advocating for safer communities, mentoring young people and building stronger futures.

Young women across the Territory are watching what happens in this parliament, how women lead and how women are treated, and they are learning something about what leadership looks like. Even today, women in public life who ask questions, challenge behaviour or refuse to stay silent can find themselves labelled as difficult. That tells us less about these women and more about the discomfort that comes when power is questioned.

I acknowledge the difficult women of the Northern Territory who ask the hard questions, stand their ground and refuse to look away when something is wrong. I cannot end a speech about International Women's Day without doing a shout-out to my amazing mother, Dina, and my incredible sister, Annie. I am beyond lucky to have these two extraordinary women in my life.

Like so many women across the Territory they show that when women are called difficult it is often because they refuse to accept the things that are unacceptable. Time and again, it is those difficult women who help us build a stronger, fairer Northern Territory for all of us.

Happy International Women's Day to all women everywhere. Here is to building a future where women are not called difficult for speaking up but respected for the courage and leadership it takes to do so.

VISITOR
Ben Helwend

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, we have the brother of the Member for Wanguri, Ben Helwend, in the gallery. We acknowledge you, and you have an amazing sister.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr CHARLS (People, Sport and Culture): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Opposition Leader for raising this MPI because it provides an opportunity to highlight the work I already have underway across the Northern Territory to strengthen equality, opportunity and leadership for women and girls. As the Minister for Youth, Seniors and Equality, I am incredibly proud of the progress we have made in a relatively short period, and I am equally excited about the work that lies ahead.

I want to start on a positive note and reflect on some of the key initiatives in this policy area. It is fitting to begin by reflecting on International Women's Day, which we celebrated on Sunday 8 March, under the theme, 'Balance the Scales'. Across the Territory communities came together to recognise the achievements of women and to discuss the work still required to achieve true equality.

As Minister for People, Sport and Culture, I was proud to attend the United Nations Association of Australia International Women's Day luncheon alongside the Attorney-General, the Member for Fannie Bay and the Leader of the Opposition. At the luncheon we heard from three incredibly diverse women, who shared their lived experience. I acknowledge Kate Heelan and the Northern Territory branch of the United Nations Association of Australia for organising such an important and inspiring event.

Through our gender equality grants program, the government supported the luncheon and the associated International Women's Day Walk. The response across the Territory was extraordinary. This year we received a record 54 grant applications, and we supported 37 events across the Territory. That is 37 community events celebrating women's leadership, empowerment and equality. These events were community-led, locally driven and culturally diverse, reflecting the strength and character of Territory communities. I am sure members would be keen to hear some of these:

- St John Ambulance held the Women in Ambulance morning tea, a fabulous invitation celebrating the development of women in remote communities and strengthening their leadership capacity. I am sure members would join me in a shout-out to our incredible women paramedics working on the front line. Thank you.

- In the Big Rivers region the Numburindi Development Aboriginal Corporation delivered a project documenting and celebrating the stories of Numburindi women through photography and storytelling.

- The CREATE Foundation ran the 'strong sister, strong futures' program, supporting young women aged 12 to 25 who have experienced out-of-home care, with a focus on cultural identity, confidence and leadership.

- In East Arnhem the Galiwinku Women's Space Aboriginal Corporation brought Yolngu and non-Indigenous women together to share stories of strength and leadership.

- In Central Australia Be.Me. Movement Education ran a two-day camp bringing First Nations girls together with Territory women mentors to support mental health and wellbeing.

These are just a handful of examples of the incredible work taking place across the Territory. Through our gender equality grants program, the Northern Territory Government provides two funding rounds each year of up to $5,000 to support projects that advance equality. Round 1 was open from July until December, and round 2 is currently open until May.

In the 2025–26 financial year 14 grants have already been awarded. Some of these projects are breaking down barriers in areas where women have historically been under-represented. For example, the Darwin Karting Association is creating pathways for young women in motorsport. The Swampdogs Rugby

Union Club is also delivering a women's rugby inclusion initiative. The Waratah Football Club is supporting women's participation through new uniforms and equipment.

While I am speaking about sport, it is worth recognising the extraordinary achievements of Territory women on the sporting stage. Territory athletes continue to demonstrate that talent and determination know no limits. One outstanding example is Alannah Joyce. I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you are well aware of Alannah because you are one of her sponsors. She is a young Territorian who is currently ranked number one in Australia in the junior women's judo championships in the 78-kilogram division and number seven in the world. Alannah is training with the goal of representing Australia at the 2032 Olympic Games. She was also named the 2024 Northern Territory Sportsperson of the Year.

She joins a growing list of Territory women excelling in sport, including Paralympian Briseis Brittain, swimmer Macey Sheridan—who is from my electorate—and Sonya Newman who competed in the inaugural Women's World Para Ice Hockey Championships and who the Northern Territory Government supported. Let us not forget the recently retired local hockey superstar, Brooke Peris. On Sunday I had the pleasure to present twice to NTFL player Jasmyn Hewett who has won the Women's Premier League Best and Fairest four times so far, including 2026. It was great to have the Member for Fannie Bay and the Chief Minister with me at that time.

Supporting women in sport also means ensuring they have access to the facilities they deserve. That is why the government announced earlier this week a $1.32m upgrade to DXC Arena, improving change rooms and parking to support year-round sport. The DXC Arena hosts more than 1,000 cricket and AFL matches each year. These upgrades will deliver modern, female-friendly facilities that support participation for women and girls at every level.

In the remote regions, our government just last year supported the NIAA and West Arnhem Regional Council to build new sporting oval change rooms in Maningrida. That was a game changer for the community. I had the opportunity to meet the Member for Arafura there in his electorate. I was fortunate to be there for the official opening last year and to see the excitement on young faces. What this means for the community was inspiring.

Our government believes that it is important that all members of the community have access to facilities that support participation in sport and recreation, including safe and inclusive places for our female players and coaches.

Women and girls, particularly from remote and regional communities, continue to be central to the Northern Territory's arts identity. Many art centres across Arnhem Land, the Tiwi Islands and Central Australia are female-dominated workplaces, with women making up a majority of artists in some regions. Creative Australia surveys show around 60% of artists in the NT remote arts sector are women.

Women artists often combine art with cultural knowledge transmission, storytelling and ceremony. How fortunate are we to have many women in the arts across the Northern Territory? I take the example of Brown's Mart, with a team led by two strong women, Elizabeth Rogers, General Manager and co-Chief Executive Officer, and Yvette Walker, the first-ever First Nations Artistic Director and co-Chief Executive Officer. Another strong leader and CEO is Michelle Bell from Artback NT.

Of course, there are many more fabulous women in the arts across the Territory. We could not possibly list them all. However, some recent female winners in the arts space I acknowledge are:

- Emily Wurramara, who I had the pleasure of meeting on more than one occasion; Emily won Artist of the Year 2025 at the National Indigenous Music Awards

- Gaypalani Wanambi, a Yolngu artist from Yirrkala, who won the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards 2025 for her work *Burwu, blossom*

- Natasha Lee, winner of the Darwin Visual Arts and Exit Arts Awards 2026, whose self-portrait explored multicultural identity

- Sophie Kuswadi who was the recipient of the Minister's Choice Award at the 2026 Exit Art Awards.

Beyond sports and arts, the government continues to support organisations delivering critical services to women across the Territory. One such organisation is Dawn House, which provides crisis accommodation, counselling and support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence. Late last year,

Dawn House hosted the event, Standing with the Frontline, recognising the extraordinary dedication of workers across the domestic violence sector.

Another grant recipient was Ruby Gaea and the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory. This weekend I will attend the multicultural International Women's Day fashion show hosted by the MCNT.

As a man and the minister responsible for women's policy, I am conscious that this role carries great responsibility. I am committed to listening, learning and walking alongside Territory women to remove barriers and create opportunity, because when women and girls thrive, our families, communities and the entire Territory benefit. As a husband and a father of two beautiful daughters, I understand how powerful this is.

This commitment is also reflected within the Northern Territory public service. Public servants would be aware of the current statistics, as every public servant with an email received an update in their inbox on Friday, just in time for International Women's Day. It provided the statistics that women make up to 63% of the NTPS workforce, and 57.8% of senior management roles are held by women. In my own department, 68% of employees are women, and 83% of senior leadership roles are held by women. This week has demonstrated the strong leadership and contribution of women across the Territory.

The government also recognises the importance of supporting women from diverse backgrounds. The Connected Women program, delivered by the Australian Red Cross in the Northern Territory, has supported more than 750 migrant and refugee women and their families from more than 45 nationalities.

I have seen firsthand the impact of this community-led program, which brings women and families from diverse backgrounds together in a safe, welcoming and empowering environment. Programs like this create safe spaces for connection, empowerment and community participation.

Speaking directly to this broad MPI, I believe that Territory women are well represented and this government is leading by example. What other parliament can have this debate with three of the most senior roles held by women—the Chief Minister, the Opposition Leader and you, Madam Speaker?

So many of our strategies are reflective of equality, and an example of this is that our youth voices, including young Aboriginal women, are being embedded directly into policy through our Youth Round Table and Youth Parliament. As an example, more than 60% of my newly announced 2026 Youth Round Table members are female, of which 20% are Aboriginal women.

Looking ahead, the CLP Finocchiaro government is focused on restoring the Territory lifestyle, with our strategy setting a clear direction to champion the Territory's identity as a vibrant, inclusive and respectful place to live, work and raise a family. Part of this work will include the pending launch of the Northern Territory gender equality strategy.

Extensive public consultation was undertaken between 24 October 2025 and 26 February 2026 to understand the challenges, opportunities and priorities for advancing gender equality across the NT. Engagement was conducted through multiple channels to ensure broad participation, including:

- a Have Your Say page, supported by targeted emails to key stakeholders
- invited written submissions from organisations across the Territory
- face-to-face workshops in Darwin, Palmerston, Casuarina, Alice Springs, Katherine and online, as well as engagement with the NT Youth Round Table.

My department is now finalising the draft strategy, with a launch anticipated later this year. This strategy will provide a long-term framework for action across government. It will focus on improved data collection, auditing of policies, addressing unconscious bias and strengthening awareness of rights and opportunities.

Ultimately, our goal is clear. We want a Territory where every person is respected, valued and given the opportunity to succeed; where women and girls can pursue their ambitions without barriers; and where equality is not just an aspiration, but a reality.

When women succeed, the entire Territory succeeds. This government will continue working every day to ensure that opportunity, respect and equality remain at the heart of our communities.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Madam Speaker, women's equality in life is important. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this discussion.

One of the central creation stories in north-east Arnhem Land is the story of *Djang'kawu* sisters, and they are the creation spirits. This is the story of how our clan land and songlines were created as the sisters moved across the land. Many of the sacred sites and waterholes were created by their powers and their walking sticks as they moved across the land, from the sunrise in the east, through Arnhem Land, to the sunset in the west, weaving songlines and shaping the landscape that became the responsibility of the Yolngu clan nations to protect.

Djang'kawu sisters created the law of the land and the sacred digging sticks as they stamped on the ground and the water bubbled up in the sacred sites. They carried the law in their sacred dillybags that hung around their necks, the same as I have worn in the Chamber. The dillybags are old law that is woven by women. It is an important and powerful position they have. They have the special knowledge, and this comes under their authority.

In Yolngu culture, roles and ceremonies are sometimes separated into men's and women's business. In each of the spaces, there are leaders who hold equal power and contribute equally to society. They educate the young people and serve the community, both men and women leaders, working for the harmony of the community. While some ceremony spaces are divided into men and women, other ceremonies combine all leaders and community members.

A *garma* ceremony is an open ceremonial ground that brings men and women together equally, so all leaders can speak and be listened to. All governance spaces are a place of men and women, and we have strong women leaders across our country and communities.

Yesterday, I went to the airport to welcome the sacred body of one of our *miyalk* (women) leaders, of Galiwinku community. I pay my respects and pay tribute to her. She passed away the night before. Her body was flown to a morgue in Darwin until the family and community were ready to have her body returned to the land to be with the family.

When my parents were living on homeland country and I was a young man learning to become a mechanic, she took me in as though I were her own child, cared for me and showed great kindness. By kinship I call her *gutharra* as a granddaughter, but I can call her mum by now. Our relationship and her support helped me to become who I am today. She was the older sister of Reverend Dr Gondarra, and she was a strong leader of her people. She was a teacher and a principal at Shepherdson College. She was a wise and strong elder and leader.

I send my condolences to all her family at this time. I cannot say her Yolngu name out of respect for her passing, but her name was Gondarra. She was a leading light for her family and the community.

There are many strong women across our communities. I cannot name everyone, but it is important that we support our existing and emerging female leaders. This is the foundation of Yolngu law. I support the equality of women in our communities and within the balanda situations of education, employment, parliament and beyond.

We saw many leaders from our communities recognised for leadership. In 2024 my *yapa*, Miss Yunupingu, was the Senior Australian of the Year. I attended the Order of Australia awards, which were awarded to Bettina Danganbarr and Kaye Thurlow. We have female leaders in our schools, shops, arts and painting high-level stories of the law. Gaypalani Wanambi won the 2025 Telstra award. We have female leaders as rangers and health workers, on Yolngu radio and as chairpersons and board members of Aboriginal organisations.

International Women's Day last weekend was an opportunity to thank the women in our lives, and I also thank my wife for her advice and support. She is an elder of the Wangurri people and stands strongly for the people of her family and clan. She is a strong, supportive person in my life who helps me to be here today.

I have many *miyalk gathu*, my daughters, daughters as *waku*, daughters as nieces and daughters who are strong mothers. One of my daughters is a soldier in NORFORCE. Two of my daughters work at Shepherdson College, and one daughter is working in aged care and supports the elderly in Gapuwiyak. I am proud of my *gathu mala*, my children. They will become leaders of our community in time.

We spoke earlier this week about the terrible deaths due to family violence. It shows the terrible picture of the dysfunction that has come into many communities as the balanda system has impact on our systems. We must remember that Yolngu culture is not based on the foundation of the power imbalance between men and women, and we must ensure that our systems today reflect this equality. It is important that men in our communities remember our creation stories and understand that men and women have always been equal under the law of the land, no matter what influences we have seen since colonisation, and that our ancestral spirits have laid the path for us.

This is the true pathway that we all live and should be able to reflect in who we are, the clan, or whether we are balanda or Yolngu living together—we all have respect and live with the women. They created—they are our mothers and people who care for us, so we stand with them. Through our culture, we have high respect because of the first ancestors that created and gave power to our women.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, women make up 48% of the Northern Territory's population, and the majority of those are under the age of 35. They are aspirational, with more than 60,000 women in the workforce, and they are inspirational, with more than 15,000 women volunteering in our community. I think of people like my mum, Christina, who was recognised last year at the Seniors of Excellence Awards for more than 50 years of community service.

Territory women are migrants, entrepreneurs, public servants, community leaders, frontline workers and Defence personnel. They also include an increasing number of women in public life, and there is no better place for women to lead than in the Country Liberal Party.

History shows that the CLP is the natural home for women who value our unique lifestyle, work hard and want to make a difference. That rings true across the country. Australia's first federal MP was Enid Lyons, a Liberal from Tasmania. She also became our first Cabinet minister. The first woman elected to a council, the first state MP and the first head of a federal department were all women from the Liberal movement.

In the Northern Territory, the CLP has blazed the trail for many women in public life. Our first MLA was Liz Andrew from Sanderson, who also became our first Cabinet minister. Our first MLA from Central Australia, the late Loraine Braham, was elected as a CLP member. Our first female Lord Mayor, Dr Ella Stack, led the city's recovery after Cyclone Tracy. Who could forget Bess Price, former minister for women and the mother of Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price—two Aboriginal women breaking the cycle of violence and dysfunction and two CLP women who have served the Territory with distinction.

Our movement is the best place for women who lead, and history shows it. It is not just history. After Saturday's by-election, one in five of Labor's MLAs are women. Meanwhile, women make up more than one-third of our parliamentary team in the CLP. Women make up almost half of our Cabinet. We are fierce local champions of hardworking parliamentarians, including Laurie Zio, the Member for Fannie Bay; Oly Carlson, the Member for Wanguri; Robyn Cahill, the Minister for Business, Trade and Asian Relations and a million other portfolios, including Prevention of Domestic Violence and Children and Families; and Jo Hersey, the minister for Education and the Public Service.

I acknowledge Jo and her leadership in the wake of the Katherine floods. Even after having foot surgery and rolling around in a wheelchair, she has been committed to her community and to updating the rest of the Territory and Australia by any means possible. She is a trooper, and we cannot wait to have her back here and, hopefully, have a celebration cake, because it was her birthday the other day during the floods. We are lucky to have her as the diligent Member for Katherine.

There is also our Chief Minister, Lia Finocchiaro. She is a remarkable Chief Minister doing a remarkable job as she leads a unified, strong, diverse team. We are dedicated not only to Territorians but also each other, because we believe that we can take the Territory forward. I could not think of a better example for girls in the Northern Territory.

All of us in this place can agree that public life can be challenging, but a woman's place is at a Cabinet table, at a decision-making table and in the Chamber. We all, male and female, have a role to play to make sure women are represented in our decisions.

Nowhere is more important than in criminal justice. We have the worst rates of domestic violence in the country, and Aboriginal women are seven times more likely to be murdered by their partner. This is our greatest shame. That is why we are taking such strong measures to reduce crime and tackle root causes. We have made sentences stronger because we believe that punishment should fit the crime.

We introduced mandatory sentencing for DVO breaches to lock up DV offenders. In less than 12 months we have seen more than 1,600 offenders face imprisonment. That is about 1,600 victims who now have the chance to escape and find the support they need. Just this week we introduced the strongest penalties in the country for DV murder.

We have introduced the strongest bail laws in the country, and we are investing a record $36m a year into domestic violence prevention. Even though the Member for Gwoja would have you believe otherwise, $36m is more than Labor invested and more than it promised. We are not doing that for photo ops or feel-good workshops, but funding the 45 practical actions, including Circuit Breaker, which has now handled over 529 cases. That is more than 500 cases of early intervention to end the cycle of violence.

Under Labor, domestic violence went up by more than 80%. Under the CLP, domestic violence is down by 3% across the Territory. It is down by 16% in Alice Springs alone, and that number continues to trend downward. We are seeing real results.

We have so many amazing Territory women across business, government, local councils, local organisations, in sport and all day every day doing incredible, amazing work. We celebrate every one of them.

I make special mention of some of the women in my community, being the women's division 2 Palmerston Magpies team, who won their premiership title on the weekend. They won the grand final against Jabiru—sorry, Member for Arafura. They did an amazing job, and I am pretty sure they were outsiders to win that grand final. As a proud patron of the Palmerston Magpies Football Club, I can see that the women in the club—some have been there for a long time, and some are coming up through the ranks—are rebuilding that club.

They have had a tough couple of years, as a club, and I can see now they are turning that around, thanks to the women. Even the men in the club tell me that when I visit. I am rooting for them to get better at their football and just to love the game and the companionship that comes with it.

The women and men at the Palmerston Rovers Football Club held an event over the weekend. Sadly, I could not make it, but it was called Kick Like a Girl on Her Side. The Palmerston Rovers are known for the growth in that football club, with more women coming on board every year. It was great to hear that they had a successful event, so well done to the Palmerston Rovers.

I must mention the Palmerston Raiders Rugby League Football Club, because their women have been playing rugby league for a long time, and they are exceptional. I am pretty sure they have either been in the finals or won their grand finals across multiple age groups from the first time the women entered the competition. I am proud of them and continue to support them.

There are amazing women at the Palmerston Game Fishing Club, and they also held an International Women's Day event. A huge shout-out goes to some of the women in that organisation: Emma; Rose; and Peta, just to name a few. They work tooth and nail to the bone and are basically the driving force behind the fishing club. They do a mountain of work, and their membership is growing. Fishing is one of those lifestyle things we love about the Territory. I am proud of the women in that club.

Tara Academy Darwin is a group of young ladies who are learning Irish dancing. It is cute, but they are going places; they perform in competitions and are serious about what they do. They are fundraising at the moment, so I was proud to support them. I give a shout-out to the young ladies in those competitions and their parents who take them along and organise all that. They are doing a great job.

The other shout-out I want to give is to Renae at SAM's Dance Studio. Renae is the owner, and there is a number of dance teachers at the studio. The young ladies across a number of age groups who perform at that studio are often at the Palmerston Markets doing performances for us. When they perform, the crowd is out of control. There are no car parks when they are on, and there is no food left after they have been. We love it because families come to watch these wonderful young ladies perform. A huge shout-out goes to their teachers, the young ladies and everybody involved, especially Renae.

As you can see, women contribute so much to society. The examples I have given demonstrate the contribution women make. This is how we make our community great, and it is why it is so great, because we have amazing women doing amazing things, and the Territory is all the more richer for it.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, the Northern Territory thrives when every person, regardless of gender, can safely live, participate fully and reach their full potential. Gender equality is central to this vision, and strengthening families, boosting economic growth and forging safer more connected communities where women and girls are empowered to lead is part of our vision.

Just days ago, on 8 March 2026, the NT joined the world in celebrating International Women's Day under the powerful theme of 'Balance the Scales'. This theme perfectly catches our shared mission to level the playing field for Territory women so they can access every opportunity without barriers.

Our CLP government is proudly supporting a record number of events this year—from Darwin to Palmerston to Big Rivers, the Barkly, Central Australia, East Arnhem and West Arnhem—drawn from 54 grant applications, the highest number of applications ever. These events showcased extraordinary leadership and connection, and I was proud to attend so many with many of my colleagues from both sides of the Chamber over the weekend.

St John Ambulance hosted a Women in Ambulance morning tea, giving pathways for women in remote communities. The Numburindi Development Aboriginal Corporation celebrated women through photography and storytelling; CREATE Foundation's 'stronger sisters, stronger futures' empowered young women aged 12 to 25 from care backgrounds; the Galiwinku Women's Space Aboriginal Corporation united Yolngu and non-Indigenous women in cultural exchange; and Be.Me. Movement Education in Central Australia monitored First Nations girls through movement and wellbeing camps.

These gatherings were not just events; they were catalysts for empowerment, reflecting the Territory's diverse spirit. At its core gender equality means gender should never dictate safety, opportunities or the chance to embrace the Territory's lifestyle.

Our three-pillar strategy—reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our lifestyle—embeds this principle, ensuring genuine equality of opportunity for all Territorians regardless of race, religion or gender. In just 18 months we have delivered tangible actions, funding community programs, opening leadership pathways, promoting inclusive sport, bolstering support services and advancing workplace equality.

Women now form 63% of the Northern Territory Public Sector workforce and hold 57.8% of senior management roles from SAO2 to ECO6. This is a testament to our inclusive government and environment. The gender equality grants program ran two rounds in 2025–26, and 14 general grants of up to $5,000 supported projects like the Darwin Karting Association, breaking motorsport barriers; the Swampdogs Rugby Union Club's women inclusion; and Waratah Football Club's uniforms for female players. Five targeted grants went to powerhouses like Ruby Gaea and the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory, sustaining vital equality programs.

Most people know by now that I love my sport, and I can proudly say that sport in the NT exemplifies our progress. Northern Territory Sports Academy programs approach gender parity, with 253 male and 244 female participants as of December 2025. Standouts include the regional and remote physical literacy program, with 61 females and 29 males, and coach official scholarships, with 17 females and 18 males. Across 413 paid sport staff, it is balanced at 203 women and 209 men.

Boards feature 127 female directors out of 268, aligning with our NT peak sporting bodies grant requirement for 50% female and gender-diverse representation. We host NT Women in Sport forums for networking and leadership, while six Territory women excel in the Australian Sports Commission Women's Mentor Program. Our female athletes inspire us every day: Paralympian, Brydee Moore; AFLW star and 2025 NAIDOC Sportsperson of the Year, Danielle Ponter; NTFL's Jasmyn Hewitt, who on Sunday night got her fourth NTFL Women's Premier League Best and Fairest; judo phenomenon, Alannah Joyce, who is Australia's number one, 2024 NT Sportsperson of the Year and a 2032 Olympics hopeful; Sonya Newman in World Para Ice Hockey; and Macey Sheridan of the electorate of Fannie Bay, the 2025 NT Sportsperson of the Year and an amazing swimmer.

This week we announced the $1.32m DXC Arena upgrade, with modern female change rooms, better parking and safety features for more than 1,000 annual AFL and cricket games, spurring participation and international cricket's 2026 return. This is a great announcement for cricket and AFL, specifically for the PINT Football Club of which I am proud to be the patron. The PINT women's premier league team are playing in their grand final this weekend on Saturday at 4.15 pm at TIO Stadium, if anybody wants to watch great women's sport.

I am also fighting for my electorate commitment of upgrades to the infrastructure at the Waratah Football Club, which will improve facilities for women who play sport at the club. Hopefully, we can get that over the line.

In arts and culture, Territory women lead globally. Emily Wurramara won the 2025 National Indigenous Music Awards Artist of the Year; Gaypalani Wanambi won the 2025 NATSIAA prize of $100,000; and Dr Shellie Morris AO won the Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Frontline supports thrive as well. Dawn House provides DV crisis accommodation, counselling and education, with its Standing with the Frontline event honouring sector workers. The Red Cross Connected Women program, which I am glad to have supported and have attended many events, has empowered 715 migrant or refugee women of 45 nationalities.

Romy Carey is the NT Cattlemen's Association CEO; Taylah Peters received the 2026 Northern Territory Award for Excellence in Women's Leadership for her work with DV survivors; Jenny Duggan OAM is the 2026 NT Senior Australian of the Year; the 2025 International Student Award went to Sabrina Doha; Melissa Andrews-Wurramarrba is a young Aboriginal educator; Talia Liddle won for tourism; Uxel Mason won for disability inclusion; Anneliese Grazioli won for small business, and she does an amazing job with her small business—I have been there and witnessed it; Kate McTaggart won for connecting communities; Jules Gabor, youth leadership; Toni Hedditch, career achievement; and Darwin Basketball Association's Annie and Georgia in sport.

Since 2024 there have been 22 NT women earn Australian honours, including Medals of the Order of Australia to Helen Summers, Donna Rousham and Bettina Danganbarr and Officers of the Order of Australia, Justices Jenny Blokland and Judith Kelly.

Our female pioneers also shine. Adelaide River's 1970s all-women fire brigade has finally been honoured. Station Officer Yva Woerle is the inaugural NT Women in Fire and Emergency Services Award winner. Senior Sergeant Donna Cayley won the 2026 Patricia Anne Brennan Award for Policing Leadership. I congratulate them all.

Looking ahead, we are developing the Northern Territory gender equality strategy through extensive consultation from October 2025 to February 2026. There have been 1,600 people on the Have Your Say website. There have been 40 surveys, 16 submissions and 35 workshops across Darwin, Palmerston, Casuarina, Alice Springs, Katherine and online. There is also NT Youth Round Table input. Feedback is shaping focus areas such as gender disaggregated data, policy auditing, unconscious bias training and rights awareness. This will launch later this year.

I attended an event at the Sri Lankan Australian Friendship Association on Sunday morning. I am of the firm belief that I do not think women need to be equal in everything. When we talk about balancing the scales, it does not mean that we need 50% of everything. It means that when a young woman or girl wants to do something, she can and she can see other people championing that work. That is what we spoke about at the event.

Additionally, I have two amazing daughters who are strong, confident and do amazing things for our families and the communities they operate in. I now have an amazing granddaughter, and I cannot wait to see what she does when she grows up. I can already see the strength and determination in her eyes and the stubbornness, which she gets from her mother, not her grandmother. I have everything to fight for when it comes to equity in the Northern Territory for women. I will be doing everything that I can.

So many people in this Chamber have already said that when Territory women and girls thrive, families thrive, communities thrive and the Northern Territory thrives. Our government delivers equal opportunity, respect and safety through bold, practical actions. We are building on International Women's Day momentum for a bigger, brighter future for the Northern Territory.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, I come from a childhood of mostly women, with my nana and my mothers growing me up, so I acknowledge them and other women in the community who are strong leaders.

Before I go on, I acknowledge you mob in the room—all the ladies in here—because I know that every meeting you go to and every discussion you have is contributing and making this a better place for my daughter to grow up. She is 14 and already stressing dad out.

Over the weekend, Territorians marked International Women's Day, recognising the contribution women make across our community every day. Women are leading in their communities, raising families, running businesses and working in essential services that keep our communities strong. In our electorates, we see that every day through our community leaders, small business owners, health workers, teachers and volunteers.

Strong women in our communities contribute to strong children and youth growing up. In my electorate, there are various teaching groups, women in schools and women at cultural hubs who play an important role in a child's life—as well as the father, obviously. In Indigenous culture, we get our moiety, our place in the kinship system, from our women, from our mothers and our nanas. It is a foolproof system. You are your mother's son; you are your mother's daughter. They play an important role, as the Member for Mulka pointed out.

I am proud be part of a government where women make up a whopping 57% of the federal Labor Caucus. The discussions that come from that and the policies that come from the federal government and here will help our ladies into the future.

One highlight is that the last three Chief Ministers of the Northern Territory have been women. I acknowledge the senators as well, Malarndirri McCarthy and Aunty Marion Scrymgour. Lydia Thorpe and Jacinta Price are there—fiery Indigenous ladies; that is the way we like it. I acknowledge the ladies in the communities as well. I acknowledge the Speaker, the Member for Araluen, for being here and keeping us in line.

I acknowledge a couple of the Darwin CEOs in a few organisations: Athina Pascoe-Bell, Mayor of Palmerston; Sally Sievers, NTCOSS; Annie Taylor, NT Shelter; Leeanne Caton, AHNT; Catherine Liddle, SNAICC; Cindy Torrens; Jane Vadiveloo; Jacqueline Bethel; Maree Corbo, Tangentyere Council; Sarah Austin; Blak Business Award winners, the ladies from Maningrida Babbarra Women's Centre; Ruth Palmer, NT Property Council; and Cathy Simmonds, Hospitality NT.

I will talk about women in leadership roles playing a big part in our youths growing up. The discussions are important, especially for our Indigenous kids coming from the community and being encouraged to participate in our society. Women play a major role in our cultural context. When we are making policies we need Aboriginal ladies here because they hold a big part in our cultural identity. All their education—whether it is in the school in the Western system or in our traditional cultural system—is pushing for our youths to have a place in society. Getting them to the table to have a say definitely brings a different perspective.

My partner and I read the same articles, like a piece in the *Australian* or the *NT News*, and she takes away something different from what I take, and I say, 'How did you see that?' That is why it is important that we have discussions.

I congratulate every women who is in a leadership role. I understand it is not easy; they have to handle the household and be the gentle one and the fierce one to handle families. I acknowledge women and that participating in every level of government and every discussion, meeting and board level will make it a better Territory for everyone.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I want to ensure that the CLP government keeps a close eye on what is happening in parts of the flooded areas across the NT that are not necessarily in the CLP members' electorates. I said earlier today that I am not above begging to make sure the people of Jilkminggan and Mataranka are considered in the post-disaster planning.

This morning at 6.30, the federal Minister for Emergency Management, Kristy McBain, was travelling to Katherine. I am eager to hear what her observations were, and I appreciate the support from the federal Labor government.

I want to correct the record because yesterday I asked an important question on behalf of my constituents, particularly in Jilkminggan and Mataranka. I acknowledge the hard work of the local police in terms of emergency management, the local schoolteachers who have been working around the clock for 12-hour shifts, sharing the load, as well as the Roper Gulf Regional Council and other members of the community.

The Chief Minister, even though we sit only a couple of metres away in this Chamber, ignored my acknowledgement of those NTG workers, as well as local government and community services, and then went on this ridiculous rant rather than answering the question that I was given to ask the Chief Minister about emergency services, the evacuation of Jilkminggan and the extra support that is needed because people are exhausted in Mataranka. They have been doing their best without any extra resources.

We are tasked in this place to represent our electorates. Particularly in times of need there should be always that middle ground where politics does not have a strong place, because we are worried about the safety and the priority of human life, people's livelihoods, their businesses and properties et cetera. I was met with disdain by the Chief Minister. She could not just answer and say, 'By the way, we have plans in place' or 'We are quite exhausted with our resources, but we will be looking at further support for Jilkminggan and the people of Mataranka'. No; she just went on a spray about me.

I do not care about me; I am in this Chamber doing my job, asking questions on behalf of community members. I can forward every text message, phone call or message on Facebook that I have had from my constituents from that area to the Chief Minister if she chooses. Instead, I want to channel all those questions and the feedback I am getting directly from my constituents so it is on the public record.

If we are missing information, which we have not been able to find through the public channels online, through the SecureNT Facebook and websites, then my job is to ask those questions. You would think I could get direct, straight and consistent answers from the Chief Minister.

For the last two days in a row she has shown her disdain for the important role that she holds—the leadership role of the Northern Territory. Again, she is proving more to be a leader by name and not by nature and just could not find it within herself to provide me with an answer to give my constituents. She sprayed about me. I do not care if Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro rubbishes me. I honestly do not care at this point, but do it any other time. All I want are the answers to those important questions that my constituents continually ask me to find out.

As we start to get to more of the recovery and cleanup phase across the Northern Territory, there will be more questions asked which need to be fielded and answered. Please, I ask the Chief Minister and her CLP government, provide some type of channel for respect when it comes to answering those important questions. All the politicking and saying that the Labor opposition is being divisive and trying to be racist—I thought, 'What? How on Earth have I asked any question that anybody could interpret as racist?' I have no idea of what the Chief Minister is thinking because she will not answer these simple questions that I need to get for my constituents.

I will continue to ask those questions. If I have to forward every text message I receive to the Chief Minister's phone—if that is what she wants me to do—I will do that. I will send every email that people have sent me or my electorate office. I will forward those to her and make sure that her office responds because she will be busy. I was up at 10 and 11 o'clock the last three nights in this place, so I could reply to every message to do my job. I do not mind doing it. I am not complaining one bit, but I want the answers so I can provide them back to all those questions and concerns that have been raised to me as the Member for Arnhem.

There are other members of the CLP government who provide timely and precise updates, and I appreciate it. There are concerns spilling out to different portfolios. I understand everyone is busy and stressed and that everyone wants to see some type of resolution, but for some reason the Chief Minister cannot find it in herself at a time of crisis—when people look to their leader for clear, consistent, regular messages—she does not want to do that. I do not understand why. Perhaps CLP members should be asking Lia Finocchiaro why she does not want to get the information out.

The different platforms of information are also the big questions I have been asked. 'I do not pay attention to Facebook and Instagram'—that is what I am getting from people. Why are we not getting regular updates from the Chief Minister and the government on the radio? Why are we not getting daily updates, and why are we not getting the geo-targeted text messages we instilled as routine? That geo-targeting was done during COVID; it can be done. It was six years ago when COVID started in the Northern Territory. Everyone has probably blacked it out now.

The conversations about what happens next are what my constituents are asking me. I want to provide them with something. I will be honest with everyone; the answer I have started giving people today—and I have never had to do it in my 10 years as a local member—is, 'I am sorry, but I cannot give you that answer. The government does not care about you because you live in Mataranka' or 'The government does not care about you because you are from Jilkminggan'.

That is the honest answer I have started to give to people in my electorate, because it is beyond belief that I cannot get a positive, constructive response about the information. I am not asking for the world to turn back. I have not gone as far as the CLP in previous years when it blamed the government for the weather.

Remember that, when there were trucks stuck that could not get to Alice Springs and down the highway on the South Australian side? The CLP opposition, led by Lia Finocchiaro, blamed Labor for the weather and for the supplies not getting up. It was, again, a severe and phenomenal weather incident on the South Australian side of the border, but apparently it was the Territory Labor government's fault at the time. It was ridiculous.

Information flow needs to be better. All those people who are listening in the Chief Minister's office, please give one bit of advice to your leader: 'Just get out and give a daily update'. Even if it is a five or 10-minute standup or something, please just get consistent with the messaging and provide people with that information because I am at the point where I will just tell people that I have tried several times to get answers, and now it seems clear that the NT's CLP government does not care about them because of where they live.

There will be updates across the Territory, and once I can get answers for my constituents I would love to provide constructive feedback—not to rubbish, because I know everyone is stretched and exhausted; I want to be constructive because I talked to someone about 20 minutes ago on the phone who said that they have been through three Katherine floods, and this is one of the most uncoordinated and stressful ones they have ever been through. They have lived in Katherine for 41 years—almost the exact amount of time I have been alive.

You would think that processes over the years would improve. For some reason there has been a lack of coordination of certain areas within the emergency response. Everyone has been doing their best. I am not rubbishing anyone, and I do not want any crap to say that I am rubbishing, because I am not. I appreciate all the work people have done. They need clear relief.

I would love to see the CLP government put out its hand to the Australian Government, ask directly for support from the Australian Defence Force and mobilise officers who are ready to go and who are capable in this national disaster recovery.

Ms CAHILL (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I will give a quick adjournment. I give a shout-out to the first recipients of my citizenship awards for 2026. I love going to the schools and seeing these kids. It is one of the best parts of the job we have. They are so amazing.

A big shout-out goes to Genie Peters for consistently showing school values inside and outside the classroom. Genie goes to Larrakeyah Primary, as does Eliz Dela Cruz, who was awarded a citizenship award for consistently following school values.

A big callout goes to St Mary's Catholic Primary School students Savannah Austin, for recognising when others need help and showing kindness, and Cris Barcelon, for consistently showing respect and care for the environment and others.

As the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations, I am a great proponent for small business in the Territory, but sometimes those small businesses are also great proponents for me. I give a shout-out to a couple of cafes that recently supported my coffee catchups for the electorate. To Prabin from Dukes on Knuckey Street, thank you for allowing me to bring people to your cafe to have a chat about the concerns they have around the community. Aliye, who owns Lime Cafe at the Waterfront, was extremely generous with her support, even making us fresh cakes so anyone who popped by could have a coffee and cake, which was fantastic. I appreciated that.

I thank my electorate officer, Helen, who graciously agreed to assist me to clean up Civic Park and some main streets around Darwin on Clean Up Australia Day. It was quite the eye-opener. It was a wet day, and we found some interesting items. We managed to pull together six large bags of rubbish, making Civic Park spick and span. We will make that a regular occurrence over the next year, because we think our city deserves to always look spick and span.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge many events I have attended in the past couple of months. Our government proudly celebrates the Territory's multicultural strength, and the invaluable contributions migrants make to our social and economic life.

The Finocchiaro government is delivering on its election commitment to establish the first-ever multicultural centre in Alice Springs. In February I was joined in Alice Springs at the site of the new multicultural centre, by the Chief Minister, the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure and the Member for Braitling. In a joint media release, we unveiled the first concept designs for the $9.8m state-of-the-art facility to be located next to the Anzac Oval precinct in the CBD. The centre will feature a flexible event space for up to 400 people, a performance stage and catering facilities. For years, multicultural communities in Alice Springs have championed the need for a vibrant, multipurpose space where cultures can be celebrated and shared. Now we are one step closer to making that vision a reality.

Whilst in Alice Springs, it was a privilege to host a multicultural community event at the iconic Araluen Arts Centre to spend time engaging with our vibrant multicultural community in the Red Centre. I was grateful to be joined by all of Cabinet as we celebrated the rich cultures that make our Territory so strong and diverse. I thank all the community associations who joined us.

On 6 February it was an honour to host a Waitangi Day celebration at Parliament House with our friends from across the ditch. It was a truly inclusive event about culture, connection and community. I thank the Darwin Maori Community Association President Jeanette O'Brien and Vice President Tania Jong for bringing the event together and sharing the Maori culture, language and music with the wider Territory community. I also thank my colleagues who attended, including the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations; and the Members for Fannie Bay, Wanguri, Goyder and Casuarina.

In February I also had the pleasure of attending the Vietnamese Court Music Nha Nhac performance at the AANT Centre in Darwin, an impressive opening of the Lunar New Year. It was encouraging to see nearly 500 people gather to experience the elegance of the UNESCO-recognised cultural treasure, performed by the talented artists of the Hue Traditional Royal Art Theatre. The evening was a powerful celebration of Vietnamese heritage, and I thoroughly enjoyed the richness and artistry of Vietnam's traditional performing arts of music, song and dance.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Australian Vietnamese Family Association, led by President Anna Dam, in partnership with the Consul-General of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Western Australia and Northern Territory, Mrs Nguyen Thanh Ha, for hosting this remarkable event.

Also in February, the Lankan Dance Academy held its prestigious Wes and Pahimpath Ceremony at the Territory Netball Stadium. The event marked the highest traditional milestone in a Kandyan dancer's journey, and I was joined by the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina. The ceremony, traditional dress, dance and rituals were extremely meaningful to witness, and you could see how proud the young boys and girls were. I thank Sadeepa and the organisers for their hard work and dedication to the special ceremony.

I was also pleased to join the vibrant Lunar New Year celebration hosted by the Chief Minister at Parliament House. The Year of the Fire Horse—a rare occurrence that comes once every 60 years—ushered in a spirit of renewal, reflection and fresh beginnings. I was delighted to celebrate alongside many parliamentary colleagues and community leaders, including the Members for Port Darwin, Fannie Bay, Drysdale, Blain, Wanguri, Casuarina, Karama, Katherine and Goyder.

It was also a wonderful opportunity to attend the 2026 Chinese New Year Banquet by the Chung Wah Society alongside the Chief Minister and my parliamentary colleagues as we again welcomed the Year of the Fire Horse—a year that represents drive and progress and a reminder that the Territory continues moving forward with confidence, strength and opportunity. I acknowledge the Dragon and Lion Dance Troupe and society leaders for their enduring contributions to these special events in the Territory.

As Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I was pleased to join the Australian Vietnamese Family Association, led by President Anna Dam, and her hardworking committee, for their Lunar New Year at the Novotel. It was enjoyable to celebrate the deeply significant occasion which celebrates heritage, family and new beginnings with my colleagues the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations and the Members for Karama and Wanguri. The Vietnamese community continues to make an extraordinary contribution to the Territory, enriching our cultural life through vibrant festivals, traditions and a strong community spirit. It was a fun afternoon taking part in games and watching many cultural performances by children and adults.

Also in February I was joined by the Member for Wanguri and honoured to represent the Chief Minister at Thai Pongal—a cherished harvest festival symbolising gratitude, prosperity and togetherness. I thank Kavithasan and the Tamil Society of the Northern Territory for their warm invitation and their ongoing contribution to harmony and inclusion in our community.

The Attorney-General and I attended the uplifting Carnival Party hosted by the Portuguese and Timorese community at the end of February. It was inspiring to experience the colour, music and energy of the night. I thank the organisers and emcee Jah-Ryse Godinho for creating such a vibrant atmosphere.

I have been blessed to attend two Holi celebrations recently, with another one this weekend. Holi is a joyous festival that celebrates people together through colour, joy and friendship. I thank Prativa and the team from the Nepalese Association of the NT and Hiranch Patel and team from the Gujarati Cultural Association of Darwin for sharing their culture and adding to the rich multicultural fabric of our Territory. To all the volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make these celebrations possible, I thank you sincerely.

Last week on 4 March I was delighted to host an Orthodox Great Lent reception at Parliament House. Hundreds of members from not just our Greek community but broader Orthodox communities gathered to celebrate Great Lent, a sacred and meaningful season. The celebration invited us to pause, reflect and look inward with honesty, outward with compassion and forward with hope. I am proud that Parliament House can be a place where communities come together to mark meaningful moments.

Last month demonstrates, once again, that our diversity is a source of strength, pride and opportunity. From Alice Springs to Darwin, our multicultural communities came together in the spirit of celebration and respect.

Our Finocchiaro government is dedicated to supporting the Territory community through the multicultural grants program initiative. Applications are now open until 31 March. The grants program is all about celebrating the rich cultures, stories and traditions that make the Northern Territory such a vibrant place to call home. It provides funding to migrant and multicultural communities across the Northern Territory to bring events, projects and ideas to life. If you have a great idea that showcases culture, strengthens community connections or shares your heritage with the wider Territory, now is the time to apply. That was my multicultural community engagement throughout this time.

As the Member for Sanderson, I want to talk about people who are currently relocated from different community areas. One of the issues raised by the people of my community whom I represent in Sanderson are the issues regarding behaviours that normally come when people are relocated to town. Last time I contacted the Member for Daly when I had an incident at one of the parks. Members representing remote communities, please expect a call if my community reaches out. When I talk to those people and they are from a certain area I would like to work with the member from that area and make sure that we address the issue because I do not want my community to be affected by the issues that are coming along with these kinds of things.

I have just been to the Marrara basketball court and seen a lot of people sitting there drinking alcohol. Yes, I can ring police and Larrakia Nation, and I will do that, but as the Member for Sanderson I will make sure that I ring the responsible member from each area, and I am expecting cooperation from that person to work together. My intention is to work together and support the individual, not to ring the police and cause chaos, which I do not want to do. I am just putting this on the record. If any of the remote community members receive a call from me, it means that I want to work with you for the people you are representing.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, *werte, palya, ngurrju*, *selamat malam*, *buongiorno*, *kia ora*. February 21 was World Mother Language Day, and it was an opportunity for us to pause and reflect on the beauty of language from around the world. What better place to celebrate World Mother Language Day than in the Northern Territory, which is home to the world's oldest living culture, Aboriginal Territorians, and the amazing contributions they make, and also all our multicultural brothers and sisters who have decided to come from all around the world to call the Territory home.

Across the Territory are amazing contributions of language, whether it is language spoken for thousands of years from First Nations Territorians or languages that have come across the seas and now call the Territory home. In the Northern Territory we have so many amazing multicultural groups that we get to work with and visit and attend many cultural festivities. There are more than 170 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken across the country and more than 400 multicultural languages spoken every day across the Territory.

As the proud Member for Gwoja, the Territory's largest electorate, I acknowledge the Warlpiri nation, the Luritja, the Pintupi, the Anmatjere, the Arrernte, the Gurindji and the Nitjpurru. I acknowledge all the amazing communities and how important language is. In the Northern Territory we can walk down the main street of any town and hear the beauty of language. We can hear languages that have been spoken for more than 40,000 years still strong in culture and in practice being spoken every day. We can hear the amazing languages from our multicultural brothers and sisters still being spoken every day. It is wonderful to see

multicultural communities from around the Territory setting up language schools to keep their language and culture strong.

To all my brothers and sisters from the bush, keep your language strong because language is power, and that is one thing that people cannot take away from anyone—your knowledge and language. We need to make sure that we continue to support that. I am a big fan of bilingual education and would love to see it continue to grow across the Northern Territory education system in remote communities and multicultural schools and classrooms. Being bilingual is important for the future.

I acknowledge a champion from the electorate of Gwoja, Xzane from Willowra School, who came third in the long jump at the national championships in Canberra. It is a long way from Willowra to Canberra, and it was a big change in the weather. It is an amazing achievement of that young one, coming third in the national championships. We are so proud of you and all your achievements. I hope you continue to do long jump. I would love to see you representing Australia at the Olympics when you grow up. It is an amazing achievement.

It has been a big week in parliament, but I thank everyone in the bush who has been strong during the last couple of weeks. We have had a lot of rain, as we heard from everyone. Yes, it has been a bit of a struggle for families and has caused some disruption to us, being at home or getting stuck in town, but once these rains clear up and people can get back to community, there is an exciting time coming.

There are a few bush members looking with excitement now, because after all this rain happens, it will be bush tucker season. The Members for Daly and Barkly are getting excited. The bush comes alive after these summer rains, and if you have not had the chance to get out to the bush to see the beauty after the rain, make sure you take the opportunity. The bush tucker will be blooming. The rock holes will be full of water. It is safe to say, Madam Speaker, where you and I are from, it will be a bloody beautiful wildflower season in the Central Desert this year.

If you have not gotten to Central Australia this year, make sure you come down and support tourism after the rains have cleared and we have done the work in the communities to get them back open. It is an opportunity to see that amazing place. Make sure you pop in to one of the local art centres. The rain has stopped a lot of business for our community art centres, and we need to make sure we support them.

We have spent a lot of time this week talking about the responses to floods and natural weather events. I acknowledge some legends tonight, and they are our council workers. They will be out mowing the verges, fixing the potholes in the roads and tending to issues in our community. I say to them: we see you; we hear you; and we thank you. The grass is quite high at the moment, and our council workers will have a big job ahead of them. I thank them for the work they do. It is hard to keep our towns in top tidy shape, but they do a good job from the Centre to the Top End.

Thank you to all the emergency responders who have done an amazing job over the last few months as we have worked through the weather conditions. It is a challenge; there is no denying that. Thank you to all the local citizens who have wrapped around and supported one another.

The rain, of course, brings life to the Centre. Anyone who has been to Alice Springs during the river flows will see that it is magic. It brings a certain element of magic to the Red Centre, seeing so many families there together or when you are driving to the airport and see families swim once the waters have calmed. It is a beautiful place, and I reiterate that. Alice Springs is the land of magic. It is great to see so many things happening in and around the Red Centre—I could say the green centre at the moment; it is fairly green when you fly in.

Thank you to all the council workers and community members who will be doing the hard work in their local communities as we work back from this response. I understand it has been a bit of a challenge for schools. To all schools and health centres in Gwoja, thank you for your strength and resilience as we have navigated these weather patterns. You have done an amazing job.

I give a big shout-out to our community stores. Outback Stores has done a big job making sure all our stores have plenty of tucker. There was a truck going to Papunya and Haasts Bluff today.

Thanks, everyone, for your time, patience and resilience. It has been a big few weeks, and it will be a few more weeks of us working through the recovery.

Thanks to all members for bringing stories from your local communities to parliament. It is a good opportunity for us to hear about the good things happening in our communities. While there are negative things happening in the Territory—and unfortunately there will always be bad stories—the good stories always outweigh them. If we can talk more about the positive stories in adjournment, it will show how positive the Territory is. We might be small in population, but we are big in positivity. Let us continue to share those good stories.

Mrs CARLSON (Wanguri): Madam Speaker, I congratulate an outstanding local business and an exceptional team serving our community in Wanguri, Hibiscus Day and Night Pharmacy, the well-deserved winners of the NT Community Pharmacy of the Year 2026, which was awarded in December. The awards were attended by the Member for Fannie Bay. On 25 February I had the pleasure of joining the team for a morning tea to celebrate this incredible achievement at the store. It was a wonderful opportunity to recognise the dedication, care and professionalism of everyone involved.

Awards like these do not happen by chance; they are a result of hard work, vision and a genuine commitment to serving the community. Owners Marcus and Sin Leong have built so much more than a pharmacy; they have created a true health hub for the Wanguri electorate and the wider Darwin and Palmerston community. People from Palmerston came for the morning tea because they get their medication there.

The pharmacy has become a place people rely on for not only medication but also trusted advice, support and care. It is a place where patients are known by name, where staff take the time to listen and where innovation is embraced to ensure better outcomes for Territorians.

Hibiscus Day and Night Pharmacy continues to lead the way in community healthcare. As the new assistant minister for Health, I am proud of that pharmacy. Marcus and Sin have established the Northern Territory's first compounding laboratory, allowing specialised medication to be prepared locally and ensuring patients can access treatments that might otherwise be difficult to obtain. They have also implemented advanced dose administration aid robotics and introduced same-day delivery services, ensuring patients—particularly those who may be vulnerable or have mobility challenges—can receive their medications quickly and safely.

What truly sets Hibiscus Day and Night Pharmacy apart is the way it works collaboratively across the health system. Marcus and Sin have strong partnerships with local GPs, the NT Primary Health Network and home care providers, allowing their services to extend well beyond the walls of the pharmacy. Through these partnerships they support aged-care facilities, rural homes and patients across the Territory, helping to fill critical gaps in healthcare in the Territory. This approach reflects a deep understanding of the needs of our community and commitment to making healthcare more accessible for everyone.

Just as importantly, Hibiscus Day and Night Pharmacy has fostered a workplace culture that empowers staff, encourages innovation and prioritises sustainability and excellence in community care. The team is passionate, highly skilled and clearly proud of the work they do every day. It is this combination of innovation, collaboration and genuine care for the people that makes Hibiscus Day and Night Pharmacy such deserving winners of the NT Community Pharmacy of the Year Award. This recognition reflects not only the leadership of Marcus and Sin but also the dedication of every member of their team who contributes to the outstanding service they provide.

On behalf of the community, I say how proud we are of their achievements and how grateful we are for the work they do each day to support the health and wellbeing of Territorians. I wish that team the best. Today is actually the national awards, which are on the Gold Coast, so hopefully they can represent the Territory and come home as winners.

I recognise another wonderful contribution to our community that celebrates connection, movement and the importance of staying active at every stage of life. At our recent seniors' morning tea we were delighted to be joined by Natalie Eerden and the Nuline dancers who brought energy, joy and plenty of rhythm to the event. Natalie's leadership of Nuline Dance has created something truly special for our senior community. Through dance she has helped bring people together, encouraged them to stay active and, most importantly, ensured that fun and friendship remain the centre of the entire community.

Many people across the Territory will know Natalie for her remarkable career as a teacher. She was my brothers' and sisters' teacher at Rapid Creek when we were children. For more than three decades she dedicated herself to educating young Territorians and supporting students to reach their full potential.

Since her retirement from the classroom Natalie has continued to give back to the community in a different but equally meaningful way. By creating dance classes for seniors she has provided a welcoming space where people can move, laugh, learn new steps and build lasting friendships.

The Nuline dancers are now regular and welcomed guests at many community events. Wherever they perform they bring enthusiasm, confidence and encouragement for others to join in. What is particularly wonderful is the way Natalie and the dancers encourage the senior members of our community to keep active. We know that staying physically active and socially connected is important for wellbeing. Initiatives like this make a real difference to people's lives. Through dance Natalie has created a community where people feel included, supported and uplifted. It is a fantastic example of how passion and generosity can continue to enrich our community long after a formal career has ended.

I sincerely thank Natalie Eerden and the Nuline dancers for the joy they bring to so many people across the community. Your dedication to keeping our seniors active, connected and smiling is truly appreciated.

I could not speak on the MPI earlier today because we ran out of time, but there are special people I want to thank—eight females in my life. I am the eighth female child in my family; I am the last female. My seven sisters—Polyn Bungalay-Helwend, Georgina Kaissis, Selena Helwend, Lorraine Motohata, Tanya Motohata, the late Loretta Helwend and the late Jennifer Williams—have all helped shape my life, as did our dear mother, Chatarina Helwend, who moved to a different country so that all her children could have a better life.

Happy International Women's Day to all women, especially my sisters and my mum.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I recognise and celebrate several outstanding achievements and community contributions in the Casuarina electorate. These are the moments that remind us of what makes our community so special, not only the big victories but also the effort, service, dedication and people who quietly make Casuarina proud every day.

Congratulations to the Tracy Village Razorbacks Football Club. Both the men's and women's division 1 teams made it through to their grand finals this season. Anyone who watched those matches would know they were not easy contests. They were muddy, fiery and fiercely fought, and although the Razorbacks did not take home the trophy, they showed something just as important—heart, determination and true team spirit. Sometimes success is not measured only by the final scoreboard; sometimes it is measured by the way a team carries itself and fights for one another and by the pride it brings to its supporters and community. The Razorbacks did exactly that.

In the women's grand final three Razorback players celebrated important personal milestones. Meg Magnuson and Ally Gilmore reached the remarkable milestone of 100 games, while Gloriana Luta celebrated her 50th game. These are not just numbers; they represent years of commitment, training and turning up for teammates, the club and the community. To Meg, Ally and Gloriana, congratulations; your achievements are something to be proud of.

I also acknowledge a significant honour for the club. Congratulations to Michael 'Mago' McLean, a Tracy Village premiership coach who has been named the 2026 Sir Doug Nicholls Round honouree by AFL Northern Territory. This is a special recognition. It reflects his contribution to not only football but also to the wider community. People like Mago leave a lasting impact. They build culture, mentor others and strengthen community. That deserves to be recognised in this House.

I will also speak about the achievements of a young local student, Adam Grace from Dripstone Secondary College. In January Adam competed in the Australian Eight Ball Federation Junior Nationals in Gladstone. His results were outstanding. He finished undefeated at the top of the ladder in his age division. He played 23 singles games with 14 wins, nine draws and not a single loss. In the team competition he won 17 of 21 games. Those incredible results earned Adam the title of Player of the Carnival for the under-15s. That was not all. Adam also went back to back, winning the under-15s 6 Red Shootout with a time of 21.46 seconds. He also tied for Sportsperson of the Carnival. What an extraordinary achievement for such a young Territorian. Adam, you have represented yourself, your school and our community with excellence.
Well done. Casuarina is proud of you.

Casuarina was also proud to celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. Students from Darwin schools recently attended a special event at Casuarina Library where they had the opportunity to learn from and be inspired by women working in science. Events like this matter deeply; they open doors, spark curiosity and show young girls that there is a place for them in science, discovery, innovation and leadership. Representation, encouragement and opportunity matter. That is why I sincerely thank the

CDU Radicle Centre and City of Darwin Libraries for hosting such an important and inspiring event for our community.

Creativity among our young people is also being beautifully showcased through the Exit Art exhibition at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. This exhibition features 59 exceptional artworks selected from more than 160 entries from Year 12 students across the Territory. That alone shows the extraordinary talent of our young people. I congratulate Henbury School 2025 Year 12 graduates Trisvina and Kiendra, whose artwork was selected for the exhibition. This is an outstanding achievement and well-deserved recognition of their creativity, talent and hard work. Art has a powerful way of telling stories, expressing identity and helping us see the world through fresh eyes. To have your work selected in such a competitive exhibition is truly special. Congratulations to both of them. The exhibition remains open to the public until 31 May, and I encourage everyone to visit MAGNT and experience this remarkable collection.

I acknowledge an initiative that my office has recently commenced—community information sessions. During February we held drop-in sessions for seniors in the community room. The first session provided information about online and phone scams, facilitated by Janine Dempsey from NT Consumer Affairs. The second focused on aged-care reforms and was delivered by Jamie Phelan from Darwin Community Legal Services.

These sessions gave seniors access to free, confidential and practical information and advice, and that matters. For many older members of our community, navigating change can feel overwhelming. Whether it is protecting themselves from scams or understanding reforms in aged care, having trusted guidance can make all the difference. These sessions are about more than information; they are about support, connection and making sure people know they are not alone.

I sincerely thank Janine and Jamie for giving their time, sharing their expertise and supporting members of our community with such care and generosity.

These stories of sporting spirit, personal milestones, youth achievement, science, art and community service show the best of Casuarina. We see a community full of talent and resilience and people who lift one another up. It is a privilege to recognise them in this House.

To everyone I have mentioned, thank you. Congratulations, and thank you for making Casuarina such a strong, proud and vibrant community.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge and commend the outstanding achievements of amazing students at Essington School, as they did the Territory proud on the world stage.

I had the chance to meet with these 12 wonderful students on 5 February. They came to my office with their principal and some of their teachers, and it was on the day they were ready to fly to New York. It was exciting to meet with them as they embarked on their journey to the World Federation of the United Nations Association Global Model United Nations conference.

These conferences are high-level, student-run simulations of United Nations proceedings. It is designed to develop the skills of the students, including their diplomacy, negotiation skills and international relations. I am informed that about 1,600 students from around the world attended this conference, which was extraordinary. We sent 12 from the Northern Territory; it was special.

Only three schools in the whole country were invited to this significant event, and it was a proud moment for the Territory to be represented by these amazing students. By this stage you are probably wondering: who are they? They are Aaron Varghese, Prionty Modak, Anastasia Hill, Elly Mercer, Matthew Davies, Evan Murdoch, Nelini Abeywickrama, Ciara Manolo-Knowles, Asha O'Brien-Hartcher, Alicia David, Hannah Lay and Lucas Cova.

They were a dynamic group, and it was exciting to meet them. They were obviously nervous but incredibly proud. I gave them a little Australia-American pin to wear on their shirts proudly. They had a strong sense of enthusiasm and curiosity for the major adventure they were about to embark on.

While they were at the conference, the students demonstrated excellent preparation. They were professional and committed and worked well with their respective committees. They developed thoughtful and well-considered resolutions addressing complex global issues. They each got the opportunity to share with me their different specific portfolio areas.

I specifically mention three students as they were recognised for awards for outstanding diplomatic practice. This was out of 1,600 students from three Australian schools, and out of 12 Territory kids, three ended up with global recognition. It is a credit to the students, their families, teachers and the school for supporting them to be the amazing kids they are.

A huge congratulations to Asha, Ciara and Anastasia for winning the diplomacy awards for showcasing excellent diplomatic skills in their committees. It is incredible.

You can appreciate that the experience extended well beyond the halls of the conference. They travelled to the other side of the world with their school colleagues. They arrived in -17°Celsius, which is a big ask for someone from Darwin. They had to negotiate the subway system, again, being from Darwin and not so familiar with subways. They showed their resilience and adaptability. They saw the Statue of Liberty and, whilst they just about froze themselves doing so, enjoyed that opportunity.

I thank their wonderful supporting teachers, Antony and Cleo, for their guidance on that journey. I have no doubt the experience will leave a long-lasting impact on all of them. I hope it sparked future curiosity in the students and teachers to keep achieving their aspirations and dreams for the future.

We are proud when Territory kids go on and do amazing things, and it is safe to say we are all proud of the Essington students. We congratulate them on their safe return, on the work they did, on the way they led the Territory and the way they represented us, and we hope it is a big part of their future. Congratulations to all.

Many Territorians would proudly categorise themselves as a revhead. Territorians love their motorsports. We are proud to support motorsports in the Territory, and I am even prouder to be the patron of Motorsports NT. We have topline events, like the Supercars and the World MXGP—the first time in 20 years in Australia—and it has been an incredible season for motorsport. We are looking forward to doing it all again this year.

Alice Springs drag racer, Dan Hodgins, at the NT Motorsport Awards ceremony—the night of nights for our revheads and our motorsport enthusiasts—took out the top gong as Sportsperson of the Year for his achievements in 2025. Dan was also named Adult Driver of the Year. Congratulations to Dan.

Katherine Speedway also came out on top, snagging Club of the Year, Club Person of the Year and Administrator of the Year. They went to Katherine Speedway's secretary Emma Robertson and Junior Official of the Year Zackery Czoloszynski. Congratulations to Katherine, kicking goals.

Other winners for that night were Trafficwerx NT Dirt Kart titles at Hidden Valley. The Rider of the Year was William Thurlbeck from Darwin Motorcycle Club. He reclaimed the title he won at the 2024 awards. Volunteer of the Year was Melissa Holmes from Top End Motocross Club at Palmerston. She has been working in motorsports since 1990, organising more than 100 events a year, which is incredible. Official of the Year went to Scott Murrell; Future Star of the Year, Liam Fookes, Junior Rider of the Year, Owen Todd; and Junior Driver of the Year, Lucas Knight from Top End Dirt Karts.

It is wonderful to be the patron of Motorsports NT. It is great when we get big crowds and people enjoying our beautiful, unique Territory lifestyle. We thank Motorsports NT President, Gary Pendlebury, who is doing an amazing job, and the 22 clubs that make up Motorsports NT for their continued enthusiasm and commitment to the sport. On the night, Gary said 2025 had been the most economically successful year in the history of Motorsport NT, which is fantastic news, given how important rebuilding our economy is.

I congratulate all of the clubs, officials, volunteers, fans, all the people nominated and all of the winners. It is fantastic to see everyone highlighted, congratulated and thanked. It is a wonderful night at the Motorsports NT Awards. I know the Deputy Chief Minister had a great time. He calls himself a bit of a revhead, so he had a fantastic night.

I acknowledge the 50th anniversary of Probus in Australia. It is a wonderful milestone, particularly for me as I am also the patron of Palmerston Probus Club and have been since it opened. The 50th anniversary was celebrated on 24 February with a high tea at Cazaly's. The celebration was organised by the President of the Charles Darwin Probus Club, Val Haydock. I congratulate her on a wonderful night.

I am pleased that the Members for Blain and Drysdale have been busy recognising this special occasion. Other attendees included Iain and Bonnie Morrison, Jim Wright, Ivy Pearse, Sandra Richardson, Marilyn Roberts, Christine Ilic, John Hopkinson and Diane Spicer, just to name a few.

Since its founding in 1976 the Probus Club has brought together retirees and semi-retirees in the spirit of fellowship, intellectual curiosity and community service. It is a wonderful organisation that fosters friendship and connection for retirees. As part of the international Probus movement that began in the UK with the support of Probus South Pacific, the club reflects the enduring values of friendship, dignity and lifelong learning.

Over 50 years, the club has built more than just a membership. This is a strong, connected community. The Northern Territory has fantastic Probus clubs. I thank all of them for the work they do here, and we look forward to the annual get-together when all the clubs come together. I know many of my colleagues have enjoyed that over the years.

Congratulations on your golden jubilee year; well done. We look forward to supporting Probus in the Northern Territory into the future.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I start by talking about a bit of bipartisan support with the Member for Casuarina, which involved DLA staff. This evening we noticed that Diem, our wonderful Chief Financial Officer, had a flat tyre downstairs, so both of us helped her change that tyre. I reached out to Diem, and just for you to know, Khoda, she has made it safely home. I shout out to Diem; she is a hard worker. I thank the Member for Casuarina for giving me a hand.

On a more serious note, today I was out with the Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, to assess the damage from the widespread weather event in my electorate. There is a huge flooding event in Darwin River, and we can see huge amounts of water still spilling over the Darwin River slipway. From that, you could see the sheer damage caused to many homes in the Darwin River area. I have been told that up to 20 homes have been destroyed there.

When you go to see it, it brings a human element to it, and you try to put yourself in people's shoes. I have heard stories from people there, speaking to them over the phone, about wading through water to get to safety. We can see the damage that has been done to some houses and everything people have lost, from homes to cars, personal items, furniture and fencing. It is a sight that no-one wants to see or go through. It is devastating for the residents of Darwin River.

I also see the community spirit from everyone coming together to ensure that we support residents who have lost everything. The Darwin River Tavern and the Darwin River Volunteer Bushfire Brigade has set up a point for people to drop off clothes, furniture and non-perishable items. Now there is a point of contact for people who have been impacted by this flooding event. People can go there and have something they can take back with them. Remember, some people cannot get back to their homes.

As we flew further to the west, we could see the impact on Daly River. I do not think I have ever seen anything like it. The sheer amount of water that is coming down that river is devastating. My heart broke for the residents of Daly River. You can see the water going through people's homes in Daly River, halfway up to their roofs. We are hearing that water is still to rise.

A huge cleanup operation will have to happen, obviously once the river recedes. It shows the scale of this event and how widespread it is across the Northern Territory.

We spoke to local councillor, Andrew McTaggart, who stayed in Daly River. He has a block on Wooliana Road at higher ground. He spoke of the many businesses that have been impacted along Wooliana Road, including some of our fishing resorts along there.

People are missing home and are anxious, worried about the uncertainty that comes with being in Darwin and not knowing what they will come back to. Also, underneath that worry is knowing that they more than likely have lost everything because they have seen photos of what has happened in their community.

The worry about their pets consistently came up with me when I visited the residents of Daly River at Foskey Pavilion. There are worries and anxieties for people. As I said last night, our pets are an extension of our families.

We then went to Emu Point to touch base with the Mayor of the West Daly Regional Council, Terry Sams, who is a homelands resident and who has been informing and keeping in contact with me about the food shortages on many homelands. We have seen food shortages in Woodycupaldiya, Uminyuluk, Merrepen, Nemarluk and Emu Point. The shop at Emu Point had no food and was down to the bare minimum. There are up to 70 people in the community of Emu Point, including old people, women, young children and men.

They have an airstrip, but at the moment planes cannot land with this unprecedented event and the amount of rain. Usually the food security is okay at Emu Point, but because of the magnitude of this weather event they could not bring food to their community.

Terry Sams is a wonderful person who I have worked with for many years, even before I was in this role. He was thankful for my advocacy. It came down to Terry and his advocacy as a local mayor to keep me informed about all the homelands where people were having food security issues. Terry Sams is a man of integrity. He is a strong-principled person who believes strongly in homelands.

If we invest in education and the school system, housing and jobs in homelands, it keeps people on country. He spoke of that today. He is seeing homelands around the Northern Territory where all levels of government are not funding them properly. It is not a crack at the opposite side. We are seeing people coming to Darwin. Emu Point is a thriving, beautiful community full of people, culture and strong language. People are proud of their community and getting on. To go in there and see how isolated people are, you get a sense of the scale of this huge weather event. There is such vast land there with long distances, and we all need to ensure we are looking after all people no matter where they are from.

My heart goes out to everyone from Darwin River to Douglas Daly, Katherine, Palumpa, Emu Point and the homelands there, but I think they have food now. Unfortunately, we could not get to Palumpa today because of the weather system.

A shout-out goes to AFL NT. I spoke to AFL NT staff earlier this week, and they will donate 500 tickets to residents who have been impacted by floods who are staying in evacuation centres in Foskey and Marrara so they can watch the grand final this Saturday for relief to ease their mind. We all love the footy in the Northern Territory. I do not know who we will go for—St Mary's or Nightcliff—but I thank AFL NT for providing 500 tickets. I will see you at the footy on Saturday night.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.