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15th Assembly



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Debates and Questions



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Madam Speaker Lambley took the Chair at 10 am.

PAPER TABLED
Public Accounts Committee Inquiry – Darwin Ship Lift Project

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee advising that the committee has received an inquiry referral from the Treasurer into the Darwin ship lift project. I table the letter from the Chair.

VISITORS
St Francis of Assisi Primary School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Grade 5/6 students from St Francis of Assisi Primary School accompanied by their teachers. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

APPROPRIATION (2025–2026) BILL
Serial 25
and
REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 26

Continued from 14 May 2025.

Mrs HERSEY (Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I carry on with my contribution.

I am pleased that the $30,000 and $50,000 HomeGrown Territory Grants will be ongoing to September 2026. This gives young Territorians a chance to get into the housing market or the mum-and-dad home builders the opportunity to build their first home. It is great for real estate companies like Elders Real Estate, LJ Hooker, Nutrien Harcourts and LAWD with Olivia Thompson in Katherine, with our new subdivision in Casuarina, stage 3. We want people to put down roots in Katherine and stay not only there but in the Territory, and enjoy the many opportunities we have and, of course, our wonderful lifestyle.

As an avid hiker I am pleased to see that the Jatbula Trail in the gorge, along with the mountain bike trails and southern walks, are all open. Thank you very much to the RAAF personnel and NT Parks and Wildlife staff who volunteered their time to clear these trails.

I have hiked the 62-kilometre Jatbula Trail many times between the gorge and Edith Falls, and it is stunning. It has waterfalls and stunning landscapes with million-star views. What a treat it is for us living in the Katherine region as well as the tourists. It is not surprising that it books out within minutes of it being open each year.

The mountain bike trails and the southern walks are also amazing; they are a treat to have in our backyard. Whether it is the short Baruwei Loop or longer walks to Southern Rockhole, Pat's Lookout, Jedda's Leap, Butterfly Gorge or the overnight hike to the Eighth Gorge, which I hope to do one day when I have time, these walks are amazing and are enjoyed on weekends by many locals, as well as tourists in the season.

Katherine Gorge (Nitmiluk) is a jewel in the crown of the Big Rivers region, and we are privileged to have it in our backyard.

Before I finish, I will touch on a letter I received yesterday morning thanking our government for payroll tax relief. This letter was from Lisa Gibson, the state manager from Goodstart Early Learning Centre in Stuart Park, which I recently visited, along with the Member for Fong Lim, Dr Tanzil Rahman. Lisa says:

'On behalf of Goodstart Early Learning Centre, I extend our sincere thanks for the Northern Territory Government's recent decision regarding easing payroll tax to support charities and aged care. Your government has addressed a longstanding source of uncertainty and helped create a more stable and equitable operating environment. Your decision will directly support our ability to continue this important work in the Northern Territory, particularly in communities where high-quality, safe and inclusive early learning underpinned by strong governance is most needed. Thank you for your leadership and continued support for the early childhood education and care sector.'

I thank Lisa for her feedback. It is always good to hear positive feedback, especially when it involves rebuilding the economy in such a meaningful way.

This budget delivers for Territorians and will see strong foundations building strong outcomes for our future. This is critical to ensure that every child has a chance to go to school, learn and contribute to the Territory. We must invest in strong safe communities and towns such as Katherine, where I am honoured to be the minister of a government that focuses on reducing crime, rebuilding the economy and restoring our beautiful and unique lifestyle through Budget 2025–26.

I thank the Treasurer and his department for their hard work.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, as the Attorney-General and Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, Parks and Wildlife, Racing, and Major Events, I stand with a deep commitment to my fellow Territorians and support our Treasurer's first budget, which restores confidence and rebuilds the Territory.

This is our first budget. It is a responsible and no-nonsense budget that begins the work of cleaning up Labor's mess. After too many years of waste, neglect and excuses, we are focused on fixing the fundamentals—making our streets safer, our economy stronger and our lifestyle better. We were elected to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore our great Territory lifestyle. That is exactly what this budget sets in motion.

We inherited deep structural problems, but instead of papering over the cracks we are righting the wrongs and charting a better path forward. That means reprioritising Territory spending, no more fake debt ceilings, no more unfunded vanity projects and no more short-changing of frontline services.

This budget backs Territorians and respects their hard-earned tax dollars. It delivers on our government's 2025 year of action, certainty and security with real outcomes, not empty announcements.

Across my portfolios I am proud to outline how we are getting on with the job.

At the heart of this budget is a victims-first approach to justice and a rebalancing of law and order that puts community safety above all. We know that the previous government neglected our justice system. Crime spiralled, backlogs grew and victims were left behind. We are turning this around.

This is the biggest law and order budget in the Territory's history, with $1.34bn for Police, courts and Corrections, which is $112m more than Labor ever delivered.

Territorians who have experienced the trauma of crime deserve more than words; they deserve action. Under Labor, remand times in our courts were astronomical. Offenders were waiting 400-odd days in remand for their Supreme Court trial, but, more importantly, victims were waiting for justice. I do not want anyone to underestimate the trauma for a victim when they wait 400-plus days for the trial to go ahead. Not only is the offender not receiving any rehabilitation during this time, but the victims have to wait.

Sometimes cases are listed to be heard in court and victims' family members book flights from interstate to come and support them or they take time off work if they live locally, but they go to court only to hear that the case is adjourned for another time. This means that all the people who have gone out of their way to support the victim have lost time and financial investment. It is also an emotional investment, given the trauma of the victim reliving the crime that was perpetrated against them while they wait for more than 400 days. This cannot be understated, which is why we are turning it around.

Under Labor, offenders walked free with all the rights while victims were left behind.

We have already strengthened the laws, and this budget delivers funding certainty with a $237.1m investment that Labor failed to provide so that we can clear the backlog in our courts, rebuild the entire justice system and ensure that victims are properly supported into the future. This is about compassion for victims and accountability for offenders.

Crime will not be an overnight fix, but victims deserve to know that they are not alone and our government is backing them. That is why this budget includes an additional $15m over five years to support victims of crime, including $12.2m for victim compensation payments and to deliver frontline crime victim services staff; $2m for assistance program such as the Vehicle Resecure program; and $800,000 towards trauma counselling

for victims. There is a 40% increase to the victims of crime levy. These measures will address the backlog of victims' financial assistance claims and help deliver timely justice for those still dealing with the trauma.

We inherited net debt projected to reach $13.97bn by 2028–29, but victims cannot wait. We are focused, we are acting and we will fund what matters.

We are also investing in our courts, improving staffing, speeding up justice and supporting victims from start to finish. We are providing $15m over five years to support victims of crime. This includes unlocking $3.5m in ongoing funding for victim services to reduce delays and provide certainty.

There is critical funding to improve offerings for specialist domestic, family and sexual violence courts and specialist prosecution services of nearly $2m per annum. We will be funding an additional Local Court judge, making this the largest judicial complement in the Northern Territory's history. We will make critical investments to boost the number of prosecutors and support staff. We are transitioning temporary DPP staff to permanent contracts to provide certainty and keep skilled workers in the Territory.

I cannot overstate the pressure placed on our entire justice system, especially court staff after years of neglect under the previous Labor government. It is not just about the numbers; it is about the people stretched to their limits, doing their best in a broken system. This government will continue to look at all aspects of the system to provide meaningful change.

With our strong support, the Director of Public Prosecutions earlier this year launched the Targeted Intervention Group – Early Resolution Taskforce (TIG-ER team) to fast-track remand cases. This taskforce has already had a major impact to reduce court backlogs. Since 29 January the TIG-ER team has reviewed 290 remand cases and finalised 213, including 87 guilty pleas. One of those cases had sat in the system since March 2024, but the TIG-ER team picked it up and resolved it in one day. There is so much more to be done.

In relation to crime we are not just strengthening laws and backing police; we are also backing education, parenting, throughcare, alternatives to custody and rehabilitation in prisons. We can and must do that. We will take strong steps to improve safety now while investing in long-term strategies that address the root causes of crime.

Despite a record prisoner population, staffing shortages and inherited infrastructure failures, our Corrections system is delivering.

An increased number of prisoners are completing rehabilitation and education programs. This year 671 prisoners completed education, which is up from 553 last year. We have grown domestic violence program completions and tripled the number of prisoners completing intensive DV rehabilitation. That is not talk; that is real action. Programs like barista training, white cards, horticulture and retail certificates, alcohol and drug treatment programs and sex offender programs are real tools for change—change that Labor ignored and change that we are delivering.

We have not even fully geared up yet on rehabilitation. Why? It is because the previous Labor government—in which the current Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Gwoja were senior Cabinet ministers—let it rot, so we had to start with fixing the foundations. We are doing that first, and we will continue to work on it.

Ms Uibo: Weren't you out there taking the credit for Groote Eylandt?

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please.

Ms BOOTHBY: When we say that our government is focused on reducing crime and the root cause we mean it, from family responsibility agreements to the Circuit Breaker Program and holding parents accountable for sending their kids to school.

Under the previous Labor government, tourism went backwards, holiday visitation declined, investment was scattergun and the sector lost confidence as the Territory's reputation for crime spiralled out of control. Labor sat back and did nothing, but we are rebuilding with a clear strategy, long-term funding and an approach that supports jobs and restores lifestyle.

Tourism and hospitality are central to our plan to rebuild the Territory's economy. These sectors support more than 16,000 jobs and contribute $3.3bn each year to our economy. That is why this budget delivers $88.4m for tourism events and the screen sector and restores Tourism NT's baseline funding of $8m per

year. This is so that it can plan ahead and not lurch from one campaign to the next as it did under Labor. This includes $1.5m for cooperative campaigns with key domestic trade partners; $1m for promotional activities in interstate markets to build awareness of the Territory as a holiday destination; $1m to support tourism activities; and $0.5m to support continued operation of the Visitor Information Centre at Yulara and maintain the Visitor Information Centre network in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

The Labor era of bandaid programs and short-term spends—in budget speak, they are funding cliffs that did little to deliver long-term strategic outcomes—tricked Territorians and our tourism industry. The funding did not provide certainty or result in better outcomes. We have learned that Labor threw money around and hoped and prayed that tourists would come, but visitation declined and local operators paid the price.

Our government is doing things differently. We are investing where it counts to convert visitation and support local operators, not to tick boxes or chase headlines as Labor did. We are only just getting started.

We are preparing for the integration of Tourism NT and Major Events, which are two teams working toward the same goal to increase our impact, reduce duplication and deliver more bang for buck. This is about marketing the Territory better, promoting our iconic events more effectively and getting tourists back to the NT in a mature model, because every dollar must count.

Ms Uibo: Yes it does when you have reduced it by $27m.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Ms BOOTHBY: We inherited a mess of $12.3bn in debt in just eight years under Labor, costing Territorians over $2bn per year in interest. That is money we could have had for teachers, police, hospitals or growing our economy. We are not here to repeat Labor's failures; we are here to fix them with a fiscally responsible plan to rebuild the economy, reduce crime and restore our lifestyle.

In just nine months we have secured more new air routes, including Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Denpasar, Gold Coast and Cairns. AirAsia's Kuala Lumpur and Denpasar routes are a clear sign of its confidence in our future, economy and direction.

We are also investing in the screen sector, which punches well above its weight. Every dollar we invest returns at least $4 to our economy. This budget backs Screen Territory with $3.6m because it delivers real jobs, global exposure and economic return. Two examples over the last nine months are Netflix's *Territory,* which generated $6.9m locally, and *NCIS: Sydney*, which injected $2.94m into the Darwin economy from just two episodes.

We restructured government to reflect our priorities, bringing Tourism, Screen Territory, Parks and Wildlife and Major Events under one department. We want to engage with industry to create a visitor economy strategy that weaves tourism across all these areas because visitors do not separate these experiences, and neither should we. It is about getting government out of silos and focused on results, and we are doing what Labor never could do.

We have launched a bold new chapter in military tourism, positioning the NT as Australia's first battlefield and a must-do destination for global travellers interested in war history. This budget invests $3m to harness our military heritage with a new Military Heritage Tourism Action Plan; a $1m grants program for operators to expand products and visitor experiences; a full audit of 30 key military sites to improve signage, infrastructure and digital access; a cutting-edge AI trip planner to create personalised itineraries; and a new NT Military Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee to shape a strategic 10-year vision.

Labor ignored the potential of military tourism. It let key sites deteriorate and failed to see the opportunity on our doorstop. We are restoring those sites because we want the world to know that if you are looking for war history, you come to the Northern Territory. From the Bombing of Darwin to Pitch Black, this is a strength to grow, not neglect.

We are securing business tourism, with more than 50 major conferences locked in this year across Darwin, Alice Springs and Uluru, delivering an estimated $85m boost to the Territory economy. Backed by our government's support for business events and new investment in infrastructure, like the Darwin Convention Centre hotel, the NT is now competing and winning on the global stage. This will grow even further once the hotel is up and running.

We are putting events back at the heart of the Territory lifestyle. This budget delivers $36.5m for iconic Territory events like the V8s, Darwin Festival, Red CentreNATS and BASSINTHEGRASS. These events drive visitation, fill venues and boost local jobs. As the Treasurer outlined, it was the CLP that brought on the Supercars and Red CentreNATS, and this budget provides certainty to Territorians that we are backing iconic events to be bigger, better and brighter than ever.

We are also sharpening our focus on national and international sporting events that lift our global profile and deliver long-term returns. To strengthen this approach, the Tourism NT and Major Events integration will cut duplication, combining expertise and creating a smarter more targeted strategy to attract visitors.

Tourism and hospitality events are not just industries; they are part of who we are. Under our government, they are once again central to rebuilding the economy and restoring lifestyle.

As we bring back law and order and rebuild the economy, we are also restoring the lifestyle that Territorians and visitors love. This budget protects, enhances and celebrates our great outdoor way of life. We have restored the right to own crocodiles as pets, reversing Labor's decision which prevented responsible pet croc owners from doing so. We have expanded recreational hunting at Harrison Dam, because many Territorians love hunting and our fantastic reserves. We backed our festivals because everyone should feel safe to walk around, go to the market, enjoy a night out or buy an ice cream with the kids without worrying about crime. Labor ignored this way of life, but we are restoring it.

We have taken real action on gamba grass in Litchfield, with a dedicated Litchfield gamba group, a coordinator and boots on the ground to protect our communities, tourism and parks.

We have committed $52.4m for our parks and reserves to upgrade access infrastructure and visitor experiences. This includes a $5.6m investment in Watarrka National Park, with a new multiday walk designed for independent hikers, not just commercial operators. Stage 1 opens in 2026. We are also rewriting park management plans with local input, not just bureaucracy, because our natural assets belong to Territorians, not red tape.

We are backing regional events that revive community pride. The NT PGA golf championships are back, but this time the Territory event is being showcased on the national and international stages, broadcast to Australia and New Zealand, which the Palmerston Golf and Country Club has been trying to deliver for years, and we made it happen.

We have also returned international cricket to the Top End for the first time in 17 years, with two T20 international men's cricket matched between Australia and South Africa in August this year.

To the people of Alice Springs, we heard you and listened. Labor abandoned Alice, but we are investing in it. This budget delivers $168.7m to restore safety, services and pride in the heart of Central Australia.

Last month the Alice Springs Cup Carnival saw crowds up by 30% and increases in nominations and prize money. As Racing minister, I have listened to industry and Central Australians and backed its return to the May long weekend from 2026, rather than being held in April.

The much-loved Masters Games will return in October 2026. Labor kept kicking this wonderful event down the road. The event brought together community and people from interstate, intrastate and across the globe. Labor did not prioritise it for the community's benefit, but we will.

Tourism Central Australia was promised a new home for the last four years. Although it was in the budget books, we did not see it get off the ground. We are backing Tourism Central Australia with $4.8m towards the permanent home it has long waited for, because we know how vital visitor information centres are to our regional economy. By the end of this year it will be located at the Alice Springs library, supporting jobs, foot traffic and thriving tourism businesses.

At its core this budget delivers on our three big promises. We are reducing crime, with $1.34bn for Police, Corrections and courts in the largest investment in the Territory's history; a victims-first budget, because community safety is our number one priority; bail reform; more boots on the ground; and strong leadership, not the soft-on-crime approach Territorians suffered under eight years of Labor.

We are rebuilding the economy. This budget backs our 2025–28 Rebuilding the Economy strategy, with a focus on private sector confidence, growth and investment. We are reprioritising unfunded projects,

reducing red tape and creating the conditions for growth. There are no empty promises, just real action after years of Labor mismanagement.

We are restoring our lifestyle. We are getting back to the basics of safer streets, better parks, stronger services and a growing economy. Whether it is housing, roads, schools or health, this budget is a step towards restoring the Territory lifestyle that people expect and deserve.

This is a budget that restores confidence and rebuilds the Territory.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I support the Treasurer's Appropriation Bill.

The budget the Treasurer handed down on Tuesday was the most honest budget that the Territory has seen in recent history. It is a budget that does what budgets under the former Labor government failed to do—include in forward year forecasts the actual cost of delivering services and infrastructure in the Territory. When in government those on the other side took a laissez-faire approach to budget forecasts, electing to selectively take up expenditure on an annual basis. They significantly underfunded the infrastructure program, which is why we face unforgivable budget blowouts on projects such as the ship lift and the State Square art gallery.

In the portfolios I am responsible for, there were ad hoc announcements of ill-thought-out programs. For example, the safe sleeping program in Central Australia was an apparent attempt to convince Territorians that the Labor government had programs in place to deal with kids out on the street in the middle of the night. Instead of negotiating with existing service providers that had capacity to offer such services, Labor threw good money after bad, in one instance doubling funding to one provider to provide services, simply so that it could make a smoke-and-mirrors announcement at a cost of half-a-million dollars to Territorians. In reviewing the effectiveness of that program it was identified that in one three-month period only one young person accessed the service at a cost to Territorians in excess of $100,000.

The Opposition Leader in her reply failed to mention that it was decisions such as these that led to the dire financial state the Territory is in today.

The Department of Children and Families leads the Northern Territory Government's response to homelessness; domestic, family and sexual violence; and child protection. Our plan is clear: reduce crime; rebuild the economy; and restore our lifestyle. In my portfolio that means investing in strong systems, acting early, supporting families to take responsibility, prioritising the wellbeing of children and young people and making people who use violence accountable.

The Northern Territory is a place of resilience and community strength; however, we face complex social challenges that demand real solutions and sustained commitment. I am proud that our government has secured significant funding for the department from our Commonwealth partners, including $135.9m under the partnership agreement Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment, which will support remote safe spaces, family support services and child and family centres from 2025 to 2031.

Budget 2025–26 sets a course of reform that addresses the root causes of crime and increases safety for all Territorians. That is our key priority. It delivers funding certainty and restores focus on safety, accountability and early intervention.

The Department of Children and Families 2025–26 budget includes $71.5m to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, including prevention, early intervention and recovery; $73.2m to support people experiencing homelessness; $204.1m to protect children and support families, including out-of-home care and family support services; $700,000 for emergency services and disaster recovery; and $23.4m for corporate, regulatory and shared services.

I will talk about the programs and services that the Department of Children and Families will deliver. When children are on the streets late at night something is not right at home, and we have a responsibility to act. That is why this government launched the Circuit Breaker Program, an intensive wraparound response that supports at-risk young people and holds their families accountable through the development of family responsibility agreements.

We know that there are unacceptable rates of domestic violence in the Territory, which is why it is no surprise that violence in the family home is a common contributing factor for young people displaying at-risk behaviour. Circuit Breaker enables us to identify these situations, provide holistic solutions with tailored support for young people and their families who may be experiencing violence and are beginning to use violence, as well as connect families to domestic violence specialist services early.

Since its commencement in Darwin and Alice Springs in late 2024 and in Katherine in early 2025, Circuit Breaker has supported 141 families, with more than 80 family responsibility agreements established. This initiative is showing results, which is why we are committing $8.3m per annum in ongoing funding to support full-time staff.

Circuit Breaker staff operate 24/7 in Alice Springs and Darwin, assessing young people found unsupervised or engaging in antisocial behaviour. These young people are either safely returned home or, if home is not safe, the young person will stay overnight in our safe supervised accommodation. Either way, formal discussions are held with parents and family members to identify and address the underlying causes of their child's behaviour, such as alcohol misuse, family violence or financial hardship in the home. Circuit Breaker staff then develop a tailored response for the family with other services required, such as education, health or non-government service providers involved.

This is early intervention with purpose. We are identifying at-risk young people before they enter the criminal justice system, setting clear expectations for their parents and providing the case management and support services to support behaviour change, breaking the cycle of youth crime before it starts or escalates.

Circuit Breaker gives families every opportunity to accept help and access the support they need, which is why we will continue to expand the program across the Territory. Importantly, when families cannot provide for the safety and wellbeing of their children, action can be taken under the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007*.

Every Territorian deserves to feel safe, and those impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence must have access to the right support at the right time. This year's budget addresses historic underinvestment in domestic violence prevention and builds a sustainable place-based response across the Territory.

We are delivering a record $36m annual ongoing investment into domestic violence-related services, providing certainty to frontline service providers and the people who rely on them. This includes:

- $5.2m annually for specialist domestic violence services to strengthen an integrated response, including case management, court support, therapeutic services and outreach
- $1.5m for a domestic, family and sexual violence training and resource centre, offering skills development, resource hubs and practice supervision
- $3.4m in community-based behaviour change programs, providing tailored services to people who use violence to educate them about what drives their abusive behaviour and hold them accountable for their actions
- $1.9m for rehabilitation and behaviour change programs for perpetrators in our prison settings, such as the Recognising Anger, Gaining Empowerment and family violence programs
- $0.85m for improving outcomes for victim–survivors, including specialist, prosecution and witness support
- more than $2.5m for whole-of-government policy coordination and governance functions
- $1.4m for the primary prevention grants program
- $250,000 for the implementation of embedding domestic, family and sexual violence risk assessments in universal services
- $500,000 annually to support improvements for remote safe houses
- $250,000 for innovation and community engagement events.

These are Territory government investments, not Commonwealth funding, and they demonstrate our commitment to long-term reform, sustainability and local service delivery.

Our program also includes:

- $500,000 to provide culturally safe, gender-specific, trauma-informed counselling
- $400,000 annually to increase the reach and capacity of the health system to recognise, respond to and refer victim–survivors and people at risk
- more than $1m to continue the domestic and family violence specialist court in Alice Springs, including funding for court, legal and non-legal support services which will expand over time to other locations
- a total of $2.5m ongoing funding for these services in multiple locations.

We know that tackling domestic violence requires close collaboration with our service delivery partners, which is why we are expanding our co-responder model with the Northern Territory Police Force. This model ensures that domestic, family and sexual violence specialists work alongside the NT Police Force and child protection staff to follow up with victim–survivors and those people who use violence, ensuring risk is assessed and services are activated as quickly as possible. This follow-up is crucial to breaking the cycle of domestic violence. We are investing $6.26m in 2025–26, increasing to $7.7m by 2029–30. The Family Safety Framework will also be strengthened with $1.6m in 2025–26.

Housing insecurity and homelessness are serious challenges across the Northern Territory, particularly for women and children impacted by violence and young people leaving care. In 2025–26 we are investing $73.2m in homelessness services. This funding reflects the partnership between the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments, with $43.8m of our total investment provided through bilateral funding under the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness. These funds will support a network of specialist homelessness services, including crisis accommodation, transitional housing, tenancy support and outreach. The Department of Children and Families is working closely with community organisations to ensure that our funded homelessness responses reflect the needs of the community that they serve and provide the greatest possible impact.

The Department of Children and Families leads the Northern Territory Government's response to child protection, homelessness and domestic violence and, therefore, plays a critical role in our government's strategic agenda to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our lifestyle. The department is delivering evidence-based place-based services that address the root causes of crime and build safer families and communities for all. This budget backs our government's commitment to invest in frontline services where they are needed and puts the wellbeing of children and families at the centre of everything we do.

Underpinning the amazing hard work being done to address the root causes of crime by working with young people and families is the growth of the Territory economy. With economic growth comes opportunities to expand the services we offer and reach more families to accelerate—as the Treasurer said—turning the ship.

My other portfolio responsibilities include International Education, Migration and Population, along with Workforce Development. Skilled migrants and international students are critical for the Territory economy in growing our population and our workforce. Over the period to 2040 the Department of Treasury and Finance forecasts up to 13,000 full-time equivalent workers are required over and above business-as-usual workforce growth. These workers will include upskilled locals and attracting skilled workers from interstate and skilled and semiskilled workers from overseas.

Skilled migrants and international students make valuable contributions to the Territory economy and lifestyle. They are vital to the Northern Territory's economy and its ability to address growing workforce shortages. The CLP government is supporting attracting workers and students to the Northern Territory to grow our population and address workforce shortages.

Madam Speaker, as you well know, the Territory is a great place to live, work and study. Access to skilled labour is a key component of economic growth. Nationally, labour accounts for 48% of output. Each skilled migrant worker is estimated to contribute $108,000 per annum to the Territory's economic output. Rebuilding the Territory economy is contingent on securing more skilled workers.

Approximately 85% of migrant inflows are directly or indirectly using skilled worker migration pathways such as the NT DAMA and the GSM program. The department provides the Department of Home Affairs with endorsements of employers and nominations for prospective skilled migrants for visas under several schemes.

The Northern Territory Designated Area Migration Agreement is a demand-driven migration agreement between federal and NT Government. Territory businesses can use this program to sponsor overseas workers for positions they are unable to fill with the local workforce. Over the past three years the Northern Territory Designated Area Migration scheme has significantly increased the number of endorsements, rising from 99 to 220, a 121% increase to address skill shortages in sectors like hospitality, childcare, aged care and disability care.

The General Skilled Migration program allowed skilled foreign workers to migrate to Australia without requiring employer sponsorship. The Territory government nominates foreign skilled workers for the permanent or the provisional visa. This program has also seen an increase in allocation from 650 to 1,600 nominations, reflecting the NT's growing demand for skilled workers.

The Territory is also a participant in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme, better known as PALM, which allows businesses to hire low to semiskilled workers from the Pacific region and Timor-Leste.

Attracting and retaining skilled workers is a high priority for the NT given its small population and increasing competition for skilled labour. Key activities supporting worker attraction include targeted campaigns in domestic and international markets, supported by platforms like WorkerConnect which links businesses with skilled workforce. This is why our government has allocated $2m over the next two years to support these programs which are critical to the success of rebuilding our economy.

WorkerConnect is essential for matching businesses with international talent. Later this month the Northern Territory Government, together with industry, will deliver online seminars to attract more workers to the Territory from the UK, Ireland and South Africa. The UK, Ireland and South African information sessions are part of our Global Worker Attraction program, which is designed to raise the profile of the Northern Territory and promote it as a desirable place to live and work.

Further, we will be undertaking an in-person jobs expo delivered in New Zealand later this year, capitalising on the transferability of New Zealand work rights into Australia. This program aims to assist Territory employers experiencing recruitment difficulties to fill jobs with skilled and semiskilled workers.

These initiatives help boost worker retention and support long-term workforce growth critical to the Northern Territory's ability to grow its economy into the future. The funding announcement in our 2025–26 and 2026–27 budget will continue to resource these programs, allowing timely processing of applications under DAMA and GSM.

Our international education marketing and program delivery will also assist in this area. In 2023 it contributed $155m to the Territory's economic output and supported more than 1,300 jobs. This sector is projected to contribute $280m by 2026, positioning it as the Territory's second-largest service export by revenue. International students also provide essential labour for industries like retail, hospitality and tourism, contributing significantly to the service sector, especially during peak season.

To maintain and expand this sector, the NT Government is focused on international student marketing and engagement programs, aiming to achieve 6,000 enrolments by 2025–26. Our commitment under this budget demonstrates our belief that this is an area that the Northern Territory must expand and grow into. These efforts being undertaken with the funding that has been provided in this year's budget and going forward into 2026–27 will enable us to secure a skilled workforce, foster economic development, increase the Territory's population and create a more sustainable and prosperous future.

In conclusion, this budget delivers action, certainty and security for all Territorians, who deserve to live in a safe and prosperous community.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Goyder, I believe it is your birthday today. Many happy returns.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, it is indeed.

I could go into detail about how the budget has increased funding for Corrections, Police and the courts, how Labor loved announcing projects and never funding them or the poor contract management that left us with a growing debt and contractual obligations, but as it is my birthday I will be a little selfish instead. I was asked by the Treasurer a few weeks ago what I wanted for my birthday. He is a nice bloke who will share everything with you except his fishing spots. I told the Treasurer that all I wanted for my birthday is for the rural area to get its fair share, and today I am a happy birthday boy.

This budget includes $80m for the Arnhem Highway duplication program between the Stuart Highway intersection and Kostka Road. I wrote to the Treasurer to request that this money rectify the problems with the Arnhem Highway and Freds Pass Road as part of the scope, as it is a constant concern in my electorate. Even though I am being a little selfish in this speech, I have reached out to the minister for Infrastructure and asked my friends in the Daly and on the Tiwi Islands—sometimes their members are not quite as active as I am. We made sure there will be money for roads in the Daly and for the road between Wadeye and Palumpa, and there is $43m for the Tiwi Island roads, so we are delivering for all Territorians, especially for those in the bush. The list goes on.

I am incredibly proud to be part of the team that has a minister for Education who listens to Territorians. The Member for Katherine asked me what I wanted for my birthday. I said, 'Minister, all I want for my birthday from Education is to make sure the kids who go to Humpty Doo Primary School get to school safely every day'. I am a happy birthday boy. This budget includes $800,000 for the kiss-and-go and covered walkway works at Humpty Doo Primary School, including $50,000 for the specific scoping of opening the parcel of land next to the school to make sure that kids are dropped off on the right side of the road and that it is safe. This will save lives. It will improve the safety of rural kids, and I am happy to have the minister for Education on my team.

She did not stop there. I did not ask for it, but I got it anyway—$700,000 for works at Taminmin College. It is nothing too flash, and there will be no ribbon cutting, but it is important work to make sure our ageing infrastructure is maintained. Thank you, minister for Education, Treasurer and the minister for Infrastructure making it all possible.

I was a little greedy, so my friend the minister for Sport and Culture rang me and asked, 'Andrew, what will I buy you?' I started with, 'Probably a new tie; I have only three', but then I said, 'Minister, what I want is to see the kids playing under the lights at Norbuilt Oval. I want to see the men and women training under the lights, out of the sun, out of the Build-Up and out of the rain.' I am pre-empting an announcement for tomorrow, so I apologise to the minister's team upstairs who are panicking, but the minister has found the money. We will be lighting up Norbuilt Oval. The Southern Districts Crocs will be playing under lights as soon as possible. This is a big win for the rural area, but it is not as big as the wins the Crocs normally win by. Thank you, minister.

My good friend, the Minister for Recreational Fishing, our Deputy Chief Minister, asked, 'What will I buy you?' I said, 'I do not need anything, minister, but I want to make fishing easier and safer for the rural kids'. I am pleased to be a part of the government that is delivering a budget that cares about the rural area, because this budget includes $500,000 for Girraween Road fishing upgrades to make sure that our kids are not standing on the road when they go for a flick, opening up new opportunities to make it safe. The Member for Nelson is passionate about his rural area, and I acknowledge that it is slightly outside of my electorate, but I used to fish there as a kid, and I look forward to fishing there again when it is safer.

The minister is delivering more support for recreational fishing through the Northern Territory Recreational Fishing Grants Scheme. I hope that this will open lots of little projects in the Goyder electorate and the rural area. On behalf of the people of Goyder, thank you, minister.

My good friend the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations asked, 'What can I get you for your birthday?' I said, 'Minister, I do not need anything, but I would love cheaper airfares for the people in the rural area'. After they have had a long working year, they like to go on holiday. Like many of my constituents, I like going to Bali. It is the tropical paradise just north of us. Today I googled flights and I could see return flights for $270. You can go to Kuala Lumpur for $350 return in July and August. I thank the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations for opening up these pathways and making sure that when we have time for a holiday, it is somewhere exotic, close and great.

My good friend the Chief Minister, the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, asked, 'What can I get you for your birthday?' I had a lovely card from her on my desk. I said, 'I don't need a present from you, Chief Minister. I appreciate our friendship, but I would like to see Bushfires NT get a bit of love.' That is why there is $350,000 in the budget for minor works at Bushfires NT. Again, it is nothing too flash—there will be no ribbon cutting—but it is important that we upgrade ageing infrastructure. There is also $2m, which I believe is joint Commonwealth funded, for the Hughes Airstrip upgrade, which I am told allows Bushfires NT to launch its planes to protect the rural area. Thank you, Minister for Fire and Emergency Services.

My great friend the Attorney-General and minister for Tourism asked me …

Mr Maley: You have a lot of friends.

Mr MACKAY: I have a lot of friends in this team. I love all my 17 colleagues, and I appreciate you, Madam Speaker, as well as most of the crossbench and everyone else.

The minister for Tourism said, 'Member for Goyder, I know you're turning 28. You're getting old, so what can I do for you?' I said, 'I have been looking for grey hairs; I have not found any yet, but I appreciate your concerns about my health. I don't need anything personally, but I would like to see more support for major events in the Territory, such as the AFL—the Gold Coast Suns are playing tonight—the V8s, Finke, Darwin Festival and the MXGP.' I want to make sure that after a long week at work people in my electorate have something fun to look forward to and attend. I am incredibly happy that the minister has delivered $36.5m to drive those projects forward, as well as announcing $3m for military tourism. It is important. There are a lot of World War II artefacts and whatnot in my electorate. I am incredibly thankful for that, minister.

My good friend the Minister for Health said, 'Andrew, you're turning 28; that's a big milestone for a lot of people.' I said, 'Biggie never made it to 28, but I did. Member for Barkly, I want to see investment in mental health. I know how important it is, especially in the rural area, for people to have access to mental health facilities.' What did I get in return? He has delivered $135m for mental health in the Territory, including $16.5m for the new mental health ward at Royal Darwin Hospital to improve services for patients and reduce the bed block in the emergency department. Thank you, Minister for Health, for all you do in your portfolios.

The Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment rang me and asked, 'What should I get you for your birthday?' Again, I was hoping for new ties, but you cannot always get what you want. I said, 'I want to see a bit more crocodile management in the Territory'. I am incredibly pleased to see in the budget papers an increase of just under $400,000 for enhanced crocodile management. I assume part of that is, hopefully, to do with all the pet crocodiles being sold in my electorate.

It is a great time to be a Territorian, and this week is a good time to be a proud member of this Country Liberal Party government that is finally delivering for the rural area. This budget delivers for the rural area in a way that has not been seen for a long time. It goes to show how neglected the rural area has been for a number of years. This budget delivers more than $87m specifically for the rural area and my electorate. That is $87m the government would not be spending unless it was needed, so it has been a long time since the rural area got its fair share.

I love this budget. I love this team. I love the Treasurer, and I wish everyone a happy 'my birthday' day. Wish me a happy birthday, and have a wonderful day.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I wish the Member for Goyder a happy birthday; I think we all will chip in and buy him a couple of ties. That will be good.

I congratulate the Treasurer for delivering a practical and honest budget to begin the long and necessary task of repairing the mess left behind by eight years of Labor. It is now our responsibility to rebuild the Territory, restore confidence and deliver the Territory's future. It is a responsibility that our united 17-member government team owns, is committed to and will be accountable for.

I will highlight features of this budget which are important for my Karama electorate, which includes the residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon.

This budget puts crime victims first and prioritises law and order. This reflects the loud call for greater community safety from the residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon at the last election. These residents felt let down by the previous soft-on-crime Labor government. Responding to this call, we have invested $1.5bn in public order and safety. This includes significant investment in our Police, Corrections and courts so that we have a total system that will ensure offenders face real consequences. Once again, we have swung the pendulum to put victims of crime first, not offenders.

I was pleased to join Minister Charls and the other northern suburbs MLAs, the Members for Wanguri and Casuarina, at last week's announcement of a $4.6m investment in a new youth hub for the northern suburbs at Leanyer water park. This will provide services and a facility for positive engagement with our local youths. Extensive consultation with our local residents and others will commence soon.

As the assistant minister for Health, I applaud the investment of $2.5bn in our health services, including hospital services, primary healthcare, mental health services and alcohol and other drug services. On that latter point, I was pleased to represent the Minister for Health on Tuesday morning to officially open the Association of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NT Conference 2025 in Darwin. The conference theme is 'Voices of Change – Leading the Way'.

I will focus on the Leader of the Opposition's comments about holding this government to account in regard to budget integrity. Theoretically this is a great goal, but I am not too sure that the opposition has the skills and ability to do so, particularly when we examine Labor's budget processes over the last eight years. These were overseen by the disastrous Gunner–Fyles–Lawler government, which the current opposition members were a part of at various times. If it was not so serious their budget approach would be comedic. Those opposite apparently had an overriding mantra of 'get with the program'. They combined this with an assessment process which seemed to have come directly from the political satire show *Utopia*. I will give examples of how this combination may have worked for the Teletubby budget managers.

Those opposite inherited a reasonable ship lift proposal which had a commitment of $100m, but, no, this was not a big enough number as they wanted to promote a record spending program. Like *Utopia* they probably asked: how can we make this number much bigger? The former Labor government said, 'If we ignore commercial negotiation processes and discipline, we could blow this out to be in excess of $500m. That is a much better number to add to our program. Let us go for it.'

The Treasurer gave other examples that may have gone through a similar Labor budget process. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Gallery of Australia was originally costed at $50m but blew out to more than $300m, a much better number for Labor to include in its record spending program. Luckily the CLP has re-scoped this.

Who can forget the Tiger Brennan Drive overpass which jumped from $61.5m to $160.9m—a $99.4m blowout? Labor said, 'Who cares? It will make our program look great.'

A final example from the many others I could cite is the so-called State Square art gallery—another legacy of Labor's priorities—which has surged from $47m to $143m. That is an increase of $96m. Labor may have wished the blowout was more than $100m. I am sure if it had been re-elected to government this would have easily happened and it could have added it joyfully to the program.

Although this wonderful huge program of investments sounds great and is great for media releases and budget spin, it falls in a heap when the emperor's clothes are revealed for what they truly are—that is, a charade. An honest question that had to be asked was: where is the cash to pay for the wish list? The voices of sanity, including from former Labor members, were ignored when raising this genuine concern. Labor resorted to its well-known modus operandi—'Ignore the message; just shoot the messenger.'

To highlight this, I will give you a few quotes from former Labor minister Ken Vowles. These are his words, not mine, when commenting on Labor's budget approach. At a press conference Mr Vowles said:

> *… the two most critical problems facing the Northern Territory were youth crime and its budget crisis, and his party …*

Referring to the Labor Party:

> *… had dropped the ball on both.*

He said that his government:

> *… had no plan whatsoever to claw back the Territory's ballooning debt …*
>
> *I'm telling you now the budget is in crisis. No matter how much spin you put out there, we're in crisis …*
>
> *…*
>
> *And right now, there are no plans for the Territory in regards to fiscal management and the opportunity for Territorians to feel that this government is working for them.*

Here is a quote from Mr Vowles at the time that I probably could also hear repeated by our Treasurer. Mr Vowles said that the Labor government:

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

I agree with what Mr Vowles said, particularly his recognition of the critical role that the private sector needs to play in rebuilding our economy.

I am still shocked when I recall the statement that the Member for Johnston previously made in this Assembly:

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

I can guarantee that our government supports the private sector. We want to see much more private sector investment and get it to help lead us out of this mess.

Imagine if the former Labor government had the fortitude and willingness to put the Territory's interests first at that time and heeded Mr Vowles' advice. We would have been in a much better financial position. Alas, it has been left to our CLP government to undertake the serious task of budget repair, and do it we will.

Mr Vowles also recognised the need to rein in the ballooning cost of our public service and suggested that the government enforce a recruitment freeze and hold departmental chiefs accountable for overspending. I agree with him that we need to better manage the escalating cost of our public service. When I was Deputy CEO of the Chamber of Commerce I publicly stated the widely held view, including by many within the public service, that it had become too top-heavy and over-managed at the expense of resourcing our frontline services. For example, the number of deputy CEOs under executive contracts within an agency seemed to flourish at the expense of resourcing our frontline services, such as police, fire and emergency staff, Corrections staff, doctors, nurses and teachers—and I know what we need most.

I urge my government to continue with its reprioritisation to strengthen our frontline services and to make savings by taking full advantage of natural attrition and completion of executive contracts to do so.

I congratulate the Treasurer for delivering a practical and honest budget to begin the long and necessary task of repairing the mess left behind by eight years of Labor. Although Labor adopted the charade of putting forward a program that it could never fund, we will be realistic and make the necessary hard decisions to fix Labor's failures, restore confidence and deliver the Territory's future.

I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

VISITORS
Member for Drysdale's Family

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of the Member for Drysdale's wife, Mrs Alice Howe, and father and mother-in-law, Mr and Mrs Harrison. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, despite promises to restore confidence in government and invest in ways that matter most, this budget doubles down on the wrong priorities. Instead of tackling our chronic housing shortage, endemic violence and a lack of social support for many vulnerable community members, it pours public money into fossil fuels and prisons. We cannot accept a budget that subsidises polluters and prisons while cutting essential services that keep the community safe.

My first concern is that the CLP is boasting about a record spend on Corrections, police and prisons. We are spending $1.34bn per year on courts, prisons and police. This is nothing to be proud of. In fact, it demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the CLP's tough-on-crime approach and a lack of understanding of the deeper issue.

The headline in the budget is 'reducing crime', but it should be changed to 'reacting to crime' because that is all it does. My community desperately wants a reduction in crime, but you do not get that by only reacting to it; you get it by preventing it, which is possible if you fund the right things.

It is not a good thing that our prisons are overflowing and we need to inject hundreds of millions of dollars into increasing prison capacity, are having to hire unqualified private security contractors to staff our prisons and need to inject millions of dollars into the justice system to help our courts cope with an overwhelming workload. The CLP is so deeply caught up in its racist, punitive, brutalising tough-on-crime agenda that it has lost touch with the evidence and is leading the Territory down the wrong path.

Corrections alone has seen an increase in its budget of $126m to a whopping $495m per year. This includes an additional $80m per year to address rising prisoner numbers and $120m per year thereafter. In contrast, the amount provided for Community Corrections, where the vulnerable and disadvantaged people facing the justice system are put on a path towards rehabilitation and away from prison, is only $49m. Each additional individual who is in prison represents not only an enormous cost to the taxpayer but also, more importantly, a number of people let down by our community and our justice system. Locking up someone does not rehabilitate the person.

NT prisons are chewing people up and spitting them out. We have the highest recidivism rates in the country, with almost 60% of people returning to prison within two years of being released. Locking up people does not make our community safer. We must invest in the programs and social safety nets needed to prevent that crime happening in the first place.

Locking up people on remand when they have been charged for minor offences is inhumane and a waste of money. We need to be investing in proper bail support services to ensure that people who have been charged with minor offences are kept out of prison. Yes, it is important that violent offenders are kept out of the community, but at the moment our jails are so full of people remanded on minor offences that our courts are being forced to bail serious offenders. The answer is not to build more prisons but to build more bail accommodation, homes and community services. I cannot see a single cent in this budget for bail support. Although it is not surprising, the ramifications of this are frankly terrifying.

The CLP says that it is investing in addressing the root causes of crime, but all it has announced is a measly $8.3m for the Circuit Breaker Program which is targeted only at young offenders. The coronial inquest in November 2024—which should drive the strategy into preventing and reducing domestic, family and sexual violence—is unbudgeted. However, I note that it is good to see the allocation of $8.6m over five years and $1.5m ongoing to strengthen the whole-of-government domestic, family and sexual violence coordination mechanism to lead consistent and evidence-based DFSV policy and practice. I will keenly watch what this evidence-based practice looks like and what ongoing consultation will be done.

The housing shortfall in the NT is a humanitarian crisis; we have the worst overcrowding in Australia. Territorians are waiting up to 10 years for public housing, and we have a homelessness rate which is 12 times the national average. In our Nightcliff office my staff and I are often trying to help people navigate the public housing system, and it is heartbreaking to tell people it will be up to 10 years before they can access a home. Every week we work with people struggling to keep a roof over their head or living in dangerous, dilapidated public housing.

Housing is not only a fundamental right but also an obvious and important solution to many of the crises we face in the Territory. Health and wellbeing, domestic and family violence, employment, education and community safety and cohesion are deeply linked to housing, yet the government is tinkering around the edges of this crisis. I welcome the $833m for housing, including $615m for remote housing, but it is not enough. We need to see a massive increase in investment in building good-quality, culturally appropriate and secure housing so that we can tackle the housing and homelessness crisis and enjoy the flow-on effects for other issues in our community.

Instead of investing in secure housing for our most vulnerable populations, the government is implementing harsher rules and penalties for public housing tenants. Kicking people out of public housing because they cannot pay their rent will not make them disappear. Victims of Crime NT has been clear that evicting people from their homes will not reduce crime and antisocial behaviour in public housing. We need to invest in strengthening our social safety net and provide wraparound tenancy services which help people stay in their homes.

I have said this before and will say again that people need a good home to thrive. The issues of domestic and family violence, unemployment, health, crime and not attending school cannot be solved if people are homeless or not properly housed. If you were a parent could you hold down a job, feed your family, get your kids consistently to school and care for your relatives if you did not have a secure home? This government needs to put itself in the shoes of our most vulnerable people and show compassion and approach housing and social services from a place of support, not punishment.

The CLP government made it abundantly clear that it works for the fossil fuel industry and not everyday Territorians. CLP members purport to want to restore our iconic Territory lifestyle, but seem intent on allowing their gas industry mates to destroy our unique and precious environment and risk the health of our communities.

The petroleum industry pays an embarrassingly small amount of tax and royalties to the NT Government. The Mining minister had the gall to claim that the industry's taxes and royalties fund important services, such as health and education, before being forced to admit that it pays only $8m in taxes. We could pay for all the things that Territorians need—secure homes, world-class health, education and nutritious food—if the government had the gumption to make the gas industry pay its fair share. Instead, the government swallows the gas industry's propaganda hook, line and sinker.

Over the last four years multinational companies have made $149bn exporting gas which they got for free, and this includes $37bn from the NT. The gas industry pays so little tax, yet it charges through the nose for our own bloody gas. Despite the fact that the government is throwing everything it has at growing our mining and petroleum industries, expected royalties are forecast to decrease from now until 2029. Why are we throwing hundreds of millions of dollars of public money at an industry with decreasing returns to the public?

I note my community's immense frustration that the CLP has increased funding to support the toxic, financially irresponsible Middle Arm petrochemical precinct. This is despite increasing evidence that it does not stack up economically, the irrefutable evidence of the health harms to the population of Darwin and, in particular, Palmerston, and the devastating impacts it will have on our climate and beautiful harbour.

I urge the government to abandon this ridiculous venture and work with the federal government to redirect the almost $2bn of public money committed to Middle Arm to instead be invested in clean energy, energy efficiency upgrades for low-income and public housing, improvements to our transmission infrastructure and grid-scale batteries. It is time to put this petrochemical nightmare to bed once and for all and start investing in the future.

I also call out the fact that, under this budget, Territory taxpayers are subsidising consumers to buy our own overpriced gas. We are expected to pay almost $200m per year in electricity subsidies to manage power costs. It is important that we address the cost of power for households and businesses, but we are propping up the profits of multinational gas industries that rort us for our own gas. Meanwhile, there is no comparable investment in renewables and battery storage. It is 2025, and it is crazy to me that I still need to make the case for investing in renewables. It has been the case for years that renewables are the cheapest form of energy; that is a fact. The NT has some of the best solar resources in the world, but we are failing miserably to take advantage of them.

From what I can see there is only one fleeting mention of climate change in this whole budget. This is a disgrace. The NT is on the front line of the climate crisis, yet there is no money for climate mitigation or adaption to be seen. The only mention of emissions reduction is in relation to carbon capture and storage at Middle Arm. Carbon capture and storage (CCS) has failed consistently to deliver results and is only a smokescreen for the gas industry to excuse its ongoing existence. Scientists and engineers the world over have rubbished the ability of CCS to do anything meaningful for emissions reduction. It is another part of the gas lobby that our government is buying hook, line and sinker.

Parts of the NT are becoming unliveable already. Alice Springs experienced more than 100 days over 40 degrees this summer. There will be no iconic Territory lifestyle if the Territory is unliveable.

In its latest blow to our precious environment, the CLP has made cuts across the board for environmental regulation and protection. We have seen a 9% cut to environmental assessment funding and over 30% cut to water security and resources. We have seen cuts to ranger programs, despite the CLP promising at the election that it would not cut ranger funding. Of course, there is $6.4m for the Office of the Territory Coordinator instead. We cannot continue with this development-at-all-costs mentality when our environment, communities and health are sacrificed for the benefit of big industry. We need to ensure that economic development is sustainable, inclusive and well regulated.

This is the largest budget ever delivered in the NT, but it deeply concerns me that the CLP government seems to think greater spending automatically equates to better outcomes. Unfortunately, this is not the case. We need strategic, evidence-based spending is driven by those working on the front line, experts in the field and people with lived experience.

Underlying all these failures in the budget is the way decisions were made without real consultation. I continually hear community organisations tell me they were not consulted, despite them being the core group working in such areas, so it is frustrating to hear the CLP talk about all the consultations, when the people in those organisations tell me all the time that they were not consulted.

I was prepared to congratulate the government on its increased funding to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence, which I am passionate about and keen to see, but now that I have seen the allocation, I am concerned that it is not informed by the sector and that it will not go towards specialist providers. I have questions as to why so much of this money is going towards Police, Corrections and Circuit Breaker—which is not a domestic, family and sexual violence reduction program—rather than to actual prevention and support services.

As identified by NTCOSS yesterday:

> *… it is essential the funding is prioritised for those whose core business is the prevention of and response to DFSV. These include women's safe houses, DFV crisis accommodation, DFV counselling services, specialist sexual assault counselling and response services, men's behaviour change programs, and specialist DFV legal services.*

This budget does not appear to be achieving this.

Budgets should be shaped in our communities, not behind the closed doors of politicians and lobbyists. When so much is at stake, ordinary Territorians deserve a voice. The CLP's 2025–26 budget is a stark reminder of who the CLP really works for. It shovels public money into fossil fuel projects and prisons while denying long-term help to families and country. We deserve better.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, my job as an Independent representative is to bring the voices, concerns and hopes of my wonderful community of Johnston to this Chamber, and to play my part—along with all of you—in making good law and good decisions for the whole of the Northern Territory.

I looked forward to seeing the CLP government's first budget to understand what it prioritised, how it plans to spend our money and what kind of future it is trying to build. The economy is not separate from the health of our society; it is a reflection of it. The budget is one of the most powerful tools we have to shape that collective future.

A budget is more than numbers on a page; it is a moral document. It tells us who matters and shows us whose needs will be met and whose will be ignored or delayed. That is why I call for a people-centred budget, not as a soft alternative to economic responsibility, but as the most strategic, effective and future-focused way to build a stronger, fairer Northern Territory, because people are the economy.

This budget risks repeating the mistakes of the past, prioritising private industry profits over economic growth for everyone, relying on incarceration over prevention and, once again, sidelining the communities most affected, especially Aboriginal people who are disproportionately impacted by these policies, yet rarely consulted on them. Too often we hear of consultation after decisions have already been made. This budget is no exception. There can be no lasting change, safety, justice or true economic growth without the meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal people in decision-making, design and leadership. We cannot build a strong economy on broken systems, burnt-out workforces or communities left behind. We build a strong economy by making sure that people are safe, housed, educated, healthy and included so that they can contribute, innovate and lead.

There are parts of this budget to welcome, such as the gambling tax, spending on housing and domestic violence prevention, a boost for the health budget and the rejection of a notion of austerity. However, it remains at its core a budget of missed opportunities and misdirected priorities.

This government has called this the law and order budget, and we are told that it puts victims first. However, when nearly $1.5m is allocated to public order and safety, more police, more prison beds and longer sentences it does not look like a budget centred on victims; it looks like a budget obsessed with incarceration rather than transformation. More prison beds is not a sign of success; it is a symptom of a failure to invest early, heal trauma, listen to the communities most affected by violence and disadvantage—especially Aboriginal communities which are shamefully and devastatingly over-represented in this government's punitive response—and do what will work to make all of us safer.

We know that we cannot imprison our way to a safer Territory. That is a political illusion. Real safety comes from housing, healing, jobs and justice. We are being asked to spend more than half-a-billion dollars on prison infrastructure and operations, largely in response to policies introduced months ago—rushed bail laws, new offences and cuts to community-led prevention programs. I will be clear that this is not a proactive investment in community safety; this is the cost of decisions made without evidence, proper scrutiny and

meaningful consultation with Aboriginal leaders, community leaders, organisations and communities which have been calling for a different path.

These decisions are costing us millions of dollars—for what? Crime rates have not gone down, people are not safer and prisons are more crowded, dangerous and expensive. We already know what drives crime and what the root causes are, yet this budget offers little more than token responses to them and instead pours millions of dollars into what will make things worse.

Instead of funding what works—housing, mental health services, youth development and culturally safe programs—we are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to entrench the cycle of incarceration while we are fining families, evicting vulnerable people into homelessness and passing laws designed to disproportionately target, control, harm and disempower Aboriginal Territorians, causing the greatest harm to those with the least power. We send people into prison with trauma and release them with more, then we act surprised when they reoffend.

We cannot build justice on foundations of harm. We need to fund healing, not only punishment. Investing in prevention and early intervention, community support, trauma-informed services and restorative justice is not only more humane but also smart, cost-effective and will do something to make us safer.

Where is the vision in this budget? It is welcome to see a continued and extended commitment to funding responses to domestic, family and sexual violence, which is the crime crisis in the Northern Territory. I acknowledge that the government has committed $36m per year ongoing to address this issue. I understand from the minister that this is all new money, and that is a positive and welcome step forward. It is a good story that reflects the importance of investing in the right areas for our most vulnerable. In particular, the expansion of the co-responder model, the specialist courts and the increase in funding for frontline services and men's behaviour change programs are important and much-needed additions. This will help ensure the sustainability of our domestic, family and sexual violence sector.

It is a step in the right direction, but several key sector asks have not been considered, were not funded or have even been defunded. This includes no funding being allocated to a domestic, sexual and family violence peak, a loss of funding for some early intervention programs and no commitment to or alignment with many of the Coroner's recommendations, including the death review.

One area of concern is the lack of evaluation for programs like Circuit Breaker. The CLP consistently refers to this program as an example of what it is doing to address the root causes of crime and support young people, but we have no information on whether it is working. If there has been an evaluation of this program, can this please be made public so that we can see that it is working as intended and meeting the needs of our communities?

It is also important to note that Circuit Breaker is not a domestic, family and sexual violence early intervention program. It falls under child protection and Corrections, which means that it cannot and should not be funded at the expense of specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services.

The welcome introduction and expansion of initiatives like this and the co-responder programs will likely increase demand on frontline services. I am concerned that these services are not adequately resourced to manage this potential growth. I also have concerns about the sustainability of programs that continue to be funded year by year without long-term security.

The minister has said that she is working with the sector to identify what works and what does not, but it is unclear what process this government is using to work with the sector. Given that the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Advisory Forum, which played that role, has been dissolved, what methodology is guiding decisions about what works? Who is involved in those decisions? We want to make sure that whatever we do here and how we spend our money works to make our community safe and to keep our women and children safe. We must have evidence-based approaches that we properly evaluate. We must invest in community-controlled organisations that are trusted and proven to make a difference.

We are yet to see any funding allocated for a domestic, family and sexual violence-specific peak body, which exists throughout the rest of Australia. This would service a vital advocacy and coordination mechanism and make sure that everything works together consistently to the same end.

There is no clear commitment or response to the recommendations from the domestic, family and sexual violence coronial inquest. There is no commitment to the death review. We are missing critical pieces that could ensure long-term essential systemic change that ensures we are not left picking up the pieces, but we

are addressing the issues before they happen. If we do not listen deeply and consistently to organisations, those with expertise and those on the frontline, we are not serious about ending this crisis and are not even managing it.

The CLP calls this a budget of confidence and growth, driven by gas, mining, Defence and tourism, but confidence and growth for whom? This economic strategy leans heavily on fossil fuels and private sector mega projects facilitating huge profits for offshore companies, while downplaying environmental risks, social inequality and community consent. What happens when this growth excludes our most marginalised, when water, land and housing needs are cast aside in favour of short-term industry deals and when Aboriginal communities are consulted after the fact? While we hear promises of jobs, the budget offers little for local procurement reform, limited youth employment initiatives and no new Aboriginal employment targets in the public sector. If we want a resilient sustainable economy we must invest in people, not only projects.

The government speaks of fiscal responsibility, trimming operating expenses and cutting consultancies, and I welcome that. However, let us be clear that repairing the bottom line must not come at the cost of essential services. We heard the government ask agencies to find $20m in annual savings. In the past, similar targets have quietly resulted in fewer frontline workers, reduced program delivery and the erosion of community-based supports, particularly in regional and remote areas.

Where is the investment in our community sector, which is not only social support but also a major employer and the backbone of the economy in remote areas? More than 11% of the Territory workforce is in the community services sector. That is larger than in mining or construction, but this sector is stretched thin, underfunded, under-resourced and struggling to retain staff. On Tuesday the government passed a Bill which repealed community sector portable long service leave—a Bill which would work to attract and retain community sector workers in the Northern Territory.

A people-centred budget would treat the community sector not as charity but as a critical economic infrastructure. It would fund service delivery at real cost, accounting for inflation, workforce pressures and regional complexity. It would co-design a Territory-wide workforce strategy to build and retain skilled workers. It would invest in wages, professional development and career pathways, particularly for Aboriginal people and people working remotely. When we invest in this sector, we are not just funding the people who look after all of us; we are creating jobs, reducing unemployment and building long-term community capability. Fiscal sustainability is meaningful only if it sustains the people who rely on public services every day.

I welcome the support for families in this budget, with back-to-school vouchers, utilities caps and housing grants. I am pleased to see continued funding for the NT Concession Scheme; however, it is disappointing that eligibility for this scheme has not been expanded to include people on some of the lowest incomes in our community such as those on JobSeeker and Youth Allowance. Although positive, all these policies are bandaids on structural problems. There is no offer of systemic fix to rental affordability, no strategy for food security in remote communities and no comprehensive plan to expand social housing stock.

The freeze on registration costs is welcomed, but supports to address the cost of living are not targeted at those who need them most. Similarly, although continued Commonwealth funding for the Household Energy Upgrades Fund and the solar grant scheme is a step forward, the absence of new Northern Territory Government investment in renewable energy is a missed opportunity for all of us.

Targeted investment in energy efficiency and solar for social housing and rentals would not only reduce living costs for disadvantaged Territorians but also help futureproof our energy systems and accelerate our shift to sustainability. Grants for first homebuyers are welcomed, but they also risk inflating prices while ignoring the rental crisis and community housing needs.

Ultimately, a people-centred budget is not a luxury; it is a precondition for long-term prosperity for us in the Northern Territory. We cannot build an economy on prisons and poverty. We cannot build workforce participation without housing or regional development without trust. We cannot grow our private sector while neglecting the human infrastructure that keeps communities together. We cannot reduce debt if we keep funding failure, spending billions on the costs of crisis, the physical and psychological harm our society experiences, while refusing to invest in the things that would prevent it in the first place.

A smarter path is possible, one grounded in community-led solutions rather than top-down command, in evidence-based policy rather than political optics and in meaningful ongoing consultation with Aboriginal people, not just box ticking after decisions have already been made. The cheapest, smartest and most effective way to build a stronger Territory is to put all people at the centre of every decision we make.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will address the comments from the Greens Party. The Greens member called the CLP government racist and said it is enacting racist policy. In that comment, they showed that they are the most racist party in this Chamber.

It is in the name of a Country Liberal—it is that word 'liberal'—that we do not care whether you are black, white or brindle, you will be treated the same under a CLP government. It is in the word 'liberal'. If you commit a crime—I do not care what colour, race, creed or religion you are from—you will find a bed in a Corrections facility, and we will make the community safe. I speak for people of all different backgrounds and heritage. They all bleed one colour, and that is red. I will represent every one of them and not reduce them to race. We cannot continue, in this year and this century, to reduce our people to race.

The Greens have done a 180 and gone so far back in time that they would like this race-based policy. They need the world to be oppressor versus oppressed. It is not so. This Assembly is here to represent every human being in the Northern Territory, and we will do so equally.

It was claimed that we do not address the root causes of crime. In our budget and plan of reform, we are addressing the root causes of crime. We are doing housing reform, which people of every race in my electorate are screaming for. They want housing reform; they are sick of being at the hands of those who disrupt the community, drink and play music at all hours of the night. We will address that and allocate the funds in our budget accordingly.

The minister has spoken constantly about the extra DV funding our government has delivered—the largest budget an NT Government has ever delivered in this space. Just because it does not suit the Greens, Labor or the crossbench on which organisation it goes to, somehow that makes it wrong. We are allocating the funds because our government cares about this issue. More importantly, we will act on this issue.

I am sick of the Greens, Labor and the crossbench subjugating the powers of this parliament to lobby bodies who have a goal to academically elitest lead. We are not subjugating our powers; people put us here to govern. It is a back door to their revolution.

A member interjecting.

Mr HOWE: She laughs, but to give up the powers of this parliament to other bodies undermines the whole system. Why even have a parliament; why not just bring in community bodies to make the legislation? That is not what the people asked for. They put us here and expect us to govern. It is time that Labor, the crossbench and the Greens took on that responsibility to govern and make hard decisions, because to be in this Chamber means you have to face hard decisions, not hand them out to other people to do for you.

I will move on to the Opposition Leader's response. I am not sure what this Labor opposition has planned. There is no narrative. Those opposite attack because there is higher debt, but then they want more spending. Make up your mind, Opposition Leader; what is your narrative? What is your opposing view? What are you putting forth in opposition? We heard none of that.

It is important that we clarify to the people of the Northern Territory exactly why there is a deficit. It amazed me that the Opposition Leader brought up the debt that the Labor government left—$55,000 hangs on the neck of every Northern Territorian man, woman and child. The people in the electorate of Drysdale can thank the Labor opposition for its time in government because it put $55,000 on their neck and that of their partner and every child in their home. They now carry that debt.

When we came into government we found out that Labor had not funded a raft of contracts. Labor accuses us of increasing debt. The people of the Northern Territory need to know that it was not optional; it has to be funded because we are in contract. You can look at the white elephants growing all over the place which Labor did not fund in its forward estimates. If we did not fund them, we will end up in the court where we will have to pay any way, with court fees on top.

We had to put in that money which, yes, has grown the debt. It is Labor's debt. No matter how this deficit is spun by Labor or journalists who are inclined to spin it that way, these are Labor's contracts about which it purposely lied to the people of the Northern Territory and did not fund them in its forward estimates to trick people leading into the 2024 election.

I have said before in here that if it was a private business those opposite would go to prison. The people of the Northern Territory should think about that. If that Cabinet was a private enterprise, an administrator would have taken over and it would face criminal charges with a penalty of up to 15 years.

In the last sittings Labor members moved a motion to congratulate themselves on that. The crossbench voted with them. They talk about accountability, yet they voted in favour of congratulating a government on something that private industry would face prison for having done. The mind boggles!

We have the highest net debt in the country of $55,000 per man, woman and child. The former government overspent on all contracts, and there was no accountability. Throughout the Opposition Leader's speech I had no idea what Labor was presenting. Does it want lower debt or more spending? We heard both, and it highlights how we got here. I beseech the Labor opposition members to have a good, hard look at themselves and think about what they will do differently from when they were last in government. All we have heard is the exact same lines that were delivered for eight long years.

We saw Labor's program, the other great lie to the people of the Northern Territory. I will bring this back to my electorate.

For years, the local member, who was also the former Chief Minister, promised an upgrade to Driver Primary School and said, 'It's on the program'. It never happened; the program was never delivered. It was a lie. Those opposite never intended to do it. It was to fool people into thinking they would do something. I am proud to say that within the first few months of coming into government, we will deliver that upgrade and work will begin this year. I will not lie to the people of Drysdale. If I tell them I will do something, I will do it. That is why we are finally upgrading the Driver Primary School kiss-and-go. It is a safety issue, and I will never tell people that it is on some program which will never be delivered.

We have heard constantly that the rights of offenders remain the priority for Labor and the crossbench, and that is concerning. Despite the calls throughout the Northern Territory, and from my people in Drysdale, they are not only sticking to it but also doubling down. We will not concede; we are staying the path. These calls can be made all they want, but we are firm in our approach. May the people of the Northern Territory know that we will not change course or give in to the pressure of the minority; we will deliver what we promised to the people of the Northern Territory.

Programs, programs, programs—Labor and the crossbench love a good social program. It so happens that we have delivered more this week than Labor did in its last year in office. In the eight or nine months we have been in government, Corrections has delivered more programs to offenders than Labor did in its entire last year of governing. We are not only committed to delivering on our election promises but also dealing with the root causes of crime and delivering more in the approach that those opposite scream for than they did in government. We are truly doing both.

The speech in defence of the former government bewildered me. We read the figures of debt and hear the stories of victims of crime—families who are left behind following the murder of a loved one, the bruised faces that exist across the Northern Territory and the families who live in fear. Those stories are throughout my electorate. People in my electorate suffer from a communal anxiety that has been caused by this crime crisis we live in. Despite that, those opposite still doggedly defend what they did in government. This emboldens and assures us that what we are doing is right, and we must fight the opposition and the crossbench. We will continue to push forward with what the Northern Territory has asked from us.

The Nightcliff Police Station is another version of shocking waste and political interference. Let us just slap a police sign on Woolworths; that will fix it. That seemed to be Labor's approach to governing as that is all the Nightcliff Police Station could do. It would be as effective as Woolies in Nightcliff. This week, we had calls from Labor and the crossbench to man it when the Opposition Leader knows that it cannot be used operationally; they built it and knew it could not be manned. It was an outrageous demand that highlights how Labor governed. In calling on our Chief Minister to do something she cannot do, which is to direct police, it gives an insight into how the Labor government acted.

The Leader of the Opposition called out and said that members of our backbench were breaking rank for talking about crime. That is an interesting insight into the Labor mind. In a Country Liberal government, we are allowed to speak our minds. It is literally in our philosophy. We are put here to represent our people, and to do so with liberal conservative values. When she called out that me speaking about crime was breaking rank, we saw an insight into the Labor way of governing. I urge Territorians to take serious note of that because I wonder, for those eight years, how many backbenchers were silenced. How many backbenchers were told they could not speak up?

We saw it. The good Member for Karama mentioned the honourable Ken Vowles, and we all know what happened to him for speaking up. There was a man who put the Territory first, and we saw his rapid execution by the then Chief Minister. It was a shame.

We continue to address the root causes. I thank the Treasurer for his work. He has inherited a mess; there is no other way to put it. The highest indebted per capita Australians in history is what our government has inherited. We will invest where we promised. We will invest in police, the justice system and Corrections.

The minister spoke about her efforts in increasing school attendance. Everyone in this House agrees that education is the only way to truly empower people and change their lives. We will invest in our school attendance officers.

I spoke about the housing reform. I openly call out the ghettos that exist in the electorate of Drysdale and the need for significant reform so that we can uplift everybody, especially those who are given a house in the ghetto areas so that they have a true opportunity for success.

It is a difficult road ahead for the Northern Territory, but may the people know that with the Country Liberal Party at the helm, we will listen to them, address what the people want—that always being our priority—turn this ship around and grow this economy. We want the economy to grow so that we can do more social good, because without that strong economy and growing revenue, we cannot do the social good in education and health that changes people's lives for the better. That is why we will continue to focus. I want to see increased wealth in my electorate of Drysdale. I want to see every family getting richer so that they can enjoy more things in life and have greater opportunities than they had when Labor was in government. That is what I will set out to do for the people of Drysdale.

I thank the Treasurer for his hard work this year, and I look forward to what the Country Liberal Party will bring.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, I feel like my speech on the budget will be a little underwhelming following a few of our government speeches. They have been well thought out and entertaining, so thank you to those members of the government.

I will quickly touch on something that I have mentioned a few times before in this Chamber. Many people come to speak to me in my office—conservatives, Greens and people who swing to the left, to the right or to the centre of the pendulum in their political beliefs. People from the neighbouring electorates of Nightcliff and Johnston come to speak to me because they do not feel like they can speak to their local member because of their beliefs and way of thinking. This gives me a great opportunity to feel what the entire community is feeling, not just the people who have the same beliefs and values that I do, which is good. This makes people feel like they can come and speak to me. I will listen to them, no matter what their political beliefs are.

Since the day I started campaigning and before that, being in the community and a local member of the Fannie Bay electorate, people came and spoke to me about their concerns. Their number one concern is crime. The centre of our budget focuses on crime because that is what Territorians want and need us to do to feel safe. If we can get the crime situation under control everything else will fall into place.

I believe that this budget delivers action, certainty and security for all Territorians, not just one group. It restores confidence, rebuilds our economy and strengthens the unique lifestyle that makes the Territory such a special place to live and work. This government has listened to the needs of the community.

With an historic law and order package, we are investing in more police, more Corrections beds and greater resources for our courts and victim support services. This is the largest investment in Territory history to tackle domestic, family and sexual violence, ensuring that our families and communities are safer than ever before. The package makes community safety a top priority by directing unprecedented resources to law and order initiatives. Significant funding will allow for the recruitment of more police officers, boosting the Territory's capacity to prevent and respond to crime, which is much needed. Additional resources will be allocated to the courts and victim support services, ensuring timely justice and better care for those affected by crime. The package represents the largest ongoing investment in tackling domestic, family and sexual violence in Territory history, aiming to make families and communities safer.

This comprehensive approach is designed to restore public confidence, reduce crime and support victims, making the Northern Territory a safer place for all residents, which everybody in the community wants. Our health investment demonstrates our commitment to the wellbeing of every resident, and with $1.6bn for education and training, including fee-free TAFE and training bonuses for apprenticeships, we are building a stronger workforce for the future.

Tourism is the cornerstone of our economy, and in this budget it receives a significant boost. This is a smart strategic investment that will grow visitation, support operators and drive long-term confidence in the sector.

New financial assistance schemes are being introduced to make it easier and faster for victims to access support for recovery from violent crime. Services are being redesigned to be trauma informed, with a focus on reducing re-traumatisation and providing more accessible, timely and supportive assistance. Dedicated legal services are being established to offer timely specialist legal advice and support, especially for victims with complex needs. Strategies are being implemented to offer long-term responsive advocacy, guiding victims through the justice system and helping them access the support they need. New victim-centred restorative justice programs will allow eligible victims to participate in restorative processes, giving them a voice and focusing on repairing harm in a way that meets their needs.

There is a strong focus on education and awareness campaigns and building partnerships between government, community organisations and victims to create a coordinated and compassionate response. These new measures collectively aim to make the justice process more accessible, less traumatic and more responsive to the needs of victims, ensuring that they receive the support, recognition and outcomes they deserve.

This package is expected to prioritise early intervention and prevention strategies, recognising that addressing the root causes of youth offending—such as family instability, trauma and lack of support—can reduce juvenile crime rates. Evidence shows that preventive measures from diversion are more effective at reducing reoffending than punitive approaches. We need to act now.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

NOTICES

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

- recognise the importance of providing a highly accessible safe place for young people to connect with each other, engage in fun activities and access the support they need

- condemn the Finocchiaro CLP government for relocating the youth hub without consultation and adequately considering the needs of young people of the northern suburbs.

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

1. note that secure affordable housing is essential for the wellbeing of all Territorians

2. recognise the Northern Territory faces a housing crisis with shortages in urban areas and severe overcrowding in remote communities

3. express concern about the government's cuts of over $100m from housing, including urban, remote, government employee housing and housing in homelands and town camps

4. call on the government to urgently restore and increase investment in housing infrastructure, ensuring funding for new builds, upgrades and maintenance

5. call on the government to deliver on the Commonwealth housing programs in full, including the Housing Australia Future Fund and National Housing Accord

6. urge the government to fulfil its commitments to provide safe, sustainable and culturally appropriate housing across the Northern Territory.

VISITORS
Darwin High School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of Legal Studies students from Darwin High School, accompanied by their teachers. On behalf of honourable members, I extend a warm welcome to you.

Members: Hear, hear!

QUESTION TIME

Government Recruitment Practices

Ms UIBO to CHIEF MINISTER

Your Attorney-General appointed a new Director of Legal Aid, despite the appointee being found not suitable for the job by an independent panel. Today you have quietly gone ahead and appointed Mr Stuart Knowles as the ongoing Territory Coordinator without advertising the role, any independent hiring process and information about the salary. It has been revealed today that you have also known about the animal abuse charges against Mr Knowles since 2023, despite denying knowledge of it in the parliament yesterday.

At a time when Territorians are deeply concerned with integrity of hiring practices of government, do you think that this passes the pub test? How can Territorians have faith in your word or judgement?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I love the opportunity to talk about the Territory Coordinator. I met with Stuart Knowles this morning to catch up on the important reformation they are doing to the Territory. I note at the budget lunch yesterday—the budget lunch that the CLP brought back—that the economists were excited about the role of the Territory Coordinator.

This is important to clear up. Yes, the Opposition Leader's email address and the Spillett email account, along with the then Chief Minister, Natasha Fyles, received an email from someone on 30 May. As the Opposition Leader and all of us know, our electorate and ministerial accounts receive thousands of emails every year. I confirm that I have no recollection of that and no action was taken because the email was sent to your Chief Minister, Natasha Fyles. In fact, she replied to the email …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Silence!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When she replied to the email on 29 May to this former government employee, she said, 'Your correspondence indicates these matters have been considered and closed by both integrity bodies'. What integrity bodies was she talking about? The ICAC and the public interest disclosure commissioner looked at it. Then the Chief Minister's Office went back to the individual and said, 'All the matters you have raised have been considered by the appropriate statutory authorities outlined above, and a ministerial inquiry will not be conducted'.

Natasha Fyles did not even think it met the threshold to be looked into. I wonder whether the Opposition Leader knew about this, given she was the Attorney-General. This had been looked at; it all happened under Labor's watch …

Members interjecting.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I cannot hear the Chief Minister with all the interjections.

Madam SPEAKER: We will have silence.

Ms Uibo: Jeez, you are reaching far to try to cover yourself now, aren't you?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, you are continuing to talk. I put you on a warning.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Opposition Leader said that I am reaching far; this reaches back 10 years, and it lands squarely in the seat of Natasha Fyles, the previous Chief Minister.

There is much rewriting of history going on, and those opposite have shown they are willing to drag public servants through the mud. They are not willing to let anyone make a mistake because they are so perfect.

Mr Knowles has apologised. He has rectified the issue. No fine was issued because the inspectors went back there.

This is disgusting gutter politics from an opposition that is out of ideas. They are doing nothing for the Territory. It tells me that we are doing a good job. If this is the rubbish you come into parliament with, god help us. You are a disgrace; you are digging at the bottom of the barrel …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Your time has expired, Chief Minister.

Let us take a deep breath at this point, everyone.

Budget 2025–26 – Fire and Emergency Services

Mr HOWE to MINISTER for FIRE and EMERGENCY SERVICES

Budget 2025 delivers action, certainty and security for Territorians and backs our frontline staff who work hard every day for Territorians. I am pleased this includes our firies, who play a crucial role in our emergency services and keeping Territorians safe. Whether it is floods, cyclones or bushfires, our Territory firefighters battle through the worst conditions and put their lives on the line all in the name of keeping Territorians safe. Can you explain to the Assembly how Budget 2025 supports the work our firefighters do and delivers an important milestone for our Fire and Emergency Services?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I know that as the assistant minister for Police the member also has a keen eye on Fire and Emergency Services. They are out there every day protecting Territorians, just like our police. They do a fantastic job.

Labor did not see that; it wanted to govern by press release. Labor put out a press release saying that it split the tri-service and it took Fire and Emergency Services out of Police. Do you know what Labor did not do? Labor did not fund it for that. In fact, Labor entered into an enterprise bargaining agreement with the firies and did not fund that either.

Our Fire and Emergency Services had an entire restructure. On coming to government we put Bushfires NT in with it, which has been a fantastic piece of work. It did not have full funding to be its own agency. Instead of all the optics management that Labor was so focused on, we are doing the actual work of government which is giving our public service the funding it needs to do its job.

We have $7m a year ongoing additional funding for Fire and Emergency Services because it is a standalone agency and deserves to be funded properly as one. This takes its total funding up to $86.8m for next year. Part of that means we can do exciting things that Labor did not do.

Labor took away the Bushfires NT office from the people of the Barkly. This funding will put back two fire management officers and put two new grassfire units into the Barkly. That gives us the capability to protect people in that region, work with communities and landholders and do the important preparations so that we do not see a repeat of the Barkly bushfires. This is exciting, and it is something that Labor took away. With proper funding we can make sure that people across the Territory, no matter where they live, are protected. That is exactly what we told Territorians we would do.

We have a new and modern standalone agency that we will continue to back. We need it to pay the firies because they do an excellent job. They deserve to be paid, so we are giving the agency the money to pay them.

We need firefighting capability across the Northern Territory. To think that Bushfires NT was having to plug that hole in the Barkly is terrible; those days are over. It was putting lives, property, our cattle industry and remote communities at risk; the list is endless.

We are proud to be delivering on our commitments to protect Territorians and keep the Territory safe, and that includes making sure that our Fire and Emergency Services has the funding needed to do an important role no matter where you live, and we are proud to deliver this as our budget.

Legal Aid Commission – Appointment of Director

Mr PAECH to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Yesterday you claimed that the new Director of Legal Aid's time working at former CLP minister Peter Maley's law firm was one of the reasons why she was qualified for the critical and highly paid director role at Legal Aid. Given your longstanding personal ties to the Maley family, Peter Maley's $15,000 donation to the CLP, your Cabinet colleagues' family and business links to Peter Maley's law firm and that Peter Maley has been acting as the new director's referee, do you still deny that you have a serious conflict of interest with this appointment?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the member obviously has a keen interest in what is happening in Legal Aid, especially because those opposite pretty much destroyed it over the last eight years. Now the CLP has been elected to change the legal system and the justice system because we need to change what is happening on our streets for community safety.

Catherine Voumard will be the new Director of Legal Aid. I am proud of that, and I back her. Under the *Legal Aid Act*, as the minister I can appoint the Legal Aid Director. I have done that based on a merit process, because I need change management in the justice system and in Legal Aid. Legal Aid is an organisation that called for reform and more funding certainty from the Labor government for eight long years, so I will back Legal Aid. Legal Aid will do a good job. It will have some new board members, which I welcome, because I welcome the change.

Let us be clear: if you do not know Peter Maley and you live in the Territory, I do not know where you have been living because Peter Maley has a longstanding business and has worked with a lot of people for a long time. I went through an interview process with Ms Voumard, and Peter Maley was not a referee. I do not know where those accusations are coming from, but they are wrong.

I will keep backing Legal Aid. It has a big job coming up, and the people there have been working hard. The staff have been stretched to the max. They have been in the courts working with offenders and trying to get access to justice for victims for a long time. They have been struggling under the demand and the pressure, and it does not look like that will go away anytime soon, because we have introduced a range of new laws to ensure our community is safe.

Therefore, we will need that reform in Legal Aid …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I know we have Legal Studies students in the gallery, but we do not need a history of Legal Aid. The question was about the Attorney-General's conflict of interest, as the first law officer of the Northern Territory.

Madam SPEAKER: Attorney-General, you have the call.

Ms BOOTHBY: I am answering the question. I do not understand the premise of that question.

I am the minister elected to do an important job—that is, to change the Territory and the justice system to ensure that our community is safe. If that means putting new leadership into organisations that need change management, a change of leadership and reform to do better so that they can support Territorians, that is exactly what I am doing. That is the job I was elected to do.

I will not apologise for an appointment, which I back. Ms Voumard will do an exceptional job. She has so much credibility. She has worked across the justice system in the Territory for a long time and in South Australia. When she comes back to Darwin after a stint in South Australia, I will welcome her. I look forward to meeting with her and finding out the changes that she will make at Legal Aid.

Legal Aid Director – Appointment – Supplementary Question

Mr PAECH to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

In your answer you said that you believe she had met the merit process. Given that the independent panel said that she did not meet a merit process and did not have the criteria, what process are you using other than political motivations?

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Quiet, please! Silence, all of you!

Mr Edgington: That is the former Attorney-General. He does not know what he is talking about.

Madam SPEAKER: That includes you, Leader of Government Business.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, whilst the Member for Gwoja spent his time as Attorney-General being obviously not happy with what public servants were doing, I am following the Act.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: No, take your seat. She has been speaking for only nine seconds, Member for Gwoja.

Ms BOOTHBY: I suggested yesterday that the Member for Gwoja should look at the *Legal Aid Act 1990*; we can send it to him. He may need to revisit that because he has probably forgotten after his time as Attorney-General. That Act specifically says that the Attorney-General appoints the Legal Aid Director, not an independent panel or a government agency.

I stand by my decision to appoint Ms Voumard. She will do a great job, and I look forward to meeting with her when she comes back to Darwin. We can work together to reform Legal Aid so that we can keep our community safe and have access to justice for victims and offenders.

Budget 2025–26 – HomeGrown Territory Grants

Mr KERLE to TREASURER

One of the CLP's key initiatives that the now Chief Minister announced in her budget reply speech last year was what would become the most significant home owner scheme in NT history—the HomeGrown Territory Grants program. Fast-forward nine months, and the CLP government has helped 25 families in my electorate of Blain and almost 600 families across the Territory to buy a house through these grants. More than a quarter of these grants have been paid or approved to build a new home. How is the CLP building on the success of our nation-leading HomeGrown Territory Grants program in the Finocchiaro CLP government's first budget?

Mr Paech: Hey, Billy, how many in Kilgariff?

Madam SPEAKER: Quiet, Member for Gwoja!

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I am glad to hear that the people in the member's electorate are taking up the opportunity of these home grants.

Builders want to build, and Territorians want to get on the property ladder. That is why after my budget address in parliament on Tuesday I announced at the Master Builders and Chamber of Commerce lunch that the Finocchiaro CLP government is extending our landmark $30,000 and $50,000 HomeGrown Territory Grants for another 12 months.

Since the CLP implemented our HomeGrown Territory Grants last October we have helped more than 150 Territorians to start building a home of their own, stimulating the economy and adding much-needed housing stock to our housing supply. That is 150 houses that Labor failed to add to the Territory's housing supply during its eight years in government, and it took the CLP less than one year.

After our government announced we would extend this program, peak industry leaders, such as Housing Industry Association NT's Executive Director Luis Espinoza said that this extension:

> *… will bolster home building activity, supporting local building, trade and supply businesses after several challenging years …*

These challenging years are well and truly over, with the latest economic indicators showing that the CLP's HomeGrown Territory Grants program has been massively successful in stimulating our economy. The CommSec State of the States report shows that the Territory is leading the nation on construction work which, under our government, has increased by 13.2% year on year. In data released last week the ABS showed that for the last quarter, residential building approvals increased by 48.6% and the number of Territorians seeking housing finance increased by 16.5% compared with the same time last year when Labor was in government.

The benefit of these grants to our broader economy is also apparent in analysis undertaken by the Department of Treasury and Finance. Assuming a typical cost to build of $400,000, the $6.5m grants the CLP has paid out have had a direct economic contribution of $56m to our economy. That is not Monopoly money; these are real dollars that have flowed to Territory builders, suppliers and tradies. With a whopping 761% return on the grant money the CLP invested to help Territorians achieve their home ownership dreams last October, we know that the HomeGrown Territory Grants are backing our builders, making a difference and making the Territory great again.

I am proud to stand with the Finocchiaro CLP government to announce the extension of these programs.

Darwin Waterfront Corporation – Investigation

Mr YOUNG to MINISTER for TOURISM and HOSPITALITY

You continue to dodge questions about allegations of misuse of taxpayer funds at the Waterfront. Instead of calling for an independent investigation, you relied on internal reports from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet and the Waterfront Corporation, then decided to assume that everything was fine. Given Territorians' ongoing concerns about this matter, will you now table the full report that led to your assumptions so that Territorians can judge for themselves?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the matters that have been raised all happened under Labor. I have made my own inquiries as to the substance of those claims. The Waterfront, like every other agency, is subject to scrutiny, such as that by the Auditor-General.

Community Safety – Bail Laws

Mr O'GALLAGHER to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Businesses in my electorate of Karama, including the Karama bottle-o, recently suffered from criminal behaviour by violent youth offenders with edged weapons. Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government is taking urgent and decisive action to strengthen community safety through Australia's toughest bail laws? What specific changes have been made to ensure that violent offenders, including youths, are kept off our streets and out of our community? How does this reform reflect Territorians' expectations, particularly following the tragic incident in Nightcliff, as well as the broader commitment of the CLP government to protect the public, restore law and order and deliver real consequences for those who break the law?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Karama has spoken to me many times about his community and the crime it has experienced over such a long time. People now expect the CLP government to reduce that crime, especially in the suburbs of Karama and Malak.

Over a number of years Labor watered down the laws, which created this crime crisis across the Territory. Labor put the rights of offenders above the rights of victims and society, which caused an all-out crime crisis. Labor failed to act when Territorians called for action, and Territorians paid the price—some of them the ultimate price, as we saw a number of weeks ago. That is why we were elected.

Straightaway, in October, we introduced a suite of new laws, including Declan's law, which changed the presumption against bail for offenders. A couple of weeks ago, after a tragic incident, we needed to recall parliament urgently. The Chief Minister immediately recalled parliament a couple of days later and set us all to work to get on with a new tough bail law, which ended up being the toughest in the country.

Those strong bail laws, which we introduced only a week ago, put community safety at the centre and as the highest of priorities when police or judges are addressing and determining whether someone gets bail for a serious offence. Not only does a decision-maker like a police officer or judge need to ensure they apply Declan's law but also, even if that offender gets over the hurdle of a presumption against bail, the decision-maker now must also have a high degree of confidence that the offender will not pose a risk to community safety. Even if that judge decides the person will not be a risk to community safety, they also need to be sure that offender will not reoffend if they are granted bail. That is why ours are the toughest bail laws in the country.

This applies to more violent crimes such as sexual offences and assault with intent to steal. Part of that bail change was for youths as well. We removed detention as a last resort from the legislation because we need to ensure that the community is safe, rather than have offenders continuing to get second, third, fourth and 10th chances out in our community and being able to hurt more people.

We have the biggest law and order budget the Territory has seen. Member for Karama, that is how we are backing them.

Violence – Member for Drysdale's Comments

Mr PAECH to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Yesterday in parliament the Member for Drysdale said that he rejected the idea that there is no place for violence in our community. With violent crime on the rise in the Northern Territory under your government, do you agree with the Member for Drysdale that the answer to violence is more violence?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, it is always good to take things out of context.

The important thing in this space, Member for Gwoja, is the work we are doing to address the root causes of domestic, family and sexual violence is critical to breaking the cycle that ends up with our young people thinking that it is okay to go on a rampage through Nightcliff, standing on roundabouts in groups, belting cars with poles, throwing rocks and causing harm. We are saying that is not okay. We are working hard to get to those kids at a point in time when there is hope that they will see that is not a path they should take and that there are people who care about what happens to them and will work with them to give them the opportunity to choose a different path, find a different group of peers, go to school and work together to see a good result where they have the opportunity to lead strong lives in our community, caring for each other as opposed to egging each other on to do harm to others in the community who just happen to get in their way.

A fantastic program has been rolled out to address the juvenile causes of domestic violence, whereby we can get to those kids at a moment in time when we can work with their families and show them that there is an alternative pathway. In the budget we have invested significantly to make sure the message is sent clearly that there are safe places for victim–survivors of domestic violence and programs that show our kids the alternative pathway.

The Member for Drysdale …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. I ask the minister to answer the question: do you share the same view as the Member for Drysdale that sometimes violence needs to be used to solve violence problems?

Madam SPEAKER: You are asking the minister for an opinion, and it is up to the minister whether she answers that.

Ms CAHILL: Without question one of the greatest advocates for change in this space—one of the people in our team who has the best experience because that person was a youth worker in the justice system and understands what is required—is the Member for Drysdale. This is a man who has walked the walk, talked the talk …

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: This had better be good. No speeches, just a point of order.

Mr PAECH: It will be good. My question is: does the government support the Member for Drysdale's position? Is that the formal position of the government?

Madam SPEAKER: Sit down, Member for Gwoja. No more points of order; that is another opinion.

Minister, you can answer it the way you choose. It is a question of an opinion.

Ms CAHILL: It is fantastic to be able to draw on the experience of people like the Member for Drysdale as we work together as a government to show those in our community who choose violence as the answer to their frustrations and choose violence to act out in our community that is not the way to go and is not the answer. Together as a government we will give them the opportunity to change their path and work with us to have better outcomes in their lives and lead to a much better solution for our community.

Budget 2025–26 – Energy Affordability

Dr RAHMAN to MINISTER for MINING and ENERGY

This week we have heard the details of the Northern Territory Budget 2025–26. Our government has moved to put energy affordability at the core of our energy strategy to ease cost-of-living pressures for Territorians. Part of that energy affordability strategy includes the uptake of battery systems in residences and small businesses. Our government previously increased the Home and Business Battery Scheme from $5,000 to $12,000, which I personally applaud.

Can you outline to the Assembly, for everyone's benefit, what our government has done in this budget to facilitate more affordable energy for Territorians?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Member for Fong Lim is passionate about this because everyone is feeling the cost-of-living pinch.

Before I begin the answer, I will give a history of the battery scheme. When the previous government was in power, it was $6,000, but the government cut it to $5,000. Those opposite bang on about how good renewable energy is and how much they support it, but they cut the benefit.

Mrs Finocchiaro: What about the tariff?

Mr MALEY: I am about to get to that; that is my next paragraph. One thing at a time, Chief Minister.

Those opposite cut it from $6,000 to $5,000, then promised Territorians that they would not cut the tariff. Guess what they did? They did a backflip and cut the tariff after promising Territorians they would not. That is a little history lesson on where we are at.

Mrs Finocchiaro: Then they grandfathered them and cut it again.

Mr MALEY: That is what I am saying; those opposite cut it. Like I said yesterday, they thought about it, acted positively to trick Territorians, misled them and then cut it. That is the history. I invite those opposite to relook at that, because it is exactly what happened.

Ms Uibo: The Deputy Chief Minister is talking rubbish.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Mr MALEY: Let me get back to what the Country Liberal Party has done. We put it up to $12,000 and doubled the pool, because the Labor government had $3m and we put it up to $6m. We did a double-double; we gave people more money and increased the pool. Increasing the pool meant more Territorians could have batteries and solar panels in their homes.

It is about the cost of living. If you set up your solar panels and batteries correctly, you can lower your power bill. Your solar panels during the day can charge your batteries when you are not home or at work—whatever you are doing—and at night you can use that battery power to live, cook and operate a home with almost a nil balance, so you do not pay a power bill. The CLP is providing real relief for Territorians, unlike the previous Labor government which tricked Territorians and cut the renewable rebate.

In this budget our government has approved an additional $3.135m for the home battery scheme, taking the pool up to $6m. Instead of cutting like Labor did, we increased it. We know that cost of living is a high priority, aside from crime and community safety. Many Territorians are concerned about it.

Between December and late April, 460 applications were received for this program. It is working and giving Territorians day-to-day relief, because that is what the CLP does. We support Territorians.

Budget 2025–26 – Machinery-of-Government Changes

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for PUBLIC SERVICE

One of your government's first acts was to create a top-heavy public sector, with six new departments expanding the public service to 18 departments. The budget handed down by the Treasurer on Tuesday fails to outline the cost of creating these new agencies. Will you detail the cost to Territory taxpayers of your changes to the machinery of government?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, coming from those opposite—who were in government and could not get anything right, leaving us with an $11bn debt—I find that question extremely interesting. The reports we had were—the question is unbelievable.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please!

Mrs HERSEY: We have created efficiencies across departments. For example, I am the Minister for Education and Training—from the start of a child's school life through to the end of their schooling—and Public Service, so you do not have to go across departments like we did under the previous government when people had to go to several different ministers when they wanted an answer to a question. We have streamlined things.

We may have more departments, but I can assure you that we have not spent more money. The departments are finding efficiencies because of the debt we have been left with. All departments have been asked to find efficiencies in their departments. We are not bolstering the public sector anymore; we have plenty of public servants who do great work every day. If there are efficiencies in their department it is their job to find them.

We are making sure that all departments are working efficiently and productively each day to make sure we, as ministers, have the information that we need. The main thing is that in each department people do not need to go across with five or three different ministers, as was the case under the previous government.

Larrimah Farms – Water Extraction Licence

Mr MACKAY to MINISTER for WATER RESOURCES

Recently the Northern Territory Controller of Water Resources made a decision to grant a water extraction licence to Larrimah Farms for agricultural development at the Larrimah agricultural development hub. Sustainable agriculture development is a key driver for rebuilding the Territory economy, job creation and economic stimulus into our regions. Can you update the Assembly on this water licence decision and explain the benefits of activating available water for development in the Territory?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this government was elected on a clear mandate to rebuild the Territory economy, which had all but come to a standstill under the previous Labor government. We are committing to rebuilding the economy through a range of reforms that provide a strong foundation for growth, with robust regulatory frameworks matching world-class environmental protections and long-term certainty for business investment. We want investment and development in the Territory. This is made possible by providing access to our resources for the benefit of all Territorians. Water licensing plays a key role as an economic enabler for responsible development.

Since entering government we have declared the Mataranka Water Allocation Plan and revised the Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan. Both water plans are based on the best available science and community

advice. The water plans have been declared for 10 years to provide certainty to the community and for investment, creating and supporting regional businesses and jobs.

Water plans in the Territory recognise our unique context. Water plans share water, prioritising most of the water for the environment first and protecting our Territory lifestyle, then sharing water between users, either for human and livestock consumption or for development.

The recent decision by the independent Controller of Water Resources is a positive one. Agriculture is a massive contributor to the growth of the Territory's regional economy and creates thousands of jobs for Territorians directly and indirectly.

The Larrimah agricultural development area offers more than 1,400 hectares of land suitable for a range of intensive agriculture and the advantage of an extended season for high-value crops such as melons. It presents opportunities for a range of broadacre irrigated crops such as cotton, peanuts and fodder, along with pastoral activities. Larrimah Farms will contribute an estimated $30m in additional gross value of production to the Territory agriculture sector.

I acknowledge Monday's decision from the full bench of the Supreme Court in relation to Fortune Agribusiness' water licence. The full bench dismissed the appeal to overturn the water licence following years of delays. This is good news for Fortune Agribusiness and for those residing in the Western Davenport region.

These outcomes will help rebuild our economy that Labor so blatantly ruined over eight years. We will continue to trust the professionals who undertake years of research and groundwork so that they can provide these recommendations and make safe and sustainable decisions to support economic growth.

I look forward to continuing the momentum by putting my trust in the experts and the science to safely achieve economic resilience while protecting our natural assets.

Budget 2025–26 – Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Funding

J DAVIS to ATTORNEY-GENERAL referred to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The CLP is calling this budget a law and order budget. Where in the budget is the commitment to the Coroner's findings and recommendations from the inquests into the domestic, family and sexual violence-related deaths of Kumanjayi Haywood, Ngeygo Ragurrk, Miss Yunupingu and Kumarn Rubuntja that are relevant to your portfolio, specifically recommendation 18, which calls for NT Government funding of mediators to support conflict resolution in domestic, family and sexual violence matters; recommendation 19, which urges recognition, regulation and funding of community-led mediation and peacekeeping groups in remote Northern Territory communities; and recommendation 20, which calls for a commitment to enhancing alternatives to custody for domestic and family violence perpetrators?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, domestic violence is an horrific state of affairs across the Northern Territory. Over the last eight years it increased by more than 80%, which is disgraceful.

We have a report, which is to be tabled sometime this sittings, to address a number of the Coroner's recommendations. We have been through the recommendations, and the departments are looking into them. We have noticed that a lot of the recommendations in the Coroner's report are things that exist, which are already taking place, but we know there is a lot more work to be done. The CLP government will not sit back and do the same thing that Labor did over eight years in the domestic violence space.

I will hand over to my colleague the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence to explain some of those recommendations, because there was a lot in your question. We take it seriously. Many recommendations are already underway. It is all important work. My colleague will go specifically into those …

J DAVIS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The question addresses the portfolio of the Attorney-General. It is not about existing funding, but new programs that are specifically in that portfolio.

Madam SPEAKER: The minister, under standing orders, can refer the question to another minister to answer.

Ms BOOTHBY: It is an important conversation to have, Member for Johnston, which is why I want to do it justice. The Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence has been doing a lot of work in this space with her department, which is why she is best to answer this part about those recommendations.

Ms CAHILL: Madam Speaker, in regard to what the Attorney-General said, the response to the Coroner's recommendations was coordinated by the Department of Children and Families, so the consultation occurred across the whole of government. Everybody was involved and got to have a say about where things should land.

As my colleague said, it was interesting that 24 of the recommendations made referred to programs that were already in existence, some of them for quite some time. The reassuring thing is that those programs that the Coroner felt should be in place, to a large extent, are in place. Some of them will need some work; some of them are not achieving the results that we would hope. We hope the Coroner recognises that.

There were a number of programs that were not in place that we looked at. I am sorry; I did not jot down all your numbers, but I will give it a go. Do you want to tell me which ones again?

J Davis: Recommendations 18, 19 and 20.

Ms CAHILL: We have supported recommendation 18 in principle and are looking at how we can achieve that. In regard to recommendation 19, those programs already exist, so we are looking at enhancing. Recommendation 20 is new and supported in principle, but that will require a considerable amount of work, so that work is being done.

Legal Assistance Services – Reform

Mr PATEL to ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Can you update the Assembly on how the Finocchiaro CLP government is delivering real reform, leadership and long-term stability to the Territory's legal assistance services, particularly Legal Aid NT? Why is it so important to provide funding, certainty and strong direction in this space, and how does this compare with the former Labor government's neglect? What practical outcomes can Territorians expect from these changes, especially vulnerable people who rely on Legal Aid NT for access to justice and victims who deserve a timely resolution and a justice system that delivers?

Mr Paech: Lots of work outsourced to Maleys.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, Member for Gwoja!

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, this is an important question because we know that Territorians have been suffering from a crime crisis for a long time under Labor and its leadership. That has put Territorian victims through a lot of extra trauma as the justice system takes an eternity to deal with offenders' charges. Legal Aid is part of the justice system.

When we have remand times of more than 400 days for a matter to be dealt with in the Supreme Court from start to finish, it puts a lot of pressure on victims. You can imagine the victim's family is there to support the victim through the hearing—they may have booked flights and come in from interstate or have taken time off work—only to go to court and hear that it has been adjourned. That is not okay. It could be for a range of reasons in our system, which is why I am here to fix all the problems we have had.

One of those areas is the trouble that we have seen with Legal Aid. It has been calling for reform and change for a long time. Legal Aid has been calling for funding certainty. It had to come to government every year begging for more money so that it can meet the demand. We are all for justice for victims, so when I met with people from Legal Aid and they said they needed funding, one of the first things we did was give Legal Aid an extra $3.5m so that it could deal with the demand of the new laws we passed in October.

Since then, the Treasurer has handed down the budget, which gave Legal Aid that certainty of an extra $5.5m a year ongoing. With the new leadership of Ms Voumard—as we have already spoken about—the organisation can be changed up so that it can offer those services to our vulnerable Territorians and victims so that they can have justice faster. There is a sustainability committee and an action plan which has been supported by this government and me. The new director, who will be in that position in the next month, will be able to make those changes to ensure that we clear backlogs and improve criminal and family law service delivery.

We need to restore confidence for Territorians in our whole justice system, not just with police and Corrections but also our courts and legal services. I am happy that the $5.5m of extra ongoing funding was approved, as it is important to ensure that our vulnerable Territorians are represented in the legal system.

Domestic Violence Prevention Services – Visits by Minister

K McNAMARA to MINISTER for PREVENTION of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Dawn House is one of our incredibly valued and essential frontline services for women and children fleeing men's violence. It has been running since the 1970s, has saved an unknowable number of lives and is a leader in expertise in our domestic violence sector. Despite their best efforts, Dawn House staff have to turn away between 100 and 200 women and their children per month due to lack of funding and resources.

I looked it up, and it is 14 kilometres from your electorate office. Have you visited Dawn House and spoken to its staff?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I have physically met with them and I have organised twice to attend Dawn House, but unfortunately the first time there was an issue with getting there and the person had another commitment, so that was not quite right. The second time we scheduled clashed with the response, from my memory, to the incident that happened in Nightcliff, so some last-minute rearranging had to be done. It is in my calendar. I am keen to visit Dawn House.

I have already visited Ruby Gaea; WoSSCA and its services and DAIWS. I have met with about 40 NGO providers in this space; some are doing prevention work, some are doing crisis work and some are doing policy work.

I had a fantastic meeting with YWCA Amplifying Voices, which is a group of women from a diverse range of backgrounds in their sexuality, professional, home life and ethnic backgrounds, who have lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence. They had some fantastic ideas that I have taken to my Cabinet colleagues to progress.

It is important to me that I visit these services on the ground to see what they look like and what they are dealing with. Dawn House does a great job. A dear friend of mine Sally Gearin, was the founder of that service, and she does great work. I have met with her on a number of occasions to discuss how we can progress in this area and which issues we should focus on. I am proud that the feedback and information which is coming from these groups, giving me unfettered, unsterilised, frank and fearless advice, is reassuring because it tells me exactly what is happening on the ground.

Sporting Events

Mrs CARLSON to MINISTER for PEOPLE, SPORT and CULTURE

As we move into the Dry Season, the Top End is once again becoming a hub for local and major events. I was pleased to hear you announce in your budget contribution yesterday that the NT Government would again be supporting the AFLW Dreamtime match between Essendon and Richmond.

Mr Paech: Go the Tigers!

Mrs CARLSON: Yes, go the Tigers. I was on the sidelines as a child.

It demonstrates that the budget is not only delivering on reducing crime and rebuilding our economy but also restoring our lifestyle. Can you update the Assembly and Territorians on what is happening in our sporting communities?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the Finocchiaro CLP government is proud to be delivering on its election promise to restore our lifestyle. Yesterday I went to TIO Stadium where we officially announced that the 2025 AFLW Dreamtime match between Richmond and Essendon will played at TIO Stadium in August. It was great to meet Essendon AFLW player Bess Keaney and Richmond AFLW player Gabby Seymour, who both played in last year's Dreamtime match, along with the head of the AFL, Andrew Dillon, and AFL NT Chair Sean Bowden.

Last night Darwin hosted the Hahn Australia Cup match between the soccer clubs Wellington Phoenix and Brisbane Roar. I was there to view the exciting match; it was great to see Territorians enjoying it. Tonight Territorians will pack out TIO Stadium when the Territory Gold Coast Suns play Hawthorn. This follows last weekend's clash between the Gold Coast Suns and Western Bulldogs. This will build momentum to the AFLW Dreamtime match in August.

We hosted an NRL match in April between the Eels and Raiders. In August we welcome international cricket back to the Top End, with international hockey and Motocross GP to follow. Some of these events are supported by the transformation of TIO Stadium, which will seamlessly host NRL, AFL and cricket games, showing that we can match any venue in the country.

The Dry Season is about not only elite sport but also our communities coming together through local competitions and grassroots engagement, showcasing what sport means to everyday Territorians and its importance to our Territory lifestyle.

Sporting facilities are abuzz with activity on the weekends and weeknights. We will invest in our sporting facilities to ensure that all sports have the facilities they require. The Dry Season sees local sports such as NRL, cricket, hockey, netball, basketball and soccer come back to life after the Wet Season and bring the community together. I am eager to continue to visit our sporting Territorians doing what they love.

It is important to note that sport in the Territory is more than just competition; it is about connection, the community barbecues after a game, the lifelong friendships and a pathway for kids dreaming big. This Dry Season we are proud to back our local players, clubs and volunteers every step of the way. I look forward to going out with the Member for Wanguri and many other members to support sporting communities across the Northern Territory.

Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program

Mr BROWN to MINISTER for LANDS, PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT

The former Labor government committed to fund the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program and the CLP matched that commitment, yet in this budget you have scrapped this $12m program. Despite an independent review finding that it delivered critical outcomes in land and sea management across the Territory, you have thrown Aboriginal ranger groups under the bus, stripping them of the resources they need to fight feral animals, control weeds and mitigate fire risk.

How do you justify breaking this election commitment and betraying our ranger groups? How many jobs and economic opportunities will be lost because you decided to axe this funding and break your promise?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, let us be clear that you cannot axe something that was never there. This time-limited funding was ending in June; that is the truth of the matter. Just like Mother Hubbard when she went to the cupboard, when the Treasurer went to the cupboard he saw that this funding was not there.

Ms Uibo: That is what an election commitment is.

Madam SPEAKER: Quiet!

Mr BURGOYNE: Labor was doing its dirty tricks to ensure that it could keep under the $15bn debt cap. Labor did not allocate any funding towards ranger groups; that is the truth of the matter. It was time-limited funding that was ending in June this year.

The former Labor government did not budget for a number of things, as we have continued to discover since coming to government. The Treasurer has spoken at great length about that time-limited funding.

An opposition member said on ABC radio that Labor had a plan for reducing debt over the next few years, yet we do not exactly know what that would to be. Just spend more and more was Labor's answer. That is not what the Finocchiaro CLP government is doing. We are making responsible decisions to get the budget under control. The Treasurer has outlined how we are spending $300m less whilst continuing to invest in Police, Corrections, courts and DV services.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question was clearly about the election commitment the CLP made and why it broke that in this budget.

Madam SPEAKER: The minister is answering it.

Mr BURGOYNE: I will say again loudly and clearly for everyone listening that the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program was time-limited funding that ended in June this year, and the former Labor government put no funding in the budget to continue it.

The budget we handed down puts victims of crime first. We have put forward a responsible budget in regard to law and order.

This government remains supportive of Aboriginal ranger groups in the Northern Territory.

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The Member for Namatjira said:

> *The CLP remains committed to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, and if elected, we will fully fund the program with $12 million over four years …*

Why have you broken that promise?

Madam SPEAKER: There will be no more points of order. The minister gets the question; there is no need to repeat it.

Mr BURGOYNE: This government remains supportive of Aboriginal ranger groups in the Northern Territory. The Aboriginal ranger groups, to be clear, receive funding from the Commonwealth Government and will continue to do so. There is a range of NT Government initiatives and programs …

Ms Uibo: Disgraceful—win a vote, then lie to people.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, last warning.

Mr BURGOYNE: There is a range of NT Government initiatives and programs for which Aboriginal ranger groups can apply for targeted funding, project funding, which we will support them to do.

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker!

Madam SPEAKER: No, there are no more points of order. Please sit down, Opposition Leader.

Mr BURGOYNE: We will continue to work with Aboriginal ranger groups across the Territory to ensure we can support them in their important work moving forward.

Breast Screening

Mrs ZIO to MINISTER for HEALTH

I bring to your attention the importance of breast screening for Territorian women. Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in females in the NT and rates are rising, especially amongst Aboriginal women. Regular screening is the most effective way to detect breast cancer and improve survival rates for women aged between 40 and 74 years. Detection of breast cancer when it is small and confined to the breast provides the best chance of effective treatment. Screening participation in the NT is the lowest in Australia.

What is the Finocchiaro CLP government doing to encourage Territorian women to have breast screening as well as a full health check to have certainty about any health concerns?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, the BreastScreenNT mobile screening bus, named Millie, is taking free breast screening to remote communities across the Territory as we speak. Along with my colleague the Member for Katherine, I met with the staff from Millie when it was stationed outside Parliament House at the start of its annual trip from May to October.

BreastScreenNT provides free mammograms for the early detection of breast cancer in women between the ages of 40 and 74. This is an important service, especially for those women who live a great distance from clinics and health services. As you highlighted, Member for Fannie Bay, regular screening is the most effective way to detect cancer and improve survival rates for women aged over 40.

Detection of breast cancer when it is small and confined to the breast provides the best chance of effective treatment. The benefits of early detection also include a greater range of treatment options and improved quality of life after treatment.

The survival rate for early breast cancer is more than 95%, with the majority of breast cancers diagnosed by BreastScreenNT falling into this category. In 2024 BreastScreenNT detected breast cancer in 58 women.

After Millie left Darwin in early May, it started its journey and is now on its way to regional and remote communities across the Northern Territory, including Wurrumiyanga on Bathurst Island, Daly River, Katherine, Borroloola, Tennant Creek, Ti Tree, Hermannsburg, Yuendumu, Harts Range, Yulara and Ali Curung. BreastScreenNT works with remote primary healthcare centres to ensure that all eligible women have their breast screening when Millie is in their community.

There are permanent screening facilities in Darwin and Palmerston and two screening blocks each year in Alice Springs from April to May and August to September.

As part of our year of action, certainty and security, I encourage women to take action and have breast screening as well as a full health check to have certainty about any health concerns.

The Member for Karama and I were at NT Breast Cancer Voice on Saturday morning. I acknowledge the chairperson of NTBCV, Judy Smith, and the committee for holding the Inform, Reflect and Connect Forum on Saturday to highlight the services available to diagnose and prevent breast cancer. It was a pleasure to have the assistant minister for Health there on Saturday morning with me. For their work, the forum and sharing that voice across the board, I once again thank the people at NT Breast Cancer Voice.

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

STATEMENT BY MINISTER
Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure – National Road Safety Week

Mr YAN (Logistics and Infrastructure)(by leave): Madam Speaker, this is National Road Safety Week, which runs from 11 to 18 May, and is a timely reminder for us all that as individuals and as a community we have the power to make our roads safer.

Road trauma continues to affect far too many families in the Northern Territory. Tragically another life was lost yesterday. As of today 12 people have lost their lives on Territory roads this year, and every life lost on our roads is one too many.

National Road Safety Week honours those we have tragically lost and calls upon all of us to pledge to protect lives on our roads. This week my colleagues and I are wearing yellow lapel ribbons in support of this important initiative. I encourage everyone to show your support by having conversations about positive and safe road culture with your family and friends and take the pledge to drive so others will survive.

Over the week national and state icons will turn yellow to raise awareness of road safety. Tonight we will see Parliament House light up, along with other various events being held across the Territory throughout this week.

In the Northern Territory drivers are four times more likely to die on the road than the national average. That is a heartbreaking reality that we should never accept.

I implore all Territorians to slow down, wear their seatbelts, do not drink and get behind the wheel and avoid distractions to help prevent the needless loss of life, because we do not want another year like last year. We need to ensure we are doing everything we possibly can to reduce our road toll so that we are not seeing more Territorians dying on our roads.

APPROPRIATION (2025–2026) BILL
Serial 25
and
REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 26

Continued from earlier this day.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, continuing from where I left off, these approaches help young people take responsibility for their actions and repair harm, often with the involvement of victims and support networks.

The package we have introduced is likely to expand the use of community-based sentencing options such as probation, supervised release and restorative justice orders.

This government is driven to reduce recidivism. Recognising the overlap between the juvenile justice system and out-of-home care, the package supports a more integrated approach involving health, housing, education and social services. This collaboration aims to prevent at-risk youths from falling through the service gaps and to provide holistic support. A portion of resources may be directed towards justice reinvestment, shifting funding from detention and correctional facilities into community programs that target the factors contributing to juvenile offending. This data-driven approach invests in communities with high rates of youth crime, focusing on long-term solutions such as education, mental health and substance abuse services.

Family group conferencing and restorative justice practices involve the offender's family and the victims in the resolution process, fostering accountability, empathy and community healing. These combined strategies aim to break the cycle of juvenile offending, reduce reliance on detention and build safer, healthier communities for young people and all Territorians.

From enhancing visitor experiences to backing major events and supporting our world-class screen industry, this budget positions the Territory as a leader in tourism and hospitality.

Importantly, this budget is fiscally responsible. We are moving away from short-term fixes and investing in long-term solutions that will benefit Territorians for generations to come.

In summary, the 2025–26 budget is a bold step forward. It delivers on the promise to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore the Territory lifestyle. It provides real support for families, businesses and communities. Above all, it sets the Northern Territory on a path to a brighter, safer and more prosperous future.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I sincerely thank the Treasurer, Hon Bill Yan, and his team for delivering this responsible and forward-thinking budget. He has made it clear that now is not the time to slam on the brakes on spending; now is the time to back Territorians and invest in our people, safety, businesses and future. This budget understands simple truths: you cannot grow an economy by cutting it to the bone; to do business you must invest; to recover you must support jobs; and to keep the community safe you must put resources on the front line. The Treasurer's leadership ensures we are spending where it matters without stalling the economy and without turning our back on growth. This is responsible economic management, supporting Territorians today while building for tomorrow.

Let me tell you why this budget matters to my electorate of Casuarina. Casuarina is not just another suburb; it is the backbone of Darwin's northern suburbs. It is where people come to shop, work and live. It is a hub for families, small businesses, schools, health services—you name it. Ask anyone where they go for groceries, coffee or a casual catch-up, and they will say Casuarina Square. Casuarina is the beating heart of our local economy.

It is also much more than shops; it is where families enjoy parks, playgrounds, and beaches. Every morning and evening people are out walking, jogging and cycling along Casuarina Coastal Reserve. You see families having barbecues, fishermen casting lines and kids playing, while others simply sit and watch the beautiful sunrise and sunset. This is the lifestyle we are proud of. It is why people from Palmerston, the rural areas and even Katherine come to Casuarina—to enjoy the best part of the coast here in the city.

The first step to rebuilding confidence is safety. This budget delivers a record $1.5bn in public safety. What does that mean? It means more police on the beat and more beds in correctional facilities. As the Deputy Chief Minister said, if you do the crime, he will find you a bed—simple. However, this budget is not just about locking up people; it is about supporting victims of crime, people who suffer because someone thinks they can do what they want. We care about Territorians who have been through trauma.

For Casuarina, this budget means safer streets. It means that families can enjoy our parks and beaches again and businesses can operate without being targeted. For example, a small business in Casuarina Square can now get up to $15,000 through Biz Secure to upgrade its security with CCTV, lighting and shutters. This is real practical support, not just words.

This budget is backing Casuarina's small businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of Casuarina. Cafes, tradies and family-owned stores create jobs and bring life to our community. This budget backs them by raising the payroll tax-free threshold; removing payroll tax for apprentices and trainees; offering $12,000 for solar battery installations; and providing energy subsidies to lower business costs. Think about a local cafe using that solar grant. Lower power bills mean more money for staff, local suppliers and growth. That is how you grow the NT economy.

When families are supported, local businesses thrive. This budget provides $200 Back to School vouchers, $100 sport vouchers twice a year, free swimming lessons for primary schoolkids and capped power price rises at just 3%. When families save, they spend more locally. It means more coffees, more shopping, more local services—that is how we grow from the ground up.

For seniors—I have a lot of seniors in Casuarina—more than $5,000 in concessions have been provided to help with their daily living. That is respect, and that is what this budget delivers.

Casuarina needs infrastructure that keeps up with its people. This budget delivers $49.3m for Royal Darwin Hospital's mental health unit expansion. Royal Darwin Hospital, on Casuarina's doorstep, is getting a major investment—a new mental health inpatient unit and millions of dollars in ongoing operational support. This means faster care, better services and critical support for families in need. For Casuarina residents, Royal Darwin Hospital is not only a regional hospital; it is their hospital. This investment matters deeply to our community.

This budget also delivers $17.7m for a new multipurpose facility at Royal Darwin Hospital; $600,000 for safer pedestrian crossings on Trower Road; $500,000 to upgrade Casuarina Coastal Reserve walking trails; and $4.6m for the new youth hub at Leanyer Recreation Park. This budget shows that every project means jobs. Every upgrade makes Casuarina safer, healthier and more liveable.

Big Territory projects mean more people in the Territory and big opportunities for my electorate, Casuarina. This is all positive. This budget invests $93.5m for the Strauss to Middle Arm pipeline; $49.6m in Holtze land development; $13.7m for the East Arm utilities upgrade; and $66m for Kakadu National Park roads. All this spending creates Territory-wide jobs. More jobs mean more people and more people means more spending in Casuarina shops.

Tourism also has a boost, with $36.5m for Territory events. That will bring visitors to Darwin, and where do they shop? Casuarina.

Casuarina is the best place in NT.

Mr Maley: Howard Springs is.

Mr PATEL: Casuarina is. It is where the city meets nature. Where else can you go shopping at the NT's biggest retail hub, walk from your home to the beach, enjoy world-class coastal walking trails, have a barbecue at the Dripstone Cliffs with stunning ocean views, watch migratory birds at Sandy Creek and witness the most iconic Darwin sunsets? Every morning fitness groups gather there, and families spend their weekends there as well. Kids learn to swim, play footy and ride scooters there; it is a part of our Territory lifestyle. That is why people from all over the NT come to Casuarina.

This budget is more responsible and lifts the whole Territory together. Let us be honest: we inherited a $10.55bn debt mess from Labor, but we are fixing it. This budget repair plan cuts waste; focuses on real deliverable projects; grows our own-source revenue; and supports business-led job creation. The budget repair plan shows that by 2028–29 the deficit will be down to $531m. By 2027–28 we will be in surplus. That is responsible governance.

In conclusion, this budget ensures that Casuarina has safer streets, supports thriving businesses, provides positive pathways for youths, delivers top-class health and recreational facilities and remains the best place in the NT for families and lifestyle. When Casuarina succeeds, the Territory succeeds. This is a budget of action, certainty and security. This budget is delivering for Casuarina and the Territory.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, it is deeply disappointing that the Country Liberal government's first budget has fallen short of what Territorians deserve and expect from a new government. This is a budget that lacks vision, compassion and a commitment to addressing the most pressing issues in our community.

It is a genuine concern that the government's single-minded focus is on a few priorities. Cost of living is critical, and we all must work to address it. However, in this budget the government is ignoring environmental protection and the lived experience of individuals and experts who work in various sectors across the Northern Territory, including those in the domestic violence sector and the environment.

Throughout this week we heard government members sing the praises of the budget and how it will reduce crime across the Territory so that we can have a stronger and safer community. Fair enough; that is what Territorians want. It is what the opposition wants as well. However, this government has yet to realise that its strategy of arresting and jailing those who commit crime will not yield those results by itself. We need to continue to invest in therapeutic solutions. This budget offers a bandaid solution to much bigger problems.

The Territory will continue to have high rates of crime and domestic violence if we do not invest our money correctly. This budget shows that the government has no clue about making those real changes. The Northern Territory is plagued by domestic violence. It is a shame. It is an issue that both the opposition and the government want to address and find a solution for. I believe, as I have said in this Chamber before, that we should all be doing the work—government, my Caucus and the crossbench—to go to Canberra and ask our federal colleagues for the much-needed additional funding to better address domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory.

In the last nine months, nearly everyone in this Chamber has passionately spoken about the effects DV has on our communities and in our lives. No-one here is immune to the effects of domestic violence. I will admit that some of the lived experience of and stories from members in this Chamber gave me hope that, as a group of MLAs, we are all on the same page when it comes to overcoming domestic violence.

I am happy that after months of deflections from the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence about what this government is doing regarding domestic violence and refusing to talk about the rollout of funding to the sector, we are seeing where the much-needed funding will go. It is welcoming to see that finally money will go towards DV services which can breathe a sigh of relief as they are assured funding for another year so that they can continue to provide vital services to some of the Territory's most vulnerable.

However, big questions still remain about how this DV funding has been allocated and how the sector has been included. How have people in the sector been consulted? The sector has already had its doubts about whether these outcomes will achieve the result so desperately needed, given the government has made decisions unilaterally without consulting those on the front line and the victims themselves.

Late last year Coroner Elisabeth Armitage—after nearly a year of investigating the deaths of Kumarn Rubuntja, Kumanjayi Haywood, Ngeygo Ragurrk and Miss Yunupingu—presented her findings to the public about how the government and DV sector can work together to make real and lasting changes to reduce the rate of domestic and family violence in the Territory. Coroner Armitage gave the government a road map of what needs to be done to start making real changes in domestic violence. Unfortunately, the government has chosen not to follow that road map entirely. The government has invested in some measures that address the Coroner's recommendations, but not all of them have received a budget allocation. The implementation of all 35 recommendations is needed if we are to address domestic and family violence.

Much of the DV money is going to other agencies like Corrections. Although I support investment into offender rehabilitation, it should be coming from the Corrections budget, not from the services supporting at-risk women and children and which are struggling under growing demand. This is a piecemeal approach. It does not match the scale of the problem or the community's expectations.

This government says that it is focused on early intervention and prevention. We have heard that in every sittings since the CLP came to government. It turns out that the CLP government is referring to programs which began under the former government that have been rebranded—for example, the much-spruiked Circuit Breaker Program, which is just the co-responder model by another name. It is unfortunate that the government continues to point to this program as a domestic violence success story when it is a diversion and supporting young people at risk.

The CLP has chosen to invest $6.6m of DV money in this program. I am not saying that the kids who go through the Circuit Breaker Program do not need that support, because they do; however, it is coming at the

cost of the domestic and family violence sector, and the women and families who deserve well-funded frontline services that heal the violence of today and stop the cycle for future generations.

The $36m going into the sector is good, and I thank the government for that contribution; however, more thought could have been put in to where the money needed to go to make a lasting impact. Was the DV sector consulted about the DV budget? That is something I and the DSV sector want to know. I want to know if the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Advisory Forum—that was axed—had been part of the DV budget allocation discussions whether some thought might have been put into those allocations.

There is no money in the budget for the establishment of a domestic, family and sexual violence peak body, which is a recommendation that has been spoken about for some time. It is an important step to overcoming domestic and family violence. There is no money for the domestic violence death review, which is another important recommendation that this government has ignored.

This government repeatedly claimed that its first budget is a law and order budget that tackles the root causes of crime, yet programs and initiatives that have shown real outcomes in changing behaviours of those caught in the cycle of the justice system have had funding cut, including the Aboriginal Justice Agreement which has lost $2m.

There is no money in the infrastructure program to turn over a new alternative-to-custody facility or new work camps. This tells us that this government is not serious about upholding the principles and the values of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The cut to funding for the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is a concerning signal from the government about its commitment to justice reform. This is a slap in the face to the community organisations and advocates who have long championed progressive reform in the justice space. It shows that this CLP government has no real plans for breaking the cycle of crime in the Territory besides locking up offenders.

That mindset was made clear by the Attorney-General this week when she announced that this government does not care about the trauma that jails can cause perpetrators. This means that she does not care that jails further entrench criminal behaviour and keep people in a cycle of reoffending. It is incredibly short-sighted.

The environment affects the lives of every Territorian. Environmental protections are fundamental to ensuring the Territory's future sustainability, yet this budget reflects a failure to invest adequately in these protections. The reduction in water investment is particularly concerning.

The Territory Water Plan is one of the biggest budget losers. It is a comprehensive plan built on consultation with communities and industries, reflecting insights, concerns and the aspirations of all Territorians about the protection, quality and security of water. The minister for Environment does not care about water. He has shown his true colours are aligned with the values of the CLP and would rather give water to his mates than protect it for future generations.

This budget cut also goes to other areas. The funding cuts to the Darwin Harbour wastewater management strategy and water resources security is short-sighted thinking and jeopardises the environment and the capacity for agencies to meet their basic responsibilities to ensure Territorians' basic human right to access safe drinking water is fulfilled. I could go on, but there are many other areas to talk about.

This government's lack of investment in the arts is deeply upsetting, given the vital role the creative community plays in fostering cultural pride, community connection and economic growth. How can this government boast about the success of our festival season, yet not provide much-needed funding to artists and communities that perform the work at the festivals? The Territory's artists deserve better.

I also acknowledge the lack of new money for Aboriginal grants. This is important. Rangers do an amazing job across the Northern Territory. They help with the fire season, creating firebreaks; maintaining country; and dealing with invasive weed species. The Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program was an integral and successful program. It was a commitment of the last Labor government for a four-year process.

During the 2024 election campaign Labor committed that if we were re-elected that program would be renewed, and I note that the CLP made the same commitment. This budget is a betrayal of the election commitment that the CLP made to Aboriginal rangers across the Northern Territory. The CLP said that it would honour the commitment and provide $12m funding to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program if it was elected; it lied. We heard from the Environment minister that the government will not continue that important funding. It has broken that election promise.

I quote Treasurer Bill Yan, the former shadow minister for Parks and Rangers, who said in the *Centralian Today*:

> *… that an elected CLP government would match the election commitment made by Labor.*
>
> *'The CLP remains committed to the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program, and if elected, we will fully fund the program with $12 million over four years,' Mr Yan said.*

Madam Speaker, I seek leave to table this.

Leave granted.

Mr PAECH: It was important to put that on the *Parliamentary Record* to demonstrate that the Environment minister, Josh Burgoyne, who continually says he is the most green-credentialled person of the government and that he cares about the environment, is talking porky pies. He has removed environmental protections and merits review processes, changed water allocations, defunded environmental groups and caused carnage to the environment. In this budget, he has now stripped funding from Indigenous rangers. For a party that talks big on providing economic opportunity and job creation, you have a big F for fail. Cutting ranger funding means people in remote communities will lose jobs because of your cuts.

It shows that the CLP government does not care about people living in remote communities. If it did, the Member for Barkly, who is also the Housing minister, would have stood up in Cabinet and said, 'You are not touching that $12m', but he did not. When there are bushfires like the Member for Barkly talks about—the Member for Braitling talks about the devastating bushfires that went through the West Macs—who is there helping? It is Aboriginal rangers. Who are you doing a disservice today? It is Aboriginal rangers. Cutting their funding causes harm for everyone in the Northern Territory. There are no additional people to help with firebreaks and the removal of gamba and buffel grass because you did not provide the funding.

The Member for Nelson loves to tell a good porky pie. He would say that the funding was cut. The funding was part of an election commitment for four solid years. At the end of that commitment, Labor said we would renew that for another four years. The CLP Treasurer, the former shadow Minister for Parks and Wildlife, Bill Yan, a remote member, said publicly that the CLP will fund it and agree with Labor's election commitment. What does that equal, Member for Nelson? It equals a broken election promise to Territorians.

You love breaking promises. You thought that no-one would pick up on this, but people have. I can tell you firsthand that rangers across the Northern Territory are disappointed in this CLP government and having their funding cut. It is disgraceful. You should be doing better. If you want to create jobs, do not cut jobs. Cutting funding will cut jobs. It will mean the loss of jobs for Aboriginal rangers across the Northern Territory. It was one thing we could say that this government was doing proactively in the Aboriginal Affairs space, but it cut that funding.

I will move on to housing. The Members for Fannie Bay, Karama and Drysdale spoke about ghettos. Your government is creating more ghettos with a $100m cut to repairs and maintenance. What do you think that equals? More derelict houses in your electorates because your government has not put enough money in the budget to fix them. What does that mean for people across the Northern Territory? More empty houses in the suburbs of Alice Springs, because the government will turn around and say, 'We've got no money to fix them, so just put up with them and leave them', and we will end up with more spaces in our suburbs that will be left derelict, damaged and not fixed. What does that mean in the bush? People will go months without repairs when wear and tear has caused things to break. It is a direct hit for people in the Territory.

The minister for remote housing does not have a big voice in the Budget Cabinet room—$100m cut. All government members will be jumping up and down, kicking and screaming, when all these empty houses in their electorates are looking terrible, and people are squatting in those houses. You have no-one to blame but yourselves. You cut $100m from the budget. When we go back to Alice Springs and the suburbs of Braitling, Araluen, Namatjira and Gwoja, we will directly see the impact of your failure to deliver in the housing space.

There is limited money for community and social housing, and you will jump up and down. I bet your bottom dollar that there will be a Treasurer's advance and a midyear budget, because you will need to fix the problem you created by not funding housing appropriately. We see it clear as day. We need investment going forward; no-one is denying that. The minister for Housing has made it clear that people need to be accountable for their actions and the appropriate processes to get revenue back into housing. By tying your hands behind your back and leaving those houses empty all it says is that $100m cut to repairs and maintenance and derelict housing is the CLP code for, 'It's ugly and damaged. We don't have any money. We'll sell it and not

replenish housing stock.' With that default situation the CLP will try to move the problem somewhere else. That is essentially what this does.

I think this $100m cut is deliberate, because probably a number of members are whingeing about public housing tenants. Rather than work with the tenants and give them intensive support, the government will let the houses get into a terrible state, be empty and derelict, so that they can be either knocked down or sold, because the CLP government will not have the money to fix those houses.

There is a $300,000 cut to the Anti-Discrimination Commission. This government has its eye on the Anti-Discrimination Commission and the Act; it wants to do work there. That will hinder the Anti-Discrimination Commission's ability to provide important protections for vulnerable Territorians.

We see these cuts all over the place. This is serious stuff.

I have spoken about the cut to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, and the direct impact it will have. I know a few members of this Assembly had the opportunity to go the ATC in Alice Springs and Groote Eylandt—fantastic. There is no money in this budget for another alternative-to-custody facility, another place for the court to send people to help get their lives back on track and change. There is money in the budget to expand the prison estate, but there is no money that I can see for setting up new work camps, like the successful Barkly Work Camp, which was important.

We heard members talk about the money for peacekeeping and mediation. That is not the work of this government; it is the work of Indigenous Affairs minister, Malarndirri McCarthy, in renegotiating the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment agreement. That money was provided in response to calls from the Member for Mulka and I about needing to have greater peacekeeping measures in our remote communities and looking at how we can de-escalate situations in our communities.

We acknowledge that either 71% or 73% of the Territory's budget is Commonwealth funding. We understand that there are challenges with self-generated revenue in the Northern Territory. We are willing to work with the government on innovative ways that do it, but do not come at the cost of providing important services to all Territorians.

The NTRAI is a significant portion of money coming into the Northern Territory each year. That provides money for police and additional money for peacekeeping, mediation, health services and education. It is an important program, and we are thankful that the agreement has been signed again. We are thankful for the Commonwealth Government coming on board with the former Labor government to renegotiate the education agreement so that we could see schools fully funded across the Northern Territory. There has been a longstanding conversation between the Northern Territory Government and the Commonwealth Government about appropriate baseline funding. That continues, and they are important conversations to have.

We have seen significant decreases in important areas. We know how important water is for every Territorian, but there are significant cuts by the CLP government in this space. It is harmful.

We are seeing a reduction of support and resourcing for the Territory's screen industry. I am from the beautiful place of Central Australia, as are many members of this Chamber. We come from the place that produces probably some of, if not Australia's most talented, Aboriginal filmmakers, along with so many other Centralians who are incredible at what they do. Having a strong and functional Screen Territory is important and we need it.

We have heard calls in the media from people from the screen industry who are disappointed and pleading with this government not to reduce the support and resourcing for them. We also hear that those calls have been ignored. The minister for Tourism can smile and say that she will watch all these amazing shows like *Territory*, but through her own work she is reducing the support and resourcing to produce amazing quality productions like that. That is what we are getting with this budget.

The government has spruiked a number of key roads in this budget. They are Commonwealth-funded roads. When we were in government we negotiated the funding partnership for them. In other jurisdictions the state contribution is a lot higher than the Territory's. We negotiated an 80–20 deal. These roads across the Territory are important; they are connecting roads, industry roads and community roads to link families together.

We must not forget that there needs to be money in the infrastructure budget so that the Treasurer can make sure that roads are being looked after in the bush, like the Titjikala road, the Papunya to Kintore road and

the Sandover Highway. These roads are important for thousands of Territorians. There needs to be money in the budget for those roads so that people can continue to access those roads in and out of town because it is important for them to be able to commute. When these roads are not looked after, people become stuck in our towns with family and in community. That sometimes perpetuates those issues we see in our communities because countrymen want to go home, but these roads are not good. When you do not have a lot of money you do not have a big flash car, and people's cars get worn out quickly. Therefore, it is important to continue rolling investment in these remote roads.

Members of the Santa Teresa community told us that the Territory government is yet to start work on Santa Teresa Road—a road that Marion Scrymgour, Member for Lingiari, got money to fix. That road will be sealed, not by the success of this government but by the hard work and advocacy of the Member for Lingiari.

A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43—I can see that everyone is happy for me to continue—I move an extension of time to continue my remarks.

Motion agreed to.

Madam SPEAKER: An extension is granted, Member for Gwoja; everyone wants to continue to listen to your speech.

Mr PAECH: I know that the Assembly is very excited …

A member: So excited.

Mr PAECH: I pick up on the interjection, 'So excited'. Thank you, government members.

I acknowledge the government's contribution in the DV space; it is important, and it is welcomed. We all should be taking a trip to lobby Canberra for more money to address domestic and family violence.

We need to ensure that we do not forget the people in the bush because the bush deserves the same level of access to services as people living in towns, cities and other areas. We want investment in homelands, outstations and remote communities.

We do not want people to be waiting a long time to get their air conditioners fixed when it is 40 degrees outside. We do not want community members, who had to call the department of Housing to report that taps are leaking due to worn-out washers, waiting weeks to have their tap replaced. These are true stories. Countrymen from my beautiful electorate of Gwoja have phoned me to say, 'Japanangka, we're still waiting for Housing to fix our taps'. I wrote to the department of Housing to help move that on. They came back a week later to say, 'Japanangka, I'm still waiting for that tap'. If the minister for Environment was serious about water security and the minister for Housing was serious about responding to repairs and maintenance requests, they would be getting on to that quick smart. Imagine how much water we could save if we had responsive repairs and maintenance being done in our remote communities, not a cut of $100m or thereabouts. Imagine if we were doing that work.

The Territory has a good story to tell about the future of housing because there is the national partnership agreement whereby the government signed on to build 270 houses a year—a big milestone. I will give credit where credit is due; if there was anyone on the government side who could put in the hard work to get it done, it is my mate from Barkly. He is passionate about housing. I said to the Member for Barkly, 'Old boy, make sure you do not just make Barkly beautiful; come to Gwoja too.'

I look forward to seeing a number of houses handed over to countrymen in Gwoja as part of this national partnership agreement. I look forward to the Member for Barkly sharing the opportunity to hand over some of those houses with the wonderful Marion Scrymgour or the wonderful Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, who is co-funding this program. Building more houses is how we change lives because when we build more houses we provide more opportunity.

This is particularly important for child protection. I am not sure whether it is the case anymore, but when I was the Housing minister a fair while ago, we had an agreement in place with Territory Families—when Housing and Families were together—to try to prioritise housing allocations for people who worked, who looked after a senior or wanted to take a senior out of an aged-care facility and bring them back home to community or who had lots of children so that those children could have a home for the first time where they each had a bedroom or shared a bedroom and could get a good night's sleep and go to school the next day. When we allocated a house to a community member who could be a kinship carer we could complete the reunification

process for a child who was in the out-of-home care system, because they could go to a safe, secure and affordable home in a remote community with their family who would help continue the love and care for that young person.

Corrections is a big part of the budget and has been for a number of years. Corrections staff do a fantastic job. I am concerned that a number of Corrections officers have told me that they are considering leaving because they do not feel safe going to work in the current climate. I told them that there is money in the budget, so they need to see what that will deliver in terms of capital for infrastructure in that area.

I acknowledge that the government is investing in rehabilitation programs, continuing from previous governments of all persuasions over the past 20 years. When I was the Corrections minister we signed an MOU with Charles Darwin University. A number of people in this Chamber have done a trade. We want to make sure that we get the foundations ready for people who are in prison to get the appropriate checks and clearances to get their cards so that they can jump into the workforce and undertake education to improve their literacy and numeracy.

I look forward to seeing this government's commitment to men's behaviour change programs being rolled out. These fantastic programs are delivered in the Top End by CatholicCare and in Central Australia by Tangentyere. We have seen the success of these programs with men who were referred to a program wanting to continue to be involved in that program even after they have finished. These men want to become mentors and bring in other men to be a part of the program. That is incredibly important.

There is an opportunity for us to look at public housing complexes across the Northern Territory. As people vacate them we should work with the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence to see whether we can use some of that housing as transitional accommodation because when women leave shelters they have nowhere to go. Can we turn some of the complexes that have become a problem in our communities into places where we can transition women from women's shelters into a secure community that has a caretaker living onsite who can identify when things might be getting tense and escalating. We can consider these sorts of opportunities.

This is the Country Liberal Party's first budget. The Cabinet members did a lot of work—certainly while the Treasurer was out catching barra. They have done what they think is a good job. I can say that being in the Budget Cabinet of any government is always hard because you must look at what you can and cannot do and to try to work around and refine it. I acknowledge that work the CLP have had to do with their budget. I do not agree with all of it, but I do not have to. We will see in Estimates what the CLP government's projections for the future look like.

This is an opportunity for us to see how the CLP can deliver on its commitments with its budget allocations, noting that public servants in the Environment space have reached out and said that there is not enough money for them to deliver their core functions responsibly in regard to baseline environmental protections, weed management and water allocations. It is a shame that there has been a cut to funding for the environment when the Environment minister refers to himself as the most green-credentialled member of that side.

The people in Braitling will be keeping an eye out. I eagerly watched the federal election results in that electorate to see how well other parties were polling against the CLP. It should serve as a warning to the Member for Braitling to get serious about the environment, funding environmental protection organisations to care for country and positive environmental reform. Clearly those calls have been ignored to date, but we live in hope that he might listen one day.

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

Motion agreed to; debate adjourned.

NORTHERN TERRITORY ABORIGINAL SACRED SITES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
Serial 23

Continued from 27 March 2025.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, the opposition has profound concerns about the substance of this Bill and the deeply flawed manner in which it arrived before this House. It is legislation crafted without respect, adequate consultation and genuinely listening to the voices of those who will be affected most, the Aboriginal custodians of sacred sites across the Territory.

This Bill represents significant failures of respect, process and cultural understanding. It amends the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989*, a cornerstone of cultural heritage protection. Rather than enhancing protection or strengthening Aboriginal authority, this Bill takes a significant step backwards. It undermines established safeguards, marginalises Aboriginal voices and invites conflicts in places where there should be genuine consent.

The opposition has engaged extensively with Aboriginal people across the Territory, and the message we heard is clear: Aboriginal communities do not want this legislation in its current form. They rightly see it as diminishing their say over critical decisions affecting their land, culture and law. This Bill claims to modernise sacred site protections, but it reduces Aboriginal input into critical decisions affecting their land, culture and law. It undermines the very principles on which the Sacred Sites Act was built: respect for Aboriginal cultural authority; protection of country; and the importance of informed consent.

Labor supports modernising and improving sacred sites protections. Administrative efficiency and clarity are important; however, genuine reform must emerge from meaningful co-designed processes with Aboriginal custodians, the holders of cultural knowledge, the guardians of stories and those with spiritual responsibility for their country. By this measure, the Bill spectacularly fails.

For these and other reasons I will highlight, Labor opposes this legislation. Let me be clear that our opposition to this Bill is not opposition to economic development, including development on Aboriginal land. We fully support responsible development that can grow the Territory economy, create jobs and deliver long-term benefits to all Territorians. Economic progress and cultural heritage protections are not mutually exclusive; they go hand in hand, ensuring respect for traditional owners, their land and their cultural rights.

Let us look at the problems with this legislation. There has been no genuine consultation with stakeholders, no exposure draft for public input and no meaningful engagement with AAPA (Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority), the statutory body charged with protecting sacred sites. Land councils were blindsided, given a mere week's notice before the Bill's introduction. Traditional owners were effectively shut out of discussions entirely. This approach is not consultation. The truth is that this Bill was drafted behind closed doors with zero input from Aboriginal Territorians.

Submissions to the scrutiny committee revealed widespread and unanimous opposition. The Northern and Central Land Councils opposed the Bill outright. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, which administers sacred site protections, expressed concerns. Organisations such as Larrakia Nation and the Environmental Defenders Office joined the chorus of opposition, calling unanimously for the Bill's withdrawal and a restart based on genuine consultation and co-design.

The submissions to the committee clearly articulated that the Bill disrespects cultural authority, weakens protections for sacred sites and even risks violating federal law. Critical provisions such as transferring authority certificates without re-consultation, adding parties to certificates without custodians' input and using enforceable undertakings without transparency were uniformly criticised as undermining the principles of free, prior and informed consent.

Faced with this avalanche of opposition one might expect the government in good faith to pause, reflect and engage, but not this government. Instead, CLP members of the scrutiny committee voted down the motion to hold a public hearing on the Bill, effectively denying traditional owners, elders and cultural authorities their right to speak directly to parliamentary members.

Scrutiny committees should measure their success by how many people engage with their inquiries. With a CLP majority on these committees, somehow they are running scared because they know that the public and communities do not support them. Let me be clear that this means traditional owners, elders and Aboriginal organisations with deep cultural authority and lived experience of sacred sites protection were denied the opportunity to speak directly to this parliament.

This choice by the government prioritises speed and developer interests over transparency and respect. It is a betrayal of democratic integrity and a profound betrayal of Aboriginal Territorians. That is a shameful choice. When nearly every Aboriginal organisation engaged in land and cultural protection tells you that you

have it wrong, the answer should not be, 'Shut the door and press ahead'. The answer is to listen, sit down and co-design. That is what a government with integrity would do.

When you legislate for sacred sites you are legislating for identity, ceremony and stories stretching back 60,000 years and going beyond our lifetimes. It is about listening to the people who carry the law and culture.

Let us call it what it is: this is not consultation; it is a box-ticking exercise and an arrogant top-down approach that echoes the worst in the Territory's past, a past which we are meant to have moved beyond.

I now turn to the Bill's content. This Bill contains provisions that directly weaken cultural protections.

Clause 7 inserts section 24A to allow authority certificates to be transferred between parties without requiring further consultation with Aboriginal custodians. On its surface it might appear to streamline administrative processes; however, the reality is deeply problematic. Let me be clear that this means the developer can take a certificate issued decades ago and hand it over to another party to do the same work at the same place without checking with the people who hold cultural responsibility for that land. What if the certificate was issued in 1993 and the knowledge holders have since passed away? What if the work has changed? What if the site has become more significant in the community's eyes? None of that matters under this Bill. It strips traditional owners of the rights to be heard on their own country. Aboriginal custodians whose sacred sites these certificates are designed to protect would not have a say.

Authority certificates are not commercial licences; they are culturally sensitive instruments grounded in direct consultation with custodians. They are based on understanding that particular people in a particular context were given consent to undertake specific activities on sacred land. Allowing certificates to be passed from one party to another without custodians' input undermines the principle of free, prior and informed consent. It severs the relationship between people and place. It opens the door for companies to rely on certificates that may be decades out of date, issued when land use was different and cultural knowledge was not as well documented or the knowledge holders themselves have passed on.

The Bill also introduces a new concept, the recorded party. A developer can add names to the certificate after it has been issued without asking custodians. This is not cultural safety, and it is not protection. It also contradicts Aboriginal cultural protocols grounded in relationship, trust, context and rapport. Consent given in one context does not automatically carry over to a new one.

The Bill fails to clarify adequately the obligations and responsibilities of these additional recorded parties. We risk a situation where multiple parties will hold authority under certificates, yet custodians have not been informed or consulted. This undermines trust and diminishes respect for cultural authority, bypassing the principle of informed consent in the interests of bureaucratic convenience.

As we saw in the submissions to the scrutiny committee, this measure could allow subcontractors or joint venture partners to be added to a certificate without speaking to the people whose land and stories are at stake. Labor supports streamlining, but not at the expense of cultural authority. Those provisions should not proceed unless traditional owners are properly notified and their consent sought.

The opposition is also concerned that the Bill introduces enforceable undertakings, essentially backdoor deals that replace prosecution for damaging sacred sites. This risks creating loopholes and instead of prosecuting companies for damaging sacred sites, they can now negotiate agreements privately with AAPA, sidelining the involvement of affected custodians. Without transparency or custodians' involvement, accountability diminishes significantly. We risk creating an environment where significant cultural damage can be quietly resolved behind closed doors with no requirement to inform custodians or obligation to seek their advice and no right for them to appeal. This measure diminishes accountability and undermines public confidence in sacred site protections.

If a company damages a sacred site, the least we can do is ensure that traditional owners are part of the response. This provision shuts them out. We have already seen what happens when governments and corporations ignore Aboriginal voices. We all remember Juukan Gorge. We must not let that happen here. This was echoed in the submissions to the scrutiny committee.

I turn to clause 6, which grants ministerial powers to appoint and remove AAPA board members. We are deeply concerned about increased political influence over the board. We cannot permit sacred sites protection to become politicised or compromised by government agendas. AAPA was designed to be independent and operate at arm's length from politics. That independence is now at risk. Currently, AAPA includes 10 Aboriginal members nominated by land councils and two government nominees. This clause

entrenches those two government appointees in legislation, but it allows the minister to remove them at any time for any reason. AAPA must remain independent and be guided solely by cultural expertise and custodians' consent, not political influence.

This is not a minor tweak; it is a red flag. If AAPA board members become subject to ministerial direction or political pressure, AAPA's legitimacy will be eroded, its decisions will be questioned and its capacity to protect sacred sites will be compromised. The opposition and stakeholders call on the CLP government to keep AAPA independent. If this government wants to change appointments it should do so transparently and in consultation with land councils and Aboriginal stakeholders.

The Bill also amends the regulations to introduce new fees when applying for transfer of certificate or to add a recorded party. Labor recognises the principle of cost recovery; however, we also share stakeholders' concerns that fees might become a barrier to Aboriginal applications, particularly those seeking to clarify sacred sites on their own land. We echo the call of organisations like NAAJA to introduce a clear exemption or waiver policy so that community applicants are not priced out of the process.

I will discuss clause 10, the transitional provisions that retrospectively apply the transfer and recorded party rules to existing certificates. This has profound implications. It means developers could rely on old certificates issued under different circumstances and apply these new rules without re-engaging with custodians. AAPA has warned that this is risky, and custodians and community have said that it is disrespectful. We agree.

It is not just the clauses that worry us; the opposition is also concerned about the constitutional legality of these changes. Nothing the government has said has eased our concerns. We heard from experts who think this Bill may breach the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, which gives the Northern Territory Government legislative power only if it considers Aboriginal people's wishes. Clearly, the Bill has not done that; therefore, it risks further erosion of trust and harm to country, as well as legal challenges.

Recent events at Lorella Springs highlight precisely why this Bill is dangerous. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority is investigating reports of interference with human remains and the removal of sacred artefacts from an Aboriginal burial site. Despite clear warnings and signage, Lorella Springs has become a flashpoint of unmanaged visitor pressure and disrespect for cultural heritage. This incident should have been a moment of reflection for this government, but instead of strengthening the Act it is pushing forward with a Bill that weakens oversight, diminishes custodial authority and risks more incidents like this.

Nigel Browne, CEO of Aboriginal Investment NT, rightly called the government's changes a shame job. He pointed out that these reforms are clearly targeted to benefit developments, like the Darwin Convention Centre hotel that threatens the cultural significance of the Stoke Hills Dreaming site. This highlights that the underlying motive is not cultural protection, but accelerated and unchecked development.

Labor supports genuine reform, but it must empower and not disempower traditional owners. It must strengthen, not weaken, sacred site protections. Above all, it must be built on respect, transparency and true partnership with Aboriginal custodians.

This Bill has been criticised by every major Aboriginal organisation involved in land and heritage protection in the Northern Territory. Traditional owners across the regions have opposed it, and legal experts have flagged it as possibly unconstitutional.

It is not too late to fix this. I call on the government to withdraw this deeply flawed Bill. Engage respectfully and meaningfully with Aboriginal stakeholders and work collaboratively to develop legislation that reflect Aboriginal values, rights and cultural authority. Legislating sacred sites is about identity, ceremony and ancient stories. These responsibilities transcend short-term political convenience and demand a genuine partnership with those who hold cultural authority.

We support development and economic growth in the Territory, including on Aboriginal land, but it must be achieved through respect and proper processes. Development must be built on genuine partnership with traditional owners, respectful engagement and cultural safety; anything less risks our cultural heritage and undermines sustainable economic growth by eroding trust and social licence. Our sacred sites, communities and future generations deserve nothing less.

Mr GUYULA (Mulka): Mr Deputy Speaker, I make my position clear that I do not support this Bill and I strongly believe that this Bill should be withdrawn. I should not be standing here talking on this Bill today, and no-one in this Chamber should be talking on this Bill. The government should not have brought in

changes to these laws without first consulting Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and the organisations that speak for Aboriginal interests.

As I understand, AAPA was consulted, but its concerns were not listened to and the minister has not taken onboard its advice. The Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet was consulted, as was the Waterfront Corporation, but no-one else has been consulted.

The minister met with the land councils, but he did not consult them nor did they see a draft of this Bill. Following that meeting Warren Williams, the CLC Chair, said:

> *We asked for information, he gave us platitudes. He disrespected us and treated us like little children …*
>
> *He asked us to simply accept that the government's intentions behind the changes are good. He wouldn't give us any details about the changes or how they would work. All he had was empty talk.*

The Bill was sent to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee. People were given one week to make submissions on the Bill, and there were no public hearings. This is not a consultation with Aboriginal people. This is not a consultation with TOs, elders and leaders who have responsibility for sacred sites. The scrutiny committee process should never be mistaken as consultation. The committee received 30 submissions, and 25 did not support the Bill.

I could not make a submission during that week because I had open heart surgery. I went into surgery worried and upset about this Bill, and I came out of surgery worried and upset about this Bill and everything that is going wrong in the NT. Now I am back, and my heart is beating stronger than ever. I have been told by the doctor that I am strong enough to live another 30 to 40 years. I will keep fighting for Aboriginal rights.

This Bill represents such a high level of disrespect for Aboriginal people that this attitude of disrespect from the government then ripples out across the NT. Things have never been worse in the Northern Territory if you are an Aboriginal person—and there have been some very bad times prior to now.

In areas such as sacred sites where Aboriginal people have recognised authority, this government is so arrogant in its superiority over Aboriginal people that it has waded in to tell us about our sacred sites—to make changes to the laws that protect our sacred sites. This is one of the few laws in the Northern Territory that reflect two laws working together; it reflects true partnership. What is happening today is there is a government that wishes to disrespect that partnership. This is not a law for government to change without consulting the custodians of the sacred sites.

As I understand, there is widespread speculation that this Bill has been brought before the parliament today because it intends to make these changes for the sake of one project. The AAPA submission states:

> *We are senior law people from across the Northern Territory and we are very concerned that these amendments will erode protections for our sacred sites.*
>
> *…*
>
> *We support economic development in the NT, and for 45 years the Sacred Sites Act has given a pathway for developers to engage with custodians of sacred sites so that projects are completed in a responsible and sustainable way, and it works.*
>
> *…*
>
> *We are concerned that this Bill is seeking to create a loophole for one project, and if that is the case this is a deplorable action by the Northern Territory Government. Time will tell if this is the case.*

Other submissions also speculated about whether this Bill has been introduced to create a loophole for one project.

Consultation on this Bill included the Darwin Waterfront Corporation, and it appears that this Bill may connect directly to the desire to have a hotel built in the Darwin Waterfront Precinct. As I understand, Larrakia elders said no to this proposal due to the sacred site at Stokes Hill. If this is true, this Bill will create a loophole whereby a certificate can be transferred to another party or a third party can be added without gaining the consent of the

custodians. Is this government using the Assembly to create loopholes in the sacred sites legislation in order to go around the Larrakia Nation so that a sacred site on Larrakia country can be desecrated?

This morning and every morning we pay respect to the Larrakia Nation. This parliament sits on Larrakia land. I am confused about what we are doing here today. The government needs to be open and honest about this Bill and what it is here for. This Assembly should not be used as the tool to create loopholes so that one project can go ahead, and it certainly should not be used to create a pathway for the desecration of a sacred site.

As I understand, there has been previous consultation to make changes to the sacred sites laws, and there are amendments that the custodians and TOs would like to see. That is the correct way to change these laws. There were 39 recommendations made in relation to improving the Sacred Sites Act from consultations conducted in 2016. This Bill contains one of those recommendations. We know that what is happening in the Chamber today is not based on the consultations and recommendations from 2016. If this government was being genuine, these 39 recommendations would be the amendments we would see as part of this Bill.

Sacred sites are *dhuyu* (sacred and holy). This means be careful and respectful of this place because it is fundamental to our existence, to who we are. Sacred sites are the sites of law. They contain the knowledge handed down from our ancestors and are sites where we have a strong spiritual connection to the land.

Damage and desecration to sacred sites cause great pain and suffering and are dangerous for our people. We have seen the physical health effects on elders when a site is damaged because it cuts to our very spirit and to the depths of who we are. We can physically experience that pain.

The Sacred Sites Act is important because it protects our sites and, at the same time, allows for discussion on how development can sit side by side with protection. That legislation gives the space for a conversation between businesses and custodians on how business can continue and how sacred sites can be protected. This works when all parties are genuine and respect the Aboriginal authority to create protective requirements as part of a certificate.

I understand that this Bill wants to create changes to the law so that a certificate can be passed from one business entity to another without the consent of the custodians. This is clearly not okay. Custodians for a site have a responsibility to that site. That responsibility is so great that if the site is not protected properly they can come under attack from other connected clans for not doing their job properly. Before a certificate changes hands, the custodians must be able to understand whether the new party is genuine in its interest to protect the sacred site. They must be able to review the certificate and the likely business happening near that site to ensure that they are still meeting their obligations as custodians for the site. The transfer of a certificate or the addition of parties to a certificate without consultation creates a grave situation where a custodian may no longer be meeting their obligations.

The changes outlined in this Bill are not okay. An even bigger problem is that the government needs to step back and respect the boundaries of where Aboriginal authority lies. These laws come squarely under our authority. This has been respected by many governments since the introduction of this law. This kind of arrogance regarding sacred sites uncovers a deeper trend and attitude towards Aboriginal people that I would like the government to think more carefully about. I want the government to think about how it is working with Aboriginal people because we do not feel that we are being included. We are not being consulted, we are not being given decision-making power and we are not feeling any partnership.

A sacred site burns a spiritual fire that generates life for the clan and the people. It provides the pathway for the next generations, our children. It holds the knowledge and the history of our people. It holds this securely for our people so that we can build *raypirri*—knowledge, respect and discipline for our people. When we stand on our land we can feel the connection and the fire and the life moving through us.

When our connection to country is broken we also become broken. Our sacred sites and our country are so important because they sustain our culture and our people. When you pick away at these laws, pull away at our sacred sites and implant a foreign idea, you engage in the process of damaging our culture, physically and spiritually; you are pulling it apart and creating holes. These are the holes that our children fall through, and this is the breakdown of culture that we see all around us as governments pick apart our culture piece by piece.

My *rom*, my way of being, is that we work together and listen to each other. This is the way that my elders taught me to conduct business. This is how we achieve *Mägaya rom*, a peaceful way of working together and causing no harm. However, no-one in government is listening, and this Bill is a clear example of that.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Mr Deputy Speaker, as a proud supporter of sacred sites protection I express my deep concern regarding the proposed Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I will not support such regressive and damaging legislation. I stand with all the Aboriginal members of this Assembly in opposition to this legislation.

This is nothing short of legislative vandalism. It serves no genuine interest for Territorians. It exists solely to clear the pathway for the Waterfront hotel—nothing more, nothing less.

When Aboriginal people speak of sacred sites we do not treat them as mere physical locations or lifeless objects. To us, it is our law. These places are family—living, breathing entities with whom we share our histories, joys and sorrows. They are our teachers and healers, sources of guidance and strength. When a sacred site is damaged or desecrated, we feel that hurt deep in our hearts.

For many Aboriginal Territorians, caring for these sites is not an option but a solemn obligation. We are bound by responsibility to protect, maintain and nurture them for ourselves, our children and generations to come. That is why our passion burns so fiercely. We are interconnected; our wellbeing is entwined with the wellbeing of country. We stand proud and unyielding in defence of these sacred places because in protecting them, we protect our identity, culture and future.

The Legislative Scrutiny Committee was tasked with reviewing this Bill, examining its proposed application and consequences. The response was overwhelming, with 30 detailed submissions received from diverse stakeholders, including Aboriginal organisations, community members and government bodies. This reflects the high level of interest in and concern about this legislation. The CLP government claims that this Bill will enhance sacred sites protections, streamline processes for economic development and improve the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA); however, submissions highlighted significant shortcomings that demand closer scrutiny. The submissions welcomed a further opportunity to speak to the committee and provide options to improve the Bill, but they were ignored.

Disappointingly, the CLP government members of the scrutiny committee rejected calls for a public hearing on this critical legislation. This decision undermines transparency, and it silences the voices of Aboriginal Territorians who have a deep cultural and spiritual connection to sacred sites. For many of our brothers and sisters, particularly those for whom English is a second language, verbal communication is the preferred and culturally appropriate way to express such matters of importance. Furthermore, for many it is inappropriate for such matters to be disclosed in writing; they are sacred stories. The minister, in introducing this Bill, emphasised the importance of community consultation, yet the lack of public hearings contradicts this commitment and excludes voices that deserve to be heard on matters integral to Aboriginal people's cultural identity and wellbeing.

The Bill as it stands fails in several key areas. There are insufficient penalties. Penalties for breaches of clearance certificates remain inadequate, failing to serve as a meaningful deterrent. This Bill says to businesses, 'Come and do the wrong thing to sacred sites, and you will only have to pay a little. You will make more money in the long run.'

Yesterday Vista Gold was fined $160,000 for damaging an Aboriginal site that is thousands of years old. In the court proceedings there was reference to the inadequacy of the penalties in this legislation. One day later we are passing a Bill with which we could change the penalty points to bring them in line with and reflect the modern Territory, yet those calls continue to be ignored.

There is a lack of remediation measures. There are no clear provisions for remediating damaged sacred sites. There is no legislative provision that says what you must do other than 'try' to remediate.

This legislation has an outdated compliance framework. The compliance measures do not align with the standards for environmental and heritage protections.

We learned yesterday—in court, not even 50 metres from where we are—that a company was fined for damaging a site. Even the judiciary can acknowledge that fines of this magnitude are grossly insufficient as penalties, and today we find ourselves debating a Bill that could have addressed this. The company was fined just over $160,000 for the hurt and damage—a mere pittance to a company that stands to make millions of dollars from this project after damaging a site for development.

This government's approach is clear. It supports small fines for those who desecrate our country and our sacred sites. It sends a message that corporations can pay a token penalty for destruction and go on to profit immensely. This is unacceptable.

Many Aboriginal stakeholders and traditional owners have called for this Bill to be rejected, not because they oppose reform but because they recognise the need for true collaboration and consultation. Reform must be co-designed with traditional owners and stakeholders to ensure that sacred site protections are upheld while supporting economic opportunities.

It is essential to emphasise that opposition to this Bill is not opposition to development. Many submitters welcomed economic growth that drives job creation, but they rightly insist that such development must occur in genuine consultation with traditional owners, Aboriginal people and land councils, especially when it affects places of deep cultural and spiritual significance.

Sacred sites and their custodianship evolve with each generation. We are not stagnant people. It is vital that legislative frameworks respect this dynamic connection and give voice to emerging Aboriginal leaders who will carry these traditions forward. Significant areas of the Northern Territory remain unassessed, underscoring the importance of proactive engagement with traditional owners, Aboriginal people, Aboriginal communities and stakeholders. Sacred sites must be safeguarded and their cultural significance preserved now and for future generations.

I acknowledge the progressive reform work previously undertaken by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and a number of community stakeholders, including the Territory's four land councils. Their efforts laid the foundation for meaningful change, yet these contributions have been overlooked by this government.

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, in genuine partnership with the four land councils, has undertaken work on modernising the Sacred Sites Act to ensure that it reflects our contemporary Territory. It is deeply saddening that instead of building on this recent, comprehensive, reform draft legislation, the CLP has chosen to resurrect a review from nine years ago to justify one change. By doing so, it has ignored the expert up-to-date work that would strengthen this Act, presumably because it did not suit the CLP's agenda. That reform was genuine, collaborative and robust. It would fortify protections for sacred sites, rather than water them down as this Bill does.

The current Sacred Sites Act is the gold standard in cultural and environmental protection in this nation. Today we witness this government weakening those safeguards. We must not let yesterday's progress be undone. Territorians, especially traditional owners, deserve legislation that honours their knowledge, stewardship and right to protect country.

The opposition remains steadfast in our commitment to protecting country and sacred sites and ensuring that any legislative changes are developed in true partnership with Aboriginal Territorians. We call on the Country Liberal government to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal people, traditional owners and the land councils to modernise compliance and enforcement measures, strengthen penalties for breaches of sacred site protections and balance cultural preservation with economic development.

We thank Aboriginal Territorians for their ongoing stewardship of country and sacred sites. We acknowledge all the individuals and organisations who contributed to the scrutiny committee process. Their insights reflected a shared commitment to protecting these sites for future generations.

This Bill represents another example of the CLP government's lack of meaningful engagement. This decision to bypass public scrutiny and sideline Aboriginal voices is not government, and it is not governance; it is disrespect. I urge the government to halt this legislation, listen to the voices of Aboriginal Territorians and work collaboratively to ensure that sacred sites are respected and celebrated as part of our shared identity and heritage.

I acknowledge the strength and resilience of Aboriginal people in every corner of the Northern Territory, particularly the fierceness, boldness and strength of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and the four land councils which have had to bear the weight of the harm and trauma that the Environment minister has placed on every Aboriginal Territorian. People in those organisations had to bear that on their shoulders as they stood up to talk for Aboriginal Territorians.

I acknowledge the Central Land Council's firm advocacy. I will highlight some correspondence that was sent to the minister today. The Central Land Council Chair, the outstanding Warren Williams, wrote to Minister Burgoyne and said:

> *While I ask you to talk with us properly before you bring the Amendment Bill back to Parliament, I also remind you of what you told our Council meeting in early April. I hope that you will be a man of your word and include at least those changes in the Amendment Bill, when it does come back to Parliament.*

1. *You said that certificates would only be transferred for 'the exact same work' … It says certificates can be transferred if the 'work or use of land' is the same. 'Use of land' is very vague—for example, mining is a 'use of land' but … can be big or small and the conditions needed to protect sacred sites could be very different.*

2. *You also said that traditional owners would be the ones who decide about enforceable undertakings. Your Amendment Bill doesn't say that. It does not even say AAPA must consult traditional owners about that decision.*

3. *You also said that you would look into a way for traditional owners to get compensation if a site is damaged, instead of that fine going to the government. The Amendment Bill doesn't say anything about compensation.*

You have heard our delegates speak from the heart about how important sacred sites are to our people and the stress and suffering we experience when they are damaged or at risk of harm. I am, we are, asking you to sit down at the table with us to make real improvements to the Sacred Sites Act that will protect sacred sites and make the laws work better for everyone.

…

Yours sincerely

Warren Williams

CHAIR, CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL

I seek leave to table that correspondence.

Leave granted.

Mr PAECH: It is important to place that on the *Parliamentary Record* forever, because we are discussing this Bill and there is a problem. When every Aboriginal Member of this Legislative Assembly is speaking about the concerns and the harm that this Bill will do and when Aboriginal Territorians and organisations are putting submissions to the scrutiny committee, stating that they very much welcome a public hearing to talk about it, that shows there is concern and genuine interest in this Bill. We are talking about the importance of this Bill, yet a government that does not have one Aboriginal member elected to the Northern Territory Assembly to help give it guidance or advice on this issue is ramming through a Bill that will cause harm. It is ramming through a Bill which has the sole purpose to help a mate at the Waterfront build a hotel. Let us be honest, that is what this is about. To say that you are going off a 2015 report—nine years ago—but you will accept only one of those recommendations is a joke.

What does the history in the Northern Territory tell us? It tells us that for nearly every project that happens on Aboriginal land there is an 'accident'—I use that word softly because there is no accident. This legislation promotes doing the wrong thing. It promotes the destruction and desecration of sites. If people know that the penalty points are so low that they can stuff up, damage a site and will pay only a small fine—and now that site is out of the way they will make millions—what will that do? It will encourage them.

The Environment minister suddenly forgot to talk to AAPA about the review work that had been done, which exclusively went to the heart of increasing penalty points, delivering mechanisms for appropriate remediation, enforceable undertakings and clarifying the ability for clearance certificates. It was all important stuff that was overlooked. That work is so fresh it was being done when were in caretaker mode. It was ready to go to consultation with industry and other groups.

This says to me that many members opposite might need cross-cultural awareness training because sacred sites and country are not lifeless objects to Aboriginal people. We do not talk about them like, 'We are going for a drive to the country'. We talk about these places because they have feelings and emotions, and they guide and strengthen us. When we look across the Northern Territory at sites that have been damaged we see the direct harm and trauma caused in our communities. In our culture if people muck around with or cause harm to a sacred site, they get sick—very sick. They become unfocused, unguided and lost. If this Bill goes through, people will get sick. This will cause sickness to all people in the Northern Territory, black or white, and it will hurt people.

Many countrymen have been following this. You might not think they are, but they are. In every corner of the Northern Territory people are saying, 'What is that CLP talking about country and sites for? That is part of our *tjukurpa*, our story. How come we are not being spoken to?'

The Attorney-General yesterday moved to refer voluntary assisted dying to a committee to do consultation, yet the government will not even let the Legislative Scrutiny Committee do effective consultation on an issue that goes to the cultural identity and wellbeing of Aboriginal people. Why? What is it so afraid of? Why will it not allow the voices of Aboriginal Territorians to be elevated and respected? Why must the government, at every opportunity, shut them down and ignore them? Aboriginal Territorians are being silenced and not included in effective consultation.

I acknowledge that there are members on the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, other than me and the Member for Johnston, who probably felt uncomfortable about the directive the ministers gave them about what they had to do. I acknowledge that they probably had to bear the brunt of a decision that was made by their Cabinet not to allow a public hearing, but it is all right, because you will all get in your deadly motor cars tomorrow and go home, and you will all see your families and have a great time.

Aboriginal people will have to go out tomorrow knowing that, at any time, these changes can have a direct impact on places of significance, culture and history. As the Member for Mulka said, Aboriginal law, a guiding principle of our being and our creation story, is our sites. They hold many stories together, yet you are willing to sacrifice them for development.

We have said that we are not anti-development by any means. Aboriginal people will tell you that they want development. They want to be part of the Northern Territory's economic prosperity, but it should not come at the cost of our sites. There are ways and means to drive economic development and achieve the government's economic targets, but that should never come at the cost of our sites.

We have good legislation that does not need to be changed. Every other state across this great country has always looked to the Northern Territory sacred sites laws for guidance and protection.

We hear comments from external groups about sacred sites such as, 'Stop them from breeding. Stop them from popping up. They're stopping me from running my business', yet there are so many parts of the Northern Territory that remain uncleared. That is for a variety of reasons. First, the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority may not have the resources to get out to every corner of the Northern Territory to do that important work.

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

Motion agreed to.

Mr PAECH: There are a few issues. First, parts of the Northern Territory have not been cleared because there might not be the resources in the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority for that. Second, they might sit on a parcel of land where access is limited. Third, and importantly, they need to remain sacred for cultural and ceremonial reasons.

I know of cases in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) where people have looked at doing development, and as they rocked up a cultural ceremony was going on there. It is still an active site. We all need to be clear that culture and ceremony are not dead. Aboriginal people are not stagnant. Living, breathing, practising, dancing, singing—the song and storylines run thick through the Territory, and they will forever. We have been dancing and singing on this country since time immemorial, and we will continue to do so.

The Member for Mulka still goes out and participates in those important songs and ceremonies. I have had the good fortune to go with the Member for Arnhem and be welcomed by her mob to participate in their ceremonies. I have been out in the beautiful Western Desert of my electorate with my family, doing our songs, ceremonies and dance and keeping culture strong. Sites will pop up when important ceremonies need to be captured in a moment in time so that they can record future generations. That is important. Our culture continues to live and breathe. It evolves because we are constantly evolving. Our cultural practices, passion, integrity and fierce nature to protect our culture, songs and places of significance remain stronger than ever.

This change, as the Members for Mulka and Arafura spoke about, is bad legislation. It has also reignited the flame of our people, who are more than ever opposed to the nature and values of this government. Our people, more than ever, are following what this government does and your track record on Aboriginal Territorians. This is not just a black issue, and I thank the hundreds of allies and supporters who have come out in support of the need to protect places of significance and country. To every Territorian and Australian

who has reached out to members in this parliament and asked them to reconsider their position if they are for the Bill and supported those who are opposed to it, thank you. Advocacy, lobbying and pressure matters.

To all my family and Aboriginal brothers and sisters, stay strong; we are standing with you today. The CLP government has the numbers and will pass this law, but our power does not get taken away. It will continue to grow, and as a movement we will be strong and grow stronger. Our fight is for everyone in the Northern Territory. It is a fight for country, sacred sites and environmental protections. This movement will not go away.

I am proud to be a member of the Labor Party, which has a history of standing up for Aboriginal people and has helped deliver transformative reform with native title and Aboriginal land rights. I will be proud to be part of a future Labor government under Selena Uibo that will rewind these terrible reforms. We respect Aboriginal people, sacred sites and the appropriate processes. We are not a party of giving things to our mates, which we are seeing here.

This legislation is purely legislative vandalism and has been designed to help mates at the Waterfront build a hotel at the cost of Aboriginal people. It is disgusting. People will get sick from this, and I hope they will remember why they are sick.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, Territory Labor opposes the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Legislation Amendment Bill because it weakens protections for sacred sites and reduces the role of Aboriginal custodians. It has been made clear that the Bill was drafted without proper consultation and undermines cultural protection and Aboriginal participation.

Territory Labor supports updating and improving protections for sacred sites because transparent and efficient administration is essential, but for real reform the government must work together with Aboriginal Territorians.

Sacred sites dotted across the Northern Territory have profound significance for Aboriginal Territorians. Hills, rocks, waterholes, trees, plains, lakes, billabongs and other natural features can be and are sacred sites. In the coastal and sea areas of Darwin, where the Larrakia people have lived for generations, sacred sites exist, including features that lie above and below the water, such as the culturally significant Stokes Hill Dreaming site.

Sacred sites are a responsibility for us, as Aboriginal custodians. Our rights and roles are entwined through our kinship and relationship to land. The custodians play a vital role in managing a sacred site and ensuring it remains safe. It embodies cultural knowledge, preserves important stories and holds spiritual responsibilities for the land, essential in honouring and sustaining traditional owners' heritage. Most importantly, sacred sites are an intrinsic part of a continuing body of practices and beliefs emanating from Aboriginal law and traditions from time immemorial. By this standard the Bill fails to meet expectations.

Territory Labor recognises the importance of economic development. We are committed to supporting initiatives that responsibly drive growth and create jobs, ensuring that all Territorians benefit in the long term. However, it should be an advancing economy that honours the cultural heritage of the Northern Territory. Economic progress and the protection of cultural heritage can and should co-exist, fostering mutual respect for traditional owners and their rights.

It has been noted by many members that this Bill was crafted in secrecy without genuine consultation with Aboriginal Territorians. This lack of transparency is unacceptable. This Bill was drafted based on a review conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2016 that attracted nine submissions and did not have public input.

Although this Bill was sent to the scrutiny committee, the performance of the government members on that committee has been inadequate. The committee inquiry received more than 30 submissions voicing concerns about the lack of consultation and limited submission timeframe.

The Central Land Council stated in its submission:

> *There has been no genuine consultation about the Bill with the CLC or the people it represents. A token meeting was called by the Minister on 20 March 2025 at which little detail was provided, notwithstanding that draft legislation had already been prepared and was introduced into Parliament a week later. CLC's Executive committee were very clear with the Minister that they did not consent to the Bill nor regard that meeting as adequate consultation. Nor does a one week comment period to the Scrutiny Committee constitute adequate consultation.*

Government members pat themselves on the back for bringing back the Legislative Scrutiny Committee but do the bare minimum. Not only did 30 organisations have one week to make submissions, but what did the government then choose to do? It refused to hold public hearing for those 30 organisations. This move blatantly undermines the nature of the appropriate scrutiny process and solidifies the secretive top-down nature of those opposite. This CLP government has repeatedly failed to consult those most affected.

The submissions to the committee made it clear that the Bill disrespects cultural authority, weakens protections and risks contravening federal law. Instead of strengthening protections it undermines established safeguards and silences Aboriginal voices, risking conflict where there should be consent.

Looking at the submissions, we can derive key concerns from stakeholders, including authority certificates being transferred without custodians' consultation, the ability to add new parties to certificates without input from traditional owners and the introduction of enforceable undertakings that can be used behind closed doors without transparency. These provisions were roundly criticised for violating free, prior and informed consent principles.

What does it tell us about those opposite when virtually every Aboriginal organisation devoted to the protection of land and cultural heritage voices its concerns and asserts that they have it wrong? The appropriate response is not to forge ahead recklessly, but to pause and truly listen.

We have said a number of times that it is essential to engage in dialogue, collaborate and deploy co-designed solutions that respect Aboriginal Territorians' perspectives and ensure they are at the table from the get-go. This is the approach that a government grounded in integrity and genuine commitment to its people would embrace, not hold tokenistic meetings where the minister can provide as little detail as needed to tick a box for consultation.

I concur with the Member for Arafura regarding consultation with Aboriginal people across the Territory and their message that Aboriginal communities do not want this legislation in its current form. I have been travelling through my electorate of Daly and speaking with constituents who are infuriated by this government's decision regarding their land, culture and laws.

Clause 7 inserts section 24A, which allows authority certificates to be transferred between parties without re-consulting traditional owners. The government tries to make us believe that this approach may seem like a way to simplify processes, but it is trying to cover up the profound consequences for traditional owners. That is because it implies that certificates issued decades ago could be exploited by different developers—all without the custodians who hold cultural responsibility for that land being notified.

I echo my Territory Labor colleagues when I say that this Bill undermines the principle of free, prior and informed consent. It fails to acknowledge changes in land use, evolving cultural knowledge and those knowledge holders who may have passed away, undermining traditional owners' rights to be heard on their own country. Aboriginal custodians, whose sacred sites these certificates are designed to protect, would have no say.

Authority certificates are not commercial licences; they are an understanding that hinges on the recognition that specific individuals within distinct contexts were granted explicit consent to engage in particular activities on sacred land. This amendment allows companies to rely on certificates that may become outdated, having been issued when land use was different and cultural knowledge was not properly documented, or the knowledge holders have passed away.

The amendments in this Bill introduce the concept of a recorded party. This allows developers to add parties to a certificate post-approval without consulting traditional owners. This disrespects cultural protocols built on relationships and trust. Consent granted in one context cannot be assumed in another. It risks a situation where multiple parties hold authority under certificates, yet custodians are not informed or consulted, thereby undermining trust, diminishing respect for cultural authority and bypassing the principle of informed consent in the interests of administrative convenience. The Bill also fails to clearly define the responsibilities of these additional parties, risking further confusion and eroding trust in the system. Aboriginal Territorians already struggle to trust governments.

Enforceable undertakings, another concerning new feature highlighted by submissions, allow companies to privately negotiate outcomes when sacred sites are damaged instead of facing prosecution. These deals can be made without informing traditional owners, without their advice and with no right of appeal, potentially allowing accountability and transparency to be lost, as sacred sites can be harmed and the response can be handled in secret.

Territory Labor supports reform that works to empower traditional owners and does not undercut their important role as custodians of sacred sites. We urge the Country Liberal Party government to withdraw this Bill and rewrite it in genuine partnership with traditional owners.

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I echo the words of my fellow Labor opposition colleagues when I state that we will not support this Bill. We believe that it weakens the protections for sacred sites, diminishes the role of Aboriginal custodians and was developed without proper consultation by the CLP government. We believe this Bill, as it stands, fails to uphold the cultural protection, Aboriginal participation and compliance with the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, which should be a government responsibility to ensure.

Labor supports the modernisation and improvement of sacred sites protections. Administrative clarity and efficiency matter, but genuine reform in this space needs to be co-designed with Aboriginal custodians and traditional owners—the cultural knowledge holders, the guardians of stories, songlines and country and those with the spiritual responsibility to protect country. By that measure alone, this Bill fails spectacularly.

The Labor opposition does not oppose economic development, nor do the Aboriginal Territorians we have spoken to and those we are fortunate to represent in our electorates. Our Labor opposition supports responsible development that grows the Territory economy which can create jobs, particularly jobs on country, and deliver long-term benefits for all Territorians. Economic progress and cultural heritage protection are not mutually exclusive; they must go hand in hand, built on respect for traditional owners and their rights.

I will outline several reasons we oppose the Bill, echoing my colleagues' concerns that have been raised by the Bill's development. The first is lack of genuine consultation. This Bill, as my deputy said, was developed behind closed doors without meaningful consultation with those who are impacted the most by this Bill.

As we heard from the Member for Gwoja, it was based on a review conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2016—nine years ago—that received only nine submissions and did not call for public input. The world has dramatically changed since then, as we all know. Social media platforms can send out information, and there are different ways to consult using technology. Even things like TikTok and ChatGPT, which many people use daily, did not exist only nine years ago.

The world has changed, but unfortunately the only thing that has not changed is the work the Chief Minister is leading, as the CLP government forges ahead while not listening to Territorians on issues that matter most to them.

There are few current members who were in parliament nine years ago when that review was completed. It is outdated. One CLP government member who was around then is Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro. Unfortunately, she has not shown the leadership and bravery we expect from a Chief Minister, because the work the CLP government is doing in this space is deeply flawed. The CLP government has failed to consult with the Territorians most affected by this Bill.

Instead of strengthening protections, this Bill undermines established safeguards and silences Aboriginal voices. It risks creating conflict where there should be consent.

Another reason to oppose the Bill is the feedback from the scrutiny committee, which some of my colleagues outlined. I thank the government for referring the Bill to the scrutiny committee. The government tends to pick and choose what should be scrutinised these days and has even removed, through the standing orders, the ability for other members of parliament, who are not presenting the Bill, to refer a Bill to the scrutiny committee. That happened just this week, much to the opposition's surprise; it was without notice. The government will do what it will do.

The conduct of members of the scrutiny committee left much to be desired. Government members of the committee refused to hold public hearings. That is strange. Submissions were made, and often the next thing a scrutiny committee would do is hold public hearings. This is a move that has undermined the purpose of scrutiny in the Westminster system and has reinforced the words my colleagues used—the secretive top-down nature of this process driven by the CLP government.

Submissions to the committee all made it clear that the Bill disrespects cultural authority, weakens protections and risks contravening federal law. Key concerns included authority certificates being transferred without custodians' consultation, the ability to add new parties to certificates without input from traditional owners and the introduction of enforceable undertakings that could be used behind closed doors, without transparency. These provisions were roundly criticised for violating the principles of free, prior and informed consent.

When nearly every Aboriginal organisation that is dedicated to land and cultural protections says that the government has it wrong, the answer is not to press ahead. The answer is to listen, sit down with the organisations and those who are affected by this legislation and co-design. This is what a government with integrity would do, and this is not what the CLP has done. Instead, the CLP has done a box-ticking exercise. It is arrogant and outdated. As the Member for Mulka said, Aboriginal Territorians are experiencing some of the worst times in history today under the CLP government—a history we should be moving beyond, not revisiting and worsening.

Another reason to oppose the Bill is its content—the essence of some proposed sections and clauses.

Clause 7 inserts section 24A which allows authority certificates to be transferred between parties without re-consulting traditional owners. My colleagues mentioned that. Although that may appear to streamline processes, there are serious implications. It means certificates that have been issued, perhaps even decades ago, could be used for entirely different developers without custodians being informed, undermining the principle of free, prior and informed consent. It ignores changes in land use, evolving cultural knowledge in our time and the reality that some knowledge holders may have passed on, who were originally part of the agreeance or the issuing of those certificates in the past.

Developers can add parties to a certificate post-approval without consulting custodians. This disrespects the cultural protocols of building relationships and trust when business is done on country. Consent granted in one context cannot be assumed to be granted in another. We heard that the CLP Attorney-General does that well; she assumes rather than using the facts at hand—using a relationship for her own purpose—to create a transparent process.

The Bill fails to clearly define the responsibilities of these additional parties, risking further confusion and eroding trust in the system that is often not open and transparent when inviting Aboriginal Territorians to be part of the process and the guiding principles to make the system better.

Enforceable undertakings is another concerning new feature. I thank the department for providing a briefing on this. We understand it allows companies to privately negotiate outcomes when sacred sites are damaged, instead of facing prosecution. Yesterday there was a news article about a sacred site in my electorate of Arnhem that was damaged by a mining company. When land and sacred sites are damaged, often they are not something that can be replaced. The damage is often irreparable. Even if there is a monetary penalty, this surely cannot replace the decades of cultural knowledge, songlines and cultural authority passed on from generation to generation; it can never be reproduced. That is disappointing.

As my colleagues said, the simple fact is that the changes being brought forward by Minister Burgoyne could incentivise wrongdoing, with people knowing that the penalties are not great and there could be other processes instead of facing prosecution. There would be no legal consequences from a government which prides itself on law and order and facing consequences. This is truly an easy pass for those who have done the wrong thing. Perhaps the government does not care if something is done to an Aboriginal sacred site on someone's country because, at the end of the day, a fine can be paid and they move on. These deals can be made without informing custodians, without their advice and without the right of appeal. In our legal system that is of huge concern to many people who will be affected by the changes in this ill-thought-out and flawed Bill.

This comes from a government which says accountability is crucial, but accountability will now be lost and transparency abandoned. Sacred sites can be harmed and the response handled in secret. At a bare minimum, if a sacred site is damaged, traditional owners must be part of the response. This Bill denies custodians the basic respect of saying how to move forward to healing if there is wrongdoing and if there is a consequence to be faced, ensuring that it is appropriate.

My colleagues spoke about Nigel Browne, the CEO of Aboriginal Investment NT, who is a Larrakia man and a lawyer. He rightly said that this Bill is a shame job. It appears to be tailored to facilitate developments like the Darwin Convention Centre hotel, which we know for the Larrakia people in Darwin and Palmerston is a significant Dreaming site. This is of concern. We are only hundreds of metres from the site we are talking about. When a CEO, a Larrakia leader and a lawyer—all one person in Nigel Browne—says that this legislation is flawed and the Northern Territory Government should be ashamed of what it is bringing into parliament, the House of the people of the Northern Territory, speak volumes. Those two words, shame job, also speak volumes.

This reveals the true motive. Cultural protection is not at the heart of this Bill. It is dressed up because it is fast-tracking development without accountability.

Labor supports reform. A huge body of work was compiled in the lead-up to the Territory's last election. The Member for Gwoja was a big part of that and he shared insights into that important work. However, this huge body of work that was done recently—not nine years ago; only a year or so ago—was ignored by the CLP government and thrown in the bin because it apparently knows better. The CLP government does not wants to listen to, support or believe in legislation that was done in consultation and co-designed with Aboriginal Territorians because it directly impacts and affects them.

This is despicable. It does not empower traditional owners or strengthen sacred site protection; it weakens that protection. Above all, any work that a government does in regard to First Nations' wellbeing—sacred sites in particular—should always be in genuine partnership with Aboriginal custodians and landowners. In no way do I make my comments as a slight to the public servants who have worked extremely hard in trying to diligently enact the will of the CLP government, even though it probably does not make sense to a lot of people.

It has made me feel heavy this afternoon. The one thing that my Labor colleagues and I cling to is the platform that we can use to voice our concerns and those of the many people who contacted us in the last couple of months about this legislation. We still have this platform and voice, even though the CLP government has denied that to many other people and organisations through a flawed process whereby it picks and chooses and chops and changes what is scrutinised and which part of the scrutiny process it will push on with and the other parts it will cut out. It has been—I cannot say the words in parliament. It has not been a good show; it has been disappointing.

We saw the submissions. We heard the Member for Gwoja read out the letter to Minister Burgoyne from the Central Land Council Chair, Mr Warren Williams. They were powerful words from Mr Williams about the integrity of the minister and the CLP government. I ask the minister to tell us, in closing debate, how he will face up to the land councils, traditional owners and the Aboriginal organisations which said that their power and voice have been disempowered, taken away and silenced through a process of government?

This government has a majority, with 17 members of a 25-member parliament. It can always pass what it wants regardless of what we say, what our electorates want and what its own backbenchers may want.

If we are truly making contemporary legislation in the best interests of all Territorians, the starting place must be scrutiny of the Bills, with experts and those who are directly impacted being able to provide their insights, questions, concerns, ideas and whether they support the legislation. However, we do not have that with the CLP government.

We are starting to see more of this bad and dangerous behaviour by a government which thinks it has the right to ignore democracy. Although it was elected in a democratic process, it is ignoring democracy at its heart. It beggars belief that this is the way the CLP is doing business, and it thinks this is the way to business when protecting business on country. When I say 'business', I am not talking about the financial transactions you may think of in the Western way; I am talking about the business of cultural protection, ceremony and songlines that are linked to sacred sites that go to the essence and the heart of why the Sacred Sites Act was first developed.

CLP members like to ignore the experts. We have seen it time and again in the nine months they have been in government. To be honest, I did not think they would be this bad so early. I thought CLP members would give themselves a honeymoon period, get their wins, get a gloss and make themselves look good before people started getting pissed off with them. I thought they would give themselves a buffer before they angered, frustrated, disenfranchised, ignored, disengaged or, in this case, silenced people across the Territory.

I can rattle of multiple examples, but I am sure the CLP members are embarrassed by the number of people they have ticked off in such a short time in government. It will be a long four years, that is for sure.

Mr O'Gallagher: In opposition.

Ms UIBO: It will be a long four years for the people of the Northern Territory to witness a government that does not listen or take criticism and rules with an iron fist because it does not like providing answers and being constructive. That is what the four long years will be, because Territorians—probably similar to what I am already starting to do—will be beating their heads against the wall because they have a government that does not listen, although it promised to do its best for Territorians. We are at a tipping point where Territorians are starting to see the true colours of the CLP. They are starting to see that the CLP was all talk and none of the substance it promised at the Territory election.

The damning part is when it comes to legislation and consultation. The government does not have to like what we say, but we have been elected to this place to do our job. We have had difficulties at times—as I am sure you, Madam Speaker, have been aware because we have expressed our concerns—when we are not even sure how to best do our job because the government is trying to play games with the legislation it brings in. How does anyone with a 17-member government in a 25-seat parliament think it is good governance to play games in regard to the general processes of parliament? That goes back to the questions about the scrutiny committee and the concerns that have been raised.

The CLP made a song and dance about bringing back the scrutiny committee, but the government picks which Bills are scrutinised and dominates the scrutiny committee conversations about which public hearings can and cannot happen. What are CLP members afraid of? It seems that they are afraid of the truth. They are afraid of doing the hard work themselves because that process means you have to be agile and flexible to make the best laws possible. Now they have an idea of what government maybe is.

I have heard from many stakeholders that a lot of CLP members are struggling in their ministerial roles and are starting to enrage Territorians regarding the way they work and do business. I have never seen that before. I have heard stakeholders say that they have not seen it either. The sad thing is I have to say, 'Do not worry; it is not just you. I am hearing it from everybody.' Every stakeholder I meet who has these frustrations is seeing it and hearing it and are scratching their heads and wondering, 'Why us? Why our organisation?' The one area that government members are not discriminating in is their incompetence to do their job properly and in a way that produces the best type of legislation possible for Territorians.

Remember that you are not legislating for the CLP voters; you are in here legislating for the whole of the Northern Territory. However, anyone would think that CLP members are thinking of only their core base of conservative voters regarding any legislation introduced in this House. That is the real downfall of this process.

Despite the genuine partnerships we are talking about, the work done and concerns raised, government members will not even meet with the key stakeholders. It blows my mind. When they meet with stakeholders, they say words—they are disingenuous when they say it—then run away, hide and do the exact opposite of what they said they would, as Minister Burgoyne has done and like we heard from the CLC through its letter and media release. The CLC is not alone. Unfortunately, it is not the one stakeholder that has been ignored or told furphies.

It will continue to be a dangerous and slippery slope for the CLP, but we will continue to do our job in the long four years of a government that is running around trying to figure out how to be a government, making laws that are not fit for purpose, modern and contemporary and not the wishes of Territorians who are impacted by those Bills. It is almost cringeworthy and embarrassing to have to tell people that is what we will have for the next couple of years.

We will continue to do the best job we can in opposition. We will continue to make sure we are representing all views, not just the views of those who voted for Labor or those who voted for us in our four electorates of the Labor opposition. We will take forward all the concerns, questions and ideas that Territorians have because that is what Territorians expect of us. Unfortunately, less and less now, that is not what Territorians are expecting from the CLP government.

I honestly thought it would be at least 12 months before we would start to see the shakes and wobbles, but it has come much sooner—much to my delight; it is quite fun to watch sometimes and, unfortunately, listen to those frustrations. It is doom and gloom on the government side, but not for us because we are getting the affirmation of what we thought would happen if there was a CLP government. The results from the federal election told us the same thing.

It will be interesting to see what the CLP government will employ to try to defend the horrible and lazy way it is governing—missing processes and cutting out scrutiny. The government is ignoring the important voices of Territorians whose concerns have been not only brought before the House today but also written in black and white for the scrutiny committee to see and pass on to the government, with no response from government. To everyone waiting for a reply from the government about how it will make the Sacred Sites Act better based on your submission, do not hold your breath because you will probably pass out.

What is happening now will be the norm for the CLP government. Government members think they know better than the experts and that they can consult willy-nilly or not at all, as they pretty much did in this case. It will be a rollercoaster, but I look forward to them hitting rock bottom because Labor will be able to provide the way up.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I will echo comments made by a delegation of council members from the Central Land Council in response to the introduction of this Bill.

Sacred sites belong to traditional owners, not to the government. Traditional owners know the stories of these sites, their Dreaming and significance for ceremony, all of which make up a cultural system that is very much alive and vibrant, and has been for thousands of years. Traditional owners are the custodians of their sites and the sacred cultural knowledge that is attached to them, meaning that the government should not change the law protecting their sites without a robust consultation with them.

Media releases from the AAPA board, the Northern Land Council and the Central Land Council make it clear that this Bill has not been properly consulted on and does not have their consent.

The scrutiny committee process was a farce; people had only one week to create submissions, and the CLP members of that committee voted against having public hearings. Shame! That is how much transparency and accountability mean to the CLP. That is the most clear and recent example of how the CLP has no regard for listening to Aboriginal voices.

We heard from our colleague and senior Yolngu leader, the Member for Mulka, who wanted to make a submission but could not because he was having heart surgery. How broken are our processes when our parliamentarians are not afforded the time to submit their incredibly valued contributions to the so-called scrutiny committee?

The new provisions allowing for the transfer of authority certificates and the addition of recorded parties are framed as administrative efficiencies; however, these mechanisms pose significant risks, which was raised in the submissions to the scrutiny committee and then ignored by the majority of the members. There are strong concerns that transfers could sever the authority certificate from the original consultation and cultural conditions, thereby posing risks of damage to protected sites.

During the briefing I had with AAPA and the department, it was confirmed that there would be no need for the transferee to receive additional briefings or information before the transfer is complete. I understand an authority certificate is detailed; however, if there is not a willingness or desire to genuinely protect these sacred sites, there is no guarantee that third parties will engage thoughtfully and thoroughly with the limitations provided. These third parties will be able to access and utilise land without renewed engagement with custodians and without the consent of the traditional custodians. Communities should have the right to know and have control over who they are engaging with. One of the transferees could have a terrible track record in which they have damaged sacred sites in the past, yet there is no mechanism to prevent the transfer.

These changes are diluting the integrity of authority certificates as instruments of cultural protection. We are seeing the commodification of sacred site clearances, transforming them into transferable assets rather than being the outcome of culturally specific and site-based negotiation.

I am concerned that these proposed amendments are contrary to section 73(1)(a) of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, which enables the NT to enact reciprocal legislation providing for the protection of, and the prevention of the desecration of, sacred sites. The NT may not have the power to enact the proposed amendments unless they embed requirements for consultation with, and to obtain the consent of, custodians.

As outlined in the NLC submission to the scrutiny committee, consent is central to all aspects of land rights, and these changes fail to ensure proper consent is gained.

The addition of enforceable undertakings, if done well, could have provided means for greater avenues of justice; however, due to this poor construction of it, many groups are rightly concerned. As the Nurrdalinji Native Title Aboriginal Corporation outlined in its submission:

> *We are concerned this scheme for enforceable undertakings … is being introduced to favour developers who breach the Act by making available a more lenient form of punishment than those currently available and allowing serious breaches to be sidelined from consideration by the court system.*
>
> *We are also concerned that AAPA does not have the investigative and compliance powers it needs to properly administer the new scheme in an effective way.*

As an enforceable undertaking removes the ability for other civil or criminal legal pursuits should an enforceable undertaking be pursued, it is considered not to be an admission of guilt by the party responsible for the damage. This is practically a get-out-of-jail-free card. As the CLC stated:

> *Allowing enforceable undertakings changes the focus of Act. Instead of emphasising protection of sites, it provides a mechanism to avoid prosecution for damaging sacred sites. This risks allowing damage to sites to become merely a cost of doing business.*

The CLP has dubbed 2025 the year of action, certainty and security, but this seems to be in service of only big corporations. There is no certainty or security being provided to traditional custodians. In fact, these changes have the potential to rob communities of both these things. It is becoming increasingly obvious that this government does not respect the principle of self-determination and the reality of Aboriginal sovereignty, both of which are essential elements to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. In fact, the dismissal and disrespect of self-determination and sovereignty has been prominent in the CLP's agenda since entering government last year, demonstrating one of the many ways it has failed to address the gap in the Territory. The CLP government has not only failed to act productively but also taken action that risks widening the gap.

Within the first six months of government the CLP discontinued the treaty process in the Territory, stifling the valuable progress made by countless Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who strove to build a mature and nuanced relationship between the Northern Territory Government and First Nations people. The government removed as ministerial portfolios Treaty, Local Decision Making and Remote Housing and Homelands; lowered the age of criminal responsibility, which will fuel incarceration rates; made draconian changes to public housing that prioritise evicting tenants over supporting them; and introduced a powerful Territory Coordinator to destroy country for big business—all of which will disproportionately affect Aboriginal people.

The government has refused to criticise NT Police, even after the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption concluded that 'any person of reasonable intelligence' would see evident racism in a series of informal awards handed out by police.

The government is aligned with the Liberal and National Parties, which do not respect welcomes to country or struggles for Aboriginal justice in general.

Considering the actions it has taken in government so far, it comes as no surprise that the CLP now seeks to erode the role of Aboriginal voices in our sacred sites regime and exclude Aboriginal voices from its reform process. This government could hardly be more blatant in its clear disregard for the perspectives of our land councils and other Aboriginal organisations such as Larrakia Nation.

We must listen to the perspectives of organisations that are experts in the field and work tirelessly to protect sacred sites, land rights, native title rights and culturally informed land management practices. As previously raised by these organisations, there is space for reform in this Bill, but it must be co-designed with all relevant parties, not merely industry parties that benefit from its dilution.

As outlined by traditional owners and the land councils which represent them, they are often supportive of sustainable development and willing for the usage of their land to provide opportunities for employment and income for their benefit. However, having less confidence in our statutory regimes to protect sacred sites may diminish the support the traditional owners often give to proponents that wish to develop industrial projects on their land and near their sacred sites.

As the CLC stated in its supplementary submission:

> *The combined land councils have spoken up for many years about the need to strengthen the Act, including by recognising the sacred sites processes of land councils. Instead the government is fast tracking amendments that please land users and developers without consulting Aboriginal Territorians, despite the enormous significance sacred sites protection has for us.*

There was a real willingness for groups such as land councils to work with the government on this to make good changes, so it is deeply disappointing to see this failure to truly consult once again.

We have one of the strongest statutory regimes in Australia for the protection of sacred sites. Let us keep it strong so that we can give traditional owners confidence that they are making informed decisions.

I do not support these changes going ahead.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Legislation Amendment Bill proposes significant changes, as we have heard, to how sacred sites are managed, protected and respected in our Northern Territory. I do not believe that the Bill should pass in this form.

I acknowledge the members in this Chamber whom this legislation directly affects. Members for Mulka, Daly, Arafura and Gwoja, I acknowledge that this is a Bill about your people, sacred sites and laws. This is a Bill which has been developed with totally inadequate consultation with Aboriginal people.

As the Member for Gwoja said, yesterday we heard the government talking about the need for sensitive and respectful consultation about voluntary assisted dying, and in this Chamber we all agreed. This government should be exercising that same respect and sensitivity in this issue, which is at the centre of the law and culture of Aboriginal people.

This Bill was referred to the scrutiny committee, and I will speak further about that shortly. The scrutiny committee's role is to inform the government about the impact of proposed laws. I am on that committee, and I take that job seriously. I will therefore be sharing the issues identified in my dissenting report to help inform our decision-making in this Chamber.

I thank all those who made submissions to that committee. I am committed to ensuring that the government hears the issues they raised.

I note the Member for Drysdale's comments, made this morning, that we cannot outsource our decision-making. Member for Drysdale, I agree that we are elected with the trust and responsibility of our communities to make wise decisions. I am bemused that you seem to think that listening to expertise to inform good decision-making is giving up power. In the absence of this, I wonder what you think a good process is that ensures we make the best laws we can. When we have a law which is designed to impact specifically on one group of people, who understand intimately what the impact of that law could be and who could help us lawmakers ensure that it works well, how is listening to them giving up our power?

In the case of this Bill, the decision by CLP government members of the scrutiny committee to oppose public hearings on this legislation is deeply troubling. The exclusion of public hearings has prevented meaningful consultation with key stakeholders who are directly affected by this legislation. It undermines transparency and limits the opportunity for Aboriginal Territorians to express their views and share their expertise on a Bill that impacts on their cultural, spiritual and land rights. This lack of engagement fails to sufficiently consider the rights of Aboriginal people, and this is a critical aspect of the scrutiny committee's mandate. Further, refusing to hold public holdings undermines our process as it reduces the information that the committee has access to and, as a result, our understanding of the Bill and our capacity to make informed recommendations concerning it.

Sacred sites are part of a living dynamic tradition and are integral to Aboriginal cultural heritage. The proposed amendments fail to address the full scope of the issues and miss an opportunity to improve the regulatory framework meaningfully. Instead, they risk undermining the Northern Territory's reputation for having one of the most effective frameworks for protecting sacred sites. I do not believe that this Bill should pass in its current form.

I want to make sure that everyone in this Chamber understands what is meant when we talk about sacred sites. The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority tells us that sacred sites are places within the landscape that have a deep significance under Aboriginal tradition. I have had the great privilege of learning a little about it from traditional owners. Sacred sites are everywhere, not just out in the bush—in fact, there is one down the road where the Waterfront sits. Sacred sites are important to the cultural fabric and heritage of the Northern Territory; they are an intrinsic part of a continuing body of practices and belief emanating from and within Aboriginal laws and traditions. They give meaning to the natural landscape, anchor cultural values and spiritual and kin-based relationships in the land.

Some sacred sites may be places where only certain people can enter. Sites and the rituals associated with them may also be restricted to women or men in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. Revealing the existence of such sites to members of the opposite gender is considered dangerous and potentially life threatening. Sacred sites belong to Aboriginal custodians whose responsibility it is to protect these sites and whose rights and roles are codified through kinship and relationship to land. They are responsible for managing the site, keeping it safe and making sure it is used in accordance with *rom*.

Aboriginal people know that sacred sites can be dangerous and powerful places. Sites can play an important part in their health and wellbeing and in the health and wellbeing of all of us. Activities such as cutting down a sacred tree or digging into sacred ground may have serious consequences for the person causing the disturbance and for the people who are the custodians for that place. According to Aboriginal law, if custodians of sacred sites allow a site to be damaged, other Aboriginal people will hold them responsible.

In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal sacred sites are recognised and protected as an integral part of our cultural heritage under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act.* It is the responsibility of all of us—Territorians and visitors to this place—to respect and preserve the sacred sites according to the wishes of Aboriginal custodians. That is why is it so important that we listen to those wishes as part of amending this legislation.

There is no denying that reform of this legislation is long overdue. The Act has not be amended since 1989. Many Aboriginal organisations, land councils and custodians have long called for improvements that would both strengthen sacred site protections and streamline the process for all parties. This Bill, however, does not deliver on that opportunity. Instead, it introduces changes that undermine core principles of independence, transparency and Aboriginal cultural authority, all while being pushed through without the level of consultation that such a sensitive and consequential Bill demands.

I will talk about the process because process matters. This Bill was referred to the scrutiny committee of which I am a member. The committee's report was tabled in the Chamber earlier this week, but the two dissenting reports—one from me and one from the Member for Gwoja—were not mentioned. Unfortunately, we were not given the chance to speak to our reports because the CLP altered the sessional orders, removing the opportunity for dissenting reports to be addressed when the committee's report is tabled.

I have said many times that the reintroduction of a scrutiny committee is a positive step, and I welcomed it. However, it seems that the promised increased accountability and transparency are yet to be realised. Time and again the government has resisted referring Bills to the committee. This week the government even changed the sessional orders so that only the mover of a Bill can refer that Bill to the scrutiny committee; there is no longer capacity for anyone else to do so. For me—for all of us—this should raise serious questions about the government's commitment to scrutiny.

When a Bill such as this one is referred to the committee, the expectation is that we will follow process and hear from those whom the Bill will affect. However, the committee is dominated by government members; therefore, the government members have the power to limit what we do, including, as they did in this case, refusing to hold public hearings.

The scrutiny committee, as per the requirements of our role, held a public briefing and called for submissions. The woefully inadequate timeframe—only one week—was unworkable for many Aboriginal communities, particularly those in remote areas, and for people who require time to properly engage with their communities effectively.

Despite this, the committee still received 30 submissions, most of which agreed that a review of this Act was long overdue. They also highlighted concerns about the amendments, which I will address, and the lack of adequate consultation and the limited timeframe for commenting on the Bill. We have heard about some of that today, but I will repeat it because it is important that we all understand this.

VISITORS
Howard Springs Scout Group

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, we have some special guests in the gallery, the members of the Howard Springs Scout Group and their leaders. I ask you to extend a warm welcome to everyone in the gallery this evening.

Members: Hear, hear!

J DAVIS: Welcome, from me as well.

The Central Land Council said:

> *There has been no genuine consultation about the Bill with the CLC or the people it represents … CLC's Executive committee were very clear with the Minister that they did not consent to the Bill nor regard that meeting …*

With the minister:

> *… as adequate consultation. Nor does a one-week comment period to the Scrutiny Committee constitute adequate consultation.*
>
> *…*
>
> *The CLC maintains its first recommendation from its 2015 submission: that no amendments be made to the Act without first obtaining the explicit consent of the AAPA Board and the four Territory Land Councils. That has not occurred here.*

The CLC also said:

> *The combined land councils have spoken up for many years about the need to strengthen the Act … Instead the government is fast tracking amendments that please land users and developers without consulting Aboriginal Territorians, despite the enormous significance sacred sites protection has for us. Sacred sites belong to Aboriginal people, not the Government, and the government should not change the law protecting our sites without consulting us. Achieving lasting and successful legislative and policy outcomes in the Territory can't be done by cutting corners at the expense of Aboriginal people.*

I also note that in the public briefings a government member of the scrutiny committee assured board members of AAPA, some of whom had travelled vast distances to attend that public briefing, that:

> *… there will be time for submissions for their voices to be heard. I want to make that very clear, so please pass that message on.*

They were meant to have plenty of time to voice their concerns. That was on Tuesday 1 April, with submissions due by Friday 4 April. There were three days for people to voice their concerns. I am not sure in what context three days is plenty of time.

Many stakeholders who managed to develop and provide submissions in the timeframe noted that challenges with language, remoteness and the time required to bring people together make a one-week timeframe to provide a submission unworkable for many of the people this Bill would directly affect.

Many submissions also indicated that they would appreciate the opportunity to talk with the committee in a public hearing, as is standard practice for Bills of this significance. They are the cornerstone of transparency, democratic accountability and genuine consultation. Public hearings allow those most affected by legislation to speak directly to lawmakers and the public.

These are laws that directly affect the cultural and spiritual heritage of Aboriginal Territorians. In this case, the three CLP members of the committee chose to block them from talking. That means that Aboriginal custodians, land councils, community organisations and concerned Territorians were denied the opportunity to speak directly to the committee about a Bill that directly affects the protection of their sacred sites. By preventing this, the government closed the door on vital voices and sent a message, whether intentional or not, that these changes will go ahead regardless of what Aboriginal people think.

The non-government members of the committee—the Member for Gwoja and I—strongly argued in favour of public hearings to allow stakeholders to voice their concerns and to provide the required expertise vital for proper scrutiny of this legislation, essential to our role in this committee to strengthen the legislation and ensure that we are making law that will work well. It remains unclear to me why the majority of the committee opposed having public hearings.

As a member of the committee I apologise to Aboriginal people, organisations and others who were denied the opportunity to address the committee directly. For a Bill about sacred sites, places of cultural, spiritual and historical significance to Aboriginal people, this approach is not only inappropriate but also profoundly disrespectful.

I turn to the Bill itself. Multiple submissions to the committee stated that Aboriginal people, custodians and their representative bodies support amending the Act in specific ways and according to their advice to maintain protection for sacred sites and to increase efficiency. The Act has not been amended since it commenced operation in 1989, and this is a missed opportunity that could achieve the Bill's intention as outlined in the explanatory statement.

In the public briefing the department referred to the 2016 PwC review, which I note is nine years old. This review made 39 recommendations, yet only one of those recommendations has been included in this Bill. There have been significant changes in knowledge since that review. A more contemporary review, particularly in the context of Northern Territory regulatory approvals concerning development, could have aligned better with government objectives and stakeholder needs.

Several specific areas of concern were identified in submissions. First of all, were the section 7 amendments regarding board members. Under section 7 the minister will have the power to recommend the appointment and termination of two ministerially appointed authority members. This will be at the minister's discretion, and the minister will not need to provide any reason for the appointment or the termination.

The committee made a recommendation to include criteria for appointment; however, it remains deeply problematic for many people that there are no criteria for dismissal. As AAPA noted:

> *The proposed amendments grant the Minister discretionary power to recommend the removal of government-nominated Authority members, without any requirement for cause or justification.*
>
> *This represents a significant shift in governance that threatens the independence of the Authority.*
>
> *Unlike the carefully structured process for Aboriginal member appointments, where nominations come from the Land Councils and removals must be justified on clear grounds, government-nominated members could now be removed at will. This introduces the potential for political interference.*
>
> *… These amendments create a pathway for governments to exert undue influence over the Authority's decision-making, particularly in cases where its responsibilities to protect sacred sites conflict with government development priorities.*
>
> *The Authority's credibility relies on its ability to operate free from political pressure, and any changes that weaken this independence risk eroding public, industry, and Aboriginal trust in its ability to uphold the protections enshrined in the Sacred Sites Act.*

This amendment also raises an issue of inequity among board members because situations are specified under which the Administrator must terminate the appointment of a board member; however, the reasons under which a minister must terminate a ministerially appointed member are not specified. Termination of the minister's nominated members at the minister's discretion is inconsistent with principles of natural justice, introduces inequity between ministerially appointed board members and other members of the authority and is not transparent or accountable. This Bill must include clear criteria for the termination of ministerially appointed members, ensuring transparency, natural justice and accountability.

Other members talked about the transfer of certificates. This is the only amendment from the government that comes from the 2016 PwC review, noting that there were 38 other recommendations that it could have drawn on. This amendment removes all discretion from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in the transfer of certificates.

The implications of transferring an authority certificate from one proponent to another or adding people to the certificate without consultation were addressed in many submissions. Several examples presented demonstrate that these amendments should not be viewed merely as administrative and that AAPA needs to have discretion over the transfer of the identity of the holder of the certificates. AAPA noted:

> *The amendments remove the ability to assess whether a transferee is a fit and proper entity to hold the certificate.*

AAPA also stated:

> *A certificate issued to one entity may not be appropriate for another … This increases the potential disputation and legal risks associated with a party who, for example, has a conflict of interest, is in a legal dispute with custodians, a poor compliance history, or history of inappropriate behaviour towards custodians.*

The NLC identified similar potential risks and said that the authority needs to assess whether the new entity has previously contravened sacred sites legislation or not complied with an enforceable undertaking in the Northern Territory or elsewhere; is insolvent or otherwise unable to undertake the works that are the subject of the certificate for financial or other reasons; has previously been convicted of an offence under sections 33

to 35 of the Act or section 69 of the Land Rights Act and it is likely they may offend again; or has a history of poor dealings with the custodians of the sites that are the subject of the authority certificate.

Many submissions emphasise the need for consultation about any change to the authority certificate; for example, this is not about how the land is used but by whom. The holders of an authority certificate need to be aligned in values and priorities and can be trusted to honour the authority with care and integrity.

Similarly, Namultja Aboriginal Corporation expressed concern that:

> *The Bill allows Authority Certificates … to be transferred without consulting Aboriginal custodians. Sacred sites aren't just paperwork—they're part of living culture. Excluding Traditional Owners from these decisions is unfair and disrespectful.*

It is both prudent and efficient that the authority retains discretion over the transfer of licences. As noted in AAPA's submission, in the majority of cases the transfer of an authority certificate would be uncontroversial; however, there will be instances when certificates for a variety of reasons may not be fit for purpose to transfer. It is essential that this Bill ensures that the authority retains discretion for transferring certificates. Given that these amendments remove that discretion, the Bill should not be passed.

The Bill also introduces a new provision for enforceable undertakings as an alternative to prosecution in cases when sacred sites are harmed. Although some people welcome this and it provides flexibility, serious gaps have been identified in how this provision has been drafted. Concerns were raised about the consultation process for custodians, the scope of the scheme and AAPA's ability to administer it. Several submissions, including those from Gudanji Yanyuwa Garrwa Marra Aboriginal Corporation, the CLC and the NLC, argued for the need to explicitly include the requirement for consultation. Crucially, there is no clear requirement for consultation with custodians in developing these undertakings, even where remediation work is proposed.

The Bill also allows undertakings to be made without any admission of wrongdoing, even in cases of desecration. Allowing serious breaches to be resolved through behind-the-scenes deals without acknowledgement of harm or direct involvement of the custodians undermines justice and the purpose of the law. These same Aboriginal corporations and land councils noted that an enforceable undertaking must include consultation with custodians, as it is essential that any plan to undertake remediation work is developed in collaboration with custodians and that custodians be present when the work is undertaken.

It is critical that the views and wishes of traditional owners are the primary consideration in the authority's decision about whether to accept an undertaking. Insertion of that as a mandatory consideration would reflect the commitment given by Minister Burgoyne to the NLC on 10 April 2025 that traditional owners would be the ones to decide whether a company will be allowed to give an enforceable undertaking.

Many submissions expressed concern that the drafting of the Bill is unable to contend with serious breaches where sacred sites are desecrated or harmed, and this undermines the deterrent effect of criminal and civil penalties. The NLC specifically expressed:

> *Due to the seriousness of the harm involved, the NLC does not consider an enforceable undertaking is an appropriate remedy for desecration of a site under s 35 of the Act.*

There is concern that the amendments do not provide AAPA with the necessary investigative and compliance powers to administer the new scheme in an effective way. I quote from the AAPA submission:

> *The Authority has no explicit power to compel information, conduct site inspections, or verify compliance with an undertaking. This creates a significant enforcement gap and reduces accountability for non-compliance.*
>
> *These powers have been subject of previous recommendations to amend the Sacred Sites Act, but are not included in the current bill.*

This Bill must ensure that consultation occurs with custodians before an enforceable undertaking takes place. Any contravention of section 35 should be removed from the ambit of the enforceable undertaking regime, and AAPA must be properly resourced and afforded powers to investigate and enforce compliance.

This Bill could have been a chance to modernise the Sacred Sites Act in ways that enhanced both protection and regulatory clarity and in a way that was led by Aboriginal people, but that is not what we have. Instead,

the government ignored most of the recommendations of its own 2016 review. While development pressure has clearly been a driving force, Aboriginal voices have not been included. This is a fundamental failure of process, and it is a fundamental failure of respect.

Sacred sites are not symbolic. They are living cultural landscapes; they are law, history and the heart of Aboriginal identity and responsibility. We have a duty to respect that and legislate in partnership with those who hold that law and knowledge.

This Bill, in both process and content, does not meet that standard. It introduces real risks to sacred site protection, weakens institutional independence and has been rushed through, as we heard from many members, without proper consultation or public scrutiny. This all describes a process that prioritises speed over substance and convenience over cultural integrity.

The Member for Mulka said that no-one in this Chamber should speak on this Bill and that the government should not have brought in changes to these laws without first consulting Aboriginal people, and I agree. I speak as a non-Aboriginal person who has been tasked with being part of lawmaking that I have no right to take part in, and I recognise this. I am deeply grateful to Aboriginal Territorians for their ongoing care for country and custodianship of sacred places.

I thank all those who contributed to the scrutiny committee process for sharing your wisdom and ideas. I once again express my regret that we did not offer an opportunity to learn more from you in order to strengthen this Bill for the benefit of all Territorians.

There is still time to do the right thing. I urge this Assembly to pause, listen and re-engage with the people this Bill affects most. Let us take the time to consult properly and to strengthen, not erode, the independence of our institutions. Let us draft legislation that reflects the values of fairness, partnership and respect, because protecting sacred sites is not a barrier to development; it is the foundation for meaningful and successful progress for all Territorians, not only those this government appears to represent.

Let us listen to the wisdom in this Chamber. As the Member for Mulka invites us over and again, let us work for *Mägaya rom*, a peaceful way of working together and causing no harm.

I strongly oppose the passage of this Bill today.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank honourable members for their contributions to this debate.

As we have discussed this evening, the purpose of this Bill is to amend the Sacred Sites Act and the regulations to ensure that they are contemporary and remain effective in achieving their purpose. Three key amendments which we have discussed in detail include:

- formalisation of the existing composition of the members of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority board, which will ensure continued strong representation of traditional owners, along with additional expertise in development and governance; the existing practice includes 10 Aboriginal members nominated by land councils and two additional members nominated by the minister

- the transfer and adding of parties to authority certificates, which allows for existing certificates to be transferred or have additional parties added, as long as the proposed work and use of the land are the same and all existing conditions in protecting the sacred sites remain unchanged

- the enforceable undertakings, which will provide a useful tool for the authority to continue to ensure rigorous protection of sacred sites in the NT and increased powers to ensure remediation occurs where there are any issues.

The Aboriginal Land Rights Act requires that laws concerning sacred sites must provide a mechanism which takes into account the wishes of Aboriginal people in determining the extent to which those sites are protected.

The process of transferring authority certificates is administrative in nature, and all protective conditions imposed at the time of issuing the original certificate will carry over to the new party or as new names are added, ensuring the continuing protection of sacred sites. This new provision is consistent with the requirements of the Commonwealth's Aboriginal Land Rights Act, as it does not seek to change any of the protections initially imposed, which would have considered the wishes of the relevant custodians for the extent to which sacred sites are protected in respect of the same work and use.

There is no proposal or intent to change the way any sacred site is protected. Where there is a change to the works or proposed use of land, or a proponent seeks to change the protective conditions that had been imposed, this administrative transfer would not be available, and the proponent must apply for a new authority certificate.

Similarly, with long-term large-scale development projects involving multiple entities, the amendments will allow the holder of an existing authority certificate to apply for additional individuals or groups to be listed as recorded parties. Currently, each entity must go through the process to obtain a certificate, even if it is for the same area of land and the same works. The amendments simply allow for continuity of approved work where there is no change to the nature or location of the work or the use of the land. Most importantly, the provisions do not permit new types of work or altered activity without further assessment and, when necessary, renewed consultation with custodians, which many have spoken about this evening.

The suggestion that this legislation prioritises economic development over cultural authority is unfounded. This approach is consistent with the principles of both the Sacred Sites Act and the Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights Act, which aim to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage while enabling responsible land use.

The implementation of an enforceable undertakings regime will introduce a fair and constructive approach to compliance, allowing for negotiated outcomes for minor breaches rather than immediate prosecution; the AAPA board has called for that. The Bill does not reframe or diminish the authority's core role of protecting sacred sites. It maintains the authority's fundamental responsibility to ensure that any proposed use of land does not pose a risk to sacred sites and the custodians are consulted and their knowledge respected before a certificate is issued. These changes are designed to empower the authority and to encourage greater collaboration between proponents and the authority by creating opportunities to resolve issues with respect to sacred sites.

It has been more than 30 years since the Act was substantially updated, during which time there have been considerable economic, political and social developments in the Territory. I had a number of conversations with industry stakeholders who raised the issue of certificate cost and the inability to transfer, as well as the resulting inefficiencies that stem from those issues.

We want proponents to get their certificate. We want them to look at their certificate as though it is a golden ticket—something they must work hard to obtain and comply with. That is why this Bill is aimed at reducing the process duplication. It is providing much-needed and long overdue clarity on fees and enforcement, which will be addressed through changes to the regulations.

The Territory has some of the strongest sacred site protections in Australia, as mentioned by those opposite, and there is no intention to change that. These amendments have been in discussion for some time and are necessary to improve the process for everyone involved.

Consultation has been spoken about at length this evening. In addition to the extensive consultation with traditional owners, industry stakeholders and government agencies as part of the comprehensive 2016 review, I engaged in a face-to-face meeting with the board of the authority where I gave notice that I intended to make amendments to the Act …

Ms Uibo: What about the 2024 work?

Mr Edgington: You had your turn to speak. Why do you not give him a chance?

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please! Come on.

Mr BURGOYNE: I had face-to-face and videoconference meetings with executive members of the four land councils on Thursday 20 March 2025 and a face-to-face meeting with the full Central Land Council at Yulara on Thursday 10 April 2025, where I answered more than 30 questions from councillors over a one-hour period.

It is important to acknowledge the work done in regard to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee report. This government appreciates the careful work of the scrutiny committee. I thank each of its members for their work in consideration of this Bill, as well as every member or organisation in our community that made submissions. The government notes the advice obtained by the committee from the independent legal adviser, Mr Ned Aughterson, which confirmed that the amendments were not contrary to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, commonly known as ALRA. The report stated on page 18:

> *As noted in the Explanatory Statement, Professor Aughterson agreed that, in his view, proposed sections 24A and 24B are not inconsistent with the ALRA or section 42 of the Act …*

That being the transfer provisions.

I will go through the recommendations that the committee put forward. Recommendation 1 is:

> *The Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly pass the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 with the proposed amendments set out in recommendations 2–4.*

This government accepts that recommendation in part. The government proposes to pass the Bill, but without change. Careful consideration was given to each of the recommendations in consultation with the authority and the basis for this decision is as follows.

Recommendation 2 is:

> *The Committee recommends that proposed section 6 be amended to include criteria or matters the Minister should take into account when nominating members of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.*

It is considered that legislative amendment is not required for this, as this matter can be worked through between the minister and the authority operationally, as has been done in the past. I highlight that the reason for the change in this Act is that the process for the minister to appoint and terminate, if needed, ministerial appointments is not explicitly laid out in the current Act.

Recommendation 3 is:

> *The Committee recommends that, to ensure the integrity of the original Authority Certificate is retained, consideration be given to amending the Bill to provide that the substance of the Authority Certificate is separated from the identity of the holders of the Certificate, such that the Certificate contains the substance of the given authority, including any conditions, with an addendum that identifies the holders of the Certificate.*

Again, this is an operational matter for the authority, and legislative amendment is not required. As an administrative change it is not necessary for this to be legislated. It would also be an administrative burden for the authority by requiring an additional register to record the authority certificate holders. I spoke to the authority about how this could work, and this is the advice I was given.

Recommendation 4 is:

> *The Committee recommends that, if not covered by an existing process, proposed sections 24A and 24B be amended to require that the Authority must notify custodians of any Authority Certificate transfers and the name/s of the holder/s of the Certificate.*

Once again, I consulted the authority on this. Notifying custodians of any authority certificate transfer and the names of the holders on the certificate is another operational matter that the authority is already working through, so it does not require legislative amendment.

I will acknowledge some of the comments made by honourable members in response to this Bill. I thank the Members for Arafura, Mulka, Gwoja and Daly, the Opposition Leader and the Members for Nightcliff and Johnston for their contributions.

Meaningful consultation was raised by all members this evening. I once again sincerely highlight the consultation gone through in regard to this Bill. We had meetings with the board and land councils. I was invited in writing by the Central Land Council to attend its meeting, and I thank the Central Land Council for writing to me in my capacity as a minister. I went out of my way to ensure I could make that meeting at Yulara. We drove there and listened to what everyone had to say. These representatives of their regions were passionate in the words they spoke, and I outlined our government's reasons for putting forward this Bill. I thought it was a productive meeting. I am thankful to those representatives for their time and for enabling me to stand in front of them all to explain why we are making these amendments.

Members opposite spoke about weakening sacred sites laws, but that is incorrect; this legislation is to strengthen sacred sites. Sacred sites need to be known about and protected. By ensuring there is an ability

for people to transfer authority certificates, more people will ensure they have an AAPA certificate and know where the sacred sites are so that those sites can be protected. The Member for Arafura mentioned that if a knowledge holder from 1993 passes away, their protections might be lost. I highlight that the whole reason for the ability to transfer is to ensure that the knowledge from knowledge holders is held in perpetuity. The knowledge and story that were told in that certificate as it was originally laid out will be held in perpetuity for all time as it is transferred.

Enforceable undertakings were mentioned by several people, and there was a lot of confusion. The Member for Gwoja spoke about enforceable undertakings being something he had worked to draft, but I am unsure whether he supported this. There was talk of a $160,000 fine and that penalties needed to be increased, yet through two terms of Labor government nothing was done in this regard. That is interesting. There was talk from the Member for Gwoja that it was good legislation in regard to enforceable undertakings.

Enforceable undertakings have been brought in at the request of the authority. Currently, there are blunt tools for recompense for traditional owners who feel that there have been breaches, such as exclusion zones being entered and desecration of or damage to sacred sites. It was mentioned a number of times that some members felt that $160,000 in regard to recent decisions made by the courts was insufficient.

Enforceable undertakings will mean that the authority, in conjunction with traditional owners, can go to an entity and, if they can, come to an agreement on the relevant compensation that needs to be paid and the works to ensure that traditional owners are satisfied. If at the end of an enforceable undertaking process someone is still not happy with what has been agreed to, legal proceedings can take place. That is an important process to talk through.

The Member for Gwoja mentioned the money that will go to TOs. A lot of people may not understand that when AAPA—the authority—takes legal action against an entity and the legal action is successful, the money goes to the entity taking that legal action. That is what I have been advised. TOs raised with that me. Through the enforceable undertaking regime, if an agreement is put in place between traditional owners and a proponent, there will be the ability for traditional owners to receive compensation as a result. Many people have overlooked that.

Ms Uibo: There is also an ability for them to be taken for granted. They do not have the legal entity straight through with the land councils. We asked, and that was the answer.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, silence!

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to also note that many people spoke about the scrutiny committee being a farce. It is a process for people to have their voices heard, as is this debate. It is an opportunity to hear the concerns of those opposite. It is their job to consult with their communities; by the sounds of it, some have and others believe they have not had the ability or time to do so.

It is important to mention—people who are new to this Chamber perhaps will not understand this—that in the past in regard to legislation and debates in this Chamber the Country Liberal Party in opposition was silenced. There were motions to move that the question be put and little ability for us to speak on many debates, which was extraordinarily frustrating. I genuinely sat through everyone's contributions and listened to them all because it is important legislation. Everyone acknowledges that.

We may differ in our opinions on the Bill's ability to strengthen the Sacred Sites Act; however, we consider that it will mean that more people will get an AAPA certificate, which is what I want. It frustrates me when we chat to people in the regions and they say that it is too difficult to get an AAPA certificate because the process is too costly, it takes too much time and, at the end of the day, we have no idea. This government is trying to ensure that a proponent seeking to purchase new land or go to a new site can continue with the same work that has been conducted there. They will be able to have that certificate transferred to them, understand explicitly where those sacred sites are and the provisions that are held in that AAPA certificate and comply with them.

Mr Paech: Why didn't you implement all the recommendations?

Madam SPEAKER: Enough, Member for Gwoja!

Mr BURGOYNE: Agreeing to this Bill provides for long overdue modernisation of this legislation to bring it in line with contemporary expectations for both sacred site protection and development. It is a step towards clearer, more efficient processes in the Northern Territory.

I acknowledge all officers who contributed to this Bill, including those from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority; the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; and the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Motion agreed to; Bill read a second time.

Consideration in detail

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can we focus on consideration in detail? No interjections, thanks. We will go through clause by clause, as is the right of the Assembly. I remind people that questions must be relevant to the clauses.

Clause 1:

Mr BROWN: What is the effect of including both the Act and regulations in the title?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Bill when passed will be cited as the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Legislation Amendment Bill. Clause 1 states the short title of the Bill.

Ms UIBO: It would be unusual for an Act to have the regulations in the title. Why is it just included as an annexe?

Mr BURGOYNE: The regulations, in this case, work with the transfer provisions which is why that is the case.

Ms UIBO: To clarify, rather than have it as a separate annexe, having it in the title means it is all part of the one Act essentially. If it were to be amended in the future, would the whole legislation have to be changed rather than just the regulations?

Mr BURGOYNE: To be clear, one fee is for the transfer of certificates; that is coming as part of this Bill in the regulations. There will be further regulations that relate to other parts of the Bill.

Ms UIBO: On the tail end of my previous question, if the regulations are to change, would that require an amendment by parliament, or could you change the regulation in the normal process?

Mr BURGOYNE: These two fee structures are being written into the Act, but there is the ability to change regulation at a further date.

Ms UIBO: Would that require an Act of parliament, or could that be via a gazettal process?

Mr BURGOYNE: It would not require us to come back to parliament to change those regulations.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2:

Mr BROWN: Why not fix a date to allow implementation readiness?

Mr BURGOYNE: The Bill will commence on the day after which the Administrator's assent is declared, as is the case with most Bills.

Mr BROWN: Will transitional guidance be available immediately following assent?

Mr BURGOYNE: The purpose of having two of the regs written into the Act means that it can commence and there are fees in place in regard to the structure. The rest of the regulation, as with many Bills that pass through the House, will be formulated at a later date. Anything that needs to be worked out in the meantime will be worked out with the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Ms UIBO: Once assent by the Administrator enacts the amendments for this legislation, will the department or the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority issue any type of notification to landholders who have already been issued an AAPA certificate in the past, so they are aware of this change?

Mr BURGOYNE: Are you asking whether AAPA will advise every AAPA certificate holder of the changes to the legislation?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr BURGOYNE: There are 20,000 authority certificates that have been issued by the authority over its time. The authority will not go through them one by one to advise current authority holders of the changes. What will happen is that any time anyone interacts with the authority, seeks to transfer a certificate or commence a new one, they will be working with the authority to ensure they are complying with the relevant regulations.

Ms UIBO: A proponent who may be looking to get a transfer of certificate may be aware of this amendment. Once it is assented by the Administrator for commencement, under clause 2, would that then mean there is a disadvantage to the landholder who was originally issued one of the 20,000 AAPA certificates, not knowing what this change actually means once it commences, as per clause 2?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am happy to answer further questions about the transfer of certificates at the relevant clause. We are talking about the commencement date, which will be on the day after the day on which the Administrator's assent is declared.

Ms UIBO: We will ask this question a bit later as well. We do not have a commencement date; it is whenever the Administrator signs off on it. Therefore, we want to know how people would know that the transfer is available if they have been issued an AAPA certificate which they may be requested to transfer.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 4:

Mr BROWN: Clause 4 amends section 3. Does the new definition of 'recorded party' provide sufficient clarity for enforcement?

Mr BURGOYNE: A recorded party for an authority certificate will mean a person who is specified in the certificate as a recorded party for the certificate.

Mr BROWN: Why does this not recommend guidance on implications for liability?

Mr BURGOYNE: It simply amends the definitions to ensure that those that are listed—we have an enforceable undertaking defined by new section 39B—are a 'recorded party'.

Ms UIBO: In terms of the enforceable undertaking, would any penalties, if there were any, remain the same?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am happy to discuss this further at the relevant clause; this is simply defining the amended definitions.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5:

Ms UIBO: In terms of the nomination of the members, will there be clear criteria to meet the appointment by you and any future minister in this position?

Mr BURGOYNE: Section 6 is being amended to clarify the way in which the minister can appoint those members of the authority. The way the previous Act was written was, let us say, grey in regard to the function, the way in which a minister could appoint and/or remove ministerial members of the board. This clarifies the process in which that will now take place and the ability of the minister to appoint or remove members as they see fit.

J DAVIS: Why are comparable qualities specified for criteria for Aboriginal members of the authority and not for ministerially appointed members?

Mr BURGOYNE: The balance is essential on this board to ensure that decisions made by the authority take into account a wider range of interest. As it relates to the Aboriginal members, those members are put forward

by the relevant land councils, so there are nominated members. The ministerial members, as with many boards, are appointed by the minister.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6:

Mr BROWN: Are you aware of stakeholder concerns that this change could politicise the authority and erode independence?

Mr BURGOYNE: I want to be clear in regard to this. Previously, ministers could choose anyone they deemed necessary to go on the board. To say now that it is a political—what words did you use, Member for Arafura?

Mr BROWN: Erode independence.

Mr BURGOYNE: This does not seek to erode the independence of the board; it simply ensures that the minister's appointments are just that—they are members appointed to the board by the minister.

Mr BROWN: Does this allow the minister too much discretion over the authority composition?

Mr BURGOYNE: To the contrary—it clearly identifies the way in which the minister can appoint and/or remove any member who is appointed under the minister. It was not made clear in the previous Act, and this makes it explicit.

J DAVIS: Why does the Administrator not also have the power to terminate ministerially appointed members if they are incompetent or misbehave?

Mr BURGOYNE: The advice I have is that any decision made by the minister in regard to a statutory authority still goes to the Administrator for sign-off. At the end of the day, the minister makes the decision as to whether to appoint or remove, then the sign-off is made by the Administrator.

J DAVIS: Does the Administrator have the power to terminate a ministerially appointed member if they misbehave or are incompetent?

Mr BURGOYNE: The practice is not that the Administrator steps in and removes someone; the practice is that the minister recommends someone be removed and the Administrator fulfils that request.

Mr BROWN: Can you explain the justification for granting broad new powers to terminate the appointment of board members of AAPA at will?

Mr BURGOYNE: There is what has been happening in practice in regard to ministerial appointments to the AAPA board, and there is what is articulated in the current Act. We are formalising the process by which a minister can appoint and remove ministerial appointments to the AAPA board.

Mr BROWN: What safeguards are in place to ensure that the independence and integrity of AAPA will not be compromised by political influence and interference?

Mr BURGOYNE: The makeup of the board is 10 members put forward by the land councils and only two members put forward by the minister, so there will always be—even in low quorum situations—a majority of Aboriginal members, who were put forward by the land councils.

Mr BROWN: Did you consider consulting Aboriginal stakeholders and land councils before introducing these changes and, if not, why not?

Mr BURGOYNE: In my wrap-up speech I covered consultation in regard to this clause.

Mr BROWN: Why has the government chosen to grant such broad ministerial powers to remove members from the AAPA board, given stakeholder concerns about the independence and impartiality of AAPA?

Mr BURGOYNE: I believe I have answered those questions.

Mr BROWN: Can you provide assurances on how political influence will be mitigated under these provisions?

Mr BURGOYNE: The provisions clarify it by reflecting that such persons are the minister's own nominees. Once the minister makes the recommendation, the Administrator may remove the member or appoint a member, when a member is being appointed to the AAPA board.

I also advise that AAPA has advised me that there are closer to 4,000 certificates, not 20,000. I would not want to be seen to be misleading, so I clarify that. I previously had been told 20,000, but now have been advised that it is closer to 4,000.

Mr BROWN: Why were limits or criteria for termination to prevent potential abuse not included?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is not the issue we are trying to remedy. The issue we are trying to fix is that the Act does not clearly specify the ability for a minister to appoint or remove members of the AAPA board.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7:

Ms UIBO: What safeguards exist to ensure sacred site protections are upheld with the new parties—the people who are getting the transfer?

Mr BURGOYNE: As with all AAPA certificates, it outlines the responsibilities in regard to the certificate, the sacred sites and any restricted work areas that may be entered into. Anyone who has been transferred a certificate has to ensure that they comply with the undertakings in that certificate.

Ms UIBO: Can the government explain how this Bill complies with section 73(1)(a) of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* which explicitly requires the consideration of Aboriginal issues when legislating about sacred sites?

Mr BURGOYNE: The new provision is consistent with the requirements of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* as it does not seek to change any of the protections initially imposed which would have considered the wishes of the relevant custodians regarding the extent to which sacred sites are protected in respect of the same work and use.

J DAVIS: What protection does this Bill offer to prevent an entity which has previously contravened sacred sites legislation or not complied with an enforceable undertaking in the Northern Territory or elsewhere from receiving a transfer certificate?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to note that for any transfer or authority certificate which is granted to anyone in the Northern Territory, as long as they comply with all the relevant conditions in that AAPA certificate, they are allowed to continue. If they breach any conditions, they will be open, as anyone else would, to either prosecution or, now, the enforcement undertakings if agreed to with AAPA traditional owners and the certificate holder.

J DAVIS: To clarify, there is no protection offered if someone has previously contravened the Act, is insolvent or has done something against the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*; it is only if they do something wrong in the future. Have I understood that correctly?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to remember that through this process we are not prejudging any proponent or anyone in regard to this. As long as they comply with the AAPA certificate which has been issued and ensure that they protect the sacred sites laid out in the certificate, they will be allowed to continue their activities. If at any point in time they do not comply and are found to be breaching that, they, as would anyone else, will either have legal ramifications or have to enter into an enforceable agreement as agreed to between AAPA and the traditional owners.

J DAVIS: If an entity has previously been convicted of an offence or acting against the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, that will not be taken into consideration when a certificate is transferred.

Mr BURGOYNE: I have answered the question.

J DAVIS: Is the answer yes?

Mr BURGOYNE: I know what you are trying to get at.

J DAVIS: I am trying to understand.

Can you clarify what would happen if an authority certificate is transferred and the certificate is silent on a particular aspect of the proposed works—the height of a building, for example—that may not have been considered in the original application? Specifically, what are the consequences if the new certificate holder proceeds with works that were not originally envisaged which result in harm or desecration of a sacred site and go against the wishes of traditional owners?

Mr BURGOYNE: The conditions that were laid out in the original authority certificate carry over and it ensures that whoever conducts work that is of the same nature as the original certificate can do so, complying with the necessary conditions as part of that AAPA certificate.

J DAVIS: If there is a part of work not envisaged in the original certificate, and that work is against the wishes of traditional owners, could that work still go ahead with the certificate transfer?

Mr BURGOYNE: The original certificate with all its conditions carry over to ensure the protection of any sacred sites that may be impacted.

J DAVIS: Once again, I want to be clear. If there is something that was not envisaged, we know that some of these …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Johnston, the minister has answered this a number of times. I do not think he needs to restate it.

Ms UIBO: What is the rationale for allowing authority certificates to be transferred without fresh consultation with Aboriginal custodians?

Mr BURGOYNE: As outlined in my speech this evening, it is important to ensure that the original intent, the protection of those sacred sites, is laid out and the original certificate is carried through in perpetuity. This seeks to do that, to ensure that the sacred sites are acknowledged and protected into the future. Any new owner who comes into that site can have that AAPA certificate transferred, so they are aware of the sacred sites and have to comply with the conditions laid out in it.

Ms UIBO: How will the government ensure that cultural knowledge and sensitivities are appropriately considered if the certificate is transferred decades after its original consent?

Mr BURGOYNE: As we spoke about, it is about ensuring that the intent of that certificate to protect the sacred sites is transferred in perpetuity. That is why it is such an important Act.

Ms UIBO: If an Aboriginal custodian wanted to revoke an AAPA certificate, could that occur, which would then mean that the transfer of certificate could not take place?

Mr BURGOYNE: There is no ability to revoke an AAPA certificate. That is currently the case.

Ms UIBO: I know you spoke about this at length in your wrap-up of the debate, but I want to reassure people who may have questions about this with the transfer of authority certificates. If there was a new development on country, a new proposal and a new proponent, would that proponent still need to go through the whole process of applying for the certificate? Would they automatically get a transfer if it was a different type of development? It has been explained as like for like. The rationale for the question is the open letter from the CLC which talks about the size of a like-for-like project. If it is a small mine versus a large mine, would that be covered, or if it was a complete change of scale of project?

Mr BURGOYNE: The intent of the Bill is that the agreed works are the same. If someone is authorised an AAPA certificate to conduct mining activities on that land and will continue operating a mine on that land, it may be transferred.

Certificates often can be a lengthy process. My discussions with AAPA are often about the length of time and the in-depth consultation that occurs to ensure that an AAPA certificate can be issued. We are streamlining this process so that once those processes have been gone through and all sacred sites have been identified, the knowledge in that certificate and the protections in place can be transferred.

Ms UIBO: The reason for my next question is what happened recently in my electorate, as you would be aware, where a sacred site has been damaged and destroyed. In this case, could a transfer of authority

certificate still occur even if the sacred site has been damaged or no longer exists? For example, another—in my case, a mine—proponent comes in to use or develop a site but the sacred site under that AAPA certificate no longer exists because it has already been damaged by the previous AAPA certificate holder?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important that sacred sites are clearly identified. If in any case, as you outlined, a sacred site is destroyed, action will be taken by the authority, but the site itself remains as part of the certificate. That is important to acknowledge.

Ms UIBO: Thank you; that is heartening to hear.

Have you received legal advice on the potential breach of the principle of free, prior and informed consent as protected in the federal legislation?

Mr BURGOYNE: The advice that has been given to the parliament and the committee does not raise any issues in regard to the legality of these amendments or their ability to engage with the Act.

Ms UIBO: To confirm, have you received legal advice?

Mr BURGOYNE: We have received legal advice.

Ms UIBO: Given the overwhelming opposition in the submissions received by the scrutiny committee regarding the transfer of authority certificates without renewed custodians' consultation, why has this provision been retained in this legislation?

Mr BURGOYNE: Is that in regard to transfers?

Ms UIBO: Yes. In terms of the opposition through the public scrutiny committee, why has the government kept this clause?

Mr BURGOYNE: This is the intent of the Bill and what this government is seeking to do.

Ms UIBO: Is it purely based on government principle, not on the submissions of organisations and land councils?

Mr BURGOYNE: We spoke a lot about the 39 recommendations in the 2016 report. Some people believe that more recommendations from that report should be included in this Bill. We can all agree that the transferability of certificates was part of that review. We have taken that, along with what some would consider minor and other alterations to the Act, one being enforceable undertakings. That was put forward at the authority's guidance to ensure that there is strong regulation in the ability to protect sacred sites, so we can streamline approvals processes whilst also ensuring the protection of sacred sites throughout the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO: There is lots of reference to the 2016 report, but there is nothing about the 2023 or 2024 work.

What safeguards exist to ensure that original cultural context and custodial consent are still respected if authority certificates are transferred?

Mr BURGOYNE: The conditions are laid out in the AAPA certificate.

J DAVIS: If a new building is being put on a site, will that require a new certificate so that the specifications of that building can be …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Johnston, I think we addressed this in the previous question.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is all right, Mr Deputy Speaker; I am happy to answer.

It is important to understand that the original AAPA certificate that has been issued, as long as the works and use are the same as the original issue of the certificate, then the same works and use under the certificate can be continued, other parties can be added and the certificate can be transferred.

J DAVIS: Would a new building require a new certificate? It is a genuine question.

Mr BURGOYNE: Absolutely. As long as the use is the same as the original authority certificate, they can continue utilising that space in line with the conditions laid out under the original AAPA certificate.

Mr BROWN: I refer to new section 24B. Why does the Bill allow new parties to be added to existing authority certificates without consulting with custodians?

Mr BURGOYNE: New section 24B reduces the regulatory burden and red tape in long-term projects involving multiple parties by eliminating the need for each new party to apply for a separate authority certificate for the same work and land, ensuring continuity and efficiency.

Mr BROWN: What steps will be taken to ensure that custodians remain fully informed about additional parties added to certificates issued for their land?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is an operational matter for AAPA. In my conversations with AAPA it has advised me that it would be undertaking to advise traditional owners.

Ms UIBO: Why was it not added to this new section, since it is being created?

Mr BURGOYNE: As with all legislation, there is that which needs to be explicitly laid out in the Act and that which is deemed to be operational.

The authority also gave me examples. If in one case there was no continuation of certificate holders, and it is explicitly laid out they must, how are they meant to find someone who does not exist? It is about ensuring we give AAPA the ability to operate and do the work it has been doing for many years, while not explicitly putting something into the Act that may then inhibit AAPA from fulfilling its role.

Mr BROWN: Do you acknowledge that this provision risks undermining trust between Aboriginal custodians and developers?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is not the intent.

Mr BROWN: In light of submissions highlighting risks to custodians' authority and cultural integrity, why does this Bill allow additional recorded parties to be added to certificates without custodians' consent?

Mr BURGOYNE: The AAPA Act clearly outlines AAPA's role in ensuring it is protecting sacred sites. As long as a certificate is transferred appropriately, all the information and conditions are transferred across. AAPA is fulfilling its role in protecting sacred sites whilst ensuring that a certificate can be granted to a new entity.

Mr BROWN: How will custodians be informed of new parties being added to certificates affecting their sacred sites?

Mr BURGOYNE: In line with the operational workings of AAPA (Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority).

Clause 7 agreed to.

Clause 8:

Mr BROWN: Clause 8 amends section 25. Could this unintentionally expand immunity for misconduct?

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause updates section 25 as a consequential amendment. This happens as a result of updating other parts of the Act. In new section 24B both the holder of the authority certificate and the recorded parties can use or work on the land in accordance with the authority certificate.

Mr BROWN: Can you clarify the circumstances under which enforceable undertakings would be accepted as an alternative to prosecution for damage to sacred sites?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am happy to do so in the relevant clause.

Ms UIBO: Under which clause can we ask that question?

Mr BURGOYNE: Clause 9, the next one.

Mr BROWN: Will custodians be involved in negotiations or have any say on the terms of enforceable undertakings?

Mr BURGOYNE: We need to sign off on clause 8, then I am happy to answer any questions on clause 9.

Mr BROWN: How will transparency and accountability be guaranteed? Why is there no mandatory requirement to inform custodians?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is not explicitly written in the Act to ensure that AAPA does not then comply with the very Act it is meant to. It is an operational task for which AAPA has advised me it is something that it would do.

Mr BROWN: Given scrutiny committee submissions expressed concern about enforceable undertakings undermining custodians' involvement and transparency, why has the government opted for this mechanism over prosecution?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am happy to address that in clause 9.

Mr BROWN: Can you detail how custodians will be involved in decisions regarding enforceable undertakings following damage to sacred sites?

Mr BURGOYNE: I am happy to address that in clause 9.

Mr BROWN: Do you acknowledge that without clear liability limits for recorded parties, there is a risk that accountability is diluted? Why not include them?

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause updates section 25 as a consequential amendment of the new section 24B so that both the holder of the authority certificate and the recorded parties can use or work on the land in accordance with the authority certificate. It is simply a consequential amendment to section 25 in regard to what are we doing with new section 24B.

Mr BROWN: Did the government consider the potential for unintended immunity implications?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not believe that is relevant to the clause.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9:

Ms UIBO: Can you clarify the circumstances in which enforceable undertakings would be accepted as an alternative to prosecution in regard to damage to a sacred site?

Mr BURGOYNE: The enforceable undertaking will be entered into between AAPA and a proponent if in any case an alleged contravention of this Act or term or condition of an authority certificate has been found to have occurred.

Ms UIBO: Would there be any notification to the land councils to this effect?

Mr BURGOYNE: As AAPA is the authority that protects sacred sites, it is relevant that it works with traditional owners to ensure that they are protecting those sacred sites.

Ms UIBO: If the landowner who had provided that original certificate chose to engage the land councils, would AAPA also involve the land council on the wishes of the custodian?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is important to define the operation in regard to this. An enforceable undertaking is entered into between the authority and traditional owners and a proponent. The authority may accept an enforceable undertaking given to a person in connection with an alleged contravention of the Act and a range of other issues.

VISITOR
Kris Civitarese

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, I draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Litchfield Councillor Kris Civitarese. Welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

Ms UIBO: It must be a bit slow in Litchfield tonight to come and watch parliament! Welcome, Kris.

Will custodians be involved in negotiations or have any say in the terms of enforceable undertakings and the penalties?

Mr BURGOYNE: New section 39C(2) states:

The authority must consider the following before accepting the enforceable undertaking:

(a) the nature and gravity of the conduct constituting the alleged contravention;

(b) if applicable – the maximum penalty provided for the alleged contravention;

(c) the benefits of the proposed undertaking and the public interest;

(d) the interests of justice;

(e) any other factor that the Authority considers relevant.

Working in conjunction with traditional owners and AAPA, that is the reason that enforceable undertakings are being brought forward.

J DAVIS: Will the authority be required to monitor compliance with enforceable undertakings, or will this be the responsibility of the party to the undertaking?

Mr BURGOYNE: The enforceable undertaking must be in writing, be signed by the authority and the person who gives the undertaking and be dated. The authority must publish on the authority's website, or in any other way determined to be appropriate by the authority, notice of the decision to accept the enforceable undertaking and the reason for that decision. If an enforceable undertaking is not completed or found not to have been complied with, prosecution could occur.

J DAVIS: Who will be monitoring the compliance? Will that be up to the party to the undertaking, or will it be AAPA?

Mr BURGOYNE: It will be AAPA (Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority).

J DAVIS: As AAPA will be responsible for enforcing these undertakings, will there be additional resources for AAPA to do that?

Mr BURGOYNE: That is separate to the clause we are talking about, but I have had at-length discussions with AAPA about ensuring it has all the necessary resources as we transfer the Act over.

Ms UIBO: Given scrutiny committee submissions expressed concerns about enforceable undertakings undermining custodian involvement and transparency, why has the government opted for this mechanism over prosecution?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is not that we are putting this over prosecution; it was made clear to us that the tools available to AAPA to resolve disputes between traditional owners and proponents, or in some cases not to go down the road of legal prosecution if it is not what traditional owners want, is limited. If there is any desecration, damage or entry into prohibited areas that AAPA is made aware of, I have been advised that prosecution was its only means of dealing with that.

We are trying to give another tool which AAPA can use to work with traditional owners and proponents to ensure that there can be an amicable outcome in which traditional owners feel reparations can be made to ensure their sacred sites are protected and if they wish work to continue to occur, it can.

Ms UIBO: Can you detail how custodians will be involved in those decisions about enforceable undertakings following damage to a sacred site?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is an operational matter for AAPA. Currently as it relates to any matters of damage to sacred sites, it works with the relevant traditional owners and prosecutes that matter. If there is another option, enforceable undertakings, they will inform traditional owners and work with them on the best course of action.

Ms UIBO: As this new provision is being inserted, would AAPA then provide a list of possible or available enforceable undertakings so that people know what actions would be pursued if a sacred site was damaged and there was no prosecution?

Mr BURGOYNE: New section 39B(4) clarifies that negotiations about the undertaking do not affect or compromise the legal rights, claims or positions of any party involved. Generally speaking, if negotiations fail neither party can use what was said or agreed upon during the discussions against the other in any future legal proceedings. It is about ensuring that we try to find an amicable enforceable undertaking. If one cannot be made, legal prosecution is still available to AAPA.

Ms UIBO: That was a good answer. I was thinking of a simple undertaking in terms of whether AAPA would have criteria to show people what enforceable undertakings may look like, because it is a new provision. Would there be something on a website to show examples of what enforceable undertakings could be? Obviously prosecution is clear.

Mr BURGOYNE: New section 39C(2) requires the authority to consider various matters before accepting an undertaking, including the nature and gravity of the conduct, the maximum penalty for the alleged contravention and the benefits of the proposed undertaking and the public interest and the interests of justice. There is a number of things that AAPA must consider, along with traditional owners, before entering into an enforceable undertaking.

Ms UIBO: Would that be published and available for the general public, or would that be retained only within AAPA itself?

Mr BURGOYNE: Any agreed enforceable undertaking, as stated previously, has to be published on the website.

J DAVIS: What is desecration understood to mean under this Act, and how does this differ from damage?

Mr BURGOYNE: Desecration is an offence, as are other contraventions of the AAPA certificate. The penalties are not tiered. If an offence occurs, AAPA deals with the traditional owners. Previously they would have gone through a process of prosecution, and now they will be able to deal with the proponent to see whether an enforceable undertaking can be agreed to. If not, prosecution is still available to them.

J DAVIS: It will be up to AAPA and the TOs to determine whether it is desecration and whether there will be an enforceable undertaking or there needs to be another pathway; is that correct?

Mr BURGOYNE: Desecration is not defined. If it goes to prosecution, it will be a matter for the courts. If it goes into an enforceable undertaking, it will be between traditional owners, the proponent and AAPA to decide on a penalty that they all agree to.

Mr BROWN: How were fee levels determined? What measures exist to prevent fees from becoming a barrier to custodians?

Mr BURGOYNE: There are no fees for custodians for enforceable undertakings. There is no fee sought by AAPA to enter into an enforceable undertaking. There are fees for transfers and for a new certificate.

Ms UIBO: If a custodian had a site damaged, do they have to engage in any fee to have that enforceable undertaking occur? I am making sure that they will not be out of pocket.

Mr BURGOYNE: No, it is the role of AAPA to ensure that traditional owners are represented in these matters.

Mr BROWN: Has the government modelled the potential impacts of these fees on Aboriginal individuals and communities? If so, can these assessments be made publicly available?

Mr BURGOYNE: The last question answered that one.

Mr BROWN: How will this be monitored to ensure enforceable undertakings are not used in place of prosecution where warranted?

Mr BURGOYNE: An enforceable undertaking will have to be entered into with the agreement of all parties.

Mr BROWN: Can you clarify the basis for introducing new fees for transferring certificates and adding recorded parties?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is an administrative fee that has been agreed upon.

Mr BROWN: Will exemptions or waivers be provided to ensure that these fees do not become a barrier to Aboriginal custodians seeking protection of their sacred sites?

Mr BURGOYNE: There is a provision within the Act which allows for fees to be waived if AAPA decides it is necessary.

Mr BROWN: How will the fees collected be utilised by AAPA? Will funds specifically support Aboriginal cultural heritage initiatives?

Mr BURGOYNE: Fees go to consolidated revenue, but AAPA works on a cost-recovery model. I have been discussing with AAPA how we can ensure that any additional undertakings it now has to comply with can be cost recovered.

J DAVIS: I do not really understand this. People are asking me about it, and I am not sure how to answer.

If there is desecration of a site, will that be dealt with under enforceable undertakings?

Mr BURGOYNE: The purpose of this is to ensure that traditional owners and AAPA have another means by which they can seek reparations for any offences that occur in regard to a sacred site. They are not tiering or saying that we will or will not deal with certain things differently. The advice given to me from AAPA is that it is unlikely to enter into an enforceable undertaking where desecration of a sacred site has occurred. It is all about enabling another tool for AAPA and traditional owners to get the desired outcome.

One thing that has always been said to me is that there may not be the ability to get a successful prosecution, in which case, how do you ensure that traditional owners get a positive outcome? Although something terrible may have happened, if you cannot prove who did that to a sacred site, there cannot be any successful prosecution. However, there may be an entity that is willing to agree to an enforceable undertaking to ensure that it can continue work on that site. It is about ensuring that we can get agreement between AAPA, traditional owners and a proponent that anything that may go against the AAPA certificate can be dealt with appropriately. Prosecution is the only avenue that is currently available to AAPA, but it is not always successful.

Mr BROWN: How will the collected fees be transparently accounted for and reinvested into sacred sites protections?

Mr BURGOYNE: The benefit of enforceable undertakings is that you enter into an agreement that all parties agree with. As I said earlier and want to make clear, when a successful prosecution is made by AAPA of a proponent, that funding goes back into consolidated revenue. If an enforceable undertaking is agreed to between the proponent and traditional owners, they can possibly seek compensation. That has been made clear to me in my consultation with the members of land councils.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10:

Mr BROWN: Do these provisions ensure smooth application of the law to existing certificates and appointments?

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause inserts new Part VII, covering the new section 55 regarding transitional provisions to ensure a smooth transition when the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Amendment Act 2025 comes into effect.

New section 55(1) clarifies that a person who already held office as a member of the authority before the amendments take effect will remain in their position after the amendments commence.

New section 55(2) clarifies that an existing member who is not an Aboriginal member will now be considered a member appointed on the nomination of the minister. This updates their classification without requiring a new appointment.

New section 55(3) clarifies that section 7 applies to existing members after the amendments take effect and new sections 24A and 24B apply to authority certificates that were in place before the amendments. This ensures that the certificates will remain valid and be subject to the updated provisions.

New section 55(4) provides a definition for the terms ‘amending Act’ and ‘commencement’. It is all about the transitional part of this Act.

J DAVIS: In terms of the transitional arrangements, I understand for the ministerial appointments that currently one position is filled and the other is vacant. Under this new section, does that mean the minister could recommend the existing member be dismissed and replace them or will their role continue?

Mr BURGOYNE: This clause does not directly deal with membership; the previous clauses do. As stipulated, once this comes into effect the minister will have discretion as to the ministerial appointments, whether they remain or are removed.

J DAVIS: Is it the minister’s intent to dismiss Rachel Perkins?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not think we need to take that question, minister.

Mr BROWN: Can the minister explain why transitional provisions apply retrospectively to existing certificates without any further consultation with custodians?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is so every certificate can be transferred. That is essentially so it applies.

Mr BROWN: What assessments have been made regarding the potential cultural risk posed by developers relying on outdated certificates issued under significantly different circumstances?

Mr BURGOYNE: I do not believe that goes to this clause. This is purely a clause for the smooth transition from the old Act to the new Act.

Mr BROWN: Do you agree that this retrospective application undermines the original consultation and informed consent principles?

Mr BURGOYNE: I believe I answered that question previously.

Mr BROWN: In regard to nominated members, is there a veto power with the ministerial appointments compared with the Indigenous appointees from the land councils?

Mr BURGOYNE: I will allow leeway here, because I do not believe it is relevant to the clause.

I want to make clear in regard to Aboriginal members there are 10 positions. There are 20 people put forward to the minister, from which the minister selects those 10 members—five male and five female, so it is a balanced board. None of that changes.

I have dealt with a lot of the previous stuff in the other clauses.

Mr BROWN: Sorry, not the Aboriginal members; I mean the ministerial appointees to the 10 other board members from the land councils. Is there any difference in power, veto or voting power when they vote on things? That is what I am trying to get to.

Mr BURGOYNE: Under the Act, the ministerially appointed members are appointed by the minister. That is how it works.

Ms UIBO: We understand that. If there was an issue with the two ministerially appointed positions, could the other 10 members invoke some type of veto if they felt there was a conflict of interest with the ministerial appointees?

Mr BURGOYNE: We are getting a long way away from this clause.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, you are right.

Mr BURGOYNE: It is a board. It has all the responsibilities of any board under the …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think that answer suffices; thank you, minister.

Ms UIBO: The point is if there was the thought of political influence in one of—or maybe both—the ministerial appointees that the other 10 members may dissent or …

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister has already answered this question. He mentioned that it operates like a normal board, so we will leave it at that.

Mr BROWN: Can you justify the retrospective application provisions relating to transfers and recorded parties, despite strong opposition from Aboriginal stakeholders regarding cultural risks?

Mr BURGOYNE: I feel as though I answered this under the transfer clause.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Arafura, can you specifically talk about clause 10, please?

Mr BROWN: Yes.

What consultation, if any, has been conducted to assess the potential impacts of applying these provisions retrospectively?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have outlined the consultation which went into this.

Mr BROWN: Given significant stakeholder feedback suggesting noncompliance, has the government sought legal advice on potential breaches of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act? Can this advice be tabled?

Mr BURGOYNE: I have answered that question.

Clause 10 agreed to.

Clause 11, by leave, agreed to.

Clause 12:

Mr BROWN: Are the fees appropriate and not prohibitive?

Mr BURGOYNE: The fees have been agreed to with AAPA. It is an administrative application fee.

Mr BROWN: Given stakeholder feedback which called for waivers to be available for community applicants, will the minister consider amending it?

Mr BURGOYNE: As previously stated, someone can seek to have their fee waived through AAPA.

Mr BROWN: Is there fee transparency?

Mr BURGOYNE: The regulation outlines the fees.

Ms UIBO: Are there no changes or, as you stated in your earlier answer at clause 3, could you change the fees under the regulations but not bring it back to the parliament through the legislation?

Mr BURGOYNE: I can change the fee structure through regulation after the Bill is passed.

Ms UIBO: Would that occur via gazettal notice?

Mr BURGOYNE: It is my understanding that is normal practice.

Clause 12 agreed to.

Clause 13, by leave, agreed to.

Remainder of the Bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill agreed to.

Mr BURGOYNE (Lands, Planning and Environment): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 15	Noes 6
Ms Boothby	Mr Brown
Mr Burgoyne	J Davis
Ms Cahill	K McNamara
Mrs Carlson	Mr Paech
Mr Edgington	Ms Uibo
Mrs Hersey	Mr Young
Mr Howe	
Mr Kerle	
Mr Mackay	
Mr Maley	
Mr O'Gallagher	
Mr Patel	
Dr Rahman	
Mr Yan	
Mrs Zio	

Motion agreed to; Bill read a third time.

RESPONSES TO PETITIONS
Petition No 3 – Take Immediate and Effective Action to Protect Litchfield National Park from the Spread of Gamba Grass

The DEPUTY CLERK: Honourable members, a response to Petition Number 3 has been received from the Minister for Parks and Wildlife. It has been forwarded to the member for distribution to the petitioners.

Dear Mr Keith

Thank you for your correspondence regarding Petition 3 – Take immediate and effective action to protect Litchfield National Park from the spread of gamba grass.

The Northern Territory Government recognises the significant threat that gamba grass poses to Litchfield National Park's biodiversity, cultural values, tourism assets and visitor safety.

Our Government took gamba grass to the 2024 election as a key commitment because we understand how deeply this issue affects Territorians. Litchfield National Park is not only a tourism icon visited by over 250,000 people annually, but a treasured part of the Territory's lifestyle and identity. Protecting it is a priority.

Our Government is taking real and coordinated action to control the spread of gamba grass in Litchfield. Since coming to office, we have implemented a suite of targeted measures, including:

- *Establishing the 'Gamba Litchfield Loop'—a coordinated management model uniting Parks and Wildlife, the Weed Management Branch, councils, and landholders.*
- *Creating a dedicated Litchfield Gamba Group—a team tasked with surveying, spraying and monitoring for up to seven months each year.*
- *Appointing a Gamba Coordinator—to lead seasonal coordination across government and local partners.*
- *Launching the 'Litchfield Gamba Army'—an on-ground crew targeting gamba grass around high-use sites like Florence Falls and Central Valley.*
- *Prioritising key visitor areas—ensuring weed control near major infrastructure and campgrounds such as Buley Rockhole, Florence Falls, and Sandy Creek.*
- *Investing in technology—with quick-spray loggers to track herbicide use and treatment effectiveness.*

- *Increasing public awareness—including updated signage and site information during treatment periods.*

Between November 2024 and April 2025, on-the-ground efforts have resulted in:

- *Over 2,000 hours of combined staff and contractor effort.*
- *More than 61,000 litres of herbicide applied.*
- *Treatment of 4,100+ hectares of priority gamba zones—including multiple repeat applications.*
- *Contributions from:*
    - *Parks and Wildlife (campgrounds and visitor sites).*
    - *Acacia Land Management (eradication zones).*
    - *Weed Walkers (remote areas on foot).*
    - *Outback Helicopters (aerial spraying of hard-to-reach sites).*

From now until June 2025, two further spraying rounds and a comprehensive aerial resurvey will be completed, followed by updated fire operations based on new data.

We are listening to community voices—such as Gamba Grass Roots, Eliza Tobin, David Liddle, Sherie Bruce and others—and we are acting in response. Their advocacy has helped guide our focus, and we thank them.

Our Government's commitment is long-term. This is not a one-off program—it is an ongoing priority to protect one of the Northern Territory's most valued landscapes.

Yours sincerely

MARIE-CLARE BOOTHBY

Petition No 8 – Port Keats Road Upgrade

The DEPUTY CLERK: Honourable members, a response to Petition Number 8 has been received from the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment. It has been forwarded to the member for distribution to the petitioners.

Dear Mr Keith

Thank you for your correspondence dated 12 February 2025 to the Hon Joshua Burgoyne MLA, Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment in relation to Petition Number 8 'Upgrades to Port Keats Road'. Your correspondence has been forwarded to me as the responsible Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure.

Port Keats Road is a vital connection between the West Daly region and rest of the Northern Territory including the major communities of Wadeye, Peppimenarti and Nganmarriyanga (Palumpa). Design, investigation and approvals have commenced for the upgrade of a 47km section between Wadeye and Palumpa. This will support improvements to social, education, health and economic outcomes for the people of the West Daly region through the development of more reliable transport linkages and improved year-round access.

Budget 2025–26 commits $90 million to upgrade Port Keats Road including $18 million Northern Territory Government funding. However, the project is still subject to consultations with Traditional Owners.

Detailed designs are to be completed along with securing the required Traditional Owner approvals via the Northern Land Council. The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure will be in a position to schedule the construction works once this approval is granted.

I thank the petitioners for raising the importance of this project with me and I look forward to seeing the final approvals in place ready for project delivery.

Yours sincerely

BILL YAN

Petition No 7 – Improve Humpty Doo School Crossing

The DEPUTY CLERK: Honourable members, a response to Petition Number 7 has been received from the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure. It has been forwarded to the member for distribution to the petitioners.

Dear Mr Keith

Thank you for your correspondence of 29 November 2024 regarding Petition No. 7, to improve the Humpty Doo Primary School (the school) Crossing. The petition requests an immediate review and upgrade to the road infrastructure along Freds Pass Road, directly outside the school.

Freds Pass Road and the immediate surrounding road network to the school are the responsibility of the Litchfield Council. At present, the Council is undertaking road safety upgrades on Challoner Circuit, in close proximity to the school, to improve on-street parking and enhance safety for pedestrians and the local school children.

Any changes made within the school grounds are the responsibility of the school. The school made an application to the Department of Education and Training (the department) and the Northern Territory Government has committed funding in the 2025/26 budget to undertake an internal traffic upgrade including reduction of hazards to pedestrians and students entering and leaving school grounds.

The department, together with the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (DLI) are working with the school to identify potential modifications to internal access roads and walkways.

The department places a high priority on the safety of its students and their families and remains committed to ongoing collaboration with the school, DLI and the Litchfield Council as appropriate, to enhance safety for students and their families.

Yours sincerely

JO HERSEY

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Federal Election 2025

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

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance: recognising the outcome of the 2025 Australian federal election and the opportunities it brings for the Northern Territory.

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

Ms UIBO (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, 3 May 2025 was an historic day for the country and for the Northern Territory. Around Australia communities voted for fairness, aspiration and opportunity for all. Around Australia communities voted for the strength to show courage in adversity and kindness to those in need. Around Australia communities voted for inclusion, not division. As a country we chose optimism and determination over fear and division.

Territorians voted for lower taxes, cheaper medicines, more bulk-billing, more energy bill relief, more manufacturing in Australia and fee-free TAFE. They overwhelmingly voted to bring the Port of Darwin back into Australian hands. They voted for an urgent care clinic for Darwin; a 120-bed aged-care facility for Darwin; 2,700 houses over 10 years for remote communities; $2.8m in road upgrades for the Territory over the next 10 years; creating 3,000 jobs in remote communities across Australia; more funding for ranger jobs to care

for and protect country; $2bn to fully fund Territory schools; $4bn for remote housing; and increased funding under the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment agreement.

Territorians rightly rewarded the Albanese Labor government for boosting hospital funding in the Territory by 30%, amounting to $560m in the 2025–26 financial year—the largest percentage increase among all Australian jurisdictions. Territorians rewarded the federal Labor team for building eight Medicare urgent care clinics in the Northern Territory, including Ali Curung, Alyangula, Galiwinku, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Alice Springs, Palmerston and Wurrumiyanga. These clinics have collectively handled more than 50,000 visits, providing timely care and alleviating pressure on our hospital emergency departments.

Territorians overwhelmingly rejected nuclear power and instead backed renewable energy. The nuclear policy championed by the CLP at this election was bizarre. Instead of backing renewable energy projects like SunCable, the CLP advocated for a nuclear policy that would not have delivered an iota of energy for the Territory and would have raised power prices for all Territorians. The only thing we were seeing from the CLP nuclear policy is the waste that would have been dumped in the Territory. I note that supporting nuclear energy remains the policy of the Country Liberal Party.

With our critical minerals, abundant sunshine and desire to become a manufacturing hub for northern Australia, the Territory can play a critical role in furthering the national ambition for a renewables future. We have an abundant gas reserve that will also be critical for this transition. We have a federal government that understands this and we need the Territory CLP government to join with the rest of the country in supporting the transition to renewables. It recently scrapped the Northern Territory renewables target.

Territorians overwhelmingly rejected the high-taxing agenda that the Liberal Party and the CLP advocated for. I found it bizarre that the CLP championed a tax plan that would increase income tax for every Territory worker. On our side of the Chamber we believe in lower income tax for all Territorians, and I am glad that Territorians and the rest of the country have agreed with us.

Post-federal election the Chief Minister made comments about the Territory getting special tax treatment. Her comments are strange seeing as she wrapped herself around the Dutton tax plan that would see every Territorian paying more. The Chief Minister felt that Territorians should pay for the nuclear reactors with her enthusiastic support for higher taxes for Territorians and this gives her no credibility when championing lower tax for Territorians.

During the campaign our fantastic Cabinet minister, Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, announce the first round of grants for the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program. This program helps replace the failed CDP and will create more than 3,000 jobs in the next few years. In the first round of funding, we will see 140 jobs funded in Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt, 100 jobs funded in communities in Central Australia and 100 jobs funded in communities in the Top End and the Tiwi Islands.

No federal government has done more to support the bush than the Albanese Labor government. These new jobs are in addition to the 300 roles created through the new jobs program trial. This investment is also on top of the funding provided to those who still need help to become job ready. The Albanese Labor government is also delivering on the second stage of replacing the CDP, with a $1.9bn investment over five years for the Remote Australia Employment Service. These jobs will help to build skills and experience and contribute to closing the gap in employment outcomes and contribute to remote communities and their economies. It is a disgrace that it is only a Labor government that will support these jobs with fair wages in the bush and ensure there are fair conditions, including superannuation and annual leave.

This investment is on top of the investments made in October 2024 by the Albanese Labor government, with more than 1,000 new Indigenous ranger jobs being created across the country. This week we saw the Northern Territory CLP government break its election promise to Territorians to continue to fund the Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program. The CLP made that commitment in 2024 to win over voters. This is a massive blow to our hardworking rangers who work day-in and day-out, often after-hours, on land and sea management across the Northern Territory. Unlike the CLP, the Albanese Labor government understands how important our Aboriginal ranger groups are for economic development, job creation and environmental management.

The election result should also be seen as a rejection by Territorians of the far-right views that are creeping into our national politics.

Territorians were horrified that the CLP campaigned on sacking 41,000 Australian public servants and on its plan to end the right of employees to negotiate with their employers to work from home. Those in the CLP government will claim that Peter Dutton backflipped on this policy mid-campaign. Although he could backflip

on a policy when he realised it was poisonous electorally and he would not win the popular vote—which he obviously did not do—he could not backflip on his core beliefs. That is what Australians and Territorians voted against.

Territorians heard loud and clear that the CLP thinks that caring for your family and working in an office are a binary choice. According to the CLP and its campaign, you can run a Treasury room from your tinnie in the middle of river. If people have a child or care for a family member and have a job with the Australian public service, they have to sit in an office. That says to me double standards and inconsistency, which we continue to see from the Country Liberal Party.

We all watched in horror when former Country Liberal Party Senator Jacinta Price told the rest of Australia that she would make Australia great again—in the Trumpism that is. We were perplexed when she was appointed as the shadow minister for government efficiency—a clear carbon copy of the American DOGE model that has ripped through the US public service. The United States is a great country and among our closest allies, but what works in the US will not necessarily work in the Northern Territory.

We were truly horrified when we looked at the CLP how-to-vote card and saw, once again, that the CLP had cut a shameful deal with the One Nation Party and told Territorians that it felt its values most aligned, secondly, with Pauline Hanson's divisive party. Over the years division against First Nations people and our multicultural communities by the One Nation Party has been a blight on Australia's history and modern-day politics. CLP members should hang their heads in shame for this shameful deal they did on the preferences.

I truly believe that the Territory has one of the most successful and amazing multicultural communities in the entire world, and the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly reflects that. We should be proud of the role our multicultural communities, First Nations people and women play in building the Territory we have today and legislating for the Territory of tomorrow.

It is unbelievable that once again the CLP decided to align itself with a political movement fiercely articulated by Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party of division—the party which said that Asians have swamped Australia; Islam is a disease, and we need to vaccinate ourselves against it; and South African migrants are riddled with AIDS. It is disgusting. More shockingly, this CLP government wants to align itself with these types of values and add Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party as its second choice for Territorians. Is this really what the CLP government values? That is what the voting card would tell us.

Every corner of the country and the Territory rightly pushed the Liberal–National Coalition out of the way for cuddling up to the far-right activists. I will leave it for others to investigate why so many members of the Brethren Church and Freedom Party, with their questionable views about women, First Nations people and multiculturalism, were running around—in some cases flying around—the Northern Territory, wearing an orange shirt to represent the Country Liberal Party of today to try to get Lisa Bayliss elected for Solomon, Lisa Siebert elected for Lingiari and Jacinta Price and her running mate, Dean Hersey, the husband of the Member for Katherine, elected to the Senate.

This federal election was the worst result for the CLP in the Territory. When the final count is done, not one member of the CLP will be elected from the Territory. The results show that there will be three members from the Territory Labor federal team and one Liberal—zero who claim to be CLP.

I congratulate all candidates who contested the election in Lingiari, Solomon and the Senate. Win or lose, it takes a special type of dedication to put up your hand to run for parliament in the Territory or our nation's capital. Our democracy is richer for everyone who participated, so regardless of your values, thank you for wanting to represent Territorians at the national level.

In the Senate Malarndirri McCarthy was elected in the first spot with the overall Territory Labor vote increasing. She was again elected without preferences and is likely the only candidate to receive a quota in their own right. I acknowledge and thank Mike Alsop who ran the second ticket on Labor's Senate card.

In Lingiari Marion Scrymgour received a massive swing towards her, which was impressive given that prior to the election Lingiari was one of the most marginal seats in the country. The results in Alice Springs and the Barkly were particularly telling; at some booths in Alice Springs, Marion saw a 10% swing to her, and in Tennant Creek she had a massive 15% swing to her. On a two-party preferred basis, 56% of Alice Springs voters chose Labor over the CLP. Booths in Braitling and Namatjira had figures higher than this, while in Tennant Creek 60% chose Labor over the CLP. Despite a similar number of people voting in the bush compared with the 2022 election, we saw voters across the bush in strong numbers support Marion and the great Australian Labor Party.

CLP members should look at these results, as we have done, and start to dissect them and reflect on their position. Talking about areas that make a difference for Territorians, divisiveness will never pay off. That is what the CLP members led with, and it failed them spectacularly. They may need to rethink their lack of consultation and their disdain and disregard for Aboriginal Territorians, First Nations issues and communities the further away they are from town. Think about the matters that massively impact on the lives of remote Territorians. Take a moment to reflect and do your job as government; consult, learn, listen and be agile to change legislation so that it will better all Territorians and not just a few hand-picked CLP supporters.

Luke Gosling won Solomon for a fourth, record, time. With all the investment he has secured for the NT, he should be proud.

It was a tight race—that is not new information to those in this House—and we note that there was a swing against Labor in Solomon. There will be lessons for Territory Labor from it; however, the result should be placed in the context in which the campaign was fought. Nine months ago at the Territory level Labor was wiped out in the seats that cover Solomon. In 2012 when the CLP won government in the Territory it also won Solomon shortly afterwards. In 2016 the seat was won by Luke Gosling, shortly before Labor won the Territory election. Solomon has always been a marginal seat, with a few exceptions, but it has also been the bellwether to assess public sentiment with the Northern Territory Government of the day.

For reasons others can explain, the CLP decided to make the seat of Solomon a referendum on the Finocchiaro CLP government. I did not see any material put out by the CLP that had Peter Dutton's face on it or referred to him as the National–Liberal Coalition leader. I think the CLP members saw the writing on the wall and chose to put him away from the Territory CLP federal campaign.

Instead, the CLP made the choice in Solomon clear. The CLP told voters that if you think Lia Finocchiaro is doing a great job as the CLP Chief Minister, vote for Lisa Bayliss—a strategy that was rolled out in Lingiari and Solomon. Every Darwin and Palmerston-based CLP member signed on to this strategy. They spent hours away from their own communities and electorates and hung out at pre-polls.

Even the Member for Barkly signed up to this; he was hardly in his own electorate and barely present in Tennant Creek, his home town. It was not lost on Territory Labor how much time the Member for Barkly spent in Parap, here in Darwin, on election day. It was quite a strange decision. The Member for Barkly, in opposition, used to talk about the Berrimah Line; perhaps he has forgotten about the Berrimah Line himself, but from the reverse position. Maybe the Member for Barkly could have been a goodluck charm for Luke Gosling because he comfortably won Parap, Ludmilla and the Darwin City booths on the primary count overall and the final two-candidate preferred count.

Likewise, Luke Gosling and Labor won every booth in the northern suburbs of Darwin which are currently held by CLP members. It is interesting. In just nine short months, Territorians who supported Lia Finocchiaro to become the Chief Minister turned their backs on her when she asked them to add Lisa Bayliss to the team. It was an utter failure by the Chief Minister.

Lisa Bayliss was an incredibly strong candidate and comes from a long line of distinguished CLP politicians. She is well regarded and respected for her work as an individual, her decades of service to the public and the time she has given to serve and protect us in the Northern Territory. I am not questioning her individual commitments to the Territory, but I will question something which I am sure philosophers will spend a bit of time on now that we can all reflect. I pose this: the philosophers may ask, had the CLP not put Lia Finocchiaro on the corflutes of the candidates, Lisa Bayliss in particular—it could have spoken volumes—perhaps we may have had a different result in Solomon. It was interesting because anyone looking at those corflutes would have thought that Lia Finocchiaro was going for the federal leadership role.

We have seen backlash from the recent move by Senator Jacinta Price, who changed her party room a couple of days after the election loss and wipeout of Peter Dutton and the Liberal–Nationals; she was not even left a deputy position in the party room.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, we are talking about the federal election at the urging of an MPI from the Labor Party. The Leader of the Opposition cares more about what is happening in Canberra, Victoria and New South Wales than about what is happening in Nightcliff, Gray, Arnhem Land, Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek or the rural area. What a joke. Those opposite are more concerned about feathering their own nests in their future Senate races to replace McCarthy or, in the case of the future Opposition Leader, the seat of Lingiari. What a joke.

We could instead be speaking about our rising road toll, especially in the Member for Daly's electorate, given that it is National Road Safety Week and we have lost more Territorians' lives in the last two weeks than we have in any other period this year. Perhaps we could be talking about the International Day of Families, given how important strong families are to reducing poor health, social and economic outcomes for Territorians.

We could talk about how it is 100 days out from the NT local government elections. Madam Speaker, I know your history with councils. Local government is a foundation of the Territory, and we could be talking about how important it is that people put up their hands and think about running.

Perhaps we could talk about any other topical issue affecting the Northern Territory or constituents in the electorates of those opposite. We could be talking about the concerns in the Member for Arafura's electorate or the Member for Gwoja's electorate, but instead we are talking about federal politics. We are reading a script provided to us by Anthony Albanese's team so that we can spruik him in the NT parliament to all our lovely listeners and viewers. I know there are many millions watching the live stream, and they appreciate the deep and meaningful content coming out of the Leader of the Opposition's mouth.

However, we are talking about federal politics. The electoral boundaries of Darwin and Palmerston have changed back and forth, but Solomon has had a federal Labor member for nine years. What do we have to show for it? Madam Speaker, when you visit Darwin can you find Aldi? I cannot find it, no matter where I look. When I drive around the northern suburbs—I hate driving that far into town—I cannot find Aldi. Who can forget when Gosling yelled at Katie Woolf about Aldi? He was passionate about Aldi, but I cannot find it. What a joke. It is almost as big a joke as this MPI.

While we are being held captive by the failed opposition I might as well run through some statistics and, hopefully, those opposite can at least pretend to understand the numbers. We know that they could not understand previous budgets or financial management, but maybe I can explain the numbers to them.

In every state and territory across the country there was a two-party preferred swing to Labor, except the Northern Territory. In every Territory electorate within Solomon, there was a primary vote and a two-party preferred swing to the CLP.

In Blain there was a 6% primary swing. There was a 9.7% primary swing in Brennan.

Casuarina is represented by a fantastic local member who is passionate about Casuarina and a strong advocate for his electorate. We had a 9.9% primary swing and a 6.6% two-party preferred swing.

The Drysdale booths had a 12% primary swing and a 9.74% two-party preferred swing. It is working; we are doing well. Who can forget that only nine months ago that electorate was represented by the Labor Chief Minister of the Northern Territory and we are now getting big swings to the CLP in that electorate?

The electorate of Fannie Bay is represented by a fierce advocate for those northern people. There was a 6% primary swing and a 2.3% two-party preferred swing.

Fong Lim, represented by the doctor, had a 13.7% primary swing and a 7.4% two-party preferred swing.

The Member for Karama is a fierce advocate. His electorate achieved big swings in its booths. There was a 10.43% primary swing and a 7.63% two-party preferred swing in booths that were traditionally Labor dominated. These were normally 65/35 booths and we have pulled them right back.

In the Chief Minister's electorate of Spillett there was an 8.88% primary swing to the CLP.

In every Solomon pre-poll booth there was a primary and a two-party-preferred swing to the CLP. In every other category of voting, including absent, provisional, pre-poll and postal votes, there was a swing to the CLP.

For the interested people at home, there was also a voter turnout drop of 1.23% in Solomon, which I always find incredibly disappointing; I will touch on that a bit later.

Going back to the federal election, which Labor thinks is more important than any issue affecting the Territory today, in the seat of Solomon there was a 7.2% swing against Labor when federally there was a 2.8% swing to Labor. That tells me there is likely a little federal drag which is happening, and perhaps people did not resonate with the messaging of the federal campaign, but that cannot be used as a justification that somehow Luke Gosling is doing a good job.

Coming into the election Luke Gosling was the 32nd most marginal Labor seat. In an election where Labor picked up 16 seats, Mr Gosling now has the sixth most marginal seat in the country. Let us not forget, the Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling, on 2 May told the *NT News*:

> *I'm really happy with the support I have from the Prime Minister, and he's certainly indicated to me that he sees me in an (assistant) ministerial position after this election …*

Well, well, well—it turns out that if you perform badly and almost lose the seat, you do not get a reward.

Perhaps without the federal drag we would have won Solomon and had a great local member who cared about the Territory instead of trying to position themselves for a ministry after failing for nine years to demonstrate any leadership.

Madam Speaker, let us talk about my federal seat and your federal seat, Lingiari. Perhaps one of the Labor opposition members could please remind the member that the Darwin rural area is part of her electorate. At every booth in the Northern Territory in the rural area there was an overall swing to the CLP. On 12 May the Member for Lingiari said on Facebook:

> *The bush spoke loud and clear last Saturday …*

Senator McCarthy said:

> *Remote communities turned out to vote in support for Labor.*

I have heard the reports about what has been going on in the bush, and I am incredibly disappointed by the federal members' response. The Labor Party treats the bush with utter contempt and straight up misleads voters out there by telling misleading statement after misleading statement. I think I am allowed to say the word lie in this context, as I am not referring to a member in this Chamber, but they will lie to voters in the bush.

Let us talk about the turnout in the bush. Lingiari had only 61 …

Ms Uibo: Pathetic.

Mr MACKAY: I pick up on the Leader of the Opposition's interjection. It is pathetic that they lie to the people in the bush. Lingiari had a 61.15% voter turnout. In real terms the number of people voting in this federal election in Lingiari fell by 1,500 voters. That is nothing to be proud of. That is not the bush coming out to vote.

Those opposite love low voter turnout in the bush; perhaps without it they would not be sitting here. Let us quickly run through the numbers from the Territory election that left us with four lonely opposition members in this Chamber.

The Member for Gwoja was elected on a 42.1% voter turnout, 57.9% of people in his electorate did not even vote in the last Territory election. He was elected by 26% of his electorate. The Member for Arafura had a 44.6% voter turnout in his electorate, having won the seat on the back of only 30% of his enrolled voters. The Member for Arnhem, our esteemed Opposition Leader who would rather spend her time in this Chamber talking about the federal election than her own electorate, won her seat with a 52% voter turnout with only 32% of the vote.

I won my seat with more than 50% of the enrolled voters in my electorate either voting for or preferencing me.

The Member for Lingiari also posted to social media on 10 May a question to the Treasurer about the road to Santa Teresa and when it would be sealed by the NT Government. She was silent while Labor sat on the federal money for that project and many other projects, including the road between Wadeye and Palumpa, the money for roads on the Tiwi Islands for roads, as well as other projects in the bush. I hope one day we will have a federal Member for Lingiari who does not just play gutter politics but instead will work with the NT Government to progress the Territory.

I am an active member of my community, and I have been for a number of years, even before I was elected to the Litchfield Council in 2021. Despite that, I have been to as many events as possible under the sun in the rural area, which is part of Lingiari. In the last four years I have seen the Member for Lingiari a grand total of five times, including yesterday.

Rural Territorians in the greater Darwin area deserve to have federal representation. Instead, we are told that the only vote that mattered was the 50% or the 30% of people in the bush who vote and not the 80% of people who vote in the rural area.

We need to work with our federal counterparts. I will not pretend that we do not need to work with the Anthony Albanese Labor government, and I acknowledge its successes are our successes. It takes two to tango and, especially in the case of the Territory, we need it; a large percentage of our funding comes from the federal government.

This CLP government is unlocking our federal funding and ensuring that infrastructure projects are actually being delivered. Rather than going out to Wadeye and telling people every year, 'The road is coming next year', the Treasurer, our esteemed Member for Namatjira, said, 'You know what? We will just build the road and make it happen.' We could have promised, 'Vote CLP, and we will do it next year', but instead we said that we would just build it because we know that it will improve the lives of Territorians. Why would we just sit on money and not spend it? It does not make sense. We should be delivering for Territorians. Instead, on this lovely Thursday—my birthday—we are talking about federal politics instead of what Territorians care about.

I guarantee there may be somebody listening tonight—maybe Luke Gosling is listening, and he thinks this is an interesting topic and is pleased with himself—who is interested, but the majority of Territorians care about the cost of living, crime, what they are doing on the weekend and whether it is safe to go to work tomorrow. They do not care that they have another goose for nine years in Solomon and another three years in Lingiari.

I went to the Freds Pass markets two weekends ago, the weekend after the election. It is a lovely market; I highly recommend it. Madam Speaker, if you are free on Saturday mornings, go down, buy some chickens, drop them at someone's house—because you probably cannot take them on the plane—and get the food. See whether the rugby is on or the polocrosse—I know the Member for Nelson loves his polocrosse. It is a lovely market.

A Labor tent was set up the weekend after the election, and I thought, 'This is incredible. This is the last time I will ever see a Marion Scrymgour tent at the Freds Pass markets.' We all know she will not run again. I did not see her any time between the last election and this one. It is incredibly disappointing to know your federal member does not care about your region at all.

We were promised $10m by Damien Ryan in 2020 and 2021 for Freds Pass Reserve to build netball courts and have lights and everything in Freds Pass. It would be a great $10m package. Marion, to her credit, and the Labor Party matched that commitment. Madam Speaker, if you go to Freds Pass markets this Saturday, which I recommend you do if you are not going home—let me know; I can be there and show you where my favourite smoothie van is—go for a drive around Freds Pass and point out to me the netball courts. Show me where they are, because they do not exist. It is just another promise. I am told plans have been done up. I am also told there was a lot of interfering from the Labor member's office with what the designs had to be and which sports her grandkids play and all of that.

One last thing I want to touch on—this is publicly available information on the Australian Government website—is that parliamentarians in the Northern Territory who were elected before 2005 had access to an NT parliamentary salary. In return for the assumption that you would not go on to be a lobbyist, if you served three or four terms you were entitled to a pension. There are quite a few former members who have benefited from this scheme. In 2005 or thereabouts, they decided against it in the Territory.

The Member for Lingiari was elected to the Legislative Assembly from 2001 to 2012, and she qualified for this scheme. If you go to the federal website for members' interests, you can see as an income source, the Member for Lingiari is still claiming her NT MLA pension, which I would assume is worth a significant amount of money. Over the last 10 years and in the last three years when she has been in federal parliament, I would hate to think what she is costing the NT taxpayers and the NT budget, while still collecting a $200,000 federal salary. She is still in public life, but on that declaration she is still claiming it. I care about the Territory's economy. I wonder, would we be better off having a federal member sitting there, not doing anything for the Territory, or would we be better off having that money back in our pocket?

Ms Uibo: Didn't you try to double-dip in your Litchfield Council meetings? That is what I heard. Double income from Litchfield Council, I heard—wanted the maximum amount for both meetings. That is why Litchfield Council did not want you.

Mr MACKAY: I pick up on the Leader of the Opposition's interjections, because she is hoping one day they might preselect her for something. Unfortunately, Leader of the Opposition, you probably will not even do the budget reply next year. The man behind you probably will.

Ms Uibo: Go back to Litchfield Council. That is right; they do not want you.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, silence!

Mr MACKAY: It is incredible that she is still interjecting. She has wasted our time with an MPI on the federal election. She could be talking about her constituents, what is going on in the bush, investments she would have liked to have seen, her budget reply, the Member for Arafura's electorate or upcoming great events. We could be doing lovely adjournments and little Johnny speeches. Instead, we are having her yell out uncontrollably, without the backing of her three Labor members. It is sad to see. At least I know when I get up I have the full support of my 16 CLP colleagues in this Chamber.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr MACKAY: There is a lot of talk about this being somehow a referendum. Territorians are smart enough to know the difference between Territory and federal politics. I hate this idea that people think local government can be compared with the Territory or federal government. Do not get me wrong; I did great in my local government election and in the Territory election, but that is more to do with me than politics.

For example, there were wonderful swings towards the CLP where it was already quite strong in the Member for Katherine's electorate. She was a proud advocate for change. If I have seen the Member for Lingiari five times in the last four years, I hate to think how many times my good friend the Member for Katherine has seen her. It is sad.

For the last three minutes …

Ms Uibo: The One Nation member as well was helping the CLP.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, silence, please!

Mr MACKAY: Do you think Territorians care that, 'Wow, they put One Nation as their preference', 'They put the Greens as their fifth preference', or this party or that party? I will teach you one day how preferences work. When you vote for the CLP in the Northern Territory, I guarantee you we make the top two. We made the top two in every seat we contested at the Territory election. Labor did not.

I would hate to think what poor Mr Bowden, the former Member for Johnston, is doing, because he could not make the top two. I certainly did. All the members on this side made the top two, whereas many of the Labor members' former colleagues are probably wondering whether the senator will be retiring soon because they need a job again. It is sad to see.

I will only say this another six times to get the last two minutes out of the way, because if those opposite will waste my time I may as well waste theirs. There were so many other topics we could be talking about, such as mental health …

Ms Uibo: Why don't you put up an MPI? Where is your MPI, Member for Goyder?

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, be quiet!

Mr MACKAY: I would love to see the opposition bring in an MPI about mental health so that we can have the real conversations in this Chamber about what affects Territorians …

Ms Uibo: You have never done one. Shame job!

Mr MACKAY: I pick up on the interjections from the Leader of the Opposition who thinks that mental health is a shame job. That is appalling …

Ms UIBO: A point of order, Madam Speaker! That is misleading and not what I said, so I ask the member to withdraw. Standing Order 31; I find it offensive that my words be taken out of context by the Member for Goyder, deliberately trying to mislead Territorians …

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Everyone sit down! Leader of the Opposition, you have been interjecting consistently for almost the last 20 minutes. I will not ask anyone to withdraw anything because your behaviour has been unacceptable.

Member for Goyder, I did not really hear whatever you said; I was not paying attention. I was listening more to the chitter-chatter by the Opposition Leader. You have 58 seconds to go. Let us keep it clean. You will be heard in silence.

Mr MACKAY: As I will say one last time, we could have been using this mechanism in our parliament—Standing Order 66: Discussion of a Matter of Public Importance—to talk about something that is important to Territorians. We could have used this two hours to talk about something productive; instead, I will hear the script from Malarndirri McCarthy's office, Luke Gosling's office and some Labor staffer who wrote a poor speech trying to find something relevant about Luke Gosling's near loss.

I care more about what is happening in the Territory; that is why I wear my Territory flag with pride. I care more about what is happening in Humpty Doo, Acacia, Nightcliff, Gray, Arnhem Land, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and the rural area than what is happening in Canberra.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, we have descended to an unfortunate position. The matter of public importance should be framed more as the acknowledgement that there has been an election and the Commonwealth Government, regardless of who it is, is a major player for the Northern Territory Government. A total of 71% or thereabouts of the Territory's budget is Commonwealth funded …

Mrs Hersey: That was not your MPI motion.

Mr PAECH: I have not interjected on anyone for the purposes of this MPI. Let us keep the rest of the evening respectful and not interject on each other.

This is important, and we should acknowledge that with this election comes a range of opportunity and investment for the Northern Territory. It is good investment. I acknowledge that there were a number of investments on both sides that had the opportunity to deliver for the Territory. I highlight that good investments are coming through to the Northern Territory Government to deliver and some investments that will go directly to organisations and everyday Territorians.

I am a bush member. Come 1 June, there is a Commonwealth subsidy for food in remote community stores—that is, Outback Stores and independent stores across the bush. It is important for people in remote communities to have access to subsidised quality food, including the pastoralists and travellers who access those remote community stores. It was a commitment to have town prices in remote community stores This is an important initiative driven by the Commonwealth Government to address that. About 32 items will be subsidised and monitored to ensure there is a reduction in price to be in line with town prices. This goes to addressing concerns people have about health in remote communities.

There is also the ongoing commitment to the national partnership on remote housing, an agreement between the Commonwealth and the Territory Liberal government. It is an important investment to continue. The Territory will also be a winner under the roads investment. A range of work is being done at the Commonwealth level. Ministers in this parliament will be working with those Commonwealth ministers to deliver important reform and investment for the Northern Territory.

I will acknowledge a few comments made tonight in relation to the bush. The bush is a wonderful place filled with passion, energy and resilience. If the Member for Goyder wants to make accusations about the treatment of people, that should be referred to the Australian Electoral Commission to ensure that a proper and thorough investigation is undertaken.

We are Territorians; we are proud of who we are and do not need people coming up, putting on orange shirts and telling people what to do. I find it offensive and insulting that a position has been taken that Aboriginal Territorians are somewhat incapable of deciding who they vote for. That is so insulting. Whether Aboriginal people wanted to vote for the Labor or Liberal Parties, that is their choice and their democratic right. To make the assertion and assumption that they are not capable of doing that is offensive, and that behaviour needs to be called out. If people believe that there have been instances of misconduct, it needs to be reported and substantiated.

I acknowledge every candidate who ran in the federal election because it takes guts; regardless of who you are and what party you represent, you put yourself on the line. That is a big thing. For both sides of politics—left and right, Labor and Liberal, Independents and minor parties—we saw a level of treatment of people's property, with the damage done to people's corflutes and the insulting things that were written on them. That is not the Territory we know and that is not the Territory we want to be a part of. Electoral reform work should be done in this space.

I congratulate Senator Malarndirri McCarthy. It is wonderful to have a Territory person be the federal Indigenous Affairs minister because she will deliver progressive reform.

I acknowledge Que Kenny, who ran as an Independent from Mparntwe, down near Hermannsburg community. Que was in the communities talking to people.

Labor does well in the bush because Labor cares about the bush. Comments are made in here about treating people and doing this and that. I make it clear that in many communities across the Northern Territory that I have been to or where I knew people were at for the election, not one CLP person even bothered to turn up on the day of the election in those remote communities to talk about their policies. They did not even care about remote Aboriginal communities.

I congratulate Marion Scrymgour on a great campaign run and for being a solid and firm advocate for the Northern Territory. The electorate of Lingiari is amazing. It is huge, being the second-largest electorate in Australia, with 1.3 million square kilometres, taking in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island. Regardless of who has that seat, you are on the road constantly. My electorate—which is the largest electorate in the Northern Territory—is big. The Member for Barkly's is the second largest electorate in the Northern Territory. We are travelling on the road every minute we get, and our electorates are not even half the size of Lingiari, so I acknowledge the hard work that gets done. Marion Scrymgour delivered significant investments for the Northern Territory, and I thank her for that.

I acknowledge Lisa Siebert, because that poor woman was out campaigning, often by herself, doing the hard work. After the election, the CLP dropped her like a hot cake. The poor thing was left in Alice Springs. After the election, the media could not even be bothered to talk to her about her position on the election and her feelings and thoughts about the election—gone. It was like she never even existed. She is a person, and nobody has bothered to check in with her. She ran a hard campaign, and she still deserves some respect. We all need to acknowledge the work that she did.

Aunty Marion won the campaign, and she did a bloody good job and will be a bloody good member, but there are other candidates who ran as well, and they get lost for other people. Why? Because the spotlight went on Senator Price to see what hateful things she would say about other people and what culture wars and politics she would play. Lisa Siebert, a reasonable true-blue Territorian, was overlooked in order to feed a political narrative and culture wars.

Australia needs to move on from these culture wars, and we need to come back together. I know that we will not all agree. We are in this parliament on different sides of the political spectrum, but regardless of our position, we need to use the federal election as a moment to draw a line in the sand and try to walk forward together so that we are not getting involved with this divisive nature. I know this federal election was hard for many people.

We are not America; we are so much better. We are the greatest country in the world. We are Australian, and we are amazing. We are many cultures and the world's oldest living culture. We do not need to run politics like Americans; we need to run politics like Australians where everyone gets a fair go. We can have functions and dinner parties and spend time with our families and not be so caught up in the polarisation of who we are and what we believe in.

I am a Labor member. I was the Deputy Chief Minister of a Labor government. Some of my family members vote Liberal, some of them vote Independent and I do not know whether some of them vote, but I tell them to vote so that they do not get a fine. That is the beauty of the Australian way. We should still believe in one another and support one another. People say to me all the time, 'Why do you talk to that person? They are a Tory. They are CLP.' If I did not talk to CLP members, I probably would not talk to a lot of people I know. Here is the thing: we have to work together; we have to talk together and understand what each other is saying. We often want to get to the same destination, but the road we take is different.

I will not spend this MPI saying who is better than who or whatever, or what election result is this and that. The fact is that we all need to work together.

We have an election coming up in three years' time, and some of us are exhausted even thinking about it. How do we grow our democratic principles and participation across the Territory? There are many people who feel disengaged from both sides, so how do we engage people to participate in elections, so they feel more involved? The issue is that some people do not feel like voting any more. How do we grow the number of people voting?

Local government elections are coming up in 100 days. I am a former Local Government minister. The Members for Barkly, Araluen, Goyder and I come from local government, so we know that local government is important. What we want to do—party politics has no place in local government—is grow participation in those elections. I am sure a bunch of people in Alice will run over the scandal of the Sturt's desert pea—hopefully they do.

This is a great opportunity for the CLP government. Let us work with the new government to leverage investment, because at the end of the day I want more money to come into the Territory. I do not care who is in government, as long as we do not have to sell ourselves too much. We want investment in the Territory so that it can grow and flourish. We want every Territorian to feel proud. If that means growing infrastructure, more roads, places of significance—my partner is American, and he loves coming back to Australia. That is why we call Australia home. We have a long relationship with Defence, and that will grow. We need to make sure that in all industries the Commonwealth Government is working with us regardless of who they are. We want more money into the Territory so that we can invest more. Great policies are coming out, such as removing eligibility tests so that more families can get their kids into childcare. This is what we should all be celebrating and working with.

I acknowledge the first woman leader of the Coalition, Sussan Ley. Girl power! It is great to see a woman taking on that role for the first time. She has a big job ahead of her. Democracy works best when the principles of democracy are supported and we have good measures in place to support them. We need healthy oppositions for governments, Independents and the mechanisms to support that.

This MPI is a moment to reflect on our goal. Regardless of what side of politics we sit on, all 25 of us should be trying as best we can to get more money from the Commonwealth into the Territory so that we can continue to make this the greatest place in Australia to live, work and play.

I congratulate the Albanese government. Well done; it was a good campaign that is bringing Australians together.

We cannot afford to go down the path of American-style divisive politics and fake news. We are better than that; we are Australians. We should do politics in the Australian way.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I have just learned not to leave my computer on this desk because it seems that both the Members for Goyder and Gwoja have borrowed parts of my speech. Different parts, but I cannot believe it. So be it; it is often worth saying something time and again and occasionally people can understand it.

What an interesting MPI to speak about. Surely, we have more important things to discuss in this parliament, such as how we fix the eight-year mess left to us by a disastrous NT Labor government. How do we reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore our lifestyle? These are the issues Territorians want us to tackle, but, no, this Teletubby opposition wants us to dance around the sun god and talk about the recent federal election. Those opposite fancifully claim this reflects voter sentiment against this CLP government. I will have to succumb to the wishes of Laa-Laa, Dipsy, Po and Tinky Winky and speak on this irrelevant MPI.

Like most people, I fully respect the decision of the Australian people and congratulate Prime Minister Albanese and his team for being re-elected to government. I hope that over the next three years he can help rebuild the Australian economy and create a better future for all Australians, including those living in our regional and remote areas such as the Northern Territory.

Despite the fanciful request this morning from the Member for Nightcliff that we all abandon the opportunity to strategically develop the East Arm precinct, I hope our NT Labor opposition will join this CLP government in holding the new federal government to account on delivering its promise to support this strategic development for our country, along with its commitment to support the development of the Arafura Resources project in Central Australia.

As the assistant minister for Health, I hope that this Labor opposition will get the Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, to deliver her election commitment, made on 26 April 2022—namely, federal funding for 500 new First Nations medical trainees and 30 new renal clinics and doubling of the funding for rheumatic heart disease.

Now that the federal and Territory elections are over for a number of years, our government will look to work constructively with the new federal government to deliver positive outcomes for the Northern Territory. I hope this pragmatic cooperation will be reciprocated by the new federal government. Why? Because the development of the Northern Territory is in the national economic interest, including national security.

Whilst we are looking at the federal election, let us reflect on the performance of the Greens. The Greens lost three of its four members in the House of Representatives, including leader Adam Brandt from the so-called safe seat of Melbourne where he had an 11% margin. Why did Australians vote against the Greens? It is simple; Australians no longer understood what the Greens stood for.

This was the party that always wanted more than what was on offer, irrespective of the economic consequences. Australians could no longer accept this dogmatic approach of the Greens which was, 'Give us all we want, or we will support nothing'. The Greens could not understand that many Australians recognise that something is better than nothing. Those Australians became fed up with academic theoretical proposals divorced from economic reality. As discussed yesterday, the Greens are backed by and readily accept funding from a professional gambler. I wonder how much he lost on backing the Greens this time.

I turn to the NT result, particularly in the seat of Solomon. Different issues were at play in the federal election from those in the recent Territory election. With all due respect, there is no doubt that a definite anti-Dutton sentiment impacted on the federal election across the nation.

Like the Member for Gwoja, I congratulate all the Territory representatives elected to the new federal parliament, including the Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling. I thank all candidates who stood and contested the election as part of our cherished democratic system. I personally thank our wonderful CLP candidate for Solomon, Lisa Bayliss, who gave her full commitment to winning the seat and just fell short in a tight contest. Lisa, you were a fantastic candidate and I encourage you to run again in the 2028 election.

Having said that, it is important to note that the Northern Territory was the only state or territory in the country that had a swing to the Coalition—as the Member for Goyder pinched from me. The country swung 2.8% to Labor, so realistically Luke Gosling should have increased his margin like the rest of his Labor colleagues did. Instead, he went backwards by 7.2%. Coming into this federal election, Luke Gosling held the 32nd most marginal Labor seat, but after an election in which Labor picked up 16 seats, Mr Gosling now has the sixth most marginal Labor seat.

Let us look at the results in the three booths in my electorate of Karama. There were primary vote swings to the CLP of 8.8% in the Malak booth, 10.9% in the Karama booth and 13.6% in the Karama East booth respectively. The general assertion that a vote for an Independent should be considered a vote for Labor proved true, but I am sure Territorians will not be fooled next time. I note that the Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling, was quoted as saying:

> *I'm really happy with the support I have from the Prime Minister, and he's certainly indicated to me that he sees me in an (assistant) ministerial position after this election …*

Well, well, well—it turns out that if you perform badly and almost lose your seat, you do not get rewarded. The Prime Minister seems to have quickly reneged on this promise to the Member for Solomon, so we have to hope that the member can build up his influence within his own party.

I appreciate that NT Labor opposition members are celebrating their federal colleagues' win, but I caution them not to take this as a prediction for the next Territory election. I advise the Leader of the Opposition that although focusing your attention on a win in Canberra sounds great, unfortunately it does not excuse your team from ignoring the residents in Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon. Those residents will not forget that long-term neglect.

I recall the Member for Fannie Bay relayed how many residents from the neighbouring electorates of Nightcliff and Johnston come to her for advice because they feel neglected in their own electorates. I can also confirm that I have similar experiences with some of these residents coming to me, as they now wish they had a government member.

Yes, the CLP won a majority at the last election, with 17 members, but none of my colleagues take that for granted. I walk the streets of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon to hand-deliver my quarterly newsletter, allowing me to stay connected with my community, along with all my other engagement activities. My motto, printed everywhere on my signage and shirts, is 'to be visible, to be accessible and to serve my community'. I am fully committed to this. I know my MLA colleagues are also connected with their electorates. We are all committed to our plan—I hold it up again—to reduce crime, rebuild our economy and restore our lifestyle.

Labor had a victory in the federal election, but let us be honest: this NT Labor opposition has a long way to go to regain the trust of Territorians. If those opposite keep objecting to all the positive things that the CLP government does and trying to stymie them and say, 'No, no, no', I expect that they will be further thrown out at the next election as well.

I hope that those opposite change their task. I keep urging Labor to be constructive. The Leader of the Opposition says, 'We will be great. We will hold this government to account.' That is fine. Holding us to account is fine, but do not get in the way of us delivering our promise to Territorians and our electorates.

The Leader of the Opposition said that she will come to Estimates and get into things at the Estimates hearings. That is great; those opposite should do that. The Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Gwoja seem to have a love affair with the Member for Barkly. They probably like him because he is so insightful and has a laser-like incisiveness in questioning people and looking at facts and figures. He reminds me of that wonderful federal Speaker Hon Bronwyn Bishop and her ability to get into Estimates and drill down to things. I think it is amazing. I take on that, and if I am involved in Estimates I will use that as a bit of a role model. We will get in there, drill it and hold people to account. Holding people to account is one thing, but do not get in the way of true progress and people who want to make it.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his remarks about the Member for Barkly reminding him of Bronwyn Bishop; that is a new one for us. I do not know whether the Member for Barkly is enjoying this or is a little embarrassed and blushing. We know what we will be calling out to the Member for Barkly from now on.

I find it concerning and disappointing that the Member for Goyder said this is not an important MPI. Tonight's debate about the federal election is important for Territorians because, as we all know, we must work with the federal government and lobby it for funding. That is the job of all of us. No matter what side of politics we are on—whether you are part of the CLP, a Labor member, an Independent or a Greens member—it is in all our interests to talk about this. The fact of the matter is that we heavily rely on the federal government for funding for programs. We all understand that basic concept. I found disappointing the Member for Goyder's remarks about it not being important.

I pick up that he said he does not see the Member for Lingiari often, but he has seen her five times. I will remind the Member for Goyder that she has a huge electorate; it is pretty much all the Northern Territory except for Darwin and Palmerston. I can tell you that I have seen the Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, more than Senator Price. Not once have I seen Senator Price in Wadeye, Daly River, Peppimenarti, Palumpa or Pine Creek. Where has she gone? To Tamworth for the country music festival.

Mr Mackay: I do not see you in the rural area.

Mr YOUNG: I am always in the rural area, mate. I live in the rural area. You can come to Wagait Beach anytime, mate; I am always there. Do not worry about where I am because I am always there …

Ms Uibo: He has his own electorate; he does not need to service yours too.

Mr Mackay: I look forward to seeing you this weekend.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Let the Member for Daly speak, please.

Mr YOUNG: When constituents come into my Berry Springs office—I love meeting with my constituents in Berry Springs—I always say, 'Go and talk to government members too'. That is because we should all be working together. I tell people to speak to government members because they have access to the ministers directly. The Member for Goyder does not like hearing the truth …

Mr Mackay: When is your office open?

Mr YOUNG: He is sitting here interjecting …

Mr Mackay: I will be at your office at 8.30 and see whether it is open.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Goyder, desist, please.

Mr YOUNG: The Member for Goyder clearly has a gripe with me. I am not sure why. Maybe it is because I beat his friend, Kris Civitarese, who then went and worked in his office. Straight after the election he got a job with the Member for Goyder. There he is—he is protecting his mates. That is what the CLP does. It is in CLP members' DNA to go and protect their mates.

I will remind the Member for Goyder of the amazing achievement in this election that happened in a remote community of Daly. Do you know what we received, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms Uibo: I reckon you will tell us.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Daly, address your question through the Chair.

Mr YOUNG: There was 92% towards Labor in Wadeye. Do you know what was hilarious about this? I had three CLP members—I think they were from Brisbane; they were not even from the Territory …

Ms Uibo: Brethren, One Nation—yes, they are the Brisbane mob.

Mr YOUNG: Brethren, One Nation, disguised as CLP, came and circled me and asked whether I was Dheran Young. I said, 'Yes, welcome to Wadeye. How can I help?' They said, 'We are just here to give people a choice'. I said, 'Of course, I am glad you have made it, but you are two days late. Where were you for the last two days? Do you really care about people out here in Wadeye? I do not think so.' They flew their mates in from Brisbane. I did not see one local Territorian helping on that booth.

A member: Carolyn was there.

Mr YOUNG: She was a great help for us. I will thank her for that, don't you worry. I will leave that with the CLP government.

Members interjecting.

Mr YOUNG: I get on well with her; she is one of my constituents. The sad thing about all of it is that a lot of people have ignored her, but I will always talk to her. That is what a good local member does. I have respect for her. You can call out and say that and laugh about her, but I do not think that is funny. I work with Carolyn; she has come to my office. I see her all the time. Do not come in here and laugh at one of my constituents. That is a disgrace from the Member for Goyder.

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the interjections. Speak through the Chair, please. Let the Member for Daly speak.

Mr MACKAY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Standing Order 31; disorderly. That was not me interjecting. The Member for Daly said the Member for Goyder was yelling; it was not me.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: It was you, the Member for Blain, everyone—it is just a general thing, thank you. Enough; continue.

Mr YOUNG: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker—I was about to call you Deputy Chief Minister.

Ms Uibo: He could be; you never know.

Mr YOUNG: He could be—you never know—when there is a roll after this federal election.

I thank those members from the bush for coming out and voting Labor. There was 92% in Wadeye and 82% for Labor in the West Daly region, which is amazing.

It is disappointing that accusations are being slung in this House, from the Member for Goyder, that suggest there was any wrongdoing. I suggest to the Member for Goyder that if he believes it, he should report it to the Australian Electoral Commission through the right channels. That is the proper process and the right thing to do, for the commission to investigate.

People out bush know who they are voting for, because they know that Territory Labor will always look after them. We hear the Member for Katherine laughing over there, but I remind her of 92% of the vote in Wadeye. Silence—crickets now. She is not laughing anymore, because she knows it is true.

Mrs Hersey: What do you want me to say? It is your contribution, mate. You are the one talking.

Mr YOUNG: That is right; I am giving out the facts and the stats of what happened there.

I am proud of the work that our team has done as the Territory Labor opposition. I am proud that our federal members Marion Scrymgour and Senator Malarndirri McCarthy retained their seats.

It was disappointing when I was in Daly River that one of the CLP volunteers said that Senator Price had not been seen; she was gone. The volunteer asked, 'Member for Daly, have you invited her out here?' I could not believe that a CLP volunteer asked me whether I had invited Senator Price, suggesting that I need to tell her how to do her job to represent her constituents. That is what we are all elected to do. The basic principle is to come here and represent our constituents, yet a CLP volunteer suggested to me that I have to tell Senator Price how to do her job. It is an embarrassment that the CLP thinks a Labor member needs to tell a CLP senator how to do her job and represent all Territorians.

We always welcome seeing any senator who represents the Northern Territory, including Malarndirri McCarthy, who has been to Wadeye and the West Daly region on a number of occasions with me. Senator Price was interstate; she was not around.

Mr Edgington: I have visited you.

Ms Uibo: The Member for Barkly wants a special shout-out.

Mr YOUNG: I will give the Member for Barkly credit. He has been there and taken selfies at all those new houses that are opening thanks to the Labor government that brought in the funding. I am still waiting for that invitation from the Member for Barkly to get behind his camera with him for a selfie. I look forward to that day.

Mr Edgington: I only publish good photos.

Mr YOUNG: I think he has just invited us down there, Opposition Leader, so we might head down in a few weeks and get that selfie with the Member for Barkly.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Daly, can you conduct your love affair with the Member for Barkly via the Chair?

Mr YOUNG: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker; I will put my comments through the Chair.

Under the federal Labor government the NT is set to receive a 30% increase in hospital funding, amounting to $560m in 2025–26, which is the largest percentage increase of all Australian jurisdictions. This funding aims to reduce emergency department wait times and cut surgical backlogs.

Eight Medicare urgent care clinics have been established in communities, including Ali Curung, Galiwinku, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Alice Springs, Palmerston and Wurrumiyanga. These clinics collectively handled more than 50,000 visits, providing timely care and alleviating pressure on hospital emergency departments. Darwin will also get one in this term of the federal parliament. A huge thanks to Luke Gosling for securing it.

With the Albanese government re-elected, the future of Medicare and bulk-billing are secure. There will be the single largest investment in Medicare since its creation more than 40 years ago, with $8.3bn to deliver an additional 18 million bulk-billed GP visits each year, hundreds of nursing scholarships and thousands more doctors in the largest-ever GP training program. Territory patients and families will save hundreds of dollars a year in out-of-pocket costs, with patient savings of $859m by 2030. Labor's record investment restores the $8.3bn that the Australian Medical Association says was cut from Medicare through the funding freeze initiated by the Liberals and the CLP a decade ago.

For the first time, Labor will expand bulk-billing incentives to all Australians and create an additional new incentive payment for practices that bulk-bill every patient. This means that nine out of 10 GP visits will be bulk-billed by 2030. This is a huge deal for Territory families.

The re-elected Albanese government will also invest $1bn to expand free Medicare-backed mental healthcare. There will be $225m for 31 upgraded Medicare mental health centres; $200m for 58 new or expanded headspace services; $500m for 20 new youth specialist care centres for young people with complex needs; and $90m to train more than 1,200 new mental health professionals. This investment includes upgrades to the Medicare mental health centre in Alice Springs and the establishment of a new health specialist care centre and a headspace Plus facility in Darwin, enhancing mental health service support for young Territorians.

Labor is also investing in a new aged-care facility in Darwin. There is $60m allocated to construct a new residential aged-care home in Darwin, adding at least 120 new beds to address the city's critical shortage. Darwin has the lowest number of aged-care beds in the country after a decade of neglect by the Liberals and the CLP nationally that triggered the disgraceful findings of the aged-care royal commission.

The Mala'la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation in Maningrida will receive $12.8m to upgrade and expand its aged-care facilities, which the Member for Arafura was excited to hear. He was at Maningrida, his home town, for that announcement during the campaign.

On behalf of the Territory Labor opposition I give special thanks to an unexpected ally in our fight to retain our two seats at the federal election, the Treasurer. He reminded all Territorians of who sold the port a decade ago. We thought this issue was past its use-by date. Thank you once again for reminding all Territorians of who made the ridiculous decision to sell the Port of Darwin. Maybe the CLP would have been better off sending the Treasurer fishing for a few more weeks at the Daly in my beautiful electorate. Noting the massive swings against the CLP in your booths and the vigorous campaign you ran to remind all Territorians of the CLP's history of asset sales, we are grateful for the support you provided to the Territory Labor campaign. On behalf of this side of the House, thank you, comrade Bill.

Mr HOWE (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I will shift the energy a little. Although I do not agree with the humility of an MPI on an election win, I congratulate Senators Jacinta Price and Malarndirri McCarthy and MPs Luke Gosling and Marion Scrymgour for their re-election.

Amongst the chaos there is always opportunity. In looking for what I could talk about tonight, this is something that we have clear bipartisan support on—I call on my Labor colleagues in the Chamber to champion this, along with our government members and the four Territory representatives in Canberra—that is, the importance of the NT and USA Defence and strategic posturing, the alliance we have fostered and grown with our US Defence allies and the benefit the Territory can offer them. I raise this due to concerns that Canberra, for a while now, has moved away from strategic military positioning and used it more as an electoral tool. I urge our American allies to make decisions based on military strategy, not where the government of the day sees it can win the most votes.

I draw the comparisons of what Darwin and the Northern Territory offer our US allies with what Townsville and Queensland in particular can offer. Darwin and the Northern Territory has a far superior geo-strategic location. We are the gateway to the Indo-Pacific and we have unmatched proximity to key maritime choke points. This includes access to the South China Sea, the Lombok Strait and the broader archipelagic sea lanes of Southeast Asia. There is also readily accessible access through sea lanes to the Indian Ocean. All this is offered by Darwin.

Darwin offers a far faster deployment into contested seas than any east coast city in Australia. Darwin is 1,400 kilometres closer to Manila than Townsville is. That is a 30% reduction. We are 1,800 kilometres closer to Taiwan, which offers a 37% reduction. That is shorter times for humanitarian deployment and aid. That is shorter deployment times for training with our Southeast Asian neighbours, particularly the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its growing importance within the Indo-Pacific region. This offers more opportunities for joint naval training with these partners and allies and with Australian forces.

We offer far greater operational flexibility, with our vast air space, our deepwater sea access and our training ranges that are free from commercial congestion. Our low population density offers immense opportunity, especially in Air Force and land training. On all these fronts we outcompete Queensland. That is something we can offer to our US allies.

We have far greater force integration, with ADF and US integration now decades ahead of anywhere else in the country. We have been hosting the Marines at Robertson Barracks since my first year as a lieutenant. That is how long that relationship has been fostered. We are used to having the Marines in Darwin. We have bipartisan support in this Chamber for their presence and we welcome them every year on their rotation. That is a humungous advantage we can offer our US counterparts.

Interoperability protocols and joint exercises are already established in the Northern Territory for land, air and sea training. We also host large-scale training exercises for allies across the Southeast Asian region, both in the Air Force and Navy. There is even growing land force interoperability that we are seeing across the region.

Darwin is the natural continuation of the Guam–Tindal–Darwin–Diego Garcia arc. This offers our forces and our US allies a forward defence posture that supports dispersed basing and decreased strategic vulnerabilities. This is all offered by investing in the Northern Territory. These bases are also less cyclone-prone than those of our Queensland counterparts. Tindal, in particular, offers far superior safety from any natural damage that could occur. We already have established rapid refill and rearm for long-range operations across the Indo-Pacific; that is far superior than it is on the east coast.

Despite what you may see at times in the Chamber, we offer political stability and bipartisan support for the US presence in the Northern Territory. You will not find support that strong anywhere else. We have not had the community backlash or political weaponisation as we have seen across the east coast. This offers a much less risky environment for US investment. The CLP government is pro-Defence and pro the Australian–US alliance. The Labor opposition is also pro this US alliance and investment.

I call on all of us in this Chamber and all four of our federal representatives to counter Canberra's centralisation of where it thinks the US needs to be, because I see a concerning trend that its decision-making is influenced more by electoral politics than military strategy.

To our US allies in Darwin and the Northern Territory, with Tindal we provide the best military strategic option for you in Australia and, in doing so, offer you a stable and safe investing platform for posturing to Southeast Asia, which will only increase throughout this century.

We also offer the historic importance of Darwin. We have long been a military town, and we have the industry to support it. There was a reason Japan came here in World War II. You can learn things from your enemy. The Japanese Navy knew this was of strategic importance; that is why it came here after Pearl Harbor. For the same reason, we must see the investment in Darwin to maximise that strategic importance. It is in our DNA. We are the front line of a shared commitment to the Indo-Pacific for peace, prosperity and deterrence.

Tonight I call on all parties of the Northern Territory and our federal counterparts to combat Canberra pushing our US allies into other states and ensure that they come to the Northern Territory where we will welcome them with open arms for greater peace and certainty throughout our region.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Madam Speaker, this federal election was tougher than it needed to be on our Aboriginal people and communities across the Territory. Instead of having a battle of competing ideas and investing in the bush, strange and outdated culture wars were being fought.

We did not need to have a debate about welcome to country during the election campaign. The debate started after the Anzac Day ceremony in Melbourne which Neo-Nazis interrupted. As a parliament we should all agree that the important issues we debate should not be dictated by what Neo-Nazis think.

Welcomes to country and acknowledgements of country are respectful and welcoming, but they are optional; it is always up to the event organisers and planners whether they occur. In regard to welcome to country, in my electorate Tiwi Island communities all do a welcome in Tiwi, but every other community is from a different language and clan group. That is why it is so important. This is not controversial. It reflects the overwhelming majority view of Territorians. We should be proud of our Indigenous culture.

As someone who has served in the Army I respect the rights of RSLs and councils across the country at Anzac Day ceremonies and applaud those that include welcomes and acknowledgements.

Across the Territory people have fear and anxiety about real issues such as how they will pay the rent week-in and week-out; how they will afford medical treatment; and why there are so many wars around the world. These are real fears. For some reason, the biggest thing for the National–Liberals was standing in front of the Indigenous flag. This is a bizarre fear to have. I hope that this election taught us something as Australians.

I acknowledge the work led by Linda Burney, Malarndirri McCarthy and Marion Scrymgour. They have invested $774m in the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program for Indigenous communities, which is set to create up to 3,000 jobs over three years, with more than 100 employers establishing an initial 650 new jobs.

The federal government will expand the Indigenous rangers program. The program includes over 1,000 new ranger jobs, with 700 positions for First Nations women and funding for an additional 800 ranger positions, to support environmental stewardship and cultural preservation.

The funding I am most proud of is the $4bn joint investment announced to build homes over the next 10 years. It is a game changer for all of us and will create a decade of jobs for Territorians.

There is $840m over six years to improve service delivery in remote communities. This funding will support policing, women's safety, children's health, education, alcohol harm reduction and Aboriginal interpreter services.

I note that the Chief Minister announced with the Prime Minister earlier this year a demonstration of federal Labor's desire to improve the Territory, irrespective of who governs in this Chamber.

A $99m investment in First Nations justice initiatives focuses on justice reinvestment programs to reduce incarceration rates and improve community safety. This is long-term investment that Territorians have been crying out for to help break the cycle of criminal reoffending.

In 2025–26 the Commonwealth will invest in a range of new measures:

- reduce the cost of 30 essential products in more than 76 remote community stores to help ease cost-of-living pressures and improve food security in remote communities
- build a nutrition workforce in remote communities by upskilling up to 120 local First Nations staff in remote stores
- roll out new laundries and upgrade existing facilities in 12 remote First Nations communities to help improve long-term health outcomes
- strengthen the Indigenous Procurement Policy to boost opportunities for First Nations businesses
- increase the opportunity for First Nations Australians to buy their own homes and build intergenerational wealth through a boost of Indigenous RBA home loan capital
- establish a place-based business coaching and mentoring program for First Nations businesswomen and businessmen
- increase the availability of culturally safe and qualified mental health support, including scholarships for up to 150 First Nations people
- continue to deliver early intervention response services to address family, domestic and sexual violence in high-need First Nations communities
- extend the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme
- continue the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' digitisation of at-risk audio and video collections held by First Nations broadcasters.

No federal government has ever done more to support remote Territorians. This investment will help generations of Territorians escape poverty and put them in a position to build a better community and stay within and build up their communities.

The Member for Goyder made a passionate speech. We know it is your birthday; you probably missed happy hour. Happy birthday, mate; go and relax.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.