Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about the direction of this government for 2015-16. A direction that is committed to placing community best interests at the centre of all decision-making.

A direction that establishes the right frameworks for the Northern Territory’s future, that recognises opportunities and delivers the very best outcomes for Territorians.

Put simply, it’s time for us all to get on with making people’s lives simpler, easier and safer.

Madam Speaker, we’ve achieved a great deal in the past two years but there is still a lot to do.

In 2015, my government’s work will include:

- Supporting Northern Territory families and communities
- Giving our kids the best education and keeping them active
- Promoting our great Territory lifestyle
- Protecting our environment
- Bringing on land release to ease the housing squeeze
- Strengthening our prosperous economy
- Creating jobs and removing road blocks to regional development;
- Cutting red tape
- Investing in the infrastructure Territorians need to move themselves around and get their products to market;
- Attracting new visitors and celebrating our unique Territory culture.

In doing this Madam Speaker, I want to assure Territorians that we will work with you.

We want to walk beside you on this journey

And that means speaking to Territorians directly about their priorities and local solutions.
We want to recreate the sense of community that used to be the Country Liberals strength.

We want to be a reflection of the community – not viewed as isolated from their needs and aspirations.

The Government I lead will be 110 per cent focussed on Territorians – not focussed on an agenda that improves a balance sheet but ignores the needs of the mum and dad in Malak.

I believe Territorians have a lot to contribute and my government wants to properly engage the community.

People feel that their politicians have left them behind with the big picture agendas.

The big economic picture in particular is often too big for people to see.

As a result, government has become detached from the average Territorian.

This is going to change.

We need to better support Territorians in the things that matter in their daily lives rather than assume that all they want is to be part of a dry economic agenda.

People are part of a community not a five year plan.

Economic indicators and credit ratings are important but I know they don’t mean much to everyday Territorians.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that people are more interested in the state of their kid’s classroom than a Moody’s rating.

Madam Speaker, our economy is going from strength to strength

We have a good story to tell but I understand that we have not always explained the benefits of this to individual Territorians, particularly when it comes to some of the larger projects.

In essence, they all mean job opportunities for Territorians.

We need to grow the economy but Government’s role is to ensure that the benefits of a growing economy translate into jobs and better facilities, better services and a sense of inclusion for all Territorians.

- Things like lights at their local oval so their kids can train in the evening rather than be out on the street.
- More support for sporting and community groups so they can decide their own priorities rather than a government deciding what their needs are.
My Government is committed to restoring Territorians as being at the centre of everything we do.

When the Country Liberals were elected in 2012, we promised we would make the Territory a better place for everyone.

We are working hard to achieve that with a focus on the community, lifestyle and the economy.

**Making life easier for Parents**

In 2015 we will be continuing support for Territory families through our hugely popular back to school payments and sport voucher schemes.

We have added an extra $5 million to the Sports Voucher scheme to get more children off the couch and into recreation activities.

These vouchers have increased from $75 to $200 per child and we have expanded the scheme to include more activities such as dance, music lessons, arts and learn-to-swim lessons for children up to 5 years of age.

This will encourage our children to live healthier lives and reduce the cost to families.

We have doubled the Back to School payment to $150 per child to further ease the burden on families.

The payments help offset the cost of purchasing educational items such as uniforms, textbooks, stationery, school excursions and student ID cards.

We want to help our kids learn but also keep them active and these two Country Liberals initiatives make it easier to do both.

We have reduced the cost of child care services by increasing child care subsidies by 10% and expanded the scheme to include family day care.

Five child and family day centres have been constructed in Palmerston, Gunbalanya, Maningrida, Ngukurr, and Yuendumu that will deliver both government and non-government integrated early childhood services, including health and parenting support.

**Making education better for students**

We’ve completed the most comprehensive review of Indigenous Education in 15 years to give our bush kids a future.
The Country Liberals have committed more than $40 million to implement recommendations from the Wilson Indigenous Education Review.

The 10-year Indigenous Education Strategy, *A Share in the Future*, will begin this year and will provide a strategic direction to create future success for all Territory Indigenous children.

The *Our School Our Future* plan aims to provide greater autonomy for schools. It is giving parents and communities increased opportunities for input into the decision making that shapes their school’s strategic direction.

As part of this plan, the Global Schools Budget model was announced in September 2014 with implementation to commence in all Northern Territory schools for the 2015 school year.

This new school resourcing model will improve the targeting of resources, and provide schools with greater flexibly in decision making and a clear framework for forward planning.

For the first time, principals and their school communities have a line of sight to their full resourcing package and can make decisions about how to utilise these resources in line with their local priorities and needs.

Six schools were successful in their application to become Independent Public Schools in 2015 - Braitling, Larrakeyah, Leanyer and Wulagi primary schools, Darwin High School and Palmerston Senior College.

**Building better schools.**

We’re building a new school for students with special needs; the new Northern Territory Open Education Centre and a new child care centre at Ntaria.

In response to improved student attendance, funding has been provided to improve infrastructure at 5 schools involved in the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy: at Maningrida, Borroloola, Ntaria and Alekerenge Schools as well as Shepherdson College.

The NT Government is committed to expanding the availability of regional boarding schools for remote and very remote students and has committed $40.5 million to the establishment of boarding facilities, including one in Nhulunbuy which will be supplemented by Australian Government funding.
$52 million has also been allocated over the 10-year life of the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory to establish and upgrade teacher housing in remote and very remote areas.

**Keeping Territorians safe**

Under the Country Liberals, the Territory has seen property crime figures drop to their lowest level since current records began.

Unlike Delia Lawrie’s failed Labor Government, the Country Liberals take law and order seriously.

Our policies are delivering, driving crime down and cutting alcohol consumption.

The Government has introduced a suite of alcohol measures including Alcohol Protection Orders, stationing police at bottleshops and paperless arrests which are driving down violent crime.

Alcohol-related Assaults are down 16% Territory-wide over the past year as a result.

The effects have been especially visible in Alice Springs where alcohol-related assaults are down 30% and Tennant Creek where they are down a staggering 53%.

We hope to see similar results from an expansion of the police policy of putting police at bottleshops in Katherine.

Territorians are safer on our streets under the Country Liberals.

Alcohol Mandatory Treatment is helping to turn the tide of damage caused by alcohol abuse

More than 600 people have been referred to Alcohol Mandatory Treatment since July 2013 when the program started.

Lives are being changed, people are obtaining work and life skills, people are reconnecting with families and their health is improving.

This year we will expand the AMT program in Alice Springs and we are looking to build a secure treatment facility in Katherine.

Property Crime is currently at the lowest levels since we were last in Government in the 1990s.

Commercial break-ins are down 21% in Darwin and House Beak-ins are down 22% in Alice Springs.
House break-ins have halved in Tennnant Creek and they’re down 16% in Katherine.

The Government is investing heavily in the Territory’s CCTV Network as a crime fighting tool with 180 cameras soon to be operating NT-wide.

We understand youth crime is an issue in many Territory towns and communities.

We’ve heard this message and have just announced a new $4.2 million package of funding for regional youth programs focussed on early intervention and prevention which we believe is the key to tackling this issue.

We’re also keen to ensure we take Territorians with us as we embark on new policies like this.

That’s why we have decided to tap into the local knowledge of the Regional Coordination Committees in each of the major centres to decide how the money will be allocated.

Local people have the best idea of their communities’ needs, where there are gaps in services and where there’s a risk of duplication

**Keeping Territorians Healthy**

Work is continuing on the Palmerston Regional Hospital on two fronts with the Northern Territory Government assessing expressions of interest from a number of private health providers, to design, build, operate and maintain the public hospital.

This means, for the first time Territory families will be able to access a fully functioning Level 3 hospital close to the Palmerston and Rural Area and there is also the potential to increase the scope of private hospital services in the Territory.

Major earthworks on the Stuart Highway and Temple Terrace intersection are currently underway to improve safety and relieve congestion in the local area.

The $150 million hospital capital investment is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Territory Governments.

We’re also investing in existing health infrastructure and look forward to announcing the next tender for Fire Rectification Program works at the Alice Springs Hospital early this year.

The $26 million building program is anticipated to be on-going for the next 4 years.
The hospital is also undergoing the development of a new Teaching Training Facility at the cost of nearly $5 million which will provide State-of-the-Art training for Central Australian Health employees.

In 2015, NT Health will employ 164 graduate nurses and 19 graduate midwives in the Graduate Nurse Program and Graduate Midwifery Programs respectively.

This is 28 more Top End graduates than in 2014.

Territory locals represented 40% of last year’s intake and 53% of the positions offered in 2015.

The Northern Territory Government has also introduced measures to help increase the number of Aboriginal Health Practitioners employed in the NT, both in government and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation sectors.

The Government is committed to improving regional health and empowering the transition of health services in our remote communities to the community controlled sector.

We are leading this reform through the *Pathways to Community Control* program.

Through its *Chronic Disease Programs*, the Northern Territory has seen a significant improvement in life expectancy, especially for Aboriginal women.

Remote primary health care teams have increased their access to adult health checks, which enables identification of risk and prevention of early onset of chronic diseases.

The Government has increased women’s choices for birthing in the Northern Territory by introducing legislation that allows privately practising midwives to care for women birthing in the home.

Patients in Central Australia can now receive MRI scans for the first time, with the installation of a new Magnetic Resonance Imaging machine at Alice Springs Hospital and we have opened a new Emergency Department in Tennant Creek and a new GP Service at the hospital.

In addition, the expansion of the Telehealth NT network means increased access to health services for those living in remote communities.

56 government remote sites are connected; 85 remote sites and 5 hospitals are all on the road to participating; and work continues to add further connections.
Protecting victims of domestic violence

In 2015, my government will continue to implement a coordinated approach to tackling domestic violence.

More than 60% of assault offences in the Northern Territory are associated with domestic violence, with 82% of the victims being women.

Minister Bess Price knows only too well the pain and suffering caused by this terrible and violent crime and has made a huge contribution to this policy.

Enough is enough.

We are going to tackle domestic violence head on and give government agencies all the support they need to remove this scourge.

The NT Government’s Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy 2014-17: Safety is Everyone’s Right is a victim-focused, integrated strategy that aims to create an improved, coordinated approach.

Safety is a basic human right and is at the core of the approach.

The Strategy is jointly funded by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, and will see 11 Government departments and non-government organisations work closely together. The long-term commitment to reduce domestic and family violence is strengthened by increasing funding for support services.

Strengthening the public service

The NT Public Sector is the Territory’s largest employer with 20 000 people working across 30 agencies.

I understand that savage cuts to the public service in other jurisdictions have been hugely unpopular and unproductive.

That’s why we have bucked the trend and have in fact increased the number of employees our Northern Territory public service since we came to government.

Last year we unveiled a package of measures to make the Northern Territory Public Service a more attractive place to work.

The changes were aimed at modernising our Public Service, promoting training and staff development, as well as give staff more flexibility in their working lives.
The changes include the ability for staff to accrue leave to use over a new Christmas shutdown period.

This will bring the Territory into line with other jurisdictions across the country.

There is provision for more flexible work hours.

There’ll be better options for part-time work and we’re also simplifying the recruitment process to make it easier to apply for government jobs.

We are keen to build our skill base within the NT Public Service and will offer new training guarantees for public servants at A02-A05 levels to assist employees with their professional development.

Today I’d also like to unveil a new plank of these public service reforms by setting a new Aboriginal Employment target.

We have done a review of Aboriginal employment across the public service.

Around 30 per cent of the Territory population is Aboriginal and yet when we came to Government only eight per cent of the public service was of Indigenous heritage.

This is unacceptable.

As such I announce today that I want to see the proportion of Aboriginal public servants to double from 8 per cent to 16 per cent by 2020.

I will have more to say on this at a later date but this target will be achieved through a new Indigenous Employment Strategy which we will be announcing in the coming months.

I want to give Indigenous people an opportunity to have a real job in government and a chance to contribute to breaking the cycle of welfare dependency that has crippled Aboriginal people.

We are standing up for the economic rights of Aboriginal Territorians – something our Labor predecessors were never willing to do.

We are setting up the enabling framework that will empower Aboriginal people and give them a voice.

We have already amended Labor’s diabolical super shires which cut Aboriginal people out of the decision making process.

In their place, we have set up new Regional Councils and established and funded 63 Local Authorities that are already restoring local voices.

This is all part of setting up the enabling framework that will empower Aboriginal people and give them a voice.

I want Aboriginal people to know that the Country Liberals Government is working to reverse years of centralisation by Labor Governments.

We are empowering Aboriginal Territorians to take back control of their affairs and driving reform in an effort to improve educational outcomes and employment and business opportunities.
Protecting great Territory lifestyle

During 2015, my government will continue to defend our unique Territory lifestyle and protect the environment.

We want to make it easy for Territorians to enjoy our great outdoors, whether it’s fishing on our world famous rivers or swimming in a waterhole.

We’re investing in CCTV at our boat ramps and infrastructure in our national parks.

We also know how much Territorians love their sport and that’s why we’re investing millions of dollars in bringing first-class sporting teams to our backyard.

Since coming to Government, we’ve started building an impressive calendar of fixtures.

Because of partnerships formed by the Country Liberals Government, Territorians now get to see national and international Soccer, AFL, Cricket and NRL on a regular basis.

I’m particularly proud of our partnership with the “Territory” Eels who’ve made Darwin and Alice Springs their alternative home.

It was fantastic to see Alice Springs getting behind them at ANZAC Oval last weekend.

Celebrating our unique culture

In June 2014, this government created FestivalsNT, a new initiative to expand the Northern Territory’s annual program of cultural, sporting and business events, by:

- having a key focus on attracting visitors from overseas and interstate;
- strengthening the Territory’s role as the gateway and meeting place between Australia and Asia;
- promoting the Northern Territory as a tourist destination;
- developing and showcasing the arts;
- expanding the reach and range of sporting events and competitions;
- building on celebrated Northern Territory events;

Festivals NT includes a year-round, Territory-wide festival calendar that builds on existing events and incorporates new sporting, business and cultural elements.
It is already proving to be an enormous success.

Not only have we seen additional events in the Arts, including an expanded program of events within the 2014 Darwin Festival, but also some great sporting events including the Adelaide United partnership and the inaugural Mitchell Street Mile.

FestivalsNT will continue building on existing festivals across the Territory in 2015, with a focus on Asian engagement.

A new Director has just been appointed within the Department of the Chief Minister, to oversee FestivalsNT.

She joins the Government later this month and comes with broad experience having relocated from Indonesia where she was working in the Australian Embassy producing the recent Oz Fest event.

One of her key tasks will be to develop signature events to celebrate Territory Day based on research we conducted last year.

The key messages that the government heard from the community consultation were that: people believe that Territory Day is important and should be celebrated.

Territorians are proud of the Territory and of being Territorians.

Territory Day should be a celebration that belongs to the people and recognises our history, our heroes, our achievements, our lifestyle and our future.

Most accept that fireworks are part and parcel of Territory Day celebrations but there are mixed views on whether the gazettal of a public holiday is essential to celebrating Territory Day.

We asked the question and the community responded with a 50:50 view slightly in favour of a public holiday.

It is clear at this point in time that there isn’t a strong enough desire from the community to create a public holiday to celebrate Territory Day.

The government has listened to Territorians and has therefore decided not to introduce a public holiday at the present time.

But we do want to build on the “It’s Our Day” campaign that we started last year.
As such, Territory Day 2015 will be a time where we expand on our family friendly public firework displays.

We will also work to create a sense of both local celebration and Territory-wide unity through some new events to be held in regional areas.

**Remembering our Territory roots**

Between 2014 and 2018, Australia will commemorate the ANZAC Centenary – 100 years since the First World War

The NT Government has announced its support for a Northern Territory ANZAC Centenary Program with the highlight being The Borella Ride - a re-enactment of Albert Borella’s 1915 enlistment journey from Tennant Creek to Darwin.

It starts on Friday in Tennant Creek and arrives here in Darwin on the 3rd March.

We also recently hosted the arrival of Albert Borella’s Victoria Cross which is proudly displayed in our Main Hall and will then be moved into the State Library to join the Borella display for a further month.

The NT Government has committed funding of $4.5M over 4 years for the Anzac Centenary Program including the Chief Minister’s Anzac Spirit Study Awards.

There will also be special commemorations for the 75th anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin in 2017.

**Protecting our environment.**

We must maintain clean air, water and land;

Water is one of our most valuable resources and we must do all that we can to manage it wisely.

We must ensure that sound scientific knowledge is in place as we seek to harness the benefits of resources;

We must put the proper measures in place to allow for sustainable projects;

And we must listen and work with those whose knowledge of country is profound.

In 2015, the Government is developing a ‘Balanced Environment’ Strategy.

This is a framework to ensure the Territory has an environment that is: sustainable; balances use with protection; and is well managed, including urban design and public spaces.
The Northern Territory has high standards, overseen by the Northern Territory Environmental Protection Agency, which ensure protection of our environmental values.

For example, we have negotiated an Environmental Assessment Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth to reduce the regulatory burden on developers without compromising environmental outcomes.

The objective is to ensure an integrated, coordinated approach that minimises duplication and ensures an efficient and effective process.

In 2015, my government will continue to work with the Commonwealth to further reduce duplication and unnecessary green tape, while putting first and foremost the priority of protecting our environment.

**Making the lives of Territorians simpler by cutting Red Tape**

We’ve also been making the lives of Territorians easier by cutting more than 200 pieces of red tape since coming to government and there’s still more to come.

Labor’s disgraceful red tape legacy was laid bare in a report by Deloitte last year which showed how the burden on local business exploded between 2006 and 2011.

Deloitte’s ‘Building the lucky country’ report showed that red tape grew exponentially under Labor’s watch and that legacy is now costing local businesses $4 billion every year.

It’s a mess that we have been working hard to tackle.

We are driving down the cost of doing business in the Territory by slashing the ‘dumb’ rules and regulations that put the brake on development and investment.

This campaign covers a range of areas including construction, mining, motor vehicle registration, licensing for trades, property conveyancing, building approvals, land titles, tourism and government procurement.

We have established a Red Tape Abolition Squad and our procurement reforms are making it easier for businesses to tender and supply goods and services to government.

We now have a one stop website for the tracking of invoices, making it quicker and easier for businesses to get their government bills paid.

We’ve also launched a website for the public to report unnecessary bureaucracy.

Some of our most important reforms have been in the construction sector, helping fast track new residential development across the Territory to increase housing supply and drive down the cost of living.
We have introduced Australia’s first online integrated building approval lodgement system, shaved three months off rezoning approval times and started a one stop shop for development applications.

In especially welcome news for local construction projects, new developments now only need one utilities clearance to secure title instead of the current two clearances for the same project.

This has been a huge cash-flow issue for many developers and has previously slowed the release of properties onto the market.

I am pleased we have been able to listen to the concerns of the industry and deliver this important change and I promise Territorians will see more of the same cuts to red tape in 2015.

**Cutting the cost of living for Territorians by releasing more land.**

In 2015-16, my government will continue to implement the biggest residential, Commercial and industrial land release program in the Territory’s history.

We understand that the cost of housing has become a huge burden for many Territorians and that this is a product of Labor’s failure to release enough land when they were in Government.

They fell asleep at the wheel but we are quickly overcoming the enormous shortfall they left behind.

Palmerston is a centre of growth in the Top End, with Zucconi Stage 2 expected to deliver land for 600 dwellings and Stages 3 and 4 a further 1700 dwellings.

Proposals for the final instalment, Stage 5, are currently being assessed and will supply land for a further 400 dwellings.

Works on site will commence early this year.

In 2015, the Darwin Regional Land Use Plan will be incorporated into the NT Planning Scheme.

This is a framework that provides greater certainty on future land uses for facilitating growth and increased population.

It identifies the location of strategic infrastructure e.g. ports, airports, water catchments - including future transport and utility corridors and sites for essential facilities.

The Government has released the Territory’s largest ever brownfield site; 168 hectares at Berrimah Farm.
Three proponents have been shortlisted and invited to submit detailed proposals for redevelopment of the site which could yield up to 3000 dwellings.

The initial stages of Holtze will be released during 2015 and will provide for approximately 1200 new dwellings.

This stage will support the new Palmerston Regional Hospital and surrounding health precinct.

Industrial Land Release in 2014/15 includes Darwin Business Park north, Muramats Road East Arm, and Middle Arm for the development of commercial and industrial land for downstream gas processing, extractive industries and commercial support industries.

24 affordable lots have been sold in Kilgariff Stage 1A in Alice Springs and Stage 1B is now released bringing the total amount of lots available to 80.

A “Review of Planning Scheme Provisions” is underway focussing primarily on Alice Springs’ CBD.

The Katherine Land Use Plan was introduced into the NT Planning Scheme last year. The Katherine East 19 hectare site is expected to yield over 100 lots and support more than 200 dwellings.

Construction and sales off the plan for the first 71 lot stage will commence in early 2015.

Land in Kalkarindji and Tennant Creek will also be released for development this year.

There is no doubt that our massive land release program is stimulating the building activity which is vitally important for our future to ensure that our population grows and that there are affordable homes for our young people.

**Helping Territorians buy a home in the city and the bush**

Pride is important and owning your own home helps to build a culture that is proud and confident of its future

This government is selling up to 50% of all remote public housing back to tenants.
As of 1st of July 2014, housing on a 40 or 99 year lease became available for sale to tenants which will help to restore pride in home ownership and further break the cycle of dependence on government.

We said we would build a better future for all Territorians, and what better way than a better education and owning your own home.

We have increased the First Home Buyers grant for new homes by a thousand dollars to $26,000 and altered the eligibility to encourage the construction of new housing.

New housing creates more jobs and helps to keep the cost of living down by increasing the supply of homes.

Under our Real Housing for Growth plan, the Government is delivering 2000 new dwellings over 4 years.

The Department of Housing has already supported the delivery of 50 new affordable rental units in Karama and 9 in Tennant Creek. These properties have been made available to eligible key service industry workers at 30 per cent below market rates.

The public housing complex currently being developed, at Runge Street, will deliver 59 2-bedroom dwellings - 15 affordable rental units for key service industry workers and 10 units reserved for eligible purchasers through the Home Buyer initiative.

In the first quarter of this year, there will be 122 new affordable rental dwellings available under the Head-Leasing Initiative to support the attraction and retention of key service industry workers in the Northern Territory: 60 at Coolalinga, 37 at Farrar, and 25 units in Braitling. Another 116 affordable rental units are under construction across the Darwin/Palmerston region.

The Homebuyer Initiative provides opportunities for eligible Territorians to purchase their own home at affordable prices. HomeBuild Access provides low deposit and low interest loans targeted at new dwellings to eligible Territorians. $4.5 million has been set aside over the next 3 years to enable Territorians in remote communities to become home owners.

The Department of Housing is working with Defence Housing Australia on a joint redevelopment initiative trial in Darwin that to address the social goals of Framing the Future by redeveloping older public housing.

The development will be funded wholly by Defence Housing Australia in exchange for land provided by the Department of Housing.
Key reforms over the next 3 years will focus on:

- improved tenancy and property management practices;
- consistent management practice across remote and urban public housing;
- enforcing tenant obligations (paying rent and paying for tenant responsibility damage);
- supporting mobility initiatives so that there are no barriers to remote community residents transferring their public housing allocation to a regional centre if they gain employment;
- allocation of housing to families whose children attend school regularly or to families where the tenants are employed; and
- increased Indigenous employment in property and tenancy management.

Helping vulnerable Territorians

The NT Government recognises the important role the non-government sector plays in providing services to Territorians.

Several new initiatives have been and will continue to be introduced to build the working relationship between the government and NGO sector including a Partnership Group initially focusing on how both parties work together.

A Statement of Principles to underpin the working relationship has been ratified and I recently launched these in Darwin and Alice Springs.

This reaffirms our shared commitment to working together to achieve outcomes for those most vulnerable and at risk within the Territory.

Securing jobs for Territorians.

In 2015, we will create jobs for the future by building a strong economy.

When we came to government, the Northern Territory’s finances had been run down to such a point that it was difficult to fund any new initiative.

The Labor Party had done its best to bankrupt the Territory.

But in the 2013-14 Treasurer’s Annual Financial Report, we delivered a net operating surplus a full 3 years ahead of schedule.

By reducing waste, tightening our belts and staying focussed on outcomes, by the end of 2013-14 we had already reduced the debt burden on the Territory by $1.5 billion.
We had reduced interest payments to service that debt by $32 million a year, and the projections to 2015-16 are to have further reduced this burden by $1.8 billion and $80 million respectively.

And the latest Deloitte Access Economics report gives a glowing outlook for the Territory economy with inflation moderating to the second lowest in the country and our economic performance expected to remain strong, growing by an average of 4.2 per cent per annum between 2014-15 and 2018-19. That’s the highest average annual growth forecast of all jurisdictions.

The recent message from the CEO of the Northern Territory’s Chamber of Commerce, dated 29 January 2015, sums it up: “The recent Sensis business confidence index showed that NT businesses are the most positive in the country”

This outstanding achievement is allowing us to get on with business and to look forward to 2015, 2016, and beyond.

This year, we continue with the hard work to ensure that the economic settings are correct and that we can create jobs for Territorians.

The Territory has the lowest unemployment rate in the country as well as the highest year on year employment growth and the highest participation rate of 71.9% compared to the national 64.7%.

**Creating jobs in tourism**

We will continue to develop the Territory’s tourism potential

After years of decline, my government has returned the Territory tourism industry to a position of growth and we will continue this focus through 2015-16.

Independent research shows holiday visitors numbers and expenditure have increased.

Holiday visitor expenditure increased by 18% to $896 million dollars - this translates into an additional $135 million for the Territory, a return on investment of almost $17 for every extra dollar invested in tourism by my government since 2012.

These results represent a significant turnaround and are a clear sign that Tourism NT’s revitalised marketing strategy is working. However, there is much to do over the coming years to return the tourism sector to the position it was in during the early 2000s.
In 2015, my government, through Tourism NT, will focus on maintaining and building visitor growth. For that we need game changers to attract more visitors, enhance their experiences in the NT and encourage regional dispersal.

We need investment in tourism infrastructure to deliver diversified and innovative experiences:

Imagine a cultural centre of national and global significance based in Alice Springs, providing insight into the arts, culture and philosophies of Australian Indigenous peoples.

How about a major attraction in the Top End that capitalises on the resurgence of interest in Australia’s involvement in both World Wars and the ANZACs in general?

It would complement our Defence of Darwin museum but be broadened to include interactive experiences on land and water utilising advancements in technology to bring history to life - for example, holograms to tell stories through the eyes of those who were here during the bombing of Darwin.

Then there’s the upgrading of Darwin port facilities to position the city as not just the successful short visit destination it already is, but as a destination that is a base for quality cruise experiences that explore the magic of the Spice Islands and other countries to our north.

Along with that we need effective integration of the Waterfront Precinct with Darwin City itself as a welcoming gateway for our cruise ship visitors.

Not only is a Cruise Activation Plan to maximise the NT cruise sector in the final stages of development, but the major Cruise Down Under Conference will be held in Darwin in September 2015 putting an additional spotlight on this increasingly popular cruise destination.

Imagine the Territory as the leading backdrop for self-drive or guided tours, renowned for routes leading to both popular and little explored locations. For instance, Alice Springs to Tennant Creek being on everyone’s bucket list as a must do Australian drive! This range of diverse projects demonstrates the potential of the resources industry to underpin economic development in our remote areas.

We want to reposition the Territory in the adventure space, linking our natural wonders such as Katherine Gorge and Karlu Karlu whilst opening up spectacular country to cater a well-managed way for the 4WD market.
This includes breathing new life into the Savannah Way, famous for linking 15 national parks and five World Heritage areas across northern Australia.

Over this year and next, my government aims to turn such ideas into reality. To introduce circuit-breakers that will change our thinking about what attracts visitors, and turn thinking into attractions that are compelling and not to be missed.

We must revamp the sense of welcome that visitors experience when they arrive in Darwin and Alice Springs – make them feel excited and sense that they are arriving somewhere that is very special.

We must use our strengths to leverage opportunities. This is already happening in East Arnhem Land with forward thinking Traditional Owners offering customised educational stays on their homelands.

70% of recreational fishing in the Territory occurs in regional areas, where it is often the primary economic and development driver and new venues include Dhipirri Lodge near Milingimbi where charters experience fishing the Glyde and Woolen Rivers.

A new NT Aboriginal Tours & Experiences brochure was launched in November 2014 but we must encourage more new destinations, such as the Tiwi Islands, by facilitating an environment that fosters tourism investment to provide diversified and inspirational experiences for the discerning traveller.

We must open up the Territory’s world heritage listed national parks, Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta, by providing new and exciting experiences to attract more visitors.

Imagine an accommodation habitat on a remote billabong in Kakadu National Park. Maybe one with a stairway to a construction below the water line so that those staying in it can view (and sleep with) underwater wildlife – what an experience that would be!

Traditional owners are concerned about falling visitation to Kakadu as it affects their livelihoods and those of their children. My government is already working with them on this concept and will continue the work during 2015 and beyond.

We are also working on new experiences such as a 2-day walk and high quality ‘swag experience’ between Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) and Uluru, accompanied by Traditional Owners and park rangers to help travellers really understand and appreciate the country – setting off at sunrise on Day 1 and finishing at sunset on Day 2.
The Larapinta Trail in Central Australia already has as a world class reputation and we are intent on establishing walks in Kakadu and our other parks to rival those of Larapinta.

We must expand our natural offerings. I know the Jawoyn people are interested in expanding beyond Nitmuluk National Park to the south end of Kakadu. This area, including Katherine itself, is rich in natural, cultural, pioneering and pastoral history. Let’s help others to explore, learn and enjoy by attracting investment for tourism development.

We must unlock the land with care and create accommodation and experiences in secluded, but accessible unique settings such as, for instance, a boutique lodge within easy reach of Karlu Karlu or a luxury lodge experience on the shores of Mary Ann Dam north of Tennant Creek.

My government is ready to support investors with visionary concepts that are outside the square, that complement the uniqueness of the Northern Territory, and that realise the Territory’s full potential as a compelling tourism destination.

This will be our focus over the next 5 years.

**Creating jobs in the bush**

It is important that the bush shares equally in the benefits of this extraordinary economic growth. Therefore we will continue to support and supplement regional economic development opportunities and programs and initiatives at every opportunity.

In 2015, we will continue to remove the road blocks to regional development and pursuing real economic opportunities with a number of communities

We’ve seen fantastic progress and partnerships on the Tiwi Islands.

And we will continue that model to other regions in 2015, working with communities to connect them with investors and projects that suit their vision for the local economy and to maximise job creation.

The Tiwi people are looking forward. The affordable ferry service to the Tiwi Islands carried nearly five and a half thousand passengers last year; The first woodchip harvesting is planned from March 2015, creating up to 100 jobs on the island.

The Port Melville redevelopment will provide marine base support, including a 30 million litre tank farm, and half a million dollars has been allocated within the 2014-
15 budget for pontoon development. The potential for a tourism precinct is also being explored.

This government’s focus on creating jobs in regional areas is working and it is expanding.

**Creating jobs in Resources**

The resources sector plays a vital part in the Territory’s economy and jobs market and will continue to do so into the future

The effects of the current downturn are fully recognised, but this is the time to put in place planning and infrastructure for the future. Short term fluctuations in the oil prices should not distract us. The global economy is, and will remain, hungry for gas.

Natural gas currently accounts for about a quarter of global energy consumption.

The mainstay of power generation is moving away from coal towards gas-fired and the International Energy Agency expects the global LNG market to grow 40% in the next 5 years, with half of all new exports coming from Australia.

It is vital that Darwin is fully prepared to play its part as a strategic hub for servicing the region’s expanding oil, gas, marine and defence industries.

This government is progressing development of just under 100 hectares of waterfront land within East Arm Logistics Precinct in order to capture this market opportunity and the Masterplan will be completed during the course of the year.

There is no doubt that LNG will displace iron ore as the main source of Australia’s export growth within this decade. But the Northern Territory Government is not only focussed on LNG export markets to our north.

With the dynamics currently facing gas supply in New South Wales in particular, the importance of investment in pipeline infrastructure cannot be underestimated. This pipeline will be a priority for my government’s focus in 2015.

It was clearly stated in the COAG Communique in October 2014, and I quote: “COAG supported the work being undertaken by NT to establish a competitive process for the private sector to bring forward proposals for the construction and operation of a pipeline to connect the Northern and Eastern Gas Markets. COAG agreed that connecting these gas markets is the next step to developing a national gas grid and will contribute
to the development of a more national and competitive domestic gas market, helping to improve supply security

This gas pipeline - the North East Gas Interconnector - will stimulate investment in infrastructure across the Northern Territory, create substantial business, employment and economic development benefits, and further unlock the Territory’s economic potential. The pipeline carries Major Project Status, and 11 companies have been shortlisted to proceed to the next stage of the bid process.

In 2015, the pipeline will a priority for this Government.

Before I move away from the oil and gas industry, I would like to re-emphasise the employment and training opportunities for Territorians.

A few months ago, I opened the Onshore Supply Base for Shell Prelude at East Arm Industrial Business Park. At the same time, Charles Darwin University launched their ‘Prelude to the Future’ training and employment program, a unique 4-way partnership between the Prelude joint venture, the NT Government, CDU, and Group Training NT. It will run for 2 years, providing participants with 20 weeks of auto-mechanic training, work experience and ongoing mentoring.

We are in talks with other major resource companies about future projects that will build on the Territory’s proven track record as a reliable source of LNG.

Major projects like INPEX and Prelude create jobs, they create a future for the next generation of apprentices and tradies, plus widespread business opportunities for local companies – all of which this government will rigorously pursue in 2015.

The NT Government is committed to assisting businesses access skilled workers. It’s good for business and it’s good for Territorians that want to work.

In 2015, the NT Employment and Training Advisory Board will prepare reforms to deliver a training system to be introduced from the start of next year that is more responsive to the needs of business and industry, and delivers better outcomes for workers and future workers in the Territory.

In 2015, the Department of Business will finalise arrangements with the Australian Government for a second stage of the Designated Area Migration Agreement, providing an increased number of places in a greater range of occupations identified by NT employers as suffering from a labour shortage. The Territory will also look to
expand the pilot project established between Australia and Greece to other priority nations with significant migrant communities here in the NT.

Creating jobs in Mining

Despite the current challenges in commodity markets, the value of mineral production in the Northern Territory continued to increase last year, and the Territory has a strong pipeline of emerging mining projects moving forward including, I am pleased to say, projects in central Australia.

The first new gold mine in the Tanami in more than a decade is scheduled to commence this year, with ABM Resources’ Old Pirate project having received all of its Government approvals.

At the Mount Peake project near Barrow Creek, TNG Limited is developing one of largest strategic metals vanadium-titanium-iron projects in Australia. TNG is in the final stages of feasibility studies with plans to begin construction in 2015 and production and exports from 2017.

KGL Resources’ Jervois project on the Plenty Highway began a drilling program in September last year and is working towards the Pre-Feasibility Study at what is one of the highest grade copper open pit projects in Australia, with significant silver and lead/zinc potential.

There is also an underground salt mine on the cards and the major new Teena zinc discovery near Borroloola.

This range of diverse projects demonstrates the potential of the resources industry to underpin economic development in our remote areas.

Another project on the Major Projects list is the Ord River Expansion which presents enormous potential for economic development and employment not only in agriculture but also for other opportunities in the area including gas and mineral resources.

During 2015 and beyond, this Government remains committed to ensuring that these projects have the maximum opportunity to proceed into development and we also remain committed to supporting exploration for new deposits that can ensure the long-term contribution of mining to the economy.
However, let me stress that at all stages we continue to be mindful of our unique lifestyle which is the envy of many.…

**Creating jobs and business opportunities with Defence**

In 2015, we will continue to actively encourage growth of Defence services in the NT.

We currently have 20% of the RAAF’s air combat capability based in the NT and DHA will be commencing work on 80 houses on RAAF Base Darwin and 50 houses on RAAF Tindal.

There are 700 or so personnel at Larrakeyah Barracks operating the patrol boat fleet from HMAS Coonawarra, and new wharf facilities are currently under consideration by Defence.

The Multi User Barge Facilities and common area in the Marine Industry Park will proceed through the Parliamentary Works Committee with capital provided by the Royal Australian Navy. A decision is expected mid-2015, with works commencing by the end of the year.

And of course we have the Combat Brigade, 1st Brigade, at Robertson Barracks, which will grow incrementally when it enters the ‘readying’ rotation phase in July 2015 - this includes the relocation of 9th Field Squadron from Adelaide to Darwin.

The Northern Territory is the key strategic location to support future Defence, Border Security and Humanitarian operations into the Asia Pacific.

In 2015, I will release the government’s strategic plan to maximise the economic benefit of Defence’s evolving presence in the Territory.

This report, entitled ‘*Northern Territory and Defence: A Strategy for Security and Prosperity*’ will outline our plan to integrate future ADF presence and infrastructure spending with the US Force Posture Initiative for the economic benefit and regional stability of all Territorians.

The US initiative will see the continued presence of 1175 Marines from April 2015 and the planning for this number to grow to 2500 in 2017-18.

In addition, 2015 will be a major year for International Exercises in training areas across the Territory, including a significant influx of United States Army, Navy and Marines in conjunction with the Australian Defence Force for Exercise Talisman Sabre.
My government is focused in 2015-16 on the benefits of the defence spend to the Northern Territory.

**Attracting private investment to create jobs**

During 2015, we will continue our work, building an economy that is strengthened by new private and public infrastructure projects that are critical to delivering the long term infrastructure requirements of the Northern Territory.

We are investing a record $377.8 million on roads this financial year because we know that better roads will open up the Territory to new investment and opportunities.

The Outback Way stretching from Laverton in Western Australia to Winton in Queensland has a total program for the NT of $40 million over 3 years, jointly funded by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. Construction is due to commence on Tjukururu Road in May and the Plenty Highway in June this year.

Other projects include the upgrade of the Leviathan Creek Crossing on Fog Bay Road, expected to be completed by December 2015;

Sealing sections of the access road between Kalkarindji and Lajamanu;

Joint projects through the Regional Roads Productivity Package including: Upgrade and sealing sections of road between Alice Springs Airport and Santa Teresa, including Yam Creek Crossing, with completion expected in May 2015.

An upgrade of sections of the Arnhem Link Road, dependent on the outcome of stakeholder consultation;

Work on the Buntine Highway with an anticipated completion of September 2015;

Port Keats Road flood immunity improvement through the Moyle River Floodplain, expected to be completed in November 2015.

Construction of a bridge over Rocky Bottom Creek on the Central Arnhem Road, with expected completion in December 2015.

New bridges at the Roper River and Wilton River crossings, due for completion by December 2016.

Another significant project is the Alice Springs Rail Overpass expected to be completed in May 2015.

Also this year, the Tanami Road will see newly sealed and upgraded sections and a project to extend the seal will continue.
Remote aerodromes provide a vital link for regional and remote towns, and in 2015 upgrades will include Utopia Airstrip, Kaltukatjara and Yarralin. Port Keats Aerodrome and Bathurst Aerodrome are the next priorities, subject to budget allocation.

**Cutting the cost of living by leasing our Port**

Legislation enabling a possible lease of the Darwin Port will be referred to a Parliamentary Committee to ensure the proposed model offers the best outcome for Territorians.

We have heard loud and clear that people don’t want the port sold and I want to reiterate that what we are talking about is a lease NOT a sale.

But our port must grow so that it can meet the needs and opportunities of the future and I want Territorians to be confident that any lease arrangement we enter into is in their best interests.

There are different ways to structure a lease and I want Territorians to have faith that the model that is ultimately chosen is the best one available after considering all the evidence.

As such, debate on the enabling bills currently before the Assembly will be deferred until a Parliamentary Select Committee has had the opportunity to examine what’s being proposed, as well as alternative models.

The Committee will look at options for enhancing the model to ensure that any partner is focused on growth and development of the port, has competitive prices and follows international best practice in safety, environmental and operational efficiency.

The Committee will also consider existing Northern Territory public/private partnerships such as the Marine Supply Base and what lessons can be learnt from the process undertaken by the former Labor Government to set it up.

I’m particularly keen to see the Committee’s recommendations about the duration of any lease.

Whilst a 99 year lease has been floated previously, there are many time frames used around the world and I’m interested to get feedback on the preferred length of any lease.
The key to this will be giving sufficient certainty to any potential partner while retaining the Government’s ability to consider the partner’s performance against pre-agreed benchmarks.

Ultimately, we want to maximise the benefit to Territorians from any partnership both in terms of ongoing financial returns and long term expansion of the Port.

Our economy needs a port that is efficient and competitive and any lease agreement must be focused on achieving that goal.

The Inquiry will run for five weeks with the final report to be presented by 20 March 2015.

**Investing in infrastructure to make Territorians’ lives easier and cut travel times**

The Territory Government will establish an Infrastructure Fund to directly invest in infrastructure to support the future development of the Northern Territory.

The Fund will comprise a share of the proceeds from sales of Government assets. It will support investment in economic and social infrastructure in the Northern Territory and leverage private investment, where viable, and access contributions from available Commonwealth funding for infrastructure purposes.

The overarching objective of the Fund will be to promote investment in infrastructure which supports the longer term economic growth and development of the Territory and the social well-being of Territorians.

Already, $50 million from the proceeds of the sale of the TIO has been set aside for flood mitigation initiatives in high risk flood areas. Flood mitigation is expensive work and no Government has ever been willing to tackle it before.

But my government has begun the work and in 2015-16, we will be getting on with it.

Last month, I announced draft Terms of Reference and membership details of the Darwin and Katherine Regional Flood Mitigation committees being established to make recommendations on how the funding can best be spent, ensuring value for money for taxpayers.

$25 million is set aside for works in Rapid Creek and the Darwin Rural Area, while another $25 million has been allocated for Katherine, including $7.6 million to move the town’s Ambulance Centre out of the flood zone.
After calling for public expressions of interest, the Government has announced membership of both committees and together we will focus our efforts in 2015-16 to ameliorate effects of future flood damage to people and property.

In addition to dealing with matters of significant infrastructure and flood mitigation, this government is implementing a number of reforms to make people's lives easier and improve convenience…

The much welcomed reforms at MVR will continue in 2015 providing more options for service access and greater convenience for customers and industry.

The start of the school year has seen the commencement of a trial for a new Alice Springs school bus in consultation with the local operator ATG Downunder.

In 2015, the Government will finalise the review of the taxi industry and the regulatory framework for the commercial passenger vehicle industry to improve services to the community and to the tourism industry, and access into the industry, while maintaining quality and safety standards.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, 2015 will see:

A Government that is listening to Territorians about how they want to see the Territory grow;

A government focussed on law and order and continuing to drive crime statistics down;

A government committed to the priorities of good health care and education;

A government that ensures land release continues so that home ownership can be achieved by many more Territorian families.

A government that is supporting small business and local industries, encouraging training and creating jobs for Territorians;

A government that pursues capital investment in improved infrastructure that will lead to regional development;

A government that is promoting international trade and Asian engagement to create more investment opportunities for the Territory;
A government that will find ways to enable traditional owners to attract private sector investment and finance to develop their own land to create jobs and economic advancement for Indigenous people.

A government that is making the most of our strategic position within northern Australia in every aspect from agribusiness to defence, from international education to LNG.

Madam Speaker,

I am proud to lead the Northern Territory over the year ahead, making the lives of Territorians easier, safer and simpler.