

Madam Speaker took the Chair at 1.30 pm.

MESSAGE FROM ADMINISTRATOR

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received from His Honour, the Administrator, Message No 27 notifying assent to bills passed in the May 2011 sittings of the Assembly.

TABLED PAPER Advice from Acting Consul of the Republic of Indonesia

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the advice from the Acting Consul from the Consulate of the Republic of Indonesia that the resolution relating to the live cattle export to Indonesia was forwarded to His Excellency Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Given this was an occasion for a special sitting, I will read the letter:

Honourable Madam Speaker,

I am writing to extend my sincere appreciation for your personal delivery of the motion and letter to our President in regards to the NT parliament resolution on the live cattle export to Indonesia.

Indonesia and Australia, in particular with the Northern Territory, need to continue to strengthen cooperation and I sincerely believe that cattle industry has played an important role in strengthening the relationship between the two countries. NT parliament's initiative and united front in addressing the issue of live cattle export is indeed very important in resolving this problem as quickly as possible.

The Consulate has forwarded the document to H.E Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono through related authorities in Jakarta. Any response on this document will be forwarded immediately to your office.

Again I thank you and look forward to continuing our cooperation in the near future.

And it is signed by the Acting Consul, Mr Bambang Daranindra.

Honourable members, when I receive correspondence from His Excellency I will ensure all members receive a copy as soon as possible.

RESPONSES TO PETITIONS

The CLERK: Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 100A, I inform honourable members that responses to Petitions Nos 48, 49, 51 and 53 have been received and circulated to honourable members.

Petition No 48

Intrastate Travel Entitlements for NT Pensioner Concession and Carer Scheme Senior Card Holders

Date Presented: 1 December 2010

Presented by: Mr Styles

Referred to: Minister for Senior Territorians

Date response due: 18 October 2011

Date response received: 3 June 2011

Date response presented: 23 June 2011

Response:

The NTPCCS travel concession was introduced as a mechanism to encourage seniors to remain in the Northern Territory during their retirement years by providing them a mechanism to maintain contact with friends and family who reside interstate and overseas.

This concession was later expanded to allow frail Territorians who find travel difficult, to use this concession to bring a family member or friend to the Northern Territory to visit them. Intra-Territory travel has never formed part of the NTPCCS travel concession and there are no plans to alter the scheme to include this as it is not in keeping with the aim of the concession.

The NTPCCS aims to assist the majority of members with the basic cost of living and is the most generous scheme in Australia when the combination of benefits is taken into account.

Petition No 49

General Aviation Aerodrome in Greater Darwin Area

Date presented: 29 March 2011

Presented by: Ms Purick

Referred to: Minister for Lands and Planning

Date response due: 17 August 2011

Date response received: 2 June 2011

Date response presented: 23 June 2011

Response:

This government is committed to the development of the City of Weddell based on the fundamentals of sustainability and good urban planning practice. A future general aviation facility is potentially part of

a broader Weddell vision. Investigations are currently under way to determine the viability and practicality for such a facility in the Weddell region, which may at some time service the general aviation industry in the greater Darwin area and cater for its future growth.

*Petition No 51
Rezoning sections of Hundred of Strangways*

Date presented: 29 March 2011

Presented by: Ms Purick

Referred to: Minister for Lands and Planning

Date response due: 17 August 2011

Date response received: 18 May 2011

Date response presented: 23 June 2011

Response:

The application has been withdrawn and is not being considered any further. Everyone that made submissions on this proposal has been notified.

*Petition No 53
Lot Size Rural Residential Zone in the Litchfield Council*

Date presented: 5 May 2011

Presented by: Mr Wood

Referred to: Minister for Lands and Planning

Date response due: 25 October 2011

Date response received: 14 June 2011

Date response presented: 23 June 2011

Response:

The Rural Villages Discussion Paper on the potential shape and form of centres in the Darwin rural area is currently out on public exhibition. The closing date for submissions is 13 June 2011. Government's position is, and remains, that 4000 m² lots are restricted to the rural villages only.

At the close of exhibition, government will consider all submissions received and the result of that process will be made public. Any amendments to the NT Planning Scheme will be the subject of a formal planning process under the Planning Act, providing a further opportunity for public comment.

**TABLED PAPER
Remuneration Tribunal Determination -
Interstate Study Travel Reports – Members for
Nelson, Brennan, Sanderson and Nightcliff**

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table Interstate Study Travel reports pursuant to paragraph 3.15 of the Remuneration Tribunal Determination No 1 of 2010 for the following members: the members for Nelson, Brennan, Sanderson, and also for me.

**TABLED PAPER
Fourth Report of the
Council of Territory Cooperation –
Recent Community Trips**

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I table the fourth report of the Council of Territory Cooperation, Recent Community Trips, dated 31 May 2011.

**MOTION
Print paper – Fourth Report of the
Council of Territory Cooperation –
Recent Community Trips**

Mr WOOD (Nelson)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the fourth report of the Council of Territory Cooperation, Recent Community Trips, dated May 2011 be printed.

Motion agreed to.

**MOTION
Note paper – Fourth Report of the
Council of Territory Cooperation –
Recent Community Trips**

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the fourth report of the Council of Territory Cooperation, Recent Community Trips, dated May 2011.

Madam Speaker, I seek leave to continue my remarks at a later hour.

Leave granted.

Debate adjourned.

**APPROPRIATION (2011-2012) BILL
(Serial 163)**

Continued from 5 May 2011.

**Tabled Paper
Pairing Arrangements –
Members for Fannie Bay and Braitling; and
Members for Arafura and Fong Lim**

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received a document relating to pairs for the member for Fannie Bay with the member for Braitling, and the member for Arafura with the member for Fong Lim. The first one is from 2 pm to close of business. I table that paper.

In committee:

Madam CHAIR: I call on the Chair of the Estimates Committee.

Mr GUNNER: Madam Chair, I am pleased to table the reports of the Estimates Committee and the Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee on their consideration of the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the schedule to the Appropriation Bill 2011-12.

The two reports and this tabling statement make up the final report of the 2011 Estimates Committee and the Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory. Each report outlines the key areas of concern reflected in the lines of questioning that became evident as the hearings progressed.

I advise honourable members that any outstanding information, including answers to questions taken on notice, must be tabled in the Legislative Assembly by 8 August 2011. Until that date, the Committee Secretariat will be updating the Questions on Notice database as answers are received. The House has not authorised the publication of answers received after the next sitting date, so I ask ministers to ensure their agencies provide their written answers to the secretariat as soon as possible.

Madam Chair, I now turn to the process of the Estimates Committee's public hearings for 2011.

The management of the overall workload of the Estimates Committee is always a challenge and this year was no different. There was an increase in the total number of hours of estimates and the Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny from 50 to 60 hours, with the addition of a sixth day to the estimates timetable, and the increase to the questioning of the Government

Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee to four hours.

This provided more time for the examination of the proposed expansion for 2011-12, and allowed much more room for committee members to expand the scope of questions for each output group. It also allowed for a more family-friendly schedule of only three 11 pm finishing times. There was also an increase in the total number of hours for the Chief Minister and the Treasurer. The Chief Minister and the Treasurer were each questioned for a total of eight hours. The other ministers were capped at seven hours each, although only three were questioned for seven hours and three were questioned for six hours to allow more time for the Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Reinforcement of the committee's terms of reference regarding questions and questioning again proved successful, provided clarity and certainty for departmental officers attending the hearings that questions were directed to their minister. When officers were required to provide answers, these were given through their minister. I also commend the goodwill agreement reached again this year, as it was last year, around providing greater certainty to agencies when they appear and for the arrangement regarding allocations of questions between the opposition and the Independent members.

This year we again commenced questioning with the Treasurer; an important change implemented in 2010, and again allowed the overall picture of appropriations for 2011-12 to be examined from the very beginning of the hearings. As in previous years, participation of other members of the committee provided every opposition shadow minister the opportunity to question their corresponding minister, and also provided flexibility for members to be present while specific portfolios were being scrutinised. It appeared our two Independent members also managed their turns effectively and assisted each other by asking questions on the other's behalf when appearing on the committee.

Over the last few years members of the committee, in preparation for estimates, have sought the list of agencies or output groups not questioned during the hearings. This happens for a variety of reasons and knowing which outputs do not appear during estimates assists us in setting up the estimates for next year.

This time, the output groups not reached for whatever reason - questions not asked were on Financial Management, payments on behalf of government, Superannuation, Economic Regulation, Central Holding Authority, Northern Territory Treasury Corporation, Non-government

Education, Training, Women's Policy, Darwin Bus Service, Arts and Culture, Data Centre Services and NT Fleet. It should be acknowledged, in respect to a number of those outputs within the Treasury portfolio, that was because of the flexibility we took as a committee, with the discretion of the Treasurer, to deal at a higher level early in the examination at the agency whole-of-government level - which is much appreciated by the committee.

This information may assist in the allocation of the order of outputs for ministers at next year's estimates.

This is the Legislative Assembly's 10th year of Estimates Committee hearings. With each year, the Assembly learns from the previous year, and over the years it has improved its estimates process greatly. The Assembly has become very efficient at the conduct of this very important scrutiny role in our parliamentary democracy. A very significant change this year was the opportunity of having both the Shareholding minister and the Essential Services minister, accompanied by the Chairman and Managing Director of the Government Owned Corporation, which happened earlier this morning. The result was very robust and productive questioning and answering. This new arrangement was very successful and has set a standard for future years of government owned corporation scrutiny at committee hearings.

The extra hours and day gave room for more intense questioning of particular output groups and greater focus on key budget areas of each portfolio. This required a fair degree of management to sustain the intensity of questioning over the 60 hours, and I appreciate the efforts each member of the committee put in.

I can report there has been a decrease in the total questions taken on notice during the proceedings. There were 149 questions taken on notice this year, of which five were for Power and Water. This is a decrease of 22 questions from last year. Over one quarter of questions taken on notice were answered during the hearings. On behalf of the committee, I thank the ministers and agencies for the promptness of responses thus far, and I also ask any outstanding questions be provided as soon as possible in order to meet the August sittings tabling of question and answers.

I take this opportunity to thank all members who participated in the 2011 estimates process, particularly the ministers for their cooperation during the process, and all other witnesses who appeared in assisting the ministers in answering their questions.

Much preparation goes into appearing before the Estimates Committee and we appreciate the hard work done by many public servants. We acknowledge their preparatory work and that the briefings they prepare are not necessarily needed during the Estimates Committee process at times, depending on which way the questioning goes. We appreciate they do that work regardless.

Thank you, also, to the staff of the Legislative Assembly for their work to ensure the whole process ran smoothly. Special mention must be made of Hansard, Building and Technical Services and Committee staff. I have said before that the Estimates Committee is probably the hardest transcribing work Hansard does in many ways because of the conversational nature, the back and forth, and people talking over each other. It is a hard process to transcribe and Hansard does a particularly good job.

I acknowledge the Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee. The process this morning provided valuable insight into the operations of Power and Water. The four hours and two ministers being present for questioning were beneficial to the process and improved transparency and accountability.

Madam Chair, I place on the record my sincere appreciation to the staff of all agencies involved in the estimates process over the six days. The process could not be effective without their hard work and dedication. Preparation for estimates begins many months in advance, and the staff put in long hours for and during estimates, particularly those who appear late at night not knowing whether they are going to be called or not. Everyone works hard, but when you are sitting around at 10 pm not sure if you are going to be called, that causes extra strain.

I particularly thank the secretariat of the Estimates Committee. It was Mr Russell Keith's first Estimates Committee. He is very experienced and we appreciated his professionalism and assistance during the Estimates Committee process.

Madam Chair, I commend the reports of the 2011 Estimates Committee and the Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee to the House.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, member for Fannie Bay and Chair of Estimates.

Honourable members, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly dated 4 May 2011, the committee has before it consideration of the Appropriation (2011-12) Bill 2011 (Serial 163), and reports of the Estimates Committee and the

Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee.

The question is - That the proposed expenditure be agreed to and that the resolutions or expressions of opinion as agreed to by the committees in relation to the proposed expenditure or outputs with reference to the Appropriation (2011-2012) Bill 2011 (Serial 163), and the activities, performance, practices and financial management of the Power and Water Corporation with reference to its Statement of Corporate Intent for 2011-12, be noted.

I remind members that speech time limits for this debate are as follows: ministers, Leader of the Opposition and shadow minister, 20 minutes; any other member, 10 minutes. The maximum period for consideration and conduct of this debate is five hours. As the time is now 1:45 pm, if the debate is not concluded by 6:45 pm I will put the question.

Honourable members, when consideration of the bill and reports have been concluded and the question put, the following question will then be put forthwith without debate: that the remainder of the bill be agreed to and the bill will then be reported to the Assembly. Following this report, the Speaker will then call upon the Treasurer to move the third reading of the bill.

Mr WOOD: Madam Chair, I would like to say a few words as a member of the Public Accounts Committee so I do not forget at the end.

I thank all the staff, especially Russell Keith, who did a fantastic job keeping us organised. Also, the Hansard people, who have a difficult time understanding some of the things we talk about. Also, all the public servants who spend hours preparing material. Anyone who sat through a Public Accounts Committee and watched our public servants come in and out the room knows they have spent much time preparing for the process. I may have a whole list of questions I would like to ask; they also have many answers that are not always required. Much of the information they collate is still important. It is not wasted information; it is information, even within government ranks, that is useful.

It has been a long two weeks. Even though it is tiring, the Estimates Committee is a really important part of our democratic process in this parliament. It is a chance to dig in, to investigate where the government is spending its money, and to look at policies and outcomes. That is why, even though it is a long period, it is a very informative time where the parliament works together, because it is also a two-way street.

My initial feelings are that the time limit we have at present is sufficient. We have been adjusting it every year, and it is time it is settled down and given a few years to run at this length. There are still issues and I could be accused of being one of the problems; that sometimes questions and answers can be too long. I do not know whether the standing orders for the PAC need adjusting, but knowing we divide a department up into certain sections and are trying to get the maximum numbers of questions answered, if both sides support that process we can do better than we have this year.

In some cases, there were periods where one subject would go for an hour. Sometimes, we have to précis and focus those questions so we get better value for money and time. That is probably the only issue that concerns me - time efficiency. Naturally, there is some politics and people will try to drag out answers to give a speech. That needs to be looked at so we get better value for money.

From my point of view, a couple of areas were of interest. The definition of waterways is one that really concerns me. The wetlands of the Northern Territory, especially in the Top End and Central Australia - I have just been to Elkedra where the Elkedra River has a beautiful wetland right near the station. The definition of what is a waterway under the *Water Act* needs to come to our attention fairly quickly to see whether there are loopholes in the law. Listening to the debate we had, if a depression is filled by storm water then that depression - if we want to call it that - is not protected under the *Water Act*. Most of our lagoons and wetlands are depressions filled by storm water. Some are probably kept partially full during the Dry Season from the water table, but most of our wetlands are filled by rainfall. It is an area that needs to be looked at urgently. I asked the minister to come back with some clarification on that issue, and also who owns water, especially when water is divided. The minister said the Crown. Which part of the Crown? Who will prosecute someone for pumping water on their block if it does not come under the *Water Act*? There are some issues in relation to that.

The other issue of concern is the dwellings at Daly River. It seems very strange you can have a system where, on one hand, a person can apply to put dwellings on a parcel of land in an unzoned area as medium density development and be knocked back by the Planning Authority, and the person can do exactly the same thing just by putting the dwellings on the block. That area needs investigating because it seems to be a very strange planning process which needs to be sorted out quickly.

There are issues at Mt Bundy in relation to the processes around the arsenic scare. I am not here to blame people for the mistakes made. All I say to the government is the issue has caused pain for the family at Mt Bundy. It would be the honourable thing for the department, or even the minister, to apologise for the incorrect information that was leaked to the media which has hurt the family, both from a grieving point of view, because they are suffering from the loss of their son, and also from a business perspective, because their business has been set back a long way. No matter what happened, the government has a responsibility to mend some bridges that have been burnt.

We need to look at the Department of Resources next year. Live cattle export is an important issue. The poor old Department of Resources got 20 to 25 minutes. There may need to be some flexibility when a particular issue is current and needs some discussion in estimates. Perhaps there should be enough flexibility to move one departmental area to the top of the debate and another to the bottom. I put that as an issue to be looked at. The live cattle export area certainly needed more discussion.

I am glad to hear the railway bridge will be preserved when they build the new bicycle path in the rural area. People may know, a railway bridge built about 1890 was stolen. In fact, I have a copy of an article from the *Chicago Tribune* - that is how far and wide, and Wicking had some very interesting cartoons about it. It is good they are going to rebuild it - there is enough steel around to rebuild it - because this bicycle path is not just about bikes, it is about heritage, and that is really important.

We need to work harder on the heritage parks. Our World War II heritage is a valuable contribution not only to history but the tourism economy of the Territory. We are one of the few places in Australia where you see that type of heritage and we need to work on preserving and promoting it.

I listened to the department of Business going through all types of figures and facts and I wondered if the department should be reviewed from the point of: does it make a difference? Does it create jobs? Should that be an area the private sector looks at? We have private groups that promote jobs. I am not saying that because I do not like people in the department; I am asking the question. Government should review what its departments do and their outcomes, because a great deal of money is spent in these departments. Accrual accounting is about outcomes, so if the outcomes are not there we should be questioning why and whether there should be a change in policy.

I was surprised the minister did not debate Asian Relations. It needed debating, and he has to realise we would have debated it carefully with common sense because we knew the issues of concern.

Aged care in the rural area and a retirement village is a really important area.

In relation to GOC, both ministers were not questioned much at all today. It might be better if the ministers attend for the first hour and we get the questions to them instead of them sitting around, because most of the questions were answered by other people. However, it is important they are there; it may just need a little tweaking.

Madam Chair, it was a very good Estimates Committee. It is a very important part of the democratic process, and I encourage people to partake in it for that reason.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Madam Chair, I extend my thanks to the Treasurer and the ministers with whom I had conversations during the estimates period. They were conversational in nature as the Chairman pointed out, and I commend the ministers I had any dealings with on the way the estimates were conducted. Although the answers were, in some cases, long-winded, and putting aside the fact the government and the ministers in general were quite evasive, the conduct of the estimates process was quite good.

I extend my thanks to the public servants who came along. It is a very busy time for them. They have an enormous amount of preparatory work in the lead-up period to estimates and their efforts do not go unnoticed. I am sure the ministers appreciate all the help they are provided in this period.

In thinking about the length of estimates, some areas were cut short and primary industries – Resources - was a case in point. I do not know if we can extend estimates times, but the extension of time this year allowed many of us to quite thoroughly examine parts of the budget. That said, there were some areas of the budget I did not get to that I would have liked to. This is a learning experience for all of us. We pick up bits of information and we pick up how we feel the government is travelling in the budget and the future of the Northern Territory.

It became apparent to me, as I stand here looking across the other side of the House, that I see a very tired government. I see a government with no particular course charted. I see a reactive government. What concerns me most is the future of the economy in the Northern Territory. I spent quite some time talking to the Treasurer

about a number of aspects of the economy, including the deficit we are in and the mounting debt. It was apparent from the answers given throughout the estimates that there is no plan for this government to bring the budget back to surplus and, by extension, no plan to start reducing debt.

We are facing a current debt of about \$1.1bn that is going to double in the next three or four years. Even though the forward estimates are expecting a reduction in the deficit going out four years, beyond that the Treasurer is unable to say when we will be in surplus and when we will start to reduce our debt, which will spiral. If I give credit where it is due, not too long after the federal government was elected in 2007, the Treasurer had a plan to get the deficit under control after it had spent everything John Howard had built up.

I understand 2012-13 is the date the federal budget will be in deficit and I contrast that to the Northern Territory where there is no plan. That frightens me, because the Treasurer keeps using the global financial crisis as the reason we are where we are today. The effects of the global financial crisis are still around; however, the global financial crisis itself has been over for some time. Even the Treasurer admitted that. She said, on a number of occasions, we are in a post-GFC period. However, there still remains no plan for moving forward for the Territory.

The Treasurer also likes to drag up history about the deficit of past CLP governments, but in those days the CLP was building the Territory. If you are maintaining a debt, you had better be spending money to bring some productivity to the Territory. Thinking of the last 10 years of this Labor government and summarising those Territory-building things the money should be spent on, I come up with a fairly short list.

We have the convention centre, the water park and a couple of schools. I am not going to talk too much about roads because they are generally federally-funded, although there was some contribution by the Northern Territory to Tiger Brennan Drive. I cannot think of a single infrastructure program of any significance south of Darwin for a very long time. One of the last large infrastructure programs done in years gone by in Katherine was the court house, and the one before that was the police station, and we are talking in the late 1980s. It is a similar story across the remainder of the Northern Territory - the area outside Darwin. If you are going to spend money, if you are going to maintain a deficit and take the Territory into debt, there ought to be a very good reason for doing so and it ought produce some results.

The Treasurer says we would be worse off if we had not gone into deficit and spent as much as we have. Nonetheless, I look at the economy of the Northern Territory, notwithstanding the deficit, and see an economy falling to pieces.

We have a nett negative interstate migration rate. Approximately 100 more people are leaving the Territory for interstate per month than arriving. There would be multiple reasons why they are leaving. The exorbitant cost of living and the exorbitant cost of housing and rent are contributing to the reason people are leaving the Territory. Those factors can and should have been part of a long-term economic strategy for the Northern Territory. Any strategy this government had has not worked. That has become more apparent as times goes by, and was exposed during the course of estimates.

A Country Liberal government in the future will manage the budget properly. We will be spending money on infrastructure and programs that will continue to grow the Territory. After all, we have a prior record for doing just that. The CLP built the Northern Territory, and if things were not going so pear-shaped for the Territory at the moment I would say thank you to the Northern Territory government for holding it for us; for looking after it for us for 10 or 11 years. However, I cannot do that because things are not good.

One small saving grace is median unit prices have fallen by a fair amount recently due to the fact the housing market peaked because this government has not released land over the last 10 years. We went through that in estimates. We looked at the projects that were supposed to be brought online and have not - those land release programs that have contributed so much to the cost of living; the cost of buying a house, and the cost of rents in the Territory. Frankly, this government should stand condemned for failing to manage the component parts of the economy that would make the Northern Territory a great place to be. It has made it very hard on people and they are leaving.

I believe the government is tired. We have been cajoled, encouraged, and castigated by this government for not politicising the cattle affair. It does not want us to politicise it because it will show how tired and lazy it is. I spoke to the Treasurer about this during estimates questioning and she seemed disinterested. There was an abrogation of responsibility on her part when it came to some comments she made in the media.

The greatest abrogation of responsibility was listening to the Minister for Asian Relations, and for Trade last night. He was very pleased to say to the Leader of the Opposition: 'Oh, I do not want you to politicise this'. Because this

government is so tired, lazy and does not get it, it was quite apparent the Minister for Asian Relations has done nothing to help the crisis our cattlemen and the associated industry people find themselves in today. That is what I mean about a tired government - there is no self-motivation. Government is not interested enough to do something constructive and proactive. It is not thinking about the implications of what will prove to be, if not fixed shortly, the greatest crisis the cattle industry in the Northern Territory has ever faced.

I asked the Treasurer last week if she had spoken to any banks or financial institutions about the cattle situation and her response was: 'Why?' I explained banks and financial institutions, the lenders of money for pastoral properties which hold mortgages over those properties and hold the purchasers to loan to value ratios, also have an interest in the capacity of those pastoral properties to repay debt. Given the global financial crisis and how it manifested itself in the United States - something the Treasurer likes to talk about all the time - I would have thought she, or Treasury, might want to speak to the financial institutions to ensure they are not going to start revaluing properties, start foreclosing or calling in loans in what could become a very difficult financial position for our pastoralists. That is what I mean about tired; not thinking, not being proactive, not doing things. The government is just bumbling along from crisis to crisis.

Mataranka is a prime example. During estimates questioning and through some FOI documents, we discovered the Minister for Local Government was advised there was a month in which to commence a prosecution - one month before the statute of limitations ran out. She also knew the Animal Welfare Branch did not have the resources to properly investigate the matter within that month period. During estimates questioning, the minister was unable to say whether she authorised additional staff, additional resources, or any contract labour to assist in that investigation to bring about a prosecution before that one month expired. That is what I mean about a lazy, tired government. I daresay the minister looked at that and did not give it another thought - tired and lazy.

It is becoming more and more apparent from the attitude of this government that it no longer deserves the right to govern the Northern Territory. It is all over. It has reached not quite the twilight of its reign - that is approaching in August next year. Unless this government can turn itself around - I remember 12 or 18 months ago people on this side of the House saying the same thing I am saying today - tired and lazy. It has not improved.

Perhaps they can turn it around if a spark of energy comes from that side of the House. I will be pleased to see it because we are politicians on both sides. This is a political debate but at the end of the day we are all here to make the Northern Territory a better place to live. If this Labor government finds a spark, some energy, decides it is going to be proactive, starts thinking again, starts putting some of those thoughts into action, maybe the Northern Territory will be a better place in the next 12 to 14 months. Perhaps voters at the next election will be a little kinder. The way things are going at the moment, no way in the world. People are sick of seeing this laziness and ineptitude. It is very disappointing.

We covered several things in estimates about local government, and I would be remiss if I did not go there. There was some questioning around the financial sustainability of our shires. You will be aware the shires are about three years old. The term I often hear regarding the way this government dealt with the shires is it gave birth to the baby but failed to nurture the child, and we are now seeing that come home to roost. At the end of June last year, three shires were in the red, one with insufficient untied funds in its bank account to cover its debts. Unfortunately, there never seems to be enough time in estimates; I would have loved another hour with the minister on Local Government. We would love to know what the minister did about that and, rest assured, I am going to be looking at, very soon, how financially sustainable these shires are. I will wait with bated breath to see the new report into financial sustainability, because the minister has hidden the other one in Cabinet confidentiality.

All those things - a lazy, inept, tired government. It has caused enough damage to the economy of the Northern Territory to say it does not deserve to govern any longer. The poor financial management is now coming back to bite us. It is not good enough.

Mr ELFERINK: Madam Chair, we are being asked to pass expenditure of billions of dollars and I am a little surprised that, after the estimates process, none of the ministers can muster the energy to speak. I find it equally surprising I am on my feet having to respond because a tired government, as the member for Katherine referred to it, is not in the mood to talk to its Appropriation Bill; a bill seeking billions of dollars out of the Northern Territory Treasury, and there are numerous issues the Estimates Committee has thrown up as part of the appropriation debate.

One of the things I am deeply concerned about is the quality of information we are given from time to time. I specifically refer to the quality of information received from the Department of Justice and NT WorkSafe in relation to matters

pursued over the last two estimates which has now given us a matter to be quite concerned about.

At the beginning of the Estimates Committee, the Chairman of the Estimates Committee, the member for Fannie Bay said, and I quote: 'However, I will also remind witnesses that the giving of false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute contempt of the Legislative Assembly'. During the investigation of the NT WorkSafe component of the Department of Justice, I became quite concerned about questions that were asked. Last year, the member for Fong Lim raised the issue of the Bellin report into NT WorkSafe and the management issues in NT WorkSafe and, as a consequence, a document was tabled with 13 recommendations.

That matter was pressed by the member for Fong Lim at some length and we were given assurances, as an Estimates Committee, as a parliament, and as the people of the Northern Territory, that all 13 recommendations had been implemented and there were only 13 recommendations. However, it is interesting that something happened in the last year because this year I raised the issue of the Bellin report and discovered there were not 13 recommendations. Despite my asking the question again, the same question asked by the member for Fong Lim last year in relation to that report, I was assured the document tabled the year prior contained the 13 recommendations.

I then produced what I believed to be the Bellin report. It came to me in the electronic equivalent of a brown paper bag. The document was tabled, and now the minister for Justice has had an opportunity to review the tabled document, I have not heard a denial that the document I tabled was the Bellin report which was delivered to government. The cover of that document carries the title: 'An organisational assessment report and 17 recommendations for the WorkSafe leadership team'. As I pressed the issue with the Justice department, as well as the minister, it became clear there were more than 13 recommendations and 17 recommendations were, in all likelihood, correct. As I understand it, the document I received was the original Bellin report. I wait to stand corrected on that.

However, there is a tendency by government to sanitise the information it passes to the people of the Northern Territory and there might be any number of reasons it choose to go down this path. However, to say there were 13 recommendations - here is the list - and not acknowledge there were 17 recommendations is misleading. Moreover, when pressed, there was an admission that certain recommendations were dropped because they carried personal details. If you go through

the original 13 recommendations tabled, they refer to other people within the department. Those recommendations were not dropped because they carried personal details; they were merely changed to remove the personalities involved. It is a spurious argument in the extreme to assert you have deleted recommendations because they had personal names attached to them when in fact you have included other recommendations and simply dropped those names. You either do it for one or you do it for all.

I am concerned the member for Fong Lim was told last year that the recommendations were implemented. I quote from the CE last year:

It is like the Executive Director answered, it is more that he made suggestions on how to improve things and WorkSafe actually undertook to implement those and that is what we have attempted to do.

In truth, the answers elicited from this year's questioning demonstrate there was no intent to implement many, if any, of those recommendations. I quote the Executive Director of WorkSafe as saying, in relation to recommendations: 'Because the recommendation was not accepted'.

It is incongruous in the extreme to have in one year evidence given that all recommendations were being implemented, only to be told the next year: 'We did not feel like implementing some of the recommendations'. Upon questioning, I would argue none of the recommendations by Mr Walter Bellin were implemented.

This places on the shoulders of the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General a need to explain the inconsistencies which have come out of her department and to answer several questions. The first question is: why were four recommendations withheld? In fact, why were we told there were only 13 recommendations when there were 17 recommendations? Moreover, why were we told those recommendations were implemented when it is clear not all, if any at all, were implemented?

The integrity of the Estimates Committee, and people giving evidence before the Estimates Committee, is drawn into question in those circumstances. To omit recommendations 9, 11, 12 and 17 out of the report, which were fundamental to the operation of the report and what the report was driving at, and tell the elected members of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly there were only 13 recommendations is not good enough. It is not mere sanitisation and spin - it has strayed into the realm of misleading conduct.

I do not know what has happened in the Department of Justice to bring about these results. I do not know if there is any *mens rea* on the part of those people involved; you can only extrapolate that from the evidence you are given. However, having been provided information which clearly demonstrates the information was not only wrong, but averred to be wrong by those people giving evidence, it now falls upon the minister for Justice to explain what happened.

If the minister for Justice is unable to give a cogent and reasonable explanation for the occurrences which led to incorrect and false information being laid on the table of the Estimates Committee, this may result in a letter from me to the Chair of the Committee of Privileges to deal with the issue arising out of the warning given by the Chair of the Estimates Committee at the outset.

I wait for an explanation from the minister for Justice as to why this has occurred and why there was a choice to provide wrong information rather than say: 'There were 17 recommendations but we want to withhold some; that is how we govern'. That would have been the honest thing to do; not to say there were just 13 recommendations. It ill behoves government to allow this sort of thing to occur. I ask for an explanation from the Justice minister and look forward to the explanation which would prevent me, I hope, from pursuing this matter any further.

I now turn, as the shadow Corrections minister, to the issue of Corrections. Circumstances during the Estimates Committee meant I was given half-an-hour with the Corrections minister on this important portfolio area. I have heard much from the minister for Corrections lauding the new era in Corrections. One of the problems with the public pronouncements we hear from the minister is all this stuff they are 'gonna' do. They are going to spend money on training courses, have more sex offender courses and have more courses of all types to improve rehabilitation in the Northern Territory. That is a noble pursuit, and I applaud the minister for trying. There is no doubt the minister is making every effort.

However, it is disheartening to hear, when asking about the number of training courses commenced - in this instance, the answer was 652 - to ask how many of those courses were completed and be told 13. A 2% completion rate, for whatever reason, is not what you would call an edifying result. It demonstrates how this government struggles to bridge the gap between ambition and achievement.

The Northern Territory government is oft out there selling packages of: 'what we are going to do', but when you ask questions as to how it

achieved what it set out to do, the failure is manifest. Thirteen completions from 652 kick-offs does not a grand final winner make. That is a matter of ongoing and deep concern.

Other courses offered, such as the cannabis course, had nil participants in the first year, 2009; no participants in 2010; and no participants in the year 2011. It makes you wonder why we have a cannabis course for prisoners. I presume the course is to enlighten prisoners as to the folly of smoking that illicit drug ...

A member: Is it like a try before you buy program?

Mr ELFERINK: No, I do not think so. Perhaps the chronic issue currently out there will be seen as a substitute, who knows?

The concern I have is this government continues to spruik effort but we do not see achievement. In questioning the minister for Justice over the achievement of the simple object in the strategic plan to reduce levels of violence in the community, the Justice minister was not able to point to a single indicator which demonstrated the government was achieving its stated aim. There were many excuses as to how much more is being reported and those sorts of things. Perhaps the Justice minister might turn her imagination to a simple thought: because all indicators are showing an upward trend in violent crime in the Northern Territory is it perhaps the case there is more violent crime?

Whilst we can make excuses until the cows come home, that truth has not yet been acknowledged. I would argue there is more violent crime on the streets of the Northern Territory, and if the experience I saw the last time in Alice Springs was any yardstick, that is borne out. There are more people on the streets of a disposition which would lead them to misbehave and, ultimately, commit violent crime. There are just more there.

As the Justice minister continued to make excuses, even in the brief 45 minutes available to me, which meant I could not intrude on the area of Justice in any real way, I was not able to get a simple, straight answer from the Justice minister on that point. There is more violent crime, it is as simple as that, and every indicator the government has at its fingertips is telling that story.

The logical conclusion is that its policies are failing and the government has to change them, even the plans, policies and benchmarks contained in *Territory 2030*. If you read the *Territory 2030* document you can see in the manifold areas across government they are failing

to achieve the benchmarks set several years ago which should be met now. The *Territory 2030* strategic plan is falling well short of expectations, and it is only two years into a plan supposed to operate for a period of 21 years. This should be ringing alarm bells for the Chief Minister, the minister for Justice and the government because that failure, already apparent in the *Territory 2030* strategic plan, will resonate and become amplified as time passes.

It is time for the government to acknowledge it is, and has been, wrong in the assumptions it has made in the governance of the Northern Territory. I am aware on a daily basis that the level of irritation on our streets and in our communities is increasing. Individuals defecating, urinating, expectorating, fornicating, and doing any other number of ghastly acts is on the increase. What I have seen in Darwin over the Wet Season period, in Alice Springs recently, and in Katherine, only serves to confirm the impression in my mind, as it does in so many other Territorians' minds, that it is time government admitted it was wrong and started to bring to bear policies effective for the future safety of our community and the future of the Northern Territory as a whole.

I finish with observations in relation to how government sits on its hands and fails to operate. That was no more apparent than the Minister for Asian Relations and Minister for Trade saying he would refuse to answer any questions on the cattle trade. The minister sets the policy for trade. We trade in livestock to Indonesia. For the Minister for Trade to not talk about livestock trade into Indonesia, which is part of the Asian Relations portfolio, strikes me as an abrogation of duty unparalleled in the history of this jurisdiction. It is what we are paid to do.

The good times are fine, but during the bad times we have to step up to the mark and not simply fold our arms over our chest in the estimates process and say: 'I am not going to talk about it'. I will talk about it because I am proud of the Northern Territory's live cattle export industry, it is world's best practice from the moment the cow is born on our pastoral stations to the moment they leave the feedlots in Southeast Asia. When you find an ingrown toenail on the end of your leg you do not have to amputate the leg at the hip, which has been the federal government's response. I am proud of the industry. I wish the government would say it is proud of the industry and join with us to say lift the ban now.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs LAMBLEY: Madam Chair, this is a sad state of affairs, isn't it? The government cannot muster the energy to respond to this wonderful opportunity to round off two weeks of estimates.

Too tired, too worn out, too broken, and too pathetic, from my point of view. The opposition, with its enormous team of five workers as opposed to the government's cast of thousands, as a team has decided to summarise what we think was a fairly disappointing performance by the government in estimates.

This being my first estimates as the shadow minister for child protection, I was intrigued by the process. As I have mentioned already, the amount of effort that goes into the process is quite remarkable.

Mr Westra van Holthe: And you did a good job.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Thank you, member for Katherine. The Minister for Child Protection displayed almost apathy when it came to the questions I put to him regarding child protection. Eight months after the *Growing them strong, together* report came out - the board of inquiry report into child protection in the Northern Territory - the government was slapped over the wrist again for its appalling management of child protection in the Northern Territory. The minister showed almost contempt for this portfolio, deferring most of the questions I put to his executive officer. He found it difficult to answer some of the questions, and I was, quite frankly, surprised and shocked at how little the minister knew about the business of child protection. For example, when I asked the minister about how many review teams his department had implemented since it commenced in December 2008, the answer was zero. This reinforces our suspicion, and the evidence in the community, that this government does not like to be externally monitored by anyone.

A few months ago, we saw the Ombudsman have her powers to scrutinise the child protection system stripped away from her. We had a recommendation of the board of inquiry report into child protection ignored by the government. The recommendation was the Children's Commissioner be allowed to monitor the implementation of the *Growing them strong, together* report. The government decided the Children's Commissioner could not have that external monitoring power and gave it to the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee, which it set up. It carefully selected a group of professional people and set up this committee which, from all accounts, is a toothless tiger.

In the last eight months it has met twice. In estimates we hear again the government does not want to be externally monitored. It does not want anyone coming from outside the organisation and telling it that it might not be doing a good job.

Since the review teams were put in place in December 2008, none have been established by this government. It is absolutely appalling, and much to the embarrassment of the minister and the executive officer of the department.

I questioned the minister about his real commitment to regionalisation given two regional director positions were advertised in February this year and, over four months later, we were told in estimates these positions have not yet been filled. The minister told us it was perfectly normal to take over four, five or six months to recruit to any position in his department. 'Perfectly acceptable', we were told by the Minister for Child Protection. Once again, I could barely believe what I was hearing. This is unacceptable practice in any workplace. For the minister to sit back in his comfortable soft chair and say: 'Yes, that is perfectly okay; four, five, six months to recruit to any position is fine', you have to ask how this minister can sit there without any shame and expose the ineptitude of his department when it comes to having a reasonable time frame to recruit to these critical positions. It not only demonstrated an appalling recruitment practice, it also demonstrated the government is not really committed to regionalising child protection services in the Northern Territory. No, it is far better to centralise all power and control of child protection in Darwin. Centralise it all; have everyone in Darwin so the minister feels far happier having it all around him rather than giving it to people in the regions.

Actions speak louder than words, and the fact we have been hearing about this regionalisation process for over six months and nothing has been done makes it the only conclusion I can reach. It is a shameful situation. No commitment to regionalisation by this government whatsoever. No commitment to giving some control and power back to places like Katherine and Alice Springs. No, this government wants to keep it all in Darwin.

I asked the minister why over half the staff of the Department of Children and Families is employed on a temporary employment contract. Over half the staff of his department are employed on a temporary contract. Absolutely appalling! We were given a response once again from the executive officer not the minister, who said: 'We are trying really hard to address this problem'. I have been talking to many people in the community who are telling me the system is absolutely overburdened with bureaucracy trying to maintain these temporary people in those positions. Having temporary employees generates much more red tape than permanent employees. Middle managers are completely overwhelmed and demoralised by the amount of bureaucracy and administration involved in having over half their staff employed on a temporary

basis. What a sham; what an example of maladministration and dysfunction. The story goes on and on.

We heard from the minister in response to a question around commitment to prevention. In the *Growing them strong, together* report one of the recommendations emphasised by Dr Howard Bath, chair of the board of inquiry, as the most critical recommendation of the whole report was to set up preventative services within the communities for child protection. We are talking about family support services; services that help prevent child abuse and neglect in the community.

We heard good words saying, yes, they are committed to it; we are all committed to it because we know nothing is ever going to change in child protection in the Northern Territory until we increase resources in the communities to assist families to better care and support their children. When I asked the minister what the increase in funding was over the last 12 months to non-government organisations which are more than equipped to provide these tertiary preventative services for child protection, he took the question on notice. Some time later, a piece of paper was handed to the executive officer and we were reluctantly told there has been a 3% increase in funding to non-government organisations from last year to this year - 3%. Effectively, no increase whatsoever! That is the government's commitment to providing funds for non-government organisations well placed in the communities to provide support for families – none; no increase in funding whatsoever.

Dr Howard Bath expressed great fear that the government would do this. In the briefing I had with Dr Bath in October last year, early in my days as a new member of parliament, Dr Bath expressed fear the government would not prioritise this area of funding. Dr Bath, your fears have been realised; this government has not increased funding to non-government organisations to provide preventative services for children in communities throughout the Northern Territory to any significant degree. To me, 3% is barely worth mentioning and is probably why the question was put on notice, hoping the figure would disappear from the spotlight. It has not. I was astounded, and am sure the people of the Northern Territory will also be astounded by that zero commitment to increasing the funding to non-government organisations providing preventative measures for child protection.

The dismal state of affairs continued regarding the commitment of the government to use a new measure of income management made available by the federal government to use as a child protection measure. I asked the minister how many cases the Department of Children and

Families has referred to Centrelink for income management since August last year. This was a new measure made available by the federal government to assist in helping families provide better care and protection for their children. The answer was 51. Of the hundreds of cases that come to the attention of the Northern Territory Department of Children and Families every year, 51 cases have been referred for income management by Centrelink. That is an appalling figure; a shocking figure. This measure has been used quite controversially in the Northern Territory Emergency Response, otherwise known as the intervention, to varying degrees of effectiveness. This measure is available to the department as a means of changing behaviour of parents who might otherwise spend their money on alcohol, gambling and drugs. It is a way of ensuring they spend their money responsibly. It can be used, and should be used, in conjunction with a whole range of other measures. The Department of Children and Families has referred a measly 51 parents or carers for income management by Centrelink.

When I asked why this number was so low the minister could not respond and referred to the executive officer of the department. She said the figure was very low because there is such a high turnover in staff and it is difficult to keep training and information up to the new case workers, and the continuity of care of case management practice was a problem. Those were not the words she used, but was my understanding of what she said. In other words, there is a problem with the continuity of case management with workers that are quickly turning over in the department. We all know retention of staff in the Department of Children and Families is a problem, but I am hearing the reason this figure is so low - 51 in last eight months or so - is because there is a reluctance within the department, a general attitude within the department, to not use income management as a measure for protecting children.

There is a prejudice against using this as a measure for protecting children. That prejudice, I suppose, comes from the fact it is used as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. It is not a popular mechanism, but a mechanism in place thanks to the Labor federal government - a measure put in place for the exclusive use of the child protection system of the Northern Territory. I challenge the minister to get his troops in order and encourage them to use this as a measure. It has been effective in many instances throughout the Northern Territory in stemming alcohol and drug use, and keeping families on target to provide better care and support for their children.

In my two hours of estimates questioning we got to the Ochre Card, which comes into effect in

a matter of days. The question I asked was fairly straightforward - what is the situation with people in contact with children at different workplaces? The government has not been able to give the people of the Northern Territory a clear indication of who requires an Ochre Card. We have heard from the government: 'It depends'; 'I would certainly recommend'; 'we would encourage'; 'it is strongly suggested'; 'I think that it is a necessary precaution'. We have heard various responses when asked specific questions about who needs an Ochre Card and who does not. The message the community is getting about the Ochre Card is: we are not exactly sure who requires an Ochre Card. That is not good enough, minister. It is very concerning that the community, as well as the government, is deeply confused by something which is due to be implemented within days. The people of the Northern Territory deserve a much clearer indication of what the Ochre Card is and who requires it.

Madam Chair, estimates was a fascinating experience which exposed more than anything that this government is still deeply dysfunctional when it comes to providing child protection services in the Northern Territory. It did nothing to instil confidence in me that it is getting on top of things. It spoke volumes that what government said it was doing it was not actually being put into practice. This department is led by a minister who is sitting back, thinking more about fishing and strolling along Nightcliff beach from August 2012 than keeping his mind on the job. He is asleep at the wheel and people are suffering. There are many reasons why this government has to go, and child protection is probably the biggest reason.

Ms PURICK: Madam Chair, at the outset, I express my appreciation to all those associated with the Public Accounts Committee and the Legislative Assembly staff for the hard and diligent work they undertake in getting us to the Estimates Committee. Also, I extend my thanks and appreciation to the multitude of government officials who work behind the scenes, and those who appear before the Estimates Committee in a formal capacity or as technical advisors.

I want to comment on two main areas. With my shadow portfolio of primary industries and fisheries, and mines, it was disappointing not only for me, but for my rural colleague, the member for Nelson, that we only had 30 minutes to attend to these three key and major economic drivers of the Northern Territory, all of which are experiencing much trouble and are of great concern, notably because of the suspension of the live export trade to Indonesia. As I mentioned, not only does it impact across the pastoral industry, it has a huge impact across the agricultural industry: the Douglas Daly area, the Tortilla Flats area, and the greater Darwin rural area. Anyone associated

with the production of hay and fodder for the live export trade has been severely impacted by the suspension, as have a myriad of other businesses and families. I will not go back over what I said previously, but I urge this government, and all parties associated with that matter, to get the blanket ban lifted so families can have some peace of mind at night.

It was difficult to ask too many questions of the minister and get information because of the lack of time. I wanted to ask questions about primary industries and where the government is going in regard to research programs; more information about pest and disease surveillance programs; biodiversity issues; research and development - what are our future new crops in the Northern Territory; and what are the plans for the mango and banana industries, being our two key industries in primary industries. I struggled to get any real information from the minister regarding risk assessment. In light of what has happened with Indonesia, and I appreciate his concerns that we only have one major destination for our product, I would have liked to discover what work the department and the government is doing in lessening our exposure to such a huge risk.

Sadly, we did not get onto the seafood industry or the recreational fishing industry. The potential for registration or boat identification is of great concern to many people. There is the issue of declaration of marine parks in our offshore waters and the development of bio-regional plans, which is not a new item on the agenda for the seafood industry in the Territory or elsewhere in Australia. I would have liked some dialogue with the minister in that regard; perhaps that could be in a briefing or a question on notice.

In relation to Lands and Planning, minister, you are one of the few who tries to answer all the questions yourself and not deflect to advisors or technical people. I thank you for advising there is an extension to the moratorium regarding building certification because that is creating huge headaches and heartache for many people across the greater rural area. Whilst their buildings and dwellings are cyclone coded and safe, there are paperwork issues which need resolving and an extension of two years is welcomed by me and many people in the Northern Territory.

There was much in land administration I would have liked to discuss in greater detail, perhaps at another time. I still have great concerns regarding any development of Berrimah Farm into an activity that is not Berrimah Farm.

There are some huge issues around the placement of the new gaol in the Howard Springs region, notably traffic management flows and impact on surrounding communities; also the cost

of the new gaol once building commences and the impact it will have on that community.

There are huge planning issues regarding the ongoing development and expansion into the greater rural area. The minister has undertaken to have dialogue with me, and the member for Nelson, about smaller developments in the rural area we both oppose. We are not opposed to development per se; we want to have sustainable development in the rural area in keeping with the amenity of the area.

There are ongoing concerns for me, and sections of the industry, regarding the Building Advisory Services Branch and the *Building Act*, and residential building insurance. There were, and still are, many unanswered questions in that regard. I accept that the insurance industry is a complex and complicated industry, as is reinsurance. We have to get it right this time. We cannot afford to have the number of builders going broke, bust, into liquidation or receivership and leaving as many families stranded as has happened in the last 12 months, mostly due to inadequacies in the legislation associated with the industry. In moving forward, we need to not only get this home warranty insurance scheme right, but we also need to have a decent and solid look at the whole builder registration scheme and the *Building Act* in general. I thank the minister for offering briefings on a variety of issues in this area; they are important.

One area of concern and complaint that comes to my electorate is in regard to building, the *Building Act* and everything associated with it. Another is planning and development issues, whether they are rezoning issues, development issues or inappropriateness of people trying to do things in the rural area. We have to work much harder at getting it right in moving forward for the greater rural area, which may or may not include Weddell depending on your definition - whether Weddell should be considered as part of the rural area or a new Palmerston. Again, I will be talking to the minister's office to get further information on that.

In regard to Asian Relations and Trade, I heard the opening comments of the minister last night and was alarmed he did not want to address the issue of cattle export given it is not only an agricultural issue, it is definitely a trade and Asian relations issue. Indonesia is an Asian country and one of our main trading partners. That has to be addressed not only today, but into the near future because we have to work together to identify the issues around this very sad state of affairs.

I will leave it at that, Madam Chair. I thank the Public Accounts Committee and all the hard work of government officials behind the scenes.

Mr CHANDLER: Madam Chair, I also thank the Chairman and Deputy Chair for a job well done. Both members did a fantastic job keeping law and order within the committee.

It is an interesting process watching how different members prosecute estimates. Some people use a meticulous approach, and other people go for the heart. It is interesting watching different members approach the role looking for the same result - to get answers from what can be a difficult area and going through budget papers. The way the budget papers are presented is very much like a headline. You will get a dollar amount for a different area; however, until you use the estimates process to drill down, you often do not know what that money is for. That is why I find the estimates process invaluable.

This year it is a shared view that it was a far better process than previous years, although still frustrating when you continually watch the clock to ensure you get through the entire process. I, in some respects, over-prepared, because you are left with literally hundreds of questions you have not had the chance to ask, a number of which will end up as questions on notice. They are important questions, some of which need to be answered in depth, if possible. You do not often get through as many questions as you want.

The experience of preparing for estimates is a journey of learning in itself; a remarkable journey and you learn so much by looking for questions. There are the easy questions to ask; the ones where someone may come into your electorate office and ask a direct question regarding something government has done they do not agree with or have a grievance with. They are the simple things to deal with. When you are going through budget papers - its strange how things fall on your desk, end up in your office, or are slipped under your door - it is an interesting and valuable journey. History will tell you governments change from time to time, and the time you spend in opposition researching and understanding the role of a minister and what the government provides for the community is invaluable. We have used this argument before; it is very much like an apprenticeship. If we choose to sit on our backside and treat the job with contempt and not learn as much as we can - if you found yourself in the future as a government minister, you would let yourself and the community down if you do not try hard. That is what each of us does in opposition; we learn as much as possible in the event we are given the trust of the Northern Territory to form a future government.

Government does not do everything wrong; government does many wonderful things. It is the job of government to provide whatever is possible for the community. We have our differences from

time to time on policy, particularly outcomes. Again, the estimates process helps us identify areas where we may have a different idea of how a government should or could operate. Sometimes it is not about the money spent. It is a large budget and the money is welcome in the community. It is how that money is spent we often complain about; how it could be spent better. When questioning the minister for the Environment during estimates, I discovered \$148 000 was awarded for a tender to provide a paper to show how to better converse with Indigenous people regarding water management. I found that hard to believe; the government has given a company nearly \$150 000 to develop a paper on how to better converse with people. That is a very strange way of spending taxpayers' money.

I said to the minister, who identifies as an Indigenous man - we speak quite openly together and I like to think anyone could speak to anyone about different issues - that I do not see how a paper telling a government department how to converse with Indigenous people is good value for money, given we have been talking to Indigenous people for many years. I recall when I worked for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there was real frustration in Aboriginal communities when government people arrived to count them and ask questions. The frustration was: 'Goodness, gracious me, don't you guys get together? We answered these things; we had a different department here last week asking the same questions. Why can't you get the information from these people?' It has been suggested time and time again that our Indigenous residents of the Northern Territory are one of the most studied people on this planet by way of asking questions and gathering statistics. The ABS does a number of collections of information every year, as do a number of government departments, and there is real frustration out there. Spending \$150 000 for a paper on how to talk to people in a different way is one area which questions the use of public money.

The opposition could be accused of nitpicking - that is our job. That is what the opposition should do. If we find fault or think money has been wasted, or outcomes have not been met, our job is to keep government to account. I become a little angry when you ask a question one year in estimates, ask the same question the following year, and are given the response that government is still working on the problem. Twelve months has passed and the issue has not been resolved and you wonder how many people have been working on it, how much money has been expended through staff and other resources, and the matter has still not been finalised.

I have mentioned the matter of water at Mataranka previously. Water management plans cannot be developed overnight; however, I have raised the matter over a few years, and last year the answer I was given left me with the impression that the issue was just about resolved. I thought the government was working on it, but find out 12 months down the track the issue still has not been resolved. You need to ask questions on how long some things take to complete.

There were many questions in regard to education. I became bogged down with Alawa Primary School based on some FOI information I had received and, as the minister pointed out, that information was probably out of order in the way it was presented. However, I received that information in the order it was, and the numbers placed in the top right hand corner of the page were done by people who prepared the pack for FOI. That information sent me in a direction. It very much confused the minister; it very much confused the department because I was presenting information that, in my opinion, was correct but, in fact, was not correct. I am grateful that in the end the information revealed did stack up, and everything was then like lining up the ducks. Everything else fell into place as the minister had been describing. However, given the information I had the ducks could not line up if that document was correct. That took an hour and we did not get to other issues. I will place a number of questions on notice to the minister.

One thing I would really like to know is: what was the end cost of the new Palmerston Senior College wing? When it was first announced several years ago the new wing, at the then Palmerston High School, was around \$10m to \$10.5m. It was given to an interstate contractor who failed miserably, to the extent the government had to step in and take over that contract. I recall counting 40-odd contractors working on the site one Anzac Day and I thought this would be costing. I take my hat off to the people coordinating it to get the men there on Anzac Day. I have not been able to ascertain the end cost for that building.

Ambulance services in our schools: the ambulance service costs are increasing each year, and yet our schools do not appear to see any additional budget to cater for those additional costs. The SESA contracts we touched on - the answer this year was much like last year: we are working on that problem. It is sad when we have staff working with children with special needs on contracts and employed or sacked within the week because they had no guarantee of work next week. Many I have spoken to, even in the last few days, have had their hours reduced to one or two a week for the last two weeks of the school term because the bucket of money has run out. How

many SESAs are working with children with behavioural issues? I have no problem; schools have to deal with children with behavioural issues. However, if an allocation of money is made for staff such as SESAs - special education support assistants - to deal with children with special needs, that money should be spent on children with special needs.

You may consider behavioural issues are a special need; however, that should not tax the budget allocated for children diagnosed with a particular special need. We need to provide these staff with job security and a career. Money is put into training these people and we need to hold them. If there is a six-week break at the end of school, people's mortgages do not stop, the cost of living does not stop, yet these people do not receive an income. We are going into a four week break tomorrow. In some instances, SESAs in the Northern Territory do not know whether they have a job in four weeks. That is sad, not only for the children, but also the people who are trying to manage the situation in our schools. It must be a frustration for principals not knowing what they are going to need on day one; whether they have the staff to handle it, and sometimes not knowing whether they have the budget to allocate for that particular area. That is something we should be concentrating on.

It was revealed in the last few weeks we have a woodwork teacher no longer teaching woodwork because government has taken a different pathway when it comes to vocational training. Woodwork is not taught in our high schools. We have all the equipment, lathes and probably tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment sitting idle because we do not teach that subject. A woodwork teacher is now teaching science and maths in a high school and, because he is not skilled in the science area, he is limited to experiments using bicarbonate soda. You question the limits of his ability to teach students science when he cannot do experiments with anything other than bicarbonate soda.

Call it nitpicking if you like but these are genuine concerns. If we have students coming through our high schools or our middle schools without access to teachers with the right qualifications to deliver what they should, we have a real issue.

There are many questions on NAPLAN and attendance rates and I hear the work, through the CEO and the minister, being done in those areas. I pointed out an interesting fact regarding the strategic plan, particularly regarding Indigenous education. Many years ago strategic plans were a simple, well-constructed document. The former minister, Syd Stirling, had a six or seven page strategic plan dealing with Indigenous education.

I understood it; it was well put together. The following document turned into about 47 pages. Many of those pages are filled with photos and a big, glossy booklet; however, it becomes more complex. I am not suggesting Indigenous education is a simple process; I wonder if we overcomplicate things today. Have we created work within a department to create a strategic plan, a glossy brochure, which looks impressive, but when you map it against the results on the ground you question whether we have made it too complicated? Can we simplify it? Can we look at what former minister, Mr Stirling, did? Keep it simple. The current minister is from the old school and has been around long enough to know the old KISS principle is perhaps the way we should be going. We may have made things too complicated and if we work towards simplifying things may find it easier, or achieve better results by focusing on something less complex.

That may also be with our reporting. Do we report on everything we do? We are lost in the reporting and not the delivery. Do we make the classroom too complex for teachers where much of their time is dedicated to paperwork and dealing with the program rather than teaching kids rudimentary processes in maths, English and science? Have we made the job for teachers in our schools more about the process itself than teaching? I only have about 60 seconds left. I was going to get onto

A member: Extension of time?

Mr CHANDLER: I do not think we can have it here.

Ms Lawrie: No, we are in committee.

Madam CHAIR: It is a convention that we do not. There is a global time of five hours of debate.

Mr CHANDLER: Madam Chair, I was going to get onto the health of our harbour, the arsenic scare, Tree Point, discharge licences and an issue the member for Nelson pointed out in regard to water and our swamp areas around Darwin. Government believes it has fixed a planning problem; however, it has created a whole new headache for the environmental world. By fixing that planning issue, you have opened up a huge can of worms when it comes to water storage and our natural waterways across the Northern Territory.

Mr MILLS: Madam Chair, I take this opportunity to congratulate the parliamentary officers and the staff of Hansard for serving this process so well. I also acknowledge the work of public servants present during the estimates process, and those who helped prepare for the estimates process. I admire the contribution you

have made. The expectations you were endeavouring to meet may or may not have been served through this process. Nonetheless, whatever the result, I acknowledge the work you have done to serve this process in the interests of good government.

Having been involved in estimates for a number of years, and the process in existence prior to that, the system we have in 2011 is a much better process providing a greater amount of time and space around the different portfolio groupings allowing the process to be more effective and efficient. We have come to a better place where we have spread it out over the two weeks rather than contain and concentrate it into the single week.

As an indulgence, pre-2008 and the years before we had the output groups concentrated on a few days and the opposition, at that stage having four members and, on two those occasions one of those members unable to present, I remember having carriage of 12 portfolios plus a couple of others because a member was unavailable and it was concentrated over a few days. Where we are now, having 11 members whom I am proud of, and a process that allows a greater concentration on the work at hand without having to just get through the process in a limited amount of time, is a much better place.

The exercise and conduct of estimates is good for members. We are elected to represent the interests of our community and, paying a compliment again to the public servants who are the experts in the field, I accept many of us have much to learn. The estimates process provides us, on both sides, with that opportunity to learn more about the instruments of government, the complexity of decision-making, what forms effective policy, how that is measured and implemented, and the determining of the outcomes of expenditure in real and measurable terms. We all learn a great deal through the process.

The role of the opposition is to gauge the capacity and performance of government. I am concerned that in the difference between the language - the rhetoric and the result - there is a significant gap. In my gauging of the performance of the government there seems to be a lack of connection to the reality of the situations to be addressed in the interests of Territorians and the processes to deliver that result. It seems to be more of a focus on the process itself rather than the results; more of a concentration of the amount of money spent or the time taken to consult, talk, or consider, than the result that is measurable in the lives of the people we have been elected to serve.

For the opposition too, it is the opportunity not only to gauge the capacity and the performance of government and determine the gap between the rhetoric and the result, but to gather information and, from that information, gain a better understanding of how the instruments of government are being implemented by the government. That provides us with knowledge to further do our job in opposition to ensure government is held accountable, and glean that information and be able to separate fact and fiction. Clearly, the wider community has had enough of the spin, the gloss, and the public relations component of this Labor government, and now has an enlarged appetite for plain speaking and real results.

The estimates process provides us with the capacity to measure the difference between spin and truth - fact and fiction. The difference between spin in the interest of protecting the image of government and seeing matters as political situations that need to be managed - the truth is the state of the budget is of real concern. The level of debt is a particular concern. The absence of a plan and the capacity to repay and address that debt, and a clear and believable response in regard to that debt is a real concern, particularly in the context of the slowdown in the economy and the increased cost of living.

I remain convinced the government ministers I have spoken to and observed during this process seem more caught up in the explanation and excuse which places them at the centre of the story. They think it is about themselves and their government when it is about the debt and how that will be repaid. The economic future of the Territory and the threats that are very real for the Northern Territory - I was concerned at the response of the Minister for Business and Employment to objectively assess and describe the real threats facing Territory businesses. Once again, the thinking seems to be curtailed by thinking it is political, thinking it is having a go at the government, thinking it is about the government when it is about the threats presented to Territory business and what is being done in response to those threats. There are some very real threats which need a response. One of those is the cost of living. The truth around the unemployment figures is something we need to be very plain about. We have a challenge, particularly when we are talking about unemployment.

The figures appear to be good at one take; however, the pressure and cost of living has caused a number of people to leave the Territory. We also recognise there are many Territorians who are not involved in any meaningful work at all, which is a grave concern. I am talking principally about those who are remote, particularly

Indigenous Territorians. We need to reach the point where we can be honest about it and start talking about it in mature terms, rather than hiding behind language that prevents us from accessing the real issue and how we can respond to it. We at least get a chance, during estimates, to go into that space. There is, sadly, by being very defensive, much push back, which is a shame, because the real challenges people in the Territory are facing are not assisted by that kind of attitude at all.

The looming presence of a crisis in the Northern Territory around the threat to the cattle industry is significant and has absorbed most people's thinking. I found it difficult to sleep last night thinking about this, seeing the cattlemen gathered on Tuesday. Knowing how stoic they are, how they have suffered all kinds of travails and challenges through living on the land, to have the threat of their whole industry, all their livelihoods and assets being washed away because of a decision to impose a blanket ban in Canberra. Yet they seem to politely listen, applaud at the right time, but go away and be prepared to fight that fight in their own quiet and strong way. I admire them immensely. I am pleased we have at least been able to have a single message come from this parliament to give them some recognition for the troubles that lie ahead for them.

Whether the blanket ban is lifted in the short term - it appears the diplomatic impasse now being reached is going to make that less likely, which is a tragedy. However, we have to stand resolute in the face of a wider Australian community that needs to get a clearer understanding of this situation and, to that end, we members of this parliament should be able to do that. There is great sensitivity when it comes to 'we must not politicise this'. Let us talk plainly: the decision to impose a blanket ban, which is the problem, was made by the federal Labor government. The diplomatic impasse we have reached and the compounding effect politically can only be resolved by careful and skilful diplomatic negotiation.

That aside and acknowledged, the human toll of that decision and the ripple effect for the Territory economy has its presence in estimates in every line. Therefore, it is ever present with us, and the effect this has in our considerations of the Territory budget as currently constructed, without reference to the impact of the loss of this sector. The prolonged effect the closure of live trade will have is frightening to consider.

In reference to the people we have been elected to serve, there would be genuine concern about the handle the government has on managing the budget given the very real threats

we face with the failure to release land in a timely manner, which has driven the cost of living up and is driving skilled workers out of the Territory. The language would indicate we have responded and there is plenty of land available, but it has come on too late and people have decided to leave. That is leaving us with a challenge, even for the INPEX project, with the capacity to supply skilled labour and support that economic growth because people are leaving now.

Territorians are greatly concerned about the decline in law and order, the amount of money being spent; yes, the programs that have been run, yes, but the results, no. Violence is increasing. Every time we have results I am further concerned at the evidence of the decline of our social capital through violent assaults, and the failure of measures to curb that behaviour by establishing clear consequences to reinforce meaningful and real standards in our community, year by year, and reporting cycle by reporting cycle. Yes, the amount of money spent and, yes, we are trying, but the results are appalling, and I am deeply concerned, as are Territorians.

The cost of living has been mentioned, particularly when it comes to those on modest incomes who are acquiring skills for apprenticeships or traineeships, those who have just made their first big decision – it might be a married couple thinking of being part of the great Territory story - the cost of rent, the cost of the mortgage is making them think twice. You can explain it away, but the evidence is the failure to make a timely decision when required, and the cost is being borne by young families now, which will be a cost upon the Territory in the longer term.

The revelation a government that talked a great deal about openness, honesty, transparency, accountability, and all those buzz words failed to disclose where its donations have come from was a particularly embarrassing point for the government. I have not heard much more on that, but it is seriously overdue in the disclosure of where the donations came from. This sends a bad message, and I would have expected it to have been corrected almost immediately. To my knowledge it has not been which is of further concern.

I acknowledge the work of my parliamentary colleagues in their performance during estimates. It has been a good experience; we will reflect on our experience, how we can improve, what we have learnt, and how that feeds our performance going forward.

Madam Chair, I will finish in the way I started. I congratulate and sincerely thank the parliamentary officers who supported us through this process. Those working in Hansard, thank

you very much; and those public servants who helped prepare ministers and senior public servants for the estimates process, and those senior public servants who were present, thank you for your contribution.

Mr STYLES: Madam Chair, I add my weight to the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to how the estimates process was conducted. I am grateful to the Standing Orders Committee for extending the time frame; it worked well. There is room for improvement in any system, and we hope as we go on we can improve the system.

I also acknowledge the excellent job done by the Chair of the Estimates Committee, the member for Fannie Bay. He was very fair and well-balanced, and did an excellent job of keeping the peace in estimates. Also, the public servants, many of whom spend a considerable amount of effort and time preparing for estimates only to find, due to time frames, they do not get much opportunity to demonstrate how well prepared they are. Thank you to those people. I am assuming they will do it again and again as most public servants are dedicated people.

I need to speak in relation to a number of my portfolios, the first one being Transport. Much has been said today, and I do not intend going over ground others have covered. We have probably one of the greatest man-made disasters in our economy at the moment, the blanket ban on live cattle, and the impact across the Territory on families, across the economy - the human cost is enormous, let alone the economic cost. I still struggle to understand why the federal government has placed a blanket ban. Many things occur in our community where we chastise people who do the wrong thing. We do not stop doing things because a number of people do not comply.

It brings me to the story of a partially blind gentleman in the Northern Territory who was given a guide dog. Unfortunately, over a period of time he mistreated the guide dog and a number of people complained. Eventually the dog was taken from him. However, guide dogs were not taken from all blind people. When people take animals from animal welfare institutions and do not look after them properly, the institution does not place injured animals in their care again. We prepare for all sorts of things but do not say: 'We are not going to do this', full stop.

I wonder why the federal government has put at risk such a large portion of our economic development, our employment, and placed us in a situation where the social fabric in regional, rural and remote Northern Territory could be torn apart very quickly. Rural people face floods, drought

and fire. They are at the beck and call of the weather; however, they cannot anticipate the man-made disaster we have on our hands - a blanket ban by the federal Labor government. I am assuming the Greens and Independents are in there as well.

I asked the Transport minister what he might do to assist those in the transport industry who have contacted me expressing concern about their future. I had another person from the transport sector this morning sobbing on the phone because they are really concerned. They have not been in the industry for long and have made a huge investment. Everything their family has - a young family - is invested, and they are about to see it go straight out the door and destroy their financial viability, perhaps forever. There will be many cases like that in the transport sector.

I asked the minister if he could waive fees to assist these people. Is there a plan? Apparently, there is no plan and the answer in regard to waiving fees is: 'I think the simple answer will be no'. I draw the attention of the Minister for Transport to what happened in Queensland when the floods took a huge toll on people. The Queensland government provided several concessions towards registration after the floods, including waiving the surcharge fee for three- and six-month registrations, waiving late payment fees, an extension of time for heavy vehicle compliance certificates, and allowing seasonal registration of grain trucks to be deferred. When you have a situation where governments need to respond and, in many instances, governments are the only ones that can respond, consideration needs to be given by governments to assist people. We could have the argy-bargy of politics all day but in the interests of those people who use our roads and depend upon the transport system for their income and their future, I ask the minister to reconsider his answer, talk to Cabinet and see if we can help these people. These people are desperate for someone to help them.

No risk assessment or impact statement has been done on what is going to happen to these people. There are 700-plus prime movers registered, many in the live cattle business. We are going to lose a huge capacity. When you talk to these people, which I have in the last couple of weeks, they say they are being told to sell their beef on the local market. That is not feasible because it will crash the market. The beef grown in the Northern Territory is not for the Australian market; it has been developed over a 20-year period as a live export market. If you were to put all that beef onto the Australian market you would crash the market. The cost of the beef and the return to the producer will take a dive; there will be a small return. You will not have the trucks, the

drivers, or the facilities to transport the cattle because these people are going out of business.

I was talking to some operators yesterday who are drawing up lists of people they are going to put off. That is a real shame. There are no jobs at the moment for these people, so there is a huge unemployment factor. With the cost of living in the Territory being so high, many of these people will leave the Territory. These are people from Territory families who will have to go elsewhere for employment to sustain themselves. Given the cost of living in the Northern Territory is high, they will not stay; they will go somewhere cheaper. Again, we lose skilled labour.

I refer to the Northern Territory government's *Territory 2030* strategic plan, page 32, Economic Sustainability and quote:

Growth will be dependent on continued flows of both private and public investment as well as expanding the Territory workforce beyond the limits of the natural growth of population.

Apart from the fact we are currently losing 100 people a month - skilled labour leaving not partners of people who are working - these are families leaving the Territory. Talk to the schools; their numbers are dropping because people are leaving due to high costs. Also, we are about to destroy one of our most important industries, one of the backbones of the Territory economy, and we are not looking at sustainability. I do not know where the government gets this from. Page 33 of the same report says:

Maintain the Territory's five-year growth rate at least 1% above the national average.

We are about to go backwards extremely fast if we lose this important industry.

Much has been said about the abattoirs in Indonesia that meet Australian standards. I ask the government to start speaking loudly in support of this. We had a great session of parliament with a tripartisan agreement that we support the industry. I have not seen the Chief Minister on the national stage criticising the federal government for this blanket ban or having it lifted. If he is, I congratulate him; however, it would be nice if he told us what he is doing. That would be excellent.

There is a range of things in relation to this. I spoke about youth, and about some of these families being ripped apart at the moment. I asked the minister what would happen to the young people who return because people in the cattle industry cannot afford to keep kids at boarding school. There is no plan, there has been

no assessment and the answer was: 'No one has asked us'. I ask the government to be proactive and anticipate what is going to happen. If rural people do not have the money, they cannot keep kids in boarding school. They are going to come back to the Territory. Do we have positions in schools for them? Do we have teachers? We struggle to retain teachers. There is a whole range of issues.

In relation to the live cattle ban and seniors, a number of seniors talk to me about superannuation and their pension, which is tied up in cattle properties. At some stage they will sell the property to their children or someone else, and that is their future. They are deeply concerned that the price of cattle stations is about to take a huge dive, the price of their stock is going to take a huge dive, and there goes their life's work and effort.

Recently, a person on the land explained their whole family is on the land - three generations living on the property. They are deeply concerned about what they are going to do and what their children and grandchildren are going to do. They pointed out in relation to the small number of abattoirs and killing areas for beef in Indonesia, if people have an issue with that - I find it terrible and would like to see it done in the most humane way possible. They said if they cannot get their stock sold, if there is no transport or the cost of transport is prohibitive, they will have to shoot their stock.

When you consider we export 500 000 head of cattle off the land, we are looking at huge degradation of land. If they remain will they eat the paddocks out? They will have to get them off some way. When the price of beef crashes, people in regional, rural and remote Australia have the problem of what they do with it. You cannot sell it, you cannot give it away, no one wants it, and no one wants to pay to transport it anywhere. What happens? They stay in the paddock. Thousands of cattle that have to be shot or disposed of in some way are an enormous problem. How are we going to do that and who will pay?

The compensation that may flow from this - I do not want to think of the figure given we are borrowing \$109m a day federally, and have a substantial deficit in the Northern Territory. Where will that put our economy? Where is the animal welfare for cattle left to die in the paddocks or shot and injured? You cannot shoot everything in the paddock; that is not the way it happens. It will have to be done from helicopters or a vehicle, which will incur huge expense. What happens to that stock? I am concerned about how those animals will be treated and dealt with.

Multicultural affairs: as the shadow minister for multicultural affairs, I have relationships with many groups in our community. People from the Indonesian community have spoken to me. They were very nice about it but said: 'We are a little concerned about how this has been handled'. They did not say they felt personally insulted - they did not want to get into that area; however, they thought the way things have been done was a little rude. I am sure it could have been handled better. Mind you, there are probably many people in the government in Canberra who would agree with that statement.

There is a range of issues in relation to alcohol policy. I do not believe the government has it right. This is a terrible problem in our community. I hope the government proves me wrong, but I doubt it. The anecdotal evidence I am getting from numerous people is that the government will struggle to fix the problem with the Enough is Enough strategy.

Madam Chair, I ask the government to reconsider its approach to its federal colleagues and start voicing concerns nationally so that the people affected by this blanket cattle ban realise they have the support of the government of the Northern Territory at a national level.

Mr CONLAN: Madam Chair, I had about three hours to get through \$1bn worth of health expenditure in estimates, which is not much time for so much money; to get through it in 20 minutes is near impossible. I will focus on an area we spent a considerable amount of time on - hospital waiting lists speak for themselves. The government's policies are simply in tatters. Areas such as Alcohol and Other Drugs, which my other colleagues have raised, speak for themselves. The community knows it and has stopped listening to the government.

Perhaps the community is not aware of the debacle surrounding the current aeromedical contract. This has been a disaster from go to whoa. We spent close to two hours trying to extract answers from the Minister for Health. It was quite extraordinary how not across his brief he was considering \$256m of your money is going towards this aeromedical contract. The advice provided by the government was skewed and flawed. The government has not acted, by signing off on this contract, in the best interests of the Northern Territory, particularly those people who will be utilising the aeromedical service, those in the regions of the Top End, particularly Katherine.

We have to start with the time frame. The tender for the provision of four new aircraft to provide aeromedical evacuation services to the top half of the Northern Territory closed early in 2010. The question has to be: why has it taken

so long for the government to examine the tenders and make a decision on the successful tenderer? This was blown out month after month, and only recently have we seen the government sign off on it. The minister's strongest argument for awarding the contract to CareFlight was the provision of twin-engine aircraft, or Beech 200, King Air aircraft and, in the same breath as saying how wonderfully safe the King Air aircraft was on a number of occasions throughout estimates, suggesting how unsafe single engine aircraft, particularly the PC-12 aircraft, are.

The government cited several examples of engine failures with regard to Pilatus aircraft. It was interesting that the minister gave no examples of failures of twin-engine aircraft. He said that the aeromedical fleet across Australia is moving towards a twin-engine capacity - that is wrong. I am unsure where the minister got his advice. Yes, I do; it was from this report commissioned by the Northern Territory government, and we all know my feelings on the report. The question has to be asked: is the minister, and the Health department, aware that more than half the aeromedical fleet across the country is moving away from twin-engine aircraft towards brand new PC-12 aircraft single-engine turbine. The minister appears unaware of that, and was slavishly taking the advice of the author of the aeromedical service model - the Cornish report.

I asked the minister if the department had received advice from civil aviation regulators, either from Australia or elsewhere around the world, that single-engine turbine aircraft are less safe to operate than its equivalent multiengine competitor. There was no answer because there is no advice. Civil aviation regulators in Australia have deemed single-engine turbine aircraft are capable and safe enough and they meet the highest possible standards - the RPT standard - regular public transport standard - the same standard our airlines operate to.

The reason I am stuck on single versus twin-engine aircraft is the greatest capacity for the government to deliver an aeromedical service to the Northern Territory. If the advice in the Cornish report was fair, balanced and independent, we could all safely accept the decision. The advice in this report is not fair, not balanced, and was not independent. When you weigh up what has been recommended and what is available, and measure that against the cost to the Northern Territory government, you have a pretty poor decision by the Northern Territory government. The ones to suffer are not necessarily in this Chamber, like the member for Johnson and the member for Karama - you do not live too far from Royal Darwin Hospital - but those people who live a few

hundred miles away from Royal Darwin Hospital and need to be evacuated to it quick smart.

Does the department have any objective advice that a single-engine turbine aircraft is less safe to fly in the Wet Season in the Top End of the Northern Territory than its equivalent multiengine competitor? The answer is no, because there is no advice and no compelling evidence to suggest a twin-engine aircraft is any safer to fly in a storm of lightning than a single-engine turbine aircraft. This is the argument being made by the Health minister on the advice of the author of this report. I know it is his advice because I have spoken to the author of this report on several occasions. He has peddled the same line to me as he has the minister, and the minister parroted those same claims to me in estimates. Essentially, there is no information available, certainly no evidence, that a single-engine aircraft is any less capable of flying through electrical storms or adverse weather conditions than a twin-engine aircraft - a PC-12 versus a Beech 200.

Is the Department of Health aware that the Northern Territory police department operates three single-engine turbine aircraft in the Northern Territory all year round? The NT Police Air Wing operates three PC-12 aircraft. It is staggering how it is okay for the police but, somehow, not okay for anyone else. In fact, they operate two single-engine turbine aircraft through Darwin and Alice Springs. Has the Department of Health expressed these concerns to the police department or the Commissioner of Police about our hard-working police officers flying in single-engine aircraft? According to the minister, in statements he made repeatedly on Tuesday morning, single-engine aircraft are not as safe as a twin-engine aircraft to fly in. Has he expressed those concerns to the police department? I would bet my bottom dollar he has not.

I need to talk about independence. The big question is: did the department check to ensure the author of this report, Mr Cornish, had no previous connections with any of the aircraft manufacturers whose aircraft had been put forward by various tenderers? Did the department, or the minister, or Cabinet, check to ensure the author of this report - the advice the government has taken on so enthusiastically - had no previous connections with any other aircraft manufacturer, or any aircraft manufacturer whose aircraft had been put forward by the various tenderers?

It is a very interesting question. The answer, I suggest, is probably no. In particular, did the department check whether the author, before being appointed, had worked for, or in, organisations opposing the use of single-engine turbine aircraft for aeromedical services? Did you

bother to check? If you had you may have found something interesting. Additionally, did the department research whether the author of this report - the advice the government has acted upon by awarding the latest aeromedical contract, to the tune of \$256m - Mr Cornish, had previously been employed as a broker, a sourcing agent, or a marketing agent selling multiengine turbine aircraft after he left the Royal Australian Air Force? Did you bother to check? I doubt it.

Since leaving the Royal Australian Air Force, the author worked for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, South Eastern Section, as Operations and Aviation Manager. He was put forward by the South Eastern Section in the early 1990s as a spokesperson for why they would not use single-engine aircraft, and why only multiengine aircraft would suffice for the RFDS South Eastern Section. It is interesting to note the South Eastern Section of the Royal Flying Doctor Service is the only section which does not fly single-engine aircrafts. Surprise, surprise, surprise!

The author subsequently left the Royal Flying Doctor Service, South Eastern Section, and worked as a broker marketing agent for a company that specialised in the sale of second-hand King Air aircraft. Surprise, surprise! He was a marketing manager for King Air. He then set up his own company, J Cornish and Associates, as an advisor to government agencies. It should also be noted, in all consultancies across various state governments, any tender the author has been involved in has only ever recommended multiengine aircraft and has excluded single-engine aircraft from tendering.

I place on the record that I believe the King Air is a beautiful bird. It is a wonderful aeroplane. I really love them. They are very capable. My point is the cost-efficiency to the Northern Territory taxpayer and the advice. My argument is purely with the advice, and how the advice could be so heavily weighted in one dimension without any - what sounds to me - background checks, follow-up, or confirmation of any of the facts presented to the Northern Territory Department of Health and, indeed, the minister. The minister had not even bothered to check any of the facts or information presented to him by the author of this report. That is obvious in his responses to me in estimates, so enthusiastically repeating and parroting the same information I received when I had conversations with the author of this report.

The reports submitted by the author do not provide the government with a balanced review of aircraft type, nor aircraft options available to service the aeromedical requirements in the Northern Territory. He acknowledges there are two main types of aircraft providing aeromedical services in Australia - point 5.2 on page 20 of his

report. However, he makes no effort to provide the government with a capability comparison of the two types of aircraft - a PC-12 versus a B200 King Air - nor the safety record of the two types in aeromedical or other operations. Instead, on page 23 of the report, he states the aircraft available is to be the B200 King Air, a new one, which would come in at a cost of \$7m to \$7.5m, or second-hand, which comes in at \$4.5m to \$5m. It is interesting to note a brand new PC-12 costs about the same. In fact, the capital acquisition cost saving when comparing new aircraft is about \$US10m. He neglected to advise the government of this in his report. It is a matter of convenience for him what is left in this report and what is removed.

Point 3.3 on page 11 of the report references a letter from the CEO of the Katherine West Health Board to the Minister for Health describing poor service delivery; an appalling level of non-performance in supply of aeromedical service with nine delays in one month and between 12 to 48 hours wait for aeromedical services. This was while under the previous contractor. As a result of that poor service, that contract has been torn up. Despite this notification in the review by the author of this report, the government decided to award the contract to CareFlight, which only recently contributed to the same delays of up to 18 hours in the remote community of Yarralin, about 420 km south west of Katherine. As an interim contractor, they have already contributed to delays in retrievals. That is clearly a concern. I hope they are able to provide the service we all need in the Top End of the Northern Territory.

The minister mentioned the issue of wallabies. He is still banging on about wallabies. He did not even know a notice to airmen had since been removed. It is now an ERSA, an en-route supplement, which is available to all pilots. It is full of information: runway length, runway distance, frequencies for pilots for radios, a stack of things. I will tell you what it mentions about wallabies. It does not say anything about wallabies; surprise, surprise. It does say animal and bird hazards exist. However, go to any aerodrome around the country and there will be animal and bird hazards on every airstrip, including Sydney airport, including Darwin airport, including Alice Springs airport. No mention of wallabies, because the wallaby issue is a non-issue.

If you cannot land a twin-engine aircraft, a single-engine aircraft or a hang-glider at Tindal safely - at a Category 5 airstrip! Tindal Airport is an alternate for the Space Shuttle. It is a pretty impressive setup they have. The runway is 2744 m - 2.7 km long. It has Category 5 emergency services with a tower that is manned 24 hours a day during military operations, and

24 hour emergency service capability, regardless of whether the Hornets or the RAAF are utilising the airport. It is nothing for a fire engine or one of the Emergency Services personnel to get out and sweep the runway. It is very wide - you have 2.5 km to land on. It is extraordinary that it is okay to land an aeroplane on a dusty, old, scratchy strip at Ramingining with lanterns lighting up the thing at night. That is perfectly acceptable, but to suggest there are wallabies at this Category 5 world-class airstrip and it will be a problem is rubbish. That is not just an opinion; that is the fact. The notice to airmen has been removed, and the only advice to pilots is animal and bird hazards exist. We have safely dismissed that.

The author and the minister both cited examples of incidents regarding single-engine aircraft in Western Australia and mentioned the RAAF Roulettes, which is an extraordinary example considering it is a totally different aircraft with a totally different engine. Nevertheless, we can take him to task on that. It was a fuel problem with the RAAF, and you will find the RAAF has 100% confidence in its PC-9s, which it has operated for a long time and continues to operate. They are still flying. The RAAF does not seem too concerned. He did not give examples of twin-engine aircraft incidents. There have been plenty of twin-engine aircraft incidents resulting in deaths. I could quote a few but I do not want to go down that path. Some of those incidents may be a bit close to home for us. You might be able to read between the lines. Because you have two engines and one fails does not mean you can fly safely home. That is what the minister seems to think. He does not realise it takes more effort to fly an aircraft that has one engine going full bore on this side and nothing on the other.

Is the minister aware of the 10 000-odd incident-free hours the RFDS working out of Central Operations have? We are out of time. Minister, safety is not just about contingencies, safety is about a record, and you need to look at the record of these operators before you sign off.

Madam CHAIR: The question is - That the proposed expenditure be agreed to and that the resolutions or expressions of opinion as agreed to by the committees in relation to the proposed expenditure or outputs with reference to the Appropriation (2011-2012) Bill 2011 (Serial 163), and the activities, performance, practices and financial management of the Power and Water Corporation with reference to its Statement of Corporate Intent for 2011-12, be noted.

Motion agreed to.

Remainder of the bill agreed to.

Bill reported; report adopted.

Ms LAWRIE (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Madam Speaker, I thank everyone who has put in so many hours assisting the estimates process. This year, the overall time for estimates increased by 20% from 50 hours to 60 hours. This has meant some extraordinary hours worked by Assembly staff and, in particular, Hansard. I place on the record my sincere thanks to those staff members of the Assembly. Thanks to the many departmental staff from across government who have spent many hours preparing for estimates, in addition to those who attended, as well as the Power and Water Corporation and its staff for a similar effort.

The committee members this year with 60 hours of estimates, the three government members and the Independents put in very lengthy hours, and the members of the opposition rotated their way through. Estimates is an important process which provides an extra level of scrutiny and transparency. That is why we introduced it as soon as we came to government. Over the years, the Estimates Committee has evolved, it has changed, and this year we put in additional hours of scrutiny: 60 hours to question ministers across their portfolio areas.

Budget 2011-12 was a necessarily tight budget developed in an environment of constrained revenues but increased service demand. The budget is responsible and responsive to the needs of Territory families and businesses. For a Labor government, quality and affordable healthcare and education are key priorities, and we deliver record investment in these areas. At its centre, Budget 2011-12 has quality and affordable services to support Territory families to get ahead, and also builds on opportunities positioning us for the next stage of economic growth in the Territory.

While Australia and the Territory dodged the worst of the global financial crisis its effects continue, with further reduction to GST revenues, limits on credit affecting business activity and, as a consequence, the Territory's own source revenue. Territory businesses have felt the lingering effects of the GFC with more cautious consumer behaviour and those tightened credit markets. Throughout this period, Territory businesses have remained among the most confident in the nation, and the Territory's unemployment level reached the lowest in Territory history. Importantly, with this government's deliberate decision to increase its infrastructure spending to shoulder the construction sector and our economy, more than 12 000 jobs have been created in the last three years, with approximately 90% of those full-time jobs.

Budget 2011-12 keeps infrastructure spending at historically high levels, with \$1.5bn to continue to create and support Territory jobs and the broader economy until the private sector investment returns to more usual levels. Increased infrastructure spending and the consequent deficit was the only appropriate way to respond to the tightened economic conditions we are facing as a result of the global financial crisis. Industry recognises the government's strategy; it supports this strategy. The Master Builders Northern Territory said:

I think it is a courageous budget because the government had to continue the deficit.

Deficit is not a dirty word.

You cut your cloth to suit the times. In the times we are in, in a small jurisdiction like the Northern Territory, we rely on government as a backup to keep us in the game.

The Chamber of Commerce understood the decision, supporting it by stating:

I don't think at this point in time it is essential that we have surplus in the budget.

They suggested we needed to keep our economy ticking along:

I think they are being responsible going into deficit...

Industry understood this was the right time in the economic cycle to support industry through that all important infrastructure spend, and also in the payroll tax cuts we are delivering in the budget, the subject of debate for the next bill before the Chamber. We made deliberate decisions to keep Territorians in jobs and to ensure a healthy economy waiting for that all important private sector investment to return to more normal levels.

No one expects too much of a shadow Treasurer who dodges some stamp duty, but the member for Katherine's earlier efforts in debate today defy belief. Any visitor in our gallery today from interstate, overseas, or tuning in around the world would have been baffled by what economy he was talking about. They would have heard his wailings of woe and could be forgiven for scratching their heads. He said the economy is falling apart, he said everything is going pear-shaped; and he said government is not proactive in building the economy. Which jurisdiction is he talking about? Is it Spain? Is it Greece? Is it the US? No. Apparently, it is the Northern Territory. He is new as a shadow Treasurer, and is not

particularly interested in certain aspects of the Territory's economy and revenue – such as stamp duty – but the strange reality he lives in truly needs to be addressed.

The Territory enjoys the lowest unemployment rate in the nation, and this is under a Labor government. We are tipped by Access Economics to be the fastest growing economy in our nation over the next five years, equal first with Western Australia. This is under a Labor government. This growth is, in part, fuelled by mining investment and major projects pursued by this Labor government. 'Oh, but we built the Territory', he whines. Let us be clear about this: this government has built the Territory into a flexible, strong, growing economy which is the envy of other developed jurisdictions, despite the debt-addled economy and the neglected infrastructure we inherited from the CLP, not because of it. Not to mention a government which took courageous action in supporting Territory jobs during the greatest financial crash the world has ever seen. Hang on, I need to qualify that: the world excluding the member for Katherine, because he thinks the government uses the GFC as an excuse.

Once again, I ask the member for Katherine to explain this to our international and interstate visitors - people coming from places where unemployment is 7%, 10% even 20%, whose economies are contracting, where people queue for welfare payments or even soup for dinner, where people are marching in the streets because their government has failed to protect their jobs, their families, their livelihoods. Look them in the eye, shadow Treasurer, and tell them about the Territory's woes, and they will peg you for the fool you clearly are ...

Mr Westra van Holthe: It could be so much better here, Treasurer!

Ms LAWRIE: They will peg you for a fool. Our debt is as a result of a deliberate decision to go into deficit to support year-on-year high spending on infrastructure. This is productive infrastructure and productive debt. The opposition has been scaremongering on the issue; that the debt is unsustainable. Yet, we have Moody's rating agency assessing the Territory's position at AA1, saying we are rated as stable with a very serviceable level of debt.

The CLP has been quite vocal in its opposition to this budget and infrastructure spending, but what they refuse to understand is this was absolutely critical in keeping people in jobs, off those unemployment queues, and away from the soup kitchens.

To highlight the CLP's lack of credibility on the economy, the shadow Treasurer, during the estimates period, said the global financial crisis is over. We know the CLP would be in there slashing spending on critical legacy infrastructure. It would be slashing public service jobs and the result would be an unmitigated disaster for the Territory and our economy - thousands of Territorians out of work and an economy heading backwards under the CLP plan for the Territory. It says it would not be slashing jobs. Look at its election platform, it tells a very different story.

We are focused on ensuring we not only sustain the jobs we have, but we also grow jobs in our economy. We are a developing jurisdiction, with an extremely bright and exciting economic future in diversity, in oil and gas, as well as the resources sector.

If you heard debate in the committee stages today you would have thought, from the Chief Minister through to senior ministers involved, we were ignoring the decision by the federal government to suspend the live cattle trade to Indonesia. Nothing could be further from the truth. We broke into the midst of estimates, recalled parliament, had a motion passed by members of this Chamber, and had our Chief Minister in Canberra lobbying the federal government. We have been strong advocates for the industry; he was at the cattlemen's dinner in Canberra. Our minister for Primary Industry is a frequent caller to the federal minister, Joe Ludwig, lobbying him regarding the swift resumption of trade. It was a subject of significant debate and discussion during estimates. What we have consistently said ...

Mr Westra van Holthe: The cattlemen know what your government has done.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Ms LAWRIE: It is not in the interests of the industry - the long-term sustainable viability of the industry - to politicise this. It is a cheap trick to create a political football out of people's livelihoods. A cheap stunt is starting to occur. Again, I warn members of the opposition, this is a very serious matter. It calls for a time where we pull together to support members ...

Madam SPEAKER: Treasurer, your time has expired.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, this needs a response. The standard defence from this government in relation to any comment at all from this side of the House about the live cattle trade is 'playing politics'. If this government was genuine about its passion for the trade it would set aside the politics it plays. The politics being played by this government in relation

to this is quite simple. Our federal friends in the Australian Labor Party have made a determination to suspend a trade as a result of pressure from the backbench of that Labor Party, and this government has not criticised the federal government, but rather sought to 'work with them'. I have seen little evidence so far that working with the federal minister, Joe Ludwig, has provided Territory cattle folk any form of comfort whatsoever.

A very simple solution to this problem is for us, as a jurisdiction, to seek to protect our cattle industry by asking the blanket ban be lifted now. There are several abattoirs in Indonesia that could easily pass the standards we require. However, we have sent, as a nation, a signal to Southeast Asia which says all its abattoirs are wrong. The blanket ban, the knee-jerk reaction from the federal minister, has caused enormous suffering in the Northern Territory, and will continue to cause suffering. It is all well and good for the minister to say: 'Oh, you are just playing politics'; I accuse the government of playing that political game because it is refusing to look after the interests of Territorians by demanding the lifting of the blanket ban on live cattle exports. That is the politics being played at the moment.

The government says this is such an important issue and we have to work together on it but the Leader of the Opposition was in Indonesia on this issue long before any other Australian. We, on this side of the House, were asking for a recall of parliament long before the Northern Territory government signed up to a recall and we offered, at that point, and continue to offer, bipartisan support for the motion passed by all 25 members in this House for the interests of this industry.

Where was the government on this? It was reluctant at first, and only when comforted that this was a genuine offer to send a message, both to Canberra and the Republic of Indonesia, did it condescend to come into this House. The member for Fong Lim was agitating very early in the piece for a fighting fund to be put together, and I am glad the Northern Territory government has finally condescended to some advertising to help protect our industry, although that idea was also generated from members on this side of the House.

What did the government do in the first two weeks? Nothing. It sat on its hands and said: 'We are going to work with a task force, we are going to work with the cattle industry', and that type of thing. I understand why the cattle industry and the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association are extremely nervous about controversy surrounding this issue; it is their livelihood and they are, by nature, cautious. However, I object to the allegation being levelled

at members on this side of the House that we are playing politics when, in fact, that is all this government has been doing from the very first moment.

Mr Vatskalis: That is what you are doing now.

Mr ELFERINK: That is what we have to do in the sense that is what we are - we are politicians. In protecting and fighting for our industries, we have to get involved at a political level. The decision to ban this live export trade was a political decision. It is a surprising allegation to make: all you guys want to do is play politics. We are not playing politics. This is a deadly serious business and I am engaged in doing it, hopefully, with the best outcomes for the Northern Territory live export trade in mind.

I hope that is the intention of government. It does not automatically follow that we on this side of the House will remain silent when we see a vital industry for the Northern Territory under threat. I am profoundly disappointed in the determination of the federal minister to create a blanket ban on live trade; however, that has occurred. We supported a motion in this House asking for it to be lifted as soon as possible. The time has come for this blanket ban to be lifted, and for the trade of live cattle to resume to those abattoirs which we already know can take the cattle and deal with them appropriately during the slaughter process.

Madam Speaker, I am proud of our live export trade and I am proud of the Northern Territory cattle industry. They have an exemplary record, as far as I am concerned, from the paddock to it leaving the feedlot, and it disappoints me that the federal government has chosen to respond in the way it has. It was unnecessary to go to those extremes. The blanket ban should be lifted, and the trade should resume for the sake of the people in the industry in the Northern Territory, and the Northern Territory as a whole.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I understand there are people sensitive about a debate on live cattle, and I do not want to put my big foot in it, which is probably a cattle statement; however, we should be permitted to talk about the issue and, if possible, put some positive notions forward. We discussed this last night, and I raised some issues in relation to the way Indonesia felt about our approach. I have just been on the phone to two quite distressed cattle people, one in the Douglas Daly and one near Dunmarra, who are at their wit's end and reflect how every cattle station owner in the Territory is feeling at the moment.

My feeling is we have insulted Indonesia. Minister Ludwig has put draft plans to Indonesia to find ways to overcome the animal welfare issues, and that will take some time for the Indonesians to come back; however, we have to mend some fences. One way we can do that is by offering the Indonesians financial assistance to upgrade their smaller abattoirs. One of the dangers if we open up the trade only to big abattoirs - from the information I received today most of those abattoirs are owned by Australian companies, and you will see an 'us and them' situation which could have political ramifications within Indonesia.

As an act of goodwill towards Indonesia and a way of offering an apology for the way we handled the situation, an offer of financial help to upgrade small abattoirs which many poorer Indonesians rely on for an income, would be a positive approach towards mending those bridges.

I have no qualms about criticising the decision by the federal government. It was a short-sighted decision based on sound reasons, because we all saw what was on television, but sometimes good leadership requires one to step back and make a wise decision based on all the facts. This did not happen. We could spend time blaming this person or that person; however, we are in a position today where we must move forward.

It would be good if this parliament discussed the issue, looked at ways of resolving the problem, encouraged a mending of bridges burnt, and put out the hand of goodwill to Indonesia. We could do that in a practical form, and we could do it quite quickly by saying we would like to help bring these abattoirs up to standard. In the long term, we should be assisting Indonesian farmers and some of these people in Indonesia who do not have electricity and refrigeration. What would be wrong with us assisting them to have those facilities; improve the infrastructure in poorer parts of Indonesia? That would help and would mean eventually the live cattle industry may not be required because we could send meat to Indonesia through our own abattoirs. One of the issues in this debate is these people do not have refrigeration and cannot store meat.

Madam Speaker, there is a whole range of ways we can show Indonesia we are and have been good neighbours. The cattle industry is one practical way we have been showing Indonesia we are good neighbours and are willing to work together. Now is the time to look positively forward; to mend those bridges and do something practical. Let us not worry too much about what has happened. Let us worry about fixing the problem we have today.

Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

**REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 164)**

Continued from 4 May 2011.

Mr WESTRA VAN HOLTHE (Katherine):
Madam Speaker, I am going to be brief with my contribution to the debate. All that needs to be said about the budget has been said. Clearly, the government does not get it, neither does the Treasurer. That is okay; we will move on.

This legislation was introduced on 4 May to facilitate a number of budget commitments. The amendments were split into two different commencement dates with the *First Home Owner Grant Act* and the *Stamp Duty Act* commencing on 3 May, and the later amendments to take effect on 1 July, being changes to the *Payroll Tax Act*, *Stamp Duty Act*, *Taxation Administration Amendment Act 2003* and the *Taxation Administration Act*. There are a number of other changes, such as the repeal of a number of acts, including the *Fuel Subsidies Act* of 1998.

The purpose of the bill was to facilitate budget commitments. One was to reduce the payroll tax rate from 5.9% to 5.4%, which is in line. It is a little better than what the government promised in 2008, where it said it would be at 5.5% and it has brought it down to 5.4%. It would be worthy to note that the Country Liberals' budget commitment in 2008 was to reduce the payroll tax rate to 4.5%. You could argue the business community has been duped by 0.9% on its payroll tax on the basis we have a Labor government not a Country Liberal government.

There are also changes to the payroll tax threshold and an increase in the conveyance stamp duty rate on transactions of \$3m or more from 4.95% to 5.45%. Those other measures counteract the reduction in the payroll tax rate.

The introduction of the \$10 000 BuildBonus for purchase of new properties between 3 May and 31 December this year is a nice sweetener but it is not the silver bullet. It is not going to be the cure for all ills. We have said it before and I will repeat it: what has led to some of the crisis we are facing in the Territory is the glacial rate of land release in the Northern Territory over the last 10 years. Considering the impact of a \$10 000 BuildBonus, I will refer to an article which appeared in the *NT News* on 21 May where a builder said:

It will be of use only to people who already intend to buy.

The money may encourage a few people to buy a little sooner, which may get a few

small housing projects off the ground a bit sooner.

But it certainly won't get to the core problem - that we just don't have enough properties being built to cope with demand.

That is because there has not been enough land release to cope with demand. The story went on to say it would do little to ease the Territory's growing housing crisis.

It is a step in the right direction, but a reasonably lame attempt to counteract some of the failures of this government in land release. It has failed completely; it has dropped the ball and cannot meet targets. Land release has been planned and not executed. The government has not released blocks in a timely fashion, not released them according to its schedules and not released them to cope with the demand in the Northern Territory. Herein lies the problem. We have a small token thrown into the budget mix to sweeten the deal but, clearly, it will not be enough.

There are other changes to legislation around Territory revenue with principal place of residence, and some around stamp duty in relation to property and breakdown of relationships.

There is also repeal of several other acts. I had a query about one of them - I am not going to take it to committee because I have had an explanation from Treasury, and thank you to the people who provided it. I looked at the off-road fuel subsidy, which is one of the repealed acts. It is called the *Fuel Subsidies Act* of 1998. Not knowing the history of it - because this legislation is still on the Territory books - it has not been used for a number of years. It was changed in form a few years ago and has become superfluous legislation which does nothing.

This off-road fuel subsidy, had it still been used in the form intended, may have provided some relief to people on pastoral properties. My intention was to find some small way to help the cattlemen. Unfortunately, that is no longer relevant because the legislation is no longer used.

I will not speak for too long on this. We will not be opposing this; it will go through. We clearly have concerns about the budget as a whole. The Treasurer said we have been highly critical of the budget, and with good reason; we are worried. Notwithstanding Moody's rating and all those other things - I do not have figures in front of me to compare - our current debt is a quarter of our entire budget. I do not know if that exists in other jurisdictions - \$1.1bn debt currently and our total budget allocation for this year is about \$4.5bn, isn't it? Yes, one-quarter; worth reflecting on.

Madam Speaker, I will wind up there and look forward to speaking in the adjournment debate to discuss other issues.

Ms LAWRIE (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the support of the opposition in this revenue legislation. It is amending the *Payroll Tax Act*, the *First Home Owner Grant Act*, the *Stamp Duty Act* and the *Taxation Administration Act* to implement our budget revenue measures. Obviously, a key measure is that all-important opportunity for small business, which is where we reduce the payroll tax rate from 5.9% to 5.5% from 1 July. We also deliver a year early on our election commitment to bring the payroll tax rate down to 5.5%. Importantly again for small business, we are increasing the payroll tax threshold from \$1.25m to \$1.5m in exemption from deduction. This ensures additional small and medium local businesses will no longer have to pay payroll tax. It improves the equity of the tax system, and we are removing red tape for larger businesses.

We expect the changes will provide some \$6.75m in savings to businesses in 2011-12. We know most of our local businesses will pay less payroll tax, with businesses that pay wages up to \$3m saving as much as \$14 750 a year. Another key measure in the bill is an increase to the conveyance stamp duty rate applying to transactions of \$3m or more, taking that rate from 4.95% to 5.45% from 1 July. That provides a return to the Territory on very high value property transactions, consistent with the average of the rate in other states and territories while maintaining our tax competitive status. The increased rate only applying to high value transactions of at least \$3m will have no impact on small-to medium-sized businesses or most of our home buyers. I am unaware of family homes going over \$3m.

The additional revenue raised enables government to provide that new initiative, the BuildBonus scheme, supporting homebuyers and the construction industry, providing an all-important one-off \$10 000 grant to buyers of a new home valued at up to \$530 000.

The bill also makes a number of changes to maintain the integrity of our tax system, providing greater simplicity, efficiency and equity under the Territory stamp duty and general taxation regimes. It also repeals various pieces of revenue legislation no longer required, generally because they relate to taxes abolished years ago.

Madam Speaker, I commend the revenue legislation to the House.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Ms LAWRIE (Treasurer)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Dr BURNS (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly, at its rising on 23 June 2011, adjourn until Monday, 8 August 2011 at 10 am or such other time and/or date as may be advised by the Speaker, pursuant to sessional order.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I know everyone is keen to go home, but there is something I want to talk about tonight. It has been belaboured from some point of view; however, I want to talk briefly about some issues in the cattle industry – surprise, surprise.

The member for Nelson gets it. He uttered some very wise words this afternoon. He spoke of the relationship we have with Indonesia and he is right: significant damage has been caused to the relationship between Australia and Indonesia and, for that matter, between the Northern Territory and Indonesia. That is extremely regrettable. We, as a government in years gone by, worked very hard for many years to build the relationship with our northern neighbours, including Indonesia. We have been working long and hard for 20 or more years to bring about a sustainable live cattle trade from the Northern Territory and, for that matter, the north of Western Australia and Queensland into places like Indonesia.

Unfortunately, this situation has now - I was going to say degenerated, but it has probably escalated into a diplomatic incident. Such is the strained relationship now between the Northern Territory and Australia that this has become a diplomatic incident. I am calling on our Foreign Affairs minister, Kevin Rudd, to go with urgency to Indonesia to rebuild the bridges and mend the fences. This must be done for the long-term viability and sustainability of the industry. Members on the opposite side of the House have talked about the long-term viability of our industry. If the relationship is not repaired that long-term viability will no longer exist. That must occur first.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Rudd, to go to Indonesia and sort this problem out

because it is having an impact now, and will continue to impact on our cattle industry in the Northern Territory for many years to come. It is going to affect the ancillary industries as well. An enormous number of personnel, employees, and businesses support the cattle industry and are already feeling the pinch.

On day one or day two after the announcement of this blanket ban - this ill-considered and ill-thought-out blanket ban - I was driving between Darwin and Katherine listening to ABC radio. The journalist on the radio was talking to a farmer on a tractor in his paddock and the question was asked: 'What do you feel? What are you going to do now?', and he said: 'I do not know whether to continue baling hay or not'. The next question was: 'Do you have any employees?', and he said: 'Yes, I have one part-timer and one full-timer. The part-timer has been told not to come in and I do not know what to do with the full-timer'. From day one or day two, the impacts were flowing into the Territory in relation to jobs.

I heard a rumour today that I subsequently found out is not true: a large number of jobs were lost in a particular company. Thank goodness that did not happen, but I can tell you what is at stake. Right now in Katherine - and this example has been used in the media before - Northern Feed and Cube make cubes and pellets for the live cattle export industry, 95% of which product goes on the boats. They had around 20 orders on their board before the blanket ban was announced. That afternoon, every one of those orders was wiped off the board. They have nothing. They have nothing other than millions of dollars worth of equipment sitting idle. They have nothing more than 12 employees who are still being paid - I do not know for how long - while they sit around doing nothing because there is no work. They cannot make cubes because what is the point?

The turnover into the Katherine community is \$5m. They spend \$3m of those dollars buying hay locally - \$3m pumped into the Katherine economy. They are the reasons this live export ban, this ill-considered ban, should be lifted immediately. Where will those 12 people find jobs? Our unemployment rate is low. Where will they find jobs? I am concerned because there is not a single business in Katherine that does not rely, either wholly or partially, on the live cattle trade. There are supermarkets, the local saddlery shop; every business in Katherine is affected by this. I was speaking to a cattleman recently who said: 'Willem, I want to tell you what the impact is for us'. I said: 'Do tell'. He said: 'We were going to buy a couple of freezers today; we were going to go to Betta Electrical and spend \$1000. My wife collared me this morning and said maybe we should just hold off'.

You can be assured that scenario is being replicated across the Top End of the Territory, not just Katherine, and across the top of Western Australia and those areas in Queensland which are also affected by this.

This, mark my words, is going to be, if not already, the very worst crisis the northern cattle industry has experienced and is already manifesting itself across the economy. It is imperative the federal government lift this ban now. It must resume trade and allow trade to abattoirs that comply with Australian standards which, I might add, are higher than international standards. A process must be commenced immediately to certify the remainder of the abattoirs that practice at Australian standards but are not certified.

The member for Nelson is right, we must move forward with this. It is easy to criticise federal Labor, easy to criticise Senator Joe Ludwig, easy to criticise Prime Minister Julia Gillard; they need to be criticised. The incompetence they have shown is astounding; the lack of understanding of the northern cattle industry is astounding.

Correct me if I am wrong, I understand the Chief Minister said this ban was placed without any consultation with the Northern Territory government. If the federal government did not consult with the Northern Territory government, you can bet pounds to peanuts it did not talk to anyone in the Northern Territory; it capitulated. It rolled over to the political pressure of the animal welfare movement and the backbenchers and Independents who keep it in power. That is what has happened. It was a politically gutless decision without a shadow of a doubt.

We must move forward. What needs to happen now is what should have happened on day one: have representatives from the federal government, from the federal department of Agriculture, Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland departments of Resources or Agriculture - whatever they call themselves - on the ground in Indonesia working with those people to ensure the supply chains. That is the call - the supply chains.

Years ago, the Northern Territory government department had a ton of outreach workers, people who were working on the ground. If this government says it does not have the workers for that the reason is it has let those workers slip. Those people on the ground have been replaced with bureaucrats so we do not have that capacity any longer. That is what should have happened; that is what needs to happen right now. We need to get this live trade ban lifted ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Katherine, your time has expired.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I wish to touch on a few issues. Issue number one is public drunkenness which continues to be a problem in the electorate. I thank, again, the police for their efforts; when I call them they respond.

However, a group of drunks have taken up residence at the bottom of Nurses Walk at the Little Mindil site. I draw the attention of the minister for Police to that issue. I have spoken to Superintendent O'Brien from Darwin Police Station, who is attending to the matter. It is an ongoing problem with drunks around Darwin and, whilst many people expected the defecating and urinating in doorways around businesses would stop after the Wet Season, it has slowed down slightly but has not stopped; it continues to occur. It is an ongoing problem the Country Liberals are dedicating their attention to. Should we form a government after the next Territory election, the Country Liberals' habitual drunks policy will see these people removed from circulation and placed into compulsory rehabilitation services through the system we have outlined. We will see less and less of this conduct in the future.

Whilst I appreciate the government has made some efforts in this direction, there is little evidence the approach has worked in other centres and I am unconvinced the approach will work in Darwin. The truth of the matter is, as a government, it has promised us on several occasions these matters would be attended to. After 10 years, we find not only is the problem there, it is escalating.

I now move to some of the answers I received in relation to Flagstaff Park. Flagstaff Park is part of the Ribbons of Green policy this government introduced five or six years ago and has not produced anything like the pamphlets promised. In the case of Flagstaff Park, we continue to receive incomprehensible answers from the minister in relation to the questions I ask. If the estimates process was any measure, people who live in the area can take little comfort anything constructive is going to happen. The minister still cannot indicate with any certainty whether a restaurant will appear at that site, despite being repeatedly asked the question in the estimates process.

Moreover, we get a promise from the minister that, in the financial year 2013, \$6m will be dedicated to the development of Flagstaff Park. I draw the minister's attention to the pre-2008 election promise of \$6m dedicated to the development of Flagstaff Park. The truth of the matter is this government is not to be believed. It

said it had set \$6m aside prior to the 2008 election; it says it will have \$6m set aside at the next election. However, the chasm between its ambitions and its achievements is exemplified by what has happened or, more to the point, what has not happened at Flagstaff Park.

Minister, what happened to the \$6m set aside in 2008? Perhaps he has kept it in his sock draw at home and is deciding to whip it out in 2012-13. Clearly, Flagstaff Park remains unattended to, as does the old hospital site, as does any other part of the Ribbons of Green, a policy dedicated so long ago it was introduced by the former Chief Minister, Clare Martin.

I close with a couple of observations in relation to the live export trade. The accusation is mounted from time to time that people are playing politics. Politics is rarely played, in my opinion, by either side of the House. Politics is a serious business but, nevertheless, a necessary business by virtue of the fact the system of government we have demands people pursue political ends. It is the nature of a free system. I have always considered it to be a serious business. I am not given to taking politics as a matter of levity, and nor should any person engaged in the political debate.

What is occurring, and what has occurred, in relation to the live export industry is a serious business. The government has approached it as a serious business but, nevertheless, have approached it from a political perspective.

The silence of the Northern Territory government after the ban was imposed, which went on for weeks after the imposition of the ban, demonstrates it was also taking the politics of this issue seriously. It had a political agenda of how it dealt with the federal Labor government in Canberra.

Consider this: we see Mr Henderson aggressively attacking Senators Xenophon and Wilkie about their proposal to introduce a ban on all live exports over the next three years, but warmly shaking the hands of the Prime Minister, the person who has ultimate carriage of the ban imposed. That is because the government will argue it has to work closely with the federal government in an effort to have this ban lifted. That is true, but the government should be more vocal than it has been. By remaining silent for such a long time it was testing the water. That is also part of the business of politics. It did not know, as members on this side of the House did not know, what the public reaction was going to be to the ban. However, members on this side of the House determined the defence of the industry was worth the potential political pain.

That is the reason you saw members on this side of the House, such as the Leader of the Opposition, go to Indonesia; the member for Port Darwin calling for an emergency sittings of parliament; and the member for Fong Lim calling for a fighting fund to take this fight to the southern states where people may need to be convinced of the importance of this industry to Australia. That is the important business of politics. I urge members on the other side of the House to do the business of politics earnestly, but not lose sight of the important truth: whilst you have loyalties to the party in Canberra, your loyalty must primarily be to the people of the Northern Territory.

You were prepared to do it with Muckaty; however, that was an easy political decision to make. It did not require a great deal of political skill to understand how to deal with that issue. How the government deals with Canberra - I hope and urge at all times that the government places the political importance and priority upon the people of the Northern Territory and the live export trade above loyalty to its own political party.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Madam Speaker, tonight I talk briefly on an issue in my electorate. At the outset I say it is within the Building Advisory Services Branch, and I urge the minister, and the government, to address the issue as soon as possible.

It involves buildings at Freds Pass Reserve. Apparently, someone was disgruntled and unhappy about how he had been treated in regard to a matter with horses in that area. He went to the Building Advisory Services Branch and lodged a complaint saying all the buildings at Freds Pass Reserve, of which there are many, were not suitable to be used. As a consequence, the building inspector went with reserve management people to inspect some of these buildings, including the stables that service the Noonamah Horse and Pony Club, and also the polocrosse clubs, their competitions and weekend activities. Some of the buildings have been found not to be certified; not up to scratch, not up to code, and some have not been able to be used since the time the building inspector visited.

The reserve board has engineers looking at all the buildings; at the footings, at the stables, to see what needs to be done, if anything. A report is being prepared by the Department of Lands and Planning Building Advisory Services Branch, and I urge the minister to assist in having this issue resolved as quickly as possible, primarily because some 37 groups use Freds Pass Reserve throughout the Dry Season, and some 3000 young children per week use the reserve for their activities. Many of those activities have already been severely impacted on, notably the pony club

and the polocrosse people who meet there on weekends.

I ask the minister to take on, as a matter of urgency, working with the Freds Pass management board and the engineers to see if something can be done as quickly as possible within the regulation legislation to make the buildings safe, if that is the issue, so those young people can get on with their activities and enjoy the reserve as the good reserve it is.

Mr STYLES (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, tonight I acknowledge a great Territorian. Last night I had the privilege of attending the opening of the Carlton Mid Darwin Cup Carnival season for 2011 and, whilst there, witnessed the issue of life membership to the Darwin Turf Club. That is not given out lightly in that industry, particularly in the Darwin Turf Club. It was Michael Stumbles, more affectionately known to everyone as Mick Stumbles. Mick is a race caller and has contributed a fantastic 40 years to calling races at Fannie Bay race track. Some of his achievements mentioned last night were substantial. I do not have enough time to relay them all tonight, but I would like to make a few comments.

Mick came to Darwin in May 1971. It was the first time he had ever been on an aeroplane. He arrived with \$14 in his pocket and a future in front of him. He had a number of jobs and then spoke to a friend, as they always do in the Territory, who got him a job at Fannie Bay Racecourse calling races.

Mick admits in the early days he was not very good at it; however, race callers were few and far between here, and he described some of the challenges of the early days of trying to balance binoculars in one hand and a microphone in the other. He told some great stories about how he could hardly see the races. He was very entertaining.

Mick had 40 years in that profession; 40 years in the Territory. He came here as a young bloke and wanted to contribute to the Territory. He has raised a family here. He said last night, after a few years he kept looking for jobs down south in the racing area. He thought he was pretty good; however, by his own admission, when he went down south he was the only one who had that view. Five years after he started he was presented with an award for being a sports reporter and caller, and he said everyone around Australia was looking for him to join their radio station to call races.

The man's career went in leaps and bounds from then. His contribution to Fannie Bay race track and, in particular, Darwin Turf Club goes back many years, even working to raise the profile

of the races interstate, where he put packages together to bring people to the Territory. Given I have been here 30 years and went to my first Darwin Cup about 29 years ago, I have enjoyed every single one of them.

It is good to place on the public record acknowledgement of fantastic Territorians who have given much; who have raised their family here, still live here, and intend to retire here and continue to contribute to our community.

Mick, on behalf of Territorians, and through our parliament, I would like to offer the congratulations of all of us on your 40 years and life membership of the Darwin Turf Club. Can we ask you to keep up the good work and keep contributing to the Territory?

Madam SPEAKER: Before adjourning and putting the question, I thank, on behalf of all honourable members, parliamentary staff, particularly committee staff, for the huge amount of effort they have put into estimates this last week, especially Russell Keith and the staff there. I also thank Hansard; having to record all those proceedings over two weeks must be a pretty tiring and exhausting experience. Thank you very much to those staff.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.