

Madam Speaker Aagaard took the Chair at 10 am.

**STATEMENT BY SPEAKER
New Zealand Mining Disaster**

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I note confirmation of the tragic death of 29 miners in New Zealand, including some Australians. As a mark of respect for their families and the people of New Zealand, the flags at Parliament House are at half mast today. With the concurrence of members, I ask you to join me in standing for one minute in silence as a mark of respect.

Members stood in silence for one minute.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you, honourable members.

VISITORS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Years 7 to 9 Nightcliff Middle School students, accompanied by Ms Janine Woodroffe and Mrs Tasia Kondonis. On behalf of honourable members, I extend to you a very warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Karama**

Dr BURNS (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Treasurer, Ms Lawrie, be granted leave of absence for Thursday, 25 November 2010.

I inform the House that in Question Time today I will take questions relating to Attorney-General and Justice, and the Chief Minister will take questions for the remainder of the Treasurer's portfolios.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I advise we had advance notice of this, and we have signed a pairing arrangement.

Motion agreed to.

**TABLED PAPER
Pairing Arrangements – Member for Karama
and Member for Katherine**

Madam SPEAKER: As indicated by the opposition Whip, I have received a document relating to pairs for the member for Karama with the member for Katherine, signed by both Whips. It is for today's sitting day. I table that document.

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Katherine**

Mr MILLS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I move that the member for Katherine, Mr Willem Westra van Holthe, be granted leave of absence for Thursday, 25 November 2010.

Motion agreed to.

**PETITION
Rural Area Cycle/Walk Paths**

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I present a petition from 328 petitioners praying that funding be allocated for the development of a cycle/walk path in the rural area, notably Virginia. The petition bears the Clerk's certificate that it conforms with the requirements of standing orders. Madam Speaker, I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read:

To the honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, we the undersigned respectfully showeth that we are seriously concerned for the safety of children and adults alike who wish to participate in push bike riding, walking or jogging along Virginia, Lowther, Bees Creek and Wells Creek Roads. A cycle/walking path should be made available to these areas to alleviate dangers and hazardous risks associated with using the main roads for such activities.

Your petitioners, therefore, humbly pray that the Northern Territory government commence planning immediately and allocate funding for the development of cycle/walk paths so that rural residents can enjoy the same services as residents in the urban areas.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray.

**ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION (BEVERAGE
CONTAINERS AND PLASTIC BAGS) BILL
(Serial 136)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr HAMPTON (Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Bill is to establish the regulatory framework for a Northern Territory container deposit scheme and a ban on

the supply by retailers of single-use, lightweight, non-biodegradable plastic bags. These important initiatives will assist in establishing a culture of improved waste management, recycling, and sustainable living in the Northern Territory. Passage of this bill will see the Northern Territory become the first jurisdiction in Australia to commit to such an initiative since the South Australian government introduced its legislation on container deposits in 1975 and plastic bags in 2009.

The Territory community has long supported the introduction of a container deposit scheme. Over the years, we have seen a number of voluntary schemes implemented, including that now operating in Alice Springs. The member for Nelson will be aware of the history of consideration of such a scheme in the Northern Territory. He has been a strong advocate for a container deposit scheme.

I thank the members for Nelson, Macdonnell, and Fannie Bay for their contributions made in informing the development of this bill. I am sure they are as excited as I am about the introduction of this bill which represents a significant milestone in making a container deposit scheme a reality in the Northern Territory.

Through the *Territory 2030* strategic plan, this government is committed to reducing the amount of waste being taken to rubbish dumps by 50% by 2020. The container deposit scheme and plastic bag ban proposed in this bill are two key measures which will assist in reaching this target. These measures will take millions of bottles, cans, and plastic bags out of landfill, our waterways, parks, and streets. The container deposit scheme and plastic bag ban are also important strategies identified in the Territory government's Climate Change Policy.

Territorians use approximately 40 million plastic bags and over 100 million drink containers each year and consumption is on the rise. These plastic bags and drink containers fill our landfills with products that do not really break down, and many of them cause highly visible litter problems or find their way into our oceans. In the 2009-10 Keep Australia Beautiful National Litter Index, plastic litter items contributed the highest amount of volume to the litter total in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory's container litter represents 10% of all container litter recorded across Australia. This is unacceptably high considering the Northern Territory represents just 1% of the country's population.

Plastic bags and beverage containers create litter in our street, kill wildlife and, through their production, deplete natural resources and increase greenhouse gas emissions. This bill will reduce beverage container and plastic bag litter

and increase resource recovery in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory currently has a limited collection system for recyclables. The opportunity to expand collection systems and services is an exciting opportunity and a great challenge. The Territory government has started to build new working relationships with established industries and businesses and wants to develop opportunities for new partnerships locally.

Not only will the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Bill work to minimise environmental pollution, but the container deposit scheme will be a great opportunity for individuals, community groups, sporting groups, and schools to raise money. During the drafting of the bill, the Territory government has been consulting with key stakeholders in the beverage industry, retail industry, waste industry, local councils, as well as community groups. The majority of stakeholders in the retail and waste industries consulted either accept or support the container deposit scheme.

No doubt, the beverage industry as a whole would prefer government to not go down this path, but constructive discussions have occurred. A number of companies have indicated their acceptance, and I believe more will do so as we work through the detail. All community groups consulted were supportive, and strong feedback from the public indicates that most in the community agree the container deposit scheme would help to reduce litter in the Northern Territory. All retailers consulted, including national and remote operators, are supportive of the plastic bag ban. Consultations with stakeholders will continue over the coming months to work through the operational components of the container deposit scheme and the plastic bags ban.

I will now turn to the bill in more detail. The objectives of the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Bill 2010 are to minimise environmental pollution by:

1. establishing a container deposit scheme to reduce beverage container waste and to increase resource recovery, reuse and recycling; and
2. regulating the supply by retailers of single-use plastic bags.

The bill combines provisions for a container deposit scheme and a ban on plastic bags. I will discuss each of these in turn. The bill provides the necessary regulatory framework for the establishment of a container deposit scheme. It achieves this by prohibiting the supply in the Territory of containers unless they are approved or specifically excluded. Under this bill, an approval to supply beverage containers in the

Territory is subject to the requirements that the container bear the approved refund marking and an effective waste management arrangement is in place for the container. A waste management arrangement for approved containers is an arrangement made by participants in the scheme for the collection, sorting, and aggregation of the containers and their reuse, recycling, or other appropriate disposals.

Under the scheme, empty containers bearing the approved refund marking can be delivered to an approved collection depot for the consumer to receive a 10¢ refund per container. Collection depot operators must also ensure that a waste management arrangement is in place for the containers collected. This creates the necessary nexus between beverage manufacturers and those collecting their containers. The operator of an approved collection depot must pay the 10¢ refund to the person returning an approved container. The operator of the collection depot may require the manufacturer to pay the refund amount and the reasonable costs incurred by the operator relating to sorting, cleaning, storing, packing, and processing the container to ensure the container can be reused, recycled, or otherwise disposed of.

It is anticipated the beverage industry will appoint an administrator for the scheme, similar to the super collectors in South Australia. Their role includes collection and management of deposits and fees, and finding markets for the collected glass, plastics, aluminium, and cardboard.

The bill establishes a container deposit scheme in which the beverage industry has a central role in the implementation. I understand some in the community believe government should run the scheme, or that it should be managed by an independent operator. Government has looked very closely at those alternatives and, while there are attractive elements with both, it is quite clear that either would be at risk of being invalid under the Australian Constitution.

The provisions in the bill have, therefore, been modelled on those in the South Australian container deposit legislation. This creates a uniformity of approach which provides certainty and simplicity for everyone involved, and provides industry with a model they are already familiar with and have been operating for over 35 years. Other areas of consistency with South Australia are that each eligible container will receive a 10¢ deposit, and the initial scope of containers covered by the scheme is identical.

There are some changes to the approach in this bill that are worth highlighting. The bill requires the responsible minister to develop

principles for ensuring effective, efficient, and equitable waste management arrangements. These principles will be developed in consultation with manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of regulated containers, operators of collection depots, and prospective participants. These principles will be formally adopted as a service level charter identifying responsibilities of participants in the scheme. The principles will deal with:

- the responsibilities of participants in managing the collection, reuse, recycling, or other disposal of regulated containers in a cost-effective and efficient way;
- the provision of reasonable access to collection depots throughout the Northern Territory;
- the establishment of a standard and transparent process for receiving and paying refunds and handling costs, including those processed in bulk;
- a dispute resolution process for participants; and
- an accountable and transparent monitoring process.

Another difference in this bill is the inclusion of a built-in mechanism to review and possibly expand the types of containers covered by the scheme. As stated, the containers included in the scheme will initially be aligned with those in the South Australian scheme. The bill requires a review of the range of containers to which the scheme applies within two years of commencement. A further key difference is the inclusion of provisions for setting and monitoring of targets for the reuse, recycling, or other disposal of regulated containers. So, while the scheme to be established by the bill is modelled on the South Australian scheme, government has sought to make specific improvements within constitutional constraints.

It is imperative that all beverage manufacturers wishing to sell their product in the Northern Territory participate in the implementation of the scheme. Importantly, offences have been created in the bill to ensure everyone is clear about their responsibilities regarding the scheme. This scheme is not voluntary.

The supply of a beverage in a regulated container to a retailer for sale can only occur if the container is approved. The bill creates two levels of offences to deal with any contraventions of this requirement which are scaled to the level of risk the offence poses to the scheme. An offence

involving strict liability will be imposed on typically low-risk offences with the current maximum penalty of \$13 300 for an individual or, if subject to an infringement notice, a penalty of \$266. A second offence involving fault elements of recklessness and intention will be enforced for the larger, higher-risk offences. The penalty for such offences is currently a maximum of \$53 200 for individuals and \$266 000 for a body corporate.

Each transaction which supplies unapproved containers attracts a separate offence, thereby increasing the deterrent to those who may be considering undermining the scheme through non-compliance. Additionally, this bill holds the director of a body corporate accountable for any of the committed offences. Other offences created through the bill include the sale of an unapproved beverage container by a retailer, claiming a refund on a container which was not purchased in the Northern Territory or South Australia and claiming a refund on a container which was purchased before the scheme commencement date.

This last offence is part of a suite of measures in the bill which is aimed at preventing the return of containers for refund which were purchased prior to the scheme's commencement. This is to manage the potential problem of stockpiling as returning such containers can, potentially, have a substantial financial impact on the scheme as manufacturers would be required to pay redemptions on containers prior to that redemption being factored into the market price of regulated containers. This would be unfair to industry, so this bill disallows the redemption of deposits on containers purchased before the scheme comes into operation. Other measures to minimise this risk include the capacity in the bill for a limit on the number of containers which can be redeemed in a single transaction. Additionally, government will ensure this issue features prominently in the community awareness campaigns conducted for the scheme.

This bill provides for commencement of the container deposit scheme in late 2011. Following consultations with stakeholders, a transition period has been included in the bill to allow the beverage industry time to label regulated containers with an approved refund marking. This period will be 24 months from the commencement of the bill. In the interim period, the South Australian refund marking will be recognised for the purposes of the Northern Territory scheme.

The scheme established under the bill does not require that retailers operate as collection centres, although they may choose to provide such a service. I expect this may be the case in remote communities where community stores may choose to offer collection services as an adjunct to other enterprises.

It is also important this bill allows for innovative and convenient collection technology such as reverse vending machines. While part of container deposit schemes in Europe and North America for some time, these machines are only now being trialled in South Australia.

The service level charter established under the bill will help resolve some of the issues which have proven to be a barrier to the adoption of innovative technology in the South Australian scheme. No doubt the container deposit scheme created through this bill will create considerable interest amongst industry, local government, and the community.

Government has undertaken considerable consultation thus far which has assisted in framing this bill, and will continue to consult as the emphasis shifts to implementation next year. No doubt, there will be some in the community who wish to raise issues such as the impacts on kerbside collection and price impacts or regional implementation. I offer reassurance that government has methodically worked through these issues and is confident this bill will create a scheme which is financially, legally, and regionally viable. With commitment, none of these issues are insurmountable and I encourage industry to continue to engage with this perspective in mind.

As the emphasis shifts to implementation of the scheme, ongoing engagement will be achieved through a number of mechanisms. A steering group of key retailers, beverage industry and waste industry representatives, including representation from remote communities, will be established to lead the development of the service level charter. A comprehensive communication strategy has been developed which will ensure the community is kept well informed of developments.

A working group has also been established incorporating the Darwin City Council, City of Palmerston Council, Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, and the Northern Territory government. The group will work through the potential impacts the scheme may have on current kerbside recycling contractual obligations. My Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport is committed to working through these considerations with local councils to ensure positive outcomes for Territorians, the environment, and councils.

The Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Bill will also regulate the supply of single-use non-biodegradable lightweight plastic shopping bags. Plastic bags are a highly visible, ugly component of litter. They do not readily break down in landfill, and often find their way into our oceans or our streets. Their

production depletes natural resources and increases greenhouse gas emissions. Under this bill, the supply by retailers of single-use lightweight plastic bags will be prohibited. More specifically, the bill defines these bags as those with handles and made of polyethylene, with a thickness of less than 35 microns. This bill does not prohibit the supply of alternatives to single-use plastic bags and the following alternatives will remain available to consumers:

- reusable 'green bags'; that is, heavy polypropylene plastic bags designed to be reused over 100 times;
- recycled bags shoppers bring along themselves;
- heavier retail or boutique bags, typically used by clothing and department stores;
- biodegradable bags that state they meet the relevant Australian Standards; and
- barrier bags, the type dispensed from roll, typically for items such as loose fruit and vegetables and deli products.

The ban is due to take effect in late July 2011. Government has listened to retailers, and this date avoids the busy Christmas period.

In the lead-up to the ban, a four-month phase-out period will be implemented. The objective of the phase-out period is to raise awareness of the ban, facilitate a smooth introduction, and allow retailers the time to introduce systems and alternative bags. During the phase-out period, a retailer may only provide a prohibited plastic bag to a customer to carry goods if an alternative bag is also available to be provided to the customer upon request. This will ensure consumers gradually become accustomed to their options and retailers are not left with unreasonable stocks of old plastic bags by the introduction of the ban.

In the lead-up to and during the phase-out period, government will be assisting retailers by providing a comprehensive training manual, signage materials, fact sheets, and information forums. Government will also be working with the relevant unions, ensuring, for example, that relevant occupational health and safety issues are adequately addressed.

Government is particularly focused on providing assistance to small and remote retailers so they can readily access plastic bag alternatives. It is enlightening to note that, of the 90 stores operating in remote parts of the Territory, at least 37 stores are unlikely to be impacted by the regulatory ban as they are

already plastic bag-free. This clearly demonstrates the benefits of being proactive on important environmental issues and that this bill is in line with community expectations and business realities.

A concerted community awareness campaign will also be conducted to inform consumers of the changes and, more particularly, their options. It will cover, for example, issues such as bin liners and how to avoid getting caught short without a bag when popping into the shop on the way home from work. We have all become accustomed to the easy availability of lightweight plastic bags. It will take some time to embed new routines and behaviours. South Australia has clearly shown it can be done.

Once the full ban comes into effect, a retailer cannot provide a prohibited bag to a customer. The penalty for supplying a prohibited bag is 50 penalty units, or currently \$6650 for an individual and \$33 250 for a body corporate. The bill also creates an offence for misrepresenting that a bag is permitted when it is actually prohibited; the penalty for this offence is \$26 600 for an individual and \$133 000 for a body corporate.

Two-and-half-years after the ban has commenced, the bill requires the responsible minister to prepare a report which will assess the effect of the plastic bag ban on the following: the community; the restriction of supply of prohibited plastic bags; and the other relevant matters pertinent to the plastic bag ban.

I introduce this bill as an important step towards developing a culture of improved waste management, recycling, and sustainable living in the Northern Territory. How we reduce the consumption of natural resources that support our everyday lives while maintaining our standard of living is one of the great challenges of the 21st century. By combining community expectations with sound business practice to protect our environment, this bill embodies the principles of ecologically sustainable development that informs this government's decisions. This bill puts the principles of ecologically sustainable development into practice.

Madam Speaker, this bill helps us take an important step towards reducing our collective ecological footprint. The passage of this bill will lead us towards a Territory economy that is strategically placed as a green resource base into the future. The community expects this government and this bill will work towards delivering on those expectations. I commend the bill to honourable members, and I table the explanatory memorandum.

Debate adjourned.

**ENVIRONMENTAL OFFENCES AND
PENALTIES AMENDMENT BILL (No 2)
(Serial 126)**

Continued from 21 October 2010.

Mr CHANDLER (Brennan): Madam Speaker, the Environmental Offences and Penalties Amendment Bill 2010 (Serial 126) was introduced into the Legislative Assembly on 21 October 2010 by minister Hampton. My understanding is the purpose of this bill is to enable the penalties set out in the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Act* to apply to offences in other Territory legislation that may not be directly associated with harm to the environment. The mechanism by which this will apply is through prescriptive regulation. It should be noted that neither the bill nor the second reading speech elaborated on which acts or types of offences may be prescribed by regulation. Perhaps the minister will be able to elaborate in closing. This is the first of a few questions I would appreciate answers to.

The *Environmental Offences and Penalties Act* was introduced by the former CLP government and commenced on 22 January 1997. As the minister mentioned in his second reading speech, the act was amended with a bill introduced in June 2010. This bill introduced in June 2010 doubled the penalties and converted dollar penalties into penalty units. This act itself does not define specific environmental offences, but various Territory legislation applies the offence levels set out by the act.

The intent of the original bill was to make penalties consistent across various acts that cover environmental management and pollution control. Territory legislation referring to offence levels within the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Act* are as follows: water management and pollution control; *Water Act*; *Weeds Management Act 2001*; *Petroleum Act*; *Nuclear Waste Transport, Storage and Disposal (Prohibition) Act*; *Marine Pollution Act*; *Mining Management Act*; *Geothermal Energy Act*; and *Energy Pipelines Act*.

In case some historians are listening today, again I mention that the truth is the original *Environmental Offences and Penalties Act* was introduced to the Legislative Assembly in 1996 by the former CLP government and formed the basis of government-wide policy to protect the environment from damage. The reason I like to remind people is we continually hear the rhetoric from this government that all things CLP are evil, and we have no regard for the environment. That is just not true. Those sitting on the government benches have an evil habit of rewriting history and promoting their spin that the Northern Territory did not exist before 2001, and they were the true

creators of the Northern Territory. That is simply not true.

The Country Liberals supported the increase to penalties contained in the bill introduced in 2010, clearly demonstrating that we consider the environment to be important. I recommended a number of amendments to increase the penalty imposed under infringement notices, which was accepted by the government and, for this, I thank you. Common sense is hard to beat and the minister recognised this.

This is another bill that relies heavily on actions prescribed by regulation. As there were no regulations as part of the bill, and the information provided by the minister during his second reading speech could, at best, be described as vague, it was very difficult to be convinced that the Country Liberals should support this legislation in the first instance.

I understand the current long title reads, 'An act to establish penalties for certain offences relating to the protection of the environment and for related purposes'. The amendment is to remove, in the long title, the reference to offences relating to the environment, inserting the words to penalise offences under any specified Territory legislation. Currently, section 3, as amended under clause 5, reads that an environmental offence is an offence described as an environmental offence in a number of Territory acts, and the amendment is that some offences this act applies to will now be prescribed by regulation rather than independent acts.

I can only imagine this is, possibly, an attempt to prescribe some offences as environmental offences if they have an environmental impact. Unfortunately, as the government has not provided a copy of the regulations, there is no indication what offences will be prescribed. The minister did not provide further elaboration in his second reading speech, apart from - and I quote directly from the minister's second reading speech:

The regulatory system aimed at protecting the environment can involve offences that might, on the face of it, seem minor or indirectly related to environmental harm; however, without compliance with those offences, the overall system of environmental protection may be jeopardised.

I hope the minister can provide some more advice and understanding of this issue, particularly in regard to the regulations.

Regarding clause 6, the new section 11, my understanding is this new section ensures the

validity of the environmental offences designed under the current act are not affected by the amendments made in the bill. It was because of the uncertainty created after the minister's second reading speech that left me feeling very uncertain whether I could recommend to the Country Liberals wing to support this bill. I will reserve my judgment on that until I hear the minister wrapping up, and determine if he has answered, or can answer, some of my questions and convinces me that this bill does stack up. I also need to be convinced that the minister understands what the legislation is trying to achieve as, listening to the minister's second reading speech, I suspect not.

On seeking further advice - and it should be noted I am indebted to the minister for his indulgence and, of course, his advisor, Mr Andrew Buick, who was able to provide some more detail on the bill and its intent. The advice I have now received suggests the amendment to the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Act* is a minor legal tidy-up after discussions with Parliamentary Counsel during drafting of the earlier amendments to double penalties that were passed in June 2010. Legal advice provided to the department was the long title of the act could be interpreted narrowly so it is constrained to the use of the penalties in the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Act* to only those offences where some level of environmental harm was directly attributable. That, I can understand.

Further advice was there are many environmental offences that contribute to the overall environmental protection framework, where, perhaps, that direct nexus to environmental harm is not apparent, or is more arguable; for example, reporting something when required to, submitting monitoring information, complying with some licence conditions, and complying with directions, etcetera. I agree these sorts of offences are important to the way the whole framework is designed to work. Therefore, a narrow interpretation could constrain the use of the penalties for existing and, very importantly, new environmental laws.

Government has advised that, rather than have any doubt around the breadth of offences which the *Environmental Offences Penalties Act* could cover hanging over the operation and enforcement of the environmental laws, it is government's view it is better to put the matter beyond doubt. That is the intent of this bill. It does not intend to introduce any new policy into the act. I appreciate this but, until we see the regulations, we can never be sure if those regulations will have the ability to change the intent in any way.

Finally, the advice I have been provided has explained how amending the long title will ensure

there is less ambiguity around the scope of the offences which could fall under the penalty regime. I am further advised the amendments in this bill create a formal process by which acts using the penalty structure will be prescribed through the introduction of regulations. I have already pointed out I have some reservations about this until we see those regulations.

The third area these amendments are designed to address puts the use of the *Environmental Offences Penalties Act* penalties in existing environmental laws beyond doubt by validating any existing designations of offences using the penalty structure.

Now, we are getting close. I am starting to understand and, in future, I recommend the minister's advisor should or could deliver the second reading speech. Now that I understand, with some reservations specifically around regulations, I recommend the Country Liberals should not oppose the legislation. It will provide a sound base for any future government - a government which would actually take action in regard to our environment - to have an effective mechanism to ensure our environment is protected - something this government has failed to do in recent times.

It would be remiss of me if I did not raise what has become a tragic history for our environment under the watch of the Henderson Labor government. The reality is that all the legislation in the world will deliver *nyet* unless it is backed up with appropriate resources and the skills to provide an effective regulatory program. I can only assume, to date, businesses, including government owned businesses, have treated this government with absolute contempt because they have known for a long time that there are no checks and balances in the process - no regulatory officers on the deck following up on pollution complaints or providing regulatory compliance patrols to ensure both business and government are doing the right thing to protect our environment. I suspect most industries provide lip service to reporting only because the so-called leaders in the Northern Territory provide an excellent example of just that: paying lip service to any serious issue or major challenge facing the Northern Territory.

I see how this legislation can help to strengthen the environmental protection work. I will wait with bated breath for the day when someone is actually prosecuted for an offence against this, or any other environmental law, in the Northern Territory.

We have seen any number of recent tragedies. Recently, we have seen the absolute worst environmental catastrophe this country, not just

the Northern Territory, has ever seen in the Montara oil spill. Every time we have seen one of these catastrophes and higher levels of pollution going into our harbour, whether it is the copper concentrate which is poured into our harbour, sewerage outlets, or unknown sources which are contributing to turning our harbour into an s-bend, it uncovers more issues which put in doubt this government's real focus and thoughts on protecting our environment. It is quite good at advertising and announcing new ways of dealing with things but, behind the scenes, there is very little which backs up the advertising and programs which are introduced.

I endorse many of the programs the government has introduced which support our environment. However, when you scratch the surface and dig into them a little deeper, you find they are backed up by absolutely nothing. When you have businesses suggesting they have breached an environmental law or a process, admitting guilt, and the government still fails to take action against it, you wonder how any legislation under this leadership is going to mean anything.

The sole reason I want to support this legislation is I know we are not always going to be left with the inadequate government the Northern Territory has today, and this legislation will provide a very effective framework into the future which will work to ensure we can protect our environment, as long as it is given the valuable resources and the skills required to deliver on this legislation. It is akin to having all police officers walk off the deck tomorrow; you have all the laws in place, but you have no one who can do anything to back it up, to take action when someone has breached a law which has created a tragic occurrence in our environment.

Madam Speaker, I will be recommending to the Country Liberals that we support this legislation only because I know there will be a day when we have a far better government than we have today.

Mr HAMPTON (Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I will be quite brief. I thank the member for Brennan for his contribution. Besides getting caught up in the politics - he could not resist it, which I understand; he has been told to do that - generally he has the environment at heart, unlike some of his colleagues ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr HAMPTON: I understand the politics of it. This gets back to my second reading speech and

is quite straightforward. The reason I am bringing forward this amendment is to refine the scope of the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Act* so it can continue to be used to establish consistent penalty structures for offences in existing legislation. It is quite straightforward; it is about tidying it up. Politics aside, I believe this government can stand proud on its reforms for the environment. In the 12 to 18 months I have been the Environment minister, we have seen a great deal of reform and legislation; and some great policy initiatives this government is proud of. I do not agree with the member for Brennan. We can discuss the politics of it - and I am sure we will over the next 18 months leading up to the next election - but I believe our record stands for itself. If we compare that to the opposition, then I believe it will be a good debate.

Member for Brennan, regarding your issue of wanting to see the regulations, I am happy to discuss that with you once it is drafted. The regulations are there to list the acts which can pick up the penalties. I am happy to talk to you about that once it has been drafted. I am sure you will be happy to take up that offer.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Mr HAMPTON (Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

HUMAN TISSUE TRANSPLANT AMENDMENT BILL (Serial 127)

Continued from 21 October 2010.

Mr CONLAN (Greatores): Madam Speaker, this may well be the shortest second reading response by the opposition in the history of the parliament, because this is, indeed, wholeheartedly supported by the opposition. I thank the minister for his briefing on this. I found it to be quite enlightening about exactly what is unfolding here and the reasons why this particular bill is before us.

As the minister pointed out in his second reading speech, and it has been highlighted in this parliament on quite a few occasions, this is, essentially, a pathway for homegrown doctors in the Northern Territory. It is in cooperation with Flinders University in South Australia. The breakdown of government-funded placements hones in on locals. There is a breakdown of Indigenous postgraduate placements as well. This is a beginning for when we will have our very own fully homegrown doctors in the Northern

Territory. That is important. It will equip us with local knowledge to deal with our unique circumstances in the Northern Territory, not taking anything away from the hard-working medical staff we currently have in place. If we can get some homegrown local doctors - fully homegrown - this is the start. As we progress down this very productive path and get fully homegrown doctors, it can only be of great benefit to the Territory with the unique circumstances we face across the Territory. There are different circumstances in the Top End and in the Centre, two very different parts of the Northern Territory.

I understand, in a nutshell, this is allowing for body donation. Of course, you cannot train your own doctors without a School of Anatomy; students need to practice anatomy. I guess the only questions we have - I pretty well know the answers - are, essentially, what has been put to me, after some discussions with various groups, is that people donate their bodies for very strong personal reasons and they feel they should be able to do that. I understand the Northern Territory is such a small community you do not have to go too far to know someone who knows someone, who knows someone. For those reasons, we understand you cannot donate your body in the Northern Territory.

I believe we are sourcing our cadavers from South Australia. It was put to me whether we can donate our body to South Australia and then have it brought back here. I believe we cannot do that either. The transportation is also a bit of an issue. We understand that and, in principle, agree with it, of course. However, there are some issues in the broader community and with some organisations that this is done for very strong personal reasons. I guess we are just a victim of our circumstance in the Northern Territory being such a small population.

We need a School of Anatomy to train our doctors, and this is the first step for it so, of course, we wholeheartedly support it.

Madam Speaker, I did not think I would actually hear myself say that we in the opposition actually agree with something the worst government in the Northern Territory is putting forward. We support the bill; it is a step in the right direction. The government is bringing this on and we support it. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GUNNER (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, it is fantastic to hear the member for Greatorex speaking in support of the bill and commending it to the House. It is always good to be on the same team as the member for Greatorex though, at the end, he did have to hit the political key message of the opposition at the moment. However, both

sides agree to the spirit of the bill, which is great to hear. As the member for Greatorex said, this is, essentially, about allowing things to happen that were not happening previously for medical students around the anatomical examination of donated cadavers.

The bill is going to do four things: establish the Northern Territory School of Anatomy; allow students and teachers to participate in the anatomical examination of donated cadavers; ensure the appropriate transportation of human specimens or bodies; and, finally, to align the practices and drafting with current legislative practice.

There are some critical amendments. I believe the most important amendment of this bill is that it will allow the commencement of medical studies, or anatomy studies, for the new medical students commencing at Charles Darwin University in Semester 1 2011, the first semester next year. That is great news for the Territory: doctors in training who will be able to have vital firsthand experience in the Territory. We will have doctors in training in the Territory for their entire medical degree, thanks to a partnership between our government and the federal Labor government. It is a great step forward for the Territory, a great step for NT Health services, a huge step forward having locals learning locally, which means they are more likely to stay local.

It is big thing for young students, after completing Year 12, to move south to study. The length of time it takes to complete a medical degree sees people often establish new friends, new family, relationships, and commitments in the city of their studies. Having locals learning locally means it is more likely they will stay local. It also means anyone moving here for their degree may also choose to stay here, which is very good news for the Territory. It is one of the most critical things to happen for the long-term benefit of the health of Territorians.

It has been a long journey to reach this point. Since 1996, we have had a partnership with Flinders University through the Northern Territory Clinical School at Royal Darwin Hospital that allows for postgraduate students to commence the first two years of their medical degree in Adelaide before they can return to Darwin for their final two years of study in the Northern Territory at Royal Darwin Hospital.

However, the critical decision by the current federal government to invest in a full medical education program in the Territory means we will have doctors learning locally from Day 1 of their degree. That is a capital investment up-front of \$27m, and an ongoing budget of \$4m a year that will see doctors learning daily about the

healthcare needs of Territorians in the Territory, from Day 1 of their degree. That means 24 doctors in full-time training on scholarships, and bonded to work in the Territory for two years after the completion of the degree. However, full fee-paying students can also participate in the course. That is really good news for the Territory, having those doctors in training from Day 1 of their degree in the Territory.

We are supporting them by amending this bill in the House today to ensure they can have critical firsthand experience as part of their studies. It is a critical amendment. Anatomical examination is a fundamental requirement of the university medical curriculum. As part of their studies, students need to undertake the anatomical examination of donated human cadavers. Without this legislation, our students would have to travel to Adelaide for their anatomy studies. We do not want to impede our students from having access to top quality education at Charles Darwin University.

Parliamentary Counsel also took time, when they went through the old legislation that has not had a full review for over 30 years, to update the language, the numbering and so on, plus they also updated the penalties according to the Department of Justice formula. The penalties are significant compared to previous levels, and refer to serious incidents involving the use of body parts of dead people; for example, the consent to remove organs – I believe we always want to give consent - trading of body parts, reckless use of body parts, all contributing to the Code of Practice at anatomy school.

Those penalties cover some quite serious things, not trivial things - they are not trivial matters. They match contemporary legislation that was introduced in 2008 in New Zealand. In Australia, the legislation around the country is mainly 20 to 30 years old, and penalties have not been updated to reflect contemporary issues. The Territory is the first jurisdiction, essentially, to modernise the legislation. It has been kick-started by the fact that we are going to have doctors in training in the Territory from first semester next year, and that is fantastic news.

An important caveat for this debate to note is - as the member for Greatorex said, we are often the victim of circumstance in the Territory with the size of our population - we will not be using local donations. We have a small population, there are cultural sensitivities, and bodies will be accessed by body donation programs from interstate. Should any Territorians wish to donate, they will be referred to the University of Adelaide. It is important for doctors in learning to have those donations. In the Territory, we will now be allowing our medical students to have that

firsthand experience; those doctors in training, from Day 1 of first semester next year.

Madam Speaker, this bill supports local medical students. I thank the minister for presenting it. I welcome the opposition's support from the member for Greatorex. I support the minister and commend the bill to the House.

Mr MILLS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, this has our support, and so it should. Being in this Chamber when there was a debate which changed the structure and operation of the then Northern Territory University to CDU, it has always been a dream that this occur and we train our own medical practitioners in the Northern Territory. This is an historic moment. This legislation provides an essential response to permit that dream to proceed.

This morning at breakfast, I had the good fortune of spending some time with the lady in charge at CDU and someone representing Flinders University. They were speaking with some excitement about what is now potentially here, particularly with the number of students being sourced locally. That is a real boost for the Northern Territory. For those who are in pre-med courses now, the legislation we are discussing is meaningful to them, as it is to all those involved in this - whether they be at CDU or in Adelaide. It is always a refreshing reminder that the business we discuss in the Chamber has significance to those outside the Chamber. There was great interest this morning when I was able to advise that this is being discussed in their own parliament this day.

The donation of bodies has been mentioned, but I will leave that until last. It strikes me this step requires additional effort to be made in our education system to ensure those who are being given every encouragement with literacy and numeracy are also being actively encouraged to dig deep so they can serve in this way in their own community and be trained in the Northern Territory, particularly Indigenous students.

There is some excitement about the number of Indigenous students who are involved in the pre-med courses. There is also some anxiety that they will be able to meet expectation and hope of enrolling in the full course, which puts weight on the minister and the department of Education to ensure those who set their sights on a goal to serve their community in this way are supported and encouraged all the way through, and we focus our efforts in education to ensure those who have that desire are able to realise it. This also speaks to that part of the enterprise. There is a challenge there. We do not want to have this step taken and then not followed through because we have not been able to provide the capacity for those local

people to be involved in this. Sincere best wishes for all those involved.

Something in the briefing which caught my attention, as invariably these sorts of things do, is that if a citizen of this nation who is a resident in the Northern Territory desires to donate their body for research of this kind, it appears that is not possible. I acknowledge the member for Fannie Bay saying they can donate it to Adelaide. However, in my discussions over breakfast on this matter, it appears there are some real challenges in that occurring and some technical problems in that being facilitated. I would like that to be explored a little further so, if there is a citizen who wants to provide their support for this enterprise in that way, they are able to do so. It appears there is a technical impediment for the transportation of bodies from the Northern Territory to Adelaide.

I can fully understand why, in small communities such as this, it would not be wise to have local bodies being used. The simple reason is that anyone in the Territory knows if you are sitting anywhere having a coffee you cannot talk about anyone who is not at that table because there is someone on the next table who either knows the person you are talking about, is related to them, or lives in the same street. That shows we are a close community, so I fully understand that aspect of it. However, distinct from organ donation, I understand the technical issues regarding the donation of a body for medical research. I hope the minister will be able to advise, for any citizen who has a desire to participate in that way - not to say they can go to Flinders - whether it is possible, what the impediments are, and whether they be overcome. With that, we give our support.

Mr VATSKALIS (Health): Madam Speaker, I thank the opposition for its support. It is an historic moment in this parliament to introduce these amendments to legislation because this really marks the beginning of a medical school for the Northern Territory. Never in my wildest dreams, when I first stepped into the biology lab at Curtin University in Perth where I did my Environmental Health degree and saw my first cadaver, did I think that in 15 to 20 years I would be in parliament in the Northern Territory introducing legislation about anatomy and cadavers. It is part of the education, part of the training. Some people find it frightening; I have seen people fainting when they see their first cadaver lying on a table. It is something we have to do if we are going to train health professionals.

This legislation is a comprehensive amendment of the legislation first introduced in this parliament in 1979. It is very comprehensive because it covers issues about transportation of bodies, the penalties, and also the respect of

cultural beliefs of people. As the Leader of Opposition said, it is impossible to sit somewhere without knowing someone else. It is the seven degrees of separation. If this is true for Australia and the world, imagine how it is for the Northern Territory. With 30% of Territorians being Indigenous, we fully understand their cultural beliefs and what they believe about their bodies. I understand in other countries and other states, locally donated bodies are not used for biology, but bodies transported in from other cities or other jurisdictions to avoid these issues.

This is a very comprehensive amendment because it marks the beginning of the Northern Territory medical program which will commence in February 2011 with 24 students who will receive scholarships and be bonded to the Territory for two years, with Indigenous and Northern Territory residents prioritised under the program. We have a pharmacy school and an engineering school at the Charles Darwin University, and now we are going to have a medical school. Our experience with nurses and pharmacists has shown that if you grow them locally they will stay. If we have doctors trained in the Territory and even 50% of them stay in the Territory, we will have a significant boost in the number of doctors operating in the Territory.

I will not apologise for the penalties. The penalties seem to be severe; however, at the same time we have to remember there are many cases around the world of organ and tissue trafficking. We have seen cases in America where parts of bodies have been removed from funeral parlours to be sold for medical purposes. Let us not forget we have had in the past some university pranks, unfortunately, using parts from the anatomy school, and we want to discourage this kind of behaviour. A body should be respected because it has been donated by a person for medical purposes. Irrespective of that, it will be like any other human body. The parts and organs of the body will be kept together as much as possible to be given back to the families for burial or cremation.

Madam Speaker, I thank the opposition for their support of this legislation and our medical school. Member for Grotter, if the worst government in this country can bring a medical school to the Territory, something his party failed to do for 27 years, that means we are a very good government.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Mr VATSKALIS (Health)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
A Working Future for Indigenous Families in Remote Areas

Ms McCARTHY (Indigenous Development):

Madam Speaker, today I inform the House on the progress being made to build a working future for Indigenous families in remote areas of the Northern Territory. I will begin with where we would like to be in 20 years time. When I say 'we', I mean people in our remote regions, all levels of government, all Territorians and, I believe, the great majority of Australians. Together, we are working towards a stronger future, a working future for Territorians living in our regions, a future where remote communities become vibrant towns based on their unique cultural values, identity, and diversity, and where homelands do thrive; a future where our towns and homelands enjoy improved services, jobs and development.

Together, we are working to begin a transformation. By 2030, our bigger remote towns will be as large as places like Airlie Beach in Queensland, or Wallan in Victoria with just over 4000 residents in and around the town.

How will the residents of our large remote towns be living in 20 years time if our shared vision with local people is put into place? Let us start with the children who, typically, make up more than half the population in our remote regions. In 2030, babies and children in remote areas of the Northern Territory must be as healthy as those in the rest of Australia. We want them healthy now, but we have to plan for our future. Even before they start school, children will start their learning adventure through universally available early childhood education. As the children get older, at least 90% of school-aged children will be attending school, and their reading, writing, and numeracy levels will be on par with the national average. That is why our government is absolutely committed to every child, every day, in every school across the Northern Territory. The majority will stay on to complete Year 12 as they do elsewhere in Australia, a commitment that our government has pursued vigorously in the decade we have been in government.

Many of their fully-qualified teachers will have gone to school in the very place they are teaching. After school and on weekends there will be plenty of opportunities to participate in other activities: sport, art and culture, as well as enjoying the incredible country of the surrounding regions. As the residents of our remote towns reach adulthood, they will be, importantly, as healthy as any Australian in the country if we can remain vigilant on improving the health and life expectancy of our Indigenous Australians.

For older residents and those with special needs, aged care and disability services will be available. We are working now, and we will continue to work, as a government in the Northern Territory parliament, to ensure these services are there for all people.

Fluoridation of the local water supply will mean people have better teeth, while a reduction in smoking will have improved the health of hundreds of residents. We recognise the incredible challenges around smoking and tobacco intake. We know, as does the campaign nationally, we have to focus on the reduction of smoking across the Northern Territory. Many public areas will be smoke free.

As more homes are built in the community by both government and private individuals, overcrowding will be a thing of the past. It has to be a thing of the past. Our vision is vital in ensuring there is a future where we can see this is about families having places to call their own for those who live in it. Couples and families can look forward to buying their own home, and people will take pride as their houses appreciate in value. Not everyone will want to be participating in purchasing their own home, but the choice has never been there to provide for Indigenous Territorians across the regions. The choice is coming; the choice is now. More land will be opened up for housing and industrial development, allowing for expansion of each town to accommodate more residents. Residents are the local people, the local cultural groups, kinship clan groups, but also for those people who want to move into those areas who want to call it their home.

Sealed roads within the town will make a big contribution to keeping the community safe and dust free, while better roads to outlying areas will give people in homelands and smaller communities greater access to these services in their regional town.

As the population grows, so will public transport options, with services available within the town and across the region, linking to other major towns and cities in the Northern Territory. This is our bold vision for the Northern Territory. With the growth in the number of private businesses, residents will have a better choice of shops and business services. More local townspeople will own these businesses, and more jobs will be available. A good number of those who have sold their business to the next generation of local business people will reinvest their profits in the local area.

It is a body of work my colleagues, in their different agencies in the Cabinet, are working comprehensively to ensure those particular

agencies are focused on this vision for the 20 growth towns across the regions.

New community buildings and facilities like sporting grounds and community halls will coincide with more town residents volunteering for a range of activities including the football and softball clubs, arts and culture centre, reading for old people, and the volunteer fire brigade.

The one-stop shop for government services will make it easier for people to access services such as the Motor Vehicle Registry, Territory Business Centre, Territory Housing and the Department of Lands and Planning.

The implementation of the town plan will see our remote towns become models for best practice in tropical design. Many homes and businesses will be creating their own power through rooftop solar systems and generation methods we have not even heard about yet.

Townpeople will feel safe in how our government is working towards ensuring the children and families of the Northern Territory live in environments that are safe, where they can sleep at night, where they know they can raise their children with a future.

Working with local police, emergency services and the shire council, there will be a strong and vibrant local language and culture, complemented by the cultures of others who have chosen a remote town as their home. Most importantly though, the people of our remote towns will have a sense of pride that they have developed their own community, with the assistance and support of the Australian and Northern Territory governments for the first time in the history of the Northern Territory, and where shire councils and the business community are working collaboratively together with the local people.

To start down this road to the future, some new thinking was required. This new thinking is emerging in the form of local implementation plans which allow people in remote areas to lay out their vision for the future. Every local implementation plan is different, because each community is different, and each community has different needs. The local implementation plan is the starting point for a unique journey in each of our growth towns and the communities and homelands they serve.

I am delighted to inform the House that, after many months of hard work and good faith negotiations, local implementation plans are now being agreed to and implemented. Local implementation plans, or LIPs as they have become known, are about recalibrating the relationship between government and Indigenous

people in the bush. They are a clear break with the process of the intervention, where policies and practices were imposed rather than agreed. LIPs represent a groundbreaking partnership between the Territory government, the Commonwealth government, shire councils, and local people in our largest remote towns. They provide a detailed and coordinated approach to achieve the shared aim of raising service and infrastructure standards, and socioeconomic indicators to the same level as country towns anywhere else in Australia. Importantly, they will help to achieve these aims in a way that is agreed with local people, and in line with the unique cultural values and identity of each place.

LIPs provide the detail for the hub and spoke model which was set out in broad terms under the *A Working Future* policy last year. As well as improving life in Territory growth towns, the hubs' investment in LIPs will also enable better services to homelands and outstations – the spokes.

LIPs hold governments accountable to the people of remote regions in a way that has never occurred before. They make transparent the major investments the Northern Territory government is making under the *A Working Future* policy, which includes the most historic budget announcement in the Northern Territory's history of \$980m in infrastructure investment committed so far.

Importantly, the government also announced last month an additional investment of \$130m over five years to boost child protection services in the Northern Territory, with a clear focus on reinforcing child safety measures in remote localities. For the safety of children we are dealing with the core issue of neglect in these regions. We know dealing with neglect is based on improving the housing, infrastructure, and the services for families in these regions.

These big numbers can sometimes overshadow the fact that these investments mean real, tangible improvements in our remote towns with things like \$6.7m to implement the Strategy for Safe Water at Ali Curung, Yuelamu, and Kintore; \$2.1m for a multipurpose facility at Alekarenge School; the sealing of the road between Angurugu and Umbakumba at a cost of \$20m; more than \$3m worth of construction projects at Angurugu and Umbakumba Schools; a \$5.65m bridge over the McArthur River at Woollogorang Road; \$800 000 to upgrade the Borroloola clinic; \$2.1m for a multipurpose facility and security fencing at Borroloola School; \$6.6m in upgrades to the Buntine Highway to benefit residents of Kalkarindji and Lajamanu; more than \$1m in new facilities at the Kalkaringi School; more than \$2m for new facilities at Elliott School; more than \$6m to upgrade barge landing facilities

at Nguiu, Galiwinku, Gapuwiyak and Maningrida; \$7.8m to construct a permanent police station at Gapuwiyak; \$14.5m to upgrade the Central Arnhem Road for the benefit of many towns and communities in the East Arnhem region; \$17.6m for new children and family centres in Yuendumu, Gunbalanya, Maningrida and Ngukurr; more than \$10m for new trade training centres at Wadeye, Ngukurr, Nguiu, Gunbalanya and Groote Eylandt; more than \$3m in additional investments at Ntaria School; \$2.5m for a new airstrip at Lajamanu; more than \$5m in additional facilities for Maningrida School; \$4.5m to upgrade the Milingimbi health centre; more than \$4.5m for new construction at Milingimbi School; \$1.5m to complete the Numbulwar Police Station; nearly \$1m in upgrades to the road between Ngukurr and Numbulwar; close to \$1m in improvements to facilities at Papunya School; nearly \$700 000 in upgrades to Kintore Road; nearly \$2m in upgrades to Tanami Road; \$8.4m to construct a permanent police precinct at Ramingining; more than \$3m in improvements to Ramingining School; a \$2.3m upgrade to the Wadeye health centre; \$11.6m to upgrade Port Keats Road for the benefit of residents in and around the regional centre of Wadeye; more than \$180 000 to kick-start a regular local bus service between Nhulunbuy and Yirrkala; more than \$2m worth of new facilities at Yirrkala School; and an additional \$2.125m to Yirrkala Homelands School.

There are many more of these grassroots, frontline investments in our remote regions - things which are making a very real difference to the wellbeing of families in these areas. My ministerial colleagues will, during their contributions to this debate, outline the specific areas of their respective portfolios and electorates.

A great deal of important work has gone on behind the scenes to develop local implementation plans and help coordinate and sequence the work happening in our remote areas. Just over a year ago, the Territory government created the Service Delivery Coordination Unit which is charged with assisting all agencies across the Northern Territory government to take a place-based approach to their work in remote towns. This unit, which falls within my portfolio responsibility, also reports to a remote service delivery subcommittee of chief executives. This arrangement ensures there is an unrelenting focus on remote areas starting at the very top of each Northern Territory government department.

Further, the Service Delivery Coordination Unit works out of a regional operations centre with officials from the Commonwealth government. This centre enables the Territory and Commonwealth governments to jointly manage

government business managers and Indigenous engagement officers in our largest Territory growth towns. All of this work is independently overseen by our Coordinator General for Remote Services, Mr Bob Beadman, and the Commonwealth Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, Mr Brian Gleeson. This very high level of cooperation and oversight between the different levels of government is absolutely unprecedented in the history of the Northern Territory.

The Service Delivery Coordination Unit has also undertaken the most comprehensive exercise of location-specific baseline mapping ever undertaken across the regions of the Northern Territory. As a result, we now have the capacity to assess a wide range of social, economic, and service delivery indicators for each Territory growth town in order to map progress and analyse the gaps. Importantly, it will also allow for our efforts to be accurately measured and monitored in a very transparent and accountable manner. This is absolutely crucial to the transparency of government procedures for the parliaments of the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth to be able to assess and monitor the growth of these regions in a very sensible, articulate and, obviously, methodical way. While the bureaucracies of each of the Territory and federal government agencies are aligning and coming together in a coordinated way, we are not forgetting the people of the Northern Territory. This must be led, driven, and determined by the people who live in these towns who wish to grow it the way they want to determine their future for their families. That is the fundamental difference to the process we are now embarking on across the Northern Territory.

I also acknowledge the important work the Territory's land councils are undertaking with us on this long journey to improve the lives of Indigenous Territorians. In particular, it is vital to remember each one of our Territory growth towns belongs to a group of traditional owners - always has, always will. These traditional owners, represented by their respective land councils, have borne the full force of sweeping changes in our remote areas in recent years, over many years. They are still willing to engage with government on complex issues such as leasing, development, and town planning, and that engagement is testament to their resilience, patience, and enduring wisdom.

I am pleased to see that, despite the challenges and complexities, we are working closely with land councils and traditional owners to develop land tenure arrangements which can support private sector investment, home ownership, and capital growth on Aboriginal land, particularly in our larger Territory growth towns.

The strength of *A Working Future* policy lies in the fact each and every agency in the Northern Territory government is charged with its implementation. It is our priority, it is our focus, and it is our bold vision for all people of the Northern Territory. You will hear more on this from my fellow ministers and colleagues in the Caucus. However, I demonstrate this point by briefly outlining some of the work being done across my areas of ministerial responsibility.

As Minister for Indigenous Development, I am pleased to be working with the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Council appointed by our government in 2009, chaired by Bess Price, with deputy chair, Mark Motlop. Through the work of this council we are bringing Aboriginal voices to bear on Aboriginal issues we face today. To ensure the future of homelands and outstations, our government has undertaken the widest and most comprehensive consultations with residents of homelands and outstations ever conducted. Over 300 homelands and outstations were covered in our recent consultations. We have listened to people on homelands and outstations and heard them speak to us of their strong connection to country and their absolutely clear intention to remain living where their homelands and outstations are.

We have also learnt a great deal about the service delivery needs in the remote communities where a quarter of our remote Aboriginal population lives. I will ensure this government works to honour its commitment that it values the social, economic, and cultural contribution homelands and outstations make to Northern Territory life. I believe in a future where our government will keep helping homelands and outstations with funding for services, where we will help residents and traditional owners look after their own houses, bores, and generators. It is critical that our *A Working Future* ensures Territory growth towns extend their reach and better service homelands and outstations into the future. We have to do it together, not only as the traditional owners in their respective areas, but as the local shires, the Northern Territory government, and to find a way forward with the federal government.

I briefly acknowledge the work of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, which is now establishing a permanent presence in our growth towns. To date, the Aboriginal Interpreter Service has established offices in Maningrida, Yuendumu, and Wadeye, and we plan to open Aboriginal Interpreter Service offices in 12 additional growth towns over the next two years. This is our government's commitment to the maintenance and strength of all the Aboriginal languages across the Northern Territory. There are over 100 Aboriginal languages, and I commend my

advisory council, under the leadership of Bess Price and Mark Motlop, for working on an Indigenous language policy for the Northern Territory government. The Aboriginal Interpreter Service is not only playing a critical role in ensuring key messages are being communicated in local languages, it is providing real employment opportunities for local residents. It is an outstanding success story that currently more than 350 Indigenous Territorians are receiving consistent employment through the Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

I am sure all members would agree that Indigenous cultural tourism provides a compelling point of difference for tourism in the Northern Territory. I am proud to say that Tourism NT currently works with over 100 operational Indigenous tourism experiences and 22 developing businesses across the Northern Territory. These tourism operations are creating employment opportunities, including opportunities in remote and regional areas. In each Territory growth town there is significant opportunity for tourism business and employment opportunities to be explored and developed. For many years, communities including Maningrida, Hermannsburg and Gunbalanya have been involved in making visitors feel welcome on their country and, in more recent times, a number of other growth towns have been involved in planning for tourism.

In 2009, Tourism NT commenced working with community members in Ngukurr and Numbulwar on a scoping study for Indigenous tourism opportunities in the southeast Arnhem Land region. Initial work is now entering the implementation stage, following on from discussions held as part of the Future Forum in Ngukurr in August this year.

As part of the planning process for Wadeye, tourism has been identified as a key growth priority and, as a result, Tourism NT has since visited several outstations in the region and conducted 'What Is Tourism?' workshops for interested community members. This had led to a blossoming of interest in tourism and, in October, the Tourism NT Advisory Board conducted a field trip which included discussions at Fossil Heads outstation with Thaddeus Dartinga and his family.

I am pleased to announce that, as part of every local implementation plan, Tourism NT and the Department of Local Government, Housing and Regional Services have undertaken to provide business support, mentoring, and training to all individuals and groups wanting to start a viable business, including local tourism enterprises.

Another of my portfolio areas is the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, or AAPA. AAPA

continues its work to support development across the Territory, particularly in remote areas, through the protection of sacred sites. Sacred sites are an integral part of Aboriginal spiritual connection to land, and the preservation of sacred sites is important for the maintenance of Aboriginal identity and wellbeing, and for the cultural heritage of the Northern Territory. AAPA consults with Aboriginal custodians and issues authority certificates to ensure new developments can go ahead without causing damage to sacred sites. In 2009-10, a total of 399 authority certificates were issued, of which 154 were for planning, infrastructure, and housing purposes across Aboriginal communities. To date, sacred site authority certificates have been issued for 47 of 73 Aboriginal communities identified for planning, housing, infrastructure, and power and water improvements across the Territory. This includes authority certificates for Territory growth towns receiving new houses under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program. By June 2012, all 73 Aboriginal communities will have community-wide authority certificates giving protection for sacred sites and certainty for works on each community.

It is an incredible body of work being undertaken by the staff in the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, and I take this opportunity in the House to say well done to the staff for the incredible extra effort that has gone into the work that needs to be approved in each of these places. They quietly, diligently, go about their work and are a fundamental part of ensuring the growth of these towns is about respectful relationships with Indigenous people. I thank the staff of AAPA for the work they are doing and continue to do on behalf of our government.

Works associated with supporting remote area transport infrastructure were also issued with authority certificates throughout the year, protecting sacred sites while improving remote transport infrastructure for Territorians. To date, seven sacred site clearances have been issued to facilitate laying of fibre-optic cables for the National Broadband Network which will deliver faster Internet to most of the Territory.

The work of AAPA is a tremendous example of government, traditional owners, site custodians, and industry working together to develop the remote regions of the Northern Territory in an historic capacity, with the values we certainly hold dear in ensuring local people on the ground can determine the direction of growth in their towns.

As Minister for Local Government, I believe shire councils are an essential part of remote area development now and into the future. I thank all the Territory's remote shire councils for their considerable contribution to each local

implementation plan and their day-to-day delivery of services to Indigenous Territorians.

Shire councils - the great majority of which are made up of Indigenous Territorians living in remote towns and communities - deliver services from sunup to sundown, and often beyond, every single day of the year. They deliver these services in some of the most challenging circumstances facing any local government bodies anywhere in the world. They are quickly criticised for the service delivery gaps that are not of their making, but rarely acknowledged or praised for the thousands of tasks successfully delivered on a daily basis. As Minister for Local Government, I am always conscious of the infancy of these councils in the second year of their development across the Northern Territory, but know they are a pivotal part of the greater picture for the future of our residents in the regions. Shire councils are developing these powerful governance entities, led by mainly Indigenous-elected members. If we are to achieve the visions being developed as part of *A Working Future*, we need to do so in close partnership with our elected colleagues in the shires.

As Minister for Regional Development, I am proud to say we are working with a wide variety of stakeholders to provide the foundations for economic development in our remote regions. In addition to providing direct support for Indigenous business development, our regional development officers are producing an economic profile and investment opportunity prospectus for each of the growth towns. We are currently supporting nine economic development committees to ensure local people are setting the regional development agenda. We have also ensured there is a strong connection between the work of these committees and the Regional Development Australia network established by the Commonwealth government. That is why it was vital, in my discussions with the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government at the federal level, Mr Simon Crean, to look at the Northern Territory being able to access a fair part of the \$10bn that is going towards regional Australia over the next couple of years.

Among many things we are doing to facilitate regional development, I will briefly highlight the Indigenous Business Development program. That initiative provides \$600 000 a year to kick-start and grow Indigenous businesses throughout the Northern Territory. Since the program's inception in July 2005, we have assisted around 140 Indigenous businesses and organisations with funding totalling over \$2.5m, with an estimated 290 Indigenous jobs created as a result.

Another major focus of our regional development efforts over the next 12 months is

Future Forums. In partnership with local community champions, Future Forums are being held across Territory growth towns to provide a sharing of information and ideas on employment options and business development pathways for local residents. The success of the recent Future Forum in Ngukurr demonstrates how these events can be both important economic development forums and celebrations of local culture and identity.

In closing, I point out that our *A Working Future* policy is embedded in *Territory 2030*, our 20-year strategic plan for the Northern Territory. At times in the Territory's past our remote Indigenous towns and communities have been an afterthought in many previous governments' plans for the future. I am proud to say that under the Henderson Labor government that is certainly not the case. Just as *Territory 2030* is a long-term plan with clear targets which provide a framework for our government policy initiatives, the local implementation plans in each of our growth towns provide a similar joined-up framework for remote area residents. Just as *Territory 2030*, with education and families at its core, sets priorities for society, economic sustainability, health and wellbeing, the environment, and knowledge creativity and innovation, the *A Working Future* policy and each local implementation plan ensures these priorities will flow through to people in the bush.

Not too long ago, there was a chorus of people saying our bush towns are unviable, that we would shut them down. I dare say some of those voices persist. I am proud to say our government has adopted an unshakeable commitment, through a practical and sustainable framework linked to the Territory's long-term strategic plan, to see our bush towns thrive and prosper into the future based on the cultural identity and integrity of the people who live in these regions.

I am under no illusion this will be easy or that our journey will not be punctuated with failures as well as success. We also have much healing to do in our remote communities, for the future will be built on the foundations of strong families, culture and country.

Madam Speaker, I understand when people in the bush are cynical about these words. They have been promised so much and let down so often. However, I truly believe we have adopted the right approach to support and serve people in the bush in attaining the bright future they deserve. I commend this bold, creative and visionary statement to the House.

Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the statement.

Mr GILES (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for the statement. I learnt something. I did not realise that statements did not have a time limit. The member for Nhulunbuy informed me they do not have a time limit.

Madam SPEAKER: Can I clarify that it is only for the minister who is moving the statement.

Mr GILES: Sorry, that is what I meant. I found the statement to be very light on detail across a number of issues. That is partly because Indigenous affairs business is everyone's business, and it crosses over a number of portfolios, whether that is education, housing, health, NTFC, or so forth. I wanted to listen to everyone else's portfolio to see what they had to say to the statement, but I would have been accused of not responding straightaway, so you have to stand and talk.

The purpose of opposition is to hold government to account, help develop policy into a more robust process, and get improvements in the Territory. We come from different paradigms in how we see that needs to be done. There is an opportunity in this statement to bag and politicise many things the government does not get right. I will try not to do that; I am not aiming to do that at all.

I want to put forward a few ideas where I believe we can move forward with Indigenous affairs. I will allow my colleagues to talk on their portfolios more specifically. I read this statement overnight and, as I said, it is light on detail. I recognise there are six parts to the *A Working Future* agreement; those being the growth towns, outstations and homelands; the remote service delivery model; the employment and economic development; the remote transport strategy; and the *Closing the Gap* evaluation process. I am interested to hear about the fifth one, the remote transport strategy, and getting an update from the minister and the member for Barkly about how that is going.

I recognise there is still no policy on outstations and homelands to date. It would have been good if the minister had focused on that. The employment and economic development strategy has not gone anywhere and I will wait to see how that goes. In particular, on the remote service delivery and how government is trying to improve service delivery in some of the remote communities, I recognise government is trying in that area and things need to improve. They are slowly starting to improve in some areas.

Focusing on Territory growth towns, the hub-and-spoke model of service delivery in the Northern Territory is the way forward. Identifying select locations where services can be improved,

economies can be built, and reforms can be made, is the way forward. That is something I have believed in for a long time. When this policy first came out, I thought it was a good idea. However, I did not think, and still do not think, the locations identified have been identified based on merit and economic principles.

I have said before Yulara should have been considered, based on its population in the cross-jurisdictional geographical area in the southwest corner of the Northern Territory. I recognise the population numbers of Indigenous Territorians across the Northern Territory means some geographical areas have more growth towns per capita than others, particularly in Central Australia, whereas on the eastern side of Central Australia, there is no growth town. The whole Utopia region - not just as part of this policy - has been let down for many decades in government service delivery, perhaps because there has never been a major central point, although Alparra is considered to be that point.

I believe the growth towns are the way to move forward. I believe the growth towns have been selected for political purposes in Territory-based seats rather than on economic grounds. The model I would have liked to have seen is communities given resources to develop some economic plan and to apply to the government to be a growth town and say: 'This is how we see our region moving forward, this is where our hub will be, this is how we will have land tenure reform, this is what we think our economic base will be into the future, and this is how we can create jobs'. Then, seek government assistance in improving things such as remote service delivery, land tenure reform, housing development, jobs training, education and so forth. Not that I disagree with all of the locations; I believe there could have been a different way to do it to prove these locations are the way to go. As it is now, the geographic locations in context of No 4, which is the fourth part of *A Working Future*, employment and economic development, there is no plan for industry development in those locations.

On that point, take into your thoughts ideas around marine sanctuaries off the coastline currently being talked about. There is talk about the possibility of two marine sanctuaries being built on the Territory coastline. I am not getting into the merits of whether that is a good idea or not, however, should something like that happen, it would be an opportunity for a region to develop an industry around that. In some of my previous workings on an economic aspect, I found New Zealand has done much work around marine tourism, particularly for the Maori populations. It would be an opportunity for people who are living in coastal areas of the Northern Territory to

consider that. I would have taken it from a paradigm of economics, rather than social or political, to move it forward.

I spoke briefly about the importance of identifying growth towns on economics to support a region. The member for Stuart, the minister for IT, yesterday made a backhanded remark about me not supporting land councils. That is not true at all - completely not true. I recognise the work, the role, and the hard work of the land councils over the last 30 years, and their role into the future. I believe, though, that the two mainland councils are too big for the populations they are trying to represent. There are significant opportunities for regional land councils to move forward in a more dynamic model.

The benefit of having regional land councils will do a number of things. One, it will give people their voice back that they have lost through a number of governance changes, particularly when the government closed down the community councils and brought in the shires. It will give back a voice at that level. It will promote an era or an ethos of competition between regions, particularly in economic competition with people wanting to get their regions moving forward a lot more. People will see their regions not being able to attract investment, create industry and economies and jobs, and will be put under pressure by their own people to then move things forward. That represents a massive opportunity.

Take, for instance, the Daly region. If you look at Daly River, Palumpa, Peppimenarti, Wadeye, Emu Point, Wudapuli, and all the other places around that area, as a region it has enormous potential that can be realised much quicker than other areas, just based on perceptions about where things are. Resort development, fishing, the climatic conditions to geography - there are so many things that could be done there, and the opportunity for a regional land council based in that area to move forward would be fantastic. I note the conversations which are happening with the Jawoyn at the moment, and the regions around Nhulunbuy - all those conversations about regional land councils. This is not a personal attack on anyone at land councils - I know some members of the government will try to display that - it is not. It is about how we move forward and change where we are now.

The future presents an opportunity for the alignment for new regional land councils and shires together to give opportunities to remove one level of bureaucracy and administration, to put in a reform process that increases the rate base so the shires and the regional land councils, as one combined organisation, have an increased level of funds to do roads, as the minister mentioned, to act on environmental health

concerns, to take the dust off the streets which gets in the kids' ears and in their throats which makes them sick. There is an opportunity to have regional land councils and shire boundaries exactly the same and become one body which caters to all, and get an equilibrium or parity in the rate base so pastoralists, miners, explorers, and Indigenous residents in that area are all on a level playing field, an equal footing, and all contributing. This builds the reconciliation approach and helps build a region. With regions in a competitive model with other regions, things will move forward and the Territory will grow. That is really a way forward.

Places like Ngukurr, which is being hard done by under the SIHIP model, has an opportunity, depending on whatever region it may go into as part of the council, to have that council base at Ngukurr move forward. Then, they have a greater say in things like SIHIP and getting better economies of scale, more houses, fewer administrative costs, and less bureaucracy.

I have made a few notes on my page so I will cross a few different topics without getting into the tos and fros. The minister mentioned smoking; she really did not go into smoking. It is recognised that smoking is the biggest killer of Indigenous Territorians. So much more needs to be done on smoking. She did not go into that so I hope the Health Minister talks more on that. It is a terrible thing. I am happy to say I have given up smoking now for seven months, and I miss it every day ...

Dr Burns: Well done!

Mr Henderson: You have to tell Marion how to do it. Have a chat to her. We keep getting up her.

Mr GILES: I miss it every day. It is fantastic. I started smoking when I was young. I have always enjoyed it. It is hard to give up when you enjoy something ...

Ms Scrymgour: Oh, I am jealous of you, Adam.

Mr GILES: Yes. I gave up cold turkey - just decided to stop and have not had one since. I will digress: I was caught smelling an unlit one in the lobby a couple of days ago.

Getting back to the point, smoking is an important thing that needs to be addressed. It is never really spoken about. To use some simplistic conversation, I always find it amazing that you go into a community, any community, and even in the new outback stores, all the stores sell either Winfield Blue or Winfield Red, they never sell light cigarettes. Having been a smoker - and I

know the federal government will say there is no difference in smokes, and they have to take out the measurements about which ones are stronger - I would rather smoke a Winfield Grey than a Winfield Red, because one is actually stronger than the other. However much you get that smoke into your lungs; whether you put your fingers over the holes in the cigarette butt - however it works - we know how these things work. However, it always surprises me that, in communities, they never sell lighter smokes, or the lighter colour, or what used to be referred to as the lower level of nicotine cigarettes. I find that amazing.

If we want to have an advancement on smoking, particularly with the government intervention into outback stores, why do you not start selling weaker smokes and people might actually be able to cut down on their smoking habits, get to lighter cigarettes, and then maybe even give up. But what do we do? We keep feeding people with Winfield Red or Winfield Blue - not picking that brand particularly, but that is generally the brand of choice. Why do we do that? Let us get out some Winfield Whites, as weak as they are, but that is important.

The minister did not talk about foetal alcohol syndrome. I was looking forward to having a chat about that in the previous alcohol debate. I meant to bring it up. I hope the Minister for Health will talk about foetal alcohol syndrome. I have to do a little more research on that. It is a big problem in Australia. It is not generally discussed in the Northern Territory, publicly - that is not to say it is not discussed privately. I wait for the Health Minister to, hopefully, talk about that.

I noted, at the end of the statement, the minister talked about sacred sites. In an area of giving my thoughts on these types of things, I believe the location of sacred sites need to be publicly listed. We agree sacred sites are a no no, particularly for investors' purposes. They must see sacred sites as a pain, and a bit of a union-type intrusion in how you try to do things. I believe we should be getting a list and publishing them, fencing them, and promoting them as tourism opportunities. There are so many sacred sites that tourists would like to go to - that is a men's area or women's area, whatever it might be - these are real tourist things. I cannot remember the number of sites you said there were, but there are thousands of sacred sites across the Northern Territory which should be promoted and utilised, if they are fenced off, they are respected, not just by Indigenous Territorians, but by all Territorians.

These are things that help build that funny term, the 'social fabric' of the Territory, where everyone gets along and recognises these are sacred sites. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

people become proud of them, and they become part of a community, not just a secular part of the community. I would like to see all sacred sites promoted, listed for the purposes of helping investors so they know where they are, whether they are mums and dads or businesses but, more importantly, listed so people can use them for tourism purposes. Fence them off, whatever you need to do, and then promote those as a tourism asset in the Northern Territory. I believe that is an excellent idea.

While I am running through ideas, I was going to raise something with the member for Macdonnell, the previous minister for Indigenous Affairs, when she was the minister for Indigenous Affairs. In the context of economic development, I found, going to developing third world nations which do not have a system of welfare, people in that environment are heavily dependent upon self-responsibility, about earning an income to be able to get something to eat, to drink, to live, and to survive. Having travelled throughout many parts of the world, but some parts of Asia particularly, and seeing how people have to be entrepreneurial to survive, I was going to approach the previous minister - and I offer this to the current minister - to say let us find some people in the Northern Territory, some potential entrepreneurs in these Aboriginal communities, and take them to places like Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Let us get out there and start seeing how these people do things, because people are so entrepreneurial in these places. The entrepreneurial bone runs through Aboriginal people in the Territory, but we have just lambasted them with this welfare system which stops people thinking, stuck on Winfield Red and grog.

I am very keen for the minister to read what I was saying in *Hansard*. It is a really good opportunity to pick two people from each growth town who the community nominates as potential entrepreneurs, take them to Vietnam or some Asian country where people survive by being entrepreneurs - those sorts of things are seeds of thought and will get people moving along. It is a good idea. I mentioned it to the previous minister, after she was minister, and I believe it is a good way forward.

While there is no outstation or homeland policy and there are fundamental problems with land tenure for housing management in those areas, which I fully understand - and I recognise you and your people are working in that area, minister, and there is a long way to go - based on conversations we had yesterday about the SIHIP debate and how there are houses which have been handed over and are not managed any more, people on outstations, particularly in that area, need assistance with economic literacy. It is not just

those people, it is across the board. People need assistance with economic literacy to develop budgets, look after asset programs on their houses, do repairs and maintenance, save for the time when you have to repaint the house, fix the roof or do the gutters.

I fear that, while yesterday there was a heated exchange within this Chamber about what is happening with those 300 or so houses, if we are going to leave people in these houses we have to try to educate them on how to handle the financial components of looking after those houses. I am sure members are aware that much work has been done before by the Australian Bankers Association. It may be an opportunity to look at the Australian Bankers Association to see if it could put out some banking and economic literature to try to encourage people to manage outstations and houses. These are ideas in which I recommend you take part. I know the Australian Bankers Association has previously been part of the Indigenous Economic Development Task Force in the Northern Territory. Perhaps you could ask those people for assistance, in a philanthropic sense, to educate people in that area.

Finally, I might settle on land tenure reform. I spoke about regional councils, growth towns, and the linking of shires to growth towns, making them one body and giving people back a voice in the bush. There needs to be root and branch land tenure reform across the Northern Territory, both in the pastoral sector and the Indigenous sector. We need to move to a model where the land can be utilised for economic purposes where it cannot be now. The old story about land rich, dirt poor continues today. The Chief Minister has reiterated the comment I and many other people have made before, that town camps should be no more, that they should be part of the Territory's normal suburban structures.

In Alice Springs, there are several town camps which are moving to that model. I am aware of another town camp which is looking at that model and has recently written to the federal Indigenous Affairs minister, Jenny Macklin, seeking support. They have advised the Minister for Central Australia about this matter. It is a massive opportunity. I have been working with these people for some time; I will not say who they are. They want their town camp to be part of town. While it is hard to get agreement from every town camp resident, these people want their town camp to be part of town.

These things need to be worked through. I have had conversations with people in bureaucracy at the federal level about how to make this happen. My conversations will next be with the Territory government about how to bring

this to fruition. I am told the administrative and bureaucratic burdens - and I understand many of them - are quite difficult to find a way through but, with leadership and determination, these things will change ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Braiting, it is just after 12 o'clock. I ask that you finish your speech after Question Time.

Debate suspended.

VISITORS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise you of the presence in the gallery of opposition electorate officers. On behalf of honourable members, I extend to you a very welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION

Note Statement - *A Working Future* for Indigenous Families in Remote Areas

Continued from earlier this day.

Mr GILES (Braiting): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Stuart for the update. They got 40 runs in the last minute, so England has done well.

I was very interested to hear the Chief Minister with his backflip in his personal explanation in relation to the people at Yuendumu and confirm there were government employees there when I was there. He denied it for a couple of months, but we have that confirmation. He did say I said she was encouraging. I never said that at all, so that was completely misleading. I said she was assisting these people and doing a fine job. Tracey is a nice person, a great person. I said she was doing a good job. There was no motivation; these people made their own decision to move. It is good to see the Chief Minister do a backflip ...

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! My understanding is we are resuming the debate on the *A Working Future* policy. I ask you to call the member for Braiting back to that debate, thank you.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Braiting, it is about *A Working Future*, not about Yuendumu, so if you could just continue.

Mr GILES: Under *A Working Future*, Yuendumu is a growth town, and some of those people from Yuendumu chose to move to Adelaide. I was not going to continue on about this, but I am more than happy to talk for a long

time around the issue of growth towns and the people at Yuendumu, and how the Northern Territory government, with the federal government, was assisting these people in their situation, member for Nhulunbuy.

As I was saying before we broke for our two-hour lunch period, about the *A Working Future* policy, I do not agree with the way those communities were selected for the hub-and-spoke model. I do not agree with all of the communities that have been selected. There are dissenting reports, such as this one from ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, CAEPR, by Will Sanders, paper No 72/2010, *Working Future: A critique of policy by numbers*, which looks at the number of people in particular regions by how many growth towns there are per capita of Indigenous people.

It really smells of political hypocrisy where these places have been picked. It picks up 85% of the Indigenous population in a catchment area within a certain zone, but it is all about politics in trying to shore up votes. It did not work too well in the seat of Lingiari in the last federal campaign. We know this government has the shire debate so wrong, and has taken away the voice of all the people in the bush from the shire debate, so much so people are now disorientated in their ability for political leadership under this four shire reform that is happening in the Northern Territory.

When you do have a break in a speech, I need to reiterate that, yes, I support land councils, but I support them in a regional context. I support the shires being realigned to ...

Madam Speaker, a point of order! This is a government statement. I call attention to the state of the House.

Madam SPEAKER: Ring the bells, a quorum is required. A quorum is present.

Mr GILES: Madam Speaker, I know the Ashes is on and it is a wonderful day to sit around television, but we are politicians, we should be here listening to debate, especially when it is a government statement about an important issue such as *A Working Future* and the future of the Northern Territory in relation to Indigenous affairs, policy and development.

I have not belittled the government about its failures in many areas. I have tried to provide some support for future opportunities. I have given some ideas for policy in the future on how to make some improvements. I did not want to speak first on this, because I wanted to hear the debate by government, in all their portfolios, about what they were going to say. I encourage my colleagues not to jump up, but to listen to the

whole debate by government and, then, I will work with some of my colleagues to try to summarise the end of the debate for the statement.

Madam Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

Madam SPEAKER: Ring the bells, a quorum is required. A quorum is present.

Mr GILES: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I encourage my colleagues to not speak and let all the government ministers speak, particularly in education, health, employment and housing, then we can respond after that. As I said, I tried to keep this fairly civil and provide opportunities for the way forward. Thank you, minister, for the statement.

Mr KNIGHT (Business and Employment): Madam Speaker, I support the statement. Getting down to it, *A Working Future* is about recognising and putting an emphasis on the bush. Having so many bush members on this side of the House, we see it as vitally important.

A Working Future is bringing many parts of government together and trying to coordinate them, not only coordinating the Northern Territory government agencies, but coordinating the federal government agencies which often act separately and independently and without collaboration. There are a number of non-government organisations, statutory bodies, and trying to coordinate all those is vitally important. There is not only the challenge of today but it is unwinding decades and decades of decision-making which has not been consistent. There are many problems with assets and infrastructure, historic backlogs, and deficits on these communities - a lot of policy failure from successive governments, both at the Territory and federal levels, in recognising where these communities can and should be going.

The future has to lie in the balance of mainstream and cultural respect. I believe that can be done. It was done in years past with the missionaries moving on to remote communities and setting up remote communities. There was still a lot of cultural practice whilst people were involved in a Western religion and participating in a Western economy. I guess that is where ...

Mr BOHLIN: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I draw your attention to the state of the House.

Madam SPEAKER: Ring the bells! A quorum is called.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! I remind honourable members that a quorum relates to all members. A number of members of the opposition have left in the last few moments as well. A quorum is present.

Mr KNIGHT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, there is much work to be done to unravel decades of inconsistent decision-making; that is what we are trying to do.

My area of responsibility lies in the job creation and business development of these regions. That is a fundamental part of moving into a greater degree of wealth for a family, an individual, and a more prosperous life of having money in your pocket, being able to purchase a car, put food in the fridge, live independently and not on a pittance of roughly \$10 000, which many people in the bush do. It staggers me that people survive on that sort of money. Real independence, real moving into the mainstream world can be achieved through having a job and your own personal wealth. That is what we are focused on.

Within the growth towns, the two main parts of the equation are about labour supply and employer demand. Regarding supply, there are more than 12 000 working-age people currently living in growth towns. This is expected to rise to some 16 000 people by 2018. Most importantly, there must be employer demand for this labour, which means creating more sustainable jobs in the growth towns. In March this year, my department audited every job in each of the growth towns. It was the first time this had been done and we have used this information to inform both the baseline mapping process and the whole-of-government efforts in economic participation.

There are 5279 jobs across the Territory growth towns. If you exclude the CDEP program from the figure, the total is 4257 positions in the growth towns. A total of 1585 of those jobs are held by non-Indigenous people, leaving only 2672 Indigenous people employed in the Territory growth towns either in full-time, part-time or casual positions. Based on Northern Territory Treasury population figures, the working-age population is 12 582, meaning 33% of the working-age population has a job, including the non-local people in growth towns.

There are two potential avenues to explore in creating job opportunities: the public sector and the private sector. At present, 57% of all employment in the growth towns is in the public sector. If you exclude publicly-funded private sector employers such as homeland resource centres, the figure is something like 76%. The private sector accounts for approximately one in five jobs in the bush. Across the Territory, the

private sector average is closer to four in five. So, it is a staggering difference.

Currently, there is a lack of small and big business and a mainstream economy in these growth towns. The enterprise benchmark in the Indigenous community study in 2008 highlighted sustainable enterprises based on population alone. Despite populations that could sustain businesses, in many of the growth towns these businesses do not exist. The reasons are the lack of interest by entrepreneurs, the lack of access to commercial finance, the lack of places to conduct business, and the lack of knowledge, skills and the capacity of those who are interested in going into business.

For budding entrepreneurs in the bush, there are a number of barriers to entry. The Department of Business and Employment has partnered with the Indigenous Business Development team within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services in both urban and remote settings. Recognising the strength of the Indigenous Business Development Program in identifying, fostering and supporting fledgling remote businesses, my department is focusing its efforts on removing those barriers to entry, and delivering business enablers to the community. These include: developing the government business centre model and concept; improving commercial and financial literacy; extending ICT services; working with banks to enable mainstream finance access on Aboriginal land; and refining our procurement processes to encourage Indigenous business growth. Over time, this work, in partnership with the Indigenous Business Development Program, will deliver sustainable employment opportunities and grow the economic foundations of the Territory growth towns.

In 2010, the Northern Territory government continues to work closely with the Australian government to develop local implementation plans under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery. Our shared effort focuses on 15 priority sites, the first of which was signed in Gunbalanya on Wednesday, 10 November this year by my colleague, the Minister for Regional Development, Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, the Australian government Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Hon Jenny Macklin MP, and members of the local reference group. This signals the combination of extensive community consultation and collaboration and planning for these towns. Agencies have engaged in this process with unprecedented levels of cooperation.

The local implementation plan is the backbone of all work to be done under the *A Working Future*

policy in the Territory growth towns. They are the vehicle for community and government aspirations and strategies. Under the LIP process, each growth town was able to nominate its own list of priorities, arranging them under seven building blocks.

My department's area of interest focuses on the economic participation building block. The Department of Business and Employment has been instrumental in government coordination of this area and the process which has brought us to this point where the LIPs are being finalised and signed off by all the stakeholders.

A number of the Northern Territory and Australian government agencies have a stake in economic participation. The Department of Education and Training; the federal Department of Education; Employment and Workplace Relations; the federal agency of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and the Northern Territory Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services. These agencies have contributed high-level officers to work in the multi-agency working group. The Remote Training Employment and Economic Development Working Group, or RTEED, has brokered responses to the LIPs' priorities across agencies and across all levels of government. It has strategically planned steps needed to fulfil the commitments the government has made. RTEED is also pioneering a new way of executing these strategies on the ground.

On Friday, 19 November 2010, we established the first economic development team using a place-based approach in Gunbalanya to drive implementation of the economic participation building block. This specialised team is comprised of regionally specific field officers with decision-making power. This will see a move from the silo approach, giving more momentum, cooperation, and problem solving to the enormous task ahead in Territory growth towns. This approach will be introduced for all seven building blocks of the local implementation plans, with specialised place-based teams solving problems and contributing to the united, concerted effort under the new framework for the LIPs.

With respect to the economic participation building block and the newly launched economic development teams, my department has committed to take the lead on several LIPs' actions concerned with private sector enablers and the development of the Territory growth towns. These include capacity building and service provisions through the establishment of government business centres: capacity-focused measures such as financial and commercial literacy; ITC enablers; and tangible, proactive support through procurement practices.

The Department of Business and Employment is developing a proposal for the government business centres in 10 Territory growth towns where this has been requested, with a view to rolling out the government business centres in all Territory growth towns over time. This concept is a *Territory 2030* target and is a fundamental pillar of the *A Working Future* policy. This component is central to the success of many other government commitments under the *A Working Future* strategy.

To deliver the strength and breadth of services articulated in the local implementation plans, appropriate office accommodation is required. The government business centres will provide residents in Territory growth towns with a multi-agency government transaction hub which will enable expanded and improved service delivery and, importantly, local employment opportunities. A range of services may be provided from this transaction hub, and options will be considered for local organisations to build and own shopfront facilities with long-term tenancies.

A private investment model has been developed by my department with the intention that local organisations will have the opportunity to own and maintain the transaction hub building that will enhance the asset base and wealth of the community, and present an opportunity for additional commercial infrastructure to be developed, and a market over time.

The business centres will deliver a number of significant outcomes. First, they deliver concrete opportunities for the capacity building by local Indigenous organisations that will be supported to build and run these centres. Second, business centres will build and deliver opportunities for employment, both in the management and the maintenance of the building.

In Nguiu, initial discussions have been held with an enterprise arm of the Tiwi Land Council, and basic drawings have been developed based on requirements from the agencies involved. A template design is being commissioned for application in all the growth towns. This design will be used to gain a clear cost outline and enable negotiations with the enterprise arm and other organisations in respect of future growth town business centres.

Embarking on this process will also advance another of my department's local implementation plans' commitments; that is, to remove barriers to finance that have resulted from land tenure issues in the growth towns. My department has committed to working with financial institutions to assist with removing the barriers to accessing finance for investment on Aboriginal land, and we

are working directly with banks to develop certainty around the possibilities for securing mainstream finance under township leases. Consultation with major finance institutions is well under way.

In Borroloola, we are working with the McArthur River Mine Community Benefit Trust, targeting the construction of a business incubator as one of the trust's key priorities in the 2010-11 year. The transaction hub would be used to provide business support services and develop programs focused on establishing or developing local businesses. The McArthur River Mine Community Benefit Trust is prepared to inject a considerable lump sum into the project once key partners are identified and agreement established. The completed building would be owned by a community organisation which, as well as managing the programs mentioned, could potentially lease space to business and government organisations, as well as providing a range of related services, namely, building management and cleaning.

In supporting business in the urban environment, my department runs a number of programs including the business skills, up skills and business growth programs. However, in the bush, the needs of that clientele are very different. My department is working on breaking down those wider inhibitors to enterprise creation and growth in remote Territory growth towns where people have not had as much exposure to private sector enterprise as those in the city. This means working not only with the entrepreneurs, but also with the communities that support them. Sustainable start-up enterprises are difficult to achieve if the community that supports them is not equipped with the understanding of the concept of competition and with a sense of ownership of the enterprises that begin springing up.

To engage in the mainstream economy, an understanding of commercial and money systems is essential. My department has completed a groundbreaking pilot research program looking at understanding commerce, enterprise and the money flows amongst remote Indigenous Territorians. Currently, financial literature programs are very much focused downstream on those household incomes, as I said in Question Time today, and it needs to be brought up to a higher level to get people to comprehend how an economy actually works.

Equally, employment outcomes are not simply a matter of job creation ...

Mr ELFERINK: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The minister may need an extension of time.

Another point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 310, which enables this House to stop its business for long enough to congratulate Peter Siddle on his hat trick ...

Mr Henderson: And his birthday.

Mr ELFERINK: And his birthday.

Madam SPEAKER: Are you moving that the member's time be extended?

Mr ELFERINK: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Motion agreed to.

Mr KNIGHT: Thank you, Madam Speaker and members. Without better coordinated financial literacy programs, Indigenous people will not recognise the financial benefits of having a job. This threatens meaningful engagement in the workforce and, at a worst case scenario, the goal of seeing local people benefiting from local opportunities.

As I mentioned in Question Time today, in Galiwinku on Elcho Island, my department is taking a place-based approach with the local implementation plans to actually look into the financial literacy area to help people understand money management. It needs a coordinated approach which will happen with key players including the shire and ATSIC.

My department is also the joint lead agency with the Department of Education and Training in guaranteeing employment pathways into the Northern Territory Public Service for those students in growth towns who complete their Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training. My department has committed to provide jobs, training, and further education offers for the NTCET graduates through an organised transition to work to program. Under this commitment, up to 26 young people may take up this employment opportunity for the next year. The Department of Education and Training will work with those who do not take up the public sector employment offer to assist, via linkages with shires and other organisations, or to go on to further education. They are going to work with them on those pathways to employment or further education.

This is one aspect of the Northern Territory's workforce strategy, Jobs NT, which aims to build a skilled and work ready workforce in demand areas, including our Indigenous workforce. Indigenous employment in the mainstream economy is expected to increase in line with increases in economic activity, but this is dependent on a range of factors including employer demand and labour supply. Three key

components which drive the Northern Territory's Indigenous workforce strategy framework are developing Indigenous labour supply, growing demand for Indigenous labour, and supporting Indigenous enterprise.

The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation signed in February last year includes a commitment from the Northern Territory government to strengthen current government procurement policies to maximise Indigenous employment. A procurement policy crosses the following three components: developing Indigenous labour supply; growing demand; and supporting those enterprises. Within the area of developing an Indigenous labour supply we are building an Indigenous labour supply through skills development, education and training, and improving the participation rate. Within the growing the demand area, we are building the capacity of businesses, assisting employers to employ more Indigenous workers, and working with the Australian Employment Covenant. Promoting the values, skills and availability of Indigenous employees also helps grow that demand.

In supporting Indigenous enterprises we want to partner with the existing commercial businesses and work with Indigenous businesses when sourcing goods. The NTICN – many people want to know whether they can utilise a local Indigenous business – is helping them.

There is a range of initiatives within the Department of Business and Employment to try to create positions and enable people to get those positions. In the Northern Territory at the moment we have an unemployment rate of 3.1%. Those remote communities have unemployment rates of 70% to 80%, so we have a huge disparity. That disparity with the mainstream in the capital of Darwin is reflected in the social and physical conditions we see. It is something which must be resolved within the Northern Territory. It must be resolved if we are all going to move forward together.

There are real opportunities; we have a very strong economy and we have to try to take everyone along with us. We have genuine commitments from this side of the House and, I believe, from the other side of the House. The business community certainly is on side as well, so we have many well-intentioned stakeholders. If we continue to work at it, we will get those fundamental understandings out there, and make people aspire to having a better life and working towards that better life. There is only so much governments and the business community can do. At the end of the day it really comes down to individuals making that clear choice.

I believe the *A Working Future* strategy, and everything incorporated in it, provides those opportunities, those pathways, those steps, that support, and that opportunity is becoming more available to people. People have to make the choice to participate and they will gain the benefit for themselves and their families.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate the minister for bringing forward the statement.

Mr HENDERSON (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, this is a very important statement, not only for this House, but for all people in the Territory. As I said in Question Time today, the *A Working Future* policy of the government is probably one of the most important and profound policy reforms since self-government. This is about establishing today, and into the future, 20 functioning towns throughout the Northern Territory whereby we would expect to see, over time, towns of between 2000 and 5000 people having the same economy, facilities, level of education, and economic outcomes in similar towns throughout the Northern Territory of the same size. It provides a framework for investment and accountability for everyone to see the transition of these towns from remote communities to proper functioning towns, providing services not only to their residents but to the communities surrounding them.

In saying that, as I talk about *A Working Future* throughout the Territory and interstate, this is as much about changing the culture within government - I say this with no derogatory intent at all. These places are not remote communities. They are not remote from the mainstream. Those two words 'remote communities' imply people who live in remote, isolated communities should have to contend with basic infrastructure and services that are not up to scratch. It is about recognising everyone who lives in remote towns, and throughout the Territory, is entitled not only to a level of infrastructure and services towns of 2000 to 5000 people could expect anywhere else in Australia, but also a realisation for the people living in those towns throughout the Northern Territory they can no longer see themselves as being remote from the mainstream, and there is a level of expectations of governments to fund infrastructure in these places. People have to look to the opportunities, particularly afforded to them through the education system, to participate in that system and in the workforce and the economy we are attempting to create in these places.

It is about a partnership, a new framework, and providing a framework for investment for the Territory and the Commonwealth governments, from the private sector that is open and transparent and going to be accountable to

Territorians going forward, whoever happens to occupy the government benches. Now that this framework is in place through national partnership agreements with the Commonwealth government, with oversight through the COAG Reform Council regarding this investment, no future government will be able to walk away from the vision and accountability being created through *A Working Future*.

We are committed to delivering improved education, health, social and economic outcomes to Territorians living in remote parts of the Territory. We have had extensive consultation with outstations and homeland residents and service providers across the Territory to determine the best way for government to provide services to growth towns and outstations. This has resulted in a change to the way all government agencies will work and deliver services in the future - from a centralised approach to a place-based approach to each town to ensure improvements to education, health, social, and economic outcomes are sustained.

As indicated in my ministerial statement, Jobs in the Territory, the creation of jobs has been one of the government's most outstanding achievements, and continuing to grow the Territory's Indigenous workforce is a key factor to economic prosperity for Indigenous Territorians.

My colleague, the minister for Housing, held up some photographs today of Indigenous people being trained and employed through SIHIP, and there was an element of derision and laughter from those opposite. The places I have been to where SIHIP houses are being rolled out - on Groote Eylandt, the Tiwi Islands, Maningrida, Gunbalanya, and Wadeye - in speaking to those Aboriginal people, both old and young, both male and female, who are working on this program, there is a sense of pride, a sense of hope that this job is providing for them the sense of self-worth and dignity which comes, not only with employment, but the fact that people are actually building new houses for their community. In talking to the member for Arafura, the new subdivision which is being built for a whole new suburb at Maningrida - people have not seen this level of investment in these places for generations. The \$900m we are investing this year in these towns, with the Commonwealth - this level of investment has not been seen in these places for generations.

To be talking with those Indigenous people who are working on these programs with SIHIP has been, for me, one of the highlights of the year. It comes down to individuals. Some of those houses we saw on Groote Eylandt were in a totally dilapidated state and are being rebuilt and refurbished. We saw people ripping into these

houses, pulling frames off, stripping everything back to the bare steel or timber frames, re-roofing houses, replacing gyprock, and putting in new kitchens and bathrooms. Talking to a couple of young fellows who were doing fully-fledged apprenticeships on these houses was a real highlight.

The opposition can nitpick all it wants, but get out there and talk to the people who are doing this work and you will see this is transformational. There is a very old saying which has nothing to do with Labor as in politics or the political party, but in labour as regards to work. That saying is: there is dignity in labour. That is why jobs are the most important pathway through poverty. That is what we are doing through *A Working Future*, really striving hard to generate jobs out there to give kids in these towns hope for the future.

The minister said in the statement we are working towards a stronger future. *A Working Future* will ensure Indigenous Territorians in remote locations will be able to get jobs and obtain the skills to actively participate in the Territory's future prosperity, and their community's prosperity. For these kids, it is not just about having a job in the town or in the region they live. I still look forward to the vision the member for Barkly has that some of those kids in the Barkly will be working on the INPEX LNG project. That is what I am really looking forward to. It is about giving those kids in the bush the skills, the education, and the opportunity, so if they want to come and work in Darwin, Katherine, or Alice Springs, and they come from Borroloola or Lake Nash or anywhere, they have the ability and the confidence to do so.

A Working Future is a shared way forward for remote Territorians. It is about local people - the Territory government, the Australian government, our shires and land councils - all working to improve the standard of living in remote areas.

After many months of hard work and good faith negotiations, the first of the 25 local implementation plans was signed by the Australian and Territory governments and the Gunbalanya Local Reference Group on Wednesday, 10 November 2010. I was unable to attend that particular ceremony, but I have had fantastic feedback about the sense of excitement at Gunbalanya at the opening of the abattoir there and the work people are doing on cattle properties.

Our local implementation plans, or LIPs as they have become known, provide a foundation for the three levels of government to work with individual communities on issues that are important to them to build the growth towns. This is where it is so important, and one of the major

differences. These local implementation plans are built from the ground up. It is all about sitting down with the local communities and talking to the key people in these towns and communities about: 'What is your vision for this place for the next 10 to 20 years?' - working with those communities in refining that vision of what is possible and putting that into a plan that is accountable - accountable for government and for the people who live in these places in their commitments to these plans.

Areas such as early childhood, education, school, housing, economic participation and community safety are all addressed explicitly in these LIPs. LIPs are about recalibrating the relationship between government and Indigenous people in the bush. It is not a top down approach; it is not 'government knows best, this is what we are going to do'. It is about putting some accountability in, in what is possible, what is realistic, and working with communities, the Australian government, the shires, and the land councils to put these plans into action.

The development of growth towns into economic hubs in their regions requires the growth of commerce and industry. I suppose this is probably one of the most difficult things to achieve, but we are making a difference. In so many of our towns across the Northern Territory, with a number of laudable exceptions, the only economy in these places is the government economy. It is government expenditure, it is a government workforce, and it is welfare money that is going around and around.

There is no real private sector investment in these places, or a private sector economy. That has to change. However, not change in a way where there is rapacious investment from outside, and people making a pile of money and taking it out of the community. The debate starting to emerge out there is that people want to understand: 'How do we get into this business world? We have the land. There are all of these people who live here who have money to spend. How can we make a business out of this?'

More and more, people are talking about joint ventures, partnerships, and about establishing their own Indigenous enterprises. People are talking about become property developers in their own right, or with a joint venture partner from outside in developing a commercial precinct - just like we do in our cities - and then leasing space in those commercial precincts to government and the private sector - anyone who wants to establish a retail outlet or start a franchise in the same commercial way that would occur if someone had a commercial property in Darwin and wanted to lease property. People are really starting to talk about this out there now, and it is very exciting.

We are starting on a journey where people are not going to give up their rights to their land, or walk away from the whole concept of land rights and inalienable freehold title. People are saying: 'We have land. How can we work and be our own property developers, work with people who want to invest here alongside with us to develop viable businesses in these places?' As I said, some of the conversations I have had in these towns are quite exciting. We are on a great journey.

The development of our growth towns into economic hubs in the regions requires the growth of commerce and industry. The minister recently held a Futures Forum at Numbulwar, I believe it was, and took a number of people to Numbulwar, including senior people from one of the big four banks - I cannot quite recall which one it was - people from the Chamber of Commerce, people from other sectors of business and industry, and sat down and talked with the community about what their vision was for jobs in this region. It was a great conversation and a big eye opener for all parties at that meeting.

Budget 2010-11 provides \$2.75m as part of Jobs NT 2010-12, including \$1.25m to boost Indigenous training and employment programs targeting the growth towns, and \$1.5m for Indigenous entry level employment programs in the public service, including general and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. The minister has been very passionate about establishing scholarship programs for kids in our remote towns to enter into the public service. As I have said quite often through forums I have had with our public service discussing *Territory 2030* and the overall policy framework for the Northern Territory, I would like to come back here in 20 years time, or fast forward to 20 years time, and see a public service which looks like the community that it serves - to see 30% of the public service being made up of Indigenous people. The reality is the public service not only implements the policy of the day, but also provides advice to government. If we do not have a public service which is in tune with the issues and challenges of our regions and remote parts of the Northern Territory the government is not as strong as it could be.

The minister is very keen about this scholarship program for the public service: \$4.7m for Indigenous training and employment programs which target training to identify community jobs, and \$1.3m to support Indigenous entrepreneurs in tourism to develop new products with a focus on opportunities in growth towns. At the Brolga Awards the other night, it was great to see - I have been going to those awards for a number of years now - the number of new Indigenous tourism enterprises that were emerging and were up for awards. This was not thought of 10 years ago, or

even five years ago. It is amazing to see the growth and appetite for tourism and the opportunities that brings.

My government continues to explore opportunities for private sector companies. For example, ERA in your electorate, Madam Deputy Speaker, provides training and job opportunities for Indigenous Territorians through the delivery of vocation education programs, school-based apprenticeships, and school to work programs. Programs such as SIHIP continue to provide employment opportunities. The vision in the Jabiru area of the mine, working with Jabiru Area School and Gunbalanya and having a principal who oversees those two schools and is to provide opportunities for those kids into ERA - not only into the mining operations, but the administrative operations and the environmental rehabilitation parts of the company - has been really good to see. I look forward to an update from you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how that program is going when you contribute to this debate. It is a sign of partnerships and people coming together and saying it is time to open the door and provide real opportunities for people in our regions.

My government will also continue to link with the private sector to identify training and job opportunities for Indigenous Territorians as part of major projects. INPEX is an example, and I am really looking forward to the opening of the Larrakia Trade Training Centre in February next year, which is a project between Larrakia Development Corporation, Kormilda College, and INPEX. INPEX has funded \$3m to construct the trade training centre in Berrimah, and Kormilda College will be the registered training organisation providing registered training for up to 400 Indigenous people - that is extraordinary - and give pre-employment, pre-vocational training and opportunities for many of those kids to take on jobs when the INPEX project gets up to speed.

The way of doing business across the Territory is changing. Things are changing and business is looking to partner with Indigenous ...

Mr McCARTHY: A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 77, I move the minister be given an extension of time.

Motion agreed to.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker. Times are changing. As my good friend the member for Johnston, a big Bob Dylan fan, said - the times are a'changin, and business has seen a need, a requirement, and an opportunity to do the right thing to encourage Indigenous people into employment.

We are also improving access to education because this is essential for creating job opportunities in our remote regions. The government continues to work in partnership with the Commonwealth to ensure improved education and employment outcomes. Budget 2010-11 provides \$17.6m to build children and family centres at Yuendumu, Gunbalanya, Maningrida and Ngukurr. That is a very significant investment: \$17.6m to build those children and family centres. We all know the importance of a strong start in life and of kids in these towns and their young mothers who get into the routine of going to school and understanding the value of education and the importance of school. These children and family centres are going to be very important.

There is another \$5.3m to improve education and training in our growth towns; \$3.6m for early childhood integrated service hubs and Families as First Teachers programs in our growth towns; and \$2.5m for mobile preschools. On top of that is the extraordinary investment through the BER program in all our remote schools, the investment in the trade training centres in our remote schools in the bush, the investment by Telstra, the Territory government, and Rio Tinto Alcan in the fibre-optic cable which has been laid across the Arnhem Land coast all the way to Gove to improve opportunities for online education and training in these places. We are moving ahead.

My government recognises attendance at school, without coining any turn of phrase, is vital to the future of Territory kids. The government continues to deliver programs to keep kids attending at school, such as a youth pathway service, student engagement programs such as Clontarf, our girls' academies, and enrolment and attendance strategies. Attendance still happens to be the biggest and most important challenge the Territory faces. Getting kids to school each and every day is, without doubt, the most important issue for the Territory right now, and we are working hard to improve attendance rates. At the end of the day, parents have to step up to the plate because they are doing their kids no favours by not sending them to school every day. We have talked much about this issue. I encourage parents in the Territory to do the responsible thing, the right thing. Even the United Nations, through conventions on children's rights, says every child has a right to an education and parents are failing their children when they do not send them to school.

Making communities safer is also an objective, and the Territory is working with the Commonwealth government to provide additional policing services in remote communities. Already, the Territory and Commonwealth governments have provided approximately \$75.3m in funding

for additional policing in remote areas; new police stations at Alparra and Imanpa; and the completion of works at police stations in other remote communities of Gapuwiyak, Ramingining and Yarralin.

A Working Future presents a coherent plan for long-term investment by the Commonwealth government. The hub-and-spoke service delivery model provides a practical approach to ensure sustainable improvements for Indigenous Territorians. This is very important. Whoever occupies the Treasury benches in the Commonwealth, government benches in the Territory, this framework is now in place and I believe it will never be undone. Politically, any government that attempts to undo this in the future will be castigated and pilloried in the community because it will be an attempt to withdraw from the accountability we are putting in place.

A Working Future is an essential part of the government's 2030 strategy. It is about all Territorians - government, local government, land councils and the private sector - working together to build a better future for Indigenous Territorians living in our remote and regional communities. *A Working Future*, in all of its areas, focuses not only on our cities but also in the bush.

I will finish where I led off, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker. I believe our *A Working Future* policy that has been introduced in this term of parliament is probably the most progressive, important, and substantial policy reform seen in the Northern Territory since self-government. For once and forever, it stops seeing remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory as being out of sight, out of mind. It forever puts a lie to the fact that people living in remote communities are people who are not entitled to a level of services and infrastructure that other Australians living in similar size communities elsewhere in regional Australia would expect.

It is transparent and accountable - accountable to all Territorians and to the Commonwealth government. It is visionary, and I commend our minister who has a passionate carriage of implementing this strategy across government. I also thank all of my ministerial colleagues and all of my colleagues in Caucus for all of us working together, pulling our weight through our agencies to implement this policy.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, it is an exciting journey we are now on. Obviously, there are going to be problems; there are going to be things that fail. There are going to be issues where people say this particular service or these facilities are better in this community than that community. We are going to have those issues and challenges, but I believe the reform agenda is

the right agenda. The Commonwealth government agrees this is the right agenda. We have national partnership agreements in place as intergovernmental agreements for at least five years. I thank the Commonwealth for their cooperation and their investment and commend the minister's statement to the House.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I will not be on my feet for long. I was just ferreting around in my office - I was not actually going to speak to this statement - and I ran across a document which might be worth listening to:

In the last few decades we have seen different governments pursuing a variety of directions and policies regarding Aboriginals.

These policies have fallen under the broad headings of 'assimilation' or 'self-determination' and now it is 'self-management'.

I have faith that self-management will prove to be the approach that will result in Aboriginal people standing firmly and confidently on their own feet, as free as other Australians to determine their own futures.

In the Northern Territory self-management is becoming a reality, assisted by the granting of land rights, the establishment and operation of Aboriginal bodies like the land councils, the National Aboriginal Conference and the Council for Aboriginal Development ...

And so it goes on. In this document, curiously, there is another general heading marked 'Part 2: Land, well-spring of economic development' and this bangs on about how good and wonderfully rich the Northern Territory is and how all will prosper under the enlightened policy this document propounds.

The document to which I refer was issued by the Australian Government Publishing Service in Canberra in 1979 called *Aboriginal Land Rights in the Northern Territory: What it Means and how it will Work*. It was issued by the then minister for Aboriginal Affairs, minister Viner, I think, if memory serves me correctly. There he is - Ian Viner.

Why is it, then, after 31 years since this document was published, we are still having the same debate; that we are still going to fix all these problems that are out there? It is because government cannot do this - it just cannot. We hear it in child protection. Government was going

to fix this problem - what? - 10 years ago. The CLP never did enough, and we are all evil and hate children of both persuasions, so along came the new enlightened Labor government and they were going to fix it. All of a sudden now, we hear the Minister for Child Protection saying it is a community problem. Yeah? But it is also a jobs problem.

I applaud the intent of this stuff, I really do. I genuinely believe the members opposite are trying to do the right thing. However, there is only so much they can do before they are going to run out of steam, because in the area of child protection, no matter how much government puts in, we will always find more neglect - guarantee you, the deeper you dig, the more you will find. In the area of economic development we will always find economic retardation in remote areas. I know the Chief Minister says there is no such thing as a remote area any more. Unfortunately, they are economically remote areas more than they are geographically remote.

Part of the remoteness is caused by a legislative instrument, and I refer to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, which makes investment difficult in those areas. Part of the remoteness is because, in some sections in some land councils, there is a resistance to investment, a resistance to change. We are the conservative party in this place? Goodness gracious me, you ought to see some of those land council administration conservative attitudes about not changing things. I have always, in my heart, been an economic dry, not because I believe necessarily that being an economic dry is some sort of Nietzsche-istic world view by which only the tough will survive and the rest should be cast to the four winds. I have always been an economic dry simply because the capacity for people to generate their own wealth, thus generating their own income, is far greater than anything any bureaucracy can provide.

I am sure members will have seen the night time photograph and, if you have not seen it, it is a really interesting photograph. Look up the Korean Peninsula at night on the images section of Google, and you will get a clear - I notice the member for Brennan laughing, he has seen it - demonstration of the difference between when government tries to deliver a service and when people are left to their own devices. Yes, some people fall by the wayside, and that is tragic. There should be some procedure in place to catch those people. I am not saying that should not be done, but what I am saying is that people's liberty, self-interest, is the primary driver to advancement, not altruism. There is an old expression in some areas - I think it was in an anthropological work - in which the learned scientist who made the comment referred to 'scratch an altruist and watch

a hypocrite bleed'. There is a certain amount of truth in that.

Self-interest is still one of our primary motivators as people. It is self-interest that sees some of the very worst outcomes you ever see in the world occurring, such as we see in Zimbabwe today. It is self-interest which sits like an anvil around the necks of the Zimbabwean population; it is the self-interest of a few who have deprived the rest of power.

The concept of self-interest was described by Adam Smith in his work often referred to by the contracted title of *The Wealth of Nations*. You cannot read *The Wealth of Nations* without reading his earlier work, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which describes an environment by which self-interest is a primary motivator, but there is a moral construct within which that occurs. If you read *The Wealth of Nations* in light of the comments and observations he made in relation to his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, *The Wealth of Nations* takes on a completely different flavour and colour.

Mr Smith was not a rapacious economist the way he is painted nowadays, but he did understand that there was a morally correct place for self-interest. I would never espouse the values of Ayn Rand, who then took that particular idea and ran to an absurdity. If anyone has read books like *Atlas Shrugged* or *The Fountainhead*, you quickly get an idea of the extremes of those sorts of attitudes. That carries that Nietzsche-istic philosophy of let the weak die. I would never claim any form of social Darwinism as something I adhere to, but I believe there is such a thing as a moral self-interest and it applies in remote Aboriginal communities - economically remote Aboriginal communities - as much as any other place. It is through that lens, and a lens I share, interestingly, with Noel Pearson - I heard an excellent lecture given by him on a deconstruction of socialism and liberalism and how to apply it within Aboriginal communities. He believes in a form of critical liberalism. The puts him in an interesting place, almost in the same place as Adam Smith in his work *The Wealth of Nations*.

Consequently, I feel that self-interest has, through the structures, particularly of the *Land Rights Act*, been centred on and has empowered the wrong people. Until such time as those values which enable the landowners - and I am talking about the landowners through the traditional structures of land ownership which, curiously, have a remarkable similarity and resemblance to the common law of England of 600 or 700 years ago - they would be able to pursue self-interest much more aggressively than they currently can. This would mean that some Aboriginal people would advance themselves more quickly than

others. If half the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory turned out to be wealthy and half turned out to be poor, that is a 50% improvement on what currently exists. Moreover, I suggest that once Aboriginal people, like any other citizen of this nation, realised that self-interest would put a car in their driveway, a roof over their head, and food into the tummies of their children, self-interest would become a primary motivator for Aboriginal people.

What the government espouses in this place is not based on that concept of self-interest. It still clings stubbornly to the world view that government can fix these problems - government is going to do this; government is going to do that. If we build a new road, according to the minister for infrastructure, that will bring jobs. If we build the NBN, that will bring jobs. Whilst this infrastructure will be useful to create jobs, if the requisite self-interest does not exist at the other end, what you will have is an NBN and a road which stops in a community which does not generate wealth.

I have no problems with Aboriginal people owning their land. It has never bothered me in the least. I have no problems with any person owning their land. What I am concerned about is that we continue to believe we can do better for people than they can do for themselves. We espouse that belief through various forms of government policy. This is just another example of that world view.

I am not talking about an abandonment of Aboriginal people and casting them to the four winds of good fortune or mal. What I am referring to is enabling a liberation, if you like, of traditional lands in such a fashion that self-interest can drive people. I genuinely believe that Aboriginal people, when presented, like anyone else, with those opportunities, will seize those opportunities and achieve better outcomes.

It was a moment of utter dismay on my part when I heard a story not long ago. A gentleman who was working in Yuendumu wanted to start a laundry there. He spoke to some of the people in Yuendumu who said: 'That is a good idea. We will get eight or nine jobs out of that'. That person, as I understand it, spoke to the general manager at The Granites, and the general manager said: 'Yes, we produce laundry. If you guys can wash it, it is not going to cost us much more to truck it back to Yuendumu, and we create some jobs. It is wonderful'. The story, as it got back to my ears, is that when a certain individual within the Central Land Council heard this, they stymied it. The reason given for that stymieing was that Aboriginal people do not do other people's laundry.

The opportunity to develop something like that has been lost because of what? Pride? Is there anything more proud than eight unemployed people? I would rather dig ditches than be beholden to the gifts and largesse of the altruists opposite who would tell me their nobility would be my guide to a safe and prosperous future. I am not particularly trusting of the government opposite, not because of who they are, but because they are a government.

If I should become part of a government I would expect, hope even, that people were not particularly trusting of that government. I do not want to sell my rights and liberties for circuses and bread. I want to create an environment which will see Aboriginal people get jobs. From that child protection, better health outcomes, and better educational outcomes will follow. The schools will need to be there - and I congratulate government for keeping schools in these communities - as will the health clinics to look after health issues. No problem with that. The police who maintain law and order will need to be there. The fact is, without jobs, you have idleness. At the risk of being a little controversial, the devil finds work for idle hands. I use that term metaphorically more than anything else.

I do not believe all the problems in Aboriginal communities are from alcoholism or petrol sniffing; it is mere idleness. Aboriginal people lived for 30 000 years in this country, I am told, but they were not idle - they were working and working very hard. Their wage was 3000 calories a day if you were lucky, maybe 2500 calories. How much do you find in a good lunch? A ham and salad roll with a can of Coke is about 1500 calories. That is how much they would work in a day for if they were lucky.

When the cattle stations were here they had an abundance compared to their lifestyle - I am referring to my knowledge of Central Australia. All of a sudden, they were guaranteed that which they were having to work for every single day, and it came with no guarantees: the abundance of a supply of protein which would have been incomprehensible to them in the shape of a cow, and a supply of running water - far beyond any standard of living they would have had. By my standard of living, living in a humpy and having a supply of meat and water would not be a particularly high standard. However, relatively speaking, that would be a vast improvement.

Then came the 1950s and 1960s, and there was no requirement for many Aboriginal people working on cattle stations. There was a genuine, and dare I say, real resentment held on the part of Aboriginal people as the fences continued to grow higher and more common on their land. I can well understand them resisting that, and I can

understand the drive for land rights. As a European culture, and the dominant culture of the country, determined we were now guilty for the poor outcomes, we then determined they were going to have things like equal wages, and that is where the idleness comes from.

Whilst there was some alcoholism prior to that period, many Aboriginal people worked. Whilst there were many places where education was not provided, there were places where it was provided to an extraordinary degree. If you want to speak to a literate person in Hermannsburg, speak to any person over the age of 65, because they were educated when there was very little government, but there was a rationale and an understanding for the need of education. Look at the photographs from the 1940s and 1950s in some of these remote communities. I saw some photographs of Titjikala not so long ago. The kids were living in what I would call humpies and wearing white shirts to school, which were as clean as the one I am wearing now. They would have dirt up to their ankles and were spotless from there up.

They were not idle, they worked. And whilst they worked for a pittance and poor wages, there was another component of labour that was misunderstood, and continues to be misunderstood; that is, labour provides dignity - not government. I cannot give another person their dignity, they must earn it, otherwise it is meaningless. I cannot give another person a moral construct or a set of values. That must be earned - and earned through difficulty; therefore, a value gains value. That is completely missing from the continued response from governments, conservative and left-leaning, both federal and state, throughout this country and, dare I say it, in other countries. Until such time as the responsibility for the future of Aboriginal people, or any people, is assumed by a third party, that idleness will continue.

I always urge government, and continue to urge government, to put that principle at the forefront of their thinking, and those people will be forced to find new and innovative ways to deal with the problems that face them. Because they find the ways to deal with those problems, and they generate the wealth and the values from the system, then it is they who will have struck the chains off themselves. Through our charity, our goodness, and our value system, we have killed more Aboriginal people than any other form of policy in this country. That is my greatest lament: through our best and most noble intentions we have seen borne from our efforts and our works the most despicable outcomes.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, nothing I am seeing in *A Working Future* gives me a great deal of comfort that the fundamental thinking which

underlies these outcomes has, in any way, changed.

Dr BURNS (Education and Training): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, education is a key priority of the Henderson government, and education is at the centre of the *A Working Future* policy. This government, I believe, is doing more than any other CLP government ever did to improve education in the bush. We have a record Education and Training budget of \$886m.

The Henderson government is targeting improvements in Indigenous education with more teachers, more schools, and more targeted programs. The government is delivering more teachers across the Territory. Since 2001, we have had an extra 398 teachers across the Territory. We have worked with the Australian government to deliver the extra 200 teachers to remote schools. This is a four-year program. We now have 127.5 full-time equivalent teachers in Northern Territory government schools. I should add, as part of that total of 200, I believe there is 27, or thereabouts, teachers in non-government schools. So, the target of 200 is not wholly for government schools. I believe we are on target with 127 or 130-odd at this time.

DET has introduced a more comprehensive recruitment process for teachers which includes more screening as part of our quality teaching agenda. It is no longer good enough to recruit people to the bush just to fill jobs; we want the right people who can make a commitment to their school and community, I believe, for at least three years. DET will also deliver a more extensive induction program for remote teachers, with more cross-cultural training to prepare them for their post.

We have also worked with the Commonwealth to deliver more teachers' housing in the bush. We have invested nearly \$10m to deliver 44 new dwellings for teachers in Galiwinku, Gunbalanya, Umbakumba, Ntaria, Ramingining, Ngukurr, Maningrida, Yuendumu, Alparra, Daly River, Imanpa, Murray Downs, and Wallace Rockhole communities, to mention a few.

The government is committed to developing more Indigenous educators. Our Growing Our Own program is helping more Indigenous people obtain training and qualifications so they can work as educators within their own community.

I now turn to infrastructure. We are building better schools across the Territory. The government, under the direction of the previous Education minister, delivered secondary education in the bush. Of course, I am speaking about Syd Stirling. Since 2001, we have built new schools in Emu Point, Manyallaluk, Mamaruni, Wugularr,

Alparra, and Yilpara, as well as secondary education in Ramingining, Maningrida, Papunya, Kalkarindji, Minyerri, Shepherdson and Wadeye. As an election commitment, this government committed to a \$300 000 upgrade for all government and group schools in this term.

Schools are also benefiting from BER, an initiative the CLP did not support, to build new and improved facilities. It is going to be interesting, as the BER projects are opened. No doubt, we will see opposition members slinking around, trying to claim credit for something their comrades in Canberra soundly rejected - and they went along with it. I well remember the motion in this House that the CLP opposed on some sort of technicality. I have not heard of one substantial complaint about BER within the Northern Territory. There was one as part of the audit process commissioned by the Commonwealth government. One gentleman objected to a fence being built in one particular school but, apart from that, it has been pretty positive as far as I am aware.

You will see the members there. The member for Brennan will be at his schools with a great big smile, trying to get in the picture. If there is a plaque there, he will be putting his head around the corner, trying to get into the picture, trying to pull the curtains across the plaque, trying to get in on the act. However, if he was really honest with his electorate, he would say: 'I am sorry, our party did not really support BER right across Australia. It might be nice but, out of principle, I cannot come to this opening. Out of principle I cannot come to the opening because we did not support it'. Tony Abbott did not; they still do not support it.

The Australian newspaper is running a pretty scurrilous campaign against the BER all around Australia, just the same as *The Australian* ran a scurrilous campaign against the NBN all around Australia. We expect as much from *The Australian*, but members of the opposition should stand by their convictions. They should not go to these BER openings, because their party, nationally, opposed the BER. It will be interesting to see who comes along and who does not - who has the courage of their convictions, or the convictions of their party, and who does not. I digress, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker.

Regarding programs, we know students in the bush are still not getting the results we all want. Attendance, literacy, and numeracy are key priorities, and I have outlined them to this House. We are also doing more in the areas of early childhood development to prepare children and families for school. It was heartening to see the NAPLAN testing in the Northern Territory achieved the highest rates of improvement in many categories compared to other jurisdictions,

but it is still very poor. The NAPLAN results and the My School results to be published soon point to a crying need in the Territory. Whilst there is some heartening news in there, the challenges remain great.

We need to redouble our efforts to do even more. I have been pleased to recently announce significant new strategies and initiatives being delivered through DET to further improve education in the bush. Our attendance strategy is part and parcel of that: Every Child, Every Day. Attendance is the critical issue in remote education; not enough children are going to school every day. Very remote attendance averages at 65%, although I have to say there is a number of schools - and some of them in the member for Macdonnell's electorate - which have excellent attendance. They are working well with their communities and have a very harmonious relationship. I commend those communities and the leadership in those communities for recognising the value of education. I recognise the good work of the principals and the teachers in those communities for working with the community. Unfortunately, the average overall is 65%, and there are quite a number of schools remotely which have a very abysmal performance in attendance.

Our new strategy is a comprehensive approach, I believe, to try to boost school attendance. It includes rewards for attendance and consequences for non-attendance. A communication strategy will be the centre of this including advertising, text and voice messaging to parents. We have to make that communication strategy very local. We are going to have an extended school year, particularly in our larger towns, to try to pick those times, depending on the location, when it is more likely we can attract more children to school. We are going to have a frequent attenders program at selected locations and there will be benefits for students who attend on a regular basis. We are going to have regional attendance teams and truancy officers and we are going to boost the numbers of those. We want engagement and we want attendance. Clontarf and Sporting Chance academies are already in existence and they do a great job.

Introduction of attendance infringement notices of up to \$200 will, as I have told this House, be brought in at the beginning of the school year. We want to engage with parents. We want a process by which we try to support those families in the first instance and address some of the issues, but after a period if there is still non-attendance, we want to reserve the right to issue infringement notices to those who are recalcitrant.

Government schools cannot resolve these issues alone; we need parents and families to

take responsibility and the support of communities. There is a role for local members in all of this. In our Caucus we had a discussion about how local members can become involved and try to convince communities that it is preferable to time sporting events and festivals outside of the school term so kids can attend school.

There are other elements; sometimes people exhibit impulsive behaviour, they want to go to town, they want to shop. I understand that, but we know if one goes the whole family goes, and some families need to give thought to the children attending school. The importance of school attendance is a message we need to endeavour to get across to communities and family groups.

We established our Literacy and Numeracy Task Force this year under the leadership of Dr Thelma Perso. The task force has developed a literacy and numeracy strategy. One of its first achievements has been the release of the prioritising literacy and numeracy diagnostic test kit for Transition to Year 9. That is all about finding out where the kids are in their literacy and numeracy, and developing an individual plan so kids can reach the minimum benchmarks by the end of that school year.

We have also engaged with Professor Geoff Masters from the Australian Council for Educational Research, which is a very august organisation and a leader, not just in educational research but in the interface, in the coalface of schools and school leadership. Professor Masters will be reporting to me directly as minister, with the CEO. He will be working independently of the department. I have asked him to visit as many schools across the Territory as he can. I am trying to do likewise. The ACER is a distinguished research and strategic planning body and has worked with Queensland to lift their literacy and numeracy results. They achieved a very significant, positive change from the work of Professor Masters, working strategically, ensuring quality in teaching and supporting school leadership, which is our principals within the schools. That is an important strategic way of trying to lift literacy and numeracy within our schools.

In Vocational Education and Training, there was the very welcome announcement of the member for Nhulunbuy, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Training with a specific focus on VET. The member has already become very engaged with this challenge. She has experience of this in her own work life, and I am very much looking forward to her work plan for next year. We have already started discussions about that, and we will be working very closely

together in that particular endeavour. Her focus will be pathways to work.

We are working with the Australian government on the Trade and Training Centre Program. We have recently welcomed \$8.5m for new trade training centres at Gunbalanya, Jabiru and Groote Eylandt. Trade training centre facilities have also been built at Tennant Creek High, Kormilda College, Our Lady of Sacred Heart at Wadeye, and Marrara Christian College. Construction is due to start shortly on Darwin High School and Ngukurr School and is under way at Xavier Education Centre in Nguuu.

In early childhood development, more is being invested to prepare children and families for school with Families as First Teachers Program being rolled out to the growth towns. There are already a number of growth towns where this program is operating. Mobile preschools are now in six locations and universal access program delivering more ...

Mr TOLLNER: A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! I find the minister very interesting. More people should be listening to him. I call your attention to the state of the House.

Madam ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ring the bells. A quorum is present.

Dr BURNS: Thank you, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker and member for Fong Lim.

I was talking about the universal access program delivering more childcare and early development programs that are being trialled in eight communities. We have a focus on trying to give kids the best start they can have with their schooling in a whole range of ways. We know that in the early childhood developmental index our kids lag behind. There are many reasons for that. I believe for many of them it is the way in which the test is administered. I believe our kids in the Northern Territory are smart, if not brighter. I said this at a national forum in Parliament House just a few weeks ago. Our kids are as bright, if not brighter than kids anywhere else in Australia. We have kids who, at a very young age, have mastered quite a number of languages. They also understand a very complex social system, particularly with regard to relationships and culture. They are brighter and more advanced, in many ways, than kids elsewhere in Australia.

I received some feedback about that from other ministers when I said that at a gathering in Canberra, and also from quite a number of principals since then. We recognise our kids are bright, but we have to work with the families to try to prepare the kids for school, so they get a good start in school. I am sure if we give the kids and

the families that sort of support, those kids will just excel; they will be absolutely brilliant in their schooling.

In housing, I received a bit of derision in Question Time today over SIHIP and employment. I felt that was a bit unfortunate and uncalled for. Regardless of what your criticisms about SIHIP are, there has to be recognition that there is a real effort going on in employment for Indigenous people. I hear the criticisms about people flying in and flying out. I understand those criticisms, but the fact is, unfortunately, for many reasons, many of our Indigenous people, particularly young men, do not have the skills or the education. I would like it if they were all electricians and plumbers on these projects but, at this stage, we have to get those plumbers and electricians from somewhere. Sometimes they come from interstate. We want to develop our own workforce to try to support many of these young people, particularly young men and young women on the pathway to a career. I see SIHIP as being a very important first step in that regard as well. I have witnessed, as I travel across the Territory, many young people very enthusiastic about what they are doing - learning, growing and earning - and that is very important.

For our remote housing framework, we are introducing a consistent approach to housing management across remote communities, and this will be a long journey. The decades of neglect from successive governments is not going to be turned around overnight, nor is the lack of knowledge many people have about a tenancy, what it takes to sustain a tenancy, and what it takes to look after a house. We need to support people in that journey. I keep on being asked: 'Are you going to evict people for this and that'? I am not in the business of evictions. I am in the business of trying to house people. Basically, what I am trying to do is support people in their tenancies. I can say, if people wilfully damage or destroy houses, I have instructed the department - and I know the Commonwealth feels the same way - we will be taking action, not only for wilful damage and informing police, but also trying to get people to repay the damage that has been caused by that destruction.

In summary, I support the minister's statement. It is a very important process we have embarked on. The minister has been a driver of this policy right from the start. It is a big piece of work. It is not going to be achieved overnight, but we will continue to move, to support people, to support communities and, in the end, I believe the Northern Territory will benefit from this policy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.

Ms ANDERSON (Macdonnell): Madam Deputy Speaker, I congratulate the minister for bringing this statement forward. It is a journey and it is a hard journey. It is a journey that will have to be adapted to not just government but Indigenous people in communities, parents, and also the private sector. It is very important that we move the private sector forward, with government and Indigenous people in remote Aboriginal communities. This has to be a whole-of-community approach to move on Aboriginal disadvantage, child protection, children's education, and Aboriginal health. We know the government does not have an endless bucket of money. We also know that Indigenous people struggle. However, I believe governments can change in some areas to make the lives of Indigenous people a little better.

Some of the suggestions I put to the minister in support of this statement are – I have always said in this House that there is not a black or a white way of doing anything, but a right way to do things. I speak often of the teacher assistants, the Aboriginal police officers, and Aboriginal Health Workers. You have teacher assistants who have been teacher assistants for 17 years and, sometimes, 21 years. When are these people actually going to become teachers? We have imprisoned them to remote Aboriginal communities forever through the false certificate that we give them saying they are teacher assistants. In my electorate there are some Indigenous teacher assistants and health workers who would like, one day, to become a nurse or a teacher.

We know if you go through mainstream universities, you do a teacher's degree in five years and you become a teacher - as you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker. The certificates they get goals them in their own communities. With that certificate, they can only move around from community to community. They cannot use that certificate to go to Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Darwin or Katherine, or even to Sydney or Melbourne. Those avenues should be open so these people with certificates can travel around. There are many people in remote Aboriginal communities - and the member for Stuart would know this, because he definitely has some really bright teacher assistants who have worked for many decades in communities like Lajamanu, Yuendumu, and Nyirripi who want to use that certificate so, if they do go to Adelaide or Darwin, they can get a job.

I have mentioned in this House before, about five or six years ago, my sister-in-law who, because she was having problems with her children, wanted to live in Alice Springs. She tried to use that certificate to get a job in a mainstream school in Alice Springs, but she could not get one.

The only school that would accept her was Yipirinya, which is similar to remote Aboriginal schools.

Those are the factors hindering real employment opportunities. We have to, as government, get rid of them so we open the pathway, the avenues, in this great journey we take as Territorians, giving people the right opportunities to get the right jobs, so they are not just streamlined into black jobs. There must not be two streams of employment in the Northern Territory - not a white job and a black job. We need to ensure we streamline them into right jobs, so they can be teachers in Casuarina school in Darwin, or somewhere in Adelaide or Sydney. These are the real opportunities. The minister will talk to her Cabinet colleagues, and I am sure the minister for Education will talk to his colleague, the Minister for Regional Development and Indigenous Development, to ensure these avenues along this path of taking the Territory forward in a very different way will change the face of the Northern Territory, as the Chief Minister said, forever.

Any government coming in, if there is a change of government, cannot change what this government has developed for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. That is really vital, because we have many Indigenous people stuck in the black section of education, black section of health, black section of the police and, now, black section of rangers. I believe we need to get rid of that and make one stream for all Territorians to have all the jobs we enjoy.

In congratulating the minister for bringing this statement forward, there are other things I wanted to talk about such as the mobile preschools. Harts Range and Alcoota are in my electorate. There are 25 to 30 groups of Aboriginal people living at Irrerlirre. In a week, you would have the mobile preschool going to at least five communities, and that tells you the children are only getting one day of preschool. Can we really advance the education of these children to a next level if they are only getting one day of preschool?

The young girl at Harts Range who was supposed to do the mobile preschool did not have a car, so she could not actually deliver the program to the other communities. She had no way of delivering that program. Since then, the young girl has gone. She was really committed to that program and changing things in that area. It is a very hard area to deal with already, because the Plenty Highway was totally different to the western side of the highway. We need to give real commitment to these people as they are already struggling. Most of them live on excisions of cattle stations, and they are very quiet and humble people. When there are programs like that, I believe we need to keep an eye on it to ensure

there is real service delivery, and their children are not just getting two or three hours once a week. We need to ensure the mobile preschool is at least delivering to two communities in one week, and then two communities in another week, so the children are actually getting two to three days, or two-and-a-half days per week, rather than two or three hours once a week.

In this statement of the vision we have to move the whole Territory forward in *A Working Future*, I hope we all, even if we are not inside this House but sitting at home, can, in 10 years time, say: 'We were all part of that fantastic journey of driving Territorians forward'. The reason I say that is I remember Bob Hawke making a statement in 1987 that, by the year 1990 no Australian child would be living in poverty. We do not want say in 10 or 20 years time that some of the policies we developed have not worked. We do not want people to say: 'You said that 20 or 30 years ago and there has been no change'. We have to be very proactive, work together - not just government but people in communities. I believe the corporate sector is a big player in all this. It is about uniting people, saying to the private sector: 'Come and join us in this journey'. This is a journey for all of us as Territorians to make the lives of all Territorians better. We need our black and white children to sit together in the Northern Territory and be real teachers, police officers, and health workers. That is the biggest task we have as politicians in this House.

I congratulate the minister for Education for talking about truancy levels and saying governments cannot take children out of bed and take them to school. Ultimately, the responsibility is with the families, with their mums and dads, extended families, and the community to take a leadership role, as Hermannsburg has. Hermannsburg has an absolutely fantastic result which it achieved because there is leadership in the community. Everyone - black and white - in that community is working together because they know, at the end of the day, that benefits their children.

The teachers at Hermannsburg are hard-working. I know Daryl sits there sometimes until 7 pm planning the next day's lessons. The opportunity is always there for his teacher assistants to do the same. Hermannsburg would not have achieved the results if it was not for the community, the non-Indigenous people in the shop, the church, the council, and the shire. This has worked as a whole-of-community for Hermannsburg. It is absolutely fantastic to see they can get those results with that pulling together of all the key players in that community. I believe we can replicate that in other communities.

One of the biggest things - and I have said this often, even to the minister for Indigenous policy regarding child protection - is we must have education strategies in place, whether they are commercials on television to say all these changes are happening, or sending leaflets to communities so communities are aware of our direction. We can develop all these policies for the future but, if we do not engage with the people on the ground with some sort of education strategy, then these people do not know the direction we are heading. We are going in this direction saying: 'This is what is going to happen' but, because there is no information, people are going a different way.

Somehow, through a really good education strategy about attendance and truancy, communities coming together, and child protection, we have to have an education strategy in the form of advertisements on television or sending leaflets to communities to say this is the major change of the Northern Territory government, and this is the future: 'This is your future and you have to be involved in it'. If we can do those little things at the same time as driving this policy, we will get communities coming together in this journey we have endeavoured to take. It is a fantastic journey, as the minister and many people in this House have said, which will take a while. It will not be done tomorrow, next week, or next year, but it will be done.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this will change the face of the Northern Territory forever - to say you cannot leave Aboriginal people behind anymore; Aboriginal people have to walk with you, that it is a vision to move all Territorians forward. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr VATSKALIS (Health): Madam Speaker, I support the Minister for Regional Development's statement on *A Working Future*, this government's radical plan to transform 20 remote communities into real towns. As the minister said earlier today, together we are working towards a stronger future, a working future for Territorians living in the bush - a future where remote communities will become vibrant towns based on their unique cultural values, identity and diversity, and where homelands thrive, and our towns and homelands enjoy improved services, jobs, and development. The *A Working Future* strategy gives great opportunity for people living in remote areas and is a cause for optimism for their future.

With the real chance of obtaining a real job in their home town, families are learning there is a reason for their children to go to school and complete their education. Many times I have advocated one of the reasons we do not see kids go to school is because they grow up in an environment of: 'What will be the outcome after I

finish school? Where are the jobs? What am I going to do? I would like to work in this town but there are no jobs anymore. Some of the jobs have already been taken and there are not going to be any jobs in the future'. We need to see more people training for local jobs. We need to see people in real jobs with real incomes. Then, kids will find there is a future if you go to school, and they will go to school.

Local implementation plans are being developed in each of the 20 growth towns. My Department of Health and Families is a keen contributor to see these plans be effective with input into the community safety, health, and early childhood building blocks. Community safety working parties are being established in most growth towns headed by the Department of Justice, with support from police, Northern Territory Families and Children, the Commonwealth Department of FaHCSIA, and other agencies. We have taken an active role in developing and implementing community education programs as one of the critical building blocks in protecting our children.

Community education helps to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect, and equips individuals and organisations within our community with the knowledge they need to act to protect our children. The very best way of protecting the children is a community that has knowledge and is vigilant. The prevention and reporting of child abuse and neglect is everyone's business, and education programs are already under way in Northern Territory communities.

Programs delivered by Northern Territory Families and Children focus on mandatory reporting obligations under section 26 of the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007*. Programs deliver sessions relating to information about child abuse and neglect. Education services are also provided by:

- Mobile Outreach Service Plus providing remote community and health worker education and training programs in more than 87 remote communities across the Territory;
- remote Aboriginal family and community workers provide a focal point of contact to facilitate further education and support programs within the community;
- Aboriginal community resource workers travel to remote communities as part of their work with the Child Abuse Task Force; and
- the Safer Kids, Strong Futures project was developed by the NTFC in

partnership with the Officer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.

Safe Places are an important community resource. They provide support and a safe environment to help with the healing process for families experiencing family violence. They also provide a venue for other providers to run programs and offer services that aim to break the cycle of family violence and raise awareness of this issue in communities. Safe Places are another feature of community safety plans. Currently, 20 Safe Places are available to people in remote communities. Nearly 1000 people have accessed the Safe Places since January 2009. All of the remote Safe Places are staffed by local people and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Safe Places also provides employment opportunities for local people. Workforce development is a key priority, and an accredited training program along with mentoring for remote staff has been developed. Currently, there are 76 local people employed to operate Safe Places.

Income management and other strategies are to assist families who care for their children. Income management, combined with enhanced family support, will provide a valuable new tool for child protection workers to use and prevent child neglect. Australian government and Northern Territory officers working on this scheme are collaborating closely. Parents referred to income management for child protection reasons often need additional help to develop the parenting skills to provide a safe and supportive home for their children. The Australian government has agreed to fund \$25m over four years from 2010-11 for the provision of new and expanded family support services across the Territory. This means by 2013-14 an additional 100 family support workers will be funded to provide enhanced services across the Northern Territory to ensure families with child protection issues, including those living in remote areas, are able to build parenting skills and resilience. To date, the Department of Health and Families has made five decisions to require individuals be placed on compulsory income management.

Local implementation plans for the health building block are progressing well. A series of workshops with community leaders identified the community aspiration for better health services, with each plan customised for each community. Communities are able to articulate the role they will play in services, and commit to a mutual responsibility for better health.

The department realigns their services to match community preferences. For example:

- the towns on Groote Eylandt have prioritised services for Machado-Joseph disease and an MJD coordinator has been recruited. Care and support services for MJD clients, their families, and carers are under way;
- strategies to reduce smoking are in place in Gapuwiyak where the community wanted to take action by providing better access to nicotine replacement therapies, and ban smoking inside homes, cars, and other enclosed areas. The department is providing advice on how the new *Tobacco Control Act* can assist the community with these goals by voluntarily declaring areas to be smoke free;
- the community of Gunbalanya is leading the way encouraging local people to commit to attending specialist appointments and arranging more optometry services to visit the health centre; and
- a formal strategic health plan has commenced for Maningrida to determine health service needs and staffing levels for future years. The community is also progressing along the pathway to community control to develop a sustainable service management system for the future.

Mental health, oral health, nutrition, smoking, alcohol and other drugs management, healthy lifestyle programs, and aged care and disability support services are common themes communities are aiming to improve through this process. I assure you, my department is supporting these communities so we will see healthier and stronger children and families in every growth town.

In many local implementation plans, a review of health infrastructure is planned to ensure the health facility will continue to meet the community's needs for the years ahead. This work is done in collaboration with the Commonwealth government and the relevant healthcare provider which, in many cases, is the Aboriginal community-controlled health service.

In the context of my Primary Industry portfolio, my department is focused on developing resource projects and employment outcomes in the 20 growth towns. We are working with industry associations to develop programs and partnerships to stimulate Indigenous employment and enterprise development in primary industries, fisheries and mining sectors. Scoping

opportunities are currently occurring with prospects in the pastoral, horticultural, and agricultural areas in particular. The draft Agribusiness Strategy contains specific strategies to support the department's *A Working Future* efforts.

The Department of Resources is developing amendments to the *Mining Management Act*. One of the new initiatives being planned for consideration is a mechanism to support greater social inclusion arising from mining activities. More particularly, amendments will be designed to promote outcomes such as increased mining sector training and employment opportunities for Indigenous Territorians in regional and remote areas. This will support the economic participation to improve the lives of Indigenous Territorians.

We are also working with local communities and other relevant agencies for the delivery of affordable and sustainable food supplies in Northern Territory growth towns. Planning for food supplies starts with the identification of where suitable land and water supplies might co-exist.

In my Fisheries portfolio, there has been work undertaken on several communities to identify and commence the establishment of food supplies through fishing and agriculture ventures, and to identify the key factors required for establishing an Indigenous agriculture business. The range of species being assessed includes traditional foods such as giant clams, barramundi, tropical lobsters, mud crabs, prawns and oysters. The nature and scope of Aboriginal coastal licences is also being investigated with consideration being given to broadening the scope of licences to encourage more fishing activities and the provision of seafood within communities.

Agriculture and pastoral pursuits are developing in each Territory growth town, and variety depends on the strengths and interests of its communities. For example:

- Maningrida has a full commercial mud crab licence;
- for Nguiu, the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sports is developing a water resources strategy for the Tiwi Islands;
- the pilot trial of edible oysters at Pirlangimpi on Melville Island may be extended to a site near Nguiu if the trial proves viable and training of community operators is successful. The aim of this pilot is to supply traditional food to local stores;

- Gunbalanya has a small cattle production and meatworks leased to the Indigenous Land Corporation with meat for local consumption;
- Kalkarindji has leases for pastoral purposes between traditional owners and pastoralists facilitated through ILC and the CLC. There is a small meatworks supplying meat for local consumption; and
- Ali Curung has various agriculture projects and a small independent family-owned pastoral operation.

The Department of Resources provides training in fishery's compliance and enforcement, and logistical and financial assistance of \$60 000 to eight Indigenous marine ranger groups around the Territory coastline, including Anindilyakwa, li-Anthawirryarra Galiwinku, Maningrida, Nguiu, Numbulwar, Ngukurr and Wadeye. The Department of Resources is also organising coordinating and providing training to other coastal marine ranger groups and assisting in building capacity to patrol sea country and accurately report suspected illegal fishing activity.

Ongoing mining operations and explorations are occurring in the majority of growth towns, creating opportunities for Indigenous engagement and employment through the implementation of coordinated Indigenous mining employment programs.

A Working Future is a real opportunity to bring about realistic change for a long-term sustainable future for people living in remote areas. It is bringing together Territorian and Commonwealth government agencies to focus on what local communities actually want to build their future, and it encourages strong local leadership to ensure positive changes are implemented.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the minister's statement and commend it to this House.

Debate adjourned.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE **Child Protection**

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, the Speaker has received the following letter from the member for Fong Lim:

Dear Madam Speaker

I propose for discussion this day the following definite matter of public importance: the importance of government

to develop its own plans to protect children in the Northern Territory.

It is signed by Mr David Tollner, member for Fong Lim.

Is the proposed discussion supported? It is supported.

Mr TOLLNER (Fong Lim): Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the support of my colleagues and members of government in allowing me to debate this very important matter of public importance. It is about government making its own plans in the areas of child protection and protecting children.

It is fair to say this government has not shrouded itself in glory over the years in regard to protecting children. First, there was the *Little Children are Sacred* report that came out, that threw the Northern Territory Labor government into national disgrace. It shone a light on some of the alarming and disgraceful things that were occurring in remote Northern Territory. That led, of course, to the intervention. That intervention was not really supported by the Northern Territory government in any way. The member for Arafura referred to it as the black kids Tampa. Government in the Northern Territory did everything it possibly could to stymie the federal intervention.

One of the criticisms was it did not follow any of the guidelines or the recommendations contained in the *Little Children are Sacred* report. I can tell you that, at the time, Mal Brough and John Howard were overwhelmed by the findings in that *Little Children are Sacred* report, but were quite underwhelmed by the recommendations that the report actually contained. They were seen as weak and wishy-washy. What the federal government wanted to do was to act, and act in a real way. They saw what was occurring in the Northern Territory as a national emergency and responded as if it was a national emergency. They invoked the Northern Territory intervention, and that was a sign of real action.

Some three-and-a-half years later, we are again back in this place, and only a month or so ago, this report, the *Growing them strong, together* report, was tabled in this place. Again, the national spotlight focuses on the Northern Territory for all of the wrong reasons - completely wrong reasons. In fact, in this report they say things have become worse, not better, in recent times in remote communities. What is the government's response to the *Growing them strong, together* report? Their response, even before anyone has had any opportunity to digest the contents of that report, is to say: 'We accept immediately all 147 recommendations in that

report and, what is more, we are going to put up \$130m over the next five years to kick-start those recommendations'. That is their response.

At the last election, this government ran on the slogan, Fresh Ideas and Real Results. Where are the fresh ideas? Clearly, it is all out of ideas. Clearly, people opposite have not had time to digest this report, to understand the findings and recommendations of the report. Some of the recommendations, similar to the *Little Children are Sacred* report, are very under-whelming. It is a demonstration that this government is more interested in playing politics than delivering real results. It prefers to play politics. It prefers to try to get out a message - window dressing, whatever you call it - rather than coming up with some plans and actions of its own. It has blindly accepted all of the recommendations contained in this report without looking at them.

There are some things in here which I find very under-whelming and some I find very alarming. Of the 147 recommendations, the first thing which alarms me is that there is a range of recommendations which focus on two systems of child protection operating in the Northern Territory. The authors of this report advocate setting up an Aboriginal-only child protection system in the Northern Territory. There is a clear assumption that, somehow, apartheid works. There is a clear assumption that there is something inherently different between Aboriginal children and all the other children on the face of this earth. For that reason, we need to set up a completely separate system of child protection specifically for Indigenous people.

In my view, that stinks. That stinks, because children, whether they are black, white or brindle, whether they are Aboriginal, Greek, English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Scottish, or New Zealander, are similar inasmuch as that they are children, they need love and care, and raising those children is not greatly different at all. To set up a separate system of child protection is muddle-headed. It is costly. There is, obviously, an assumption that government is just a big can of cash which is ready to dole out money and set up bureaucracies and the like willy-nilly; funds are not a problem as far as government is concerned. That, to me, is a great concern.

The other thing which concerns me is that there is nothing in there about sorting out dysfunctional families. Many of the children who come into contact with the child protection system come from very dysfunctional families. Some families are extraordinarily dysfunctional. They are faced with joblessness with neither parents working. Quite often, both parents are not there. There is often alcohol abuse, drug abuse and domestic violence. There seems to be very little

focus in this report on building and improving families. Some of these families are so far down the track there has to be an element of compulsion if we are ever going to rehabilitate them.

What I am saying is there seems to be very little focus on getting parents from these dysfunctional families into mandatory rehabilitation and institutions that can teach them proper parenting skills, cleaning them up, sobering them up, getting them off the drink and off the drugs and back into work, living a decent life. The vast majority of families out there are juggling many balls in the air all at once. They have work commitments, they have to get kids to school, and all of that sort of stuff. It is a big responsibility to be a parent in the 21st century. It is not an easy responsibility and, for many of the families who come into contact with NTFC, or FACS as it was known, it is not a responsibility they can take on easily. I believe there is a role and a function for government to become more involved in sorting some of these families out.

Obviously, there are some families that are beyond saving. This is a very alarming story and is the tip of the iceberg. About three or four months ago, I was leaving my office at Winnellie about 5.30 pm on a Friday. I was just about to walk out the door and two people came into my office. They asked to be taken to the spin dryer. I said: 'Why do you want to go to the spin dryer?' They said: 'We want to get a bus to Palmerston. Spin dryer will take us to Palmerston'. I said: 'All right, but I cannot take you to Palmerston'. The lady pulled a battered business card out of her pocket. It was for a FACS employee with a lady's name and a phone number on it. This lady and the man both stank of alcohol - absolutely reeked of alcohol. They told me they wanted to go to Palmerston to see their baby because they had not seen their baby.

I was immediately quite alarmed. I rang the mobile phone number on the card and got a very nice worker from the department who explained to me this couple had had a baby two months before. The FACS lady said the baby had been taken into care at an office in Palmerston, and they had been trying, without luck, to track down the parents for, at that stage, well over six weeks. The parents had not seen their brand new baby in six weeks. The FACS lady said they could come in, but all the workers had left and there was no opportunity for them to see the baby. She said if they called first thing Monday morning they could go to the Palmerston office and see the baby, because FACS workers were very concerned and interested in seeing the parents and the baby brought back together.

I told those people that, and they thanked me and shuffled out of my office. I never saw them again. However, I did keep that FACS lady's number. I contacted her just out of interest several weeks later and asked her how things had gone with that couple who had come into my office. She said: 'We have not seen them yet. They still have not come in'. At that stage, it had been at least two months since they had seen their baby. I do not know whether they have been united with their baby, but it is quite clear to me those people were beyond saving. Well, if they could be saved it would be a miracle, but it is almost certain to me they were past the point of saving.

What happens with a baby who comes from a completely dysfunctional family, as in that situation, that is beyond rehabilitation, beyond saving? I asked myself that question. I read through this report, and do you think I can find the word 'adoption' anywhere? What will happen with this baby is it will go into foster care. It will not be allowed to bond with those foster carers because there is a recommendation in this report that says they do not want these children bonding because that is detrimental to their growth. So, they go to another foster carer, another foster carer, and another foster carer. All of a sudden, you can see there is a whole cycle that is starting of a kid growing up in life without any love, without any parents to love and nurture that child. I ask myself why the word 'adoption' is not anywhere in this report. Why do we not talk about adopting children?

I recently dug up some information from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which said 35 years ago there were 10 000 adoptions in Australia. As of 2008, there were just 568. Adoptions have dropped from 10 000 to 568. Of those 568, only six of them were Indigenous children from Australia, and only two of them were adopted into non-Indigenous families.

It comes down to - and there are many reasons why adoption rates have dropped off - not just concerns about stolen generations and the like, but in the last 35 years there has been more effective birth controls developed, better family planning centres, safe sex education classes, and greater access to abortion. All that has had an impact on the rate of adoptions. However, there is still a large number of Australians looking to adopt - decent couples with good jobs and houses who, for a number of reasons, want to adopt a child. It is almost becoming impossible to adopt a child from Australia. We go to overseas countries - Africa and some countries in Asia - if we want to adopt a child.

Here we have, it seems in our own back yard, a number of children who come from families that

are completely dysfunctional, and will never be functional, but are going to be denied love and care virtually for the whole of their entire childhood. I believe that is wrong. Any mention of the word 'adoption' it seems, when it comes to Aboriginal children, is a complete taboo in Australian society these days. It is something we seem to be totally scared to talk about. That is played out when you read reports such as *Growing them strong, together* because there is not one word mentioned of that. It seems to me political correctness has taken over at the sake of the children. I believe some of these children have an opportunity to be adopted into a family which will love and nurture them.

Obviously, I am not talking about wholesale adoption programs happening. It should only occur in the most extreme cases. What we want to do most is place children with their natural parents and help those parents and families rehabilitate and become good and decent families. However, for those few extreme cases where parents are beyond the pale, beyond help, beyond rehabilitation, children need to be given a chance.

I find it alarming that this government has no ideas and blindly accepts 147 recommendations thrown in front of them by people who may well be child protection experts, but I believe they have a bit of a different view than most people in the community when it comes to protecting children. I do not think most people in a community want to see two sets of child protection systems set up in the Northern Territory. I do not think most people in the community would find it too difficult to think about rehabilitating and providing mandatory rehabilitation for some parents who need it. I do not think most people in the community find adoption so abhorrent that it cannot be mentioned.

It is a crying shame that a government which runs to an election using the slogan 'Fresh Ideas and Real Action' falls down so badly when it comes to protecting children and has no ideas. The action that is seen is nothing but a knee-jerk reaction and a response to a report that has the most damning findings in it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the House for taking the time to listen to my contribution.

Mr VATSKALIS (Health): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for Fong Lim for his very important matter of debate. He is, obviously, very disillusioned with his own party. The shadow spokesperson the other day had an MPI and she withdrew it. You have to be congratulated for putting an MPI on such an important issue before the House today. Backbenchers have plenty of time to do their research, and you are not afraid to state your opinion. I may sometimes disagree with your opinion, member for Fong Lim, but one

thing I know for sure, you are a father of two young boys and I know how much you love your children, as I love mine. We see a concern about children and, sometimes, it saddens us to see children suffering, even if we are not around the children, but we read it in the newspaper.

I understand that, despite our political difference, you share the same vision about protection of children in the Territory. I heard from the tone of your voice and your passion that child safety and child protection is very close to your heart, the same as it is to me.

I might be doing a job as a Minister for Child Protection, but I tell you, it is more than a job; it is a responsibility I take personally. Nothing will erase from my memory what I felt when I heard that a young girl had been found dead in the garden of her foster carer. I thought this was a despicable event which should never have happened, and I am still at a loss to understand why it happened. We also agree the primary responsibility rests with the families and the communities. Governments do not make good parents; it is the family that has to be there for children.

Child protection is the responsibility, not only of the government, but also the community. The child protection system should be child focused. We should actually focus on the children, nothing else. I agree with you, it does not matter if it is a white kid, black kid, Greek kid, Aboriginal kid, or a Chinese kid, the kid's safety comes first. At the same time, we should support families. If the family has a financial difficulty, they can pick up the phone, speak to an NGO and they will receive assistance. If a family has a problem with their children, or with the family itself, there is nowhere yet to ring and get some assistance. Also, we should incorporate and include everyone to make decisions about children. I believe we should actually ask Indigenous people. People in any Indigenous community should be involved in making decisions about the safety of their children. Also, if we are going to assess and intervene for child protection, that should be evidence based, not just bleeding hearts.

We want a society in which citizens can have a safe and healthy start to life, where children develop well and are ready for school, where children and young people live with families in appropriate housing, where physical and emotional needs are met, where children can be safe from harm and injury, and where children and young people and families have access to services that are responsive. These principles and aims are universal in children's services systems across Australia. These principles are also consistent with the targets established in the *Territory 2030* strategy.

The function of the child protection system is reliant on a healthy functioning society. *Territory 2030, A Working Future*, correctional reform, and alcohol reform are initiatives about establishing the building blocks to improve life outcomes for all people in Australia, and especially for children.

It is not only families that contribute to child abuse. Lack of housing, inadequate education, and inadequate health services all contribute to child neglect. If you look at the cases we have today in our system, the majority are not child abuse, sexual abuse, or physical abuse. The majority is neglect - neglect by the families. The families are supposed to love children, to nurture children, to provide protection. Families neglect to feed their kids, they do not take them to school, they do not take them to the doctor, and they do not give them clothes. We see that, unfortunately, even downtown in Darwin, Sydney, and Melbourne.

I read through the member's matter of public importance. It should be stated very clearly that each and every inquiry has been commissioned by this government. The reforms of the 2003, *Little Children are Sacred* report, our *Closing the Gap* response, and the *Growing them strong, together* report were commissioned by this Labor government. We have not been afraid of tackling the issue of child protection head on. It is a very sensitive issue. There are no winners; there are only losers in these issues. We have to be able to face the problem and find solutions.

I outlined the government's progress in the House the other day. The Board of Inquiry has picked up on many of the recommendations made by the Department of Health and Families in its submission to the inquiry. We knew very well the Board of Inquiry would provide recommendations. We are not afraid to say we are going to adopt these recommendations. The panel of experts, having interviewed hundreds of people, and read submissions put in by different departments - we knew very well it was not going to be a nice report. It was going to be a report which stated the bleeding obvious, and we said we are going to adopt the recommendations.

My department's submission to the inquiry outlined developing government and non-government prevention and early diversion programs and services to reduce reliance on tertiary child protection services. The last thing I want is to take the kids away. I want to keep the families together, support them at the beginning, not step in and take the kids away at the end. Even if we have to take the kids away, we shall work in such a way that, at the end, it will bring the kids back to the family and the family back to normal standards to keep them together.

We also have to take a whole-of-government approach, tasking each agency to take a more structural role and align its functions and services to address child protection issues and protect the Northern Territory's children, developing child safety wellbeing teams in each of the 20 growth towns to deliver integrated prevention and early diversion services, as well as joint responses to complex child protection cases and ensuring the government's child and family support hubs are developed as similar service delivery centres by the government and non-government centres, providing integrated case management and lift-up referral services.

Our NGOs in the Territory are not developed, as they are down south, to provide children protection services. At the moment, everything is provided by the government. If a child is in danger, we step in. If a child is at risk, we step in. If there is child neglect, we step in. No one else is doing anything and we have to bring the NGOs in. If we bring the NGOs in and they, somehow, take care of 75% of the children who are neglected, that leaves us to deal with children in danger and children at risk in a more comprehensive and more efficient way.

We have to develop a new structure for the department. The department cannot be the little brother of the Health department. The department should focus on the primary role of looking after children and families. We have to talk about and develop instruction, not only in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine, but outside Darwin. In the past few years, we focused on the urban centres and the secondary urban centres, but there were no child protection officers in Ngukurr or Yuendumu. They had to travel. If you have a child in danger in Yuendumu, the closest officer is in Alice Springs. How long is it going to take to drive from Alice Springs to Yuendumu, or even to fly? We are supposed to respond within 24 hours. It takes more than 24 hours to drive there. We have to have these people on-site.

Approximately 30% of the population in the Territory is Indigenous. All our qualified child protection officers are university qualified; they come from other states. They come to another planet when they come to the Territory. This is not downtown Perth or Sydney; we are talking about remote communities. People come here without any cultural skills. We have to train them or retrain them. Why can we not have Indigenous child protection workers? Okay, we cannot have officers yet because they have not gone to university, but workers. That is why we are cooperating with Queensland to take some of the programs they have in place, and have Indigenous people trained at Certificate III or IV level to be child protection workers. Why can only social workers be employed as child protection

workers? Why can we not have teachers and nurses - they work with children, they have skills - and find a way to train them on the job so they can progress to child protection level so we have both skills - a teacher or nurse who is also a child protection worker.

The member for Fong Lim asked why we have to have two parallel systems. There is no intention to have two parallel systems. What we want to develop is an Indigenous child support service to work together with my department in the same way Indigenous-controlled medical services in the Territory work closely with the Health department ...

Mr Tollner: You want an Indigenous child protection peak body.

Mr VATSKALIS: The peak body is ...

Mr Tollner: You want two separate systems. Read the report, Kon!

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Speaker, the intention of the peak body is not to develop an Indigenous and Northern Territory Family and Children Services. The intention is to develop mechanisms and a structure that works in parallel and with us together to supply this.

We have Indigenous medical services working together with the mainstream Health department to provide culturally appropriate services in communities like Millingimbi, Kalkarindji, Ngukurr, and Yuendumu. These are the people who know the connections, the culture, the language, and the social dynamics. We should actually be able to utilise that knowledge to the benefit of the children in the Territory.

I am very pleased the inquiry came out with recommendations; it was very sensible. I am also very pleased they divided it into three categories: the urgent, the semi-urgent and the ones to be done in two to three years. Our attention always was, and is, and will be, to commence the implementation of these recommendations in the time frame specified by the inquiry. This is our aim. We will not deviate from that. Our intention is to protect the children in the Territory wherever they live.

While the inquiry marked a crossroads for child protection in the Territory, processes were already under way to help build a better future for vulnerable children and families. The recommendations made by the board are exactly what the government was seeking to do when we established the inquiry. When the inquiry presented the report to the government, we did not say: 'Okay, we will take two weeks to study this and then we will come back and tell you what

we are going to do'. Within hours we had a Cabinet meeting and decided the first allocation of money and the first wave of action to meet the recommendations, and to act quickly. We allocated \$130m over the next five years. That is on top of the \$135m per year spent on the child protection system.

We decided we would have a new child safety department - a dedicated department taken out of the Health department; a standalone department to focus on children. The immediate steps were taken to assist, and also to seek assistance from other jurisdictions, to address the backlog situation. We know we have a big backlog and we have a heavy workload for our people, but we could not employ other people. We had to go far away to find people, all the way to Canada, Ireland and England, because it is very difficult to employ people in Australia.

I am very pleased we employed 51 frontline and support workers, when we announced the first wave of 76 in Budget 2010-11. I am very pleased the department now has made an offer to 41 people from overseas to work in the Territory. I have had several meetings with NGOs and Indigenous organisations; and I even had meetings with the churches. Every member of the community has to play a role. You cannot say: 'That is not my job. That is the government's job'. No! As a society we have a role and a responsibility. I do not care what your religious denomination is, kids are kids and we have the obligation to look after our children. I do not care what your political affiliation is. I do not care if you belong to the government or the opposition. When it comes to it, kids do not see colour or political affiliation. Kids look at someone and ask for protection, and we are the people who have to offer the protection.

It is easy to say we will implement the recommendation but who will oversee the implementation? That is why we need to establish a committee with experts, and these people are going to oversee the implementation of a committee and, through me, they will report to parliament in the beginning of six months and, when things stabilise and improve and we see action, every year.

We also decided the CEOs of all the departments would come together under the auspices of the CEO of the Department of the Chief Minister in order to have a whole-of-government approach. It caused an immediate reaction. I do not intend to play politics. I have much to say about the previous administration but I will not because this is not about politics. This has been identified in the report. Clearly, the inquiry said: 'Do not play politics, please, with this report'. This is too

important to start blaming each other; let us get together and see what we can do.

My intention is to work as closely as possible with my opposition spokesman because, at the end of the day, I want to be remembered as a person who did something - not solved it, but did something to improve the situation in the Territory. I did something to take a kid out of risk, out of danger. I do not want my name as the person who fixed the problem, because I am telling you now that it is not going to be fixed in six months or six years; it will take time. This has to be a cultural change. It has to be a paradigm shift within the organisation, but also outside the organisation and in the community.

Our budget for this year is \$135m. We put an extra \$130m for five years, but the reality is, throwing money does not fix this problem. What we have to do is find a new way of doing business. We have to develop a new system. We cannot just rely on a system developed in Europe in the 1950s/1960s to apply to the Territory of 2010. We have to work together as a community and as a society in order to address this issue which is not unique in the Territory.

By coincidence, my second cousin in Greece is a welfare worker. She is quite well known because she has written a number of books about child protection and child abuse. How did I find out? My sister pointed me out to her and I met her through Facebook. When I saw her biography I was astounded that I was the Minister for Child Protection in the Territory, when she is the CEO of an organisation concerned with child protection in Greece. Do you know what the surprise was? When I looked at the statistics in her book, the same thing which applies in the Territory - surprise, surprise! - applies in Greece. The percentages of kids suffering neglect in Northern Territory and Australia is very similar to the kids suffering neglect in Greece - 75% to 80% of the kids who are abused in Greece suffer neglect. Our number is 80% to 85%. The minority of the kids were the ones who suffer sexual or physical abuse.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the problem is not unique to the Territory; it is not even unique to Australia. It seems to be a problem of our civilised world - 'civilised' because it looks like we are not that civilised, after all, if we cannot protect our own children.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for Fong Lim for sharing his personal perspectives on child protection in a very open and frank way. I also thank the Minister for Child Protection for revealing his current perspective on child protection. Given that this government has been

chipping away at child protection for the last 10 years in a very inadequate way, I do not feel particularly comforted by the words the minister has spoken this afternoon.

I believe actions speak louder than words and it is, indeed, time for action. It is time for this government to act instead of talk. This government has probably been well intentioned, but has failed to act and put in place measures to protect the children of the Northern Territory who require, at the most, being notified to the child protection authorities.

Today, we heard an incredible speech by the member for Arnhem about *A Working Future* for the Northern Territory. Most of us were lulled into a state of total and complete relaxation by the motherhood statements, the absolute utopian society we look forward to being in, in 2030 – it was quite incredible - where everyone is literate, well educated, employed, we all live in wonderful houses, there will be land releases, a wealth of infrastructure built, wonderful health services, good teeth, fluoridisation of our water, roads, a full and blooming economy, and well-serviced, healthy, happy people.

I was astounded not one mention was made of the health and welfare of children in this plan for 2030. Not one mention was made of how this government was going to really look after the needs of children in the Northern Territory. Perhaps they alluded to it by mentioning things like education and housing but, no, child protection remains fairly low on the list of priorities when it comes to *A Working Future* of the Northern Territory for this government.

In August 2007, this government released a *Closing the Gap* report which was a response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report. This included plans for how they were going to look after children in the Northern Territory. This was in August 2007, as I said, three years ago – over three years ago. It included ambitious plans and targets for the next five, 10, 20 years. What are we meant to believe? I have not been around that long, but I am totally confused. Are we closing the gap or are we looking at *A Working Future*? It does not really mean anything, because whatever this government says never really comes to fruition, particularly when it comes to the welfare of children.

What I would like to do is talk about the *Four Corners* program which aired on television on 8 November, just a few weeks ago. The documentary was titled 'Dangerous Territory', and it featured three cases of terrible child abuse and neglect. In two of the cases, the children died as a result of terrible treatment and terrible neglect on the part of the Northern Territory government.

Deborah Melville was one of these children. She died just before her 13th birthday in July 2007. This was when the member for Karama was the minister. She died while she was in the care and protection of the minister. The minister was, in fact, Deborah Melville's parent. The minister was responsible for providing Deborah Melville with all the care, attention, and facilities any child in the Northern Territory deserves and requires.

Baby Peter died in the back seat of a car, also known to the department for many years. This was during the member for Karama's time as minister. The third child who was talked about in the *Four Corners* program was the baby of the mother who died in the Royal Darwin Hospital as a result of swine flu. As a result of the mother's death, she was placed in the care of an uncle. This is the case Susan Mansfield was referring to on the documentary 'Dangerous Territory'. Susan Mansfield felt quite strongly that this baby should not be placed with the uncle. She had some major concerns about the capacity of the uncle to care for an infant, and she made every endeavour to alert the authorities, NTFC or the child protection authorities, about her concerns. Susan Mansfield was a professional woman, a social worker of many years experience, I understand, and her concerns fell on deaf ears.

Last week, I was contacted by a gentleman who is a friend of the family of this baby. He, too, notified NTFC on several occasions about his concern regarding the capacity of the uncle to look after this baby. He rang me because he was quite traumatised by the whole affair. This baby was readmitted to Royal Darwin Hospital two weeks after it was discharged with bilateral brain damage and broken legs - and apparently those injuries are permanent. He has permanent disabilities as a result of these very suspicious injuries. This gentleman rang me. He was angry and upset, and he asked that I name him in parliament. I am not going to do that, because I fear for his safety. I fear for reprisals against him, so I am choosing not to name him, regardless of the fact he asked me to. I feel I need to represent this man because he made every endeavour possible to alert the child protection authorities of the potential danger this baby was being placed in.

Susan Mansfield brought up the issue of cover-up in the department, which the Ombudsman was made aware of too, and she was very concerned about the fact that people were being muted and suffering reprisals as a result of speaking out, as a result of feeling they had a professional obligation to pursue the matter beyond the child protection authorities, and beyond the normal chain of control within the hospital in the case of Susan Mansfield.

This failure of the government to protect the child has traumatised this gentleman who called me last week, the professional people who were involved, the extended family of the child, and it has had an impact far and wide throughout the community.

The Northern Territory Ombudsman is a great advocate in our community for the children of the Northern Territory and for professional people who have given their lives to helping children. She has advocated that there be significant bureaucratic and political reforms in the care and protection of children in our community. Similarly, the Children's Commissioner, Howard Bath - one of the authors of the latest report into child protection, *Growing them strong, together* - is a great advocate for children in our community. He wants the Children's Commissioner to be the watchdog of the government in the implementation of the recommendations of the *Growing them strong, together* report.

The opposition has put together a proposal to amend the *Care and Protection of Children Act* to allow the Children's Commissioner to become that watchdog. We need a watchdog in place as soon as possible to ensure this government is held accountable for the implementation of the recommendations of this report. We cannot trust them; they have not done their job in the past. Regardless of the good intentions of the current Minister for Child Protection, we cannot take them on their word.

Already, we are getting mixed messages about time frames. The Chief Minister said a few days ago: 'Yes, we will definitely implement the 34 urgent recommendations in the six month time frame which is recommended within the *Growing them strong, together* report'. On the same day, the Minister for Child Protection was indicating it would more likely be nine months, and that was just the commencement of the implementation of the recommendations, not the full process of implementing them. So, we need a watchdog in place as soon as possible to keep this Northern Territory government accountable.

In 2002, we were in a state of denial with regard to child protection when the *State of Denial* report was released. In 2010, we have to say we are still in a state of denial. This government still denies there is a very serious problem in child protection. All we hear are glossy statements about what we are going to do: 'We have some great ideas'. They quote from the latest report: 'This is great, we have our head around it'. However, there is little comfort in those words.

Going back to the *Four Corners* documentary called 'Dangerous Territory', the Chief Minister, at

no point, apologised for the mistakes, neglect and incompetence of this government. He said:

The system has failed because it has been the wrong system. ... the system has ... been a top-down approach and what we need now is to invest in communities, invest in strengthening families, strengthening communities, particularly remote communities in the Northern Territory and rebuild the system from bottom up.

Do you know what? He got it wrong again. The Chief Minister has had all these reports given to him - six or seven reports over the last 10 years - which clearly stated the approach must be from both ends of the spectrum. It should be from top down and bottom up. The Chief Minister is thinking, again, one dimensionally, looking for a quick fix and an easy way out. How wrong could he be? Howard Bath very clearly stated in the briefing he gave the opposition that the strategy has to come from both ends, reform from both ends.

We need the community development side of things happening - the support, the strengthening of communities, education for families - and also we need reform within the bureaucracy in how we go about assessing the notifications, processing them, having better systems in place and more staff. But no, the Chief Minister goes for a one-dimensional, simplistic and very wrong perspective on, I might add, national television. Once again, the whole of Australia knows just how incompetent this government is in its approach to child protection. I doubt if the Chief Minister has even read the latest report, which is an absolute disgrace. Since 2002, we have been in a state of denial. We have been hearing endless excuses about why this government has not been doing its job.

I read the report of the inquest into the death of Deborah Melville again a few nights ago and it is equally disturbing the second time around - probably more so in lieu of the *Four Corners* documentary 'Dangerous Territory'. One thing that jumped out at me was the apology that Jenny Scott gave. Jenny Scott was authorised to speak on behalf of the Department of Health and Families. I quote from the Coroner's report where she had prepared a thoughtful and comprehensive statement for the inquest. A section of the apology part of her statement read:

The department of Northern Territory Families and Children (NTFC) accepts responsibility for its part in the tragic death of a child removed from her natural mother and placed in out-of-home care program. We failed to properly monitor and review

the placement of the child with her foster carer, to recognise ongoing risks associated with placing five very young children with a foster carer already responsible for a large number of children on her own, and living in difficult circumstances. We failed to adequately monitor the needs of the foster carer, and how she was coping, and to provide her with the counselling and support she required. Our failure contributed to the circumstances in which the foster carer failed to obtain urgently needed medical attention for the child.

NTFC apologises to the family of Deborah Melville for our part in her death.

How gracious was that! Jenny Scott, whoever Jenny Scott is, apologised on behalf of the Department of Health and Families for the terrible death of Deborah Melville. The Coroner said:

This gracious apology is entirely appropriate.

Where has the Chief Minister's gracious apology been in this affair? Why have we not heard the successive ministers responsible for child protection since 2001 apologise for the systematic failure of this government to protect children? What is wrong with this government that it cannot emulate the graciousness of Jenny Scott and take responsibility for this mess?

Dr BURNS (Education and Training): Madam Deputy Speaker, in speaking to this matter of public importance, I thank the member for Fong Lim for bringing it before this parliament. It is a very important issue which has dominated debate, quite rightly, over the last six to eight weeks. I believe it is appropriate we keep on scrutinising and examining this issue, for the very reason the member for Araluen spoke about, particularly the death of Deborah Melville.

I have recently spoken in this House about my feelings and shock at watching that *Four Corners* program, even though many of the elements of Deborah Melville's tragic death had been brought before this House and debated. The stark reality of that poor little girl's death really affects us all. If there is anything positive that comes out of Deborah Melville's death it should be the resolve of government, this parliament, the department and, indeed, the Northern Territory community to change things for the better. We have debated at length about issues around child protection. The minister, today, again placed on the table his commitment to reforming the system.

I pick up on some of the issues raised by the member for Fong Lim in speaking to this matter of

public importance. He voiced concern about government setting up a separate system around child protection. I think he even used the word 'apartheid'. This revolves around the fact of involving Indigenous non-government organisations in the area of child protection. It goes without saying that, predominantly, unfortunately, most of the children in care or at risk in the Northern Territory are Indigenous children.

The member for Fong Lim argued very strongly that a child is a child, whether it is black, white, Greek, Chinese - no matter the origins of that child, the child has the same needs as any other child. I agree with that; children have very common needs. However, I disagree with the way the member for Fong Lim dismissed the potential positives of having Indigenous non-government organisations involved in the care and protection of the children.

I remind the member for Fong Lim that throughout the Territory we have an Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance model which has been supported by successive governments, both Coalition and Labor. Any evaluation of those Aboriginal medical services will show they are very effective. If we are talking about Alice Springs, in particular, I point to the work of Congress. The work of Congress is particularly around treating chronic disease and following up - which is probably one of the most important elements of treating chronic disease - and ensuring compliance, ensuring people understand what their treatments are and that they are taking their treatments, particularly their drug treatments. If it is diabetes, they ensure they are controlling their blood sugar and, if it is renal disease, they are trying to avoid that cascade from the very first effects of kidney disease to end-stage renal failure.

The Aboriginal medical services, working with the acute care sector - if we are talking about Alice Springs working with Alice Springs Hospital and the rental units there - has done a very positive job in supporting people with chronic disease. They also work with children failing to thrive, and support families and mothers. I have seen some very positive results in the work the Aboriginal medical services have done, particularly regarding sexually transmitted infections. They do a fantastic job.

I say to the member for Fong Lim to just reflect a little. I am sure he is aware of the very positive things these Aboriginal medical services do. They have also offered to try to move into that area of non-government organisations working in the area of child protection. I believe they can be very positive, member for Fong Lim. They can add much in this particular area of endeavour.

I remind you again, it is not just Labor governments that have supported Aboriginal medical services; Coalition governments have. When Tony Abbott was Health minister, he worked very closely with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory. He was also in conversation with Stephanie Bell and others, and there was a very close and fruitful working relationship there. You only have to look at your own party, member for Fong Lim, to see the positives which can come out of engagement with Aboriginal organisations.

It is wrong to rule it out. It is wrong to ask a question: 'Is this apartheid or not?' Given the terrain we are dealing with, it is all hands on deck. I endorse the recommendations of the child protection inquiry in developing this sector.

The member for Fong Lim also said there is nothing in there to support dysfunctional families. Before I move into that area, I say to the member for Fong Lim, yes, there are very dysfunctional families out there. I, too, have met those families you are talking about, and I ask them: 'Where are your kids? Why are you here on the grog making a nuisance of yourself, making a mess of yourself? Where are your children, where are your grandchildren? Who is looking after your children and grandchildren?' As a community, more of us need to be saying that to people. It makes them angry; they do not like it. One of these days I might wear one. I believe the member for Fong Lim knows that I am not backward in coming forward, and I do not take - well, I sometimes take a backward step when I really have to; I am not as quick on my feet as I used to be. It is important that, as a community, we give people the message about 'who is looking after the kids?' That is an important message.

That statement that you made that there is nothing in what the child protection inquiry is about to help dysfunctional families ignores the efforts of government. We are certainly trying. We might not agree on the methods. We are trying to address the issue of alcohol abuse in our community. We will differ side to side about that but, as a government, we have taken steps - and massive steps - from the first time I entered this parliament in 2001.

What the CLP is proposing now would have been seen as incredibly radical by the likes of Stephen Dunham and others. They would not have accepted where you are now as a party in steps to curb alcohol abuse in the Territory. I commend you for that. Both sides of politics are trying to find solutions here. We differ, we will argue about that. However, the debate has moved on incredibly; the landscape has changed since 2001, and that is very positive.

As a parliament, we are endeavouring to come to grips with the whole issue of alcohol abuse which fuels much of the child abuse and child neglect situations we are confronted with on a daily basis and, unfortunately, the department and the medical system is confronted with. We are taking steps.

At the very basis of what we are trying to do as a government is to foster economic development, particularly for Indigenous people and those living in remote areas. I do not often talk about the work and research that I did when I was with the Menzies School of Health Research, but a project I did was on petrol sniffing at Maningrida. There was a cohort of about 50 young blokes who were forever in trouble with the police. It was mainly minor stuff - they were breaking in, making a nuisance of themselves, a whole lot of shenanigans going on in relation to that, and making the community's life a misery.

What was done in the community was a bottom-up approach. The community started to take responsibility for community service orders for those young men and put them to work, so to speak. They got a coordinator and put them to work in various areas of endeavour. They started cleaning up the perimeter of the airstrip and repairing the fencing. From there, they moved on to the housing stock. They had a painting crew and a demolition crew. They had a crew called the roach busters. They had a whole range of crews working in this area. They had another crew which was very interested in the amenity of the community which helped build the oval, started a nursery, and was doing a whole range of things. You could see and feel the whole atmosphere of that community change as those young men became engaged, and they wanted to go to work every day. It was more a positive for them to be good, so to speak, and be shown to be contributing to their community, to be valued by their community, having challenging things to do, than to be running around half the night making mischief and petrol sniffing.

There is a bit more to this story. The community substituted aviation gasoline for petrol in that community - that was part of it - but, moreover, the community was able to enforce a ban on petrol coming in from elsewhere. It was more about community development, in my book. That was a very important lesson for me: that if people can have meaningful work and challenging things to do - particularly young men - that can turn the whole situation around. That is why this government is so focused on economic development and jobs for Indigenous people. Underneath all of that, of course, is education.

I do not think it is right for the member for Fong Lim to say: 'There is nothing in this space'. There

is a great deal of activity going on. I agree with what the member for Araluen said. It just cannot be a top-down approach; it also has to be a bottom-up approach. The whole Bath Inquiry report is about engaging with community. The Chief Minister has made it very plain that governments cannot do all of this; it needs to come from the community, from families and parents. We are trying to engage with communities, families, and parents on this issue of child protection. I do not believe we have an exclusively top-down approach.

I disagree with the member for Araluen when she said that child protection is not a priority of this government. I can assure you, member for Araluen, it certainly is.

In conclusion, this is a very important debate which the member for Fong Lim has brought on. He has introduced some new elements into this debate - elements which we were probably missing four weeks ago and during this week, but I welcome that. Without trying to politicise what I am saying, it has been a real shame the member for Fong Lim has been sidelined as an opposition backbencher. It appears to me he has been unable to put his important ideas forward. I do not necessarily agree with them, but I do not think the response of the opposition to the Bath Inquiry has included the thinking of the member for Fong Lim.

I note what he had to say about adoption. I am not going to comment on that at this stage, because the member for Fong Lim has ...

Mr Tollner: It wouldn't be politically correct, would it?

Dr BURNS: No, no, I will tell you why I am not going to comment, because I want to think about what you have said, member for Fong Lim. I was not aware of those stark statistics on adoptions in Australia and the Northern Territory which you have raised. I said in this House of the child placement principle, the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child has to be paramount. On top of that, we have to look at where that child can reach its fullest potential in every facet of life. You have raised a very important issue for me, and I am taking what you have said on board. I want to think about it and I want to talk with you about it, as it is very interesting.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for bringing the matter of public importance to the Chamber. I do not agree with everything which has been said here today, but we have to continue discussing this matter. Child protection is such a high priority issue, as a parliament, we should be trying to work towards a bipartisan approach because this is a problem which is not going to go away overnight. It is one that successive

governments will have to deal with. It is a very important issue and, if possible, we should come closer together on the way we are going to move forward on it in the Northern Territory.

Discussion concluded.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr GILES (Braitling): Madam Deputy Speaker, I will quickly talk about a couple of things. In parliament the other night - and I need to correct something - I made a silly mistake I was not aware of when I made the comment.

The other night I gave an adjournment speech and commented about people riding black motorbikes in camouflage gear. I referred to Defence personnel as AJs. That was not a deliberate mistake. Having never lived in a Defence town, I just thought personnel were commonly referred to as that. I did not understand the full meaning of what that meant. I have since been informed by some of my colleagues the meaning of that, and I would like to make it clear that it was not a deliberate term, and I correct the record. It was not meant to be; I simply had no idea what it stood for and I wanted to correct the record.

I also wanted to talk about growing concerns regarding the state of Territory Housing properties in the electorate of Braitling. For a while, the minister was trying to work closely in improving the upkeep of Territory Housing properties through the improved management of Territory Housing tenancies.

There are a number of properties which are continuing to degrade due to the upkeep of the dwellings, particularly not keeping the place clean and not mowing the lawns. In Patterson Crescent, there are a number of houses that could do with a lawn trim. I encourage the government to get Territory Housing staff to get on to the tenants, particularly in Patterson Crescent, but also right across the electorate of Braitling, to ensure the tenants are keeping their places tidy and the lawns mown, because it adds to the aesthetic nature of Alice Springs and the appeal of a Central Desert town.

I know it is difficult with the amount of rain we have had this year; people have had to do much more yard maintenance. However, it would be good if government did some canvassing with tenants to get them to look after their property in a way the general community expects.

Mr VATSKALIS (Casuarina): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a great loss to the Territory that after 29 years its principal fisheries research scientist, Dr Rik Buckworth, has taken up a new position with CSIRO in Queensland, but he will not be totally lost to the Territory.

Dr Buckworth has established himself worldwide as a leading fisheries scientist when it comes to our tropical fisheries, contributing to scientific research in many fisheries across northern Australia and Indonesia.

Dr Buckworth was attracted to work in the Territory in the early 1980s as a newly graduated scientist assisting in crocodile research. In 1982, he started with the Territory public service as a fisheries biologist to conduct research on the northern prawn fishery. Since then, Dr Buckworth has worked on all of the Territory's fisheries and has been responsible for the development and implementation of research programs in a number of them.

Most notably, he led the development of an innovative way to sample fish stocks in the creation of a hook called the Genetag. It takes a small sample of DNA without catching the fish and compares it with fish caught by fishers. That work has received many awards including a winner of the ABC television show, *The New Inventors*. Dr Buckworth's efforts and scientific acumen have been recognised through a range of industry and government awards including ministerial awards for scientific excellence.

Dr Buckworth's last day was 19 November 2010. He leaves a legacy of scientific knowledge and innovation to the Northern Territory. His personal and professional approach to his work has generated enormous respect from his peers and members of the fishing industry.

While his day-to-day involvement in Northern Territory fisheries will be sorely missed, we anticipate Dr Buckworth will continue to have involvement in our fisheries through partnership projects with CSIRO and other research teams based throughout Northern Australia. His leadership and scientific expertise will be a great asset to CSIRO. I wish him well in this new part of his life, and know we will regularly see him back here in the Territory.

As we near the end of the year, it is appropriate to highlight some of the achievements during this year of the schools in my electorate - the Nakara and Alawa Primary Schools and Dripstone Middle School. I thank the principals, Barry, Sarah and Fathma and the teachers in the schools for all their hard work; the parents for their support and guidance of the youth; and the

students whom I congratulate on completing the academic year.

I recently attended the Alawa Primary School assembly to present my regular Student Achievement Awards and my Caught Being Good canteen vouchers to students. I congratulate them on these awards.

The highlight this year for Alawa Primary School would be their huge win in the Northern Territory Smart School Award for Excellence in Commerce and Industry Partnerships. They won \$20 000 for this award for their efforts with such wonderful programs as the Alawa School Farm. Ms Emma Lupin, Alawa Primary School's kitchen specialist, has organised junior master chef-type cooking lessons for students, which is a big hit with the students. Alawa Primary has been working in partnership with Casuarina Senior College's Clontarf program. The Casuarina Senior College students attended Alawa School and worked with the Years 5 and 6 for sports. Students also attended the Casuarina Senior College as well.

I look forward to attending Alawa Primary end-of-year presentation evening on Thursday, 9 December, to personally congratulate the staff and students on their year.

The other school in my electorate, Nakara Primary School, has had an equally busy year with a number of upgrades to school facilities. I have attended assemblies throughout the year and presented students with awards. The last early childhood assembly was held on 5 November in their new music room, which was great to see completed and being used. In fact, it will be used tomorrow for their musical recital which I, unfortunately, will not be able to attend due to parliament sittings and Cabinet meetings.

After a number of years as Principal and good friend, Barry Griffin is retiring this year at an official celebration to be held on 9 December, which I look forward to attending to personally thank him for his hard work.

Nakara Primary School's new preschool playground equipment was installed earlier this year and it has proved a big hit with the children. I also attended a Nakara sports carnival in Term 3 and it was fantastic to see the students enjoying the day. During the year, the fence was upgraded from chain mesh to new pool fencing style along the front of the Goodman Street entrance which looks fantastic. The school irrigation system was also upgraded this year.

I look forward to attending the Nakara Primary end-of-year presentation on 2 December to

personally congratulate the staff and students for their success this year.

The only middle school in my electorate, Dripstone Middle School, also had a very busy year. I attended the annual Dripstone Day celebration in September. They raised \$25 000 which was used to purchase a special wheelchair for one of their own Year 8 students, young Anthony Andreau, who suffers from cerebral palsy. This wheelchair has already made a huge difference to Anthony's life.

Dripstone Middle School has an arrangement with Japanese sister school, Kibi Cho High School, and the annual exchange to Kibi Cho in Japan is always a highlight for the students. Another highlight for Dripstone students was winning the Northern Territory Tournament of Minds. The school also had fantastic Year 9 NAPLAN results. Other results over the year include Show Us Your Face competition winners, Weddell competition winners, and ICAS competition results. I look forward to attending the school's end-of-year presentation and graduation night on 2 December. It is going to be a very busy December.

The end of the year is also often a time to say goodbye to Territorians as they head off to new adventures and, of course, to visit relatives. This time of the year no one seems to come up north from the south; everyone seems to go down south or somewhere else.

Madam Speaker, it has been a very busy year and, near the end of the year, it is going to get busier. I am going to be involved in wrapping presents again for Somerville in Casuarina as I do every year. I always say it is like doorknocking, but this time, instead of going to people, people come to me, and they enjoy it too.

Ms ANDERSON (Macdonnell): Madam Speaker, I thank this parliament for my leave of absence in the last sittings for the 25th anniversary of the hand back of the Rock. I had a couple of fantastic days. I take this opportunity, first and foremost, to thank Christine from Parks, and Alison Hunt who organised all the dancers. It was a show everyone enjoyed - I am sure the minister would agree with me on that. It was a lot of hard work for many people. I was saying to someone earlier today, all the boobs that were out there with all the beautiful designs were courtesy of Alison Anderson. It was really lovely. The barbecue the night before in the community was about bringing people together.

I thank the parliament for giving me leave of absence from the House to celebrate such a fantastic couple of days at the hand back anniversary celebrations.

I also take the opportunity to thank Harry, the Chair of Parks, and Sammy, his brother, and Mario for driving the bus backward and forward for the people. We stayed until very late in the evening because there was a concert and music and everyone - old, young, black and white - were all dancing to the Country and Western. It was really lovely.

On another note, I thank the age carer at Papunya, Sifa, and all the ladies who work there - Katie, Rachel and Sheila. Thanks to Barbara from the MacDonnell Shire for looking after my sister who recently passed away. Thanks also to Glenys and Faye at Mt Leibig, because they shared by coming over and bringing other family members to Papunya to look after her. These are the people we do not really get to say thank you to, and they are the people who do the hard work in the absence of families when something happens to your family. My gratitude goes to these people for looking after my sister in my absence.

Ms McCARTHY (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House of a wonderful tourism event I was fortunate to attend on Saturday night. More than 400 guests from all corners of the Territory's tourism industry gathered at the Darwin Convention Centre for the 24th Brolga Awards. This year's Brolga Awards recognised business excellence across 26 business categories and three individual categories. I congratulate the winners and nominees for their outstanding efforts in support of a sustainable and growing local tourism industry. Being recognised with a Brolga is the highest tourism accolade in the Territory, and I certainly congratulate the 28 winners.

The Territory can be extremely proud of a very professionally organised event, and I congratulate the team at Tourism NT for such an outstanding achievement. In particular, I acknowledge Susan Webb from Tourism NT for a fantastic effort. Well done, Susan.

To commence proceedings, guests were given a very special Welcome to Country by Robert Mills and the Larrakia people. During the evening, the dance floor was full as Tom Burlinson and DJ Anna Lunoe entertained the crowd. Jonathan Uptin from Channel 9 did a terrific job as master of ceremonies for the evening; and production company, Dreamedia, which looked after ticket sales, decoration, theming of the room, and award winners' presentations are to be congratulated for an extremely professional event.

Functions like this are not possible without the generous support of sponsors. I acknowledge the following organisations for their commitment to the Brolga Awards. To our media partners, Imparja, Channel 9, *NT News* and Territory FM; to Qantas,

Coleman's Printing, Fosters, Darwin Convention Centre, Datatrax Tourism Touchscreens, Darwin City Council, AHA NT, Caravan World, Crimson Innovations, AANT, Department of Business and Employment, Director of Parks Australia, IBA, NT Airports, and Deloitte.

The evening had many highlights, but there were a couple of special moments I would like to briefly mention. First, I was very pleased to be able to present Frances Fausett with the 2010 Perpetual Trophy, recognising her outstanding contribution to the Territory's tourism sector over the years; a very deserving winner.

The awards night also presented an important opportunity to thank and acknowledge the CEO of Tourism NT, Maree Tetlow. Maree's contribution to the Northern Territory tourism industry has been outstanding. Her role as CEO and ambassador for the Northern Territory over those eight years has meant an improvement in important areas of tourism. Most particularly, the highlight of the evening was the recognition of her role in improving and developing Indigenous tourism across the Northern Territory. I wish Maree and her family the very best for the future in Tasmania. I look forward to keeping in touch with her as she ventures back to her home country of Tasmania, which is still a part of Australia, of course.

There is a group of people who willingly donated their time and deserve to be acknowledged. They had the very difficult task of judging the submissions. A very big thank you to Chairman of Judges, Tom Ganley, and his panel of judges for their professionalism and commitment to the industry. Thanks also to Diana Leeder, Julie Crisp, Alison Hucks, Amy Williamson, Jo-anne Harkin, Edon Bell, Fay Miller, George Dunne, Greg Constantine, Joachim Schoen, John Rawnsley, Meryl Triggs, Penni Tastula, Suzanne Morgan and Tony Mayell. The 2010 Brolga Awards would not have been possible without your assistance, so I thank you all very much.

The 2010 Brolga Northern Territory Tourism Awards were an outstanding success, and I wish all the category winners the best in their pursuit to win an Australian Tourism Award in March next year.

Mr CONLAN (Greatorex): Madam Speaker, I have to add, with the Northern Territory community screaming out for leadership on so many issues such as law and order, housing, child protection and now Montara, once again we see the government shutting the parliament down and finishing at half-past six. The junkyard of ministers is alive and well.

I will speak on a couple of matters. One is the local hospital networks which will form part of this so-called health reform which the Henderson government so willingly signed up to earlier this year. The opposition has spoken at length about our thoughts on the health reform. We do not consider it to be reform at all; it is really just a change in funding arrangements. The concern I have, as the opposition spokesperson for health, is the formulation of local hospital networks and how that will be structured throughout the Northern Territory.

The fear is that we will have one local hospital network for the whole of the Northern Territory. If you look at a couple of the documents circulating, the *National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission Report* and the *Health Reform Agreement*, they state there will be one hospital network for no less than five hospitals. That puts us in a unique position because we only have five hospitals in the Northern Territory. So, we would have one hospital network based in Darwin running all the Northern Territory hospitals.

The Alice Springs Hospital is unique in many ways, and the type of work undertaken by the Alice Springs Hospital is varied and extremely wide-ranging for the area it covers, some 1500 km. You would not find a hospital of its size for a town of its size anywhere else in the country. It deals with extraordinarily wide-ranging circumstances, conditions and presentations, and sees between 30 000 and 50 000 presentations each year. That is an enormous number of people who pass through that hospital, particularly in a town that size.

We have said on a number of occasions that we do not need fundamental health reform in this country. What we need are hospital boards with clout. That is, hospital boards which can make decisions based on community needs. The fear here is that community involvement, local involvement, will be lost through the formulation of one local hospital network based in Darwin.

If I look at the Department of Health and Families consultation paper - this is the paper being circulated at various meetings throughout the communities; I know there will be another one tomorrow night in Alice Springs, and there was one in Tennant Creek last week - it is not a very large document and it falls short of convincing the community of exactly what the government's intentions are. If you look at section 11.2, it says:

Current Hospital Boards

It is likely that following the establishment of LHNs (local hospital networks) the role of the Hospital Boards will change and that the Hospital Boards Act will be amended or

repealed as appropriate to reflect the final governance arrangements for the LHNs.

That should strike fear into every single person in the Northern Territory who lives in the regions, particularly those in Central Australia, and in some of the smaller communities such as Gove, Tennant Creek and Katherine. Essentially, that means the community's involvement will cease.

We saw a change to the *Hospital Boards Act* after the government was, I guess, embarrassed to the point where it had to dismiss the Minister for Health at the time, the member for Johnston, because of his failure to provide annual reports in keeping with the *Hospital Management Boards Act*. The government has introduced a new act to distance the minister even further from any responsibility and liability.

I believe what this will do is not only will we have to go through the whole process all over again, but it will distance the community from the running of their own hospital. It will bring the bureaucrat and the patient closer together as opposed to the doctor, nurse and patient closer together, which is exactly what local community hospital boards provide. No one is better placed to decide what is needed in that community than a local hospital board made up of members of that community.

I urge anyone in Alice Springs or Tennant Creek who is listening tonight through the linkup here, there is another meeting being held tomorrow night at the insistence of the Alice Springs community after a meeting was hastily called last week. There were some 20 to 25 people at that meeting, and the overwhelming theme was that there was not enough notice given for the meeting and people could not attend for various reasons, but mainly because they were not given enough notice. So, the Department of Health and Families did concede to hold another meeting, and that will be held tomorrow night in the Andy McNeill Room in Alice Springs starting, I believe, at 6 o'clock. I urge anyone who is interested in this to attend those meetings and voice your concerns.

I believe everyone from the region should be very concerned about the future of their local health service delivery, that is, their local hospital and what it will mean for local health service delivery to the local community. I urge you to voice your concerns about the loss of local autonomy of your hospital, because that is exactly what this will mean.

I understand there is an argument being put to the minister. I would say once again, the cart leading the horse; another example, in my view, of the department having a very strong hold on the

minister as we see time and time again in this House. There is an argument being put to the minister that there is just not enough activity, not enough business, if you like, or not enough patients through the Alice Springs and Tennant Creek Hospitals to warrant a second local hospital network. To me, anywhere between 30 000 to 50 000 presentations at a hospital in Alice Springs, and you couple that with the presentations through the Tennant Creek Hospital annually, there is a very strong case for a second local hospital network.

I hope the member for Stuart is concerned about local health service delivery in his local community because it could spell the end of that autonomy and, as I say, no one is better placed to direct health services than those in their local community, and that is exactly what local hospital boards do.

In the remaining few minutes I would just like to again talk about the aeromedical tender currently in play with the Department of Health and Families. I did suggest last night I am very concerned about the advice being provided to government. I think this advice is flawed; I think it is largely incorrect. I think the government is blindly tying themselves to this advice. I hope the people who make up that tender board are able to look beyond that advice and look at each tender on its merit.

I repeat, if safety is what the government wants, they should open the process to single and multi-engine aircraft so they can then choose the organisation with the highest safety record without eliminating a possible contender for, what I believe to be, invalid reasons.

Mr HAMPTON (Stuart): Madam Speaker, I wish to respond to the outrageous comments and claims made by the member for Braitling about the unacceptable violence involving some families in Yuendumu, and my involvement. If the member for Braitling cared at all about the welfare of the people involved in the situation, he would keep quiet and stop trying to score political points from what is a sad, sensitive situation that is having a direct impact on people's lives and welfare.

The reality is, the member for Braitling does not care, and he does not know. He sees the opportunity to grab a headline and make ridiculous and dramatic accusations. The member for Braitling wants to cover up his ill-informed meddling in this. He has tried to cover it up by making accusations about the role some hard-working public servants played in trying to ensure the welfare of the families caught up in the violence.

The fact is, DCM employee, Tracey Brand, is the Executive Director of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan and is a local Indigenous woman, well-known and respected by many Central Australians. Tracey spoke to women and children who had arrived in Alice Springs from Yuendumu to find out what their travel plans were. At no time did she ever encourage people to move to South Australia; and at no time did I instruct her to do so.

I also advise, on the day of that meeting I was out in my electorate at Laramba and as soon as I got back I received a call from those families seeking assistance. I did make that call, but I was told they already had arrangements made for them.

I also acknowledge the hard work that Tony Mayell, from the Department of Chief Minister, has done in relation to this sad incident. Tony has done a significant amount of work trying to pull these families together; and I thank Tony for that work.

All indications are that the member for Braitling actively encouraged this group to travel to Adelaide. It also seems that he played a role in arranging and, possibly, financing the travel. He needs to come clean about the games he has played here, instead of throwing around dramatic accusations and wringing his hands like a drama queen. It is all just about politics to him; it is not about the people or those families. To me, this is exactly what the sad situation is all about - it is about families. It is about my family caught up in unacceptable violence. I have tried to be very careful about what I have said publicly on this issue. I know how sensitive this is and how intemperate statements can inflame emotions that are already running high.

I made a personal call to the member for Braitling when the families were returning from Adelaide to ask him to let the situation calm down; that the people involved were asking that there be no comments or speculation in the media about the situation. I was getting a very clear message from both sides of this conflict that they wanted to get away from the media scrutiny and public comments, and wanted a stop to the ill-informed comments and speculation. This is what I told the member for Braitling when I called him. His answer was: 'No worries, mate, I understand'. But what did he do? He went straight to the media. He cannot resist hearing his own voice. Stuff the wishes of the families involved, and stuff the serious impact his ill-informed accusations could have on people's lives.

Violence is not acceptable and the police and government are doing all they can to ensure the safety and welfare of the people in Yuendumu,

and to assist getting families to resolve this conflict.

I appeal to all involved in the sad situation to sit down together and talk so a peaceful resolution can be achieved. I also appeal to the member for Braitling to sit down, shut up, and let the people who know what they are doing get on with it.

Mr KNIGHT (Daly): Madam Speaker, I wish to pay some Christmas cheer to my electorate and some people close to me, so I am making my Christmas remarks now. It may get a bit busy next week, I imagine.

I start with my office staff, particularly the most important staff member I have, my electorate officer. Sharon does a magnificent job. With my busy ministerial responsibilities I do not get out to the electorate office as much as I would like, and she does a tremendous job keeping the electorate informed and resolving problems that occur in the electorate. The feedback I get from the electorate is that she resolves many problems and people are extremely happy with her. I hope she and Chris and the kids have a great Christmas. She has certainly had a very busy year. She is interstate at the moment watching one of her girls play soccer. I wish her all the best and look forward to a great New Year.

In my ministerial office, I thank Ray. Ray has come to my office to help out, and has done a terrific job. He has been holding down a couple of positions across the floor, and I thank him and his family, particularly his wife, for giving up his time away from home to help in the office after hours. He works extremely long hours, and I wish him all the best.

To Claire, my new media officer, she has come on board and is a terrific asset; I hope she stays for a long time. She has been very good, supporting me and encouraging me. I wish her all the best for Christmas. To Graeme - it has been a fairly traumatic year for Graeme. I hope he and his two children have a good Christmas, a different Christmas it will be, but it will be a good Christmas for them; they certainly deserve it together. Graeme has been a terrific support to me, always encouraging, always happy. He handles his part of the portfolios very well.

To Carol, I hope she has a great Christmas with her family - her grandkids and her daughter - thanks for all your support. I have Briana in the office at the moment, and I hope she has a great Christmas. I hope Hopper has - I am sure he will - a great Christmas. He has been a great support with all the technical and political advice he gives me; I wish him and Rose all the best over the Christmas break.

I thank the Legislative Assembly staff. They provide invaluable support throughout the year, and we could not do this job without them. I thank the Chamber staff – being trapped in here 36 days of the year is very demanding - Annette, Gaddy, Ian and Michael for all their help. I do not know where Stokesy is at the moment, probably trying to figure out how to get the Buffaloes to win! I thank them for all their support whilst we are in the Chamber, and to the Hansard staff.

To my parliamentary colleagues on the other side of the House, I wish you and your families all the best for Christmas; have a safe one. To my valuable colleagues, it has been a very long and tough year, but it has certainly been a productive year. I am extremely happy with the way this year has gone, the strength and tenacity that has been shown in 2010. We are a very united side. I have a great deal of trust and appreciation in the collegiality that goes on between all of us. We have a great team in the House. I wish everyone, and their families, all the best for Christmas. It is very tough; I know many members and have watched their kids grow up and colleagues get older, and it is certainly great to go through that experience with them.

Last, but not least, is my own family. My children, a long time away from home and I do not get to see them very much, but I look forward to spending some time with them over the Christmas break. They are growing up very quickly, and it does not seem very long ago I was here giving this same speech 12 months ago; it has certainly gone by very quickly.

My son turned 15-years old this year. He has overtaken me - he is 6' 1" now, so he has shot past me. I picked him up one weekend, and then the next weekend I was looking up at him. He is a beautiful boy. My daughter, although very cheeky, is the apple of my eye. All the best, kids, and I look forward to spending time with you at Christmas.

Madam Speaker, I wish everyone a safe and happy New Year.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his wishes and wish the same in return to him and his.

I also wish to address some issues which came up in Question Time today, particularly in relation to the mines minister trying his hardest to wash his hands of his responsibilities in relation to the Montara oil spill - typical of the minister. Because the delegation comes from the federal minister, he says: 'Nothing to do with me'. I find that in a practical sense to be an incomprehensible position for the minister to take because what he is saying when he runs that

defence is: 'I allow an external authority to involve itself with my department and, consequently, I choose to take no interest whatsoever in what that external authority is doing within my department.'

One would think, if that was the situation, the minister would be considered not to be across his job. If I was in charge of a department and an external authority was involving itself directly with the use of my staff's time, then my interest would be: why on earth are they not paying the bills? Why are they not paying for my staff to do this, and, by the way, what the hell are you doing there? What on earth do you think you are doing with the staff who work in the department I serve? To say otherwise would strike me as a very unusual administrative arrangement.

The heart of this argument is that the Solicitor-General - not knowing, by the way, what question was asked of the Solicitor-General, so I am not entirely sure of what question he was answering - but giving that latitude to the Solicitor-General, it is clear from the Solicitor-General's opinion that:

For the offshore area of the Territory of Ashmore and Cartier Islands, however, the Joint Authority is the responsible Commonwealth Minister alone.

That is the argument this minister is running and relying on. However, he does not mention these two paragraphs:

It should be noted that the Territory collected on behalf of the Commonwealth application fees for various titles and annual fees in respect of permits, leases and licences, which amounts were remitted to the Northern Territory Treasury to pay for the administration by the Territory of petroleum activity in the Ashmore and Cartier Islands area.

It goes on to say:

It should be noted that the Commonwealth Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism has asserted that neither it nor the Commonwealth Minister supervised or otherwise oversaw the day-to-day activities of the Director of Energy in the exercise of that delegation and considered the exercise of the delegated powers to be a matter for the Territory.

Why would the Commonwealth minister have that belief and understanding? Because that is the arrangement struck with the Northern Territory government when the delegation was given in the first place. There clearly needed to be some type of communication. I find it unfathomable that a Commonwealth government would go to any

state-level government and simply acquire the use of the public servants working for that state government without informing the government of that jurisdiction. It does not make sense. It is not a comprehensible argument unless that information was granted, at which point the Northern Territory government would have said: 'That is fine. That is the arrangement. We appreciate that your delegation is going through our staffers. We will collect the cash, stick it through our Treasury books and will be responsible and ensure the job gets done'. That is the arrangement which was struck between the Northern Territory government and the Commonwealth on this issue, and that is why this minister remains responsible for what was happening at Montara.

The Commonwealth minister could have done much more to involve himself, as it is his delegation, but because the day-to-day arrangements were being overseen by this government, this minister must be responsible. For him to wash his hands and suddenly accuse his department of lying to him, effectively: 'Oh, we never told the minister', is the same defence run by the former Minister for Health, the member for Johnston, when he suggested Dr Ashbridge withheld information from him.

I do not believe it; it is not logical; it does not line up. The minister must have known what his department was doing. Clearly, the minister was aware of the oversight role because he has said on several occasions in this House that he thought it was a silly role he had to perform. So for him to say it is a silly role the Northern Territory has to perform, and then suggest, by argument and inference, that he had no idea this was occurring, does not make sense. He either knew about it, or he did not. We know he knew about it because he objected to it. If he objected to it he must have known his department was overseeing the day-to-day running of this arrangement.

If his department was overseeing the day-to-day running of this arrangement, then he is the responsible minister and he was duty bound to ensure the proper and effective management of this regulatory responsibility was executed. It was not; it was a tick-and-flick arrangement and, as a consequence of that, we saw an avoidable, maritime environmental disaster occur. That means the buck still stops with the Northern Territory minister, whether or not the delegation was Commonwealth driven. He knew and he chose not to ask.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.