

Madam Speaker Aagaard took the Chair at 10 am.

VISITORS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of students from Pigeon Hole Primary School accompanied by Mr Jimmy Hodgens. On behalf of honourable members, I extend to you a very warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I also advise of the presence in the gallery of Mrs Vicki O'Halloran, the CEO of Somerville Community Services, together with her management team. On behalf of honourable members, I extend to you a very warm welcome.

Members: Hear, hear!

PETITION

Ban Sale of Fireworks in the Northern Territory

Mr GILES (Braitling)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I present a petition not conforming with standing orders from 480 petitioners relating to a ban on the sale of fireworks in the Northern Territory. I move that the petition be read.

Motion agreed to; petition read.

We, the undersigned, call on the Northern Territory government to ban the sale of fireworks and their use by the general public.

People of the Northern Territory want to continue to enjoy their celebratory fireworks with controlled public displays only.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Order!
Honourable members! Order!

MOTION

Commonwealth Government – GP Super Clinic

Mr HENDERSON (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker. I move - That the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly:

1. calls on the Commonwealth government to deliver their commitment to provide a GP super clinic for the northern suburbs of Darwin;
2. calls on the Coalition and CLP to drop their opposition to a GP super clinic for the northern suburbs of Darwin; and

3. that this motion be forwarded on to the Commonwealth Health minister, shadow Health minister, and all Northern Territory federal members of parliament.

This is a very important motion because providing access to GPs is vitally important to Territorians. I acknowledge at the beginning of this debate that the current federal government has gone a long way to support the Territory in improving health infrastructure in the Territory, and the workforce in the Northern Territory, and I provide a few examples.

We now have the radiotherapy oncology unit in Darwin. I get such amazing support for that facility. It should never have been a political football. It is a vital piece of infrastructure for our community. There is no doubt at all because the facts speak for themselves that the current federal Labor government in Canberra provided most of the funding and worked with the Territory government to get that facility up and running. We also have the commitment from the federal government to support the funding of the new hospital in Palmerston. We have seen significant financial investment by the federal government for new health clinics in our regional and remote communities, and significant upgrades at Tennant Creek and Gove hospitals.

The big issue concerning GP access in the Northern Territory will significantly improve because of the partnership between the Australian government, the Territory government, Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, and the Menzies School of Health Research. We now have a clinical training program in the Northern Territory with 23 people currently enrolled. I hope all those people will graduate as fully trained doctors in six years time. That has been a significant achievement by our government, with the federal government, to train our own health workforce. The intake next year will be around 40 GPs.

This is not coming from a position that the federal government is not supporting the Northern Territory in improving access to healthcare. The facts speak for themselves. The first fact is this was an election commitment by the federal government - and I believe in delivering election commitments. I provide reports to this House every six months on the meeting of our election commitments, and I expect the Australian government to honour its election commitments to the Northern Territory - particularly this one because it is so important.

We can also see the success of the Palmerston GP Super Clinic, which is significantly improving access to healthcare for people in the Palmerston region, one of the fastest growing

regions of this nation. The fact the super clinic in Palmerston is also part of the training program for the new school at Charles Darwin University is now becoming, very quickly, an important part of our health and training infrastructure, as well as providing access to health services.

We know the CLP and the Liberal Party in Canberra have opposed super clinics per se. That has been their position; they have campaigned against super clinics. They campaigned against the Palmerston Super Clinic, and the current member for Solomon is campaigning against the super clinic in Darwin.

This should be beyond politics because, in the northern suburbs of Darwin, we have six registered GPs. The average for the nation's population is 83 GPs per 100 000 people. We have 56 GPs per 100 000 people. I said at the media conference yesterday we should be at the top of the queue for a GP super clinic not off the queue altogether because the need is here in lack of access to GPs, particularly in the northern suburbs - and also acknowledging our colleagues in the bush and remote communities do it even tougher trying to access a GP, let alone a GP that bulkbills.

We all know, with constituents who are moving to the Northern Territory, trying to get on a GP list to have a standing family GP is very difficult. Most of the GPs have closed lists, with waiting lists to take people. For people coming to the Northern Territory, trying to access a GP on the weekends, after hours, or during the week is very difficult. Many of those people end up at Royal Darwin Hospital in the emergency department putting further pressure on what is already the busiest hospital in Australia. Darwin families need this facility. The statistic of GPs per capita shows in Darwin we really are underdone in access to GPs.

The Australian Medical Association opposed the super clinic in Palmerston and I believe the opposition is listening to the AMA and its position on this. My colleague, the Health minister, who will also speak in this debate, says the AMA has changed its position on the super clinic in Palmerston. Originally it was opposed to it and accused us of pork barrelling Palmerston. That was unfair of the AMA. For the AMA to talk against more and better access for Territorians to GP services strikes me as a little bizarre, but apparently it has changed its tune and I will let my colleague, the Health Minister, speak about that.

I call on the Leader of the Opposition, and the opposition, to get behind this. This is a very simple request: this parliament calls on the federal government to honour its commitment. This is nothing more or nothing less than about access to GPs in the northern suburbs of Darwin.

I have explained we are significantly underdone in our ability to access GPs, and this is a fairly simple motion to support. The current position of the CLP is to oppose the super clinic but I am giving it an opportunity today to join with us and support it.

The opposition, and the Leader of the Opposition, have also promised to scale back Royal Darwin Hospital to a secondary hospital. I find that an extraordinary commitment by the Leader of the Opposition - to want to wind back services provided by Royal Darwin Hospital. He said:

To have the major hospital, Royal Darwin Hospital, stuck up on the, so far away from the centre of population growth ... I don't believe the right spot is Casuarina. That should be a secondary hospital.

Perhaps there is an opportunity for the Leader of the Opposition to clarify to the people of the northern suburbs what services he would cut from Royal Darwin Hospital and where those services would be relocated to, at what cost, and how he would fund that if he was in government. There is no doubt we need a hospital at Palmerston and, with the federal government, we will build a hospital at Palmerston. We will not stick it on a plan for 2020 or 2030, which was the previous commitment. We are determined to start construction on that hospital from next year and ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex!

Mr HENDERSON: ... we are doing much work planning for that and construction of the Palmerston hospital will start next year. It will not be on a plan for 2020 ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr HENDERSON: This is a pretty simple; I am not going to speak for too long on this. There was an election commitment of \$5m to deliver a super clinic. In the scheme of the Commonwealth budget that is a drop in the ocean; it would not even miss that money. \$5m is not a large amount of money. I accept there were no tenderers for the tender from the Commonwealth. I have spoken with my colleague the Health Minister and we are aware of a number of people and groups in Darwin who looked at putting in for that tender. They looked at how the tender was structured, the requirements of the tender and determined, in the final instance, not to put in a bid. I have asked the Health Minister to go back to those groups and consortia and debrief them as to why they did not

put in a tender. There were obviously some issues in the way the tender was constructed they felt they could not make it work, and we need to understand that.

I have instructed the Health Minister to unpack those issues and look at putting a partnership process together between the private doctors who may want to participate in this, our health service, and the training school at Charles Darwin University. I am sure we can creatively package a proposal to go to the Commonwealth that will deliver a super clinic in Darwin even though the tender process did not result in any particular tenderer.

Madam Speaker, that is the plan we have. We will go back to them with a proposal. That proposal will be enhanced if it is the will of this parliament to support this motion and say: 'Come on Australian government, meet your commitment to the Northern Territory and stump up the \$5m'. It is not that we are looking to pork barrel Darwin as the AMA and the opposition might say; the facts speak for themselves. There are 56 GPs currently per 100 000 people, the average across the rest of Australia is 83 GPs per 100 000. We are only asking for the same level of access to GP services all other Australians take for granted. It is a pretty simple motion and I urge the House to support it.

Mr MILLS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I often hear from the other side accusations that we are just playing politics with this and have this mock outrage, when the reality is the object of this exercise in relation to spending money in health is to improve access to basic healthcare in the area of increasing the number of bulkbilling options for Territorians. The Chief Minister, though not speaking for long, did not speak from the experience gained from being a resident of Palmerston. Having lived in Palmerston since 1990, we have seen that community grow and the requirements of the growing population increase around health.

Long-term Palmerston residents - I go down this path to illustrate what this is about. There lodges within a community a certain memory of how these matters have been dealt with. There is an expectation that if, after hours, a child suffers from some type of injury or has a very high temperature, you want to find help readily without any confusion. In the early days there was a clinic. I recall raising kids in Palmerston with other young families, we knew where to go without having to consider whether it is this or what is it now. We knew exactly where the building was, the hours, and it was a reliable service which was simple to access. The first thing you need is clarity and a consistent message; you do not need

confusion or anxiety at that time. This is where we started from.

We moved into the next stage where Palmerston's population grew and, with that rapid population growth, the requirements increased so we needed to increase health options and access for those families. There was the expectation, with the boom in the population growth in Palmerston, that there should be enhanced health service delivery. So, they changed it from the original community clinic model, listening to the community, that it wanted, ultimately, a hospital. This is way back in 1998, 1999. The population has expanded to such a degree we, ultimately, are going to become a much larger centre and we should have a hospital, given the military has increased its presence.

The decision was made by a Country Liberal government to invest in the Farrar after-hours clinic, which was to grow into something to service the growing population - the recognition that the population centre of gravity, as it were, had moved into that region so there needed to be a planning response. In listening to the community, it was told there would be a place to go 24 hours a day. That service was put in place. I came into parliament in a by-election in 1999, and I remember that being discussed. It was a genuine response to the expectations of that growing population.

Then, in 2001, there was a change of government and, most extraordinarily, the Labor government conducted a review of that operation in Palmerston. I have never seen it conduct a review so swiftly. Madam Speaker, you would remember, as you were the Health minister at the time. It was the swiftest of all reviews which resulted in the reduction of the 24-hour clinic to an after-hours clinic. There was quite a modest subsidy to allow that to operate and meet the expectations of the people of Palmerston, but it was then reduced with an explanation that it would withdraw the service provided to Palmerston - and they reduced it. That was a decision of the Labor government in the Northern Territory; to reduce it.

Then, there was some confusion over what time it closed; if we had an emergency where did we go? That level of confusion is the last thing you need. When it was reduced by this Labor government after coming to power in 2001, the community was understandably distressed. What you need is clarity in times of trouble with a young family, or if there is an accident. There were petitions to members who had been in parliament some time. Thousands of petitioners signatures were presented to this Labor government because there was a fear it was going to go even further and reduce this service, hoping it would listen to people. These thousands of petitioners were not

just Palmerston residents; they were rural residents as well. These petitions were presented again and again. For those of you who were not here, at the last stage there were only four members of the opposition and two Independents, and we kept that going; the community expected it. At the Palmerston markets they were calling out for it, it was not playing politics with health, it was responding to the call of families in Palmerston in this case.

The next stage was - as we were heading towards a federal election - the focus groups. I assume it was the assessment of the political opportunities. So, let us get rid of a federal Coalition and replace it with a Labor federal government. They recognised there was an expectation within the Palmerston community that could be met by providing them with all its requirements. This Labor government was required to shut down the after-hours clinic - close it right down, not even after-hours; it was very reduced hours. In 1999, it went from 24-hours to reduced hours and then it became a very small operation which caused great confusion. I still believe the Labor government further reduced the Farrar after-hours clinic to almost nothing, compared to what it was originally, so it could launch the notion of this thing to fix all our problems, and that was - wait for it, you can almost hear the music - people of Palmerston, you will receive a super clinic! The people of Palmerston said: 'My goodness, that sounds great because health is a great concern', not recognising, because it is such a primary and fundamental requirement - they had been duded by this Labor government that had reduced the services, confused people, increased the need for some response, and the idea of a super clinic was something to satisfy that need and, people of Palmerston, you are called upon to support this super clinic.

Having understood how Labor operates, that it comes up with some means to attract support, the notion of a super clinic created an impression - the idea of a super clinic as a term - so much work had gone into calling this a super clinic that it was a tremendous platform for Kevin Rudd to go around the countryside saying: 'I hear your needs. Do not worry; we are going to answer those needs with a super clinic'. Everyone felt they were going to have their problems solved by a super clinic.

When the super clinic arrived - I should not get ahead of myself because in the lead-up to the appearance of the super clinic there were many teasers as to what it was going to be, how good it was going to be, and how easy it was going to be for families - they even invested in television advertisements and glossy brochures. 'Oh my goodness, this is going to be fantastic. We have

lived in Palmerston all these years, I know we have been duded by the Labor government but it has only done that - give it some forgiveness - because this thing called a super clinic is coming'. It was sold very well in the lead-up to the federal election where Kevin Rudd was elected.

I wonder who is playing politics with health. When the super clinic appeared on the scene it had 'super clinic' written across the top - it has the title, the concept, the idea, the form; however, the substance is lacking. People are still confused as to how this thing operates. 'What time do I go there? What services does it provide?' There are still brochures that create the impression it is something extraordinary when, in fact, the model was to deliver something very basic - a place for families to go when they needed help. I honestly believe a deal has been done in order to gain political support. The transaction, therefore, should have required that you do not oversell to get your political support; ensure at least you deliver, because it has not met the expectations. That is a genuine concern.

Let us turn to the model itself. I believe a focus group came up with the title 'super clinic'. I find it embarrassing to see this called a 'super clinic' because it is an oversell - it has almost become an embarrassment because it is trading in the space where people just want a place to go. However, we have the sign up; we have this thing called the 'super clinic'. But, is it a super clinic? The super clinic should be something about which people can say: 'This is a fantastic place; all my needs are met and it has more than I expected'. We have the 'I expected more'; it is not what we expected. We have had the brochures and, now, the model itself. It is typical that a Labor government gets fixed on things. It is meant to do something. Let us focus on what it is meant to do; the service it is meant to provide. That is the object of the exercise. The object is not the production of an idea with a clever title. This thing called a 'super clinic' is not the object of the exercise. How I know Labor is caught up with this is it talks incessantly about how much money it has spent on this problem as though that, itself, is the solution. We know it is not. 'Do not worry; we have all these extra people coming'. That is fine, but have you addressed the problem in a measurable way against the outcome?

With this motion put forward by the Chief Minister, I am sure the member for Daly would be squirming because even he could see this is politics. He would say: 'You are playing politics, do not play politics'. I have heard this so many times from the impressive member for Daly. Even the member for Daly could see this - spotting the obvious ...

A member: Tongue in cheek.

Mr MILLS: Yes, with tongue in cheek. Do not worry, colleagues, even he could see this is a tactic to embarrass the opposition. That is a shameful thing because there is an expectation we have improved health services - whether it is in Palmerston, in the northern suburbs, indeed, in the Northern Territory. We have been asked to support a slogan, a concept, a model, that has not performed to its expectations. Shameful! The expectation of a family to have a place to go that will see an improvement in health service and support is the object of the exercise. Where are the measurables here? Where is the evidence we are supporting something of greater substance than a political tactic? This is more coming out from that little group upstairs - the hollow men who have come up with a clever tactic.

The fact this model has some problems is not news to anyone. The evidence it has some problems can be seen in Palmerston and also in the northern suburbs. I have outlined the oversell so you can gain political support. However, in that transaction you were to provide better services. We have not seen that in Palmerston. From 1998, relative to the population service provision in Palmerston, we were in a better position in 1999 than we are now.

The existing Farrar after-hours clinic running in Palmerston is under threat because of the super clinic, because it places a model in competition with the services being provided within the community. To further demonstrate that the Chief Minister acknowledged - and he should have amplified this if he was serious - the government could not attract tenderers, could not attract support, the market could not support it; the GPs could not support a model like that, therefore, no tenderers. Could that be a possible reason for Roxon to have made this decision? Perhaps there needs to be a re-think: do not get too caught up with the model, but recognise the objective of the enterprise is to deliver better health care.

We have been asked to support a GP super clinic as a model. I, frankly, would say, as a resident of Palmerston and having seen the operations of this Labor government, it is a crass act that you are once again trading to play a political tactic when we are talking about things that really matter to families - ensuring they can access a doctor. If the Chief Minister was serious, would he go the next step and put an advertisement in the paper and run petitions condemning Gillard, Roxon and Swan for abandoning the Northern Territory - full page ads across the country condemning them? No, he would not because at the beginning he softened his attack, because his real attack is clearly some sneaky little tactic to embarrass the opposition.

He started by saying: let us acknowledge the great things the comrades in Canberra have done for the Northern Territory. We are not going to offend them; we are going to sweeten them up by making pleasant comments about the good things they have done, about the oncology unit which started under the Coalition ...

Members interjecting.

Mr MILLS: Ho, ho, ho, check your facts, mate. You must have been in some indoctrination union, you poor bugger ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Order!

Mr MILLS: Mr former Health minister, you would have to recall the public forum of people who were suffering cancer in the clear knowledge the former Chief Minister, Clare Martin, had made a very explicit promise about the delivery of an oncology unit, election after election, and there was a large gathering of people in the northern suburbs who had their story to tell. Those stories needed to be heard in the face of a promise that had not been fulfilled. Spin it any way you like; however, you do not say things like that ...

Dr Burns: What about the member for Fong Lim and his assurance?

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Order! Leader of Government Business, order!

Mr MILLS: Spin it any way you like but the facts are ...

Dr Burns: I remember what happened.

Mr Conlan: He does not like it.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex! Order! Order!

Mr MILLS: The families that suffered cancer and turned up to that forum - to your credit you attended, but you had no option, former Health minister, but to be there. That was what was expected of a Labor government, not to just have the former Chief Minister make a promise and let it drag on election after election, year after year, and to come up with some lame excuse that the promise you made was someone else's fault. That is just not on. You had already established it and you had raised that expectation once again ...

Members interjecting.

Dr Burns: No, no, no. I delivered that promise, mate.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Conlan: Come on, Terry, you have him.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex!

Mr MILLS: Once again we see the callous form of this Labor government in reducing the 24-hour clinic to after-hours, and then reduced completely so it could position things; so it could launch a super clinic and play games with the oncology announcement year after year after year, trading on it for political support but not delivering. That is something to its eternal shame and it took us to get those people to tell their story and, ultimately, you will explain yourself to the families of the Northern Territory ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr ELFERINK: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I ask that you remind honourable members of Standing Order 51, particularly in relation to the Leader of Government Business.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you very much, member for Port Darwin. In fact, a number of members, particularly the member for Greatorex, are yelling across the Chamber. It is completely unacceptable. I ask members to contain themselves. Leader of the Opposition, you have the call.

Mr MILLS: Madam Speaker, I will go to the third item of evidence to demonstrate this is a government more caught up with tactics, tricks and smart actions to try to advance its political agenda than being honest about it.

Yes, I made a comment on radio 104.9. You have your hollow men listening to those comments and you think, 'Let us put this into a flyer and genuinely ask people what they think', without putting it into context. 'No, do not worry about the context; we are trying to make a tricky little political point here'. There is dishonesty in the way the Chief Minister characterises this by saying: 'The Leader of the Opposition has a plan to scale back Royal Darwin Hospital'. The member for Daly, who is offended by politicking around things like this, would be offended when you say he never said such a thing. I take the Chief Minister at his word; he has asked me to explain. I thought the member for Johnston would also be enriched by the explanation. The comment was in the context of: 'Let us think about this'. The population is expanding. You talk about building a city called Weddell. We need to rethink where the centre of gravity is, where we are regarding population, and where we need to put our greatest effort in building a major hospital.

Under no circumstances is this to be implied - as you would so readily do with your hollow men upstairs who run a tricky campaign at me - to reduce Royal Darwin Hospital. It is to strengthen Royal Darwin Hospital, to allow it to fulfil its function to ensure the service of health requirements needs to be placed in the long term. We have a Greater Darwin plan. You guys have copied that, run along behind the opposition, for goodness sake - how shameful for you! We have described what should be in the long term. It is evidence of strategic, long-term thinking. These guys do not get it, skipping around at the margins trying to get someone to pay attention to them. I believe it is over, guys. People realise who we have as a government, and there are signs of significant desperation, particularly when you start trading in the area of health to score political points - not on!

Recognising what this is about, I, and members of the opposition, see - there would be members over there if they got themselves out of their political mode and recognised we are dealing with health - that the model itself is not the issue; it is the delivery of improved health services into the Northern Territory. I accept the Chief Minister is very righteous when it comes to the position of: 'We made an election promise, we must deliver it'. Agreed. Therefore, if the objective is to improve health delivery, to the northern suburbs in this case, and that \$5m is being contributed to achieving that, albeit through a super clinic, then we could agree on this: that the \$5m be retained to improve access to GPs. That is really the object of the exercise, not the super clinic; not the model.

You guys do not get it. It is not the model; it is what the model does. It is to improve services to families. Let us agree on this: deliver the \$5m committed into improved services in the Northern Territory. We could send a clear message to the Territory community that we are serious and they have greater importance than our political tactics.

For that reason, Madam Speaker, I move that this motion be amended, as it should be. In relation to the amendment, omit all words after the word 'That' and insert the following:

The Northern Territory Legislative Assembly:

1. calls on the Commonwealth government to deliver on their funding commitment for primary healthcare services in Darwin's northern suburbs;

We could all agree with that:

2. calls on the Commonwealth government to support an increase in the capacity of

health services in the Northern Territory including additional bulkbilling services;

3. calls on the Northern Territory government to work with the Commonwealth on delivering a commitment for increased bulkbilling services using existing private sector providers as cornerstone partners; and
4. that this motion be forwarded on to the Commonwealth Health minister, shadow Health minister and all Northern Territory federal members of parliament.

This Labor government, with its disturbing record in responding to health, in this case – which is quite disturbing because you have traded in this space for political advantage and you have not completed the transaction, you have not provided adequately - raised expectations and under delivered. You are caught up on a model because it has the Labor brand on it. It is not the Labor brand, it is not the model; it is about doing what you should to ensure better service delivery to the families of Palmerston. That is why the motion we present by way of an amendment should be supported, if you are serious.

I call on honourable members to acknowledge the real story here is the families of Palmerston, the families in the northern suburbs, and that we have the funding invested in the Northern Territory to provide better support for families. Let us not get caught up on the super clinic model, because that is a classic oversell and under deliver, and is not the object of the exercise.

We can see exactly what this motion is about and can expect a great deal more of this leading up to the next election, and all types of tactics from those hollow men upstairs - but this is not the issue. The issue is ensuring the election commitment, the purpose of which was to improve and respond to the needs of families and their access to GPs. If you are serious, rather than taking the defensive mode and defending your position, recognise what this is about and support this motion as it should be supported.

Mr VATSKALIS (Health): Madam Speaker, I support the Chief Minister's motion. The Leader of the Opposition is very articulate; he speaks well and is believable. People who listen to him say: 'Fair enough, what he says makes sense'. However, if you look at the facts you find the Leader of the Opposition will not let the truth ruin a good story, because that is what he is trying to tell, a good story.

I will start with some of the statements he made about the Farrar clinic. Let us find out what was real about the Farrar clinic. It was a pilot

project of the CLP prior to the election, and built into that project was a review to be undertaken over a certain period of time. The Farrar clinic was reviewed and the hours were cut because we found after 10 pm it would see only two people at a cost of approximately \$4000 per person, and there were significant complaints by other GPs in the Palmerston area.

Madam Speaker, there was no 24-hour clinic in Darwin, in Palmerston, or in the Territory; and you know that because you were the minister at the time. The Farrar clinic was a furphy by the CLP. It was a political ploy by the CLP to pull the wool over the eyes of the people of Palmerston that they were provided with a 24-hour clinic.

Let us talk about other things. What is a super clinic really? The member for Blain must be the only person in Palmerston, and Darwin, who thinks the super clinic is not a super clinic and is not providing a very good service to the people of Palmerston. He should ask the 18 000 people who have attended the super clinic since its opening; he had better talk to the people in the emergency department. We have seen a 10% growth every year, but since the super clinic opened we have only seen a 30% growth in emergency department presentations at the Royal Darwin Hospital. The super clinic must have done something really good.

What is a super clinic? Is it a clinic with one GP and one nurse, or something more? The super clinic in Palmerston, the one he says is not a super clinic, provides an integrated care and case management service with a team of general practitioners, women's health nursing services, private part-time paediatric occupational therapy, physiotherapy, dietetics, Indigenous closing the gap clinics, private pathology collection centre, mental health services, private psychiatrist, psychologist, and respiratory physician services. What other clinic in Darwin offers these services? There is only one private clinic in Nightcliff, and I would call that a super clinic as well.

We are also talking about the radiation and oncology unit. Yes, it was promised by our government and we went to tender in 2005. An interstate provider wanted to run it; however, the Northern Territory government then sought Commonwealth involvement because it was very expensive. The Territory minister wrote to Abbott, the then minister for Health, in February 2006 seeking commitment for capital and recurrent funds. Abbott came in, in 2007, with \$13m; it went to tender twice, and twice the tender failed. The second time it was kept because it happened just before the federal election, and they did not want people to know they were not going to fund it. The oncology centre cost \$19.5m, and that money

was provided not by the federal Liberal government, but by the federal Labor government.

Let us talk about the facts and say to people listening that what the Leader of the Opposition has been talking about is a twist in the real story, making things fit his ideological position on super clinics and the oncology unit. The oncology unit was opened by Kevin Rudd. I recall the Leader of the Opposition was not present, despite the fact he was invited.

I am supporting the Chief Minister because it is our right, as Australian citizens, to have equal access to health services like any other person in any other capital city. As the Chief Minister mentioned, we have 56.5 GPs per 100 000 people in Darwin, compared to about 92 GPs per 100 000 people in Sydney or other major cities. Of course, that creates problems. Have you ever had a sick child and tried to access a GP in the middle of a flu epidemic? It can be very difficult. You have to book two or three days in advance and wait to present yourself to the GP for diagnosis and treatment. That is unfair. As Australian citizens, we pay the same taxes as everyone else and fulfil our obligations as Australian citizens the same as everyone else; we should have the same rights as any other Australian citizen.

That is the reason, leading up to the Commonwealth election in 2010, the then member for Solomon, Damian Hale, secured \$5m from the Commonwealth as an election commitment for a northern suburbs super clinic to be built. He pursued this initiative as he had witnessed firsthand how successful the Palmerston Super Clinic was. I remember talking with Damian at the time and providing figures on how many people had attended the super clinic in Palmerston. He was very impressed. He passed this information to the federal government, which is how he secured the \$5m. Who would knock back such an offer? The people of the northern suburbs welcomed this because the reality is if you cannot go to a GP, you will sit in the emergency department for hours. If you have the flu, you are not going to be up the ladder; people with more serious issues such as a heart attack, broken bones, or injuries will be seen before you, and you have to wait. Of course, that is something the super clinic will address.

A super clinic has always been opposed by the Liberal Party, Mr Abbott, and the CLP. Even now, we can see what the Leader of the Opposition proposes in his motion. He wants, somehow, subsidised private GPs, not support for the people who do not have the money to pay the GP and want bulkbilling. No, he wants subsidies to private GPs. At the super clinic in Palmerston, if you have a child under 16-years-old you do not pay; you are bulkbilled. If you are on a pension you do

not pay; you are bulkbilled. Guess what? You can be 15-years-old, go to a private GP, and you will receive a bill you, or your parents, have to pay.

I am not surprised at this resistance to a super clinic. The Liberal Party - and certainly Mr Abbott himself - has never been supportive of universal healthcare. It was him, as a minister for Health, who cut \$1bn per year and restricted the entry of students in medical schools, which has resulted in a shortage of medical practitioners all around Australia. One of the reasons we cannot get GPs in the Northern Territory is there are not enough to go around, and the few who are around prefer to stay in the southern states. What is more disappointing is a commitment for \$5m for the northern suburbs and the current member for Solomon, Natasha Griggs, remains quiet. She does not support it. She does not even speak to the minister for Health. At the end, she can always say: 'I fought for it; I won it for you. I am the current member; you have to vote for me'. No, she did not. Ideology, again, comes first because she does not believe people should have universal access to healthcare.

It is disappointing news to families in the northern suburbs who find it hard to get an appointment with a GP. It was disappointing to learn no application had been received in the Commonwealth's open, competitive tender process. I have not hidden my disappointment. A flurry of text messages was exchanged with the minister, a letter to the minister and, similarly, letters to the GPs and the AMA, encouraging them to meet with us to discuss different models.

We have a proven track record of making things work in the Territory. It was through our effective negotiations with minister Roxon that the Northern Territory government created the partnership with Royal Adelaide Hospital to deliver top-quality, world-class radiation oncology services at the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre. People come to the cancer care centre and tell me it is not only the most modern but it is a fact that they will be seen on Monday and start receiving treatment by Thursday. On top of that, the Barbara James Centre provides free accommodation for individuals and families. The Labor government delivered the oncology centre because the previous Liberal government did not want to, or could not deliver it.

We negotiated with Charles Darwin University and Flinders University to operate the Palmerston Super Clinic. It started as a day super clinic and we are currently finalising negotiations to operate as a 24-hour super clinic. The model we put in place is unique. It not only provides service to the people of Darwin, it provides a training ground for the doctors coming out of medical school. We

have the drive and vision to create appropriate health services for all Territorians, and I look forward to discussing this issue further with minister Roxon.

Initially, the AMA was against the idea and Natasha Griggs issued a media release: 'Even the AMA thinks Hale's GP super clinic promise is a silly idea'. However, I was pleasantly surprised when, on 13 October 2011, Dr Beaumont said:

We fully support the Palmerston Super Clinic. The model that has evolved there is a teaching model. It forms a very important part of current teaching for James Cook University and Flinders University.

Well, the AMA does not think it is a silly idea any longer.

There are plenty of competition opportunities here and a super clinic in the northern suburbs is not going to impinge on the income of GPs. After all, when you have 58 GPs per 100 000 population compared to 95 per 100 000 in Sydney, there is plenty of room for competition. Our bulkbilling rates are the lowest in the country. In Solomon, 59% of GP services are bulkbilled compared to 79% of the national average. It is even more interesting when you compare our bulkbilling rates to those of 97% and more in Sydney metropolitan electorates such as Blacktown, Fowler and Chifley. There is no substance that the super clinic will somehow interfere with the operations of individuals and private GPs.

I am disappointed the Commonwealth has listened to Natasha Griggs, who is opposed to a super clinic. The member for Solomon obviously is not in touch with Darwin families who want more affordable and accessible GP services. We have worked tirelessly to bring numerous health projects to fruition which languished for many years under Howard and Abbott. We have attracted millions and millions of dollars to our Northern Territory health system. I would like to ask the CLP member for Solomon, Natasha Griggs: 'What have you done for the health of Territorians? What have you done to improve services for Territorians?' It does not seem like she has done much. We know the CLP thinks there is something wrong with the Palmerston Super Clinic. She does not even believe in the super clinic. I just mentioned how many services are provided which makes it a super clinic.

The member for Greatorex has form about health services - he really does not like it. He said on 13 October that the Palmerston Super Clinic only exists because of a deal done between Flinders University and Charles Darwin University to provide practical training for medical students.

No, the super clinic is to provide services to the people of Palmerston and, at the same time, is a training ground for our doctors who are trained at our medical school at CDU. If you grow your own they stay here, as happened with midwives, engineers, pharmacists and nurses.

The super clinic has treated 18 000 people since its opening - 18 000 Palmerston residents. To see the members opposite from Palmerston opposing the super clinic is really sad. I hope the people in Palmerston realise their local representatives do not want them to have services like people in Sydney, Perth or Adelaide.

What is more disappointing when you look around the nation is you find there are a number of Liberal held seats which have received super clinics. Peter Dutton, the federal opposition spokesman for Health has a super clinic in his electorate of Dickson. I do not believe he came out against it; I did not hear him opposing it. Bob Baldwin, the shadow spokesman for Regional Development, Liberal member for Paterson in New South Wales, has a super clinic despite the fact bulkbilling rates there are 77%. Michael McCormack, the National Party member for Riverina, has a super clinic in Narrandera, and Dr Sharman Stone, the former opposition spokesman for Indigenous Affairs, the Status of Women, Early Childhood and Childcare, Liberal member for Murray, has a super clinic at Cobram in Victoria. Finally, in a place where the bulkbilling rates are 92% in Forde, the local member, Bert van Manen, was very pleased to receive a super clinic.

In Darwin, thanks to Natasha Griggs, we did not get one because Natasha Griggs could not stand up to her mates in Canberra and tell them the need of her constituents in Darwin was higher than the ideological position of the Liberal Party in Canberra.

We have made a massive investment in health in the past four years, more than any previous government. When we came to power - you remember it well, Madam Speaker, you were the minister for Health - the total budget for health was \$441m. It is now \$1.21bn. We not only put money into health, we supported health services in the Northern Territory. We delivered \$28m for the Northern Territory Clinical School, the first ever in the Territory, in partnership with Flinders University, Charles Darwin University and the Australian government. Now you can start preschool in the Territory and finish as a doctor without ever leaving the Territory. We delivered the \$10m Palmerston Super Clinic. We delivered the \$90m Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre at the Royal Darwin Hospital. It does not matter what those opposite say; we delivered it. Kevin Rudd delivered it; Kevin Rudd opened it. I was there;

the Leader of the Opposition did not even bother to turn up.

There was a \$4m upgrade to the Royal Darwin Hospital emergency department triage and fast-track unit; the 2008 elective surgery blitz - \$5.3m; upgrade of elective surgery capacity in 2009 with \$2.1m for the Stage 2 upgrade of theatres at Royal Darwin Hospital; and, as a gift to the member for Greatorex who opposes the health system - he does not like it very much, he always criticises it, particularly the cancer clinic, the super clinic - his town, thanks to this Labor government, receives \$24.7m for the emergency department and X-ray department with 35 treatment bays, fast-track unit, and isolation beds. Work has already started; the footings are in place and the walls are going up. I bet the people in Alice Springs know - and I will ensure they know - who put these structures in place.

In Darwin, we have provided a 50-unit patient accommodation medi-hotel and a 12-unit Indigenous mother's accommodation.

Primary healthcare - where do I begin? We are delivering new health centres in Milikapiti, Daly River, Yuendumu, Nguiu, Minjilang, Kalkarindji, Maningrida, and Wadeye. The Australian government has announced a further \$50m for seven remote health centres at Robinson River, Ngukurr, Canteen Creek, Numbulwar, Elliott, Galiwinku, Ntaria, and upgrades to Titjikala, Papunya, Maningrida, and Docker River. The CLP refused to put any money into renal dialysis outside Darwin and Alice Springs. This government put in \$40m, and we see now an increase in the lifespan by seven years for people with renal disease. People undergoing renal dialysis in the Northern Territory have exactly the same lifespan as any other Australian. Not only that, but we have the pilot electronic health record. Now if you go somewhere you can carry your electronic card with you and, in an instant, people in any clinic will know about your medical condition. It is so successful the federal government wants to copy it - other governments as well.

What can I say? The Leader of the Opposition likes to twist things around. He said: 'I did not say anything about Royal Darwin Hospital'. Well, let me quote what he said:

To have the major hospital, Royal Darwin Hospital stuck up on the, so far away from the centre of population growth. I think the real issue is that we need to have a serious consideration about where the major hospital will be built and I don't believe the right spot is Casuarina. That should be a secondary hospital.

RDH should be a secondary hospital. I do not say that. What he said on the radio is in black and white. He is now trying to say that he did not say it, he said something else, he was misquoted. No, the words are that it should be a secondary hospital. Coming to the election I remember he promised a hospital in Palmerston in 15 years. The only commitment he made was the gate - the money allocated was enough to build a gate. However, we committed \$40m, plus \$70m from the Commonwealth government, to build a 60-inpatient bed hospital in Palmerston, with day surgery capacity, specialist services, and facilities for accident and emergency. Planning is progressing very well with the Department of Health leading the clinical service planning process, and the Department of Construction and Infrastructure leading the design and construction process.

We are going ahead with the expansion of the Gove District Hospital emergency department worth \$40m, and \$3.7m for similar works at Tennant Creek Hospital. A further \$13.5m has been committed to build culturally appropriate short-stay patient accommodation at Katherine District Hospital - 24 beds, and Gove District Hospital with 23 beds. This is in addition to a \$13m investment for renal patient accommodation in Central Australia.

Madam Speaker, a commitment is a commitment. A commitment was made, thanks to Damian Hale, to build a super clinic in the northern suburbs. Thanks to Natasha Griggs, unfortunately the federal government has not yet fulfilled this commitment. I say 'yet' because I am on the record saying I will fight that; I will talk to Nicola Roxon and have some interesting discussions with the federal minister. I like her very much, however, when it comes to supporting my constituents, they come first and Canberra comes second. My commitment is to work with local GPs, CDU, and the Commonwealth to ensure the commitment Damian Hale made before the 2010 federal election is fulfilled by the federal government.

Mr CONLAN (Greatorex): Madam Speaker, it goes to show the amount of clout Damian Hale wielded in Canberra given his very short, unsuccessful stay. Absolutely zero if they have just reneged on his commitment - the one thing he could probably hang his hat on when he looks back at his failed parliamentary career. He was royally shafted by Julia Gillard and Nicola Roxon, so vale Damian Hale. Glory be to the new member for Solomon, Natasha Griggs, who has probably said the smartest thing in this debate. Mrs Griggs said in a media release that the \$5m should be redirected to other health services in Darwin and Palmerston that desperately need funding. Hear, hear! for Mrs Griggs, the member

for Solomon - probably one of the smartest, most productive statements in this whole debate.

It has been a pretty tough time for the Labor government in the Northern Territory. You have not had a good run, have you? You really are in the middle of a bad patch. It reminds me of the *Titanic* sinking and, as people were scurrying for their lives, the band was trying to boost morale and do its best. It played that wonderful hymn, *Nearer My God to Thee*. I am sure the member for Nelson would know it well. It might be appropriate if we played this underneath my speech today ...

Madam SPEAKER: No, no, no! Member for Greatorex, you do not have leave to do that, thank you.

Mr CONLAN: It is a prop, Madam Speaker.

Madam SPEAKER: It is not a prop. It is not allowed, as you know.

Mr CONLAN: Nevertheless, I can recite some of the words:

*Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be ...*

Mr WOOD: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I am unsure if it is appropriate to use a hymn used on many solemn occasions in a debate in parliament which will not reach the level of solemnity this hymn is used for in many ...

Mr CONLAN: Okay, you have made your point, member for Nelson. However, I disagree.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex, I am the Speaker not you, thank you very much. The member for Nelson has made an important point. This hymn is used at many funerals and is a serious hymn. However, you have parliamentary privilege and it is up to you whether you think it is appropriate, but ...

Mr Conlan: Thank you ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex, I am speaking. You can wait. There is absolutely no use of music in this Chamber. I am very concerned you think it was appropriate. I ask you to continue your comments through the Chair and to stick to the motion before us. Thank you.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Some might see this hymn as something else. I see it as appropriate for a very sinking government, a government right in the middle of a bad patch and that has probably failed to resurrect itself. It has not been a good year. It has been a

pretty rough couple of years. In fact, it has been a pretty poor term.

We have articulated in this House on a number of occasions that your best years are behind you. The first couple of years, 2001 to 2005, were pretty good. You had the A team; you had the big guns up there - the former member for Nhulunbuy, Mr Stirling, and Ms Martin, who led you from the doldrums, beat the mighty CLP, and took you to government for the very first time. Even Jack Ah Kit, Elliot McAdam, the big heavy hitters of the Labor Party, but those years are well behind you. This is evidence of where we are today in the Northern Territory and just how lacklustre the Northern Territory government is.

You talk about how important the GP super clinic is to the Northern Territory and Territorians. When you are sitting on a \$1.21bn health budget, why don't you provide the money yourself? Why don't you put up the \$5m yourself and build the GP super clinic, if it is that important to you? If it is that crucial, if it is that important, why don't you allocate \$5m out of your \$1.21bn health budget and build the thing yourself? You are more than happy to overrun at the end of the financial year for these ludicrous unforeseen expenses, so why not allocate some money and put it where it could be used practically - put \$5m of your own money into building a GP super clinic?

Health minister, you crow about \$1.21bn. You herald and trumpet the enormous amount of money we are pouring into health - every single year more money. You have put an extra \$200m of Territory money into health in the last five years for what outcome? Where are elective surgery waiting lists? They are some of the worst in the country ...

Mr Vatskalis: No, they are not!

Mr CONLAN: They are some of the worst in the country. You are presiding over some of the worst elective surgery waiting lists in the country, sometimes second only to Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, but more often than not the worst. We are dragging the chain. People are waiting months if not years for their elective surgery procedure. It is a disgrace. You have put \$200m extra of Northern Territory taxpayers' money into health, not Commonwealth money, over the last five years and are still presiding over the worst hospital elective waiting lists in the country. It is very clear. Look at The State of our Public Hospitals report, minister. You will see for yourself exactly where the Northern Territory waiting lists are.

It is important to also point out this \$1bn furlphy. You talk about spin - they are sitting over there pontificating on their soapbox saying:

'These guys spin something around the other way; they say it like this and it is really like this'. Let us clarify this \$1bn Tony Abbott apparently ripped out of health. What rubbish that is. What happened is that all the Labor governments got together at a COAG meeting and asked for \$3bn. Tony Abbot said: 'No, you will get \$2bn'. All of a sudden the \$1bn you did not get becomes the \$1bn Tony Abbott has ripped out of health. He could see if he gave the Labor state governments an extra \$1bn they would tip it down the gurgler like they always do - spend it on unnecessary things - which they always do. They would tip taxpayers' money down the gurgler like they always do. Tony Abbott said: 'No way, enough is enough. You are not getting the extra \$1bn'. All of a sudden that \$1bn has been portrayed as Tony Abbott, the Opposition Leader, not being trusted with health because he ripped out \$1bn from health across the country. Absolute rubbish!

This is not a good day for the Northern Territory government; this is not a very good patch at all. You are presiding over a broken promise. You hung your hat on the GP super clinic. Damian Hale hung his hat on it; it was the only legacy he had. And Nicola Roxon and the Prime Minister have run roughshod over the Northern Territory government and the GP super clinic.

The Chief Minister said Darwin families need this facility. Rubbish! What Darwin families need is better access to healthcare and to GPs. That is what they need. They do not need a \$5m GP super clinic. As the Leader of the Opposition so articulately and rightly pointed out, to put 'super clinic' before it somehow elevates and glorifies it. It is rubbish from the 'super' Kevin himself, the former Prime Minister. What Darwin families need is timely access to healthcare, not a GP super clinic. A \$5m super clinic is not the answer to the woes, concerns, frustrations and anxieties of Darwin families. What they need is better access to, and support for, GP services.

The Chief Minister says it will take the CLP 15 to 20 years to build a hospital at Palmerston. We promised it in 2008 regardless, and it was to be delivered and unrolled in stages. We promised it despite the then former failed Health minister saying it was 'a cruel farce'. I do not know whether you remember that; apparently the hospital at Palmerston was a cruel farce. Does that ring any bells in this Chamber? Does anyone remember, in 2008, the Palmerston hospital was a cruel farce? That was the former failed Health minister, the member for Johnston, who stated the CLP's policy to build a hospital in Palmerston, albeit in stages, was 'a cruel farce'. What do we have now? The great saviour of the health problems and health concerns of Top Enders in the northern suburbs, Palmerston, and the rural area, is going to be a new hospital in Palmerston.

Well, hello! We knew it a long time ago and promised it.

You say we are going to do it in 15 to 20 years. Hang on, does anyone remember how long it took to deliver the oncology unit? Goodness me, it was promised in 1999 by the then Opposition Leader and we see it finally rolled out in 2010. Hello! Hello! I remember the former failed Health minister saying: 'It will be next year - in 2005. We are on track; it will be at the end of this year'. Then in 2005: 'We are on track; it is going to be rolled out in 2006'. Then it was 2007, 2008-09, and finally we get it in 2010 – congratulations! Eleven years later you deliver the oncology unit - and what a great facility it is - with the help of the former member for Solomon, Mr David Tollner, current member for Fong Lim, who did an exemplary job of working with the former federal government in aiding the Northern Territory government to deliver it, albeit about five or six years past the promised date. Let us be careful what we say. 'We are going to promise a hospital in Palmerston in 15 or 20 years'. Hang on a second, 11 years to deliver the oncology unit.

Then we have the Alice Springs emergency department. How about that? The Alice Springs emergency department was promised - way back it was earmarked; there was money. I do not have the sheet of paper with me; however, I can correct those figures for *Hansard*. I will be careful with the figures I quote: \$6m was initially promised by the Northern Territory government. It was going to build an emergency department in Alice Springs. In 2006, the government allocated \$6m with a federal government top up, then the federal government came along in 2007 and Warren Snowdon tipped in \$13m, and all of a sudden the ED was going to cost \$19m. By this stage it is 2008, and it has blown up past \$20m in 2011. Again, we have a promise made in 2006 and follow-up promises suggesting this will be rolled out and delivered in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Guess what? Work is still going on at Alice Springs Hospital to deliver the Alice Springs emergency department. I am sure it will be a wonderful emergency department once it is completed and the Northern Territory government rids its grubby, little hands of it because everything it seems to touch turns to stone, and every promise it makes cannot be trusted. You cannot trust the government.

We can look at the Northern Territory aeromedical tender. Wow! Wasn't that a debacle? How long did that take to roll-out? How long did it take you to finalise the Northern Territory aeromedical tender? How long? Forever! Years! It ended up nearly two years overdue at the enormous frustration of not only those people who rely on the service, such as pastoralists, graziers, and those living in remote

communities, but also those people who spent enormous amounts of money and nearly a year of their life compiling the tender. Then you changed the goal posts halfway through. You have your so-called expert from whom the minister is taking advice like it is holy writ - 'Whatever he says, I will say and do. Okay, let us just do it'.

The Chief Minister talks about the Palmerston hospital and the CLP's promise to deliver a hospital in Palmerston but it will take 15 or 20 years to do it. It was to be done in stages. It was a promise we made flying in the face of the comments by the member for Johnston who said it was a cruel farce, let us establish that. They did not like it in the beginning, and have the nerve to criticise us saying it is going to take so long. I have just given three examples of where this government cannot be trusted. Hello! The decision by the federal government to withdraw funding for the Palmerston super clinic is another example of why you cannot trust the Labor Party of Australia and, indeed, the Northern Territory Labor Party - very clear examples - and that makes four. I mentioned elective surgery waiting lists and the extra \$200m of taxpayers' money into the health budget over the last five years, and we are still presiding over some of the worst elective surgery waiting lists in the country.

First, we need to invest more money. I turn to the amended motion which calls on the Commonwealth government to deliver on its funding commitment for primary healthcare services in Darwin's northern suburbs. That is a key component to the federal government health reform, the local Territory hospital networks, and the national health and hospitals agreement. If we look at the NHANA we will see the Commonwealth government - point 2 - taking full funding and policy responsibility for GP, primary healthcare and aged care. It is a key component to this so-called health reform Kevin Rudd promised in 2007. He went to the election in 2007 promising to fix the health system in the country. He said: 'I will do it by 2009'. Well, 2009 came and went and so did Kevin Rudd. A key component of the Commonwealth funding responsibility is taking full funding and policy responsibility for GP, primary healthcare and aged care services.

Here we have the Commonwealth government quitting on the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement - at least in part. Where will it end from here? Nevertheless, we see it is a key platform for the Commonwealth government. We say first we need to invest more in our local GPs. If you guys are hell-bent and think this is such a travesty, why are you putting a motion forward? Why not put up the money yourself? If you are not going to put up the \$5m out of the \$1.21bn health budget yourself and persist with this motion

and send it to Nicola Roxon and Julia Gillard, how about we look at areas where you could appropriately spend that money on health services across the Northern Territory? There are plenty of health services and areas of health across the Northern Territory requiring urgent attention. What about an elective surgery blitz? We have already seen you guys require Commonwealth funding for an elective surgery blitz. Temporary funding results in temporary results. Some of that money will see shortages in elective surgery waiting lists; however, once the money runs out the elective surgery waiting lists blow out all over again. Nevertheless, \$5m would go a long way towards an elective surgery blitz.

What about an oral health blitz? It is an area of health constantly overlooked or underestimated. Oral health is a very important component in the health of every Territorian. Gingivitis begets heart disease, and heart disease is one of the biggest killers of Indigenous people across the Northern Territory largely because many people are not cleaning their teeth. An oral health blitz would be a wonderful area to channel the \$5m.

Maternity services into Tennant Creek - \$5m would go a long way in investing into maternity services in Tennant Creek so people living in the Barkly could have their babies where they live and work - and have it for the rest of their life. I am sure the member for Barkly would be interested in that. We have seen the investment go a long way in Gove, where money fixed the problem. Money will get you what you want at the end of the day if you are prepared to pay it. The Northern Territory government spent much money attracting an obstetrician to Gove to support maternity services there and it would go a long way in Tennant Creek. Perhaps St John Ambulance, the Red Cross blood bank in Alice Springs, an increase in PATS, providing choice for Centralians with cancer, a 24/7 aeromedical service for Katherine - the money could go a long way to investing in those. The Flynn Drive Community Health Centre in Alice Springs is an absolute disgrace. It is cramped and tired and needs a massive injection of funds and \$5m would go a long way. Car parking at Alice Springs Hospital and nursing accommodation are always issues. There are plenty of areas where \$5m could be well spent.

This is a sad day for the Northern Territory. The government is in the middle of a rough patch and has been royally shafted - I am not very parliamentary and cannot think of another word - by the federal government and it shows how ineffective Damian Hale was ...

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

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I will make a few comments on the original motion and the amended motion. The core issue we are debating is whether there should be a super clinic in the northern suburbs. I go back to basics, which are: it was announced by Ms Roxon, the federal Health minister; the reason this money was being withdrawn was because no organisation expressed any interest in running the facility; and Senator Trish Crossin, one of our Northern Territory Senators, said there was a lack of interest from the private sector. The reality is not enough doctors are being attracted to the Northern Territory. It was said to me today that the idea of a super clinic here is a bit like building the bee hive and having no bees to supply it. We simply do not attract enough doctors - that is the crux of the matter. You can put all the buildings up you want, but if you cannot get doctors into the building, what is the point?

My suggestion is we use that money to attract doctors. I understand - and I have spoken to the AMA - there are plenty of clinics in the northern suburbs that can take more doctors. It is not the facility that is the problem; it is attracting more doctors. In the rural area we have a number of private clinics, including the Arafura Medical Centre which has a facility at Humpty Doo and one at Howard Springs. The Howard Springs one, which is an excellent medical facility, does not always have enough doctors. There is another medical centre at Humpty Doo and also one at Coolalinga. It is not so much the facilities are not there, it is we do not attract enough doctors.

I am unsure if we are heading in the right direction, especially with the government's motion. It says we still support a super clinic when the reality is, as Ms Roxon said, no organisation expressed an interest in running the facility, and Senator Crossin said there was a lack of interest from the private sector. You first have to get doctors here, and that is where the money should be used.

You have to ask, regardless of all the politics debated today, what the future of super clinics is. An article in *The Australian* on 13 October said only 17 of the promised 64 super clinics are operational. This is a quote from *The Australian* by Health minister, Nicola Roxon:

As a part of its regular audit program, the ANAO announced last year the GP Super Clinic program would be included in its potential audit program. Of course, if it does so, the government would consider any recommendations if and when they are made.

You would wonder if it would be more advisable to wait, considering no one is interested

in building the facility, before we start making promises that we want a GP super clinic in the northern suburbs, and see what the Australian National Audit Office has to say about the whole super clinic concept. Also, if you were to use facilities that already exist in the northern suburbs, could you still provide those facilities with the principles super clinics were meant to achieve. I will see if I can find the original document which deals with what super clinics were meant to achieve.

This is under the heading Program Objectives. I will read the highlighted parts. It will:

- provide well integrated multidisciplinary patient-centred care;
- be responsive to local community needs and priorities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and older Australians in residential aged care facilities and community based settings;
- provide accessible, culturally appropriate and affordable care to patients;
- provide support for preventive care;
- demonstrate efficient and effective use of information technology;
- provide a working environment and conditions which attract and retain the workforce;
- be centres of high quality best practice care;
- operate with viable, sustainable and efficient business models;
- support the future primary care workforce; and
- integrate with local programs and initiatives.

The question is: could those matters still be achieved using existing facilities without having to build a new facility? My understanding is the Australian Medical Association in the Northern Territory believes the existing private facilities can provide what has been put forward by the government in super clinics. The Australian Medical Association supports the Palmerston Super Clinic; however, it supports it from the point of view it is a multipurpose establishment where training and teaching facilities are also provided. It has another reason outside the original objectives of these super clinics which makes it a

more viable facility than one in the northern suburbs.

The Australian Medical Association said it had an understanding with the Health minister about a year ago that there would be no super clinic built in the northern suburbs. I would be interested to know what the government says about that and why, if it is now supporting a super clinic in the northern suburbs, it has changed its mind. That is what I was told by the Australian Medical Association today.

Madam Speaker, I support the motion put forward by the opposition but I would like to bring an amendment to the amendment. Could I read that amendment?

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, you need to move it.

Mr WOOD: Madam Speaker, I move the following amendment to the amendment:

Insert after paragraph 3, Paragraph 3A:

- 3A. call on the Commonwealth government to use the money set aside for a super clinic to be used to attract doctors to the Northern Territory.

That is the basis I put forward my argument against the government's motion. A large amount of politics has gone into this debate because one side has said this side promised that, the other side has said this side promised that, and some has elements of truth in it. I was around when the debates were held about the clinic at Palmerston because it was valuable for people in the rural area who, at the time, especially in Howard Springs, had no medical services for quite some time.

Regardless of that, I have tried to take that out of this debate and look at the issue before us - the better use of this money. Are we banging our heads against a brick wall if both the federal minister and our local senator have said no organisation has expressed an interest in running the facility and there is a lack of interest from the private sector? Have they looked at why that is the case? The AMA is saying there are not enough doctors, so the question really is: why are we not putting our money into attracting doctors to the Northern Territory? If there are existing facilities in the Northern Territory that can take up that extra load of doctors and provide the objectives of the super clinic concept, why wouldn't you do that? I put forward this amendment to highlight the fact the crux of this debate is we do not have enough doctors.

Let us not worry about putting up a building because there are enough facilities to house the doctors; let us first try to attract the doctors. Perhaps, when we have a surplus of doctors and need more competition in the medical fraternity, we may be able to do something like a super clinic. At the present time we have a shortage of doctors and we cannot compete in a market where there are not enough people.

Madam Speaker, I will not be supporting the government's motion. I will support the opposition's motion, with my amendment, because it is a more balanced and sensible approach taking into account the reality of the situation, which is that Ms Roxon said no organisation expressed an interest in running the facility, and Senator Crossin said there was a lack of interest from the private sector. I have highlighted the reasons we need more doctors; let us spend the money on getting doctors to the Northern Territory.

Mr CHANDLER (Brennan): Madam Speaker, we are talking about health services in the Northern Territory and the Chief Minister saying we should remove politics from this. Each member who spoke mentioned we should remove politics from this argument, yet we are all politicians so it is very hard to do.

I recall a conversation I had with the member for Nhulunbuy and the minister for Education about my recent trip to Elcho Island. I said: 'If you remove politics from this ...' and the member chimed in with: 'Pete, there is never a time to remove politics'. I thought that is the reality; we are talking about politics and both sides of this House use politics, as do governments around the country when it suits their purpose ...

Ms Scrymgour: Your purpose.

Mr CHANDLER: ... and that is the way it works. You who are chiming in over there, member for Arafura, are just the same ...

Ms Scrymgour interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr CHANDLER: We are politicians and we use this game of politics to make a point whenever it suits us. At other times, we seem to take the high moral ground, the righteous position we are in, and then all of a sudden it falls over because we lower ourselves to that game of politics again. It is sometimes ...

Ms Scrymgour interjecting.

Mr CHANDLER: You have a chat over there. Have your say. That is fine, but ...

Ms Scrymgour: Like you did with Damian Hale.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr CHANDLER: ... it is the reality of what we do. The unfortunate thing is when we are dealing with a genuine issue with a genuine response from both sides there is always going to be someone who wants to put in their political plug. Even the Chief Minister started off by saying there should not be politics in this, we should support this motion the way it is read, the way it is intended; however, there is a political space within that motion itself. The motion the Country Liberals have put forward is far less controversial; far less political than the original motion. Also, the member for Nelson's amendment to the amendment is not really demonstrating a political agenda; it genuinely wants to secure the funds originally promised.

When it comes to super clinics, I have an office in Palmerston which has been, over the last few years, inundated with people's responses to the service they are receiving from this so-called super clinic. I have lived in the Northern Territory for many years now, and have used both the public hospital system and the private system. In most circumstances, when people receive services in our hospitals they are thankful. People genuinely receive good service in hospital. However, it is the process leading up to that where people struggle - getting appointments for GPs or being able to have their children seen to quickly and inexpensively. That has become far more difficult in the Northern Territory in recent years.

As the Opposition Leader referred to in regard to the super clinic - I will use the Palmerston Super Clinic in this example - the example the government at the time used to describe the super clinic was really selling something which was not going to be delivered. I do not know what changed. Perhaps it was honourable at the start. Perhaps the plan for the Labor government was these super clinics were to be seen as a great provider of many different services. From speaking to people over many years about the super clinic and the prospect of the services to be delivered, they had a real expectation we were going to get a small hospital in Palmerston. That is the expectation that was sold to the community; other than surgery, you could go to this new super clinic that would be constructed and receive every service you would normally receive at Royal Darwin Hospital. Instead of going to RDH, you would go the super clinic.

From a community perspective, we have had expectations presented and a service under-delivered. The services being delivered are

very good in some respects. In fact, the service providers are probably going above what they are being funded to deliver. However, the expectation is really high and what the service provider is funded to deliver is very low. Unfortunately, the service provider takes the brunt of the community concern. If you turn up with an expectation that is high and it is funded to deliver a service much lower than the expectation, who takes the brunt of it? Not the Northern Territory government, not the people sitting in this room, but the service providers at the time. They take the brunt of the community because of an expectation provided by this government.

When the super clinic first came on the scene and was providing out-of-hours services, my eldest son was choking at the time. When you are driving to get help you question whether you are doing the right thing. Should I go to the super clinic and be turned away, or should I continue straight to the hospital? As a parent, you are panicking and probably doing all the wrong things. Perhaps you should have called an ambulance in the first place, but you panic and just want help for your child. I have had complaints where people have attended the super clinic only to be told: 'No, no, we cannot help here; you have to go to hospital'. Other complaints have included no doctor on duty, and an ambulance officer sitting in the super clinic to handle anything that comes in, if they are able to. There is no doctor on duty either because of staffing problems or not being able to secure a doctor. There are times when no one is there: 'Sorry, we cannot help. You will have to find another GP'.

The government tells us we are getting a great service - you are still trying selling that expectation. However, what is being delivered on the ground? Why do people continue to come into our offices to complain they could not be seen for this or that reason, or: 'We do not provide that service here. You will have to go to RDH'. Again, you are not delivering on the services promised.

The Opposition Leader touched on before that the term 'super clinic' does not befit the service provided and is not the fault of the service provider. It is what they are being funded to provide. It all comes down to the expectation provided to the community that we were getting a super clinic, a clinic that was described as a small hospital, and yet we do not receive that service. I would even suggest the facility constructed - it is a first-class facility, no doubt - is far too big for the service being provided. This puts pressure on the business running the facility because it has to cater for infrastructure - run air-conditioning for a large building, run lights and provide other maintenance for a large building when it is only funded to provide a smaller service which could be provided in a far smaller facility. There is a

grandiose sign at the front - 'Super Clinic' - this big building, but when you walk through it, and I have toured the facility, it is an A1 piece of infrastructure, but compared to the limited service provided, it sets up an expectation in the community that we have a super clinic - high expectation, low delivery.

I recall when the 1500-bed illegal immigrant facility was to be constructed across the Elizabeth River Bridge, I went on ABC one night and the commentator asked me a very good question: Did I think, as a local member, the existing infrastructure in Palmerston would be able to cater with another 1500 people in the area? It made me sit back and think. If you think about the current ambulance service in Palmerston - there are one or two ambulances available and if they are busy and an ambulance is called, with 1500 extra people in the vicinity who could also be calling on that service to take a sick or injured person all the way to Royal Darwin Hospital, that would put not only additional pressure on RDH, but it would certainly put pressure on ambulance services in the Palmerston region.

Recently, no ambulance was available in Palmerston and one had to be sent from Darwin to cater for an issue because Palmerston ambulances were busy doing other jobs. In the perfect world we would have three, four, five times the ambulances we have today. Again, it comes to balancing budgets. I understand that; however, it is a huge area when you consider Palmerston, the rural area, Howard Springs, Bees Creek, Humpty Doo, and beyond. There are probably 40 000-plus people in that area and if you place another 1500 people in an illegal immigrant centre, and another 2000 people with the INPEX plant - there are additional concerns because at some stage someone is going to get hurt or become sick and that will put pressure on the infrastructure.

Only weeks after that interview on ABC the federal government said: 'We are going to build a hospital in Palmerston'. That took the Northern Territory government by surprise. There was no mention of the Palmerston hospital in this year's budget - nothing whatsoever. I understand it was \$70m from the federal government and \$30m to be put in by the Northern Territory government. If that is the case and you guys were in control of planning, you would have known this was going to happen. Your budget books would have mentioned \$30m had been put aside for the first stage of the Palmerston Hospital which has just been announced - but nothing. There was nothing in the budget whatsoever during estimates hearings about Palmerston Hospital. So, you guys did not plan for a hospital.

You called it 'a cruel farce' when the Country Liberals went to the last election talking about a hospital. You said it was not required, not needed, and was a cruel joke on Palmerston and the rural residents to suggest we would construct a hospital in Palmerston. All of a sudden the federal government has come up with a hospital and you think it is amazing, it is fantastic, it is needed, it is the growth area and it is the centre. Talk about a backflip on your original position because this is something you had not planned for. If it was, it would be in the budget papers. You had not planned for a hospital, it was not even on your agenda; however, now you are happy to announce you are all for it. If that is not Politics 101 I do not know what it is.

At the Palmerston markets you have big banners mentioning the Palmerston Hospital - fantastic, like it is your initiative. You were not interested in the Palmerston Hospital and did not want it. In fact, you are not interested in delivering medical services in Palmerston because if you were, you would be funding the super clinic to a level to meet the expectations you, as a government, should provide to the community of Palmerston and beyond.

I talk about the hospital and what it provides. Royal Darwin Hospital has become an extremely busy place, and the minister for Health has mentioned on a number of occasions in this House just how busy it is compared to other hospitals in Australia. No one on this side of the House would disagree with that statement. It would be an amazing challenge to deal with potentially the busiest hospital in Australia, and the staff do an amazing job. Is health an endless bucket? Could you double the budget tomorrow and still not meet the expectations of the community? Perhaps so. It has been said health is an area government could continually throw money at and still not be able to meet everyone's expectations. Other departments would be the same; you could continually throw money and never meet community expectations. Palmerston and the rural area is where the future growth will be, and there will continue to be growth in inner Darwin and the northern suburbs, but the majority of growth is going to be in those areas.

Until we have this hospital - I am yet to see any more information about it - you will talk about it for the next few years, but I would like to see what planning is going into the hospital. What planning is being done to improve the services provided at the super clinic in Palmerston? When are you going to fund the super clinic and raise the services closer to community expectations? We would not receive the complaints in our offices if people were being serviced to the expectations you provided. It is not happening. You can talk about it, you can spruik about it, but it is not

happening. I am yet to have someone come to my office and say they received good service. People do not complain about everything. They come in from time to time and say a particular government department, a particular minister, might have done something to help them.

For goodness sake, I write to ministers all the time and get some great outcomes. I would be the first to thank them in this House when an outcome has been achieved. The government does some good work. It responds to some of the challenges we, as local members, raise in parliament and through letters from genuine people who write to you, raise an issue, and you can help resolve that issue by writing to a minister. People complain about a range of things. As local members, you will know these are erroneous complaints and many times we vet that complaint. We will listen to the people but we know they are expecting too much from a government department. On many occasions I have not passed that information to a minister or a department because it is asking too much. Some people have this mentality, and perhaps Labor governments have encouraged this around the world - that the government is always there to help; it is always the government's fault. No one today has to take responsibility for their actions, and we create that.

We have done it with Indigenous people - it is welfare mentality. We have created a welfare mentality where we should be planting the seeds to promote Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to become part of the economy. They can do it. They own half the land. They have access to land, and they have access to opportunities. With the right programs and the right support from government, a real future for Indigenous people could be promoted away from the public purse. Use the public purse to support but not promote their living.

Today we are talking about a motion in regard to \$5m promised by the federal government, which now looks to be off the table. If we want to send a strong message to Canberra and remove the politics from this, which is what the Chief Minister wants us to do, we should be supporting the motion put forward. The amended motion put forward by the Country Liberals, including what the member for Nelson was saying ...

Mr GUNNER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I move an extension of time for the member to complete his remarks pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Madam SPEAKER: I will call you at 12 o'clock, member for Brennan.

Motion agreed to.

Mr CHANDLER: Madam Speaker, I will not take up any more time. Removing the politics is something we cannot do because we are politicians at every level. The problem is the Chief Minister wants us to support a motion with a political intent. If he truly wants to remove political intent he would support the Country Liberals' motion because that removes the political intent and will send a stronger message to Canberra.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, I will call you up at 12 o'clock.

Mr TOLLNER (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I fully expect you to. It is an honour to speak on this motion put by the Chief Minister and is interesting to note the Chief Minister is up to his funny little tricks again ...

Ms Lawrie: So are you, Dave. Your strategy team did not know you were going to jump, mate.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Order!

Mr TOLLNER: I am sure they did. We have the Treasurer jumping in now telling us ...

Madam SPEAKER: Order! The member for Fong Lim has the call.

Mr TOLLNER: ... she knows exactly what is going on here. The Chief Minister is up to his funny little tricks again. He seems to think he can wedge the Country Liberals on this issue. He seems to think everyone wants a super clinic in Darwin. The Chief Minister is wrong on so many counts.

He calls on the Coalition and the CLP to drop their opposition to GP super clinics for the northern suburbs of Darwin. It would be interesting to see him call on the Australian Medical Association to support them, and perhaps call for local doctors to support GP super clinics. They do not because it is government again stepping into their turf where they are trying to nut out a living. The government is saying: 'Oh, no, we know best. We will put a competitor in the middle of the suburbs and send you guys to the wall'.

The reality is the government should be supporting local doctors. It should be supporting existing local clinics but this government does not do that. It supports the harebrained schemes cooked up in Canberra by its colleagues in the Labor Party. Fundamentally, that is what this is all about. This is not about standing up for the Territory at all. This is trying to gild the lily on a policy put forward by Australia's most useless, pathetic Prime Minister in history, Julia Gillard. This is trying to make Julia Gillard look good.

The Chief Minister has form on this. He will never back the Territory when it comes to his friends in Canberra. He will never stand up for Territorians. He will always go doggo. Every time Julia Gillard or someone in the federal Labor Party says jump, he will jump as high as he possibly can because the Chief Minister is nothing but a poor excuse ...

Ms LAWRIE: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I refer the member for Fong Lim to the motion calling on the Commonwealth government to deliver the commitment to a GP super clinic. Hardly going doggo, mate.

Mr TOLLNER: Well, hang on. Madam Speaker ...

Madam SPEAKER: The member for Fong Lim has the call. If you could keep it to the point, though, please.

Mr TOLLNER: Madam Speaker, the Treasurer might have come into this debate a little late. She should be aware a number of amendments are proposed, and those amendments call on the Territory government to support local doctors, support local clinics, and support Territorians.

The one thing this government has proved itself good at is not supporting Territorians; rolling over every time Julia Gillard in Canberra says to do so. That is what it is damned good at. We are trying to support a dog of a policy - the federal government's GP super clinics plan. How many super clinics have been delivered around Australia? We have one in Palmerston, yes. Is that 24 hours? The commitment was we would have a 24-hour super clinic. Is it 24 hours? I heard rumours it is not open for 24 hours. There are several members in here ...

Mr Elferink: I believe that is the case.

Mr TOLLNER: Here we go. I have heard rumours this super clinic in Palmerston ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Member for Greatorex, order!

Mr TOLLNER: My colleagues are jumping at me giving me information.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex, resume your seat.

Mr TOLLNER: Evidently it is not a rumour. The super clinic in Palmerston is only open from 8 am to 6 pm. Last time I checked, 8 am to 6 pm was not 24 hours. Perhaps the government is on

time delay. They can jump, rant and rave, and carry on about how wonderful the 24-hour super clinic is at Palmerston, but we know it is not 24 hours.

My good friend and colleague, the member for Sanderson, slipped a piece of paper under my nose saying 64 super clinics were promised around Australia by the federal Gillard Labor government, but only 11 are operational. Goodness me! Why is that? Why is ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Business!

Mr TOLLNER: Why is that? I will tell you why - and they say it in their own media release - they cannot get doctors who want to work in these things. They are setting up in opposition to other health services in the area. That is why these things do not operate. Sooner or later, the government will have to bite the bullet and accept this is a dog of a policy put forward by the federal Labor government. It is nothing else, and to suggest the Country Liberals are going to support some useless, pathetic, unachievable policy put forward by people who gave us the pink batts scheme, green loans, and every other fiasco we have seen, such as the ban on the live cattle export - these guys are quite happy to champion this federal government, the same people who are trying to destroy the Northern Territory. They support them and now they want the opposition to jump on board and support destroying the Northern Territory. I can tell you that we are not going to do that. We are not going to support you guys in your efforts to destroy our health sector in the Northern Territory.

I have looked at the sensible amendments put forward. The amendment put forward by this side of the Chamber is very good. In fact, I have to give credit where it is due. The member for Nelson has put forward an amendment which enhances the opposition's amendments to the motion because, ultimately, we want to support local doctors. We want to support local clinics ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, I ask you to pause it being after 12 pm. You may continue after Question Time.

Mr TOLLNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will continue after lunch.

Madam SPEAKER: We will look forward to that, member for Fong Lim.

Debate suspended.

TABLED PAPER
Pairing Arrangement –
Members for Casuarina and Sanderson

Madam SPEAKER: Before we adjourn for lunch, I have a document before me relating to pairs for 3 pm to 4.30 pm signed by both Whips, for the members for Casuarina and Sanderson.

I table that document.

MOTION
Commonwealth Government – GP Super Clinic

Continued from earlier this day.

Madam SPEAKER: I am pleased that that is the end of Question Time. We will be going back to the motion as moved by the Chief Minister. I remind members there is an amendment, and an amendment to the amendment. The member for Fong Lim is on his feet with 13 minutes remaining.

Mr TOLLNER (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, to recap where I was before the lunch break, this motion was put forward by the Chief Minister. It is a fairly ham-fisted approach at trying to trap the CLP into not supporting a super clinic. Well, news for you, Chief Minister, we never supported super clinics. I am not aware the Coalition supported super clinics, fundamentally, because we do not support harebrained schemes. That is exactly what Julia Gillard and Nicola Roxon's plan is with super clinics around Australia.

Of the promised 64 super clinics in Australia, only 11 are operational. The one in the Northern Territory, the Palmerston GP Super Clinic - great promises, great commitments; we would have a 24-hour super clinic at Palmerston, forgetting we had a clinic at Palmerston which operated quite well and required a very small subsidy from the Northern Territory government. The government pulled that subsidy in the early 2000s when first elected and it was closed down. It did not stop to think of the ramifications for Palmerston. Now we have the Palmerston GP Super Clinic, supposedly 24 hours, although it only operates between 8 am and 6 pm.

Labor people are very good at building things up. They build them up; they talk them up. They say we need a super clinic which will operate for 24 hours and is going to be all things to all people. No one in Palmerston will ever have to worry about their health again because we are putting in a super clinic. What they deliver is very little at all. On this side of the Chamber, we support local doctors and local clinics. We would like to see more doctors brought to the Northern Territory, and we would like to see existing clinics better resourced and given a chance to make a go of it

than setting up government-funded competition by way of a GP super clinic.

A GP super clinic does nothing to attract more doctors to the Northern Territory, or reduce health costs to government. For that reason, I am thrilled the Country Liberals and the member for Blain have put an amendment to the motion to say this Legislative Assembly calls on the Commonwealth government to deliver on its funding agreement. Give us the funding to use in the Northern Territory for greater capacity to deliver bulkbilling services in the Top End. That is a good call. People should be able to access bulkbilling in the Northern Territory, but you have to be a special person to access bulkbilling doctors in the Northern Territory. They are limited around the place. Generally, it is only available to Indigenous people through the Indigenous medical services, or to veterans, or aged pensioners. If you do not fit into those categories it is very difficult to access a bulkbilling service in the Territory. We believe bulkbilling should be increased and expanded, and that more Territorians should be able to access bulkbilling services. We would like to see the \$5m put towards that.

I thought we put up a very good amendment which could not be improved on; as it turned out, my little, weirdo mate from Nelson ...

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I ask the member for Fong Lim to withdraw the adjective he used to describe the member for Nelson. It is quite offensive.

Mr TOLLNER: I withdraw. I believe the member for Nelson knows it was made in good taste, but I will withdraw to appease the sensitivities of the member for Nhulunbuy.

The point I was making is the member for Nelson has come forward with his own amendment to the motion. He would like to see the money earmarked for a super clinic in Darwin used to attract doctors. I congratulate the member for Nelson because his amendment is eminently sensible. I sincerely hope the government sees the error of its ways in trying to wedge the opposition on an issue like this and reads the amendments, reads the member for Nelson's amendment, and understands in the Northern Territory we need to attract doctors and support bulkbilling services. Fundamentally, that is what Territorians want. They want to access a doctor when they are sick or injured, and get to them as cheaply and efficiently as possible. That is what this amended motion does.

I hope Labor in this House see the motion for what it is and support it. Not just support it in this House, but trundle down to Canberra and talk to Nicola Roxon, the Health minister, and say:

'Health minister, we want the \$5m; we want you to send it to the Territory because we need more doctors and more bulkbilling services'. That is what standing up for Territorians means.

I remember not so long ago this parliament passed a motion calling on certain concessions from the federal government which was unanimously passed. There were no voices against the motion. We see the extreme contrary to the will of this parliament and the will of the Northern Territory in relation to that. I am talking about Labor's new carbon tax – no one wants it. A handful of zealots in the Northern Territory want the carbon tax. I was on the *NT News* online recently and there was a question: 'Do you support a carbon tax, yes or no?' I clicked no, and up popped the results - 82% of people who responded to the survey said no. Whilst I am not certain the *NT News* runs exhaustive surveys across the Northern Territory, its poll on whether Territorians want a carbon tax, whilst perhaps not 100% accurate, is pretty close to the mark. The majority of Australians do not want a carbon tax. In a place like the Northern Territory we have a can-do, get up and go bunch of people. They are entrepreneurial; they want to have a go. The last thing they need is Julia Gillard stepping on their necks and putting in a brand new tax.

You would think the government, after seeing a motion like that passed in the parliament, would be going to Canberra and trumpeting the will of the parliament and the will of the people. The problem with this government is it never stands up for Territorians. It is more interested in its relationship with its federal colleagues than supporting Territorians and that is what concerns me about this motion. There is a real possibility this motion will get up. However, there is also a real possibility this government will simply ignore the motion and run off on its own tangent banging on about how Tony Abbott and the CLP do not support super clinics, it is horrible, and telling people nothing about the ramifications of having a super clinic here. I bet it will do everything in its power not to support the will of this parliament on this issue. We will see; some things might be different. Perhaps the government will get up on its hind legs and for the first time ever support the Territory's case and the will of the parliament. We will see.

GP super clinics are not for the Territory. They are not a resolution to any of the problems we have in the Northern Territory. When I was federal member for the seat of Solomon, I was amazed to find the electorate of Solomon had the lowest bulkbilling rates in the whole of Australia - fewer rates of bulkbilling in the electorate of Solomon than the electorate of Lingiari. That is an interesting point because quite often we think of the disadvantage and poverty in remote Northern

Territory - the electorate of Lingiari - but do not understand in Solomon we have the lowest rate of bulkbilling in the country. The reason for that, of course, is the lack of doctors ...

Dr Burns: No.

Mr TOLLNER: We have a lack of doctors. If you go to the North Shore of Sydney you have a doctor on every street corner – many of them live there. If they do not bulkbill and supply all those electronic services and whatnot in their clinics, they go broke. Here, the situation is almost exactly the opposite. Doctors are run off their feet and are working harder than any other doctors in Australia because there are so few of them. If you say to them: 'We want you to provide bulkbilling services', they say: 'Get nicked, we are flat out now and we are having trouble coping. The last thing we want is an incentive for more patients to visit us'. There is no real financial incentive whatsoever for them to bulkbill.

With this amendment and the member for Nelson's amendment, there is a real recognition we need more doctors in the Northern Territory. Government should be doing more to assist people in the private sector than it is currently doing. Currently, its focus is on public hospitals, which is fair enough. It is a government, and government has to focus on public hospitals - I have no problems with that. Government should also have an eye on the private sector, and be looking at the situation in the Northern Territory and saying: 'We have a shortage of doctors. What incentives can we put in place to bring more doctors to the Northern Territory? We have the lowest rates of bulkbilling in the country in Darwin and Palmerston. What can we do to encourage more private doctors to bulkbill?'

What does the government do? It settles on this harebrained scheme of Nicola Roxon and Julia Gillard which says we will put a level of competition in these guys have never had, and we will fund something we know we will have difficulty finding doctors for. We have to poach local doctors to work in our super clinics and, ultimately, we can see the results of that around Australia - only 11 of the 64 promised GP super clinics.

This government is a joke. It has, somehow, tried to wedge the opposition on this one. It has backfired completely in its face ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, your time has expired.

Mr TOLLNER: I invite everyone in this House to support this motion and the amendments.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, resume your seat! Thank you.

Mr STYLES (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I support both the member for Nelson's amendment and the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Opposition to this motion.

It is important, before any of us speak, that we acknowledge the hard work doctors, nurses, frontline health service providers and their staff provide. This argument is not about anyone who works in that industry. My view, over many years of having been associated with those people, is you will never find a more dedicated and hard-working group of people in our community. However, it is not about them. The super clinics are about government policy and delivery of services, and facilitating those good people to do the best work they can in the best environment. This debate has always been about the provision and improved access to GPs and, in particular, bulkbilling GPs.

As articulated by most people on this side of the House, of the promised 64 super clinics only 11 have been delivered. The community is more concerned about the delivery of services as opposed to buildings. If the federal government chooses to not spend the \$5m on a super clinic, then perhaps we should all support the member for Nelson's amendment to encourage more doctors, along with some other services.

To my knowledge, there are only three bulkbilling clinics across the northern suburbs, in Moil, Nakara and Tiwi ...

Dr Burns: There are more.

Mr STYLES: It would be nice to know where they all are.

My understanding is there are only two bulkbilling facilities left in Palmerston. Palmerston Super Clinic is not a bulkbilling clinic. I am informed the after-hours service which runs from 6 pm onwards, after the Palmerston Super Clinic closes, is a bulkbilling clinic. Talking to people about what happens from 6 pm onwards, there is a huge line of people from 6 pm waiting to see a doctor. When Palmerston Super Clinic opened, one of only two bulkbilling practices in Palmerston, the Dwyer Medical Centre, was forced to close. How does that qualify as improving better access to services for Palmerston residents?

I refer to a *Northern Territory News* article dated 14 October 2010 concerning the clinic terminal for bulkbilling GPs. The article features the good Dr Mellor, who is moving south from his Palmerston clinic due to lack of incentive in relation to bulkbilling. I will quote from that article:

A bulkbilling medical centre in Palmerston will close tomorrow because it can't

compete with the government's new GP super clinic.

It goes on to say:

It provides a bulkbilling service for more than 100 patients a week.

When you read through the article, it contains many statements about issues that have arisen in relation to the opening of the GP super clinic in Palmerston. However, AMANT spokesman, Dr Peter Beaumont, said it was a huge loss:

There are not enough doctors already, we are about 50 GPs short (in the Territory) to provide a service to people.

That outlines the situation a year ago. We were told this morning by the Chief Minister that, on a national average, we have 83 doctors per 100 000 people, but in Darwin's northern suburbs we are down to 53. I heard the member for Johnston's comments when the member for Fong Lim said we are short on doctors - the answer was no. I refer him to the Chief Minister's statement this morning where he said we are seriously down on the number of medical people and doctors in the northern suburbs.

Federal and Territory Labor governments have always been about building monuments to stick a plaque on. The Country Liberals are not about that. We are about understanding the needs of Territorians and delivering on those needs. As a sole parent for many years raising three kids, I can attest to how difficult it was to find a doctor who bulkbilled; however, they were around and we survived.

I would like to relate a story about a young lady known to a friend of mine who is employed at Nightcliff. She does not own a car. She was as sick as a dog and could not afford to shell out the \$60 to \$80 for a private billing GP and had to spend an entire day catching buses and waiting in queues to get a medical certificate. What does the government offer these Territorians? As I reported a moment ago, the figures quoted by the Chief Minister make it even more important to support the member for Nelson's amendment to attract more doctors.

We also need to retain those who are already here. Where do they go? Does the government have the exit polls to learn where they go and why they are going? One is reliably informed there are a number of reasons; however, it would be interesting to see the figures. It may be the type of work or the pressure they are under. How do we keep them here?

I would like to quote from the chart for waiting times for elective surgery. In 2008, for elective surgery at Royal Darwin Hospital it was 50 days for ear, nose and throat; 119 for eye; general was 39; and orthopaedic, 45. The only time we did better than the national average was during 2008-09 in orthopaedic. The 2009-10 figures are the latest, and we go from 50 days up to 113 in 2009-10 for ear, nose and throat. For eye, we go from 119 to 129. For general, we go from 39 to 51, and 31 is the average. For eyes, 69 is the national average. Ear, nose and throat, 113 days in 2009-10, compared to the national average of 63. Orthopaedic is the same - in 2009-10 we go to 89 days where the average is 62.

There is much pressure on people working in our health system. We hear of an enormous amount of money the government put into health from the Minister for Health and from the Treasurer. Always we hear: 'We have put so much money in, the CLP did nothing. They did not put any money in. We have put far more money in'. It is very nice to know the government has done that but it had a far bigger monetary pool to draw from than the CLP.

Why do medical staff leave? This particularly concerns me because my seat is in the northern suburbs and I talk to quite a few people who work at RDH. They come through my office or through the shopping centre where I am regularly on Saturday mornings and they talk to me. I ask: 'Why are you leaving?', and they give a whole range of reasons. Some come to mind and are ahead of the rest. A lack of doctors and nurses - there is a combination. Nurses tell me they are leaving because of the cost of living; doctors tell me they are leaving because of the cost of living. I spoke to some young doctors recently who were moving to Tasmania who said: 'We get the same money; houses are half the price. The cost of living is much cheaper and, financially, we are far better off going to Tasmania than staying in the Northern Territory'.

We try to sell the Northern Territory as a fantastic lifestyle, and to many of us it is. Young people starting off in life, be they doctors, nurses, or frontline health staff with young families, want to succeed. They want to get on. They want to buy a house. They want to have the Australian dream. However, given the high cost of electricity, the high cost of housing and rents - and that is due to the failure of the government to release sufficient land which has put pressure on housing, which puts pressure on rents, which again puts pressures on staffing and staff.

Last year, we changed the rules in relation to caravan parks. I knew a number of nurses who came here for the southern winter - they work here in the Dry Season when we have an

increased population due to the number of tourists in the Northern Territory. They work in the Territory for probably six months of the year. They cannot set up camp in a caravan park and they said it is getting too hard. A nurse left early this week. She came here every six months; she said the cost of living and all the infringements upon the lifestyle has changed it all. She has been doing that for about 20 years - working in the two places. She said talk among the hospital staff is more and more people are leaving, which puts pressure on us as a government and the taxpayer to go overseas to recruit people. We have people here but there is a disincentive to provide services in the medical area, so why would they stay? It is hard to argue with the things they are putting up.

I am reliably informed we live in the skull fracture capital of the world. We need to break that cycle and the CLP has some plans to reduce that. Unfortunately, the government takes no notice of some of our plans. I find it interesting because there are a number of people on this side who are well connected in certain areas. I ask the question: is the government well connected into some of those areas? Is the government getting proper anecdotal evidence of what is really going on in the community as opposed to spin that some people might like to put on it and give to the government?

We need to ask why we cannot retain staff. It is all very well for the Minister for Health to go overseas to recruit doctors, nurses and other health professionals. They too will suffer the same fate when they get here with the high cost of living, high rents and high cost of water. You have to have a licence to drink, you have to do this, and you have to do that. There are all types of infringements on the lifestyle we want to sell overseas that is different from down south.

We need to do some work to retain staff, recruit staff and keep staff. If the federal government is not going to commit the \$5m to building a super clinic, perhaps the government could put some money into Royal Darwin Hospital. Residents of the northern suburbs, Territorians in general, use RDH. You find many people in accident and emergency at RDH because of the lack of bulkbilling facilities and the lack of a super clinic.

It seems every time we hear from the Minister for Health he tells us of the \$1bn budget we have and how wonderful ...

Mr Conlan: \$1.21bn.

Mr STYLES: Oh, \$1.21bn. What is a couple of hundred million; we will add that to the prison. You can go from three to five, so we go from \$1bn to \$1.2bn, \$1.4bn - add it on and borrow some

more money. It is sad, but the people who are on the front line working hard and performing extremely well under the circumstances in which they work - the Royal Darwin Hospital building is in quite a poor state so one might like to take some of this information back. Perhaps the Minister for Health might, during his chats with Ms Roxon, request some money to fix some of the ills at RDH.

I would like to read an e-mail I received; one of numerous e-mails I have received from people in the northern suburbs. It starts off:

I am writing to you as my local member to inform you of my recent experience at Royal Darwin Hospital. I am hoping that if I inform others then the situation can be improved.

My child, (five-years-old) was admitted to Ward 5B, paediatric ward. The staff, both medical and nursing, were excellent in diagnosing and treating her illness. However, the physical state of the hospital ward was appalling, filthy dirty, bad smell, paint coming off the walls, cockroaches, the shower facility for parents I would liken to the bathroom in a backpackers hostel in a third world country. I needed to clean the toilet before my daughter and I could use it (each time). The staff were apologetic about the state of the ward and bathrooms. One said to me: 'I'm sorry, it is not home standard'. I was worried that I or my daughter could catch more in the way of disease and germs being in that filthy environment.

The food was also of a very poor standard. I had not eaten a meal for 20 hours as I stayed with my daughter through the ED assessment and diagnostic process. By the time I was offered food I was starving but unable to eat the dry, hard as a rock mini quiches and way over boiled frozen carrots it was served with.

I had to ask for a cup of water. I was shown to a kitchen and told I could help myself to a water jug. I took the lid off to refill the jug, it was mouldy under the lid and had lint and fluff in the jug. Again, I had to clean it before I could use it.

I could not wait to get out of there. It is not an environment conducive to recovery from illness.

To me there is no excuse for this. I cannot think of a better place or a more important way to spend our tax dollars.

Please take my concerns very seriously and do all you can to improve this situation for our sick little Territorians.

Yours sincerely

Constituent.

Madam Speaker, it almost brings a tear to your eye when parents go there with sick children and, on top of that, have to suffer this. I recall going to the hospital on many occasions as my wife worked in the paediatric ward. I can tell you from my experience 25 years ago, the hospital was never in that state. That was under a CLP government and a budget nowhere near as large as that available to the current Labor government. I ask: what has happened? When we are talking about building super clinics and doing this and that, we are struggling to retain medical staff. We are struggling to attract them, and we want to build more facilities to find more doctors who do not exist, when we could spend some of that money encouraging local doctors to bulkbill and look after some of the people who are struggling.

These are average Territorians whose disposable income has been reduced because of the high rents they are forced to pay, the increases in power and water costs and, generally, across the board. I attended a meeting recently where I was told a slab of beer is going to increase by \$5 or \$6 once CDL is introduced. The average Territorian who might want to have a drink will have to pay another \$5 or \$6 a carton. That is going to be very interesting.

These are examples of the extra costs being piled upon poor, average Territorians. People will not be able to afford to stay here. I talk to a range of people one might call middle-class tradespeople who earn a good living, but are leaving the Territory because they cannot afford to stay here. They do not have a disposable income; they cannot have a good time. They cannot go fishing and cannot enjoy our great lifestyle because they cannot ...

Mr CHANDLER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! In accordance with Standing Order 77, I move that the member be given an extension of time.

Motion agreed to.

Mr STYLES: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and member for Brennan.

We have a range of issues and concerns we could spend days discussing. However, look at the costs for average people, average workers struggling to pay the rent. If you cannot get down to the after-hours clinic early enough, you do not

get in the line. The lines are enormous. You can go to the clinic when it opens at 6 pm and it is first in best dressed - first on the list. If you are not there right on 6 pm, or you are not in line waiting for the 6 pm opening, you put your name down and they will phone you. You go to the movies, have dinner, then go back late at night to see a doctor.

When you look at the Palmerston GP Super Clinic website and the fee structure, the fee for a standard consultation is \$72 with a \$34.30 rebate. Someone has to find the difference. A young family with kids, struggling to pay rent, to keep their head above water, is going to struggle.

My request to this government is to look at pressuring the federal government to spend this money somewhere in the health services - especially in the northern suburbs - so we can provide a better service for Territorians.

The Minister for Health tells us we spend record amounts of money in health, and there are some good news stories out there, and credit where credit is due. That credit belongs to the staff of the Health department, the doctors, nurses, and hard-working people out there, and those who have to maintain the system, given the policies they have to work under. Those people deserve the credit not the government. You have some policy failures in certain areas that need to be looked at and we have outlined some of them today.

It is those issues and many more that I could spend the rest of the day discussing. The Minister for Health, in his deliberations with the federal minister for Health, could take those concerns expressed today.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members in this House to support the amendment from the member for Nelson, and the Leader of the Opposition's amendment, so we can provide a far better service to Territorians.

Dr BURNS (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I will be closing debate on behalf of government. We will not be supporting the amendments put by the opposition and the member for Nelson to this motion, and I will explain why.

The original motion, as members would be aware, is that the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly calls on the Commonwealth government to deliver its commitment to provide a GP super clinic for the northern suburbs of Darwin. Second, it calls on the Coalition and the CLP to drop their opposition to a GP super clinic for the northern suburbs of Darwin; and third, that this motion be forwarded to the Commonwealth

Health minister, shadow Health minister, and all Northern Territory federal members of parliament.

In essence, the CLP put forward amendments which are in the second part. It wants the funding commitment for primary health care and services in Darwin's northern suburbs. Second, it calls on the Commonwealth government to support an increase in the capacity of health services in the Northern Territory, including additional bulkbilling services. Third, it calls on the Northern Territory government to work with the Commonwealth on delivering a commitment for increased bulkbilling services using existing private sector providers as cornerstone partners. Fourth, this motion be forwarded to the Commonwealth Health minister, shadow Health minister, and all Northern Territory federal members of parliament.

The amendment by the member for Nelson reads as follows:

3A. Call on the Commonwealth government to use the money set aside for a super clinic to be used to attract doctors to the Northern Territory.

We stand by our original motion because we believe the super clinic model is the way to go. We recognise the issue raised by the member for Fong Lim, that is, the scarcity of bulkbilling doctors in the Northern Territory. This has been a long-standing issue and the member for Fong Lim acknowledged that, even when he was the federal for Solomon. In short, bulkbilling is an arrangement a doctor has with their patient. My understanding of the Medicare arrangement is that the federal government cannot compel a doctor to bulkbill. That is the truth of the matter. I will say it again: the federal government cannot compel a doctor to bulkbill. It is something I inquired about when I was Health minister and the legal advice is very emphatic on this; the government cannot do that. It is futile for the opposition to be calling on the federal government to compel doctors to bulkbill.

The only sense spoken by the member for Fong Lim was that doctors tend to bulkbill when there are commercial competitive factors, and he mentioned the North Shore of Sydney. I am not sure about that; however, where there are many medical practices you tend to have more bulkbilling. The fact is, over the last decade or so the number of bulkbilling practices in Australia has decreased markedly; and when Tony Abbott was Health minister, they decreased incredibly. Not even Tony Abbott could turn this around and when the member for Fong Lim was federal member, he could not address the situation either.

My suggestion is something could be written into the Medicare agreement about regionally based or geographic location-based Medicare provider numbers the Commonwealth could issue. I understand the AMA is diametrically opposed to that, and there would be an incredible legal battle over it, but it could be a way forward. Successive governments have not gone down that path, which attests to the political, economic, and legal power of the AMA. It is futile for the opposition to talk about increasing bulkbilling services as if someone had a magic wand. It is not possible. That is why we are opposing these amendments; we do not believe they are feasible.

To leave in the bit about the CLP dropping its opposition to the GP super clinic, the minister made it very plain, and the federal minister has made it very plain, a big part of the consideration of not proceeding with this is that the local member, Natasha Griggs, has consistently opposed a GP super clinic, and that goes right back to the election campaign of 2010. She has never promised it. I am not sure of any health commitments she gave as part of her election campaign. I saw her on the side of the road waving at everyone, but I am not aware of any commitment she made except she did not support super clinics. It is a bit rich for Natasha Griggs to come out now with a media release. I see it on the screen here: 'Darwin wants its \$5m back' ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Member for Greatorex, you do not have the call.

Mr Conlan: That is a bit rich.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex!

Dr BURNS: Madam Speaker, it is bit rich. She never supported it in the first place and now she wants it back. It is the reverse of Indian giving - I am unsure how to describe it.

I listened with much interest to what the member for Fong Lim said about delivering health services, getting more doctors, more bulkbilling services; more of this and more of that. I then think back to the member for Fong Lim's record when he was the federal member for Solomon and what he did or did not do for GP services in Palmerston and beyond. Commitments were made by the member for Fong Lim. First, there was a program called after-hours Medicare introduced by Tony Abbott when he was federal Health minister which revolved around practices all over the country accessing funds to provide after-hours Medicare access and medical care after hours.

Here is Dave Tollner as the member for Solomon:

As the member for Solomon, I recently announced that the Australian government will be offering a \$200 000 start-up grant for Palmerston medical clinic to provide after-hours GP services.

I believe that was in October of the election year, and later on he had to back away. He did not have the backing of the Prime Minister and surprisingly, in November 2007, he said on Daryl Manzie's show - he pulled back a little and said the Prime Minister was considering it. He is in print promising it and then, a couple of months later, backing away. As a member in one of the most marginal seats in Australia during that election campaign in 2007, he could not deliver on something he announced in the media about expanding GP services in Palmerston. He said himself that it is one of the neediest areas in a range of ways in the Territory and around Australia, and he could not win the argument.

I do not have much faith in the CLP and what it promises. It talks about what we promise. We promised a super clinic and it has been delivered. It may operate between 8 pm and 6 am, but it tumbled out before with the member for Sanderson, it offers after-hours urgent care in the time from closing of an evening until it opens that night - after-hours urgent care for the people of Palmerston. That was delivered.

Much has been made by members of the opposition who are saying 67 or 65 super clinics were promised by the federal government and only 11 have been delivered - one in six. That is a more than the member for Fong Lim delivered. He delivered a big fat zero, even though he went out in print saying he had delivered it, it was going to happen, there is a start-up grant - it never happened.

Similarly, I heard the Leader of the Opposition talking about the radiation oncology unit delivered by the Coalition. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. He said in his election material - I waved it around before - 'Delivered new oncology centre at the Royal Darwin Hospital'. Let us look at the history of this. It is true, it was promised by this government as an election commitment in 2001. I acknowledged that ...

Mr Conlan: It was 1999.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Dr BURNS: ... when I went to the meeting the member for Blain convened at the Italian Club. I was not invited. I invited myself and had the courage to stand up in front of the people and as

the member for Blain said, many upset people - the trauma of going interstate for cancer treatment. I fronted that crowd and gave an undertaking that I would work hard and be devoted to establishing a radiation oncology unit in Darwin. That is exactly what happened, with the help of Nicola Roxon, federal Health minister.

In the budget of May 2006, Tony Abbott promised funding support to establish the unit. There were negotiations between the federal government and this government around that and \$13m was put on the table. In May 2007, the Australian government issued a request for tender and that tender closed on 16 July 2007.

In August, we were advised the tender process had been concluded without awarding a tender. The tender process had failed. The Australian government, given the fact an election was imminent, announced the tender process would run again. I have said in this House many times, that second tender process failed for the same reason the first tender process failed. There was not enough money on the table, and the model for the tender - they were expecting medical specialists to construct a radiation oncology unit - they not only had to be medical specialists, they had to be engineers as well, and it was not working. Yet, the federal government, Tony Abbott and the member for Fong Lim as he was then, the member for Solomon, went ahead and it failed again.

The worst betrayal of Territorians was the fact they knew, during the election of November 2007, the tender process had failed. The member for Fong Lim did not come clean with electors in the Territory. I knew. I was told, but was sworn to secrecy because it was confidential information. I could have made much mischief about that; however, I honoured the commitment I gave - I was told on a confidential basis. As soon as the election concluded and Kevin Rudd had won, I started negotiations with Nicola Roxon, who promptly put another \$6m into the kitty and we were able, with the support of Mr Paul Tyrrell, who I asked to handle this process, separate the tender process into a building project, and a tender to provide radiation oncology services. That tender was successful, both in the construction of the radiation oncology unit and for a provider. As the minister said, it has been operating very successfully every since.

The member for Greatorex said I was getting a bit hot under the collar this morning. I get hot under the collar when I hear the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Fong Lim going around Darwin beating their chests saying: 'I got the radiation oncology unit'. Not true, member for Fong Lim; not true, Leader of the Opposition. The process failed under Tony Abbott as federal

Health minister and with you, member for Fong Lim, as the federal member. You have no creds in the delivery of promises in this area. You talked about 66 or 67 - 11 delivered, yes. One in six, yes; make a big headline about that; however, none of the things you talked about, member for Fong Lim, were delivered; neither your after-hours medical care in Palmerston or the radiation oncology unit.

I commend the minister. He will work with Nicola Roxon and will work hard. She has demonstrated over a number of projects, not least of which is the radiation oncology unit, that she cares about the Territory and is prepared to direct her department to do things it sometimes can be a little obstinate about and does not want to do. She is a good minister and will listen to our minister. I hope he gets a result. Whichever way it goes, there will be increased benefits for the Territory and for the northern suburbs of Darwin.

We will not be supporting the amendments to the motion because they are unworkable. You cannot compel doctors and GPs to bulkbill. Legally, you cannot do it. It cannot be done. It is futile to put that forward as a solution. Yes, we all want to see more doctors. That is why we have invested heavily in a medical school and are supporting that. It is great for the Northern Territory. It will take time, but will bear the fruits. In the interim, we need to work with the Commonwealth government to attract more GPs, and our Health minister is dedicated to that.

Madam Speaker, without any further ado, we do not support the amendments. We support our original motion.

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, there are three matters before the Chair. The first is the motion as moved this morning by the Chief Minister; the second is an amendment as moved by the Leader of the Opposition; and the third is an amendment to the amendment moved by the member for Nelson. The order in which we do this is the amendment to the amendment:

I move the following amendment to the amendment –

Insert after paragraph 3, paragraph 3A:

I hope all members have that in front of them.

Amendment to the amendment agreed to.

Madam SPEAKER: The question now is that the amended amendment be agreed to.

Amended amendment agreed to.

Madam SPEAKER: The question now is that the amended motion be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

**SERIOUS CRIME CONTROL
AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 182)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms LAWRIE (Justice and Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The Serious Crime Control Amendment Bill 2011 amends the *Serious Crime Control Act 2009* to ensure the act is constitutionally compatible. The amendments are necessary as a result of the High Court decision of *Wainohu v New South Wales*. In this case, the High Court decided that a similar act in New South Wales was invalid.

The act was made in 2009 to fill a gap in the Northern Territory anticrime legislative regime with a tough law geared to seriously disrupt and weaken outlaw criminal organisations, and to protect the Northern Territory community from the violent effects of organised crime. Currently, the act provides for declarations to be made regarding organisations where there is a link between those organisations and serious criminal activity. Various consequences can flow from that declaration. When an organisation is declared under the act, members of the declared organisations can be controlled and regulated with a system of control orders. These control orders can prohibit the person from associating with specified persons, being present at specified locations or events, or associating with a person who is a member of a declared organisation.

Additionally, the act allows a senior police officer to make a public safety order prohibiting a person or class of persons from being present at specified premises for a specified period where there is a serious risk to public safety or security. These can be made in a range of circumstances, including where the persons concerned are, or have been, members of a declared organisation.

The act allows the Commissioner of Police to apply to the Court of Summary Jurisdiction for a fortification removal order where premises are fortified and it is reasonable to believe that the premises are being used, or are likely to be used, in connection with a serious criminal offence.

This bill proposes to amend the act in three main aspects without altering the aims, the intent, or the end result of the legislation.

The first aspect relates to the making of declarations. Currently, the act provides for eligible judges to make declarations regarding organisations where there is a link between that organisation and serious criminal activity. The bill amends the act to provide that the Supreme Court is to have the power to make a declaration rather than that decision being restricted to a class of eligible judges. The corollary of this is that the Supreme Court also has the power to revoke a declaration. The concept of eligible judges was one that the High Court determined interfered with the independence of the judiciary. This problem has now been removed by this bill. Conferring jurisdiction in this regard on the Supreme Court, rather than individual eligible judges, will ensure this aspect of the act is constitutionally sound.

The second major amendment to the act relates to the requirement of the judge to give reasons for his or her decision. Section 20 of the act currently allows for the eligible judges not to give reasons for decisions. Providing reasons has always been a requirement in our adversarial system of justice and, as is emphasised in *Wainohu*, is a defining characteristic of a court. This provision is to be repealed and, as is the usual practice in juridical proceedings, the Supreme Court will give reasons for decisions when deciding matters under the act. It is further noted that with the Supreme Court now making the decisions, the general appeal right to the Court of Appeal in the *Supreme Court Act* applies in relation to the Supreme Court's decisions. The bill amends the act to remove express appeal rights for consistency. The appeal rights in either the *Supreme Court Act* or *Justices Act* apply, depending on whether the original decision was made by the Supreme Court or Court of Summary Jurisdiction respectively.

The third major amendment to the act relates to the definition of serious criminal offence. This definition provides the trigger for when declarations under the act can be made. This bill proposes that the definition is amended to an offence carrying a term of imprisonment of five years or more, rather than an offence of more than two years. Having the definition set at such a low threshold, as it currently is, undermines the objective of the act and can lead to anomalous situations where declarations could potentially be made in relation to very minor offences that are clearly not intended to fall within the ambit of the act, such as erecting a crematorium not in accordance with the minister's approval. The proposed amendments better reinforce the objectives of the act by emphasising the serious nature of the offences and offenders at which this act is aimed.

We have also taken this opportunity, while ensuring the act is constitutionally sound, to fine-

tune the act to meet modern requirements of fairness and clarity. To this end, the bill contains a number of minor technical amendments.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this act is a powerful statement of this government's commitment to the fight against serious organised criminal activity. The bill will amend the act to ensure that it operates validly and effectively.

I commend the bill to honourable members, and I table a copy of the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

**FINES AND PENALTIES (RECOVERY) AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 181)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms LAWRIE (Justice and Attorney-General):
Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* to improve the effectiveness of the operation of the Fines Recovery Unit, or FRU. The FRU came into existence in 2002 and is, effectively, a one-stop shop for the enforcement of court fines and infringement notice penalties. The FRU enforces infringement notices or on-the-spot fines that are issued by NT government agencies, local councils, and statutory corporations. The FRU also enforces court fines. This means when an offender is fined by a court in relation to an offence but fails to pay their fine by the due date, the fine is referred to the FRU for enforcement.

Since its commencement in 2002, a number of technical issues and concerns have been raised in relation to the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act*. This bill addresses those issues and concerns.

First, the bill makes amendments that relate to the enforcement of compensation or restitution orders. These are important amendments for victims of crime and people who are impacted by offending and antisocial behaviours. Under the *Sentencing Act* and the *Youth Justice Act*, the court can make an order that an offender pay compensation or restitution to a person who has been impacted by their offending behaviour. For example, where a person's personal property is damaged as a result of an offence, the court can order that the offender pay an amount to the person under a compensation or restitution order. Currently, where a court makes such an order, there is no satisfactory mechanism for enforcement of the order, which means offenders are not held to account and victims may not get the compensation they deserve.

The bill will amend the act to allow the FRU to enforce compensation and restitution orders. The FRU already collects monies payable under compensation and restitution orders, but will now have the power to enforce those amounts. The FRU is the logical enforcement agency for compensation and restitution orders and is well placed to undertake this important work. The FRU will have similar enforcement powers in relation to compensation and restitution orders as it has in relation to fines and penalties under infringement notices, although the FRU will not have the power to impose community work orders or imprisonment as these sanctions would not provide any benefit to the victim.

Second, the bill formally provides for time to pay arrangements in relation to an infringement notice before the enforcement stage. Currently, a fine defaulter who has failed to pay a fine, or the amount under an infringement notice, and has also failed to respond to a courtesy letter, is then issued with an enforcement notice. At that stage, the fine defaulter can apply to enter into a time to pay arrangement, but, by then, they will have incurred additional enforcement fees which they need to pay on top of the infringement amount.

The amendments in the bill will facilitate people applying for a time to pay arrangement as soon as they receive their infringement notice. A time to pay arrangement can include paying off an infringement amount by instalments, or arranging for an extension of time to pay the full amount. Entering into time to pay arrangements has obvious benefits for people who are issued with an infringement notice but who may have difficulty paying the penalty by the due date. I note that many enforcement agencies, including local councils, already accommodate requests for time to pay. The amendments in this bill will provide a formal basis for this.

Third, the bill makes some important changes in relation to enforcement options for the FRU under Part 5, Division 7 of the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act*. The bill makes amendments to provisions known as the cessation of business provisions.

The amendments will allow the FRU to request the Registrar of Motor Vehicles to cease business with a body corporate. This means that, although there will not necessarily be any immediate implications for the body corporate, if it does not pay the fine or enter into a time to pay arrangement, when they go to register a vehicle, renew vehicle registration or take other action specified in the act, they will be unable to do so until they either pay their fine or enter into a time to pay arrangement with the FRU. The cessation of business amendments will provide the FRU with a valuable tool for enforcing outstanding fines

and infringement notices against bodies corporate.

Fourth, the bill makes a change that will facilitate the FRU enforcing the costs associated with issuing a courtesy letter. The *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* provides that if a person does not pay a fine or infringement notice by the due date, they receive a courtesy letter as a reminder to pay. There are administrative costs associated with issuing the courtesy letter, which are passed on to the fine defaulter. These are known as courtesy letter costs. Where a person pays the amount of the original infringement, but does not pay the courtesy letter cost, it is unclear under the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* whether the FRU is able to enforce the outstanding courtesy letter cost. As a result, the FRU has not been enforcing courtesy letter costs, which means that the enforcement agencies do not recover their courtesy letter costs.

Fifth, the bill makes changes that relate to the default rates for paying off fines by community work and imprisonment. While one of the objectives of the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* is to keep people out of prison, imprisonment does remain an enforcement option of last resort under the act.

Where a person pays off their fines either through community work or imprisonment, the act currently sets the default rate at \$100 per day for imprisonment, or \$12.50 per hour for community service. This amount has not increased since the commencement of the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* in 2002. To address this, the bill links the default imprisonment rate to two penalty units per day, which is currently \$274, and the default rate for paying off a fine or infringement by way of community work to one quarter of the value of a penalty unit, being \$34.25. By linking the default rates to penalty units, we ensure that those default rates will automatically increase each year in line with inflation.

I acknowledge the contribution of the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission for bringing this issue to the attention of the Department of Justice. I am pleased to have been able to address it as part of this bill.

Sixth, the bill extends the limitation period for issuing an enforcement order from six months to 12 months. While the overall purpose of the infringement notice scheme is to have an efficient - in most cases, on-the-spot - way of dealing with minor offences, there are some cases where the process for issuing an infringement notice may take some time. For example, if a speed camera records a car driving over the speed limit, an infringement is sent to the registered owner of the car. If the registered owner indicates that

someone else was driving the car, then the infringement notice has to be re-issued to the nominated driver. If the infringement notice is not paid, a courtesy letter is issued. Only when a courtesy letter is not paid by the due date can the matter be referred to the FRU for enforcement.

At the moment, all of these things have to happen, for most offences, within six months of the date of the alleged offence. The bill will amend the act so that, provided the initial infringement notice is issued within the relevant limitation period, usually six months, then the enforcement agency will have 12 months to refer the matter to the FRU. Similarly, if a person who has received an infringement notice or a courtesy letter in relation to an infringement elects to go to court to defend the matter, rather than pay the amount on the infringement notice, then the enforcement agency will have 12 months within which to commence proceedings. The aim of these amendments is to provide the enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities with some flexibility where the process for issuing an infringement notice may have taken longer than usual.

Finally, and importantly, the bill also makes amendments to the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* to facilitate the implementation of amendments that have been made to the *Service and Execution of Process Act 1992* of the Commonwealth. In November 2010, the Commonwealth parliament passed amendments to the *Service and Execution of Process Act* to establish a framework through which states and territories can register their court-imposed fines for enforcement in another jurisdiction. The amendments will ensure that interstate court-imposed fines are no longer enforced through arrest and imprisonment, but will pick up the more appropriate sanctions available under the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* and fine enforcement regulation in other jurisdictions. The bill makes minor amendments to the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* to facilitate the implementation of the Commonwealth amendments.

The bill also makes a number of minor and technical legislative amendments including:

- minor amendments to the *Sentencing Act*;
- amendments to section 28 of the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act* to clarify that the functions of the FRU include to act on behalf of enforcement agencies; and

- minor amendments in relation to the annulment provisions in the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act*.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend the bill to honourable members, and I table a copy of the explanatory statement.

Debate adjourned.

**EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES
(NATIONAL UNIFORM LEGISLATION) BILL
(Serial 176)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Dr BURNS (Education and Training):

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

This bill seeks to implement the Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Bill, or the national law, hosted by the Victorian parliament as a law of the Northern Territory. This national law provides the platform for establishing a new national quality framework for early childhood education and care and school-aged care services, and will effectively replace existing licensing and quality assurance processes administered separately by each state and territory. This is a key reform under the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care, which was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in December 2009.

I also table a copy of a legislative scheme in each state and territory for members' benefit, so they can see quite a number of jurisdictions have already legislated for this, namely, Victoria and New South Wales, and every jurisdiction, with the exception of Western Australia, has introduced and is in the process of debating and passing these bills. I understand that in Western Australia the bill is still being drafted. I table this for the benefit of members, and it will assist when we come back to debate this bill.

Commencing on 1 January 2012, a jointly governed, unified, national framework will integrate new licensing and quality assurance systems in early childhood education and care settings. This new system will apply, in the first instance, to all long day care, family day care schemes, outside school hours care services, and preschools across Australia.

It is well documented that the earlier years are critical for establishing a person's self-esteem, resilience, healthy growth, and capacity to learn. Across Australia, kids are spending more time attending childcare services than ever before, which can be attributed to population growth and

increased workforce participation by both parents. In 2009, 23% of children were enrolled in formal care across Australia. In 2004, the average number of hours that children attended long day care services was 19 hours per week. By 2009, this average increased to 26 hours per week. This highlights the importance of establishing a benchmark to ensure that early childhood education and care services are of a high standard, and provide stimulating and nurturing environments so children have the best possible start in life.

The introduction of a national regulatory system will give focus to delivering quality education and care for children aged from birth and through the primary school years, and will ensure the same quality standards are met by services in all jurisdictions. The overarching objective of this law is to provide children with the optimal conditions during their early educational and developmental years, and safeguard children's safety, health, and wellbeing. It will promote continuous improvement in quality and will improve access to information about the quality of services, and reduce the regulatory burden for education and care providers.

Under the new system, provider and service approvals and supervisor certificates will be required; improved staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications will be introduced; a quality assessment and rating system based on national quality standards will be applied; and a new body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, will be established to oversee the implementation of the regulatory framework. Some of these key elements will be transitioned over time to ensure services have sufficient time to incorporate the requirements under the new system into their operations. The new system will apply to approximately 250 services across the Territory. For preschools, this will be the first time they will come under a regulatory system.

There are a small number of services that fall outside the scope of this law, namely, home-based care, occasional care, mobile services, and budget-based funded services. However, the true impact of these changes will only affect eight currently licensed services across the Territory and, therefore, other out-of-scope services will continue their status quo. A review of the national law is scheduled to occur in 2014, at which time it is possible services currently excluded from the law could be transitioned into the national system at a future point in time.

One of the many benefits that come with the establishment of a national system is the transparency across jurisdictions. Provider approvals and supervisor certificates issued by the regulatory authority in any participating state

or territory will be transferrable across jurisdictions. Additionally, data and other forms of information sharing will be easily accessible under this unified system.

The law also gives consideration to the needs of families. Under the quality areas against which a service will be assessed and rated, services will be required to demonstrate evidence of collaborative partnerships with families and communities in various aspects of its operation. Families will also be empowered with various forms of information regarding their child's learning and development and quality rating of the service, which will be published nationally.

This law sets out the role of the regulatory authority, which will be established and operated by each participating jurisdiction. Each authority will assume responsibility for administering the regulatory framework in their jurisdiction, taking on the current roles of licensing and accreditation which take place locally and nationally, respectively. To support this role, the law includes a number of offences and makes provision for a range of compliance and enforcement tools such as compliance notices, enforceable undertakings and prosecution. Processes for internal and external reviews are also provided to ensure equitable decisions are handed down.

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, which will be located in New South Wales, will guide the implementation and administration of the regulatory framework, promote national consistency and be responsible for reporting to the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. This body will be governed by a board appointed by the ministerial council following nominations from the Commonwealth, states and territories.

Regulations to support the national law have been developed in consultation with the sector across Australia and are currently being finalised. Subject to ministerial council's approval, the regulations will be tabled later this year. These regulations will provide the regulatory authorities, and people working within the education and care sector, with details such as the national quality standard, assessment and rating system, staff-to-child ratios and fees associated with the national quality framework.

We are on track in establishing the Northern Territory Regulatory Authority, which will oversee the assessment and quality rating of services in the Territory. In many instances, our services are already practising the standards which are being formalised by the national law. The Northern Territory Childcare Subsidy will continue to fund centre-based long day care centres and to offset

the cost of care for families, demonstrating this government's continuing commitment to supporting Territory families.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the application of this national law in the Territory is a demonstration of this government's ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for our kids. These critical reforms will establish a benchmark for ensuring that children and their families have access to quality early childhood education and care services.

I commend the bill to honourable members, and table the explanatory statement to accompany the bill.

Debate adjourned.

ORDER OF BUSINESS **Postpone Consideration of Kenbi Land Trust** **Bill (Serial 175)**

Dr BURNS (Leader of Government Business): Madam Deputy Speaker, the Chief Minister has already flagged that we will be moving the amendments to the Kenbi Land Trust bill and, after consultation with the opposition, who, I believe, have agreed, I move that the intervening business be postponed until after consideration of Government Business Orders of the Day No 2, Greenest Territory Government - Note Statement.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Deputy Speaker, speaking in response to the motion, I am curious as to why now. The Leader of Government Business has chosen not to give any explanation as to why this bill has to be moved. As he noted, and we acknowledged, there was a very fleeting discussion for the movement of this bill. However, before we pass this motion, it is highly unusual to change the timing of motions in this fashion. It is up to government to ensure its business proceeds through this House in an orderly fashion. Last night government thought it was ready to pass the bill we are now seeking a change of order to business for, and now we discover it is in such a state of disarray it has to change, not 18 hours later, the business it told us is important to government. It is an indication of the shambolic and disorganised government we have in this Chamber.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION
Note Statement – Greenest Territory
Government

Continued from 18 October 2011.

Mr KNIGHT (Business and Employment): Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the Chief Minister's statement on greening the Territory. It is an important statement and acknowledges the effort this government has put in place to protect our environment. This government is the greenest government in the country.

Across my portfolios, my agencies are implementing a number of measures in this area. For instance, my department of Business is responsible for the implementation and oversight of a range of targets, actions and outcomes under the government's climate change policy, including the ecoBiz NT program, Greening the Fleet Strategy, Green Office Building Policy ...

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

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Ring the bells. Thank you, we have a quorum; that is 10.

Mr KNIGHT: Just recapping, my department is charged with a range of policies, targets and outcomes including the ecoBiz NT program; the Greening the Fleet Strategy; the Green Office Building Policy; greening information, communication and technology; and also green industry development and green procurement. In addition, my department has an advocacy role in encouraging business to adopt climate conscious business practices and guide green industry development initiatives, as well as ensuring their requirements and interests are fully considered in the development of the policy.

ecoBiz NT is an NT government program operating since March 2009. It aims to help small to medium businesses and enterprises achieve reduced energy consumption and costs, and by doing that they reduce their carbon footprint. ecoBiz NT has assisted many Territory businesses to reduce their energy consumption and therefore their costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Participants in the program receive professional advice through site audits and have the potential to apply for grants up to \$20 000 on a dollar for dollar basis to assist with retrofitting existing infrastructure and operational improvements to achieve ongoing energy savings.

Since 2009, ecoBiz has conducted 287 energy audits of businesses in the Northern Territory. It has engaged with businesses across the Territory,

including Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Batchelor, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy, the Tiwi Islands, and other remote locations. ecoBiz has provided more than \$785 000 in ecoBiz NT grants to 64 businesses. These businesses are expected to save a combined total of 1850 tonnes of CO₂ which equates to 411 cars permanently off the road or an annual consumption of 267 households. This is over 2.2 million kilowatt hours of electricity, which equates to approximately \$49m worth of savings to these businesses. It is a huge saving for those businesses straight into their pockets. It also equates to thousands of trees, 14 000 litres of water and 920 litres of LPG. In addition, approximately \$1.8m in business trade has been stimulated by this work. There is not only a cost saving to the businesses, but these green initiatives create new business opportunities.

Two of ecoBiz's really successful clients are the Humpty Doo Barramundi Farm and the Parap Veterinary Hospital, which I visited recently. The Humpty Doo Barramundi Farm upgraded its pond circulation pumping system with a submersible pump and a centrifugal pump to highly efficient axle flow pumps. The upgrades have reaped a saving of \$16 800 in electricity bills annually. So, it is a significant amount of money. This equates to a reduction of 84 000 kilowatt hours or 69% less electricity use. Also, 92 tonnes of carbon dioxide is not released into the atmosphere. The total reduction in CO₂ emissions will be equivalent to taking 60 cars off the road, and that is just one project.

The Parap Veterinary Hospital, invested in a new air-conditioning system at the hospital after an audit was undertaken. The investment is expected to save \$9160 annually in electricity costs, which equates to 47 000 kilowatt hours of electricity. These are two examples of how ecoBiz is providing a financial and environmental benefit to the community.

The Australian government's Clean Energy legislation includes the mechanism to price carbon. This has refocused small and medium businesses on reducing carbon emissions and becoming more energy efficient. My department has been called upon to provide increased advice and assistance to help local businesses meet their obligations under the proposed carbon price regime. With the program's success and businesses seeking to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and energy costs, demand for this program is expected to increase quite significantly.

The Greening the Fleet Strategy commenced on 1 July 2009 and requires a minimum 5.5-star rating for passenger vehicles, and a 3.5-star rating for commercial vehicles according to the

Australian government's Green Vehicle Guide. This strategy aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the government's fleet by 20% over the next five years. The 20% reduction equates to a total CO₂ reduction of 2640 tonnes, which is equivalent to taking 580 cars permanently off our roads. Since its introduction, the strategy has been refined and enhanced to assist government agencies meet the emission reduction targets. Some key enhancements include incentives to encourage contract officers to select vehicles with a 7.5-star rating or better; and expanding the list of cars with a focus on highly-rated, energy-efficient models. NT Fleet has also actively encouraged other agencies to assist in their fleet costs and emissions.

At the end of September this year, Greening the Fleet had achieved a 10% reduction in carbon emissions, equivalent to a reduction of 1320 tonnes, which represents the emissions from 290 cars being taken off the road. Since the introduction of the strategy, the Northern Territory government fleet has directly contributed to the climate change performance improvements by increasing the number of vehicles with greenhouse ratings of 7.5 or more by some 82%; decreasing the number of passenger vehicles with a greenhouse rating of 5.5 or less by 44%; and reducing the number of light commercial vehicles with greenhouse gas ratings of less than 3.5 by almost 94%. It has also increased the number of hybrid vehicles by 71 or 58%, and increased the number of micro vehicles by 68 or 23%. Last, they have increased diesel passenger vehicles by 190 or 86%. So, there are significant outcomes with the Greening the Fleet Strategy and much more still to be done.

The Green Office Building Policy aims to achieve a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and power costs to both industry and the Northern Territory government. The policy applies to commercial office leases of more than 2000 m², and includes significant provisions for existing and new building developments. The target for leases in new buildings is a 5-star national built environment rating system, or NABERS. NABERS is a performance-based rating system which measures the energy efficiency of commercial buildings. Buildings which have achieved a 4.5-star NABERS or above, consume approximately half the energy and produce half the greenhouse gases of the average office building, which is estimated at 2-star of the NABERS.

From 1 July 2012, for existing buildings as government leases expire, new leases will include a focus on buildings having a NABERS energy efficient rating of 4.5-stars, which is consistent with national best practice. To date, all building owners have agreed to improve energy efficiency

as part of the lease renegotiations, and I commend those building owners for agreeing to that. As at the end of September this year, approximately 25 000 m² of the government-leased office accommodation portfolio has achieved a NABERS rating of 4.5-stars, or better. Two leased buildings have 5-star ratings, being the Darwin Plaza building and Harbour View Plaza - people may recognise it has had a major refit of its air-conditioning system. I congratulate the building owners for doing that.

At least 10 other buildings within the government leases office portfolio are currently undergoing refurbishment to attain a NABERS rating, or are in the process of achieving a NABERS rating. The buildings are located across Darwin CBD, suburbs, and also at Palmerston. Highway House is currently under redevelopment, and I commend Randazzo Properties for the great work. Most building owners are targeting a 4.5-star rating, with one owner anticipating a 5-star NABERS rating outcome. Well done on that.

The implementation of the Green Office Building Policy will result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas production and energy costs and consumption for those office building leases. Building owners who have obtained high NABERS ratings are anecdotally reporting a reduction in energy consumption of up to 50%. So, there is a massive reduction in energy consumption which is great to see.

With respect to the green ICT initiative, government and its ICT service providers, under the outsourced ICT service model, are required to comply with an internally mandated series of measures under the green ICT policy designed to improve the environmental performance of ICT infrastructure and equipment. The green ICT measures will have an effect of 10% energy saving by 2012. As a default, all ICT equipment must meet the gold category of the international standard of the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool, EPEAT. The Northern Territory government is setting the benchmark very high by requiring the top standard of ICT equipment to be met and maintained. Through planning required to meet this standard, the total cost of ownership will be considerably reduced and the environmental performance will be achieved. Other simple measures include the enabling of blank screen savers, shutting down computers when not in use, and adopting environmentally sensitive practices for the disposal of ICT equipment without resorting to dumping it in landfill.

New ICT equipment complies with the Australian energy standards, and printers are required to operate with recycled paper and

should be available to use remanufactured or refilled toner ink cartridges without voiding warranties or decreasing the reliability.

For government employees, measures such as reducing travel and working from home will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This will be provided through modern technologies including telepresence videoconferencing and teleworking. This is occurring across the Territory as we speak, and some agencies are utilising staff from different areas to cut down on costs. I recently visited the data centre in the Chan Building where they are upgrading their equipment and the air-conditioning system and, what used to occupy a whole room, is now reduced to almost a small box in a corner and the energy efficiency from the air-conditioning system is greatly improved.

With respect to the green workforce, the department has been involved in research to identify green skill, employment gaps and requirements to provide training opportunities for industry sectors. This is basically starting green businesses because this move to energy efficiency and green business practices requires specialised staff, which is what we are trying to achieve. It has been clearly identified this project is ongoing as green skills form part of every job and are being introduced as standard learning practice at all levels and types of jobs throughout education and industry promotions.

Green procurement is also extremely important. The government aims to achieve environmentally friendly and sustainable procurement practices. One of the five Northern Territory government policy principles, as specified in the procurement directions, is environmental protection. This is a critically important area. The criterion incorporates environmental management through supplies having a low carbon footprint and being energy efficient. Application of the criterion is also starting to be broadened to encapsulate sustainability as a measure of environmental performance.

Procurement Direction F2, Procurement Principles, states government procurement processes are to maximise resource recovery by considering products with high reused, recycled or renewable content and products with high reusability and recyclability. They also should foster the development and production of products and processes of lower environmental impact. Last, they should also provide leadership and incentives to business, industry and the community by promoting the use of environmentally sensitive supplies. The Department of Business and Employment is refining and updating tender and procurement documentation to better assist agencies'

sustainability and targets under the government's green change policy.

The release of the *Territory 2030* strategy and climate change policy by this government in late 2009 provided the foundation for the Power and Water Corporation strategy for environmental sustainability into the future. Under sustainable living, the *Territory 2030* strategy contains four targets that will directly affect Power and Water's operations. By 2015, we hope to reduce greenhouse gas emissions intensity of power generation at Channel Island and Weddell power stations by 10% compared to the 2009 levels. We also aim to reduce the amount of water Territory households use by 20% ...

Mr ELFERINK: A point of order, Madam Speaker! As riveted as I am by the minister, I seek an extension of time pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Mr KNIGHT: I thank the member for Port Darwin. A target for the reduction of water for Territory households of 20% by 2015, and a further 10% by 2020 compared to the 2009 consumption levels. By 2020, household electricity purchases in the Northern Territory will meet their 20% renewable energy target from Territory sources. By 2020, the Northern Territory will have replaced diesel as a primary source of power generation in remote towns in the Northern Territory and communities, using renewable or low emission energy sources instead.

The Power and Water Corporation is developing a climate change strategy to consolidate the current initiatives: the Indigenous energy source strategy; the sustainable energy strategy; and the corporate environmental plan. Crucial to this strategy is accessing the potential operational and financial impacts of the various sustainability and climate change targets. The Power and Water Corporation is investing in a range of scenarios and remediation measures including reduction in the level of greenhouse gas emissions through higher efficiency power generation; enhancing water sustainability through moderation of water demand; and the appropriate use of recycled water. Also, deploying alternative energy sources, particularly to displace diesel as a primary source of fuel for power generation in remote communities, and assessing the means to reduce the Power and Water Corporation's own ecological footprint.

The corporation is a member of the Northern Territory government's Green Energy Taskforce. The corporation supports the development of renewable and low emission energy and products

in the Territory and achieving a renewable energy target of around 3000 GWh per annum by 2020.

The first report of the green energy task force covering partial displacement of distillate in remote communities recommended a roll-out of 10 MW of solar PV across a number of remote communities over the next three years. In recognition of the climate change policy, Power and Water Corporation has sought expressions of interest from vendors interested in assisting to meet these objectives. Twenty-five submissions have been received and assessed.

Climate change has the potential to impact on Power and Water Corporation's provision of electricity, water, and sewerage services, and the increasing temperatures will likely change the demand characteristics of electricity, or a change in rainfall patterns may adversely affect the water catchment yields. A monitoring and reporting system has been developed to ensure things are happening, so the *Territory 2030* targets are achieved.

There is much work happening in Power and Water Corporation. The conversion of the Wadeye power station from diesel to gas is a key initiative. There is a reduction of hundreds of thousands of litres, and that is also occurring at Hermannsburg. We have taken over a number of solar facilities at Ti Tree, Kalkarindji, and Lake Nash, and are implementing a wind power project at Lake Nash. There is much work in the communities and we look forward to seeing that happen.

In conclusion, much is going on in the department of Business, and Power and Water, to improve our energy efficiency, reduce costs, and help business make the conversion. This new area of green technology and green business provides a new era of business opportunities as well as helping businesses convert to green energy.

I commend the Chief Minister for bringing the statement to the House. We are the greenest government in the country, which makes us environmentally friendly, and it is good for our economy as well.

Ms LAWRIE (Treasurer): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am proud to be part of a Labor government in the Territory which recognised the importance of a commitment to enhancing our environment with the sustainable use and conservation of our resources. This government has a track record of sustainable development through the use of initiatives to both protect and conserve our wonderful environment.

The 2011 budget continues to support the Greening the Territory initiatives and work towards those all important *Territory 2030* targets, with \$104m invested in the budget for the protection of the environment, parks, and natural resources. We are surrounded by beautiful nature in the Territory. The richness and diversity of our environment are unmatched anywhere else in our nation. This, in itself, is a resource; an environment that locals enjoy and also attracts visitors from interstate and overseas. They come from all over to see the beauty of our environment in the Territory.

We are well-positioned to continue to protect and conserve our environment and take the opportunities that environment provides us with. We take this responsibility very seriously and, while we have a very proud record of job creation for Territorians, we know development should not come at the expense of our environment. To this end, we have a bold track record of putting the measures in place to protect our environment.

It took a Labor government established in the Territory to create our first Environment Protection Authority in 2008. We then further strengthened the EPA with new powers so it can act as a watchdog for our overall environment protection system. The CLP never introduced an Environment Protection Authority into the Territory and has a track record of opposing it. The existing Deputy Leader of the Opposition has said independence of the EPA is overrated.

We also take steps across a range of different measures which our community is embracing. Our Cash for Containers is about delivering on a cleaner and greener Territory. Again, something the opposition is all over the shop on with its comments. It would like to see it crash and burn; however, we know the 10% deposit will provide an incentive for the bottles and cans to be returned for recycling rather than continue to be litter across our environment or simply dumped. Community groups, our children, our schools, and our sporting associations can all use Cash for Containers as fundraising opportunities. In the Territory, we consume well over 100 million beverage products each year. That is a significant amount and it makes sense to put in place the tools to drive that through to recycling.

This government introduced a ban on lightweight single-use plastic bags that came into effect on 1 September this year after a four-month phase out period. We took the bold measure to ban those plastic bags and we know this is about changing the way, as Territorians, we consume those bag products. It is great to see at the local level; for example, when I go shopping at Karama, my local shopping centre, Territorians are adapting well to that ban. So many families and

shoppers are coming in with their reusable shopping bags and I commend Territorians for embracing this clean and green environment protection initiative, and I commend our minister for the Environment for driving it through.

One of the critical areas in environmental debates is around protecting our waterways. If you look at CLP policy, which was lauded earlier today in debate with an interjection by the Leader of the Opposition regarding their long-term strategic planning for greater Darwin, the CLP has a plan to dam our rivers. The long-term strategic plan is to dam the rivers around our beautiful city of Darwin. Also, to its shame, for four days it accepted a Liberal plan to dam the Daly. It took four days ...

Members interjecting.

Ms LAWRIE: ... for the CLP to admit damming the Daly is not the right way to go ...

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, order! Member for Drysdale!

Mr Chandler: That is unbelievable. It is not true.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Brennan and member for Drysdale, cease interjecting!

Mr Chandler: It is not true, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr Bohlin: There are rules about this. You cannot come into this House and make unsubstantiated comments.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Ms LAWRIE: Madam Deputy Speaker, they doth protest too much!

When you put the truth in front of them about what is in the plan - and I understand the members for Brennan and Drysdale do not read documents, they just nod their head and say: 'Yes, yes, okay, we will accept them'. It is useful to read them and look at the dams around greater Darwin contained in the CLP blueprint for the strategic planning growth of Darwin.

You listened to the debate from the Liberals about damming the Daly to provide the great northern food bowl. They hid and thought it was okay to have that debate. It took four days for them to finally cotton on that it was appalling to say we should dam our magnificent Daly River.

I understand the members for Brennan and Drysdale ...

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brennan, cease interjecting!

Ms LAWRIE: ... do not quite get the detail. They do not quite read the detail or understand it, I get that. However, it is useful to look at your own policies because you are about damming our pristine waterways, which is to your eternal shame.

Proudly, this government took the action required when we came into government to protect the ...

Mr Bohlin interjecting.

Ms LAWRIE: ... Daly. We are the government which has said we need to put in place water allocation management plans. We need to stop the overuse we saw in some sections of the Daly and go back in, get the science right, work with the primary producers and traditional owners in the Daly catchment to understand the needs of primary producing in the catchment without unsustainable use of water. If the CLP had continued on its hell-bent way, we would have ended up with a Murray-Darling basin debacle in our pristine Daly region. It took a Labor government to say: 'No, stop. You need to get the science right'. We put a moratorium in place, we got the science right, and we now have world's best practice ...

Mr Bohlin: You then lifted the moratorium.

Ms LAWRIE: We now have world's best practice in understanding the cascading model of water allocation down to ensuring primary producers have access to the water they need, but we have sustainable use of that beautiful waterway, the Daly, which so many Territorians hold dear and near to their hearts in, obviously, the fishing opportunities in the Daly. We were doing it in a smarter, better way; understanding you can both enjoy your environment, you can have economic development activity within your environment, and you can conserve, protect, and make it a sustainable use of your environment.

It took a Labor government to come into power and say: 'We will protect 96% of the mangroves around Darwin'. We put them under a conservation zone. The Libs never did that, the CLP never did that. They wanted to carve them up and turn them into canal suburbs and make us look like the Gold Coast. It took a Labor government to come in and say: 'We are going to conserve the lungs of our city, the all-important

mangroves which ensure the purification of air in our city'. So, 96% conserved due to the bold actions of a Labor government.

Regarding land clearing, again, a Labor government stepped in and said: 'We recognise land clearing needs to occur, but you need to do it in a sustainable way and ensure our land clearing laws also cover freehold lands', which cover about half the Territory. Essentially, the CLP had its heads buried in the sand about land clearing on freehold. We did the hard work, working with industry, understanding the science, conservation and preservation, and the needs and aspirations of the traditional owners who have land rights, saying: 'Let us get the matrix of land clearing right so you can meet the aspirations of Territorians and preserve our beautiful environment'. If you want to look at a stark, simple, basic comparison and contrast between the policies of a Labor government on a sustainable development versus pillage at any opportunity CLP when it comes to the environment, look no further than our positions on the proposed Arafura Harbour development.

The government has said no to that development because it would literally cut that critical, beautiful environmental area of East Point in half and yet the CLP, to this day, support it. It took a Labor government to come up with a bold EcoLink plan which is literally creating a fauna corridor between the Top End and South Australia ...

Members interjecting.

Mr Chandler: It was there before.

Ms LAWRIE: I pick up on the interjection of the member for Brennan: 'It was there before'. No, the EcoLinks was not there. This is about creating and enshrining that pathway through the EcoLinks for the movement of our native animals and protecting those pathways forever; a bold, sustainable environmental policy put in place by a Labor government working collaboratively with a Labor government in South Australia.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend our Chief Minister and the Environment minister for pursuing the greening policies that are in place. These would not have occurred without a Labor government in place. It is the hollow rhetoric of the CLP versus the bold, strong, innovative action of Labor.

Ms McCARTHY (Local Government): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking in support of the Chief Minister's statement on this government's great achievements in environmental protection and stewardship. One of the things I value is the Labor Party's commitment, understanding, and

track record in respect of the environmental stewardship role and our obligations to the environment. Yes, it is the role of government to deliver a strong and growing economy, to create jobs and opportunities, and to ensure, as best we can, the wellbeing of all our constituents.

We are also ever mindful that we are but one generation making decisions that can be difficult to undo and intergenerational in their impacts. Labor governments have taken some of the important leaps forward in fostering innovation and developing a new way of doing business, both in the wise use of our resources and the valuing and protecting of our unique landscapes.

It has also been Labor governments, more than any other, that have recognised the cultural dimension of our environment in urban, rural, and remote settings. It has been Labor governments that have been willing to think big and beyond our boundaries embracing ideas like world heritage, places of universal significance, and support for global efforts to care for our world.

Returning to our own back yard, it is a privilege to be a member of the Northern Territory government that has stepped up to the plate and committed to world-class innovation and leadership in our environmental policies.

Our unique and awe-inspiring environment is, of course, one of the key reasons we attract so many travellers - local, interstate, and international - to the Northern Territory. I was recently reminded of this while on my trip to China working to ensure we are connecting with that market and developing tourism products based on our Territory culture and landscapes. One of the things I made clear during that visit was to remind the Chinese and the many organisations I met with, and others wherever I travel, that the Northern Territory is an incredibly beautiful place to visit as tourists or for business because we have such a growing economy. However, it is also about the people of the Northern Territory benefitting from any kind of relationship, such as a stronger relationship with the Chinese.

We have to ensure any kind of relationship, whether it is with the Chinese, Europe, the UK, the Americans, the Northern Territory benefits from, and, in particular, the Indigenous people of the Northern Territory whose culture is very much a reason why so many foreigners choose to visit this wonderful country.

We have been relentless in marketing the Territory in both our traditional and emerging tourism markets and we know why people visit, supporting over 18 000 jobs. Travellers come because of our unique environment. Our government recognises the importance of our

environment and we are supported in caring for that heritage with a wonderfully supportive public service; rangers, scientists, soil conservationists, and planners, just to name a few.

As well as our tourism industry, there are pastoralists and Indigenous land and sea owners. The cooperation, dedication, and work from different communities, in company with our progressive environment protection policy framework, will help ensure we have a wonderful tourism product into the future.

Perhaps one key reflection of the importance of our environmental credentials in the tourism sector is the rise of eco-accreditation as an important selling point for our tourism businesses. Importantly, our current tourism strategic plan recognises this important truth and our tourism future will mean being green is an expectation of our visitors, not a desirable optional extra.

On my recent trip to China, one of the things that came through when we talked about Uluru and the Sounds of Silence dinner in the evening, was looking at the incredible stars in the evening in the Central Desert. For the Chinese, that image alone was quite important, given they do not see the stars in many of their cities. I received this feedback consistently as I travelled through Beijing, Shanghai, and down to Hong Kong. It is the environment, the landscape, all those things which are attractive and so important, not just to the people of the Northern Territory, but to our visitors.

We are helping our tourism businesses become smart in responding to our environment and climate change challenges. Some of our activities in this area include: support for tourism businesses to access the Environmental Enhancement Fund program, which assists businesses to reduce their environmental footprint; a pilot carbon offset program helping some key tour operators in Central Australia become carbon neutral; engaging businesses to adjust and plan their business to reduce environmental impacts and operating costs while maximising visitor satisfaction; word of mouth advertising about our great landscapes, culture, and visitor experience; and support and encouragement for around 60 tourism businesses participating in initiatives like the Alice Springs solar city and ecoBiz NT.

In the realm of regional development, I am ever mindful that we have incredible challenges in the Territory, long transport lines and an often harsh working environment. However, as always, the people of the Territory rise above the challenges by being smart, innovative, working hard, and working with what we have, which

includes a realistic understanding of what our environment can support and sustain.

As Minister for Regional Development, I am pleased to be contributing to some forward thinking and planning in this area under the umbrella of the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum. In particular, this group of ministers is taking forward the groundbreaking work of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce regarding the sustainable development of northern Australia.

One of the important lessons from that work is people can have grand schemes; however, we need to heed the lessons of history and ensure our decision-making is based on the best available information we have to properly understand what resources are there for us to utilise, as well as our consequences and constraints, to ensure the sustainable development and use of our natural and cultural resources.

In regard to knowledge and wisdom in our decision-making, it is heartening to know our government has been strong in ensuring we have access to world-class technical knowledge, including that from our home-grown institutions, the Charles Darwin University and our Desert Knowledge Centre in Alice Springs.

Another great font of knowledge and wisdom that supports sustainable development and environmental protection is Indigenous knowledge. An important part of our approach to caring for our environment has been to acknowledge and support the application of Indigenous knowledge systems, particularly through the joint management of our park estate, our growing Indigenous land and sea ranger workforce, and the innovative work of the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, NAILSMA.

I have mentioned innovation. Another area of work I would like to acknowledge is the new private sector partnerships that are emerging such as those involving Birds Australia and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy – privately-funded organisations working with Indigenous landowners and native titleholders in the conservation management of land holdings in the Northern Territory.

I would also like to note another important observation of the land and water taskforce: 'Unmanaged land, whether public or private, poses risks to the natural and cultural estate and future opportunities'.

This is another reason we need to support all people of the Territory in actively managing our

estate. I note the important, sometimes critical, contribution that homeland and outstation residents have in this regard in the more remote parts of the Northern Territory.

Local government is another key area where important work is being done to ensure all Territorians, no matter where they live, are part of our collective effort to care for our environment.

Alice Springs Town Council is taking a proactive approach to environmental issues and recycling in the town. In Alice Springs, the council has taken a lead in introducing a Cash for Containers scheme, where residents cash in their empty drinking containers for 5¢ per container. The many advantages of this great initiative are a significant reduction in the town's landfill needs, reduction in litter around town, and less glass on the street.

Alice Springs Town Council officially opened its own glass crushing facility in June 2010, with glass crushed and used in non-loadbearing cement such as that used for footpaths. This is a great example of innovation and practical leadership.

The Alice Springs community responded magnificently to this initiative and I was pleased, as Minister for Local Government, to respond to a request for further assistance from Mayor Damien Ryan and support this initiative with \$600 000 over two years until the introduction of the Northern Territory government's own Cash for Containers scheme.

Alice Springs is also one of seven cities around Australia to be selected to participate in the Australian government's Solar Cities program. Led by a consortium of local organisations, including Alice Springs Town Council, the aim of the Alice Solar City project is to empower the community as energy champions through improved awareness, energy efficiency measures, solar energy technology, and smart electricity metering and tariffs. The project aims to make Alice Springs a model for the rest of Australia and the world to follow. By the end of the project, the estimated reduction in carbon dioxide emissions will be the equivalent of taking one-quarter of all Alice Springs vehicles off the road.

The Northern Territory government and Power and Water Corporation are providing important support for this work, complementing the funding provided by the Australian government Solar Cities and Renewable Remote Power Generation programs.

The Alice Solar City consortium has six core members: the Alice Springs Town Council; the Northern Territory government; Power and Water

Corporation; Arid Lands Environment Centre; Tangentyere Council; and the Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I congratulate each of these organisations and note this work is another fine example of partnership; Territorians working together for the common good.

The Darwin City Council is also doing some great work increasing recovery rates and reducing waste to landfill. Through its Environmental Management Plan, the staff of DCC are working to meet their goals set out in their *Evolving Darwin - Strategic Directions Towards 2020 and Beyond* to increase the proportion of recycled domestic waste. Reuse and recycling are central to the conservation of our planet's finite resources and in reducing the footprint of waste management.

It is also great that Darwin City Council funds a community education officer to carry out waste and recycling education activities in the Darwin municipality, including free lessons to all schools located in the Darwin municipality. Darwin City Council also has a 12-month trial at East Point Reserve of solar wind-generated street lighting. The new lighting along the extended shared path is powered by the hybrid generator, and does not require any power from the grid. It is fantastic that our municipal councils are taking a lead in developing these types of initiatives.

Our shire councils are focused on environmental protection and reducing energy costs as part of their core business. Their immediate challenge is dealing with the liability issues inherited from the former community government councils; in particular, the issue of improving landfill and waste management, and opportunities for reducing and recycling waste in all our communities.

One of key intentions in local government reform was to build more capacity for the shires to plan and bring professional technical expertise to these types of challenges. I am pleased this is occurring and the new shires are advancing their plans for addressing waste management issues, as well as developing local work teams who are focusing closely on improving local facilities and the local environment of all our smaller communities.

Here might be as good a place as any to congratulate my colleague, Karl Hampton, for introducing our Ban the Bag initiative. Plastic bags blowing around in the wind have been the bane of community life for many years, to the extent that many of our smaller communities banned single-use plastic bags years ago. It is fantastic that this is now part of Territory life - no more single-use plastic bags. I seriously doubt

our alternative Territory government would have had the will or the ticker to make that change.

I also congratulate Tony Tapsell and his team at the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory who have clearly embraced the need and the opportunity to be directly involved in supporting local government in issues across the Northern Territory. LGANT has established a sustainability and environment division that works to support, with reference material, technical advice and project management, a wide range of projects across the Northern Territory including: waste management in small communities; advice on environmental management planning; natural resource management; soil erosion control; and weeds management. A visit to the LGANT website will show it is set up with a very useful range of tools to help local government bodies with their environment management and protection work.

It is also great to see they are all active in working with the Northern Territory's Natural Resource Management Board that oversees and coordinates work under the board's integrated natural resource management plan; the key plan that guides investment in natural resource management across the NT.

Improving facilities, addressing environmental health issues, improving the amenity of our towns, and reducing the environmental footprint of our townships is also a key feature of our ongoing work in our Territory growth towns. Our local implementation plans are including activities under the health building block, particularly in waste management, secure water supply, and sewerage infrastructure.

I mention here the quiet, but important work of our Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in recording and protecting that unique and irreplaceable part of our environment - our Aboriginal sacred sites. AAPA does a great job working with government agencies, resource developers, pastoralists, local government, and custodians in protecting our sites and working as best it can to ensure development can progress without damaging our sites. This is especially important, given our growing economy, new resource development projects, and the big infrastructure investments we are making in our growth towns. One great piece of work has been a comprehensive review and assessment of sacred sites issues in all our growth towns, so all our investments in these areas can progress smoothly.

Looking to future challenges, we are also very focused on maximising opportunities from new policies and programs to address our national climate change challenge. The Australian

government has announced its intention regarding a carbon pricing scheme that values the environmental benefits of traditional fire management practices in the Northern Territory. Commonwealth carbon farming and sequestration initiatives will also provide new economic development opportunities for Aboriginal people, building on the conservation and carbon offset schemes already employed across the Territory.

We will see more carbon abatement and offset activities develop over time, including revegetation, feral animal eradication, and biodiversity conservation projects. I am sure many people across the Territory will be well-positioned to participate in and benefit from these activities.

I would like to mention the work of the new body established and led by Territorians. Centrefarm has established a position for a conservation economy manager, and project manager, Rowan Foley, is on the job establishing a scheme to encourage Australians to offset their carbon emissions on Indigenous land. Similar schemes overseas have shown people are prepared to pay a premium for carbon credits on Indigenous land. I congratulate these Territorians for once again showing how to position ourselves at the forefront of change and carve out new opportunities from this emerging conservation economy.

We understand our obligations and the need for leadership; however, we also understand the need to be inclusive and to work with people from all walks of life in the Northern Territory celebrating, valuing, developing, and protecting.

Mr ELFERINK: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I move an extension of time for the minister pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Ms McCARTHY: Thank you, member for Port Darwin.

Mr Elferink: My charity knows no bounds.

Ms McCARTHY: I am very proud to be part of this Labor government which has a very real commitment to our environment and the strength and purpose to make a difference. I commend the Chief Minister's statement to the House.

Mr Elferink: Well, that was well worth the extension.

Mr VATSKALIS (Health): Madam Speaker, I welcome the Chief Minister's statement on greening the Territory. I am pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion and

highlight the considerable achievements of the greenest government in the history of the Northern Territory

We all recognise appropriate management and protection of our environment is essential. As we pursue opportunities for further development we must carefully balance the requirements for sustainable development. This requires joint effort and cooperation not only across government, but with all stakeholders including industry and the broader community.

My portfolios cover areas from Resources to Health and Child Protection. I will highlight some of the initiatives of my departments. When it comes to the Department of Resources, the agency's corporate plan highlights the priority placed on sustainable and productive farming, the sustainable use of fish resources, and the responsible recovery of resources. This is coupled with a commitment at my department's corporate level to ensure its own use of resources should be underpinned by improving its energy efficiency through initiatives such as Greening the Fleet. It recognises that, not only can we encourage industry to act when it comes to protecting the environment, but, also individually, we can make a difference.

Let me begin by looking at the activities undertaken by the Primary Industry division. The main groups, pastoral production, plant industries, and biosecurity, continue to explore promising avenues that facilitate sustainable and productive farming. A key element of this is incorporating climate change because the department believes in climate change, believes the climate has changed in our world, in contrast to the people opposite. They have abandoned their policies and now believe climate change happens only on Titan and Jupiter.

Initially, climatic change activities were designed to build staff and industry capacity and, importantly, a research path was identified that would lead to climatic change strategies for the Territory's pastoral industry. In saying this, I note members opposite are somewhat divided when it comes to climatic change. The member for Fong Lim is a climatic change denier. His views on climate change in outer space have been talked about and are well-documented. I believe the opposition spokesperson on the environment is a supporter sometimes. The Leader of the Opposition was a supporter, but now is not. He had a policy around climate change, but now does not. Perhaps now he is a denier. Nevertheless, I will not continue; I will let the divisions in the other side speak for themselves.

As our knowledge and understanding about climatic change has improved, specific research

was identified not only as being critical to sustainable development, but also as a necessary component of profitability. In September 2009, it became a five-year project at Douglas Daly Research Farm. This project continues to evaluate a time-controlled or cell grazing management system as a more profitable and sustainable production system in the face of climatic change and increased sequestration of carbon in the soil.

Two collaborative projects began in 2010. These projects have since established on-farm demonstration of adaptation and mitigation management strategies for climate change. They focused on the Victoria River district, Douglas Daly, Alice Springs, and Barkly regions. This government's climate adaptation action plan is currently developing strategies for the pastoral industry as part of the agriculture, forest, and fisheries sector. We are looking forward to some creative and new ideas being produced from these efforts. This project will examine cost-effective pastoral practices that increase resilience to climatic change and reduce emissions. The climate change activities being undertaken by my department are aimed at developing best practices for the pastoral industry.

Another action from the 2009 Northern Territory Climate Change Policy is to collaborate research for the use of biofuels. My department began biofuel research in 2006. From then, the research team has developed a set of criteria to determine the most suitable biofuel crop for the Northern Territory. They investigate annual crops for ethanol production. They explore annual crops for biodiesel production. Other research examines perennial crops for biodiesel, including cassava for ethanol and Pongamia, an Australian native tree. The foundation of our primary industries is my department's biosecurity expertise. The task for this hard working group is to protect the Territory's green credentials.

Let us turn our focus to fishing. It is this government's intention that our future generation will be handed over healthy, thriving Territory waters. Fishing is so important to the Territory economy and the lifestyle of many Territorians. We want to ensure the fishing experience available today continues into the future, and the growing popularity of fishing itself amongst locals and tourists alike will place greater pressure on our aquatic resources. It is part of the reason we have bought back licences and set aside areas for anglers. It is also an arena in which we can boast, due to the skills of our research and managers, combined with strong partnerships with stakeholders, and a willingness to make difficult decisions, we have some of the healthiest fisheries in the world.

A recent independent review by Professor Carl Walters on the status of our fisheries by a world-renowned scientist has confirmed our fisheries are extremely healthy. We have conservative management arrangements in place, with most fisheries catching below 8% of estimated biomass. In contrast, many other jurisdictions will consider fisheries sustainable with catches of three or four times greater than in the Territory. This means NT fishers can enjoy good catch rates while ensuring our unique ecological values are maintained, and is the reason we do not see wide-scale close off to anglers, also referred to as 'no take zones'. Our fisheries are extremely well managed. This is the reason the federal government's marine protected area did not require huge tracts of water being locked up.

We have had a world-leading expert review our fisheries. The science is there. I encourage the Leader of the Opposition to seek a briefing from anglers, from the Seafood Council, from government, because the science is compelling, and I encourage him to rule out wide-scale bans on fishing.

Our unique labelling law requires all imported fish to be clearly labelled. This means people purchasing fish in the Territory can make an informed choice, and we are the envy of other jurisdictions. Seafood councils in other states have urged their government to introduce and adopt the Territory's labelling laws. To date, they have been denied that right. Hopefully, it will happen in the future.

The research carried out by my Department of Resources is used to determine the health of fish stocks, including the marine environment on which they rely. Government has undertaken some world-leading research on the survival of fish that are caught and released. Barra do very well when released. In contrast, jewfish and snapper taken from slightly deeper water do not survive. Research undertaken in the Territory using the same X-rays used for diagnosing human injuries reveal the internal organs of fish are damaged and unlikely to survive. That is why we have a bag limit, but no size limit, on some of our fish.

Indigenous marine ranger groups also assist in monitoring our fisheries and removing illegal ghost nets carried by currents from overseas. By-product and bycatch action plans are in place for many fisheries. Of the eight Territory fisheries that have sought expert accreditation, all have been independently assessed and found to be ecologically sustainable. Many of our fisheries have been afforded the highest level of accreditation possible and, when issues arise, like the unprecedented death of a large number of swordfish in Fog Bay, we are willing to take action. We are committed to protecting our Territory

waters from invasive pests and diseases. Territorians remember the Cullen Bay marina being closed and our pearling and fishing industry being placed at risk with the discovery of the exotic black striped mussel.

Ongoing environmental commitments, protocols, and safeguards are in place to minimise impacts on the Territory's aquatic environment. Inspection, and the precautionary treatment of every visiting high-risk vessel, prevents the likelihood of introduction of aquatic pests. We continue to monitor our native marine fouling communities throughout the Territory to detect any marine pest incursions ...

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, it is now 5.30 pm. Pursuant to standing orders, general business will take precedence over government business.

Mr VATSKALIS: I seek leave to continue my comments at a later date, Madam Speaker.

Leave granted.

Debate adjourned.

DANGEROUS PRISONERS (SEXUAL OFFENDERS) BILL (Serial 168)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The bill I bring before this House does not represent a new concept in our nation. New South Wales, Queensland, and other jurisdictions have gone down this path and, after a couple of referrals to the High Court, the law in this country surrounding these issues is now settled.

The idea of the bill is quite straightforward; however, it does touch on the boundaries of what the state should be able to do in a society where the rule of law is supreme.

From time to time, there comes to the attention of authorities individuals who represent themselves to authorities as a clear and real danger to the community. These are sexual offenders with a history of serious sexual offences, who have been convicted and imprisoned for those offences. These people are often on the boundaries of what the community would consider being rational but the courts have held them to be capable of being convicted and sentenced for their crimes. These people then spend their time in gaol and show no sign of improved attitude or world view, and any attempt

to rehabilitate them has fallen upon deaf ears and a dark spirit.

These people represent a serious threat and, where there is a high degree of probability that these people upon their release would re-offend, we as legislators are delivered of a quandary. All members would have heard of the concept of double jeopardy. One of the manifestations of this rule is it is not possible to sentence a person a second time for the same offence. There are good and sound reasons for such a rule and this bill in no way wishes to intrude upon that concept. The idea that we would intrude upon such a sound rule is an approach I would not be bound to with any comfort whatsoever. However, I am often torn between that position and the fact that in the real world there are rare, but real, individuals who represent a clear danger of re-offending and, are therefore, people who, upon their release, will create more victims of the worst forms of crimes in our communities.

Nevertheless, there are mechanisms available that may be engaged in by the state that do not touch upon the conviction or its subsequent sentence but can still restrain a person who is a danger to the community.

Members who are familiar with legislation such as the *Bail Act* will be familiar with the idea that there are ways of bringing restraints upon people who have not been convicted of any offence. This bill describes a system of restraint that may be brought to bear upon a person when they present a real danger and that person is in custody and may re-offend.

This bill, should it become law, will enable the government to seek such restraint to be authorised by the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory. The evidence to sustain such an application would place a burden upon the government to demonstrate to a high degree of probability that the offender will re-offend.

There is no higher burden of proof on the statute book. It places an even greater burden upon the Crown than the criminal burden of proof beyond reasonable doubt, and so it should.

This bill is different to a matter of a criminal offence. It does not deal with what has occurred but attempts to remedy what will occur. It is for that reason that the burden should be so high.

In a world we occupy, there is room for this kind of restraint. A person who is a real danger, who represents a high degree of probability of creating victims, presents us with a conundrum that we can address. It will always be in my mind that in our community there are offenders and victims. I have the strong interest, as I am sure all

members in this House have an interest, in the victims, and living in the world where there are less of them. This bill is aimed at preventing more victims from being created.

If the Supreme Court is satisfied that such a danger exists, this bill will enable it to respond to that danger in a way it has not been able to do in this jurisdiction before. The restraint it may place upon a person, should that person be subject of such an order, may be an order for continued custody or supervised release. A reading of the bill will reveal to honourable members there are numerous checks and balances in place to attend to matters that would prevent this law from being abused.

This bill is about victim protection; not only victims that have been created. If this bill passes, we may never be able to point to a particular person and say that person would have been the victim but for this bill. It is similar to taking steps to prevent a car accident. You can never claim a victory for a particular accident that never occurred. However, this, as a law, will work and it will save people who will never be cognisant of the fact they were rescued because their rapist was never released; however, we can take comfort that somewhere, someone has been saved from being raped.

For that reason, I commend this bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.

**CRIMINAL CODE (UNLAWFUL ASSAULT
CAUSING DEATH) AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 171)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

I present members with a bill that would see what we on this side of the House consider to be an anomalous matter in our law. The issue orbits around the occasions that exist in our community where people take to assaulting others and, on rare occasions in the process of those assaults, cause their death.

One such instance in recent times was the matter of the death of Sergeant Brett Meredith of Katherine. I followed the case with interest and discussed the case with people in the legal profession. There was a high expectation the matter would result in a finding of not guilty. Naturally, subsequent to that time, the contrary has been shown. However, having spoken to the widow, Aimee Meredith, she had clearly been

warned not to have high expectations of a finding of guilt. So much so, that Mrs Meredith began a campaign to make 'one-punch homicide', as it is colloquially known, a new type of crime even before the finding of guilt in the instance of her husband's death. As there was a finding of guilt, that case now has little bearing on the matter I introduce today, other than what that case highlighted in the law of the Northern Territory.

Had the quality of evidence been other than what it was - and I understand it had much to do with the CCTV footage itself; never to second-guess a jury, of course - it is conceivable there would have been an entirely different result in that matter. The law of manslaughter demands that in unlawfully causing the death of another, either the element of recklessness or negligence must exist. If neither of those elements is described, then it is not possible to return a verdict of guilty. These are not easy obstacles to overcome, and the determination that is left to the jury is to discover if those elements exist, and to find whether manslaughter had occurred.

Indeed, in the matter I referred to earlier, Justice Barr touched on the matter when referring to manslaughter as a crime that can occur across a broad range of circumstances from the very edge of murder to a prank gone wrong.

Under normal circumstances, one would hope such a broad offence would cover the field of public expectations. It does not. In the Territory *Criminal Code Act* beneath the crime of manslaughter, there is merely aggravated assault. In the circumstances where a person causes the death of another by way of an unlawful assault where neither negligence nor recklessness is a factor, that person may be found guilty of an aggravated assault. It is possible or conceivable that, in such circumstances, a person who has unlawfully assaulted another will be found guilty of aggravated assault only. The possible consequence is the matter may be dealt with by a court, and that court will only be told of the injuries of the victim without actually mentioning the death.

When the matter was drawn to my attention by Mrs Meredith, she presented me with the work of a law professor who suggested the way to create a system of 'one-punch homicide' was to make the offence an offence of strict liability. Whilst that would have achieved the desired result, it would have made the offence easier to prove but rendered the accused with no legal defence. This, to me, is unsatisfactory. This is not, and should not be, about prosecutorial convenience; this is about presenting the public with an offence in which a person who unlawfully assaults another causing their death is held accountable for their conduct in circumstances that would not qualify as manslaughter, for evidentiary reasons amongst

others. This bill bridges that gap and fills that public expectation.

The other component I wish to place on the record is that this offence does not replace manslaughter in our *Criminal Code Act*. Where a prosecution can make out the offence of manslaughter, it is expected it will be business as usual for the prosecutorial arm of government. Nevertheless, there is space for this new offence and it is intended to deal with that hole or gap in the law.

This legislation exists in other jurisdictions. Bills have been introduced in those jurisdictions because they were responding to events in which the public expectation had been disappointed. This bill is not a response to an event; it is a response to an event that will occur in the future. It is a foresighted legislative instrument that sees an issue and prepares for it, rather than responding to something after it has occurred.

For those reasons I commend the bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.

MOTION **Implementation of Recommendations of** **Ombudsman's Report**

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Speaker, I move - That this Assembly require:

1. the Minister for Children and Families to implement all of the recommendations of the Ombudsman's Report - *A Life Long Shadow*; and
2. the Minister for Children and Families to immediately appoint the Ombudsman and the Children's Commissioner to the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee to ensure appropriate local scrutiny of reforms to the Territory's child protection system.

On 8 August 2011, parliament was presented this report written by the Northern Territory Ombudsman titled *A Life Long Shadow*. This was a report of a partial investigation of the child protection authority in the Northern Territory. It was partial because, halfway through writing the report, the Ombudsman was cut off at the knees, literally. She was instructed by the Northern Territory government that she was no longer responsible for dealing with most child protection complaints that had been coming her way.

The government decided to restrict the Ombudsman's role in child protection, presumably in an effort to streamline the system, which meant

most of the child protection issues and complaints were to be processed by the Children's Commissioner. However, what most of us realised was the Ombudsman has remained a thorn in the side of the Northern Territory government when it comes to child protection for quite some time now. This was an effort by the Northern Territory government to gag the Ombudsman, to silence her; to stop her being involved in child protection matters that were highlighting the deficiencies of the government when it comes to the administration and the operation of child protection in the Northern Territory.

This report has been not a high issue agenda for the government. The government has, by all accounts, tried to sweep this report under the radar. It is not a favourable report when it comes to analysing and critiquing what has been happening in child protection in the Northern Territory over the last couple of years.

This is one independent analysis; one independent inquiry into child protection. We have had many over the last 10 years. We have had six independent inquiries into child protection, most of them pretty much saying the system is broken, the system requires widespread and deep reform, and requires changes to the way we go about the business of child protection in the Northern Territory. The reforms are across the board in all areas.

We know 12 months ago the *Growing them strong, together* report was made public by the Northern Territory government. This was a board of inquiry report into child protection. It consisted of 147 recommendations and, strangely enough, the government took those on board and accepted the 147 recommendations of that report - undertook to implement each and every one of those 147 recommendations.

All up, over the last 10 years, the government has been delivered 315 recommendations from six different inquiries into the child protection system in the Northern Territory relating to all matters of child protection - the administration and operation of how things are done within the industry.

The Ombudsman delivers her report on 8 August and the government says: 'No, we are not going to accept her 28 recommendations. We are only going to accept 40% of what she has recommended'. Given the history of this government and the relationship it has had with the Ombudsman, I can only draw the conclusion that this government has a certain prejudice when it comes to dealing with the recommendations and comments made by the Ombudsman relating to child protection. She has been scathing, has

been very forceful in her analysis and how she has presented her material; however, she has been an independent watchdog of child protection in the Northern Territory.

She has gone about the business of analysing data within this report. The methodology she used to come to her conclusions and recommendations was thorough and scientific. She reviewed 61 child protection files of children known to the Department of Children and Families. She reviewed medical files for the subject children and the parents of some of them. She reviewed police records. She reviewed previous reports and inquiries into the child protection authority in the Northern Territory. She interviewed staff, including from the after-hours crisis team, the Royal Darwin Hospital, and the Central Intake system. She spoke to the Community and Public Sector Union about its concerns. She did what I consider to be a thorough job at gathering and collecting information in a very scientific and professional manner. She has pulled it all together. She has done some things in an unorthodox way. She used cases. She was very graphic and detailed in the information she provided on particular cases in order to illustrate certain problems she identified. As I said, she looked at 61 client files of children brought to the attention of the department and refers to 17 cases in the report.

She has gone about this inquiry, just like the previous inquiries conducted, in a highly professional manner, which I commend. I have read the report from start to finish. I have flipped through it several dozen times and looked at different parts of it for my own information. This is a very sound and credible report and I do not have a problem with any part of it. She has explained why she has identified certain cases. Some sectors criticised her for not identifying certain cases; however, in the context of what she has written, she has managed to legitimise and back up her chosen style of reporting her findings.

This report is quite extensive - several hundred pages - and a culmination of several years work for the Northern Territory Ombudsman, a highly-respected, highly-regarded figure in our community. There are a limited number of ombudsmen throughout the world, she is one of them, and we are lucky to have her in that position. They form a very elite circle of professional people and are treated with great respect and high esteem in any community; however, not by this government. This government has chosen to treat her with contempt, which I find appalling.

Someone in the position Carolyn Richards holds should be given the utmost respect, regardless of the criticism she might make of how

this government goes about its business. If we come to government in 12 months time, the Ombudsman might serve us much criticism, she might analyse how we go about our business in an equally forthright, objective, and open manner which we might not be able to swallow either. However, the way this government has treated the Ombudsman is contemptuous and I reject it completely. It is a sad indictment of the lack of respect this government has for such a distinguished person in our community.

The reason I am bringing this motion today is because the 28 recommendations the Ombudsman has made in her report are all valid and should be treated in exactly the same way the 147 recommendations in the *Growing them strong, together* report were made. It should thank the Ombudsman for providing such insightful information; such insight into the mechanics of the department and giving her advice as to how this system could be improved for the children and families of the Northern Territory.

This is not a personal attack. This report is not saying the Minister for Children and Families is a bad person or completely inept, although the thought has crossed my mind. However, she is not saying that. She is saying: 'I have done some research; I have identified some problems and have given you some recommendations'. This government has decided the 28 recommendations provided by the Ombudsman do not require its attention; it does not require work on its credibility in government addressing these areas of need.

On page 211 of the report the Ombudsman talks about the response by the department to this report. She describes how she provided the report as required by the *Ombudsman Act* and goes on to say in paragraph four of this section:

The department did not agree with any of the six recommendations that were relevant to that agency. They were recommendations numbered 6, 7, 8, 13, 15, 16.

By highlighting that, reading between the lines the Ombudsman has picked up a theme; that is, the department has decided any criticism or recommendation she has made of how the child protection agency - as she refers to the department throughout this report - or feedback she makes about the department will not be accepted by the government.

Reading between the lines, the government thinks the Ombudsman has some type of prejudice against it when, in fact, when you read the recommendations she is referring to, they are reasonable and are well argued. I see no reason

why the Department of Children and Families cannot implement these recommendations.

I draw your attention to recommendation 7, which I briefly mentioned in parliament previously. Recommendation 7 from the Ombudsman's report, *A Life Long Shadow*, is:

That the facility for professional notifiers to e-mail or facsimile notifications be restored to the NT public hospitals.

This recommendation comes from a situation which arose some time ago involving Susan Mansfield, a social worker from the Royal Darwin Hospital. Susan Mansfield's name has been used quite often in parliament to illustrate the point that this woman has been put through hell; has been intimidated, has alleged bullying, and gone through all types of personal and professional anguish because she decided - God forbid! - to fax a notification to the Department of Children and Families naming children who came to her attention through her work at the Royal Darwin Hospital.

For that shameful, poor judgment she underwent disciplinary procedure by the department and could, quite possibly, be continuing to be under that disciplinary action; I have not had a recent update. However, several months ago, she was in the throes of it and feeling much anguish and distress over the fact she decided to fax a notification through to the department when she was told she should have made it verbally.

The Ombudsman has used the experience of Susan Mansfield - and this is one example of one recommendation of the Ombudsman's report that has been rejected on the basis that, for some unknown reason, the government thinks a hospital employee should not fax through notifications to the Department of Children and Families. I do not understand this; it is irrational, emotional, very short-sighted, and unprofessional. I have been a social worker in a hospital setting in the Northern Territory, and you can ring and ring to make notification but, quite often, there is no connection when you try to get through to the department. I am going back many years now; however, presumably, things have not changed much because Susan Mansfield felt under duress to fax through her notification because she could not make contact with the right people.

Here we have an example of a recommendation that is quite reasonable, is rational, is well-thought out, is entirely reasonable, and the government says 'opposed'. It has opposed this recommendation. I cannot make any sense of it. Reading between the lines, there is a general prejudice against what the

Ombudsman is recommending when it comes to reforming the Department of Children and Families because this government feels under some personal attack by the Ombudsman. The government is reading too much into it. It is fragile and has been hiding this stuff for years. It has been hiding the fact the Central Intake system is inadequately resourced and is burning out its staff - this is all documented in the report. It has been hiding the fact it has been intimidating staff for speaking out. It has been hiding the fact they have had to bodgie up their data and documents to appease the number crunchers and the bureaucrats and, ultimately, the minister. We have all types of super sensitive allegations in this report the government is not open to, does not want to hear, and does not want to accept its recommendations.

Madam Speaker, I recommend, very boldly, this government takes on what the Ombudsman said. Be open. Rejecting most of the recommendations tells me you have more to hide. There is even more than what has been revealed in the last 10 years in six independent inquiries into child protection in the Northern Territory.

It tells me you are very sensitive and your ability to be transparent and provide these reforms is possibly not happening. Your decision to not set up a truly independent external monitoring and reporting committee also suggests you cannot stomach more criticism. You cannot stomach more analysis of these dreadful incompetencies in the child protection system which have been lingering around for years and years.

I move that this Assembly require the Minister for Children and Families to implement all of the 28 recommendations of the Ombudsman's report, *A Life Long Shadow*. I also move that this Assembly require the Minister for Children and Families to immediately appoint the Ombudsman and the Children's Commissioner to the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee to ensure appropriate local scrutiny of reforms to the Northern Territory child protection system.

This is another issue closely related to the obvious prejudice this government has against the Ombudsman and, to a lesser degree, the Children's Commissioner. Although the government said it would implement all the 147 recommendations of the *Growing them strong, together* report, it failed to implement one of the critical ones due to be implemented within the first six months: to have the Children's Commissioner be the independent watchdog for the implementation of all recommendations.

Although there was a great commitment to implement all the recommendations, it was very

quickly thrown out of the equation. 'No, we are not going to do that. We are going to set up an external monitoring and reporting committee and will exclude the Children's Commissioner from that equation'.

It is almost shameful that two of the most qualified child protection experts in the Northern Territory have not been included on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee. These two people have given a significant number of years to researching, in great detail and at great lengths, what has been going on in the child protection system and trying to find solutions. They have provided a service to our community, to the children of the Northern Territory, as very few other people have. Their conviction, commitment, expertise and professionalism is almost unsurpassed when you talk about child protection over the last few years.

The Children's Commissioner was on the board of inquiry into child protection and wrote the *Growing them strong, together* report. He also wrote another report for the government in 2009, the report into intake services, which included 41 recommendations. Dr Howard Bath has been a critical player in how we have gone about the business of child protection. He is an extraordinary man. He is very smart. He is very scientific in how he goes about his business. He does not say anything or do anything, from my perspective, without great thought and consideration. To exclude the Children's Commissioner from the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee is inexplicable.

I cannot understand how this government could rationalise such a decision. Several months ago, it said it felt he had a conflict. How many people in the Northern Territory child protection industry could you say that about? How many of those people are currently sitting on some type of child protection advisory consultation committee or having input into how things are done in some fashion. It is a flimsy argument which does not wash with me. All it says is Howard Bath, the Children's Commissioner, has perhaps been a little too analytical, a little too critical, a little too forthright in how he presented his scientific data and evidence and, ultimately, his recommendation. He has got a little beyond himself and the government has deliberately pushed him away in a similar fashion to its treatment of the Ombudsman.

How the government has treated the Ombudsman is a case in itself. If we talk about how the government has marginalised the Children's Commissioner by not putting him on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee, then talk about why it has

not put the Ombudsman on it; puts that case into a different light.

The Ombudsman has been treated very harshly by this government, and I will listen with great anticipation and interest to how the Minister for Children and Families explains why these two very distinguished, highly professional individuals, great contributors to the welfare of children in the Northern Territory, cannot be included on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee. Why has the government rejected this notion? What is it? How can you explain this objectively to the people of the Northern Territory? We have a group of people, the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee, who are experts in their field. Most of them, until recently, were from interstate, which does not necessarily mean they should be excluded. However, you have two local residents, people who have lived in the Northern Territory for several years and demonstrated a commitment to the Northern Territory, to child protection, to reforming the child protection system in the Northern Territory and, for some reason, this government feels they have to be excluded. The only reason for that is because these two people signify a threat to this government, a threat to its credibility, which is in tatters anyway, a threat to how it goes about this very dodgy business of reforming the child protection system.

I have heard from numerous people, both employed within the Department of Children and Families and from different stakeholders of child protection outside the department, that the reforms we are seeing are very superficial. I feel saddened by that because we are losing years, we are wasting time. If you cannot implement genuine reforms in the child protection system you are committing almost crime to the people of the Northern Territory and, indeed, the children of the Northern Territory.

We would have the inclusion of the Children's Commissioner and the Ombudsman on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee; people who know what is going on. It does not need to be provided information, the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee relies on information currently provided by the government; it does not have an independent source of information so you have a committee that is not really independent. It is using government staff and is being briefed mainly by people from within the department. It is all sanitised and not necessarily presenting what is really going on. However, bring the Children's Commissioner and the Ombudsman in and you will have a very independent and objective analysis of what is going on. We have seen it

before. We have seen it in the Ombudsman's latest report.

This is an objective, independent analysis of the child protection system in the Northern Territory and this government does not want to know about it. It does not want to include the Ombudsman on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee and it does not want to include the Children's Commissioner because it is all too sensitive.

A Country Liberals government will have nothing to hide if we come to power next year. We will have a clean slate because you have 10 years of messing the system up from top to bottom, putting the staff of the Department of Children and Families through hell, and putting children's lives at risk with their incompetency.

Mr BOHLIN: A point of order, Madam Speaker! In accordance with Standing Order 77, I move the member be given an extension of time.

Motion agreed to.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Country Liberals will have nothing to hide. If we win government in less than 12 months time, we will be able to implement reform. We will listen to people like the Children's Commissioner and the Ombudsman and take on each and every one of those recommendations and genuinely implement reform into the system.

We are seeing superficiality. We are seeing a very poor and lacklustre commitment to real change. We would welcome the contribution of the Children's Commissioner and the Ombudsman to provide independent scrutiny of the Northern Territory child protection system.

Mr VATSKALIS (Children and Families): Madam Speaker, God help the children of the Territory if the Country Liberals are elected in 12 months time because a leopard never changes its spots. The CLP had fewer than 100 workers in child protection, a budget of \$7m, and did not care about children outside the urban centres.

The member admitted we have had six reports in the past 10 years. How many reports did the CLP have in child protection in the 27 years it was in power? None. Three discussion papers in the early 1990s. Did it not have reports because everything was perfect? No, it was not perfect and the only report done was the *State of Denial: the Neglect and Abuse of Indigenous Children in the Northern Territory* which well-described the child protection system under the Country Liberals. Non-existent! It had abandoned the children of the Territory; had withdrawn its services, and did not fulfil its legal obligations.

That was the Country Liberal Party child protection system 10 years ago ...

Mr Conlan interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Greatorex, cease interjecting!

Mr VATSKALIS: That was 10 years ago and if we look at the Country Liberal Party policy now - an extra \$9m for the child protection service was the policy it put out - whistleblower legislation and making the Children's Commissioner independent when he is independent. For the member for Araluen to sing the praises of the Children's Commissioner when a few months ago she was condemning him for not being independent, being tied to the department, is hypocritical to say the least.

We will not support this motion because it has nothing to do with child protection. This motion is structured in two parts and I will address them separately.

At the outset I again state for the record, as government we have acknowledged the Ombudsman's report and its recommendations. The member for Araluen expressed surprise as to why we adopted the 147 recommendations of the board of inquiry. We did so because we said we would; we are committed to change the child protection system and our commitment is shown by doing what we are.

Just a few days ago, the member for Araluen attacked the government because it had the audacity to employ 45 child protection officers from overseas at a cost of \$15 000. Yes, we did, and cost is not in the equation when we want to protect children. The reason we employed people from overseas is because we could not find them in Australia; there are not many in Australia.

I do not know where the member for Araluen has been in the past few months. On many occasions, I have said in parliament the government has noted the report by the Ombudsman and will adopt all recommendations. The Ombudsman's report recommendations will be incorporated in the Department of Children and Families' ongoing implementation of the 147 recommendation by the board of inquiry.

However, let us look at the Ombudsman's report. The Ombudsman's report was a result of an investigation which commenced in late 2009 which considered the functions of the former Northern Territory Family and Children's Services Central Intake, and matters relating to the former Department of Health and Families and the Children's Commissioner.

The report substantially provided a review of historical workplace practices - not current, not today, historical; what happened before 2009 - the workforce and workload of the Central Intake Unit, and also detailed the number of cases the Ombudsman wanted investigated. As I have already stated in the parliament on many occasions, the recommendations of the Ombudsman are supported and will be incorporated in the ongoing implementation of the board of inquiry recommendations. The Ombudsman's recommendations complement the board of inquiry recommendations, and we will continue to implement them.

I hope she now understands. We will adopt them; we will incorporate them into ongoing implementation of the board of inquiry recommendations. We believe they complement the board of inquiry recommendations.

Many of the Ombudsman's recommendation have been addressed already with the ongoing reform of the child protection system. These recommendations have been implemented in parallel with the board of inquiry recommendations. It has been 12 months to the day - yesterday - since the Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory handed down its report, *Growing them strong, together*. The report made 147 recommendations for the reform of the child protection system and Families and Children system.

The government acted immediately to address recommendations of the report, committing an additional \$130m over five years to overhaul the child protection system. The child protection system was not broken when we came to power; it was non-existent - a \$7m budget and 100 people worked in this child protection system, with nothing outside the urban centres. Now, the budget is \$145m a year and, on top of that, we have committed \$130m over the next five years. That is a child protection system, not a joke we used to have under the Country Liberal government.

The Department of Children and Families is in the process of implementing many of the 147 board of inquiry recommendations, as well as the recommendations contained in the Ombudsman's report. I will not go into detail of all the work currently under way, but I will state the department has commenced work in the broad areas of new processes, staffing, and training central intake - as a matter of fact, central intake is now 24/7, 365-days-a-year - collaboration with other departments, practice audit, evaluation of programs and procedures, and legislative changes.

All the cases detailed in the Ombudsman's report have been investigated and appropriate action has been taken. There is also significant work being undertaken on the technical detail of the recommendations - far more information than I have time today to recount.

As a government, we have also demonstrated our commitment to the reforms by establishing an independent committee - remember, member for Araluen, the committee that was compromised; was wined and dined - of national and local child protection experts to monitor and report on the progress of implementing the recommendations. This will occur openly and regularly. The Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee produced its first report into the board of inquiry recommendations in August. This report, tabled in parliament, demonstrates how important the child protection recommendations are and that the government is well on track with implementing them.

The only ones who did not like the report were the Country Liberals. The report states:

The CPEMRC considers that DCF is essentially on track with the reform process and applauds the substantial work that has occurred for this to be so.

That is on page 3.

In terms of immediate impact, the committee notes the excellent achievement in largely addressing the issue of the backlog of assessments and investigations.

I inform the parliament that the backlog identified during the board of inquiry no longer exists - it has been eliminated; it is zero.

On page 4:

The committee notes that the changes being implemented affect every nook and cranny of the child protection system. Changing the system, including its culture is a challenge comparable with changing course for an ocean liner. It is something that will take time ...

The report identifies the department is making changes; the government is implementing recommendations. As I said, the only ones who did not like the report were the member for Araluen and the Country Liberals.

The independent committee of national and local child protection experts is chaired by Professor Graham Vimpani and is comprised of Mr Frank Hytten; Dr Sven Silburn, who lives in the Territory; Mr Terry Murphy, who used to be in the

Territory and ran a program in Darwin - now he runs the Department of Children's Services in Western Australia; Ms Neihus, also in the Territory; and Ms Jackie Reed, also from the Territory. We have two new committee members appointed in August 2011, both Territorians. They are Lorraine Liddle of Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and Danny Munkara, a member of the Nguuu Community Management Board, Tiwi Land Council. That is a flash in the face for the member of Araluen who told us all the committee was comprised of people living outside the Territory ...

Mrs Lambley: I did not say that.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have one, two, three, four, five members of the committee who are Territorians, and one has been a Territorian and is now in Western Australia.

These people are a group of experts giving their free time to provide an unpaid and independent evaluation of the progress over the board of inquiry recommendations. The member for Araluen, with the comfort of parliamentary privilege, makes allegations that the committee has been wined and dined by the government and that is the reason it gave a good report. Well, these are slanderous allegations and I challenge her, if she is brave enough, to go outside this parliament and repeat these allegations.

The committee will meet again in December at Palmerston and, contrary to what the member for Araluen says, it does not meet only with departmental people; it meets with people from all walks of life. Has the member for Araluen made the time to meet the committee yet, or is she busy with other obligations?

A member: On 3 December.

Mr VATSKALIS: On 3 December, finally found the time, excellent. The committee has been meeting for a whole year. The member has finally found the time. I congratulate you. It is a very good day to meet with them because you will find the committee is really independent and will make a hell of a difference to the system.

Madam Speaker, earlier this year, the powers and functions of the Children's Commissioner were amended by this government in line with the recommendation of the board of inquiry. The scope of the Children's Commissioner was amended so the Commissioner could grant own motion powers of investigation; extend the complaint management powers of the commission from protected children to the broader definition of vulnerable children; expand his powers to obtain documents; and examine persons or carry out any type of investigation as part of his investigation

and monitoring functions. In addition, the amendments require the Children's Commissioner to report issues relating to the board of inquiry to the minister who will, in turn, report these issues and provide copies of relevant submissions to the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee.

However, given the role the Children's Commissioner had in the board of inquiry, it would be inappropriate for him to take a position on the external monitoring committee that is reviewing the implementation of the recommendations the board of inquiry chaired by him had developed. It would be inappropriate, just as inappropriate as it would be for the Ombudsman to hold a position on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee.

I have received legal advice. It was not a decision made by me; it was made by bureaucrats. We sought legal advice which categorically stated the Ombudsman should not be placed on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee as it would appear to be a clear potential for conflict between the roles. The Children's Commissioner, as an independent statutory body, would also fall into this category. That is legal advice from the Solicitor-General, not someone who just finished university with a law degree and willy-nilly would give advice. This is from the Solicitor-General, an experienced solicitor acting for the Territory.

The Ombudsman is an independent statutory officer who is not subject to ministerial control or direction. The role of the Ombudsman, generally speaking, is to investigate the administrative actions of public authorities, which include a body such as a committee established for a public purpose. It is essential the Ombudsman remains independent of, and separate to, a committee of government.

It is, therefore, possible that involvement in the committee would cause a conflict of interest for the Ombudsman or for other statutory office holders preventing them from carrying out their core responsibilities. Neither my office, nor the monitoring committee, has received indication from the Ombudsman that she wishes to join the committee, suggesting perhaps the Ombudsman is aware of this potential conflict of interest. I wonder if the member for Araluen has spoken to the Ombudsman about this outrageous idea.

This government is committed to making a difference to the state of health services in the Northern Territory. We found the health services system completely non-existent, and that is clearly stated in *The State of Denial* report done over the last 10 years of the CLP government in the Territory which found out ...

Members interjecting

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, thank you!

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Greatorex and member for Braitling, if you wish to have a discussion leave the Chamber, please.

Mr Giles: Sorry?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am calling you to order. If you wish to have a discussion, leave the Chamber or move to the back, please.

Mr Conlan: Okay, sorry.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister, you have the call.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a scathing report which clearly states on page 13 the department at the time, under the CLP government, rather than address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, Northern Territory child protection had, in effect, withdrawn from service provision abandoning the most impoverished children and families in Australia. We are talking about a department that was non-existent for the simple reason it was underfunded and under-resourced. It did not perform any function outside urban centres. The member for Araluen says we are trying to keep reports secret. How can you keep a report secret when I table it in parliament? It has been made public; it is in the *Parliamentary Record* and will remain there for years to come ...

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members of the opposition! Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: I suggest the member for Araluen, since she worked professionally in that area for many years, has a really good look at the child protection service now. It is not perfect, and I have said publicly it has to be fixed, but it is not going to be fixed in a day, a week, a month, or a year; there has to be cultural change. It will take years, and the culture within the department will have to change. For example, we look after Aboriginal children. How many Aboriginal child protection workers do we have? Not many. We have now changed that and are introducing training courses from Queensland and adapting them to the Territory to train Indigenous people in child protection to address issues with Indigenous children in the bush.

We do not intend to keep reports secret. All the reports have been tabled in parliament. We are prepared to work with the Ombudsman, and I have done so. I have an excellent working relationship with Carolyn Richards and often have frank and robust discussions with her. I take her advice because I believe she is an independent person who conducted an independent report. It was a historical review of what happened, and I have taken into account many of her recommendations to incorporate with the board of inquiry recommendations. This will give us a comprehensive set of recommendations and allow us to make the next set of changes.

We will not support this motion. There are legal issues with the inclusion of the Ombudsman on the child protection independent committee. I would not like to compromise the independence of the Ombudsman and the Children's Commissioner or the independence of the committee.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting this motion. I am not putting the Ombudsman's report down, but one has to be careful making the statement to implement all the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report. I have dealt with the Ombudsman in my role in local government, and sometimes receive reports on what local government should do. Government bodies, including local government bodies, are entitled to disagree with the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman gives an opinion and, when I was in local government, sometimes we simply did not agree. The Ombudsman is giving an opinion as to what should happen and people affected by those decisions are entitled to have an opinion. In the case of the recommendations put forward by the Ombudsman, there are probably very good reasons why some of the matters might not be agreed to. Some have been agreed to and some do appear in the other report. To say all those recommendations should be implemented is too broad a brush considering there is another report, and considering time has moved on and some of the issues raised by the Ombudsman may be historical and not relevant to the present time.

I am not going to go through each recommendation and say what should have been left out or put in. I am making a statement, more on principle, that it is hard to say to the Department of Children and Families that it must implement all the recommendations. Without going back to each response from children and families services, it would be difficult to say: 'You must do this because the Ombudsman said so'. That is, again, not saying the Ombudsman has not raised some very important issues.

There is another reason one has to look carefully at the two reports. One report was done by three clinical experts in child protection, the other by a very good lawyer who had to cover a whole range of subjects in the area she had to comment on. She not only comments on child protection; she might have police complaints, dog control, or a range of issues because that is the essence of her job. People who have more experience in those matters may not agree with those recommendations for a particular reason.

Again, not putting down what the Ombudsman has put forward, one has to be careful not to say all the recommendations should be accepted. If there are valid reasons why some of the recommendations should not be accepted, common sense should apply.

I do not support the second item in the motion because I am not a lawyer. The Minister for Health said he has advice from someone else. Normally, you would expect the Ombudsman and, in this case, the Children's Commissioner, to not have a conflict of interest.

The Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee put together by the government could be subject to complaint from anyone who wished to look at whether the committee is operating fairly. You would normally go to the Ombudsman or the Children's Commissioner. If they are both on that committee, they would not be able to respond, and I am unaware who you would approach. It is good we have an external monitoring committee. The CTC has already had a number of meetings and hopes to have a meeting fairly soon. It might be via teleconference to see what stage it is at in holding the government to account for the promises made in relation to child protection.

Unfortunately, because of the workload the CTC has in relation to animal welfare at the moment, we have had to put that to one side; however, as soon as our animal welfare report is finished, the CTC will be looking at this very important area again. I understand where the member for Araluen is coming from, and I am not rubbishing what she is saying; I am trying to see how authorities and various government bodies operate and the need to have people who can oversee decisions without a claim about a conflict of interest.

We have two ombudsmen operating in relation to child protection: the existing Ombudsman who can look at processes, and the Children's Commissioner who can look at complaints within child protection. If you take that away, what do you have? You have no process of checks and balances and no process of scrutinising whether the committee has done the right thing or has

made an error. That would not be good, because you would take away the ability for Territorians to go to an independent person or persons if they felt this committee was not doing the right thing.

I understand where the member for Araluen is coming from and do not in any way say what she is doing is bad; however, it is impractical from the point of view of good governance. Therefore, I do not support the second part of the motion.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Madam Deputy Speaker, I have listened to the speeches of the member for Nelson and the Minister for Children and Families and am really impressed at the power of democracy. The minister said he has decided to accept the 28 recommendations made in the Ombudsman's report and will implement each and every one. That is what I heard ...

Mr Vatskalis: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: My colleague, the member for Grotorex, heard the same thing. I am absolutely delighted; I am overwhelmed. That is not the message I have received from that side of the Chamber before ...

Mr Vatskalis: You are not listening. Two months ago, I said the same.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am thrilled to bits and sure each and every employee of the Department of Children and Families, if they are listening tonight, will be jumping for joy because there are some fantastic reforms recommended within this report. That is why I highlighted these issues and crafted a motion to ensure these recommendations see the light of day and are taken seriously. For example, the problems in the central intake system are profound. They have caused many people within the system grief, as well as providing a very inadequate service to children and families.

The reforms the Ombudsman recommended are fantastic and I am very pleased. For example, there will be more staff, it will operate 24/7, the central intake system will operate more efficiently and effectively and will be more user-friendly, as well as friendly for the staff involved who are under a great deal of stress.

There are many other recommendations in here you have agreed to accept. For example, that the child protection authority reinstitutes the third report rule to mandate that, if there are three notifications of a child within 12 months in the same household, an investigation must occur. This has not been happening, minister, and I am delighted you have agreed to implement this recommendation tonight. It is on the public record, so mandatory investigations will be up and

running again by your department. This is fabulous to hear. There is some good news happening in parliament tonight for Northern Territory child protection stakeholders and children who come to the attention of the department.

I do not accept the argument put forward by the member of Nelson. The Northern Territory has a population of 230 000 people. The child protection industry is a small, elite, specialised area. Most people invited to be on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee from within the Northern Territory would have a conflict of interest. There is at least one person on that list now who is employed by an organisation that receives Northern Territory government funding to provide services for children and families. That just does not wash with me.

The government is trying to debate its way out of not putting the Children's Commissioner on the Child Protection External Monitoring and Reporting Committee. It did that soon after the *Growing them strong, together* report was released. It argued and debated the issue. However, it still does not wash. This is a person who, you could argue, has a conflict of interest such as several other people currently on that committee; however, this person has the expertise we need to provide critique and analysis of how the government is implementing the 147 recommendations of the report.

Common sense applies here. You have the Ombudsman too. I told her we were putting up this motion. She did not offer any comment apart from to say: 'Okay, I look forward to that debate'. She did not provide any extra information; I did not ask for it. You sought legal advice. I am sure if there was a way around it, you could find it, minister. I am sure, given the nature of the Northern Territory, the very small community and specialised area we are talking about, there would be a way around it. If you wanted the Ombudsman on the external monitoring and reporting committee, minister, you could make it happen. However, that is not what you want, and is where we stand at odds.

There is a tsunami of need within the child protection industry. This government is capitulating under pressure. You have moved a little in deciding you will implement the 28 recommendations of the Ombudsman's report. You are moving a little in ensuring the Northern Territory government representation on the external monitoring and reporting committee is mainly of Northern Territory residents. Both are significant shifts.

Well done, minister, you are listening to what we are saying; however, I suggest you are crumbling and capitulating under pressure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the motion be put.

Motion negated.

MOTION

Roll-out of Broadband in the Northern Territory

Mr GILES (Braitling): Madam Deputy Speaker, I move – That –

1. The Northern Territory parliament writes to the federal Communications Minister requesting he instruct his department to conduct an immediate review into future opportunities surrounding the roll-out of broadband services to the Northern Territory, particularly rural and remote communities.
2. The review investigate the provision of:
 - (a) 4G mobile broadband services to all 73 prescribed communities and the location known as New Store in the Utopian region;
 - (b) the building of mobile base stations along main arterial routes of the Northern Territory including but not limited to:
 - (i) Stuart Highway, Lasseters Highway, Arnhem Highway, Barkly Highway, Victoria Highway, intersection of Papunya Road and Tanami Highway, Larrimah, Wauchope, Devils Marbles, Barrow Creek, Dunmurra, Top Springs; and
 - (ii) that these base stations then on-sell access to communications companies for the provision of 4G telephony and radio transmission services; and
 - (c) the feasibility of offsetting this cost against fibre to the node in growth towns.
3. That upon receiving a copy of the report the Northern Territory Minister for ICT present that report to the Northern Territory parliament.

Having said that is the motion, I have left off several places, most notably, Kulgera. I would like to see some mobile telephony services at

Kulgera. Kulgera is similar to the other locations I have identified. It is on the Stuart Highway and is a direct tourist route and access road for many Central Australians and South Australians travelling to and from one another. Most recently, Kulgera has been the centre of some tragic accidents - tourists have become lost. If mobile services were available there might have been greater opportunity to help those people.

What we see in IT today is quite amazing. Thirty-eight years ago, when I was born, the idea of mobile services, of Internet, or telecommunications was completely different. I still remember the day when we had our first Atari or Commodore 64 and got into our first computer. To see the technology we have today with iPhones, Android tablet services, and iPads is amazing.

I will not be prescriptive; there are many benefits in IT. There is access to information, the ability to shop online, food, entertainment, travel, how to do things, reading manuals for fixing cars, and understanding and learning how to build things. The information available is just amazing and provides services to people through health, medicine, telemedicine, future opportunities around surgery by telecommunications; the provision of educational services and the ability to access universities online. On the social side of things, we have Facebook and Twitter and all the other things kids like to use. We are now connecting more with friends in a social capacity, albeit electronically. Many people find love and friendships, and for many lonely people in our society the Internet provides a great resource. I note my colleague, the member for Fong Lim, is laughing.

There is a great deal of opportunity for the Internet. Mobile phones and the Internet will be a great resource for people in the Northern Territory who are currently without them. I talk about Indigenous communities through my portfolio responsibilities in Indigenous affairs and Regional Development. The more access to information people in the community have, the greater the level of education that can be provided; not through formalised education, although that is one opportunity, but knowledge gained through access to information will help improve life expectancy. Studies show that utilising the Internet - the search facilities and other information - helps brain functionality, particularly for middle-aged people where it might not be as highly-active as previously.

As we look at Indigenous Territorians in communities, and greater access to telecommunications for connectivity with family and friends, mobile broadband services will mean these people are getting information they did not

previously have, and the ability to learn more and see the outside world will be a huge factor. Yesterday, Labor announced its second intervention and also announced the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018, which I have been asked to provide comment on. My comment is that the biggest failure is it is all about social services at the back end. There are some education benefits, which are good; however, we need to be putting in place economic infrastructure and have some fundamentals around economic development and taxation reform, amongst other things. What needs to occur is a roll-out of much more telecommunications infrastructure, including access to broadband, access to telephones through mobile services, and access to communications such as a radio station, whether it is the ABC or a commercial provider. That is really important.

This government is relaxed, tired, and non-parochial about the need for this. The federal government is going into a \$43bn debt to fund the roll-out of the national broadband plan. The national broadband plan, fibre to the premises, is the model it is utilising for 93% of the country. Under current plans, the regional areas of the Northern Territory and remote areas, including Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, and Katherine, are currently not in the roll-out plan. We expect some of those urban centres might be; however, they are still not in the plan.

The plan so far is for the Darwin area to gain some NBN services, although if you are in the rural area, member for Goyder, or in the seat of Daly, you will find many of the services will be wireless, not fibre to the premises. We are not seeing any voice in this parliament fighting Canberra for some of that debt-laden NBN money to be spent rolling out greater services in the bush, including the urban areas in the bush - Alice Springs, Katherine, and Tennant Creek.

It is important we do not bash the Minister for ICT Policy, who does an appalling job. We need to call on parliament to demand the Telecommunications minister, Senator Conroy, fights for the Territory so we can get something done. When only 93% of the population is receiving this, most of the Territory misses out. We are subject to wireless or satellite. When we look at maps for wireless, only one community in the Northern Territory outside the main centres will receive wireless and that is a little community called Amooinguna just south of Alice Springs.

When you look at who will have optical fibre, you see a small number of places - Alice Springs, Darwin, Howard Springs, Humpty Doo, McMinns Lagoon, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Palmerston, Robertson Barracks, Tennant Creek, Tindal,

Virginia, and Bees Creek. Anywhere outside those places will not get fibre to the premises as per the map. However, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, and Tennant Creek have not been included in the current roll-out plan for the next 12 months.

The government needs to start fighting. If we are going to get anything, we need some fire and brimstone from the Territory government - that is not happening. However, it has rolled over on the carbon tax and the minerals tax. It seems to roll over on anything the federal government wants to do.

It was interesting listening to the Chief Minister talk recently about not wanting another intervention in the Northern Territory; however, yesterday Labor announced the second intervention. How very interesting. The government will roll over on that too. Kevin Rudd was here today and the government will have to tickle him on the belly and lie down and play dead.

The biggest thing about the NBN roll-out, or its package in the Northern Territory that is not occurring is, apart from Senator Scullion - Natasha Griggs has done a fantastic job in Solomon - on the broader Territory basis, where is the member for Lingiari? Where has he been for 25 years? Where is he? He is the bloke who shut down a press conference recently because the questions became too tough because of his failures. He is the bloke who should be fighting Senator Conroy.

There is currently no plan in the next 12 months for roll-out of the technology I am requesting and demanding, from Senator Conroy. Is the member for Lingiari waiting for the next election to pork barrel the electorate with some announcement? He does not have the confidence, capability, or interest to do it. I am demanding an efficient and effective IT service be rolled out across the Northern Territory to all prescribed communities and areas of significant infrastructure in the road network: Stuart Highway, Tanami Highway, Arnhem Highway, Barkly Highway, and Lasseter Highway. We need this important infrastructure to connect the Northern Territory. There is connectivity all the way across the Nullarbor Plain, but we cannot do the Stuart Highway. I am very upset, as are my colleagues in the Country Liberals, that we do not have anyone fighting for us.

The minister will have a speech prepared by his department and rattle on about how the CLP does not like the NBN; it wants a wrecking ball. The government will mention our name 300 times, and the member for Greatorex continues to count. There will be nothing like: 'This is what we are doing; this is how we are trying to get it'.

You have to wonder what the member for Lingiari is doing. I know what his staff member, Vince Jiesman, is doing. Vince Jiesman is letterboxing houses in Alice Springs promoting the Territory Labor campaign against local members in Alice Springs regarding uranium mines. He should be out fighting for IT. Instead, he is fighting a political campaign from the office of the federal member for Lingiari against Angela Pamela. Why not fight for IT services for the Territory? It is a disgrace.

I am not going to talk forever on this important motion. It is self-explanatory and is about whether or not the government wants to commit to providing mobile phone, broadband, and telephony services to all areas of the Northern Territory.

It is interesting to look at the NBN debate and what has happened - part of the formation of the Gillard government as we know it. The Independents, Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor, say the NBN package was an integral part of them forming government with Gillard and they talk about the importance of broadband in the regions. They do not care about the Northern Territory. The member for Lingiari does not care about the Northern Territory. The other two Independents do not care about the Territory.

I would be interested to hear what the member for Nelson says, because it is very important. Communities like Palumpa and Peppimenarti should have 4G mobile communications - right through the seats of Daly and Stuart. You will not hear the minister talk about ensuring these services in his own seat. They do not even have mobile broadband services in the growth towns. How committed can they be to growth towns? This is an important service.

Alparra - we saw Rosie Kunoth-Monks, the Mayor of Barkly Shire and resident of Utopia - about 1000 to 1600 people live in that region with no mobile telecommunications. That is highly important. The area between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek needs to have much more mobile telecommunication. Improve communications between Tennant Creek, Katherine, Dunmarra - all these places. If you are going to educate people, you have to give them the tools to do it.

With Labor's second intervention in the Northern Territory, this would be a prime component of economic infrastructure that needs to be put in place. No, there are more and more bureaucrats coming up from Canberra and nothing about fixing the economic dynamics of the necessity for infrastructure in the Northern Territory. We need to go in that direction.

My criticism about the economic development strategy that has just been released is it contains nothing about economic development apart from a few slogans - a couple of clichés. However, nothing is going to change. I was asked on the radio recently about alcohol solutions and alcohol programs in Central Australia. I will tell you the solution: get people working. Build economies, get people working, and get things happening, humming and pumping along. That is what will change everything - not this continual army of bureaucrats who come here to manage programs and take responsibility away from people, which is the complete opposite of what we are supposed to be doing. Give people responsibility, turn off the welfare tap, build economies, and get people into jobs. This is an essential component.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have put my case. It is very important to recognise the member for Lingiari has done nothing for the Territory in this area. It is important to recognise the benefits of telecommunications. The minister will attack the CLP, rather than stand up for the Territory. That is why he will get a shock come the next election. I look forward to his comments.

Mr HAMPTON (Information, Communications and Technology Policy): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for Braiting for his motion. I am passionate about ICT. The Territory government has much to be proud of in our achievements over the last 10 years.

I agree with two things the member for Braiting said. First, the telecommunication landscape has changed significantly over many years, particularly the last 10 years. I look at my own experience when I was going to school in Adelaide in 1985. We see kids today with iPads and iPhones, other technology, and being able to access Facebook and Twitter. When I was going to school in Adelaide in 1985, we had none of that, particularly iPhones and iPads, or the social networking available now.

With technology, the member talked about the opportunities for remote communities and Indigenous people. I also see some of the negatives. In developing the Territory ICT policy, one of the key planks for me will be education. It is about informing and educating Aboriginal people about the power of IT. Through experience, I know there are positives and negatives. A negative experience I have seen in my electorate is cyberbullying. People on mobile phones texting, particularly with many of the significant family issues we have in the remote communities. I see the positives and the negatives.

Positives, again. My personal experience is how my son's diabetes has been treated. His specialist is in Darwin and we live in Alice Springs. Without IT, it would be very hard for us as a family, and my son, to manage his Type 1 diabetes. I see the benefits in chronic health issues such as diabetes, which my son and I live with every day. So, there are positives and negatives.

Things have transformed significantly in IT in the Northern Territory. A key plank in the ICT policy I will be developing and releasing shortly is education. It is vitally important and something the member for Braitling did not mention during his contribution.

Regarding the landscape for IT telecommunications, it is transforming and will continue to transform very quickly over the coming years. Since coming to government in 2001, telecommunications has changed significantly, particularly since Labor came to power federally. As an example, what a difference to when the federal member for Solomon at the time, the current member for Fong Lim, was in Canberra and promised mobile phone coverage down the Stuart Highway and did not deliver it.

I will give an example, a quote on Friday, 2 November 2001 in an interview on FM radio, the member for Fong Lim who was the member for the federal seat of Solomon at the time, said:

What we support is trying to get the maximum services delivered to the Territory before we would support any privatisation of - any further privatisation of Telstra. We want to see mobile telephone coverage all along - up the Stuart Highway.

Then, a big back flip almost a year later on Monday, 11 November, 2002, again on a Top End radio show, and I quote:

Back in the election I said that I would not be supporting the full sale of Telstra until the highway was fully covered. Since then I have had some very technical briefings with a number of people from Telstra, and also other telecommunication companies who tell me that logistically we are just not there at this stage in our history and it is going to be nigh impossible to do the whole of the Stuart Highway.

There was a question from the reporter to the then member for Solomon, the current member for Fong Lim: 'So you are backing away from your election promise?' The member says:

Look, unfortunately I do have to back away from that promise because I have been

now convinced and it is not going to be possible.

If it was not possible then, it is not possible now. We do not need another review. We have done the reviews. We are now delivering first class modern technology to the Territory.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank a number of our partners in transforming the telecommunication landscape in the Northern Territory. First, Telstra, for its magnificent work in delivering ICT services to the Territory for many years. One you would be aware of, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the fantastic Arnhem Land Fibre Project undertaken in partnership with Telstra, Rio Tinto, and the Northern Land Council. This is a fantastic example of what can be achieved when we all work together.

I look forward to the roll-out of Telstra's new LTE 4G network. It promises exciting new opportunities for us and it is great to see Telstra continuing to invest in new initiatives in the Northern Territory.

I would also like to congratulate Internode for its new investment and product offerings on ADSL around the Alice Springs region. This is a fantastic contribution which sees lower prices for Centralians who can access ADSL in Alice Springs.

Congratulations to Nextgen for investing in the fibre backbone around Alice Springs that has allowed the introduction of Internode's new products and the magnificent job with the roll-out of the backbone between the Northern Territory and the east coast of Queensland.

Also, to another great partner, NBN Co, with the most recent announcement of fibre going past 25 000 Darwin homes and businesses in the next 12 months. With their announcement on fixed wireless and the interim satellite solution that is delivering broadband access in the Territory right now, a big thank you to NBN Co on behalf of the Northern Territory government. Also, to my federal counterpart, Senator Conroy, for taking the nation building initiative of the NBN and delivering it in the Territory as a matter of priority.

The member for Braitling also spoke about a lack of passion from this government. No one is leading the way; no one is driving it. He is completely wrong there. I will quickly mention a few achievements this government is proud to say it has delivered on, in partnership with some of the partners I mentioned, particularly our federal counterpart, Senator Conroy.

We have the deployment of a competitive fibre optic link between Darwin and the eastern

seaboard with \$70m spent in the Territory alone creating 1000 jobs during the build, and bringing prices down for Territorians. In 2009, we held the ICT ministers conference in Alice Springs. It was where I showcased the deployment of remote diagnostic carts and high definition video links for health services to Online and Communications Council members. This is now a reality through the Health eTowns project under the Australian government's digital regions program. The Northern Territory government lobbied for Digital Regions Initiative, which secured \$7m in Commonwealth funding for the \$16m Health eTowns project. We are seeing vast improvements in access to specialist clinicians, as well as better education and social outcomes in our Territory growth towns as it rolls out.

Another one: we need passion, we need things delivered. This government is doing that. Another is funding through the remote Indigenous public Internet access program, \$2.2m over four years coming into the Northern Territory.

In relation to a review, in making those decisions about the NBN, there have been numerous reviews into the national broadband network and its potential benefits. It is unlikely the Australian government would conduct yet another review. The most recent reviews include the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications, which released its report into the role and potential of the NBN on 25 August this year. Another review again, the Senate Select Committee review into the benefits expected of the NBN, which tabled its report to parliament on 17 June 2010. The Northern Territory government made submissions to both these reviews.

The CLP in general, and the member for Braitling, seem to be unaware of the history of reviews into broadband in the country. We understand the context of this motion given the member for Braitling said in parliament: 'I have known about this anomaly called the National Broadband Network for some time. I have heard about it, it is a bit weird for many of us, we are all not technocrats. We do not all understand it'. Despite that extraordinary statement, he was happy to say: 'I do not think the NBN is the right way to go'.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the context of this motion. The CLP shadow minister for business, the member for Fong Lim, said in parliament about the NBN: 'Only the most extreme socialists would welcome this nonsense policy by the Rudd government, picked up by the Gillard government. This is a crazy plan'. Well, the Henderson Labor government wholeheartedly welcomes the NBN to the Territory. Unlike the CLP, we agree with 99% of Telstra shareholders

who voted in favor of the deal with NBN Co yesterday. We will line up with the 99% of those mums and dads, who the CLP and the member for Fong Lim labelled the most extreme socialists in this country - the mums and dads who have invested in Telstra and who agree the NBN is a fantastic nation building endeavour.

Unlike the CLP, we welcome the millions of dollars of investment the NBN is making into the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory government welcomes the end of Territory businesses having to pay \$18 000 for the same connection they could buy in Sydney for \$2000. The Northern Territory government welcomes the opportunities the NBN provides to the Territory government to deliver better e-services, such as health, education, and community empowerment. We also welcome the new opportunities for Territory business to move into the digital economy.

We were delighted with NBN Co's announcement yesterday that fibre to the premises will be rolled out past some 25 000 homes and businesses in Darwin over the next 12 months. The competitive interstate optic fibre link to six regional centres, including Darwin, currently being undertaken by Nextgen is on schedule for completion in 2011.

The comments from the member for Braitling about nothing being delivered, it is all doom and gloom and the sky is going to fall in are completely wrong. Twenty-five thousand homes and businesses in Darwin over the next 12 months will have fibre to the premises. The competitive interstate optic fibre link to six regional centres, including Darwin, is currently being undertaken by Nextgen and is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

NBN could see more than \$500m of investment and jobs in the Territory over the next decade - the second biggest investment in the Territory after INPEX. On the other side, we have the member for Braitling and the CLP talking it down just like the price on carbon. The opposition does not want to see the opportunities; it is all about politics, smoke and mirrors. Let us do what the master in Canberra, Tony Abbott, says and object to anything the Labor government comes up with. The price on carbon and NBN are creative, visionary projects; however, the CLP does not support either because of politics.

We are delighted Telstra has announced, in time, 4G will overlay the existing 3G network. Priority will be given to those sites where demand is highest. The Northern Territory mobile network covers Darwin and all regional centres, with several companies providing a service. Outside

Darwin and the regional centres, Telstra is a sole provider offering its next 3G mobile service.

With a fitted car kit, Telstra provides almost continuous coverage from Darwin to Mataranka - I have taken that drive many times - and 34 remote communities. There are currently 39 communities, not including the regional centres or Darwin and surrounds, connected via Telstra optic fibre to the national network. NBN Co's wireless service is based on 4G technology, but is not a mobile service. It is a point to point connection which will deliver broadband communication. A device in the premise will connect to the NBN via the wireless link provided by the NBN.

The motion appears to be requesting the consideration of 4G mobile services as an alternative to the NBN proposal for remote communities; however, this is a very different proposition to the current NBN model which does not provide mobile services. The current NBN will not install a fibre to the node solution anywhere in Australia. Why? Because this approach was abandoned in 2007. It was one of the 18 failed broadband policies under the 12 years of the Howard government.

If Tony Abbott gains power at the next federal election, I wonder if he will provide funding for what the member for Braintree is asking for.

The motion proposes access to mobile base stations be on-sold to communication companies to provide communications and radio services. It is highly unlikely a telecommunications company will take up such an offer as the communities and roadway locations without a mobile service today do not present a commercially attractive proposition.

Again, there is evidence of this historically. When the Australian government presented the opportunity to install additional mobile base stations in the Northern Territory paid for by the Australian government, there was no private sector investment interest as the locations targeted were considered to be commercially unattractive.

Comparisons to the LTE service and the wireless service offered by NBN are inevitable. One of the key differences between Telstra's offering and NBN Co's fixed wireless service is you can get Telstra service from a mobile device. A laptop with the Telstra 4G dongle in it can pick up the services whenever it is in range of a 4G tower. NBN Co fixed wireless is just that - a device attached to a premise that has coded access, and NBN Co's 4G LTE service cannot connect. A broadband service is available in the premise to attach a wireless access point. A laptop can then connect through the wireless

access point. The people's preference for mobile broadband - very important ...

Mr BOHLIN: A point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker! If the minister has to read from notes, could we have them tabled? They are very detailed. Perhaps the minister could table his notes.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order, member for Drysdale.

Mr Bohlin: I thought he did not know what he was talking about.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order, he is quite entitled, thank you. Minister, you have the call.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope the member for Drysdale is going to contribute to this motion because he was recently sacked as the opposition ICT spokesman.

Mr Bohlin: I am the ICT shadow minister!

Mr HAMPTON: The people's preference for mobile broadband - a very important question - has been a consistent theme in the opposition's narrative to date. I will give you some examples here. Statistics show a 40% increase in wireless broadband take-up against a 0.5% take-up in DSL fixed-line services. The number of mobile wireless Internet connections is 44% of the total number of broadband connections nationally. This now exceeds the number of DSL fixed-line connections, at 41%. However, in this same survey by the ABS, fixed-line connections from PCs accounted for 84% of the downloaded data, while mobile accounted for only 16%.

According to ACCC figures, between December 2008 and December 2010, 91% of total data downloaded was through fixed-line services. Furthermore, telecommunications analysts note the available market for DSL fixed-line access is flattening out. Growth in wireless connections is predicted to flatten out within 12 months, and have no significant impact on the fixed-line market.

Due to the congestion issues with mobile wireless fixed-line services, wireless will always be more cost-effective. Because the NBN reaches places copper DSL cannot, the stagnant take-up of fixed broadband is unlikely to continue. The bottom line is these are not competing technologies but complementary. Mobile networks alone will not provide all the telecommunication services Australians will need in the years ahead.

This Northern Territory government does not support this general business motion from the

member for Braitling. It is a waste of time designed to make political points and adds nothing we do not know already about the NBN and mobile broadband. How much would this review cost? What sort of message would this motion, if it gets up, send to the ICT industry and Telstra investors who just voted for the agreement with the NBN company? It is the wrong message - just like the position on the carbon tax.

I will continue to fight for the best outcomes for all Territorians. I am confident we will, under the leadership of the Northern Territory Labor Party and Paul Henderson, continue to win fantastic outcomes for the Territory, together with our partners such as the federal government, Telstra, NBN Co, Internode, Nextgen, Optus, and AARNet. We have done the reviews and now we, with our partners, are going to get on with delivering for Territorians.

Mr TOLLNER (Fong Lim): Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not speak for too long although I have to respond to some of the comments made by the member for Stuart, the Minister for ICT Policy. First, the minister is quite right; mobile and fixed broadband services are compatible. Some places need fixed broadband services, other people are chasing mobility. The problem with the NBN is it only caters to one side of that equation - people at home. The fact is the majority of Australians are mobile and want access to mobile services. They want to pick up their computer, go down to the mall or to a park and sit there and tap away on the Internet.

Not everyone wants to sit locked in their house with a fixed-line service - in this case, fibre to the home. There are more reasons for Australians not to want the NBN than reasons for it. It is hideously expensive. Fibre to the node was to cost Australians around \$4bn. For those people who do not know about a node, I did not know about it until it was explained to me by the member for Drysdale. Thank you very much, member for Drysdale. The node is a little box which sits at the end of the street and takes in all the optic fibres which are then connected to the copper wires that go into the house. My understanding, and I have had it confirmed by a number of people, is copper wire is fine over short distances. For the length of a street, you get the same delivery of speed rate that you would get out of optic fibre, but the difference between fibre to the node and fibre to the home is enormous. The cost of that roll-out goes from \$5bn to \$43bn and the price is increasing as we speak. It is a massive expense.

You have to ask what would possess a government to spend that sort of money in these times. It will jump up and down and say: 'Oh well, it is infrastructure spending'; however, not many

people want to watch a movie theatre quality picture on the side wall of their house every night of the week, which is the type of service you can expect from fibre to the home.

With a simple copper wire, you can watch movies on your television screen until the cows come home, no problems. It meets the needs of most Australians and most small businesses. Obviously, if you are running a bank or an international betting agency, you will require much higher speeds and more capacity to do that. We all agree with that. However, most Australians now want to be mobile and that is the point the member for Braitling makes in this motion and why I support it: he recognises there is that need for access to telecommunications and, in particular, access to the World Wide Web.

Labor talks about closing the gap - bringing Indigenous Territorians up to speed with the rest of the country. There is no need to harp on about health problems and the lack of education issues in Indigenous communities. One way of fixing that is to give people access to the World Wide Web. It brings people up to speed very quickly on the use of technology and gives them access to a whole new world; a whole new understanding of things.

I am a big supporter of computer games. My kids, when they were very young, got into computer games. I was not big on them; however, they took to it like ducks to water and I have seen kids do that all over the place ...

Mr Hampton: You would have been used to Space Invaders.

Mr TOLLNER: I was used to Space Invaders and Pac-Man, member for Stuart. I could not really get into it too much and, like you, I was caught up in sport. These days, you almost have to push kids out of the house; there is much more entertainment inside than outside. That is the nature of the changing times. It is one way of getting kids interested in the Internet and learning.

When I was young, I was into Phantom comics. My mum often says ...

Ms Purick: What?

Mr TOLLNER: Phantom comics, member for Goyder. I know you are a rusted-on lover of The Ghost who Walks. My mother, who is a primary school teacher of some 40 years says, without the Phantom I would have been completely illiterate, which is probably right. However, for me, comics were the stepping stone to reading and, these days, like many members in this place, I am a prolific reader. I enjoy all types of books; fiction, non-fiction, two-bob westerns to the most detailed

autobiographies. It is probably fair to say, without that initial step of reading comics, I may not have been such a prolific reader.

I believe the same applies in the modern day with computer games. You get kids into computer games and the next step they are doing silly messaging. Sometimes I have a great deal of trouble understanding what things are. I know now 'LOL' is 'laugh out loud'. I will not go into what I believe some of the others mean. There is a whole new language being developed around SMSs and e-mails. This is, in hindsight, a good thing because it gets kids interested.

I am sure the member for Barkly agrees, being a long-term teacher, and also the member for Nhulunbuy. I can only imagine the difficulties in getting kids to school and sitting down and studying books when you have all the excitement of the World Wide Web in front of you and access to games we would have only dreamed of 10 years ago.

I am a big believer in that, and believe there is more opportunity to assist people in remote communities to become educated quickly, to take those first steps in understanding information and communications technology if they have access to it. That is the point the member for Brainting is making. To suggest the NBN is going to be rolled out to every little tinpot town in the Northern Territory is fanciful. To think we are going to connect houses up at Utopia with fibre optics is fanciful thinking. Peddling that type of information is building up hope when there is no hope.

The minister made the point that 10 years ago I made a commitment about mobile coverage up and down the Stuart Highway; 10 years ago, broadband did not exist. I disagree with the minister when he says 10 years ago it would not work, why would it work now? The world is changing, minister, at a rapid rate of knots. What was unaffordable and undeliverable 10 years ago has suddenly become affordable and deliverable. I remember a scandal about Telstra allowing the Prime Minister at the time to use a 42-inch plasma television. The cost was enormous. There was an uproar about the fact Telstra had connected it to his house for him to experience the latest technology in television.

These days I doubt there is a member in this Chamber who does not own a 42-inch television. I am probably one of the last ones to say I do - Madam Speaker is shaking her head; she does not own a 42-inch television. Until several weeks ago, I did not either. I bought a 55-inch television for under \$800. If you wanted to purchase a 55-inch television 10 years ago, you would have been looking at thousands and thousands of

dollars. You can buy one now for under \$800. It is similar with satellite phones.

In 1992, I took my first trip to Yuendumu. I went with a Department of Education, Employment and Training employee, a Northern Territory government department - might have been Commonwealth. We went out in his government car, a Land Cruiser. He had a satellite phone in his car. I remember saying I had never seen anything like it. I said: 'What is the go with this?' He said: 'Look under your seat'. I looked under the seat and there was the telephone. The hand set was above the dash but the phone fitted under the seat. I said: 'Oh my God'. He said it worked anywhere. I said: 'You are kidding me'. He said: 'Yeah, yeah'. I said: 'All right, what did this cost to install?' He said: '\$60 000'. It was worth more than the car!

Mr McCarthy: It was not an NT department?

Mr TOLLNER: No, it would not have been an NT department in hindsight. It must have been a Commonwealth department. However, he had a telephone worth more than \$60 000 because he was travelling remote Northern Territory and the people in Canberra did not want him getting into any danger if he had a flat tyre and could not change it. The fact is the department had spent that amount of money.

These days you can run into any Telstra shop and hire a satellite phone for a handful of dollars and hand it back a week later. You can buy a hand-held satellite phone for well under \$1000. It makes it almost affordable for everyone in remote Australia to own a satellite telephone. The point is, these services are becoming cheaper and cheaper, more competitive, and are more and more vital as time goes on.

I want to correct the record, member for Stuart. We all do embarrassing things in politics; there is probably nothing more embarrassing than breaking a commitment. I broke a commitment and at times you have to stand up, take it on the chin, and apologise. I was very sorry for that. It was the wrong commitment to make. Ignorance led me to make a commitment that there would be mobile coverage along the Stuart Highway if we sold Telstra. The cost of a telecommunications tower was around \$500 000 and there was a footprint of about 20 km. To do all the Stuart Highway would have cost the best part of \$100m plus, plus, plus. That was unacceptable, even back then. It was cheaper to buy every traveller on the Stuart Highway a satellite phone than to put up mobile towers all the way.

I often think about that; it has been a lesson for me. However, when we are talking about closing the gap and giving Indigenous kids a good break

at life, it is essential they have access to good telecommunications, access to the Internet, and access to good hardware such as phones and computers - smartphones.

Some people say it is a waste; they will smash them and they will end in a river somewhere. That may be the case with some; however, the investment is worth it. The more kids we can get computer savvy the better, whether it is through computer games or education online, it does not matter. They are using the technology and becoming adept in this modern world.

I urge everyone in the House to support this motion. The member for Braitling is very passionate about Indigenous affairs and telecommunications. I sometimes go out at night with him and he spends all night on his mobile phone, will not talk to a soul, and is texting and doing all the things young kids do these days. For that reason I urge everyone to support this motion.

Mr BOHLIN (Drysdale): Madam Speaker, I have to commend the member for Braitling. This is about looking at what we need in our remote communities. He is the regional shadow minister and the shadow Indigenous policy minister and this is a logical request. No wonder the government has failed for the last 10 years and cannot understand such a simple request. It is not hard to conduct a review into genuine telecommunications needs.

The minister for ICT said: 'We have had all the reviews; we have had everything'. Minister, I do not know whether you had everything because when you put forward your version of the NBN plan - the \$42bn plan - it did not have a business model to it or a delivery structure. It did not know if it would put things on the ground, above the ground, or through the streets. It had no plan. How can you say you have conducted a review into everything?

The NBN, as promised by the Labor government, did not have even a plan after the money was committed - after the project started. That is a blatant failure of any government. Mind you, this Territory Labor government and the minister for ICT complain about the potential cost of conducting a review into services in remote Indigenous communities and some regional development. He complains about a potential cost when there is a \$42bn spend on the table in the first place. This Labor government pays a consultant over \$100 000 to have a review into how to make it look better in the public eye. That will not deliver a thing for regional Australia.

Attempting to make this failed 10-year Labor government look good will not deliver a thing for regional Australia. But, no, it will spend over

\$100 000-plus on a consultant to tell it how to look good. That money could be spent helping regional Australia in the Northern Territory, Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, find the best method of getting communications access - some Internet that will make a difference.

The minister sat there while the member for Fong Lim was talking - they can have Internet access via satellites. Under the current federal Labor government, rebates for satellite Internet broadband into remote Australia - anywhere in Australia - has lapsed. That rebate has been dropped and it will now cost over \$1000. That is fine. Some of our communities that do not have the greatest amount of cash in their back pocket and have problems getting kids to school, if they want Internet coverage, will have to get a satellite worth over \$1000 because this Labor government has dropped the national rebate.

You have failed everywhere. You sit in the bleachers and carry on but have failed everywhere in regional Australia.

The member for Stuart, the ICT minister, who should be most passionate - he should have more passion than the member for Braitling because his own electorate is remote Central Australia - has a written speech he has problems reading, understanding, and comprehending because it is way above his head. He does care enough to suggest we write a letter to the federal minister suggesting we have a review into what our communities need. I commend the member for Braitling for getting off his tail bone and doing the job the minister should be doing, particularly considering it is his electorate.

We have commentary from the member for Daly, who should be supporting this bill because it is his electorate and would benefit most from this type of review. However, no, we do not hear anything from him. The government failed to support this logical request and I cannot understand why. Member for Braitling, you have done a great job. It is not hard; it is so logical, no wonder they do not understand it.

I heard Senator Conroy, the federal Communications minister, recently - it might have been Monday on the news - laughed in the Senate inquiry into the NBN because it was mentioned the NBN would most likely never turn a dollar - never be profitable in the life span of our current ministers in federal parliament. The senator scoffed and laughed in reply in the Senate inquiry: 'Well, ha, ha, ha, your railway did not' and he will not survive until the railway makes a dollar. He was talking about the railway in the Northern Territory - vastly different commodities.

It is tangible; the rail produces a solid service, but the NBN was a dream without a business plan that, in this case, will not look at what services are required in remote communities. It is a shame, and I look forward to the day the extra fibre, the backhaul fibre, the new NBN fibre, comes through the Territory - it is on its way. I have seen the dozers laying the optics and it is a good operation. Two dozers, clever.

The minister says it will be delivered in 2011. Well, 2011 is nearly over. It is nearly over, like the Labor government is nearly finished in the Territory. I want to see those dozers cruising through the streets of Nightcliff because fibre to the door - where they have dug to put power lines underground - means they have to dig up the footpaths again. Every footpath in Nightcliff, if it is going to be fibre to the door, will be dug up again. However, if we had gone fibre to the node, that would not be the case. The residents of Nightcliff, and those in the electorate of Johnston, are going to love their footpaths being dug up again because of a poorly-conceived plan that could have been better dealt with.

In simple terms, the member for Braitling has done a fantastic job in bringing forward a simple question to ask the government to do its job and find out what should be delivered in the bush. The Labor government is so asleep at the wheel it cannot see its job any more.

Thanks again, member for Braitling, you have done a great job.

Mr GILES (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I thank my two parliamentary colleagues, the member for Fong Lim and the member for Drysdale, who is the shadow minister for ICT. It was unfortunate I put this on to the Notice Paper before the change in shadow portfolios. My colleagues spoke sensibly about what needs to occur in ICT in the Northern Territory.

Once again, I was very disappointed with the minister for ICT. Every time there is a debate concerning the member for Stuart's ministerial role, it is a flat debate. He does not have anything to offer parliament or the Territory. He does not share a vision about where he wants things to go.

He talked about carbon tax and 'xyz', but did not talk about the carbon tax sending petrol prices up 5.5¢ per litre or diesel up by more than 6¢ per litre. He did not talk about the impact on the aviation industry with an increase in ticket prices. No, he just wants to play games with the carbon tax. He did not talk about the fact his government spent more than \$1m campaigning against the nuclear waste dump; something it was unsuccessful in. He could have mentioned how it will spend \$1m campaigning for greater ICT

services in the Northern Territory; he did not talk about that. It is always flat. It is always a prepared speech. He does not have a brain between his ears to come up with anything visionary to drive reform in the Northern Territory and that is what is required.

He did not like the wording of the motion and does not want a review. I tried to make this neat so the government would not have to commit long term, apart from calling on the federal government to investigate possibilities. I did not demand. I would like to demand Senator Conroy provide better services to the Territory. I did not bag the NBN model. Yes, it will be \$43b worth of debt for every Australian to pay off forever and a day, including Territorians who are not getting the service. I did not mention that. I let that go and talked about the benefits. I briefly spoke about the benefits of the Internet, education, all the information available, connectivity, and the benefits for a mobile population.

I threw a few stones at the member for Lingiari, who does nothing apart from direct his staff member, Vince Jiesman, to place anti-uranium election material targeting the three Country Liberals members in Alice Springs, into letterboxes. He is on the federal payroll and letterboxing people - intervening in the Territory parliament. Good on you, Vince!

Mr Conlan: He is doing it during the week too.

Mr GILES: Yes, muscle man at election time fronting up to people at the election booths. He should concentrate. Perhaps Vince Jiesman should support the member for Lingiari and start campaigning for ICT services in the Territory rather than playing roughneck political games.

I commend the comments of the members for Drysdale and Fong Lim. They both understand the issues with ICT. We can get technical in this debate or we can be parochial and say: 'Let us tell Canberra we want better services here'. Let us start throwing stones at Warren Snowdon for not standing up for the Territory. Let us start throwing stones at the member for Daly who, in his electorate of Dundee Beach, Dundee Downs, Dundee Forest, Bynoe Harbour, Cox Peninsula, Belyuen, Wagait Beach, Darwin River, Berry Springs, wherever you want to go - out Marrakai way - people who are not going to get fibre to the premises - FTTP.

These people are not going to get the NBN promised to all Territorians, let alone the people in Alice Springs, who are still in a wilderness - not in any plans to the end of 2012. They might try to pork barrel the seat of Lingiari before the next federal election in 2013, if it does not come sooner

with the knifing of the current Prime Minister or otherwise.

The member for Daly does not care about his electorate. He does not talk about Palumpa, Peppimenarti, Emu Point; Woodycupaldiya. He does not care about those parts of his electorate ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr GILES: ... does not care at all. I would be happy to go to Palumpa and Peppi and say: 'You will not get a mobile phone under the Labor government. It will not even fight for you, let alone give it to you'. This side of parliament is fighting for the seat of Daly.

The Minister for ICT Policy, the member for Stuart, does not talk about mobile phone technology in any of his communities or the advancement of 4G. He did not talk about Yuendumu, Kalkarindji, Lajamanu, Yuelamu, Pigeon Hole, Yarralin, or Amanbidji. How are you going to improve services around the Timber Creek area? That is not important to him, and is why he is a failed minister and a failed local member. That is why he is doing such a poor job and has no support in his electorate. He does not stand up and fight.

When you look at law and order in Alice Springs, it is the members for Araluen, Greatorex and me who are fighting for law and order. People appreciate what we say because we reflect the community views, but the Minister for ICT Policy, the member for Stuart, is not reflecting the community views. He talks about Darwin and ICT, which is very important - greater connectivity, we appreciate that. However, this is not about the Darwin boundaries; this is about everyone outside and trying to improve that connectivity. He does not stand up for it. We all want to see greater ICT. The fibre to the node model is the one we support because of the mobility of the population - more people want wireless than fixed.

We understand businesses want greater services, and that is a different model in itself; however, for the residential population, fibre to the node - connectivity - let us start rolling it out in Fannie Bay. Let us start moving on that right now. Let us target Fannie Bay as a prime place, get some wireless technology in there and improve the ICT service. I call on Senator Conroy to start in that area now. The Country Liberals would like to see that happen across the northern suburbs; however, we will wait to see the government pork barrel a couple of seats for political gain rather than running an economic model on ICT.

I am disappointed the minister is not supportive of this. I am disappointed with the member for Nelson. I thought he supported the bush and would have an opinion on this. Whether review is the right way to go, or whether we should demand it or start a \$1m advertising campaign, as Labor did on the nuclear waste dump - there are different approaches, but you have to fight Canberra.

If the member for Lingiari, the biggest failure of all federal members in Canberra, is not going to stand up for the Territory, this parliament has to. While Vince Jiesman is playing electorate games in the Territory on taxpayers' funds fighting anti-nuclear campaigns, clearly the priorities are wrong, especially when Martin Ferguson, minister for Resources in Canberra, is highly supportive of the mineral sector. You have the loony left playing political games.

I will put the motion. Labor will say no, because it does not support ICT anywhere. It does not have a proactive minister who can provide the fight for support. There is no one with the gumption to take the fight to Canberra. We cannot even get a decent fight on that side to support the member for Barkly, who does not want Labor's nuclear waste dump - he is a lone voice. He cannot get any support. We do not hear of any fight at all. We do not hear any fight on the carbon tax - signed up, rolled over. We did not hear any fight on the live cattle trade - Hendo standing next to Julia in Nhulunbuy saying: 'Yes, we want to stop our whole industry. Can you give it to us both barrels?' Rolled over like a little puppy dog. There is no fight at all. That is the difference with the Country Liberals - the legacy debate - 27 years of the Country Liberals. For 27 years, the Country Liberals fought for and built the Territory.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr GILES: Go through anything in the Territory and it has been done under a Country Liberal government. It does not matter where you look: the Alice Springs to Darwin railway; water retention in the rural area; the Peter McAulay police centre; East Arm deep port facility; Palmerston satellite city; research station; Bagot Road overpass; Farrer Medical Centre; Elizabeth River Bridge; the forensic laboratories, Tiger Brennan Drive; the export cattle yards; Ayers Rock Resort; Litchfield Park; Berrimah gaol; Lake Leanyer; the hospital; the Supreme Court; Lake Alexander; Marrara Stadium; Parliament House; Cullen Bay Marina; new power stations; the cardiac unit at RDH; the emergency unit at RDH; the oncology unit, thanks to the fallen member for Solomon; new laboratories at the BRF; more and more new schools; the private hospital; Marrara ovals and stands; Wickham Point gas plant;

underground residential power; dual carriageway to Noonamah; and the Palm Valley gas pipeline. These were all done by CLP. What have you done?

You do not fight for the Territory. We built the Territory over the 27 years you like to castigate. You do not fight. What you will see at the end of that list is ICT for the Territory. You have given us a waterfront; what else? You have put us in debt for \$500m for the new prison. We will put that on the list too. Broken promises, increases in violent crime, lack of affordable housing across the Territory. Nothing! This government also introduced demerit points and speed limits. We have skyrocketing prices and hundreds of millions of dollars of debt and deficit - billions of dollars. People fear being attacked in their home and have to build six-foot fences with razor wire because they do not want anyone entering. That is what Labor has left us. What a legacy!

When we are in government, I will look back and say: 'Those 11 long years of Labor, what did it deliver?' Black eyes, broken arms and a burnt out car - that long list of crime'. I look at the badge on my colleague, the member for Araluen - the CLP logo - the Territory flag; that is our flag. We did not just build the Territory, we built our flag. That is our ...

Ms Scrymgour: It belongs to Territorians; it is not your flag.

Mr GILES: This is what the CLP is all about. Every time you say: 'The CLP this, the CLP that', keep in mind we built this place. You people say there was no education, particularly the Indigenous MLAs. You received an education - every single one of you. That is a false argument and you need to be reminded of that.

We built the Territory, we built the flag and, because of your failures, we will have to rebuild it when we are in government. ICT will be on this list. Member for Stuart, when I am in your electorate talking about Labor shire failures and how you are closing down outstations, I will remind them you are not going to get them mobile phones and are not even going to fight. You will not even talk about it. I will be reminding them in Arnhem, in Daly, telling them in Barkly, and singing the same story in Arafura ...

A member: They remember you from 2007.

Ms Scrymgour: Do that. I cannot wait for you to do that, mate.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr GILES: I am glad they remember me from 2007 because I will be back there ensuring every one of you lose your seats.

As we are telling everyone about Labor shires, Labor's second intervention, Labor closing down the outstations, Labor sending everyone into town, and Labor removing culture, I will also be telling them Labor is not supporting them with technology - no broadband, no telephones - does not care.

This debate with the member for Stuart, like all others with him, has been no puff, no flare, nothing. He has had nothing to add to this debate, like every other. He went to school so you would think he could come up with his own speeches. You would think he could speak freely. People expect us in this Chamber to have two thoughts, put them together, and articulate them. No, not the member for Stuart.

Madam Speaker, I will put the motion. It has been a frivolous exercise because there is a lack of intelligence by the member for Stuart in supporting something so basic - fighting Canberra - when they have a sea of money they have borrowed from our children and grandchildren. They will waste it all over the country and will not fight for it in the Territory. We would fight. We do not care about the colour in Canberra; we would fight. Whether they are Liberal or Labor, stand for the Territory. That is why we are the CLP; we are unique, we are on our own, and we fight for the Territory.

I will put this motion. I remind everyone in the Territory that these little puppy dogs who like to roll over and be tickled on the belly by Uncle Kevin and Aunt Julia have not stood up for Territorians ...

Ms WALKER: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Members opposite have been reminded about reference to our parliamentary colleagues and using their appropriate titles.

Madam SPEAKER: Yes, that is correct. Member for Braitling, if you could reword that, please?

Mr GILES: To be honest, I cannot recall what I said.

Madam SPEAKER: You need to refer to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, thank you.

Mr GILES: Sorry, I mean uncle previous Prime Minister, aunty current Prime Minister, and uncle probably future Prime Minister, but we are not really sure ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Braiiting, that is inappropriate. Just say Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, thank you.

Mr GILES: I will put the motion, Madam Speaker.

Madam SPEAKER: You do not put the motion. I put the motion. Have you completed your speech?

Mr GILES: I move the motion, or whatever I do.

Madam SPEAKER: You have already done that.

Motion negatived.

MOTION
Deferral of Motion -
Deficiencies in Services in Darwin Rural Area

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Madam Speaker, the motion I had before the House was that the Northern Territory notes the serious deficiencies in the delivery of services and programs into the greater Darwin rural area in the important areas of youth, mental health care, aged care, and sport and recreation.

However, I will be deferring this motion. Much of the information I was going to mention and recommendations to government I will defer as the Select Committee on Youth Suicides in the Northern Territory has been announced and work is under way. Much of what I was going to discuss will be related to work that committee will embark on - some of the submissions and some of the inquiries we hold, hopefully in rural areas.

I seek leave to defer this motion at this point in time.

Madam SPEAKER: Are you deferring it, member for Goyder?

Ms PURICK: Yes, if I could defer it. Is that possible?

Madam SPEAKER: If you move that the motion you have presented be deferred ...

Ms PURICK: Madam Speaker, I move that the motion, as I have just read, be deferred.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION
Rural Centre Plans in the
Litchfield Council Area

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I move – That the Northern Territory government support the recently released rural centre plans as the most appropriate option for the future development of the Litchfield Council area.

I was looking forward to discussing services in the rural area. Perhaps another time ...

Ms Scrymgour: You could join the committee.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, member for Arafura.

The issue before us is very important. The government has released its so-called village plans; however, the basis of my discussion tonight is about protection of rural living. The member for Goyder and I have released a document called rural centre plans. On the back of that document is a statement: 'This plan is about keeping the rural, rural'. That is what rural people want. Some people will disagree, but the majority of people who have lived in the rural area, who enjoy the rural lifestyle, want that rural lifestyle protected.

The problem in developers' minds, and some of the planners' minds, is that is a very wasted part of the Northern Territory; you cannot live on a large block of land as that is a waste of a resource. They want you to live in highly-compact blocks of land so they can provide many services and, of course, that will overcome some of the housing shortages in the Darwin area. There is also the argument by some of the developers and planners that many people in the rural area are getting older and are looking for a place to live. They should be able to subdivide their land, live on the smaller block, and other people can enjoy living in the rural area.

There will be no rural area if you cut it up into smaller blocks. That is the mistake with the government's plans. I will give you a classic example. There is a large parcel of land called the forestry land in Howard Springs. To cut that up into small blocks will immediately destroy the rural amenity and lifestyle. You will have a one acre block, which is not the size to run a horse on. It is more an oversized block you might find in old time Nightcliff which are now being cut into smaller blocks.

My approach is, and the member for Goyder agrees, we are not against smaller blocks in the rural area. Good planning is about achieving that principle without destroying the rural lifestyle. We have said yes, we support smaller blocks, either

suburban or one acre blocks - which are 0.4 ha - but within specified boundaries, that is, rural centres. The plan we put forward to the government is not necessarily in opposition to the concepts the government is putting forward. It is saying you need to get the right balance; you need to ensure the rural area is protected.

You will get pressure from developers. The member for Goyder and I know what that pressure is like from people who do not have the rural area at heart. They may say they do; they really have profit. There is nothing wrong with profit; however, profit-driven development should not override good planning.

The government has put forward good planning so we have a sustainable and planned future. People ask me about subdivisions, and I imagine the member for Goyder would also be asked. People must realise if you allow planning or subdivisions higgledy-piggledy, you will have a mess. I travelled the highway between Brisbane and Maryborough several years ago specifically to look at the way some of the hinterland had been developed. If you want a classic example of how not to develop rural areas on the outskirts of cities, you will see it in some of that development along the Sunshine Coast north. You will see all types of block sizes and, in many cases, it is a nightmare when it comes to good planning.

Many people who have come from south have come into my office and said how much they enjoy the rural area because it has been planned. It did develop slowly in the 1960s and 1970s, and, as the 1980s and 1990s came along, it boomed and people were able to enjoy that rural lifestyle. Of course, the rural lifestyle has its limitations. One is water, and we know with the Howard East water management committee there appears to be a limit on how many bores can operate within the rural area without damage to the environment or damage to the aquifer which feeds those bores.

The member for Goyder and I are putting to the government that the minimum lot size be 1 ha. That is still 100 m by 100 m. You can still run a horse on 100 m by 100 m, have some space, have some bush, but you will have to have town water. The government's proposal - and you will see it in the plans, especially for the forestry land and land along the Arnhem Highway near Humpty Doo, and to a large extent the land east of the Stuart Highway in the Noonamah area - is to cut up all the land east of the Stuart Highway subject to the areas that are too wet. That would extend out to the boundary of the Elizabeth River and would be all 0.4 ha blocks. That will destroy rural living and the lifestyle the government says it is trying to protect.

Some of that pressure has come from developers; I know a number of the developers and have known of their plans for a long time. However, I say resist that development pressure. By all means, people who own large blocks of land should be entitled to subdivide within the rules, but the rules are there specifically to maintain a rural lifestyle.

One of the issues coming from this debate is a zoning classification called rural residential. In about 2002, when the government brought out its changes to the Northern Territory Planning Scheme, it was proposed rural residential land be a minimum lot size of 0.4 ha, or one acre. At that time, there were a number of rural people, especially in the Howard River Park area, who signed a petition - nearly 1000 people asking the government not to make that the minimum lot size, but to make it 0.4 ha, or one acre, and the government agreed to that. However, it did not agree to it for the whole of the Northern Territory. So, in the Northern Territory Planning Scheme at the moment, rural residential in Alice Springs is 0.4 ha, or one acre, and rural residential is 1 ha in Litchfield. Some developers, in trying to pressure the government into allowing small lot subdivisions, have written into their submissions to the Planning Authority that, as the rest of the Northern Territory has 0.4 ha as its minimum lot size for rural residential land, therefore the Litchfield shire should have it.

My suggestion is you either change the 0.4 ha to large urban - they are large suburban blocks and you can see them behind the Howard Springs school, or change the definition of the 1 ha block to medium rural or some zone specific for 1 ha blocks. That will stop developers continually using the idea that the lot size in the rest of the Northern Territory is 0.4 ha for rural residential; therefore, the government should make it the same for Litchfield shire.

I need to remind the government of the history of that: people said they did not want rural blocks smaller than 1 ha. I support 1 ha blocks, although there is some opposition, because it probably is a good use of the land and allows people to enjoy some of the rural lifestyle. If you go through some of the older parts of Litchfield, which are mainly 2 ha or five acres, or 8 ha or 20 acres, as people grew older some of that land was not used. People went to the rural area many years ago and said: 'Let us buy some horses for the kids'. That is terrific. They cleared the land, the kids grew up and got sick of horses, and the land has been left as is. It is hard to maintain and mum and dad have to look after this large block of land.

Those blocks give rural people a choice. There is a push by some to cut up those 2 ha blocks. In fact, the government's plans show

areas around Humpty Doo, both the existing district centre and up towards the Humpty Doo pub, as able to be subdivided. That is fine if one person owns all that land; however, where you have a street with about 40 blocks - 20 down either side - and you try to develop a plan to subdivide that, you will run into difficulty because you will need water and an increase in power output in that street. Power and Water will say: 'If you want to subdivide your land and you are number 10' - you are about 1 km down the road - and no one else wants to subdivide, you will have to find the money for the pipe to reach your property'. If you need a transformer to upgrade the power, you will have to pay for that as well. It would become very difficult for 40 different landowners to subdivide their land in a rational way.

It is good that you are leaving existing 2 ha lots alone for the time being, unless the government spends the money on putting that infrastructure in and gets the return from block owners as they subdivide their land. That is one option. At the moment, it allows a variation in lot sizes, which means people who want to run horses or would like more privacy - that is one of the reasons people came to the rural area - still can. Our rural centre plans are saying leave the existing subdivided rural land as it is. Where you have larger blocks of land owned by the government or privately, allow that land, if possible, to be subdivided into 1 ha lots and put your smaller lots in the district centres.

The government needs to look at some of the smaller centres and see what the future is. Southport would be a classic example. Southport is a town built around 1880, existed for about 12 years and had about four pubs, a post office, and quite a number of houses. That area is slowly growing because the Litchfield council has been selling what it calls dead man's blocks. People are moving there. The existing water supply is to pick up some water from the bore in your tanker, take it home, and fill up the tank. That is about the only service provided. There is electricity, telephones, and the Litchfield council has put some bitumen roads in. However, the future of that little town needs some work on it.

Ever since I was on the council there has been a vacuum of ideas for the future of Southport. Originally, the government said it would not sell any of its Crown land blocks off; it wanted fewer people to live there because of the sandflies and mosquitoes. Government thought it was a health hazard living there. Now it seems, with the selling of blocks in that area, it is developing. It also has a boat ramp to the Blackmore River which is quite popular. The government needs to look at that. It does not come up in its plans. In the rural centre plans the member for Goyder and I put together,

the last page mentions Southport historic township and what the future may be.

The plans the government put forward need to be expanded to look at different centres. Girraween district centre is given very little mention in the government's plans. It is a piece of land owned partly by Churcher and partly by the government. Churcher gave some of his land as part of a land swap for the development of Girraween Primary School. There was a belief he would develop some commercial activities, even housing and a community area, but a bore was put down within 400 m of that development and Power and Water have since said there will be no development unless a sewerage system can be put in outside that 400 m radius.

So, you have a developer willing to develop that small district centre but is stuck because there is a dispute over who should be responsible for sewerage in that area. The school has its own sewerage system. When the school was built someone should have had the foresight to say: 'This whole area could be developed one day; let us build a sewerage treatment plant to suit that whole development'. The Girraween district centre could then be developed - not in a big way; it would be a minor centre. At the moment, it has come to a dead stop because of that issue.

Howard Springs has developed, with time, as a private village. In this case, member for Goyder, it is technically called a village. You will see it when you come in on Whitewood Road. The member for Goyder says it sounds English, but Howard Springs has been called that. At Humpty Doo, you go to the Humpty Doo Village Centre, so the name has been around. We call them rural centres because you end up with little townships. Perhaps that is a better word for them.

Howard Springs has some issues. It has only a relatively small amount of land around it which could be developed. Because of the proximity of larger blocks, our plan is blocks down to 0.4 ha be allowed, but it would be very limited. That would not impinge too much on the rural area, and it would not increase the amount of traffic in that area because development has occurred rapidly in the Howard Springs area. Anyone who has travelled along Whitewood Road or Howard Springs Road at 7.30 am to 8 am in the morning knows the amount of traffic coming from that area.

In the case of Coolalinga, yes, this area is developing as well. There has been talk about economic growth in the Northern Territory. The Howard Springs area and some other parts of the rural area will be leading that economic growth. The developers of the Coolalinga north shopping centre have said they intend to go ahead with a large shopping centre. Rumours are it will include

K-Mart and Coles. About 80 dwellings will be established behind that shopping centre which will increase the number of people living in the rural area. It is an important development. The government has tried to extend that development to land to the north of Coolalinga which is unsuitable; it is either wet or steep. From local knowledge, we have said land in that area should be larger blocks, not small blocks, because you are moving into land not suitable for suburban development.

I will go further north and talk about the land near Wallaby Holtze Road. There is a triangle of land south of Wallaby Holtze Road bordered by Wallaby Holtze Road, Taylor Road, and the Stuart Highway. There were discussions, a number of years ago, about the future extension of Temple Terrace and an agreement there would be 2 ha blocks to the north of Temple Terrace which would buffer the existing rural blocks, and 1 ha blocks to the south. The government's plan has turned that into suburban. I am not saying that land is unsuitable for development; however, some areas are very steep. Some of those areas could even be attached to the rail path because they drop down very steeply. Maybe they are better left as protected areas. There is quite a bit of land in there that could be developed for rural residential - 1 ha - not suburban. The government argument is it should be suburban because it is close to Palmerston. It is a weak argument because you will always have some development close to some other place. It is a matter of whether the planners limit the growth of Palmerston or try to push it through areas like Howard Springs and Holtze. It is a mistake to set aside the area as suburban.

The residents of Wallaby Holtze Road, from time to time, get upset about development in their area but they would be even more upset if there were suburban blocks across the road. That is a great example of where you could put 1 ha blocks in and preserve the bush because the 1 ha blocks could be developed as rural residential with a restriction on clearing. That would be a lovely area close to Palmerston which retains rural values.

A large area of Humpty Doo has not yet been developed, which worries me. The government has had Crown land in Humpty Doo for years. One duplex has been built by Northern Territory Housing in 20 years. When I first came to the rural area, Norbuilt was building units and the government built some Housing Commission houses. Since then, only one duplex, which was finished last year. That shows me the government has not been interested in developing the rural area, yet it has a large portion of land off Challoner Circuit which could hold at least 300 houses. There has been no move that way. They ran out of industrial land years ago, yet the land

next to that industrial area is zoned Industrial and they have not done anything with it.

The sewerage ponds have doubled in size. There is a great demand for industrial land out there. Again, that is good planning: you are not supposed to be developing industrial facilities on rural blocks. The government needs to provide industrial land in the rural area. Not at Palmerston; that is not much good if you live in Humpty Doo or Berry Springs. If you develop industrial land at the back of the tip, you take the pressure off rural land being used for things it should not.

The government has done nothing in that area and our plan says this should be opened up. Our plan is you should be opening up that residential area. You do not have to put pressure on rural blocks along the highway; you have land that can be developed right now. The government has not done it and before it preaches to other people to cut up their land, it needs to need to do something with its own land.

If there was an area for a retirement village, this is it. The government is conducting surveys of older people at the moment. There is a desperate demand for places in the rural area where people can retire. That was the basis of what the government was saying. When people get old and cannot look after their larger blocks but want to stay in the rural area, they will need smaller blocks. Put the smaller blocks in the district centre - put retirement villages and aged care facilities in the district centres and people can do what you are suggesting. At the moment they have to go to Tiwi or Bakewell, or live in the granny flat on a 2 ha block. The government has not put those facilities in the rural area, which is a big disappointment.

It also wants to spread 1 ha blocks right up to the Humpty Doo pub. Some of that land is suitable for that. There are some landowners around the Freds Pass Road area, where it meets Strangways Road, who do not want their land cut up. That is one of the dangers of trying to zone over land where people already live, especially when you have multiple owners. I have written to the minister suggesting he needs to rethink that, even though there may be some advantages. If people do not want it, leave it alone, otherwise it becomes a real mess.

Noonamah is a classic example of overdevelopment. You have some big landowners and a few small landowners. I am not against that land being developed. There are large blocks of land except around Keleson Road, which is opposite Strauss Airstrip. I see Noonamah as being its own little township. It could have some suburban blocks and a school.

It could be Weddell East; a satellite town on the edge of Weddell.

One of the developers wants to make the blocks smaller. You cannot have that type of development without an overall plan because when a developer has a large number of blocks and increases the population, that developer has a responsibility for services to ensure those people's future is looked after, and that includes room for schools. It means there should be places for community centres and shopping centres. I put to the government, and the member for Goyder, in the rural centre plans a place like Noonamah should be a town, and outside that - like Humpty Doo and Howard Springs - you should have 1 ha or 2 ha rural blocks depending on the availability of water and whether the land is waterlogged.

Berry Springs is an area where the government's development plans were too large. The minister attended a meeting; however, I spoke to people afterwards and when we looked at the plans afterwards we saw the government wanted to put 7500 people in that area. They felt that was too much. We have brought that down to 3500 people; still quite large for that little town. It does not have services; it will be a long time before it develops. There is no water. It will be close to Weddell and you have to ask: do you really want to put a major centre there or do you want to allow Weddell to develop and keep Berry Springs as a small centre?

The other area is Freds Pass, a district centre. When Freds Pass developed, Bees Creek Primary School called itself Bees Creek, even though it is in the Freds Pass district centre. Now the Litchfield Christian School has called itself Sattler Christian College. They are both in the district centre of Freds Pass.

The Freds Pass district centre has been developed as a government district centre; it is all Crown land. It has some heritage sites which should be protected, and the possibility of smaller blocks being developed. It would not need much commercial development because Coolalinga is just up the road – it would not be sensible. The area is owned by the government, which has done nothing with it, yet it wants to go over the other side of the highway to the Howard Springs Defence area, which was called Kowandi South and Berno's – a vast block of land it recommended be cut into small blocks. No, leave that as 1 ha, develop your district centre as a discrete little township with small blocks so we retain the rural area and keep the idea of the district or rural centre.

Kowandi South, the Defence area, is a vast tract of land. It is probably two 320 acre blocks.

Most of that land has hardly ever burned - there was one big fire about 15 years ago - and has some magnificent vegetation on it. If you turned it into 0.4 ha blocks, it would be cleared. It is very hard to put a house on a 0.4 ha block and not clear the land. With a 1 ha subdivision and a restriction on how much you could clear, much of that vegetation would be retained. Those two blocks of land, Kowandi North and Kowandi South, are nearly conservation reserves because the government cleared the land inside for aerials, but the bush left has hardly been burned - it has always been protected by fire breaks - and they are beautiful parcels of land. The planners were thinking it was a parcel of land, but you have to know the parcel of land and that one has some beautiful vegetation. It is an area for flora and fauna and, if you developed it, the minimum lot size would have to be 1 ha to give any form of protection.

Madam Speaker, there is not enough time for the minister to respond tonight. What time do we finish?

Madam SPEAKER: Nine o'clock.

Mr WOOD: I will keep going then. The difference with what the government is putting forward is that we do not want massive development of the rural area; we want sensible development. We believe there is a need for smaller blocks. We believe people should be able to enjoy a rural amenity and lifestyle. We believe our rural centre plan finds that balance. The last dot point on page 1 is the rural centre plans are based on the principle of good planning rather than vested interest, which is really important ...

Dr BURNS: Madam Speaker, I move the member be given an extension of time pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I wanted to finish by saying there is an area not included in this plan - Knuckey Lagoon, which is the Cullen Bay or Brinkin of the rural area. Blocks of land there are worth much money. There are some big houses and flash developments, and there has been pressure on people to say to the government they want smaller blocks. I have heard rumours the block on the corner of McMillans Road and the Stuart Highway is being pushed as a 0.4 ha block and it could be argued - and I understand the argument - it is close to Darwin, therefore we should have smaller blocks.

Knuckey Lagoon is unique. Knuckey Lagoon is a little secret. Do not take this the wrong way, member for Araluen, but do you know where Knuckey Lagoon is? Have you been to the

lagoon? Do you know how close it is to Karama Shopping Plaza? They are very close. What other city in Australia would have a natural wildlife sanctuary where you see geese, pelicans, jabirus, ducks, and all types of birdlife in their thousands about 3 km from Karama Shopping Plaza? You have a unique, special place within cooee of the Darwin suburbs.

It is easy to look at that area and say: 'We can cut that into little blocks', but you should be very careful not to destroy something unique. I am not against some rationalisation of block sizes around the lagoon. Knuckey is made up of some historical blocks and some subdivisions which were relatively well organised around the Brandt Road and Farrar Road area. It has a mixture of Defence and the Mickett Creek shooting range nearby, which has some bush to create a buffer between the noise coming from Mickett Creek - it has the quad bike association area nearby. Inside the Knuckey Lagoon area are lot sizes that vary between 8 ha down to 2 ha, and even smaller around where Boscato has his paint place, down to nearly 1 ha.

There has been confusion in days gone by as to why the minimum lot size is meant to be 8 ha in the Knuckey Lagoon area. It used to be because they did not want pollution of Knuckey Lagoon - they did not want intense development with septic tanks, etcetera. Somehow, that was taken off the original draft Northern Territory Land Use Objectives the member for Casuarina launched and, in the final plan, that bit about pollution of Knuckey Lagoon was removed and the only restriction was based on aircraft, because quite a bit of Knuckey Lagoon is in the flight path into Darwin. It has been a higgledy-piggledy development with some anomalies, one being the Knuckey Lagoon Aboriginal village. It has about 15 houses sitting right under the flight path - you can just about read the brand of tyre on a Boeing as it flies over the top, yet we are saying you should only have one house per 8 ha in the same area.

Aboriginal people, for some reason, have a different rule than other people in that area. You have anomalies and my request to the government was to look at those issues and see if we could have a plan that (1) did not destroy Knuckey Lagoon; (2) did not destroy the rural amenity; and (3) made some sense. I would not be opposed to 2 ha blocks around the lagoon. I am unsure of 1 ha because of the septic tank issue. It is a pressure area and sometimes, minister, you have to see these places in the Wet Season. Knuckey Lagoon use to flood, with Ironstone Lagoon, to the Berrimah traffic lights at Truck City.

Unfortunately, a few years ago someone built a house on Agostini Road near Ironstone Lagoon - he was told not to - and that Wet Season his house went under water. The government, as often happens in planning, put a drain in. It increased the drains on the side of Ironstone Lagoon to lower the water for someone who built his house in a floodplain, not put in large culverts in different parts of Knuckey Lagoon. There has been higgledy-piggledy development, but we need to protect both Knuckey Lagoon and Ironstone Lagoon.

I mentioned Ironstone Lagoon, minister, because I might have written to you about the big drain from the new development next to Harvey Norman. Harvey Norman is on a big parcel of land and, on the other side of the road, there is going to be a huge commercial development and the level of the ground has been raised considerably. They have put a big drain from the Darwin City Council side straight across Vanderlin Drive into the Ironstone Lagoon drainage system with no catchments, no silt traps, no grassed areas to catch nutrients - modern methods using natural design to reduce nutrients and silt coming from that development. It is a straight drain with a concrete centre and the rest will be mowed grass. There does not seem to be any understanding that Knuckey Lagoon and Ironstone Lagoon are next door, and hardstand from that development appears to run straight into those lagoons.

We have this unique area, Knuckey Lagoon, right next to our city. We have an area where wildlife is protected. It really is a beautiful area. Surveys of the turtles in that area were conducted a few years ago. Right on our doorstep, people are able to come from the Aboriginal area to go hunting. We have a very special area. I do not know any other city that would have a natural area so close.

Unfortunately, poor old Palmerston used to have a natural area called Marlow Lagoon. I have seen the original photographs. The backhoe came in and dug it out. It now has Cabomba and other things. If it had been left in its natural state, it probably would still be a remarkable piece of natural habitat for birds and wildlife.

It is important we protect those areas. It is not included in this because it is not really a rural centre; however, it is, I presume, part of the discussion the government is having with itself about the future of that area - whether it will be developed into smaller blocks or not. My gut feeling is most people will not want to see small blocks in that area. There are some people who do, but they enjoy the privacy of larger blocks and understand they have valuable blocks. One of the houses in that area went for \$2.5m. The lifestyle might not be my lifestyle, but is one some people

would like to see protected because they live in that unique area.

Madam Speaker, I urge the government when it comes to planning, be careful of planners bearing gifts or sweet talking, and be careful of planners putting forward arguments that will destroy the rural lifestyle. Also, be careful of planners who see a philosophy of planning they might have dragged from some highly-developed suburbs in the outer leafy areas of Melbourne and try to implant it in the rural area of Litchfield, because that area is unique. It is important, because it gives people a great lifestyle to raise a family.

Look at our crime rates in the Litchfield area; they are quite low. Occasionally, during the holidays, you might get some graffiti - and there is always Wednesday night at the Howard Springs Tavern, but we believe they are all visitors. Generally speaking, we do not have that type of problem. If people have a larger block they can hear the birds, retain the bush, have chooks, a horse, a dog, and some privacy. They still love their neighbours, but they do not live in each other's pocket. The rural area allows that to happen. That is part of the Territory; that we retain places like the Litchfield shire.

I say to the developers: back off. If you want to chop up land, Weddell is yours, Darwin is yours, and Palmerston is yours. Keep your hands off cutting up the rural area into small blocks.

It is my place, it is the member for Goyder's place, and rural people love it; leave it that way. Thank you.

Ms PURICK (Goyder): Madam Speaker, never a truer word has been said than by the member for Nelson, although I am quite happy to share the rural area with all my constituents and the people on Wallaby Holtze Road. If I do not, they will probably kick me off Wallaby Holtze Road. I am happy to share the rural area with the member for Nelson's constituents, and also some of the member for Daly's constituents.

A member: What about Palmerston?

Ms PURICK: Palmerston is another story. No, we are not prepared to share our rural area with the member for Brennan's constituents of Palmerston. They already have a semi-rural area.

I support the member for Nelson in this motion emphatically and strongly. That is, that the Northern Territory government support the recently released rural centre plans as the most appropriate option for the future development of the Litchfield council area.

There may well be alternate options put forward by members of the public in regard to not only the proposal put out by the government titled rural villages, but also the proposal put together by the member for Nelson and me. We have aptly called it, I believe, rural centres. We do not like, and many people in the rural area do not like, the word 'villages'. There is some underlying thought a village denotes something in the English countryside. That is not necessarily bad, but it is not applicable to our way of living and lifestyle.

It is an important motion as it goes to the heart of the future of the greater rural area. When the member for Nelson and I put this document out there were some concerns about my partnership with the member for Nelson. We have far more things in common concerning the work of our electorates than not. My prime concern is always representing the wishes, aspirations, and issues of my constituents, and anyone else for that matter, in the rural area. There are, at times, no borders in the rural area; just people living there with similar issues. One of the main issues they have is planning.

There would have been planning within the department prior to the rural villages proposals being released; however, it seemed as if they came out of nowhere. There was not much good consultation. The public meetings were not well advertised, minister. Maybe the government officials took that on board because they received feedback. I received feedback from people saying they did not know the meetings were on: 'I wish I had known; I could have gone along'. Many of us in this House know public meetings in the rural area are seen as somewhat of a sport. People were probably disappointed they did not get to go to the public meetings.

The member for Daly was at one of the meetings I attended. It was a very tame meeting, unfortunately. The presentation at some meetings was fine; it was good and what you would expect; however, it lacked insight into the rural issues and what the future of the rural area is likely to be.

I will give you an example, minister. When I went to the meeting at the Noonamah Hotel, one of the areas coloured in for rural residential one acre blocks was smack bang over the export yards on the corner of Elizabeth Valley Road. When I spoke to the government official about that he said: 'Well, it is a suggestion and the cattle yards can go to the industrial area at Humpty Doo'. When I pointed out there was no industrial land available at Humpty Doo, let alone cattle yards industrial given the triple road trains and waste products associated with them, he seemed a little perplexed. It showed me they did not have a great understanding of what they had done, what they had coloured in, and what was under

their proposal for smaller blocks, urban blocks, and things of that nature.

A push to urbanise the rural area is a contradiction of terms and would upset many people and change the face of the rural area. As we have stated: rural is rural. If one was to look at dictionary definitions, 'rural' is where you undertake rural pursuits, country living activities associated with the country. 'Urbanisation', by definition, is small city dwellings. There can be some variations. Whilst you can have smaller blocks in the rural area - I have no issue with some of the smaller blocks; however, as articulated in our document, we have proposed rural centres. I am not against development; however, this is about sensible balance in development and sensible planning.

Too often we have seen planning - not just in the rural area of the Top End, but elsewhere in the Territory - that has been poor, and we are living with the legacies where we have any number of axe handle subdivisions in the rural area across our electorates. It is a pain in the butt having to deal with axe handle subdivisions and subdivisions with access through other people's blocks. I have a classic in my area, off Bees Creek Road on Thorburn Road, where there are about eight blocks and all have to access each other's blocks through the next door neighbour's block. With the current set of ownership that is creating some real headaches; not necessarily the past set. That development was pushed through without any thought of what would happen in the future. I understand it is a difficult legal issue. I have other examples of axe handle subdivisions and access through other people's blocks, particularly when things go wrong between neighbours.

When first coming into this job, I said the greatest pressure will come in the rural area. There will be pressure in regard to more people wanting to move to the rural area for all the reasons my colleague, the member for Nelson, has articulated. We feel safer in the rural area. We enjoy the amenities, the ambience, the biodiversity, and the wildlife that comes with having small, not so small, and larger blocks. We enjoy having our own water from the ground, or some people capture rain water, as I do. We enjoy doing some of the things you cannot enjoy in an urban area.

There will be pressure. There is pressure from development. More people want to enjoy what we are doing. Sometimes, they bring habits we do not want in the rural area - the use of all-terrain vehicles, but that is another story. There is pressure with regard to the future of the water supply into the rural area, the lack of water reticulation and the lack of sewerage reticulation.

There are issues with public transport, planning for new public transport, road corridors, and things of that nature.

To manage the pressures already there, and mitigate those pressures and anything associated with them, we must have good, sound planning. There is nothing wrong with modifying and looking at some of what the member for Nelson and I have put forward, and incorporating that into some thinking and planning into the future.

My understanding, and that of my constituents, is if people choose to have smaller, urban-style blocks then the future city of Weddell should provide for that, or some of the suburbs and developments in and around the Palmerston area. Why would they want an urban block of 700 m² or 800 m² which is 50 to 80 minutes from where they work? Most people in the rural area only have to be on the road between 6.30 am to 7 am in the morning to see the volume of traffic going into Darwin city from the greater rural area is enormous.

One of the other concerns about the rural village concept, and what we have tried to accommodate into our alternative option, is consideration for recreational space. There was no allocation in the proposals in the government document, minister, for parks or reserves - where people can go with their animals, or walking, or sitting under trees - whatever it is. There was a concern - even though I cannot speak for the Litchfield council or the president - that in the different areas where the rural centres, rural villages were proposed, there was no allocation for anything other than housing or subdivision areas. Where are the future primary schools, crèches, and preschools going to be? Are there small commercial areas or areas for small businesses, for example? That concerns me.

We have said less smaller blocks, bigger blocks, less of them, and try to keep the rural area rural. Keep the amenities such that not only will the existing people enjoy their lifestyle and their property with their families, but people who wish to live in the rural area, purchase land, move in with other people, can also experience and enjoy what currently is being enjoyed by people there. We do not want to have a legacy in 10, 20, or 50 years of poor planning that could have been avoided by some common sense.

Another consideration whilst we really address the response to what government put out is that there is going to be a requirement for planning and balancing the development of the rural area with the extractive industry. There is no way we are going to get around that. The further we push the extractive industries away from the town centres, the more costly the product is going to

become given the low profit margins of the commodity and the requirement to travel in bulk.

Minster, I will mention it now although I was going to during the adjournment at some time. I have written a letter to you which may not have reached your office at this point of time; however, I have been told by some constituents they are concerned there is a push to bring extractive material from Mt Bundy to service the INPEX plant, if and when it is constructed, down major rural roads, particularly Goode Road. The armour rock will have to come from Mt Bundy. There is concern, for whatever reason, and I cannot get to the bottom of it - it might not be accurate information - road trains coming down a major rural road are causing great concern to the residents. They are going down Goode Road, looping around and coming out on Elizabeth Valley Road and across the Stuart Highway down to Middle Arm.

As the member for Nelson said, the rural area is unique. It is safe, and has many advantages and benefits. Whilst we welcome more people coming to the area - and we welcome developers - we want it to be sound and want it done with good planning and more consultation. I would be most interested to know about the feedback submissions you received from other government agencies, council and individuals. At some stage, minister, you undertook to have meetings with the member for Nelson and me us to discuss the proposals further so we can get what is best for the people of the greater rural area of Darwin.

Madam Speaker, I commend the member for Nelson's motion, that the rural centre plans be considered by the government and supported as the most appropriate option for the future development of the Litchfield council area.

Mr MCCARTHY (Lands and Planning): Madam Speaker, it looks like I have five minutes. I might use that time as a preamble because there is plenty of information to share. Let me start with what a wonderful debate. I am really pleased the members for Nelson and Goyder have initiated this debate with a submission to what is a bigger exercise where considerable submissions have been received. Government takes that very seriously.

It is also pleasing to share in the passion. It is a bit of a history lesson when you have Territorians talking about their life, their families, their understandings, and their vision. At the end of the day, the real desire is to make the Territory a great place. Perhaps the nervousness is around the Minister for Lands and Planning and possible conspiracies and people waking up after a lifetime of rural living with people cutting up blocks and living next door. We will continue this debate of

the big picture of Territory growth. So, a little insight into the minister you are most nervous about is I grew up in a city, and understand what it is like to live in the biggest city in Australia.

I was very fortunate I had an old man who was from the country. He had an opportunity, and he was able to, in a Crown land ballot, purchase a block of land in a rural area. So, we had our cake and ate it too. He purchased this block of land in 1962 for £150. It created the balance in my life.

For members in the House, I come to the portfolio with an understanding of both sides. From that humble beginning of being shown the Australian bush, and spending considerable time in the Australian bush, as well as having to live and attend school in the city, I ended up choosing a pathway that took me into some of the remotest parts of Australia and lived there for more than half of my life. Coming to the portfolio with that background gives me an indication of different values, and what people share in their passion to preserve, to conserve, and to celebrate a lifestyle.

What we have here is a balance. The members for Nelson and Goyder have mentioned that concept. That is what the government is about; it is certainly achieving a balance. However, be aware this precious greater Darwin region we all celebrate and love has a big future. The big future towards 2030 - the government has some very strong, balanced, and creative plans in *Territory 2030*, which will see another 50 000 Territorians come on to this patch. There is no two ways about it; that is the way it is going.

The members for Goyder and Nelson have given the government very strong advice in ensuring we get it right. It is about good planning; ensuring we have the planning and the balance. There is a good balance in the Greater Darwin Land Use Strategy - a 50:50 balance of infill development, utilising existing serviced areas, and greenfield sites. However, as a subset, there is what Territorians have asked for - the opportunity to live in the rural area. That has not come from government whim and fancy; that has come from Territorians who are looking for options.

The member for Nelson talked about the concept of older residents in the rural area, and that is right. The member for Fong Lim told us a great story in a previous debate about managing kids growing up in a post-modern world, and those kids having different values and a totally different outlook on life. It was a great anecdote of needing to push them out the door to get them involved in traditional activities the member for Fong Lim, and many members in this House, shared as youth growing up in various parts of the country.

I put into this debate that it also is about young Territorians from the rural area. They talk about having choice and options. I will never forget a great anecdote from a young Territorian, the member for Fannie Bay, when he coined the phrase: 'I am a Territorian and I do not want to mow a lawn'. That is, basically, having a choice ...

Ms Purick: That is because he is a townie.

Mr Wood: He can stay in Fannie Bay.

Mr McCARTHY: That is having a choice, but this is the voice of youth. It is not just about staying in Fannie Bay; it is about the voice of youth and catering for all Territorians ...

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, I point out that it is 9 pm. If you are ready to conclude, I could give you another few minutes. Otherwise, it will be the next General Business Day, next Wednesday.

Mr McCARTHY: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will resume this debate next Wednesday as part of the GBD, thank you.

Leave granted.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, in accordance with Standing Order 41A, I propose that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr HAMPTON (Stuart): Madam Deputy Speaker, I recently took the opportunity to visit parts of western Central Australia through the Western MacDonnell's region and Ulpanyali and Mutitjulu regions. I was fortunate to officiate at a barbeque celebrating the refurbishment of the old Namatjira house near Ntaria, Hermannsburg, and I would like to share that experience with the Assembly.

I met with descendants of Albert Namatjira at the house and talked about the old man, the house he himself built, and the scenery of the area which he painted.

Albert Namatjira's house was constructed by Albert with some assistance in 1944 following the success of an exhibition of his paintings in Melbourne. Built of materials by local men the house reflected the style, materials, and techniques used at Hermannsburg Mission over many years. The house was lived in by Mr Namatjira and his family for only five years before the death of a child saw them move out for cultural reasons. Relatives have cared for the house over many years since and, following

renovations and conservation work in 1986, it was used as a small museum and craft outlet. Ingkerreke was awarded a grant of \$59 000 under the 2009-10 round of Commonwealth government's Indigenous Heritage Program and that work has recently been completed. It was a moving experience to go inside the house now that it is fully renovated and get the feel of what it might have been like back in the 1940s. It was awe-inspiring, to be quite honest.

The Northern Territory government funded new interpretative signage and a new directional sign to be installed to assist visitors in locating the house. At a local celebration we had for the refurbishing of the house along the beautiful Finke River with the many of descendants and relatives, I was fortunate to meet some of those relatives of Mr Namatjira including his granddaughter, Betty Wheeler, Max Tucker, Helen Fry, plus many other descendants. We had about 30 or 40 people at a really great event.

Local people were also pleased that the Electoral Commission has determined to rename the electorate of Macdonnell in recognition of Mr Namatjira - a recognition well and truly overdue.

I also took the opportunity to visit Utju, or the community of Areyonga, nestled in amongst the West MacDonnell Ranges. I really enjoyed the engagement with the community members at Utju. I was pleased to see how enthusiastic they are about the future of their community, particularly the future for the rest of the residents.

I met with members of the men's football team and the community sports committee, and many women from the softball team, including Rayleen Wilson, Joy Kunia and Kathleen Windy, and observed the progress of construction of a new building at the oval - in fact, a number of small grandstands the men are doing through a work program. It was great to see those men taking so much pride in the work they have done, and it is looking fantastic. They are really keen to hold a sports carnival there very soon. I also listened to the ladies speak about their visions for the softball oval.

We know how popular sport is in many of our remote Indigenous communities and when I played football in 1988, and played some community football against the Areyonga Desert Tigers as they were known then, there is some fantastic talent out there. The Red Dust Role Models are doing fantastic work to support the communities, particularly through sport. It was a great experience to be at Utju and Ntaria and to meet many wonderful people, and to celebrate their vision and the great work they are doing.

As Minister for Parks and Wildlife, I visited a number of park rangers and some of our great national parks though that part of Central Australia. I visited Owen Springs Reserve, which is 1780 km² in size and was formerly the Owen Springs cattle station. It was acquired by the Northern Territory government in 2000 and opened in 2003 for the enjoyment of Centralians and the public ...

Mr Elferink: As the former member for Macdonnell, I feel very proud of that.

Mr HAMPTON: Great to hear. Of course, the current member for Port Darwin was the member for Macdonnell at the time.

The area protected within Owen Springs Reserve is steeped in Territory history. The main access track through the reserve closely follows John McDouall Stuart's route through the MacDonnell Ranges. His explorations between 1860 and 1862 opened up Central Australia to European settlement. I was not aware of it, but that was the original site that was planned to go through Central Australia and you can see why with the wonderful country through there. History shows the Stuart Highway did, eventually, go through to Alice Springs and the Telegraph Station.

At Owen Springs, I met Sheridan Martin. Sheridan showed me the ruins of the old Owen Springs Homestead. She is one of the great rangers who do fantastic work in our parks. My department has entered into an agreement with the Central Land Council for one of the coordinators of the Tjuwanpa Community Ranger Group to move into the residence at the ranger station. This is part of a plan to increase the engagement of ranger groups, particularly the Indigenous ranger groups, in capacity building.

The other wonderful place I visited on my recent trip was the Finke Gorge National Park, and I have been there twice in two or three weeks. The Finke Gorge National Park covers an area of 46 000 ha, and includes the impressive Palm Valley. Palm Valley is home to a diverse range of plant species, many of which are rare and unique to the area, including the Red Cabbage Palm for which the park is well known. The Territory government, in partnership with traditional owners, has prepared a draft joint management plan for the Finke Gorge National Park. Joint management plans provide direction for the future management of parks and outline how the interests of the community, traditional owners, and conservation will be served.

In Alice Springs in June, I was very fortunate to attend the formal hand back when we had the Prime Minister and the minister for Aboriginal

Affairs from Canberra at the Desert Park to attend a ceremony recognising formal hand back of title. Many of the traditional owners could not make it to Alice Springs for the formal hand back, but it was very important to them that they had a ceremony on country. It was fantastic to get out there again to meet many traditional owners and to have the privilege of talking to them about our aspirations of working together with them, particularly in the area of engaging with Indigenous ranger groups and creating employment opportunities, economic opportunities, particularly when looking at the old ranger station at Finke River Gorge. The traditional owners came up with plenty of ideas during the management planning meeting.

At Finke Gorge, I also met a couple of the park rangers, Martin Beekman and Dianne Chunett, who are committed to playing their role in greening the Territory. It was great talking to Martin about his home at Kangaroo Island. He shared many stories with me about Kangaroo Island, and his experiences so far in Central Australia.

We looked at the visitor facilities at Palm Valley, and they showed me the new solar panels. Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I am sure you will be interested in that as the shadow spokesman on Parks. They have new solar panels at Finke River Gorge which have been installed to the hybrid power system, and are a significant step in reducing reliance on diesel fuel for power generation in an area where diesel delivery can be problematic, particularly as it is based on the beautiful Finke River.

I also took the opportunity during this great trip to visit the Watarrka National Park which contains the western end of the George Gill Range. This scenic landscape of rugged ranges, rock holes and gorges acts as a refuge for many plants and animals making the park an important conservation area and a major attraction of Central Australia. Kings Canyon features ancient sandstone walls sculptured by the elements, rising up to 100 m to a plateau of rocky domes.

I am aware of the time, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker. I will continue to inform the House of my fantastic trip through the Western MacDonnell Ranges, meeting wonderful park rangers and traditional owners in that region, perhaps tomorrow night.

Again, I thank all those people in Parks and Wildlife who have done it tough over recent times with bushfires. They do a wonderful job and I was given a great opportunity to see exactly what they do on the ground.

Mrs LAMBLEY (Araluen): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, tonight I wish to talk about some of the

achievements and activities in the electorate of Araluen in Alice Springs.

What a tremendous couple of weeks the Bradshaw Primary School has had. Bradshaw Primary School, for those who are not familiar with Alice Springs, is located in the heart of the electorate of Araluen. Bradshaw Primary School teacher, Ms Jo Sherrin, won the award at the inaugural Australian Awards for Outstanding Teaching and School Leadership in Melbourne on 13 October 2011 - just last week. She was named Australia's best primary school teacher. What an outstanding achievement for a local Alice Springs teacher.

I congratulate Jo on being named Australia's best primary school teacher at these awards. What a wonderful achievement, not just for Jo, but also for the Principal of Bradshaw Primary School, Jill Tudor, and all the staff at Bradshaw Primary School. It is pleasing to see an Alice Springs teacher recognised for being at the top of their field.

Jo has been a teacher for 22 years. She is the Bradshaw Primary School teacher/librarian and was recognised for consistently creating learning opportunities to meet the diverse needs of her students, half of whom are Indigenous students. This award has recognised the skills she has and her outstanding achievement in helping her students, and her high level of expertise, innovation and dedication.

Jo Sherrin is a founding coordinator of the highly regarded Children's Literature in the Centre Festival, and is an active leader in the Australian School Library Association in the Northern Territory, and is contributing to a trial of the new Australian English curriculum. Jo will receive a national and/or international sabbatical to work with leading educators from around Australia and overseas on an area of professional interest to her.

Bradshaw Primary School has also won an Excellence Award in the Smart Schools Awards held on 15 October 2011, once again last week. These awards are designed to recognise the very high standards of excellence and achievement in public education. Bradshaw Primary School won the Excellence in Student Inclusion and Wellbeing. This award was a prize of \$20 000. This is a tremendous achievement for the whole school, particularly for Principal Jill Tudor and her staff, and the children and families who form a part of this strong school community. Congratulations to Bradshaw Primary School – it sounds like you have absolutely cleaned up.

I also acknowledge the Territorian Dinner held on Saturday, 8 October, 2011 in Alice Springs at

the Road Transport Hall of Fame. This was a fantastic evening and was the first Territorian Dinner I have attended. To be eligible, you or your partner has to be a resident of the Northern Territory for at least 25 years, and my dear husband, Craig Lambley, reached the 26-year mark and so we were able to attend.

It was a beautiful evening; the entertainment was provided by the beautiful and talented Lisa Hatzimihail, who has a magical voice. Lisa is a born and bred Alice Springs girl and was able to get the whole place up and dancing, tapping their feet, and singing along to some wonderful music. There was also a beautiful tribute to Territorians who have passed over the last couple of years, and it was very moving and very tasteful.

I congratulate Dianne Logan and her team of helpers who put the dinner together, the Rotary Club, and Liz Martin and her team of helpers from the Road Transport Hall of Fame. It made me very proud to be a part of our amazing community in Alice Springs and being at the Territorian dinner.

Dr BURNS (Johnston): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, tonight I wish to speak about a constituent, Elizabeth Hagan, who has had a long and distinguished career as an educator and a trainer, spanning nearly 60 years.

Born in Elizabeth Bay in Sydney, Elizabeth was educated at Ascham School for girls from 1938 to 1942, and went to PLC, Orange, in 1942, then returned to Ascham to complete her schooling until leaving in 1949. It was here that she acquired her love of tennis, playing in the Ascham team for the Tildesley Tennis Shield. She continued playing tennis socially until the late 1990s.

Elizabeth enrolled at Sydney University to complete a BA with majors in history and psychology. To fund her way through university, Elizabeth found employment with Defence Laboratory. While the work was interesting, the working hours meant she missed out on some lectures. Looking for employment that would allow her to attend early evening lectures, she realised that teaching hours were almost perfect; and Elizabeth started her teaching career at her old school, Ascham, in 1953 as a primary teacher while completing her university studies.

Elizabeth found teaching primary school very rewarding, but she wanted to extend her work to secondary teaching. Returning to university, she completed a Diploma of Education and went on to teach at several schools, including Petersham Girls, Sydney.

While on a break to have three children, she decided to learn horticulture so she could better manage her garden. Applying to do a horticulture certificate course at Ryde School of Horticulture, Elizabeth was refused admittance by the Principal, Ray Rowell, because he felt it was men's work, and only men were enrolled. He felt it would not be suitable for her as the only woman in the class. This was later changed when another woman also applied to do the course. Elizabeth completed the course with high marks, and was later asked to return and teach at Ryde School of Horticulture. At this time, she became a member of the Australian Institute of Horticulture; MIAH.

One evening during a break in lessons, Elizabeth was approached by one of her older students who asked if Elizabeth would be interested in a job as Head of Science at her school. It turned out the student was Freda Whitlam, sister of Gough Whitlam, who was headmistress of Presbyterian Ladies College, Croydon, in Sydney. After some persuasion, Elizabeth accepted the posting and remained in the position of Head of Science for nearly 20 years. During this time, she introduced many changes in the school including a horticulture stream which was highly successful and popular with students and staff alike.

In 1990, Elizabeth took a year-long leave of absence to travel with her husband in their motor home - hence the connection with the Territory. It is very interesting and very typical of many people who come to the Territory, whether it is in youth or in senior years like Liz and her husband.

They enrolled as volunteer tutors for VISE - Volunteers for Isolated Student Education - almost from its inception. She used her skills while travelling, spending several weeks at a time tutoring young students on remote properties and stations. This eventually brought them to the Territory to tutor the son of the owners of the Hayes Creek Roadhouse where they stayed for three months. Travelling on to Katherine, they spent three months at the then Katherine Rural College, now a campus of Charles Darwin University, where Elizabeth team taught with Norma Higgins and tutored students for the SACE, the South Australian Certificate of Education.

Returning from holidays in Sydney, they were asked if they would like to take on a tutoring position in Darwin at what was then Northern Territory University, now CDU. This was to tutor unemployed youth under the Accredited Training for Youth program, or ATY. This program ran for 18 weeks and was designed to give long-term unemployed youth a good basic knowledge of horticulture. On completion of the first 18 weeks, they were asked to stay and present several more

courses. When Elizabeth's qualifications were noted, she was offered a six-month contract to teach horticulture units including botany, plant biology, soils, grafting, and other topics. This was followed by several more teaching contracts and, eventually, she was granted tenure.

During this time, Elizabeth was asked to contribute several articles on tropical horticulture and became a regular contributor, along with fellow lecturer, Joan Dillon. Elizabeth also became an active member of the Australian Open Gardens Scheme Northern Territory branch, and was elected to the Northern Territory selection committee where she still serves. Elizabeth has also acted as a judge at the Freds Pass Show and the Northern Territory department of Housing garden displays.

Elizabeth has spent a lifetime dedicated to education and, particularly in later years, to horticulture. Elizabeth is someone who is well liked and respected by her peers and her students, and she cannot walk the streets of Darwin or shop in Darwin without being recognised and greeted by past and present students. I congratulate Liz Hagan for her contribution. She started in the Territory in her senior years, and she has been at Charles Darwin University for 20-odd years and made a magnificent contribution.

Her husband, Barry, is also well-known around the Territory, particularly in the Top End in Aboriginal communities, and has taught many people about forestry and about felling trees, particularly during cyclone times. I have visited communities where there have been people taught by Barry who know how to get into trees blocking the roads and across houses, how to cut them up and get the community going again.

Here are two very committed people, two great Territorians. I congratulate them for their contribution to the Territory. I hope their contribution goes on for much, much longer.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE (Katherine): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I am going to begin tonight by posing a question, through the Chair, to the Minister for Lands and Planning. That question is: what exactly does your department do? I will come back to that point in a moment.

I managed to dig up a few historical documents, one is titled *Katherine Land Use Structure Plan 1991*, put together by the then Department of Lands and Housing under the stewardship of the then Minister for Lands and Planning, Max Ortmann. It is a beautiful, well put together A3 document, some 36 pages in length,

covering the whole gambit of planning issues around Katherine, or the future planning issues around Katherine. It talks about its make-up, potential for transport, climate, demographics, agriculture, horticulture, flooding; it talks about a range of things one would ordinarily find in a planning document for a town.

I also managed to dig up a document titled the *Katherine Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives*, dated 2001, some 10 years later, by the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, as it was then, under the stewardship of minister Tim Baldwin. Once again, it is a detailed document, smaller than the 1991 version, but still with all the same issues covered in it, right the way through from demographics to flooding. I note that these plans, the 1991 plan and the 2001 plan, were put together by the then departments as they were.

Currently, the Department of Lands and Planning has a budget of some \$257m. It has a staffing complement of 471 people.

I am now going to go back to the question I posed at the beginning: what exactly does the Department of Lands and Planning do?

I ask that in the context of a tender awarded - the acceptance date of this tender was 19 October 2011 - to a contractor called Sinclair Knight Merz Pty Ltd, SKM, of Parap - for a total of \$213 349. I will give you the title of the tender: *Katherine Consultancy - Development of a Land Use Plan Consultation Paper for Future Growth in Katherine*.

I thought I might be missing something when this tender was sent to me this evening. I was thinking: is it right, given the enormous resources of the Northern Territory government, particularly the Department of Lands and Planning with its \$257m budget and its staffing complement of 471, that the Northern Territory government needs to spend a further \$213 000 on a land use plan for Katherine. Surely, such a document, such a consultancy, such a plan for the future of Katherine is something that could be done by the department. It is in that context I ask: what does the department do? Where is the minister on this?

Minister, why do you have to spend \$213 000, in addition to the \$257m coming out of Lands and Planning, to construct a document to plan for the future of the third largest town in the Northern Territory? What does your department do? You already have the basis for such a document, a more contemporary one perhaps, than the 1991 or the 2001 versions, but why? Is that not an enormous waste of taxpayers' money?

A whole department ...

Mr Bohlin: That cannot do a job.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: ... can they not do their job? Are they sitting on their hands? Perhaps the explanation is that the Northern Territory has continued to lose its skilled workers at such a rate that no one in the department currently has the skills to manage such a project. Frankly, I find that hard to believe because I know quite a few people who work in the Department of Lands and Planning, and guess what? They are more than capable of conducting the work required to put together a future land use plan for Katherine, especially given most of the work has already been done. Let's face it, I could probably cut and paste a few things out of these documents, build that as a base to some more contemporary information, and produce a land use plan. I would not need to spend \$213 000 to do it.

Is it that the minister has no faith in his staff? Does he not believe in his staff? Or, does the skills drain in the Northern Territory also extend to the Department of Lands and Planning so it cannot complete this type of project which, I would have thought, formed the very basis of the work the Department of Lands and Planning should be doing.

In fact, I would go one step further and say if I was a person working in the Department of Lands and Planning and had the skills to put together a future land use plan for Katherine, I would be insulted to the nth degree that the minister has chosen to bypass me, bypass my expertise, bypass my corporate knowledge, bypass my understanding of the way of things in the Northern Territory and go to an outside consultant to provide a future planning document for the town of Katherine. I find that quite extraordinary.

When I saw this tonight I was absolutely shocked. Why does the minister bypass his own department and take something like this out to tender? Perhaps he is receiving some bad advice. Perhaps the minister might like to offer an explanation. I hope various elements of the Northern Territory media pick up on this and put the question to the minister: why do you need to spend \$213 000 to put together a future land use plan for the town of Katherine under circumstances and in the context of a department of 471 people with an overall budget of \$257m?

It is quite astounding. I hope the minister listens to what I have said tonight, and I hope he comes up with some answers. I am keen to know why he has bypassed his department and taken this out to such an expensive tender.

Ms ANDERSON (Macdonnell): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I wish to put on the public record my trips to my electorate and congratulate the Kintore community for a 30-year celebration of their movement from Papunya to Yayay and then Kungkayunti and then to Kintore. It was an excellent get together. People came from across the border, from Arrernte lands, from Kiwirrkurra, from Western Australia, and Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Mt Liebig, and Balgo helped celebrate with the people of Kintore their 30 years of existence in that community.

It was also very sad to see that repairs and maintenance of the houses was not conducted properly. I have some photos showing tiles were not put in properly. A plumber was asked three times to go back to one house to look at the taps in the kitchen where Lance Abbott lives at Kintore. It is sad to see things are still not being done properly. Houses are in very poor condition, and it is obvious the repairs and maintenance in that community has not been conducted properly. We continue to talk about the same problems in this House.

The same thing happened at Harts Range. The house I stayed in had just had a disability ramp put in, but the ramp was put in a different direction to the gate. So, if you come in by car and want to get the disabled person out of the car, you have to go right around to reach the ramp to get inside the door.

These are the commonsense, simple things that people got really wrong. Again, repairs and maintenance not done properly: fans too low, doors not fixed up, and people are complaining, in general, about things not being done properly.

Through the whole of the Macdonnell electorate the shires are on the nose, and people want to get rid of the shires. We heard that at Kintore, Imanpa, Docker River, Finke, Titjikala, Santa Teresa, Bonya, Harts Range, Ampilatwatja, Utopia, Atheley - that is the place where nothing has been done - it is between Utopia and Ampilatwatja and has 45 to 50 people living there. No repairs and maintenance whatsoever, and people are living in dire need of repairs and maintenance being done. The kids still get up for school every morning at 8.30 and wait on the side of the road for the school bus to pick them up. That shows the enthusiasm of kids in that area - they want to go to school. They wait for the school bus to pick them up, but they live in absolute squalor. There has not been any repairs and maintenance done to any of the houses in that area, and there are people with disabilities living there as well - living in a humpy in the 21st century. It is really sad to see that.

There is a large amount of bragging and chest beating that goes on from the government of the day, those opposite in this House, about the things they do for Aboriginal people in remote Aboriginal communities. They have not been to Atheley, they have not been to Mulga Bore to see that the sewerage is still being dug up, and the sewage is overflowing. We have a lady who works for aged care at Mulga Bore living in a humpy on the side of a house because the houses are too overcrowded.

These are the real problems we should be trying to address to help people survive in communities that are too far out of Alice Springs. We do not see these communities very often. You will not see ministers going out to these communities.

Bonya is a classic example: the Northern Territory government has built a school, but it is classified as an outstation and is funded by the federal government. They have this beautiful school there. Young Melanie, who lives there, is disabled and is under the care of adult guardianship. She has not been visited by anyone from adult guardianship for nine months. She has money being put into the Bonya shop on a regular basis by adult guardianship for her shopping, but no one goes to see how Melanie lives. It is really sad in this day and age that we have young children with disabilities not being looked after properly. It is hard enough for normal people to live in these communities, let alone our children who have disabilities. We need to start looking after them. If they are in the care of adult guardianship, then adult guardianship needs to look after these people.

I congratulate Hermannsburg on the Kuprilya Races. I camped at Kuprilya. I thank Mary Ann Malbunka, Conrad Ratara and Sonia Braybon because it is their initiative. Korparilya is something the former member for Macdonnell would know was only celebrated on a Sunday; it was celebrating the water that comes out of Korparilya Springs into Hermannsburg. These people thought they needed to have something on the Friday and Saturday leading up to Kuprilya, so they have the races and competitions for men and women and children to dress up as cowgirls and cowboys. It was absolutely fantastic. R.M. Williams in Alice Springs must have sold out because every adult, every mum and dad, every child was dressed up as cowgirls and cowboys. The atmosphere was just fantastic. On the Sunday, they have the horse races into Kuprilya Springs where they have the church service. I thank everyone at Hermannsburg for a fantastic weekend where the whole community is involved.

This past weekend they had the races at the Wallace Rockhole, so I thank Cathy and Max at

Wallace Rockhole and Barry, Val, and Wo. These are the people who put all their energy and effort into bringing other community members into their communities, having barbecues, getting their kids engaged in all activities, and riding horses. It is fantastic to see.

I take this opportunity to pass on my condolences to the Kulitja and the families, also the Butler family, at Docker River because they had two very tragic, sad losses at that community while I was there. These people were renal patients living in Alice Springs and are being buried on their community. It has a huge impact on the community when such a passing happens, and it affects many people cross-border from Wiluna and Wingellina, and people at the aged care. I pass on my condolences to them, and also to Margaret Smith, Tania and Lesley and Janet and Margaret at Imanpa as well on the sad loss of their mum, sister-in-law, and aunty who we buried at Imanpa.

I thank DD (Double D) Silvana and Julie Anderson at Finke for the wonderful four days we had going for *pidjari* and *asches* - that is bush tobacco - and taking all the oldies out for goanna - a fantastic week.

I end by congratulating and thanking all the departments and, of course, Aboriginal Congress for the fun day they had with Yamba at Amoonguna. It was really great. I got out there at about 9.30 am with 20 to 30 kids, and 20 adults. They had many education stalls: drink-driving, breast cancer, and the kind of foods we eat. It was a real educational get together from departments and Congress, and the clinic at Amoonguna. I thank them particularly, because they put all that material together. It was a fantastic day.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I received this e-mail tonight and I am hoping the Minister for Health, or his staff, is listening because I hope to receive an answer to this tomorrow morning at the latest. This is in regard to a constituent of mine. It says:

Gerry,

I am not sure if you are aware that Terry had a major stroke in May this year ...

In fact, I am; I visited him in hospital a couple of weeks ago:

... losing speech and causing right sided paralysis. He has regained quite a bit of his speech. He can walk short distances, no function whatsoever in his right arm, so he gets about in a wheelchair. Therein lies the problem.

He was discharged from RDH five weeks ago. RDH, having been aware that he would require a wheelchair of his own for weeks before discharge (he is eligible for a government supplied wheelchair), he was discharged with a temporary wheelchair which came out of the ark - no support for his arm. This was replaced by one on loan from TCP (Transition Care Program).

First, we were told he would get his own in three weeks. Then we learnt about two weeks ago it had not even been ordered; then that it would take a few weeks to arrive. Yesterday, 18/10/2011, I received a phone call from the rehabilitation unit regarding another matter and, of course, I asked about the wheelchair. Reply: 'Oh it has not been ordered yet'. Why? 'Because the government requires two tenders, and we have only received one due to the fact that there are only two businesses in Darwin who tender, and one of these has stopped tendering'. Why? 'Because they never win a tender'. I cannot remember my reply - not printable.

Gerry, this is ridiculous - bloody ridiculous. Catch 22 at its best. These are people's lives that these people are playing with.

I await your response

Jo Brady.

Minister, I only just received that and I believe it requires urgent response.

Jo's husband, Terry, has been a long-time resident of the rural area and has been involved in much of the volunteer work for the local Litchfield Bears Rugby League Club. Many people who know him as a plumber would have probably had their toilets, septic, or hot water system fixed by Terry. He has been around a very long time. He deserves better treatment than this.

I place it on record and I ask the Minister for Health if he can come back to me with an answer first thing tomorrow morning as to why this person has not been able to receive proper wheelchair? Also, a full explanation as to why it has taken so long. Surely, this is incompetence. Surely, the Health Department's budget is not so stressed it cannot afford to ensure a person being released from RDH is provided with adequate support in the form of a proper wheelchair - not one without any arm supports for a person who has been paralysed down his right arm.

That is a disgrace, minister. Something needs to be done urgently and I will await your reply tomorrow morning.

Mr ELFERINK (Port Darwin): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, not since Jack Ah Kit has someone filled out the chair as fulsomely as you do. I congratulate your elevation to the Chair.

I wish to speak on several issues. The first one I wish to talk about is the Access Economics report, and I will only touch on one aspect of the report briefly, and that was the aspect arising out of the question I put to the Treasurer today. The Treasurer has now done what I was concerned she would do: because of the bad numbers from the Access Economics report, it has nothing to do with the Northern Territory government. It is an old case of every success has a million fathers, failure is an orphan. The government talks long and regularly about its successes and its management of the Northern Territory economy. If that economy goes south, the government talks about forces beyond its control causing the economy to go south.

The problem I have with this whole process is it just does not bridge the credibility gap. I will quote the Treasurer from Question Time today:

That is one of the issues you get with data; you get a disagreement between what we know in the Territory is actually occurring and intuitive data coming out of outdated data.

The point I tried to make with my follow-up question to that, and other comments I made during parliament today, is whilst I understand what she is banging on about many people would not understand what intuitive data was arising out of outdated data. Moreover, it is a retreat to a position where you are now going to baffle them with bull stuff. The fact is you cannot credibly, as Treasurer of the Northern Territory, stand in this House and start banging on about intuitive data, revised down statistics, intuitive data arising out of outdated data, and use that as an explanation as to why people's businesses are going to the wall, and why tradesmen and women are having trouble putting dinner on the table for their kids tonight because they cannot find work.

In the last 18 months, we have lost 3500 jobs out of the Territory economy, and those people have fled down south. They are, essentially, the Territory's economic refugees. It is impossible for the Treasurer to ignore this issue, and for her to continue saying everything is rosy and hunky dory is to do nothing for people's confidence in her credibility. She should be acknowledging there is difficulty and pain out there at the moment.

Yes, she can bang on about all the issues or promises just around the corner, but to fail to acknowledge there is a problem right now is the Treasurer's equivalent of sticking her head in the

sand. As far as I am concerned, and other people who are listening to the Treasurer today, it is just not credible any longer for her to maintain the position she does. The denial of this Treasurer in relation to the current state of the Northern Territory economy is nothing short of - I find it difficult to find a word - amazing.

I am on the record getting that out of the way; now dealing with another issue in my electorate.

I have received several complaints from people living in my electorate in relation to noise pollution arising out of garbage trucks collecting in the wee small hours of the morning. I am also aware that minister Karl Hampton has received letters from people in the community complaining of these trucks emptying Hannons bins, or large metal bins – they used to be called Hannons bins – at 4 am and 5 am regularly. This is a problem in southern cities as well, however, it is amplified in the Northern Territory by virtue of the fact many people sleep, particularly in the Dry Season, with their windows open. This means the noise these bins create goes straight through open windows and wakes many people up. I had one business owner who runs accommodation complain to me about the issue saying it is rendering half their accommodation facility unusable because of rubbish bins causing so much noise when the dump trucks pick up the rubbish from nearby supermarkets.

I wonder if the minister can advise this House as to what action he has taken in relation to the correspondence he has received on this matter, because the matter is starting to generate a substantial amount of resentment amongst many people because these trucks generate a great deal of noise.

I will personally be contacting some of the companies that pick up rubbish and raise the issue with them to see if something can be done. I realise they have a business to run and deadlines to meet, however, the minister should involve himself in this because as Darwin grows this will become an increasing problem over time. A proactive government would turn its mind to this problem now with a view to getting some results in to the future.

I would also like to talk about the work being done by the Simlesa family in relation to pushing the issue of a skate park somewhere in the vicinity of Darwin. I was delighted to be, on 27 September, at the Darwin City Council meeting where the Darwin City Council, God bless their cotton socks, voted unanimously to pursue the establishment of a skate park and skating facilities somewhere around the Darwin CBD/Stuart Park area - and the Darwin City Council has identified some potential areas. I find it nothing short of

astonishing that the Northern Territory government, which has been aware of this issue for longer than the Darwin City Council, has remained utterly silent on this issue, yet the council has been able to respond far more effectively to the Simlesa family's pursuit of this matter. I urge the minister for Sport to get involved in this matter as soon as possible so an appropriate location can be found.

This dates back to the chief ministership of Clare Martin and the lord mayorship of Peter Adamson where, for some reason, there was an irreconcilable impasse reached over this issue between the two tiers of government and such a skate park was never built, even though funding had been allocated for it. Now we are one chief minister down the road, and another mayor down the road, and I hope there is a much higher level of cooperation between the two tiers of government to finally get this matter sorted out.

I congratulate the Simlesa family on their pursuit of this matter. I will continue to advocate for the proposal going ahead, and the only organisation that now has to get on board with this issue is the Northern Territory government itself.

The absence of the Northern Territory government in this debate is noticeable; I note it, and many other people in the Darwin, Stuart Park and Fannie Bay area, as well as the Larrakeyah area, also note the government's silence on this issue. It is about time it crawled out of its bunker, started talking to the Darwin City Council, and started finding a way to support the presence of a skate park, either through the allocation of land, and/or the allocation of funds so this skate park, after a decade can finally be built.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.