Mr EVERINGHAM: Mr Speaker, I would like to pick up a few things in the adjournment debate this afternoon. The honourable member for Elsey made a statement to the effect that the cultural centre for Darwin would be entirely unproductive. I deny that in an absolute sense in any event but it is in fact to be a cultural and convention centre. It will be a most important facility as far as the tourist industry is concerned. I would hope that a similar facility can be established in Alice Springs at an early date. It should have the effect of assisting Darwin in becoming a major national and international conference venue. I do not deny the soundness of the honourable member for Elsey’s call for additional money to be spent on rural education in the Northern Territory. My colleague, the honourable minister, has already addressed himself to that.

The honourable member for Arnhem has deluded himself on a number of occasions in remarks he has made to this Assembly. In this particular sitting, he has made remarks twice in respect of happenings at Oenpelli community and which come from someone’s imagination. The honourable member for Arnhem indicated that I had attempted to speak in a particular Aboriginal dialect. Unfortunately, and I say this with real regret, I am not able to speak and Aboriginal dialect. I have never had the time to learn, nor indeed have I attempted to speak, such dialects. I think the extent of my knowledge of Aboriginal words, if indeed they are Aboriginal words and not simply a lingua franca type of expression, are words like ‘balanda’ and ‘Yulnyu’ and I do not recall using them at Oenpelli on my visit there a few weeks ago with an Aboriginal candidate for the seat of Arnhem who is quite proud to be standing for the CLP.

I believe that he should standing aside when an Aboriginal was ready to represent Arnhem in the Legislative Assembly. I think he will be standing aside as it is. This candidate seemed to have no difficulty in communicating with Aboriginal people. I certainly would not pretend that I am always on the right wave link but my candidate, Gatjil Djerrkura, certainly seemed to be able to communicate very effectively with Aboriginal people. This is possibly why we are hearing such shrill language from the honourable member for Arnhem at this stage.

I might also mention in respect of the Police Citizens’ Youth Club that the Police Commissioner, Mr Peter McCaulay, unfortunately suffered a collapse of some sort this morning and is presently hospitalised. This is much to my regret because I believe that he is one of the most valuable acquisitions made by the Northern Territory. Since self-government, he has been working in the little spare time he has had to have the police and citizens youth centre relocated. I believe that he is aiming for a site in the northern suburbs and I have informed him that the government would assist with whatever financial and other requirements there may be.

There was one matter that I particularly wanted to speak about this afternoon. It relates to a report that appeared in ‘The Australian’ newspaper today in the transport section under the headline: ‘Evaluation finds Alice to Darwin rail link enviable’. That is a most misleading headline because the so-called evaluation is a study prepared and paid for by a vested interest group, namely, the Victorian Bus Proprietors Association. The Victorian Bus Proprietors Association is dead against the Northern Territory getting the extension of the rail link from Alice Springs to Darwin.

I have been doing a fair bit together with other people from the Territory and members from this House and the federal House to exert all possible pressure on the federal government to commit themselves to this venture. I spoke earlier this year in Canberra to the Conference of
Automobile Associations of Australia and I was attacked by a representative of the Victorian bus owners who was at the conference and who questioned the viability of the whole concept, obviously, from a totally vested interest viewpoint. I will just put a few things on the record. Even the figures in the newspaper report are totally inaccurate. The timing of the article is very bad because a great deal of time and effort has been spent in seeking to produce by the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments a comprehensive study. These people are obviously trying to shoot it down before the study comes out of the box.

The team preparing the government’s study is well aware of the Gibbs Report referred to in the Australian. It has concluded, and this included the Commonwealth government representatives, that no particular significance should be attached to it. The report was prepared for the Bus Proprietors Association of Victoria and I am reading this material which has been prepared for me by the person in charge of the Northern Territory side of this study. The Gibbs study is not a comprehensive study of the merits of the proposed railway line and, in particular, it focuses almost entirely on passenger transport which is rally only incidental to the case for the railway.

The fact that the study team has given far less attention to this report than dos today’s Australian merely suggests there was some particular motive in bringing forward the report at this time. The Gibbs Report is based on outdated information. It takes no account of development prospects, an area to which the present joint study team has given considerable attention. It is very narrowly focused. It pretends a degree of accuracy in producing various cost-benefit ratios at different rates of discount. This accuracy is spurious. No amount of sophisticated analysis can enable precise cost-benefit ratios to be determined. Again, the apparent precision in the area of energy fails to take account of the broad energy savings in the freight area and this is where the primary benefit will lie.

The only way to put this sort of thing to bed is to get our feasibility study out as quickly as we can. I have asked the team to redouble its efforts to get the matter finished so that we can release the feasibility study as soon as possible so the public can see for themselves.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.