Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH (Tiwi): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am concerned at the answer to a question I asked the Chief Minister this morning about the route of the proposed railway through the Batchelor area. He said that, in all probability, it would follow the Stuart Highway because of financial constraints, possibly by-passing the town of Batchelor. Before I start my remarks, Mr Deputy Speaker, I must declare an interest in this situation. If the railway passes on that side of the Stuart Highway, it will pass the boundary of our property at Batchelor. It is not that we expect to make millions from it; I do not think the ANR will be handing out millions for what we consider a valuable frontage. We do not expect that and I do not think that will happen. Nevertheless, I have declared my interest for all to hear.

In the interests of decentralisation of the Northern Territory, it is important for the line to go to Batchelor. Perhaps, at the moment, Batchelor is not of great agricultural or horticultural significance but there are quite a few people living there. If agricultural production proceeds in the area, it will become more important. I know it is necessary for the railway to pass through Adelaide River for reasons important to the people in the area but serious consideration should be given to running this line through Batchelor itself. Another reason has been put to me by one of my constituents. The proposed route of the railway line is working to his severe disadvantage in that he has a property over the east side of the Stuart Highway with only a very small part on the western side of the highway where it is proposed that the railway shall run. He wants to subdivide it. He is not a speculator. It is just uneconomical for him to continue to run that property with the balance on the east side of the highway. To run it with the present requirements for registration of his farm vehicles, it would cost him $52 a time to take his tractor and hay baler over there. At that rate, agriculture would become pretty expensive. This is one of the reasons why he wants to sell the blocks of land on that side of the highway. The Planning Authority has told him that it will not grant permission for subdivision because the railway may go through there.

Just up from Batchelor turnoff, on the Darwin side, is Woodcutter’s ore body of lead, silver and zinc. It is not a particularly valuable ore body but, nevertheless, it is in that area. As I understand, the railway will go over the richest part of it. It is not, at the moment, economical to treat the ore in Woodcutter’s ore body but not too far into the future this ore body could be used economically for the development of the Northern Territory, particularly if a suitable treatment plant were established and other ore bodies were worked in conjunction with this one. If the railway goes right over the top of it, the little development project down at Woodcutter’s will be lost. I will be pursuing the remarks I have made today by letter with Australian National Railways.

I had occasion to try to contact somebody about a bushfire on railway property recently. ANR people are as scarce as hens’ teeth in the Northern Territory. Finally, I tracked someone down in Alice Springs. I hope that, as interest in the railway increases, we will have a few ANR officers around so that we can get in touch easily with them concerning any queries or complaints. Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, whilst I agree that the railway is important to the Northern Territory as are financial considerations, I hope further thought can be given to rerouting the railway line near the township of Batchelor.