Mr Speaker MacFarlane took the Chair at 10 am.

TABLED PAPERS
Royal Commission into Australian Meat Industry Report

Mr STEELE (Primary Production)(by leave): Mr Speaker, I table the Report of the Royal Commission into the Australian Meat Industry.

This report is of vital importance both to the national meat industry and to the pastoral meat industry of the Northern Territory. You will appreciate that, under current meat inspection arrangements, the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry provides a service to all export abattoirs. My department provides a service for meat destined for the domestic market. It is important to appreciate the difference because, in the context of the Royal Commission's report, one must clearly distinguish between the 2 departments. This is of even more significance in light of the fact that approximately 90% of cattle slaughtered in the Territory are killed in licensed export abattoirs. As a consequence of this in so far as it relates to the Northern Territory, the report of the Royal Commission is addressed principally to the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry. The report contains no abject criticism of the Northern Territory government or its meat inspection service but it does provide some constructive recommendations. The report dwells on the legislative inadequacies of the Abattoirs and Slaughtering Act. Some time ago, the government directed that a major review of this legislation be undertaken and, as a result, I shall sponsor in this Assembly a new meat industry bill to replace the present act. The bill is designed to remedy deficiencies in regard to control of the operation, not just of abattoirs but the whole chain of establishments involved in the processing and sale of meat. Under the provisions of the bill, the transportation of meat will also be subject to tighter controls.

The government welcomes Justice Woodward's recommendation that the Northern Territory Meat Inspection Service be merged into a single system under the control of the federal Department of Primary Industry with an administrative base in Darwin instead of Adelaide. This is another example of where the Northern Territory has led the way nationally: we proposed this course of action long before the Commonwealth identified the need for rationalisation of meat inspection in Australia. The Department of Primary Production has already entered into detailed negotiations with the federal Department of Primary Industry with a view to the implementation of a single meat inspection authority for the Territory. This initiative will result in a more efficient and cost-effective system, and offer our Territory inspectors the prospect of improved career progression.

Honourable members will recall that a Pet Meat Act was passed in this Assembly and regulations to that act have already been drafted. The branding provisions of this statute will ensure the clear identification of pet meat. In summary, as far as criticism is concerned, I am pleased to be able to say that very little in the report applies to the Northern Territory. The little there is is mostly of an historical nature related to weaknesses which have been or are being eliminated. It goes without saying that the government is fully cognisant of the importance of the pastoral and beef industry to the Northern Territory's economy and welfare. We greatly appreciate the Royal Commissioner's extensive review of the meat industry and welcome his constructive recommendations, all of which are being implemented as quickly as possible by this government. The government believes the steps it has implemented to tighten controls over pet meat and improve the meat inspection system will add to the wealth and status of the beef industry in the Northern Territory.
Mr Speaker, I move that the report be noted.

Motion agreed to.

Kirton and Whiting Report on the Review of Urban-based Health Centres in the Northern Territory

Mr TUXWORTH (Health)(by leave): Mr Speaker, I table the Kirton and Whiting Report on the Review of Urban-based Community Health Centres in the Northern Territory.

In July 1981, the government decided that a review of community health services should be carried out to determine whether they meet the changing needs of the community. Miss Terry Whiting of the resource management consultants, Kirton and Whiting, was commissioned to undertake a review of community health services in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Jabiru. Miss Whiting is widely experienced in the establishment and ongoing review of community health services. She was employed by the Victorian Health Commission for 7 years to establish community health programs and set up community health groups to monitor and evaluate community health services. Since then, she has worked as a consultant with the Victorian and Commonwealth governments in the area of community health.

The objectives of the review were: to identify functions performed by the centres; to determine which functions were effective and which were ineffective; to point out gaps and overlaps in functions; and to make recommendations concerning alternative services and possible restructuring. Miss Whiting spent a minimum of 1 week at each of the community health centres talking with the people involved in the preventative and curative health-care fields. Through these discussions, and because of her knowledge and expertise in this field, she developed a thorough understanding of the needs of different communities and the functions of the health centres.

The 3-month review is now complete and Miss Whiting has submitted her report. Community health staff participated in the review. In fact, the whole exercise was carried out with their complete cooperation and involvement. Miss Whiting discussed her proposed recommendations with the staff and their input greatly assisted in the production of this report. As part of the government's consideration of the Kirton and Whiting Report, I believe it is necessary that the recommendations be considered by members of the public and interested bodies. At the same time, the Department of Health will seek detailed responses from its regional administration and community health staff who will be involved in the consideration and assessment of the report.

The report indicates that each health centre must reconsider its role in the community so that services appropriate to the needs of consumers are available. This is necessary because the needs of the various communities in the Territory differ greatly. One major trend of the recommendations is that hospitals should form a closer bond with regional health services. A principal function of community health services is in the area of preventative care. They should encourage people to adopt healthy lifestyles, educate them about health matters and provide a community support service. However, accidents happen and people fall ill. This is where hospitals play a part in health care. They are not only an essential part of the community's health services but a special part with a particular role to play in the network of health services available to the individual. To be of most benefit, this network should provide a coordinated approach to the care of the individual with no barrier between community health centres and hospitals.
The report indicates that a system of quality assurance, which has been introduced in some community health centres, is excellent and should be extended throughout the Territory. This system has been in effect in certain hospitals and health services for some time and has been fostered through the efforts of the Northern Territory Quality Assurance Committee. Over the years, Mr Speaker, much has been made of the importance of financial and audit functions in the delivery of health care but there has not been much emphasis on the quality of services. I would like to congratulate the medical and nursing professions for their initiative in this very important area.

The report also makes the point that the way our health professionals participate in the development and implementation of health care programs is changing. This leads to the concept of the generalist nurse. The Territory leads the way in fostering the development of generalist nurses and actively assists and encourages community health staff to gain the required skills. Full implementation of the concept will allow allied health professionals to adopt a different role in the health resource team, more like a consultant role, that will assist the nurse practitioner in areas requiring specialist skills.

Discussions are proceeding on the establishment of a child assessment and development unit. I raised this matter in the Assembly during the budget debate yesterday, Mr Speaker. The unit would draw on the varied skills of the allied health professional group and would provide a multi-disciplinary approach to paediatric problems. This proposal is being considered by a number of people in government departments, community groups and professional organisations which would be involved in the operations of the unit. A number of ideas are being looked at but I stress that, as yet, no firm proposal has been placed before me. I take this opportunity to advise that I would be pleased to receive the comments and suggestions of honourable members on this issue.

Mr Speaker, when the proposal comes to fruition, the government would like the unit to be named in honour of Dr Helen Phillips MBE who was a pioneer in the field of child assessment in the Territory. Dr Phillips played a major role in establishing community health services and was instrumental in the development of the infant health and school screening programs.

Copies of the Kirton and Whiting Report on the Review of Urban-based Community Health Centres will be dispatched to interested people and organisations. Other copies are available from the Department of Health if they are required. I ask honourable members to consider the report carefully and, if possible, give me their comments within the next 6 weeks. This should give ample time in which to consider the matter and provide advice.

I intend to maintain the impetus created during the review period. I know that community health staff who were actively involved in the review process will wish to implement improvements in their operations as soon as possible. The commissioning of this report indicates the importance that the government places on the community health team in improving the health standard of Territorians. It is an important step towards our goal of ensuring that Territorians achieve the highest possible standard of health and get the best value for their health dollar.

Mr Speaker, I look forward to receiving the comments of honourable members and move that the report be noted.

Debate adjourned.
Mr HARRIS (Port Darwin) (by leave): Mr Speaker, I table the fifth and sixth reports of the Subordinate Legislation and Tabled Papers Committee. I move that the reports be noted.

The sixth report gives details of the reason why the committee recommended that Copy Paper No 256 be disallowed.

Mrs LAWRIE (Nightcliff): Mr Speaker, I rise as a member of the committee to speak to these reports. Once again, my main concern is to bring to the attention of the Assembly the need of the Subordinate Legislation and Tabled Papers Committee to have independent legal advice when it so desires. This recommendation has been espoused by the chairman and other members of the committee several times now. If they look at the fifth report, honourable members will see that we have dealt with 30 separate sets of regulations, some of them very comprehensive and requiring fine attention to detail. Not one person on the committee is a qualified lawyer and that is the point. We must have access to independent legal advice when the committee considers it necessary.

The chairman and I attended a meeting of subordinate legislation committees in Canberra. Other people came from Commonwealth countries outside Australia and all said the same thing. Those committees which already have independent legal advice considered themselves to be in a far better position to peruse the material than those which did not. That would seem quite logical. Some committees had faced the wrath of their Treasurers and Attorney-Generals who had tried to insist that they use Crown law officers. The committees pointed out that those same officers are largely responsible for the drafting of regulations and they would prefer independent and fresh advice. Mr Speaker, the motion for disallowance of one set of regulations would seem to prove my point.

I draw the attention of honourable members also to the fact that paper 269 relates to the financial statements of the Darwin City Council for 1978-79 and 1979-80 which were tabled on 2 September 1982. Your committee, through its chairman, looks askance at this late tabling of the report but it is doing all it can to take remedial action to ensure that relevant departments table reports within the specified time. This involves the committee in a fair amount of work and I would like to thank the officers for carrying out the administrative tasks which we heap upon their shoulders.

Mr Speaker, to give honourable members an idea of the problems facing the committee, tabled paper 248 deals with the Weights and Measures (Date-Marking of Prepackaged Goods) Regulations. Paragraph 3(f), relates to prepackaged food. The paragraph concerned specifies food which is not to be included: 'prepackaged food where the sum of the maximum dimension and the maximum circumference or perimeter that is perpendicular to that maximum dimension of the prepackaged food does not exceed 250 mm unless intended to be finally supplied in a primary package'. That is certainly comprehensive but a little difficult initially to understand. Some members may not have the same obligation or opportunity to study regulations closely. I wish to bring to their attention that regulations should be drafted in as simple a manner as possible, as should the act which validates them, because these regulations are binding on members of the public. If they flout the regulations, they are contravening the act and are subject to a penalty. I ask that ministers responsible for having regulations promulgated under various acts ask their advisers and the draftsmen to take heed of these remarks and draft the regulations in as precise and simple way as possible.
language as possible to protect members of the public who otherwise may contravene the regulations unknowingly.

Mr Speaker, I also wish to draw the attention of the Assembly to paper 261 which relates to the revocation of a reserve, a land matter. The information initially supplied by the department was confusing and seems to conflict with the schedule supplied. Additional information was sought by our chairman which clarified matters. The committee has been critical of various government departments in the past for not providing sufficient information to allow the committee to do its work without having to refer back to a department. I feel that, in matters of land particularly, the greatest assistance by way of explanation, detail and relevant drawings should be provided to the committee at the time the papers are tabled. We should not have to go back and ask for additional information.

Mr ROBERTSON (Education): Mr Speaker, I will speak very briefly on one matter raised by the honourable member for Nightcliff: the complexity of wording which occasionally appears in regulations. I think it is widely known that I have said on many an occasion that the public is entitled to the simplest language possible in laws with which it has to work. In this case, however - and this is not an excuse but a reason - these regulations are drawn up by national conferences of so-called experts. I am afraid it is the type of thing in which the public and this Assembly occasionally become entangled. These regulations were agreed to nationally by various conferences on weights and measures and consumer protection organisations and officers of all states in the Commonwealth. Of course, for us to use wording at variance with that which pertains in the states would probably cause even greater confusion.

Mr EVERINGHAM (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, in relation to the suggestion by the honourable member for Nightcliff that independent legal advice be provided to the committee, could I first say that this is the first motion for disallowance of regulations that I can recall. I suggest that that is not such a bad record for the officers of the parliamentary draftsman's office over a period of 7 or 8 years. The suggestion made by the honourable member for Nightcliff is appealing and readily acceptable on the surface. The government has ensured that a great deal of legal work, especially that required by departments and statutory authorities, is channelled into the private sector. Unfortunately, with regulations and other matters that come before this Assembly, there are often many factors that operate behind the scenes. My colleague, the Minister for Community Development, has just outlined to us the situation in respect of the particular regulation of which the honourable member for Nightcliff complained. Of course, one would think that a mathematician would have been of greater assistance than a lawyer in interpreting that particular regulation. Mathematics is not my long suit. There are many factors operating behind the scenes in areas such as this that make it more desirable that senior government lawyers support this committee.

I am prepared to undertake that, if the committee makes a request for legal assistance, that request will be attended to by one or other of the statutory law officers. Probably they are both listening to this on the landline that takes our debates over to the Department of Law. If so, I ask them to note that undertaking and ensure that it is implemented. But the fact is that, whoever gives legal advice to this committee, can provide it only on a specific query or set of instructions. If the committee seeks advice on specific regulations or other matters, I undertake that it will be attended to by the Solicitor-General or the Crown Solicitor, whoever is more appropriate in the circumstances. They have their duties to carry out under the act and are in no way constrained by any earlier decisions that may have been taken by drafting officers. I might say
that, in matters of drafting, the Legislative Draftsman operates completely independently from the Department of Law and is in fact only administratively subject to the control and support of the Department of Law. In effect, the advice that is received from these statutory law officers will, in my view, be as independent as any other that might be obtained and much more informed.

Motion agreed to; reports noted.

MOTION
Regulations 1982, No 50 Small Claims Regulations

Mr HARRIS (Port Darwin): I move that Regulations 1982, No 50 Small Claims Regulations, tabled in this Assembly on 17 August 1982, be disallowed.

Motion agreed to.

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 264)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr TUXWORTH (Health): Mr Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

Mr Speaker, this bill contains a number of matters which are designed to facilitate the operation of the act. The majority of clauses are of a machinery nature. Clause 4, however, changes the composition of the commission by adding one more member. This should give the commission more flexibility in its day-to-day operations.

Clause 5 refers to the tenure of office of members of the commission. Under section 8 of the act, a person who has attained the age of 65 years shall not be appointed as a member. In the future, these provisions could limit severely the appointment of a valuable and worthwhile citizen who may be 65 years or older. Clause 5 will omit subsection (2) of section 8 thereby allowing a person over the age of 65 years either to be appointed or to remain as a member of the commission.

It has also been found, Mr Speaker, that section 27(1) of the act, which gives an applicant for a liquor licence only 14 days after lodging an application in which to advertise in the NT Government Gazette and other newspapers is impracticable. Particularly for the NT Government Gazette, this 14-day period is too short. Clause 6 of the bill before the Assembly will give the applicant 28 days in which to lodge the required advertisement.

Clauses 7 and 8 correct another problem with the act. Under section 34(1), applications for the renewal of a liquor licence were required to be lodged not less than 14 days prior to the expiry of the licence. In practice, this 14-day period has caused some unnecessary complications. Clause 7 proposes that the 14-day period be deleted and simply requires the applicant to lodge an application before the date of expiry of the licence. Clause 8 is an amendment consequent upon the amendment proposed in clause 7.

Currently, even though a licence fee is not paid, a licence continues in force. There is no provision for revoking a licence for which the fee has not been paid. Clause 9 proposes that a licence shall not continue in force if the licensee has not paid the fee within 14 days of receiving notice that the fee is payable.
Under section 96 of the act, when a thing is seized at the time of making a charge relating to a restricted area - for example, seizure of a car found to be carrying liquor - and the thing is not declared forfeit by the court, the only way it can be returned to the owner is by order of the Chairman of the Liquor Commission. Clause 10 proposes that a magistrate have the power to return property which the court does not declare forfeit.

In March 1981, in a special case stated, it was decided that the Liquor Commission did not have the power to require licensees to keep records in any particular form. Currently, section 3 merely requires a licensee to keep a written record. Clause 11 proposes to correct this matter by requiring that records be kept in a form approved by the commission. This amendment is necessary because proper records are essential if the commission is to be certain of the fee to be paid on liquor purchases. I commend the bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.

FISH AND FISHERIES AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 230)

Continued from 19 August 1982.

Mr B. COLLINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, this simple bill corrects deficiencies in the definition section of the principal act and also provides for increased penalties in respect of protection of the Northern Territory's barramundi stocks. The opposition supports the bill.

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH (Tiwi): Mr Speaker, as long as the fishing industry is one of harvesting not husbanding, we must have a strong control over our fish resources. I thoroughly agree with the principle and the spirit with which I hope this legislation will be carried out. It is a tightening up of the legislation to protect our fish resources in the sea. The legislation aims to do this by increasing fines for second and subsequent offences and by providing that people must be able to explain why they are in possession of gill-nets, whether they are legally in possession of them or not.

I can see legislation dealing with the fishing industry being tightened still more in the future if common sense does not prevail in harvesting of the resources. Bag limits have been imposed on amateur fishermen for some time. Before they were imposed, I asked questions about it as a result of queries put to me by wildlife rangers and bushmen. These people have an honest concern for their fishing resources and could see even then that there would be a depletion.

I hope that the legislation does not have to be tightened still further in the future but I think it may have to be if there are abuses of the system. Some people have been interested in fish farming ventures. In the interests of the fishing industry, I hope these will prove successful. If they are, we may not have to look so carefully at our fishing industry in the Northern Territory with regard to restrictions on the taking of fish by the public. We must continue to fight to preserve the fish stocks in Territory waters for people who work from Northern Territory ports and belong to the Northern Territory. I hope it is a long time before further restrictions are introduced. I support this legislation.

Mr EVERINGHAM (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, I am very pleased with the general support of opposition and government members for this legislation which is designed to further protect an important resource.
I take this opportunity to apologise to you, Sir, and other honourable members. I have to depart from this Assembly this afternoon at about 2.30 to go by plane to Hobart for a meeting of the Australian Fisheries Council where I will represent my colleague, the Minister for Primary Production, who will leave tomorrow to lead a trade and investment mission into South-east Asia. At the meeting tomorrow, the west of the Wessels fishery proposal will be brought formally before the Australian Fisheries Council. Please excuse my departure.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Bill passed remaining stages without debate.

HOUSING BILL
(Serial 240)

Continued from 1 September 1982.

Mr BELL (MacDonnell): Mr Speaker, the opposition welcomes the bill in general terms. It represents a sensible updating of existing legislation. There are, however, matters in the bill that I would like to address, in particular, a clause that we will seek to defeat at the appropriate time.

Clause 16(4), which will give selling power in some circumstances, is supported. As the minister noted in his second-reading speech, this will enable the commission to engage in the acquisition and development of land or land and house packages for immediate sale to persons who may not otherwise be eligible for the purposes of the commission's sales scheme. The commission will be able to sell to all comers developed land and or dwellings built expressly for sale. While it is not the government's intention that the commission should use this power to compete directly with private developers or real estate agents, it is noted that the possibility of that happening will remain. The provision will allow the commission to effectively mix its rental accommodation with owner-occupied dwellings. That motion is supported.

Clause 23 is of considerable significance in that it allows the minister complete discretionary powers in the matter of rental determination. This will enable the commission to comply with the requirements of the present Commonwealth-states agreement and with any new or changed requirements which may emerge in the future, either by virtue of Commonwealth-Northern Territory relations or purely Northern Territory policy initiatives. When a federal Labor government renegotiates the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement, the Northern Territory government will have no difficulty in facilitating the new arrangement.

The principles underlying clause 29 are supported by the opposition. This clause provides for all concessional terms of sales of dwellings under the various loans and sales schemes to be subject to an interest penalty if the dwelling is sold by the purchaser within 3 years of the date of purchase. The rationale that purchasers of Housing Commission or private dwellings, who receive the benefits of generous government interest rate concessions, should not be able to profit from the interest rate concession if they sell within 3 years is supported. The retrospective nature of this clause is noted and also supported, as is the retrospective nature of clause 36(3) which deals with NTPS staff sales.

The opposition cannot agree, however, with subclause (4) of clause 29 which reads: 'The amount which a mortgagee is required to pay under subsection (2) to the commission shall be deemed to be part of the principal sum of the loan'. Accordingly, I will be moving that that particular subclause be defeated. The
opposition's view is that the interest penalty should be in fact what it purports to be; that is, a penalty rather than an additional payment of principal. The penalty should not increase the seller's equity in the property.

The ministerial discretion provision in subclause (3) of clause 29 is the cause of some concern. While the difficulty in doing so is appreciated, it is felt that further elaboration of phrases such as 'extenuating circumstances' and 'genuine hardship' is necessary. I ask the honourable minister whether there are any guidelines for defining such 'extenuating circumstances' and 'genuine hardship'? I also ask when, in fact, the minister is likely to use his discretion. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not opposing the intent of this subclause but mention it in this context to highlight those particular aspects.

It is noted that the bill removes, in certain circumstances, the Housing Commission option to repurchase dwellings offered for sale within 3 years of purchase from the commission. Clause 36(2)(c), which provides for a single uniform sales formula for all dwellings sold by the commission, is welcomed. In his second-reading speech, the minister detailed the various formulae which will be replaced. The use of a concept of market value as determined by the Valuer-General will no doubt reduce the confusion which has applied in the now redundant formulae. I ask, however, whether the amendment in proposed clause 34A is consistent with the proposition. I understand this proposed clause is contained in the schedule of amendments circulated by the minister. I would appreciate some comment from him in that regard. Is this particular amendment consistent with the proposition that a single uniform sales formula for all dwellings sold by the commission should apply, as is mentioned elsewhere in the bill? Clause 34A reads: 'The minister may, in writing, determine the amount at which a dwelling, including the land on which the dwelling is situated, shall be sold under this act and, accordingly, the commission shall not sell that dwelling except at that amount so determined'. Presumably the minister would determine the sale price on the advice of the Valuer-General and there may be no conflict there. However, I would appreciate the minister's opinion in that regard.

There are 3 other matters mentioned by the minister to which I will briefly refer: firstly, the lifting of the requirement that tenants must serve a 2-year tenancy qualifying period before becoming eligible to purchase; secondly, a measure to the effect that concessional terms purchasers under the NTIPS staff homes sales scheme who resign or are dismissed should be permitted to reside in their dwellings but be liable for annual increases in interest rate payable of up to 2% per annum until a ceiling equivalent to the maximum rate of interest payable on a first mortgage under the Home Loans Scheme is reached; and, thirdly, a measure to the effect that concessional terms purchasers under the NTIPS staff homes sales scheme, who sublet for profit, should be immediately liable to pay the maximum rate of interest applicable to a first mortgage under the Home Loans Scheme. Those 3 measures are supported. But, in relation to the last measure, I ask the honourable minister what is proposed in order to detect people who sublet for profit?

Mr D.W. COLLINS (Alice Springs): Mr Deputy Speaker, I welcome this bill. The measures will give flexibility and streamline certain processes which are necessary in this very important area of housing.

One element of the bill causes me concern, It is not vitally important but needs to be looked at. Much of the operation will be governed by regulation. I believe the Subordinate Legislation and Tabled Papers Committee will have an extra task. It will need to be particularly alert, scrutinise carefully the
regulations as they come out and raise matters in this Assembly if it seems that something is not to the advantage of the community as a whole.

All that aside, as I have just mentioned, there are many disadvantages. The main one is that it will allow a quick response to changing situations in the housing industry. The fact that regulations can be brought into effect more quickly is very important. The bill sets up the commission and defines its responsibilities and powers such as power to enter and take back commission property. It defines tenant responsibility for damage and for removal of illegal structures. If a tenant does not comply, the bill allows for such removal and the imposition of penalties.

It is quite clear in the bill that the commission is under ministerial control. The main function of the commission is to administer and prescribe housing schemes, mainly in regulations. The minister has the job of determining the rents. Under the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement, there is pressure upon the minister to move towards market rents. This is of some concern because they are reasonably high in the Territory as a result, no doubt, of our buoyant economy. I noted with some interest that the member for MacDonnell mentioned that, when a federal Labor government comes, there would be no problem in renegotiating an agreement. There would be no problem then because, with the closing down of the uranium industry, the pressure on housing and the buoyancy of the economy would be such that the market rent would fall considerably.

I particularly welcome the provision which will allow the immediate sale of Housing Commission houses to people. This incentive will encourage the sale of homes. It will be well worth the effort for people to make sacrifices and accumulate the deposit to buy their own homes.

The bill will allow the minister powers, in certain cases, to authorise the sale of commission property. At the moment, apart from the various home sales schemes, the commission must either sell its property by public tender or by auction. There are situations where it would make very good sense if the minister could allow properties to be disposed of, say, to other government departments. This allows him that particular power. It also allows for participation in the secondary mortgage industry if it comes into being and, in particular, participation in immediate land and or house sales. As mentioned by the minister, this will be particularly important for the Palmerston area. The people there will see a considerable advantage in this.

It has been mentioned that it is not intended to compete with the private enterprise system. I doubt whether that is possible entirely. Some wisdom will be required in that area. If the private sector will build these houses, a lead can be given. The testing of the market may encourage the private sector. The fact that housing is to be sold at market value will definitely allow the private sector to compete on an equal basis with the Housing Commission.

Clause 29 involves an interest penalty to any mortgagee who sells his property within 3 years. This is to be backdated to the start of 1981. The aim is to prevent profiteering and the Home Loans Scheme has always been intended to encourage the permanent settlement of people in the Territory. There is allowance for the minister to consider special circumstances. It does not apply to persons who are required to move from the Territory on transfer or promotion. Obviously, that applies to the public service area but I hope it would also apply to people in private industry. There are occasions when people in firms in the Territory have to move for such reasons.

The interest rate for the Northern Territory Public Service staff homes
scheme was increased by 1% up to about 6%. The early sale of such houses will also involve a penalty interest rate and that again will be retrospective to 31 December 1980.

I am pleased to see one thing omitted from this bill: the 3-year term of joint ownership with the commission whereby, if you try to sell within that term, the commission has first option to purchase. That has always been an annoying factor. There are times when people are forced to sell and it is best that the sale go on the open market. The purpose of this bill is to regularise the sale of all dwellings. The various loan schemes have been different and that is rather unfair. I particularly welcome the provision that market value is to be determined by an independent valuer. This will allow competition on an equal footing with the private sector.

I also welcome the omission of the 2-year tenancy provision before a house can be purchased. I believe it is a great way to get people interested. Instead of paying rent for 2 years, a person can pay off a house. I believe that will have a great effect in settling people down in the Territory. I am also pleased to note that a choice of 2 houses is available. I would ask the minister to cover the particular point I am about to raise. If someone is renting a house, is he also allowed the choice of 2 other houses to purchase if he does not desire to buy the house he is in? I think most probably he is allowed a choice, but I would like to be reassured on that point.

The Northern Territory Public Service interest rate on the purchase of a house is about 6% at the moment. If someone resigns or is dismissed from the NTPS, the low rate of interest will increase annually by 2% until it is the same rate as the maximum for the Home Loans Scheme - about 12.5%. I ask whether it will be a retrospective provision dating back to the date of purchase. I agree that is a reasonable provision. At the moment I am buying my house through the scheme. It does not particularly worry me. Some would question whether the condition of service for public servants is fair compared to the private market, but that is another point for another time.

Subletting of Housing Commission homes by public servants for profit will attract the full 12.5% interest rate of the Home Loans Scheme. I believe that proposition is fair enough. The minister will have some discretion in this area which will no doubt be used with considerable caution.

I appreciate the reasons for the bill. I believe that it is flexible enough to cover the varying situations that we have in this developing Territory. I believe the minister will use his discretionary powers with wisdom. I know that the Subordinate Legislation and Tabled Papers Committee will be alert to the regulations and raise any matters which are of concern to it in this Assembly. I look forward to the operation of the bill and give it my support.

Mr SMITH (Millner): Mr Speaker, as the member for MacDonnell has indicated, basically the opposition supports the contents of the bill. It is obvious to me that the primary aim of this bill is to reduce the differences between the 2 existing housing schemes: the general public and the public service housing schemes. For a number of years now, the government has made it clear that it is ultimately looking towards the amalgamation of these 2 schemes and that is a principle I support.

The government probably knows better than I how difficult it is to amalgamate those schemes but I have some experience of it. Last year, I was invited to serve on a working party set up by the Public Service Commissioner's Office. At that stage, its task was to present a report to the government which
would show how an amalgamation of the 2 schemes could be effected. That committee had to report by October or November last year. It became evident to the committee after a number of meetings that complete amalgamation of the 2 schemes just was not possible. I am pleased to say that the government accepted that view and, at this stage, has not attempted to amalgamate the 2 schemes completely.

However, there are a number of important steps contained within the bill which lead towards amalgamation. A number of common approaches to the 2 schemes have been adopted and I support these. There is an interest penalty if the house purchased under either scheme is sold within 3 years. If the purchase price per house is based on the market value, both schemes will abolish the qualifying period of ownership before application can be made to sell. In both schemes, there is the offer of 2 choices of houses for people who wish to purchase. I commend the government on the move it has taken towards amalgamation of the 2 schemes and I think that continuing steady progress can be made in these areas. Hopefully, it will be possible to completely amalgamate the schemes in the not too distant future. At that stage, one of the main prejudices that people in the private sector have against public servants - that they have better housing rights - should disappear.

Like the member for MacDonnell, I support clause 16(4) which will allow the Housing Commission to develop its own land and sell the land and or dwellings. This was a recommendation of the Housing Needs Inquiry which was tabled and debated in this Assembly earlier this year. My memory of the debate was that members on the government side indicated quite clearly that they were not interested in such a provision. In fact, I can remember the Minister for Community Development becoming quite uptight about the idea that the government would re-enter the subdivisional stakes. I think I pointed out at that time that it would be a good idea to reserve the right of government to enter into that area if it felt it necessary. I am glad to see that wiser heads have prevailed on the government side and that this power is contained within the new bill.

I would ask one question of the Minister for Lands and Housing at this stage. There is some concern on our side whether clause 16(3) will limit the power of the government to dispose of the land or housing under 16(4). As we read 16(3), the only way the government could dispose of land or housing under 16(4) is by public auction or after inviting public tenders for the purchase of the land or housing. As I read the minister's speech, this would be against the spirit of what he is attempting to do in 16(4). I ask the minister to comment on that particular point in his concluding remarks.

Mr Speaker, I was interested to look at clause 20 of the new bill which was in the old bill. It concerns the removal of illegal structures. The Housing Commission has acted quite properly and quite often under that section against a number of people in Housing Commission houses. In my short term in the Assembly, it has, for example, directed a number of my constituents to remove illegal structures, particularly garden sheds. This has been done. I have no objection to what the Housing Commission has been doing in this area, but it does point up a useful comparison to the government's attitude to breaches of covenants on pastoral properties. The government, through its Housing Commission, has been most prompt in sorting out illegal structures and illegal additions to buildings in urban areas but the government's tenants on pastoral properties, particularly in the last year, have had no restraints placed on them because of the government's decision during 1981 that it would not take action against pastoral property lessees who breached their covenants. I am pleased to acknowledge that
apparently the government has reversed that decision this year and instructed the Department of Lands to take action, where appropriate, to remedy breaches of covenants. It appeared to me that there was an interesting difference in its attitude to breach of covenants by tenants of Housing Commission properties and breach of covenants on pastoral properties.

I want to address briefly the vexed question of housing in Aboriginal communities. There have been rumours and statements that the present right of the department to construct housing for its employees on Aboriginal communities would, at some stage, be taken over by the Housing Commission. These rumours have been widespread, particularly in the Department of Education with which I have had most experience, and have caused some uncertainty as to whether the department was to have a continuing role in the provision of housing in Aboriginal communities or whether the Housing Commission would take over that task. It would be appreciated by a great number of people if the minister could make a statement as to what role, if any, he expects the Housing Commission to play in Aboriginal communities both as to the provision of staff housing and general public housing.

Mr Speaker, with those comments, I indicate again my support for the bill.
One of the members is to be a tenant representative. Clause 7(2) provides that the tenant representative shall be a person who, at the time of appointment, was a tenant of a commission dwelling. If that person ceases to be a tenant, there is no provision in this bill to have him replaced. That person can remain there for 3 years without necessarily being a resident of a commission dwelling. I feel that it is necessary to have a tenant as a member of the commission. I ask the minister if it was the intention of the government to allow someone to be in that position who is not a resident of a dwelling. Mr Speaker, with those remarks I support the bill.

Ms D'ROZARIO (Sanderson): Mr Speaker, I too would like to address a few remarks to this very important bill. It is quite obvious that the Housing Commission plays a very important role in the Territory as a generator of construction activity, a far more important role than is played by housing commissions and housing trusts in other parts of Australia. The reason is that, for many years, the Housing Commission has had a greater proportion of construction activity in the total housing market than have housing commissions and trusts elsewhere in Australia. It is true to say that construction activity generally can be affected greatly by the extent to which the Housing Commission here participates in that activity. In the last few years, the commission has had several hundreds of millions of dollars appropriated to it in successive budgets for the specific purpose of increasing the supply of housing in Territory centres. This has flowed on to other sectors of construction and stimulated activity in the private market as well. It is appropriate that now, some 25 or so years after the first Housing Act was promulgated, we look again at our housing authority and upgrade its functions and the manner in which it operates. I welcome this bill. About 2 years ago, an undertaking was given by the minister that the Housing Act would be rewritten. We now have the opportunity to establish a new Housing Act by the presentation of this bill.

One or two matters are of particular interest to me because I have a number of constituents who are either tenants of the Housing Commission or are buying their houses through schemes operated by the Housing Commission. As the minister would know, the Housing Commission is extremely active in the electorate of Sanderson and is undertaking numerous projects in both medium-density and single-family dwellings in that electorate at the moment.

It is interesting to see that a move has been made to abolish the waiting time. Some members of this Assembly will remember that, in 1979, I put forward the suggestion that waiting times were unnecessarily disadvantaging prospective home buyers, particularly those from low-income households. In 1980, I resurrected that proposal. At the time, a suggestion was made that, if it was not possible to eliminate the waiting time for all, then it should cease to apply to low-income tenants. In 1980, I suggested a household income of $24,000 or a single income of $16,000 as the threshold at which the waiting time should be abolished. The reason for making the suggestion at the time was that, with the squeeze on housing and housing prices, some households were being disadvantaged in their access to housing. Whilst sympathetic to that view, the government said that it would not abolish the requirement at that time because the market could well be cleared of stock and leave nothing for the rental market. In response to that argument, I nominated a class of persons to whom the abolition should apply. I am very pleased to see that there are to be no qualifying periods now and that people who are eligible will be able to become owner occupants without having first been tenants.

Mr Speaker, the other matter of interest is the premiss in clause 29 that essentially the commission will provide housing for Territory owner occupants. In order to implement that policy, the bill provides that persons who arrange
to sell or otherwise assign their interests in the property before the elapse of 3 years will be liable to pay the difference in interest they would have incurred if they had been paying at the highest rate applicable under the Home Loans Scheme. I commend this proposal. A great deal of thought has been put into solving the Territory's housing problems. The income-geared interest scheme that we presently have was introduced in order to increase access to housing. We do not approve of people who avail themselves of that scheme simply for making a capital gain at some future time and not genuinely requiring it for their own owner occupancy.

The member for MacDonnell commented on the provision in clause 29(4). There is an amendment to this clause which I think will overcome his objections.

Mr Speaker, one clause which interested me has already been taken up by the honourable member for Port Darwin. It relates to the composition of the commission. By clause 7, we have a commission composed of 5 persons appointed by the minister, 1 of whom must be a tenant. The honourable member for Port Darwin has already drawn to the attention of members that the tenant representative need only be a person who was a tenant at the time of appointment.

I think that the whole idea of providing for a tenant representative is to make the views of tenants known to the commission in its decision-making activities. Whilst I can appreciate that there will be people who were originally tenants and then became owner-occupants, nevertheless there are in the Territory some tenants of very long standing who prefer to remain as tenants. These are the very people whose views we are trying to convey to the commission. I would suggest to the minister that the tenant representative be truly representative of the tenants' views and be a person who is a tenant for the duration of the time that he is on the commission. This involves the standing down of a person who was a tenant at the time of his appointment and subsequently ceased to be one. I put this point forward especially in view of the fact that the term of office is 3 years. Should a person cease to be a tenant at the beginning of his term, then, in effect, tenants will not be represented for the duration of that term.

Mr Speaker, of interest to all members are the provisions contained in clauses 15 and 16 which set out the powers and functions of the commission. I am pleased to see that very wide powers would be assigned to the commission because the commission would have to initiate innovative approaches, not only to construction but also to the marketing and sales schemes.

I note that the provisions of the existing act relating to the manufacture of products and building materials have been retained. Whilst we know that the commission, at this time, does not engage in this particular activity, I would not like to see it precluded from it. Some members would be aware that, in the early days of its formation, the commission was involved in the manufacture of building products. Commissions in the states have this power and I am pleased to say that many innovations in domestic construction have developed as a result of the activities of housing commissions. I mention one local example and one non-local example to emphasise that point. Members might recall that it was the New South Wales Housing Commission that first went into the installation of solar heating systems before they were adopted widely by private housing constructors. As a local example, I was reminded the other day, in connection with a seminar sponsored by the Real Estate Institute on mud brick construction, that some years ago the commission experimented with this type of construction and produced some adobe bricks for its own use. I am pleased to see that particular power has been retained for the commission should
it ever wish to integrate its activities vertically.

Mr Speaker, the next matter is of great concern to me because I have very many constituents affected by it. It is the provision in clause 16(3). The honourable member for Millner has already drawn attention to this particular matter. This subclause provides that the commission shall not dispose of its property, other than building materials, by any method other than public auction or public tender. The question that arises is whether tenants who apply to buy their houses would then have to submit to a public auction or public tender process. I am sure that this is not the intention of the bill because its tenor seems to be to make housing more accessible to residents. But it seems a bit inconsistent. I would like some clarification from the honourable minister.

Mr Speaker, my attention had been drawn to the provision of clause 40 which is a transition clause. It states that schemes already in force or commenced will be allowed to continue. Whilst it has been drawn to my attention that this could be the solution to the concern that I have, I look to the regulation powers contained in clause 36. Clause 36(2)(b) provides for regulations to be made for and in relation to types of housing schemes and the classes of persons eligible under such housing schemes. It seems that there is a possibility that the commission will be entering into new types of schemes. While existing schemes may be covered by the transition provision of clause 40, it seems to me that the introduction of new schemes will be impeded if subclause (3) of clause 16 remains in the bill in its present form.

I have looked at this bill several times and I do not find any explanation of what a scheme is. I am merely assuming that a scheme referred to in clause 40 would include a housing sales scheme although this is not defined anywhere. If the circumstances I have outlined come about, we would have to pass validating legislation to meet them because I, for one, would not wish to disadvantage any owner occupants who have bought their houses without going through the process of public auction or tender.

Mr Speaker, with those few comments, I welcome the introduction of this new bill and look forward to continued activity by the Housing Commission in my electorate. Before I sit down, I would like to say that, in the past few years, an enormous improvement in the design of Housing Commission dwellings has become apparent, particularly medium-density housing design and construction. In medium-density construction, the Housing Commission has held its own with any private developer.

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH (Tiwi): Mr Speaker, this legislation is an attempt to update the whole system of housing in the Northern Territory. Our government realises the importance of adequate housing in relation to the whole economy. The Northern Territory is developing its economy with the end view of becoming self-supporting and housing must be one of its main considerations. To encourage any industry, for example, not only must there be a market for the product and availability of jobs but there must also be sufficient housing to keep the workers in the Northern Territory once they have come here.

The private sector has not been able to keep up with the mushrooming of the population in the Northern Territory due to various reasons, not the least being the greater degree of vulnerability of our isolated situation. If private contractors consider it unattractive to provide housing, then the government somehow has to take up the shortfall. Nowhere else in Australia has any state government entered so enthusiastically into the field of housing as the Northern Territory government. Our positive efforts in public housing to provide serviced land to build houses, to rent them and to sell them to all classes of
people stand second to none compared to state governments' efforts.

In his second-reading speech, the minister said that this legislation aims for a more fluid situation regarding public housing in that the yoke of legis­lation will sit lightly but the reins of regulation will guide the intent of the legislation more simply and speedily. The big pitfall in this idea could be that a careful watch has to be kept on the bureaucracy that administers the regulations. To make sure that the bureaucracy is not carried away with its own importance, we must always ensure it and its regulations are not an end in themselves but the means of enacting this legislation.

As the minister mentioned in his second-reading speech, clause 16 not only gives the minister discretion to do various things, it also sets out clearly the numerous functions of the Housing Commission relating to the various situations that could arise.

We realise that clause 20 is necessary but we hope that it will be admin­istered with common sense. This clause relates to structures that have been built onto Housing Commission houses. The people in the rural area still show originality and independence in the way they build their dwellings. They do not wish to be stifled by an overbearing bureaucracy. That is why these people went to the rural area in the first place. I realise that, if the Housing Commission has let a home to a person or the person is paying off the house, the Housing Commission has an equity in it and must be concerned with the well-being of its capital investment. However, I stress that I want to see some common sense in the administration of clause 20. I do not want my constituents hassled and harried if they wish to make some well-built additions to any Housing Commis­sion home they may occupy before they get around to doing the paperwork for the operation.

I thoroughly agree with clause 29. The concessional loans and sales should not be taken advantage of in a manner which goes against the whole grain of this bill. The essence of the bill is to settle people in the Territory by housing them and encouraging them to stay here. I am very much against the idea of somebody gaining a cheap loan, building a house, selling it and shooting through. This was brought to my attention by one of my constituents who is a building contractor. He had barely built a house for a particular person in the rural area when he heard it was to be advertised for sale. Needless to say, I felt that it was my duty to bring it to the attention of the Housing Commission. I hope they did something about it.

Mr Speaker, it was the practice in the past that, to qualify for accommo­dation from the Housing Commission, people were required to reside in the Territory. It has been brought to my attention that exceptions must be made when considering housing allocations to people. The exceptions I talk about are the occasions when people have had to leave the Territory for short periods after being resident here. I recall 2 instances. One was caused by the serious illness of an elderly relative who subsequently died and the people returned to the Territory. Another was due to the serious illness of a child. The family had to go south to obtain treatment for the child. When these families came back to the Territory, they applied immediately to the Housing Commission for concessions they thought they were eligible for, but were told that they had not lived here continuously for the preceding year. I would like to see common sense brought to bear in such situations. In these cases, the previous term of residence in the Territory was taken into consideration. The discretion of the minister is mentioned in clauses 10, 13, 16, 22, 24 and 29 and probably in some other clauses. I realise that the power of ministerial discretion is always
necessary but it must not lead to such wide interpretation as to defeat the purpose of this bill.

Clause 36 is concerned with the sale of dwellings and makes provision for regulations for the sale of dwellings at market value. It would be interesting to speculate at what price houses would be offered if the Housing Commission could build them at Jabiru. In answer to a question, the minister told me yesterday that that is not possible yet due to certain lease conditions that pertain in that area relating to the head lease and negotiations previously entered into by various interested parties - the Commonwealth government, mining companies and the Territory government. I would like to reiterate that housing is a big worry to my constituents in Jabiru. I do not know if this legislation will improve the situation for them but I hope it will.

In giving my support to this bill, Mr Speaker, I realise that it takes cognisance of the increasing demand for housing in the Northern Territory. It is fitting and adequate and I feel sure it will fulfil its purpose.

Mr PERRON (Lands and Housing): Mr Speaker, as sponsor of this bill, I am pleased to see that it has a large degree of support from honourable members. Housing is one of those very important aspects of the Northern Territory's operations and success.

The honourable member for MacDonnell wanted an indication of the way clause 29(3) might be applied. This subclause gives the minister a discretion to exempt a person from paying what has been termed a 'penalty interest rate'. I point out that no specific guidelines have been drawn up as yet. No doubt very many people may wish to sell their houses within 3 years of taking up a mortgage and no doubt they will be applying to the minister for exemption. However, the real reason the clause has been included is to cover situations where disposal of the property is necessary by the operation of law, settlement of property between parties of a dissolved marriage or foreclosure by mortgagor, other than the Housing Commission, where another mortgagor has exercised the power of sale etc - situations grossly outside the control of the seller. I appreciate that the reasons people could give for having to sell their houses are infinite. However, such matters will be looked at very closely and interpreted in a fairly narrow fashion so that every person who simply has a general reason - perhaps to sell up and move interstate - is not exempt. It will be the intention to take a fairly hard line.

The same honourable member queried clause 29(4). Following consideration of his complaint, I have circulated an amendment which is quite optional. I am quite happy to include it. However, I am advised by officers of the Department of Law who looked at this over the lunch period that, whether or not clause 29(4) is amended, the effect will be the same. The mortgagee cannot discharge the mortgage until he has paid the principal sum of the loan, the interest payable under the mortgage on that loan and any additional penalty interest. The purpose of clause 29(4) clearly is to ensure that the penalty interest, if levied, is paid and therefore it must be part of the settlement of that mortgage. We did not want a situation where a person could discharge a mortgage and the penalty interest was a separate bill to be pursued independently. That is why 29(4) is there. It would seem, upon legal advice, that, whether it stays as it is or whether we amend it, the effect is totally the same: a person will have to discharge that penalty interest in order to discharge the mortgage at the same time. I am quite happy if honourable members wish to have that amendment accepted in due course.

Clause 34A, the minister's discretion in relation to selling properties
without the Valuer-General's valuation, was mentioned. This discretion would be used by the minister only on very rare occasions. I will mention by way of example an occasion when such a measure was taken. The Housing Commission inherited a group of dwellings, the design of which was not extremely popular. The commission felt that it would rather not have them on its books for continuous administration and maintenance, having regard to the fact that many commission rental premises suffer somewhat as far as occupancy is concerned and it prefers to keep brick buildings for rental purposes. In order to sell those dwellings, the government decided that they should be offered at a concessional rate to the occupants. That scheme was announced to all occupants at the time and they were given the opportunity to buy those dwellings at a percentage below the price fixed by the Valuer-General. That was decided upon by government in order to get rid of them. It was understood that the price for those particular dwellings as determined by the Valuer-General, whilst perhaps reflecting a market value, was too high to expect the occupants to purchase when those occupants had the right to transfer to other dwellings to purchase. They did not lose that right.

In Batchelor we inherited old dwellings which had been occupied for many years by the same people. They were left over from the time when Batchelor was a mining town. In those days, the Commonwealth government never paid any attention to the dwellings so far as maintenance was concerned. Admittedly, rent in those circumstances was very nominal. The dwellings were still standing only because the occupants had maintained them for 15 years. If they had not, the dwellings would have been eaten by white ants many years ago. In those circumstances, the government felt that the dwellings should be sold to the occupants at less than the market value. The true market value would have been quite out of touch with the more reasonable price consideration, having regard to the circumstances I have outlined.

Of course, once such a discretion is given, there is always the opportunity for abuse. I am sure this will be borne in mind by any minister who exercises the discretion to sell a property for less than the Valuer-General's price. It is a serious step and a minister would need to be certain that he can justify the use of his discretion in any circumstance. We were advised that, without this discretionary power in the bill, the commission would be prohibited from selling houses other than at the specific valuation of the Valuer-General. That is no reflection on the Valuer-General's expertise in his field. We just feel that circumstances may warrant the use of the powers in clause 34A.

The honourable member for MacDonnell asked if anything was proposed which would aid the detection of persons who rented out dwellings in contravention of the requirements of schemes under this act. There is no specific system and it is difficult to envisage how one could have one other than calling regularly on every person who has a loan with the government to check whether the owner is in fact the occupant. Of course, that is clearly impractical administratively. What we will attempt to do is make sure that every tenant is aware that, if he proposes to rent a dwelling that is under mortgage at concessional interest rates, he must seek first the approval of the commission, and that one of the most drastic penalties for not seeking such an approval is that the loan can be recalled. That is indeed a most drastic penalty and people should bear it in mind. I doubt that the government would go that far. Perhaps there would be alternatives that could be applied in those situations. The intention is that, where a person proposes to rent out a dwelling that is being paid off under a concessional scheme, the interest rate that would apply while the dwelling is being rented out would be 12.5%.

The honourable member for Alice Springs mentioned that a great deal was to
be governed by regulations. Other members mentioned it too. It is true. Housing is one of those areas that is changing fairly rapidly. Every 6 or 12 months, we re-examine the housing loans schemes in the light of new experience, public attitudes and, of course, correspondence and communications received by honourable members. We need a very flexible system so that schemes can be changed in response to community needs.

The honourable member for Alice Springs also asked whether a person renting a Housing Commission property who wants to buy will still have a choice of properties. I believe he will. If he chooses to purchase a house other than the one he rents, I believe he has a choice of dwellings from which to purchase. However, I stand to be corrected. In some cases, the commission has earmarked accommodation which is not for sale. We do not want to get into a situation where the commission is merely a builder of houses and every time a house is completed someone buys it. The commission has a very important role as a rental authority. Therefore, we do not want to say that every Housing Commission dwelling is for sale. Many of them are, probably most of them.

The honourable member for Alice Springs also raised the matter of a person retiring from the public service. Where members of the Northern Territory Public Service who have concessional loans either resign or are dismissed from the public service, they will be required to pay an additional annual interest rate until they reach the 12.5% rate. A retiring public servant will not be required to pay the additional interest. The view taken by the government is that the public service housing loan scheme is an extremely concessional system and part of the benefits of being a public servant. We propose to have regulations that public servants who resign will be subject to an additional penalty interest. People who are dismissed from the public service cannot expect to continue with the very generous benefits provided by the service. People who retire are in quite a different situation. We are not proposing to have their interest rates increased by 2% per annum until it reaches a maximum. Whilst they are no longer public servants, they have served their time.

The member for Millner asked whether clause 16(4) overrides clause 16(3). It does not. Clause 16(3) states: 'The commission shall not, except under this act, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of real property'. Clause 16(4) gives the minister the power by instrument in writing to authorise the commission to sell property to classes of persons. Clause 16(3) will normally apply to the commission's activities except as specified under schemes. If a scheme arises that the minister feels is a one-off and does not require being set in regulations under clause 36, the minister, by instrument in writing, can authorise the commission to sell other than under the terms laid down in clause 16(3). There is no conflict. In fact, really they are complementary.

The honourable member also raised the matter of housing in Aboriginal communities. Rather than address this complex question now, I undertake to make a statement on this matter during the next sittings. The Northern Territory government has always maintained the stance that housing is a state responsibility. State authorities quite often administer, on behalf of the Commonwealth, all Commonwealth and defence houses that are built in that state as well as the state construction programs.

For reasons perhaps of empire building within the Commonwealth bureaucracy, the Commonwealth has consistently denied the Northern Territory the right to take over the complete housing function in the Northern Territory. Until quite recently, the Commonwealth continued to allocate funds for Aboriginal housing to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs which obtained the services of the Commonwealth Department of Construction to construct housing for Aboriginal
communities in various places in the Northern Territory, not just on Aboriginal land but also on what I would call town leases in places such as Alice Springs.

More recently, the Commonwealth has decided that the Aboriginal Development Commission shall have funds for 'Aboriginal housing'. We have made overtures to the Aboriginal Development Commission offering it the services of the Housing Commission which has a great deal of expertise in the construction of houses and the letting and administration of contracts. However, those overtures have been rejected and the ADC proposes to use the Commonwealth department as its agent for constructing houses with its funds. It also proposes to use Aboriginal housing associations which have expertise in this area.

The matter is somewhat complicated also by the provisions of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act as far as funds are concerned. When we consider the use of funds received by the Northern Territory Housing Commission under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, as distinct from Commonwealth funds provided to the ADC for Aboriginal housing, a difficulty arises if we are to build houses on land to which the general public does not have a right of access - Aboriginal, inalienable, freehold land. The situation in relation to the expenditure of funds for that purpose is very complicated.

Mr Bell: The commission can build on private land.

Mr PERRON: It is true that the commission has power to use a person's money to build a house on private land. Under that very provision, we offered to build houses for Aborigines on Aboriginal land with funds provided by the Aborigines. The offer still stands; there is no conflict there whatsoever. It is a complex matter and one the Territory government has been vitally interested in. I will make a statement on the matter during the next sittings.

The member for Port Darwin was a little concerned that the definition of 'market value' may not be adequate as far as strata titling is concerned. I understand that there is no reason to be concerned there. The definition of 'market value' includes the land on which a dwelling is situated. With strata titling, the land is held by the various owners as tenants in common. I understand that that should not present a particular problem in obtaining a value for a property to sell to someone. Certainly, the Housing Commission is involved in strata titling these days and we hope will be increasingly so involved in time to come.

The provision on the appointment of the tenant representative was specifically put in on my instruction so that, when a person who was a tenant was appointed to the board as tenant representative, he would not have to vacate the board if, at some stage during his term of office, he ceased to be a tenant. The position of tenant representative on the board had been vacant for some time. I think a tenant was appointed fairly recently. One of the difficulties in the past has been that the person obviously has to be in a position to attend board meetings. That may not seem a demanding requirement but it is for many people. They feel that being a member places constraints on them. It is necessary for such a person to be able to deal with the papers that go before the board on a range of subjects. However, in the past, we occasionally appointed someone and within 6 or 12 months he purchased his house and so became ineligible to be on the board any more. It did not seem to me to be right to maintain that stance. For that reason, I had that provision inserted saying that, whilst a person must be a tenant at the time he is appointed to the board, he need not vacate the board if subsequently he ceases to be a tenant.

The honourable member for Sanderson raised the matter of housing schemes
and felt that we might be constrained by clause 16(3). I do not see clause 16 (3) slowing us down at all. In fact, most of the Housing Commission's regular activities will be conducted under schemes created by regulations provided for under clause 36(2)(b) and (c). Other activities of the commission will be governed by clause 16(4) which is where the minister says: 'By instrument in writing you can do x'. Clause 16(3), which says 'the commission shall not, except under this act, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of real property', is not a constraint unless it proposes to act in a manner that is not covered by a scheme, a regulation or a ministerial direction. In that case, it must be covered by clause 16(3) which says it shall not dispose of land or building material unless by public auction or after inviting public tenders for the purchase or disposal of those properties. I think that is quite proper. The government gets itself into enough trouble from time to time by dealing with people directly. I guess that will continue to happen on occasion. The fairest way to ensure that public criticism cannot be brought upon the commission in regard to disposal of items that are not covered under a scheme is, of course, to ensure that property can only be released by public competition. That is the only true protection the government has.

The honourable member for Tiwi, in typical style and as the true representative of her area, does not want rural residents constrained by an unnecessary waffle of paperwork such as obtaining approval for structures. Unfortunately, I have to tell the honourable member that, like it or not, the rural people will have to comply with such provisions as those relating to illegal structures. I know they all disappeared out of town into the rural area to escape bureaucracy, government inspectors and the requirements of approval systems but, gradually, they are coming to realise in some areas that government regulations and inspectors can be a good thing. For example, they are able to stop the guy next door from running a pig yard because it is contrary to the town plan. Gradually, it will also dawn on the rural people that provisions which relate to preventing people building illegal and unsafe structures are really in the public interest and not included simply to make their lives difficult.

Mr Deputy Speaker, that is all I have to say on the bill and I thank honourable members for their general support.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

In committee:

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 6 agreed to.

Clause 7:

Ms D'ROZARIO: Mr Chairman, during the second reading, the honourable member for Port Darwin and I raised the question of a tenant representative on the board of the commission. I appreciate the reasons given for the manner in which subclause (2) is phrased. I even suggested that the reason for the phrasing was the fact that people become owner occupants during the course of their appointments and would then have to be replaced. Whilst I am not suggesting that the clause be changed, I ask the honourable minister to give this Assembly an assurance that, as far as possible, the tenant representative will be a person who has the status of a tenant. By that I am not suggesting that, the moment a person becomes an owner occupant, he should step down automatically but simply that the minister should encourage his replacement by a person who is a...
tenant. The reason I put forward the suggestion is because the status of a tenant is very different indeed to the status of an owner occupant. I feel that, if we are to recognise that tenants should have some input to decisions of the commission, then the person representing them should be in a position to convey their views accurately.

Mr PERRON: Mr Chairman, I accept the point the honourable member makes. I would be delighted if the tenant representative were always a tenant. It is not proposed that I would have any power of dismissal here - the honourable member did not suggest that I should have - in the event that that person ceases to be a tenant and we find another eligible tenant. However, there are ways that these things can be effected by discussion and general agreement in many cases. If we can encourage someone to stand down in these circumstances, I would be very happy.

Clause 7 agreed to.

Clauses 8 to 15 agreed to.

Clause 16:

Mr BELL: I must rise to make a couple of comments in response to what the minister said in his second-reading speech. The government never misses an opportunity to suggest how difficult it is to live with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Clause 16(2)(c) confers on the commission the power to build on land, including land held by a private person. I would have said that that power quite clearly applies to the sort of land that the minister was referring to. A reading of today's Hansard will indicate that, during his speech, the minister contradicted himself. He had his little snipe to start with and then suggested towards the end of his comments that, in that particular area, there were really no problems. I would thank him if he adopted a slightly more constructive attitude in future.

Mr PERRON: Mr Chairman, let me change my snipe, as the honourable member calls it, to something more positive. I tried to explain to the honourable member that there were difficulties and complexities with the Housing Commission using, on Aboriginal inalienable freehold land, public money allocated for the construction of public housing. It seems that he cannot understand that. I did not say that the commission was prevented through statutory provisions from building houses on Aboriginal land. Clause 16(2)(c) clearly allows the commission to go on to private land, including Aboriginal land, and build a house. We are not about to go on private land in the middle of Stuart Park and build a public house. The provision is there so that we can build that person a house with money he provides. The opportunity has always been there for the commission to build houses of its own design on people's land. If the Housing commission were to use public funds to build houses on Aboriginal land, it would have virtually no control. Certainly, it would have no title to the land and could not possibly repossess the property. That is the type of problem I am talking about. If the commission could be provided by the Commonwealth, ADC or DAA with specific funds to build houses on Aboriginal land, we would be delighted to do that. The offer has been made and rejected.

Ms D'ROZARIO: Mr Chairman, the minister explained, in response to a concern that I had, that the provisions of subclause (3) may impede new schemes being introduced unless they provided for sale by public auction or tender by referring to subclause (4). Whilst I mentioned that I was reasonably satisfied that the transition provision of clause 40 provided some relief for the problem
that I had, he referred me to subclause (4) which did nothing but confuse me further. He pointed out that the minister could direct or authorise the commission to sell, lease or otherwise dispose of property by subclause (4). I am not quarrelling with the power of the minister to do that. Certainly, I am not saying that the commission ought not to be able to sell. All that does is reinforce the earlier provision in subclause (2) which permits the commission to sell its property. Subclause (3) goes a bit further in my view in that it specifies the manner in which the sale will take place. If subclause (4) were preceded by the words 'notwithstanding subclause (3)', I agree that a sale pursuant to subclause (4) could take place without public tender or auction. The minister referred to the 2 clauses being complementary. I think that subclause (3) determines the manner of sale and subclause (4) just that the sale can take place. In that sense, I do not believe that they are complementary and there still could be a problem with the introduction of a new scheme unless it were a scheme which could be said to be amended and therefore come within the provisions of clause 40.

Mr PERRON: Can I refer the honourable member to other provisions as well. Clause 36(2)(b) and (c) provides that the commission may, by regulation, adopt schemes for the disposal of property. It does not say in any way that they shall be constrained to public release or whatever. That is a way that the commission can dispose of property under various schemes in addition to 16(4). Clause 16(3) says, 'the commission shall not, except under this act...'. A direction under clause 16(4) would be a direction under the act. His direction to sell under whatever terms and conditions would be authorised under the act and therefore would not be in conflict with 16(3).

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clauses 17 to 28 agreed to.

Clause 29:

Mr BELL: I welcome the circulated amendment and appreciate the administrative problems of separate billing for the interest and the principal.

Mr PERRON: Mr Chairman, clause 29(4) merely makes the penalty interest a legal debt. The important words are 'shall be deemed to be' part of the principal interest payable. The reason for that clause is that the penalty interest shall be a legal debt. If we did not have that provision, we would need one enabling a presumably unsecured debt. I am advised that it does not really matter which way it is expressed. The effect is the same: it is a legal debt and will have to be discharged at the time of discharge of the mortgage. I am still in your hands. Would you like us to propose the amendment or not?

Mr Bell: Yes.

Mr PERRON: I move amendment 131.1.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 29, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 30 to 32 agreed to.

Clause 33 negatived.

New clause 33:
Mr PERRON: I move amendment 129.1.

This clause makes the commission liable for water rates in respect of water supplied to land on which a dwelling is situated other than excess water charges in relation to a dwelling that is separately metered. The reason for this amendment is that, in clause 33 which was just defeated, reference was made to the Supply of Services Act which may not be in force at the time this bill is to come into force.

New clause 33 agreed to.

Clause 34 agreed to.

New clause 34A:

Mr PERRON: I move amendment 129.2.

This new clause enables the minister to determine the sale price of a dwelling which is to be sold under this bill and requires the commission to sell that dwelling only at that determined price. That is, of course, where the minister chooses to intervene and require the commission to sell for other than the Valuer-General's price.

New clause 34A agreed to.

Clause 35 agreed to.

Clause 36:

Mr PERRON: I move amendment 129.3.

This obviously follows the earlier amendment where we inserted a new clause into the bill.

Amendment agreed to.

Clauses 37 to 44 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill passed remaining stages without debate.

STAMP DUTY AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 241)

Continued from 1 September 1982.

Ms D'ROZARIO (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, the most interesting feature of this bill from our point of view is that it clarifies the liability of joint tenants to pay stamp duty. The reason that this matter is of great interest is that there are provisions existing in the principal act which provide certain exemptions for persons buying their first house and also in certain other circumstances. Large numbers of people buy their houses as joint tenants. In fact, I would say the majority of people buy their houses as joint tenants with their spouses. This amendment seeks to clarify the liability of these people for stamp duty under that type of instrument.

At the moment, there is some argument as to whether each of those joint
tenants would be separately liable. Of course, that was not the intention of the act. The honourable minister has now presented an amendment to clarify that situation and it has been done simply by deeming that joint tenants, for this purpose, will be considered as tenants in common. The status of joint tenants and tenants in common is quite different under the Real Property Act. This particular amendment does not seek to alter that relationship for the purposes of the Real Property Act but only for the purpose of assessing duty. Therefore, we support it.

The other interesting matter in relation to joint tenants is that consideration for improvements can be made by them when the property is conveyed or transferred. For that purpose, the value of improvements can be taken into account and part exemption provided.

Mr Speaker, the other matter is in respect to the liability of statutory corporations. This bill provides that statutory corporations are liable to pay stamp duty except in cases where the instruments are prescribed exemptions. Again, it was of course always intended that statutory corporations should not have automatic exemptions from the liability to pay stamp duty and the amendment in proposed new section 6A clarifies that matter.

Mr Speaker, we support the amendments to the Stamp Duty Act.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

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

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

TAXATION (ADMINISTRATION) AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 242)

Continued from 1 September 1982.

Ms D'ROZARIO (Sanderson): Mr Speaker, once again the opposition supports the contents of this bill. It seeks to provide a fairly automatic mechanism for the collection of stamp duty by making it an offence to register an instrument on which duty has not been paid. In these days of much talk about avoidance of liability for taxes, this is a fairly sensible insertion. The amounts recovered on individual transactions are fairly small but the volume of transactions can be quite large in any particular period under consideration. The provision in proposed new section 9A is that it will be an offence to register an instrument on which stamp duty has not been paid. Of course, it would be in the interest of all those who wish to have their instruments recognised to pay the stamp duty rather than have their interests not registered.

As I say, the amounts on individual instruments can be quite small. I know of recent examples where, on the conveyance of a house, the stamp duty was about $160. I know of other examples where the stamp duty has been even lower. Certainly, it would not be an economic proposition for the Commissioner of Taxes to institute recovery proceedings against these people to get them to pay the stamp duty. The simplest way of doing it is not to register their interests unless the stamp duty is paid.

The other matter which this bill addresses is the question of refunds. Proposed new section 56A sets out not only the conditions under which a refund would be forthcoming but also the time limit for claiming it. Again this is an
administrative matter. There are a number of cases where, owing to changes in circumstances, people are entitled to a refund of duty. A 90-day limit has been imposed. If the person claiming the refund does not do so within 90 days, he loses his right to it.

The other matter covered is fairly simple. It is to allow the duty on instruments to be denoted by an impressed stamp rather than by a sticky stamp. Again this is a machinery amendment which we support. I know of a few people who have been inconvenienced by having to purchase these sticky stamps. Now they simply go to the registrar and have their instruments impressed.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

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

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

MEDICAL SERVICES BILL
(Serial 238)

Continued from 1 September 1982.

Mrs O'NEIL (Fannie Bay): Mr Speaker, the bill before us replaces the existing Hospital and Medical Services Act bringing this legislation up to date in view of the changing circumstances of the provision of medical services in the Northern Territory. The existing act is some decades old and has been amended many times. This bill provides a legal authority for government medical services in the Northern Territory.

Members will note that it expands the range of services and enables the Department of Health to charge private practitioners fees for the use of government facilities. It is interesting to note in the definitions reference to chiropractic and natural therapy services. I would be pleased if the Minister for Health could provide the definitions of those services since, in the past in this Assembly, we have seen legislation on chiropractic introduced and subsequently withdrawn. Such definitions are not easy to frame but, as they are included in this bill, doubtless the minister has some idea of what he means by them.

The bill also covers the transportation of patients, as necessary, within the Northern Territory and from the Territory to other places to seek specialist treatment. It incorporates the more recent policy changes regarding transportation of patients. In the past, the department had a policy of paying air fares for patients whose travel was deemed necessary by the department's own specialists for purposes of certain treatment. Following the introduction of IPTAAS, the department changed its policy. Unless they are in necessitous circumstances, people pay for their own transport and can then reclaim the cost from the Commonwealth government. This change relating to transportation costs causes some hardship and concern in the community. I trust the minister will ensure that those provisions allowing the Department of Health to continue to pay fares from time to time are interpreted liberally. Undoubtedly, it can cause great hardship to people to have to find an additional air fare or perhaps 2 for a child and a parent to travel, say, from Gove to Darwin or from Darwin to Sydney, in the case of a patient requiring medical treatment. While those persons may not be pensioners or otherwise necessitous in terms of other Commonwealth definitions, nevertheless to find those air fares can create very grave difficulty for them. I believe that people require an assurance that that scheme
will be administered liberally. A number of cases have been brought to my attention in recent times relating to the cost of air fares.

Mr Speaker, the title of this bill is the Medical Services Bill. I suggest its long title could be the 'Curious Case of the Missing Medical Officer'. Mr Speaker, you will be aware that we have a statutory position in the Territory of Chief Medical Officer who is both a registered medical practitioner in the Territory and a public servant employed within the Department of Health here. The position has always been that the person who is the Chief Medical Officer, for purposes of the Public Health Act and other acts, is also the head of the Department of Health. This need not necessarily be so. It seems curious to me that only last year, for example, we passed an act relating to the regulation of private hospitals and nursing homes in the Northern Territory. We gave the Chief Medical Officer substantial powers and responsibilities relating to private hospitals in that act. Before us now, we have another bill introduced by the Minister for Health relating to public hospitals and health services and yet it contains no reference to the Chief Medical Officer. The duties are divided between the Minister for Health and the Secretary of the Department of Health. I would ask the minister if he can explain to us this quite substantial change of policy.

Members might recall that I asked the minister a question in the course of the last sittings about a change in his policy relating to persons in charge of hospitals who, in the past, have always been medical officers. Now they no longer are despite the minister's reference in this Assembly some years ago to the fact that it was his policy that they should be. That is clearly a case where he has changed his policy. Policy, of course, is a matter for the minister, not the department, although he is guided by the department. I ask him how he now sees the position of Chief Medical Officer in the Northern Territory.

Nevertheless the opposition supports this new, streamlined Medical Services Bill for the provision of health and medical services in the Northern Territory.

Mr HARRIS (Port Darwin): Mr Speaker, the principle of providing the best medical services possible to the people of the Territory no matter where they live at a price similar to that they would pay if they were living in one of the major southern cities is one which every member in this Assembly would accept. That principle is one of the objects of this bill. We have come a long way since the open ward situation. The facilities and services provided in the hospitals and health centres of the Northern Territory are as good as those provided in most major cities in Australia. I would like to go on record as congratulating all those people who have been involved over the years in providing such a wonderful service to our people.

My main concern over the years has been to push for private facilities to be made available to the people of the Territory. Even though some of these facilities are placed on sites that I would not agree are ideal - and I am referring specifically to the nursing home that the member for Fannie Bay referred to last night - the facilities are still provided. One of the problems that we have had is that private organisations such as that nursing home are offered a number of sites on which they can build the facility. In this case, they decided that the site that suits them is Palmerston and also that they will operate the facility in the manner that they see fit. There is no option. I agree with the member for Fannie Bay that there is a need for input from local people but we are placed in the position of saying, 'Do you want the facility or not'. My view is that we should have it and be pleased to have it. It is a service provided for aged people even though some of us might not agree...
with the way in which it is being constructed or its siting. It will benefit the aged people of the Territory. The same thing has happened with the hospital. One is now able to obtain a private room. I am pleased to see that these options are available.

One of the initiatives that I am very interested in is that in clause 17. Provision is made for the government to charge private practitioners and private dentists for the use of government facilities. At present, no charge is made. I raise this point because, if a charge is made, somewhere along the line the costs will increase. I am not aware that governments in other parts of Australia charge private practitioners or specialists for the use of their facilities. In most cases, the specialists in those particular areas are members of a private hospital consortium and there is no need for government hospitals to make charges. I would like the minister to give me some idea of what an appropriate fee will be for the use of the government's facilities. If a private hospital were established in Darwin, perhaps the provisions that we have here would not be necessary.

The other interesting point is that specialists who are now employed by the government will be able to move out into private practice and still use the hospital facilities. At the same time, the government will be able to buy back their services when the need arises. We have lost specialists in the past because of the lack of suitable facilities for them to carry out their work. We want to keep these qualified people in the Territory. That is one of the reasons why I support this move by the government wholeheartedly. I would still prefer to see a private hospital established to cater for the needs of the people of the Territory but it appears that, at this stage, that is some way off. I am pleased to see that facilities available at our hospital give people the choice of accommodation they prefer.

I am pleased to see that the government is moving with the times and looking to the future. The opportunity is there to ensure that our own people receive vital medical services at a cost which they would be paying if they were living in one of the major cities in Australia. I support the bill.

Mrs PADCHAM-PURICH (Tiwi): Mr Speaker, to consider the current legislation relating to medical services in the Northern Territory and other legislation which has operated since the Commonwealth days is in many ways to look at anachronisms. We have very old legislation that is trying to keep up with modern times. The current legislation dealing with medical services and hospitals is good as far as it goes. However, to keep pace with the times, amendment after amendment has been passed over the years. The more amendments that are passed, the harder it is for people to understand. Before its consolidation a few months ago, the Crown land legislation had so many amendments to amendments that even the Lands Department officers had difficulty understanding and interpreting it. Legislation must be clearly presented to be understood. This bill is clearly and concisely written. It is easy to understand and I feel sure it is comprehensive.

My first comment on the legislation itself relates to the definition of 'medical services'. The definition is very extensive in that it takes into account medical services which are not available at the moment such as chiropractic and natural therapy services. We have had legislation before the Assembly relating to chiropractic services. No doubt, when legislation is passed to register chiropractic and natural therapy services and they become available in our hospitals, they will come under the definition of 'medical services'.
Nowhere in the definition clause or in any other clause can I find any reference to or definition of 'acupuncture'. I know this technique is used by medical practitioners in certain cases. I also know that there are people who are not medical practitioners who practice acupuncture. I am assuming that, if acupuncture is used and is to be considered under 'medical services', it would have to be carried out by a medical practitioner as the legislation is now written. If the need arises and acupuncturists are registered separately, the definition of 'medical services' may change in the future. Despite the fact that chiropractic and natural therapy services are mentioned, I understand that people will not be able to claim on medical benefits organisations for these services. It is not our legislation which determines what claims can be made but that of the Commonwealth.

I have no quarrel with the fact that this legislation will set a scale of fees for the use of hospital facilities by medical practitioners. I am sure that medical practitioners will not fail to pass this fee on to their patients so they will not be out of pocket. The patients will not be either because they will pass it on to their health insurance company.

Mr Speaker, I do not have an intimate knowledge of the running of hospitals because, in all the years we have been up here, I have only had the misfortune to be hospitalised 3 times, unlike less fortunate people who have to spend a lot of time there. More choice will be available in the services that are offered to the general public. Recently, the subject was raised of hiring private rooms in hospitals. We have come a long way from the medical treatment that was offered when we first came to Darwin.

The Darwin Hospital is a magnificent structure but it has a certain dehumanising effect on the whole exercise of going to hospital. It was different in the days of the old Darwin Hospital. I remember when we first came here that things were very human in the old Darwin Hospital. Patients felt that they were getting well very quickly because the atmosphere was just like home. There was natural ventilation. Visits were unlimited provided visitors behaved themselves. Everything was much more friendly and natural. There were pictures on the lawn every Saturday night for the pre-ambulatory patients and friends who happened to be there.

I would like to mention an added service that was offered by the Darwin Hospital in those days: the treatment of dogs. I cannot remember the doctor's name but there was one doctor who had a reputation as a very good veterinary surgeon. Provided the operating theatre was vacant, he would spay your bitch, perform a caesarean section, mend a broken leg or do whatever else you wanted done to your dog. When we first came up here, one of my dogs was bitten by a king brown snake. There were no private veterinary surgeons up here then. I rang the hospital and they said bring the dog in. We arrived a little late because a king brown bite to a little dog is rather drastic but, when we arrived at the hospital, there were 2 outpatient beds prepared. One was used by a human patient and the other one was prepared for my dog. I thought that was very nice. That service was extended to other people who had sick dogs. The hospital staff would make their professional services and drugs available.

Mr Speaker, some of my constituents from Bathurst and Melville Islands also have drawn to my attention the rather austere, forbidding and frigid surroundings of the Darwin Hospital. It has been mentioned in the Assembly before that Aboriginal people find the hospital very unfriendly because of the way it is built. We cannot do anything about that now. But the old Darwin Hospital was a much more friendly place, especially for Aboriginal people coming to town. Many years ago, Sister Kathleen Ryan was in charge of the ward for Aboriginal
men. She became a legend in her own time. She was a very kind person. She was a very proficient sister and had a lot of common sense. People like her laid the foundation for the nursing service and the hospital services in the Territory that we enjoy today. Although the staff at the Darwin Hospital are as competent and as kind as they were in the past, I regret that we do not have the same sort of friendly building that we had in the old days.

Mrs LAWRIE (Nightcliff): Mr Speaker, I wish to speak briefly to express, as an independent, my support for the bill. I am particularly pleased at this revision of what was an old piece of legislation, amended so many times, which became, as the honourable member for Fannie Bay said, unwieldy. I hope that as its legislative program slows down, the government will be in a position to revise other acts and bring in completely new ones which are updated, simple, straightforward and easy to read. This is a perfect example of that. It is well laid out, highly visible and able to be interpreted by any member of the public. That is what laws are all about.

I listened with some interest to the honourable member for Tiwi when she mentioned the variety of services that the old Darwin Hospital offered. Like the member for Tiwi, I am a healthy young woman and have spent hardly any time in hospital. Those times have been at the old Darwin Hospital and I share her feelings about Casuarina. I gave evidence to the public works hearing years ago when it came to Darwin and, despite all the local evidence which was by and large against that design, that was the one chosen and that is the one that we have to live with.

She referred to the feeling of strangeness, which is true not only for visitors but for patients. It is so different to their homes that they suffer a form of shock. It is very easy for a person to become immediately dependent upon the hospital and lose a lot of self-reliance, which is a very bad thing. We will not labour that point this afternoon because it has been spoken of before and I am sure it will be spoken of for as long as we have no alternative facility to the new Darwin Hospital. However, legislation is not sufficient of itself. We need enough staff to run the hospital adequately and sufficient supervisory staff to assure us that those very dedicated employees are not overworked and tired, and that mistakes are not likely to happen.

In the context of the remarks of the honourable member for Tiwi about dogs and cats being castrated and spayed, may I say that I have had representations from a gentleman. I am glad those practices have ceased because who knows what might have happened? He was admitted to the Darwin Hospital on 30 August this year at 7.15 am. He was operated on at 9 am. Twenty-four hours later, he looked at his arm and discovered that he had the wrong name on his wrist. Somewhat alarmed, he hobbled to the chart at the foot of the bed and that had the wrong name too. He was very relieved that he had had the right operation. He was known to both the surgeon and the anaethetist. Notwithstanding the incorrect tagging, the gentleman received the treatment for which he was admitted to hospital.

Mr Speaker, I only bring that forward in this debate because, no matter how good the legislation is, it is the backup services and staffing levels which will determine the quality of the delivery of health care in the Territory. Like other members, I appreciate the dedication of the staff we have. I hope that the Territory budget in coming years will allow that staff to be expanded because, as medical technology expands, we need people to administer it to the patients with the time and devotion which they have always shown and with full professional and very caring responsibility.
Mr TUXWORTH (Health): Mr Speaker, I thank honourable members for their support of the bill. There are several points that I would like to touch on for the benefit of honourable members because I believe they are worthy of comment. They were raised on a note of seriousness by speakers and I think it only reasonable that the information be provided.

The honourable member for Fannie Bay referred to transportation of patients. Up until a year or two ago, patients were carried by the department or at the expense of the department whether in the Territory or out of the Territory. Some years ago, when the honourable Ralph Hunt was Minister for Health, he introduced a subsidy scheme for travel for patients called IPTAAS. In simple terms, IPTAAS is very beneficial to Territorians because it enables us, as a government, and the people, as individuals, to claim money from the Commonwealth for the movement of patients which normally would have been billed to our account. In that sense, it is a very beneficial payment to the Territory. It is a great scheme and it is one which I think we should all use prudently. The department tries to do that.

Mr Speaker, for the benefit of the honourable member, patients carried within the Territory or sent interstate who are referred by doctors to specialists qualify under IPTAAS. Where it is understood that the patient has the capacity to pay and then claim back later, that request is made. If the department has any reason to believe at all that the patient does not have the capacity to make the payment and await the repayment from the Commonwealth, then the department steps in and pays the amount. I think that is a fairly reasonable proposition.

On the other hand, the department still carries at its own expense within and without the Territory people whom it believes should be its responsibility. I would say to the honourable member that every effort is made to apply the travel system to patients in the most generous, fair and equitable manner. If any member has knowledge of somebody who has been disadvantaged or unfairly treated by the application of the travel system, I would be only too pleased to hear about it so that I can feed it into the system and the matter can be addressed. I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that to my knowledge there has never been an attempt made to effect financial savings by restricting patient travel. The government would not subscribe to that.

Mr Speaker, the honourable member for Fannie Bay also raised the matter of the Chief Medical Officer. I am not being obtuse but I did not quite follow the honourable member's drift. Under several acts the Chief Medical Officer has statutory responsibility, particularly in relation to some matters of public health administration. Really, any doctor in the department can be appointed to the position of Chief Medical Officer for the administration of those acts. Traditionally, the Chief Medical Officer has been the Secretary. Dr Fleming divests that responsibility to Dr Quinn or Dr Chalmers, depending on the administrative arrangements that prevail from time to time. I have the greatest of confidence in both of those men and no reservations about either of them being appointed Chief Medical Officer from time to time. I do not see that there is any particular need for the Secretary of the Health Department to be the Chief Medical Officer.

The honourable member for Port Darwin raised the issue with me of what is an appropriate fee for use of hospital facilities by specialists that are charged or likely to be charged. Mr Speaker, the striking of charges or levels of fees is always a contentious issue whether it be for a doctor's time, a theatre space, a bed, drugs or whatever. The department uses a variety of mechanisms. Quite often, there are established charging systems which we can
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pick up and use. For instance, in setting hourly fees for doctors who carry out a sessional function for the department, all state systems throughout Australia have an arrangement with the AMA and there is a structured hourly fee for the respective sections of the profession. In so far as charges for the use of theatre or whatever are concerned, again we turn to the established practices in the states. We would not be looking to charge more or give away things unnecessarily but simply to be fair and reasonable in the way we dispense the services.

Mr Speaker, the honourable member for Tiwi referred to acupuncture and chiropractic services in hospitals. She asked who would conduct them and what the set-up would be. I do not have answers to those particular questions. I can advise the honourable member that acupuncture is carried out in the hospital in Tennant Creek by a doctor from Alice Springs from time to time. To my knowledge, chiropractic has not been practised in the hospital but there is nothing debarring it so far as I can see. I will address myself to those matters and provide the information to her in writing at a later time.

Mr Speaker, the honourable member alluded also to the period when hospitals were used as veterinary stations. Regrettably, that practice cannot continue, mainly in the interests of the patients. I wish we could charge as much for our patients as veterinary surgeons charge for pets. It would be a very lucrative business. I recall the time when Dr Vic Webb, who has been in the Commonwealth departmental system for 25 or 30 years, was the doctor in Tennant Creek. I remember him thawing out a baby kangaroo in his kitchen oven on one occasion.

The honourable member for Nightcliff also commented on the design of the hospital at Casuarina. I guess one great difficulty in the cost of our system is the design of our hospitals at Darwin, Gove and Alice Springs. They are very unfortunate designs so far as our communities and costs of operation are concerned. I think it significant and interesting that the most suitably designed hospital in the Territory is the Tennant Creek Hospital. It was designed by local people from the Department of Transport and Works. It was not a design from another place that was picked up and implemented in Tennant Creek. It is one more example of how a little local knowledge goes a long way in providing the services to the community that it really needs.

The honourable member for Nightcliff also referred to the need to maintain satisfactory staff levels. Let me reiterate that staff levels are related to patient numbers and the doctors and managers in the hospitals have the authority to raise and lower staff levels as patient demand rises and falls. There is no arbitrary level on the number of people who work in our hospitals. The managers have that in their control. The honourable member also told an interesting story of a case of mistaken identity involving a patient who knew he lost something that he did not want to lose. I thought I had read that somewhere in Reader's Digest; it is a really good story. It can happen to anybody anywhere.

Mrs Lawrie: I have his name here.

Mr TUXWORTH: You have his name. Is that right? It just goes to show that it can happen to anybody anywhere.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, could I say for the benefit of honourable members that there is an important aspect of this bill that is very relevant. I do not wish to seem particularly mercenary in explaining this point. There are many people in the Territory who pay hospital benefit charges and those charges entitle the patient to claim on that fund money for a wide range of services that are offered. One of our difficulties has been the legislative one that we
have not been able to charge for services that we were entitled to charge for. This bill will enable us to do that. There is no impost on the patient or the fund member, Mr Speaker. The fund levy has been based on patients having these charges made against them. We are now able to raise invoices for services that, in any other part of Australia, would have been raised as a matter of course. I think that is one of the benefits that will come from this legislation.

I thank honourable members for their support and advise that I do not have any amendments.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

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

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Mr ROBERTSON (Education): Mr Speaker, I move that the Assembly, at its rising, do adjourn until 10 am on Tuesday 16 November 1982 or until such time and date as may be notified by Mr Speaker pursuant to sessional order.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr ROBERTSON (Education): Mr Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr B. COLLINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, I will not take up much of the time of the Assembly in the adjournment this afternoon. Indeed, all I have to do is read a letter. I was handed this letter about 3 o'clock this afternoon by the Chairman of the Northern Territory Development Corporation. I do not intend to make any comment on the contents of the letter or its veracity. Obviously, I cannot do this because it was only given to me at 3 o'clock this afternoon. I had the opportunity to speak with the chairman prior to his leaving the precincts of the Assembly and, having read the letter, I advised him verbally that I found it most unusual that I should be given it. I told him that the person who should read the letter is the minister to whom he is responsible. Nevertheless, I was asked to read this into Hansard and I do so. It is addressed to myself:

Dear Mr Collins,

Re Territory Development Corporation Assembly Debate Tuesday 12 October 1982.

The purpose of this letter is to seek your assistance in correcting certain statements which you made in the debate on the Northern Territory Development Corporation in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday 12 October 1982.

On page 83 of the Hansard of that day, you stated that I had worked for Mr Dalziel in Western Australia and also had dealings with that person in New South Wales. This is not entirely correct and I would place the following information before you. In about May 1969, I commenced working for a public company called Michael Nairn and
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Company Limited in Sydney as personnel manager. In about March 1970, that company was taken over by a group of Sydney businessmen. After the takeover, I became aware that the group consisted of 4 persons named Wardell, Todd, Chadwick and Dalziel. On the takeover, a new Chief Executive was appointed whose name was Mr John Marshall and I was promoted by Mr Marshall to the position of Office and Personnel Manager. I was responsible to Mr Marshall for the performance of my duties. From the period of the takeover until I left the company in 1971, I got to know the 4 persons involved in the takeover by sight but I had no dealings with them. I attended no board meetings nor did I attend any meetings at which those persons were present. I did not meet any of those persons on a social basis.

In early 1971, the company was again sold and Mr Marshall advised me that the new owners would probably wish to appoint their own senior executives. With this in mind, I sought alternative employment and, in August 1971, I left the company. I never saw nor heard again of Mr Dalziel until I was introduced to him in early December 1980 at the Travelodge in Darwin. At that time, I recognised both the name and the face. I had no dealings with Mr Dalziel in Western Australia and at no time, since May 1969 and until the Buntine collapse, did I have any knowledge of any misdoings by Mr Dalziel. Apart from the facts I have put to you above, I have had no business dealings with Mr Dalziel.

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to seek to set the record straight as, in my view, there is some possibility of persons drawing conclusions from your remarks in the Assembly that I had previous business associations with Mr Dalziel and that, in fact, I used my position as chairman of the corporation to bestow upon Mr Dalziel favours or favourable treatment which would not have been bestowed upon persons whom I had not previously met. I can assure you that such was not the case and I would seek your assistance in setting the record straight so that any innuendos which could have been drawn from your address in the Assembly cannot now be legitimately drawn. I am available to discuss this matter with you should you so desire.

Yours sincerely,

Ted Simpson.

Mr Speaker, obviously I have no intention of commenting on the content of the letter, but I took up Mr Simpson's invitation to discuss the matter with him. I advised him that the opportunity would be available for his minister to read this letter to the Assembly this afternoon in the adjournment. I was asked to do it and, in fairness to Mr Simpson, I was happy to comply.

Mr STEELE (Primary Production): Mr Speaker, I advise the Assembly that the government will be making a submission to the Industries Assistance Commission inquiry into abattoirs and meat processing in Australia under the terms of reference that have been provided. In particular, the clause we will address is warranted in rationalising the location and capacity of plants in the industry. There are other terms of reference that need to be addressed by the unions and the industry itself and obviously some reference will be made to them in the Territory government submission. Clearly, it is our responsibility at this time to define the beef industry situation to the Industries Assistance Commission. In view of some of the failing standards revealed in the Royal
Commission's report by Mr Justice Woodward, it is apparent that the government must set on record its position in respect of Northern Territory abattoirs.

Mr Speaker, I will give some general information about abattoirs in the Territory. I believe the Northern Territory is very well serviced with export abattoirs and domestic standard kill abattoirs. Specifically, some abattoirs have been going down hill as far as their general ability to maintain satisfactory standards of kill and performance during recent years. Abattoirs that have not been doing so well are Meneling, McArthur River and Uralla. I believe that Corkwood Bore is in need of substantial upgrading to stay in the market. Wales Australian Resources Pty Ltd holds a lease over the site of the old Uralla meatworks. The company intends to build an export standard abattoir. Under the Abattoirs and Slaughtering Act all abattoirs in the Territory are required to hold a NT government licence, regardless of whether they have export status or not. An application was lodged by Katherine Abattoirs Pty Ltd. This is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Wales Australian Resources Pty Ltd. It was declared by the Chief Inspector of Abattoirs, Dr Graeme Fallon, to be invalid as it did not conform with the act. The company was advised of this decision by letter on 24 August 1982. In a telephone discussion with Mr Milton Hayward, he accepted this action and agreed that when the company was ready to proceed it would lodge formal application. An application has not been received by the Department of Primary Production.

In the course of these events, Norwest Beef advised the department in writing of its objection to the issue of a licence. The old abattoir is being demolished but the department's objective assessment is that the proposal is unlikely to proceed. The Department of Aviation advised the Department of Primary Production in writing that the land in question has been proclaimed under Air Navigation Regulations which effectively will restrict any activity on the land which may create a bird hazard. The Department of Defence, through Administrative Services Darwin, has advised verbally that it will also object to the issue of an abattoir licence in respect to the site.

Mr Speaker, I think it is an easy conclusion to draw that the federal Minister for Primary Industry will be paying particular attention to future applications for licences to export beef, particularly to the US. To my mind, not only is it doubtful that the Northern Territory could sustain further abattoirs at this particular time but also that the federal minister would want to license further abattoirs here.

Mr Speaker, another matter I want to raise today is the development of horticulture in the Northern Territory with particular reference to displays that have been undertaken in conjunction with the Agricultural Development and Marketing Authority and the Department of Primary Production. I draw attention to public reaction to a local produce display which was held recently at Casuarina Square. Some 45 people took the opportunity to avail themselves of a suggestion box which was placed close to the display. Comments included the following:

Fresh produce is great.
After having our own fruit and vegetable shop we find the quality and appearance is something growers can be proud of.
We cannot imagine why people buy second-rate produce from southern states.
Shows we can grow it just as well if not better than other places in Australia.
Very delicious fruit, please promote it more.
Most impressive display seen in this public area.
Good public relations. I would much prefer to buy locally-grown fruit even if it is at southern prices.
Well done growers, marketing people, promoters. Keep up the good work.
If it can be grown here, why import it?

Beats deterioration.

I had no idea that we produced so much so well.
Let's succeed further and secede from the southern markets.
Fantastic to see such superior fresh vegetables and fruit.
I think this is the most incredible display of absolutely fantastic top quality fruit, equal to the best, if not better than the best, to be found in the south. Keep up the good work.

Great stuff. It is about time we could buy fresh food.
I have been here for 13 years and was always told you could not grow anything in Darwin or the Northern Territory. This proves how wrong people are and I hope the local buyers are impressed.

Mr Speaker, I am fairly impressed by those expressions of support for the endeavours of growers and people who are promoting the products and those who are providing extension services in the field.

Mr Speaker, in response to the Leader of the Opposition, I would have readily presented the letter. The Chairman of NTDC requested the Leader of the Opposition to do so. Obviously, he thought he could get better mileage out of asking the Leader of the Opposition to present it. I have no idea of his motives in that regard.

Mr SMITH (Millner): Mr Speaker, this morning we witnessed an amazing display of incompetence from the Minister for Transport and Works concerning the operation of the Government Printing Office for the financial year ending 30 June 1980 and subsequently. I have only been in the Assembly a short time but the performance of the honourable Minister for Transport and Works this morning was an eye-opener to me. I would hope that we do not see too many performances like that from him or his government colleagues.

What we had this morning was a situation where a document had lain on the table of this Assembly for 2 days, a document headed, 'Department of Transport and Works Government Printing Office Financial Statement - Year Ended 30 June 1980'. On the first day it lay on the table, it became clear to us that the document made a number of damaging statements against the operation of the Government Printing Office. Those statements were made by the Auditor-General and basically said that, in the financial year ending 30 June 1980, the records of the Government Printing Office were in such an appalling state that the Auditor-General had no way of making an assessment of whether what he had been presented with was in fact an accurate representation of how money had been spent in the Government Printing Office during those 12 months.

We have had 2 days to look at the document. We have been able to ascertain in that time that there are a number of questions that both the honourable Minister for Transport and Works and the honourable Treasurer should answer. The honourable Minister for Transport and Works has had 6 months to ascertain that there are no serious charges in this report which have not been answered. I would like to nail one misstatement that the minister made to this Assembly this morning. The letter from the Auditor-General was not to the head of his secretariat, the head of the Department of Transport and Works. It was in fact to himself. The date of the letter from the Auditor-General is 16 March 1982. Very clearly in that letter, which is in the document that has lain on the table of this Assembly for 2 days, is the date of the receipt of the letter in the minister's office. That date is 1 week later; 23 March.
The minister has had 6 months in which to investigate the contents of this document and the statements of the Auditor-General, to satisfy himself that these things had improved in that area and to answer the questions that the honourable member for Sanderson and myself posed to him this morning. But his response was not that he had examined the document and had the answers but that he had sent out for a full report from his department. It is obvious that he sent out for that full report about 2 minutes before we asked the questions. That is a glaring example of incompetence. Not only do we have that sort of incompetence but we also have incompetence in the fact that the minister was not able to fulfil his responsibility under the act to table the document within 6 sitting days. Again, no reason was given by the minister for his failure in that regard.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. It reflects in a broader sense the way this government sees the Assembly and the contempt it expresses on too many occasions for its operation. The Territory Labor Party sees the Assembly as an institution through which the interests of the whole community are protected. Our concern over the operations of NTDC have always revolved around the lack of accountability for how it spends considerable amounts of public money. Our concern about the lack of accountability by the government to the Assembly has also resulted in repeated calls for the establishment of a public accounts committee. Each time the issue of accountability for public expenditure is raised in this Assembly, the government's response is: 'We have the Financial Administration and Audit Act. All departments and statutory bodies are required to meet the requirements of that act. Therefore, the community money is in fact protected'. Mr Speaker, to use the words of the member for Sanderson in a debate on accountability for NTDC, that is, theoretically, the case.

Might I remind members that it was not until the middle of 1981 that the 1978-79 Annual Report of the Northern Territory Development Corporation was tabled. On this failure of NTDC even to meet the requirements of the Financial Administration and Audit Act - which we, I might add, consider totally inadequate for the purposes of accountability of that statutory body - the Northern Territory News in an editorial on 20 April 1981 described the government's failure as 'a further example of the Northern Territory government acting as a law unto itself'. That editorial went on to say that, both legally and morally, this was a scandalous state of affairs.

Mr Speaker, we now have another example of what can only be described as a scandalous state of affairs. According to the Annual Report of the Government Printing Office, no financial statements were prepared for the year ended 30 June 1979. Further, in the year ending 30 June 1980, the general ledger was not fully maintained on a normal commercial basis. There was no way for the Auditor-General to verify sales of $2.4m for that financial year. As at 16 March 1982, there were no known details about the terms and conditions of a loan of some $3.5m that was granted to the Government Printing Office by the Northern Territory government in June 1978. Further, there was a loss of some $223 000 for the financial year 1978-79 that the Auditor-General was unable to account for because of totally inadequate accounting procedures. There was a further breach of the Financial Administration and Audit Act in relation to this annual report and that was the failure of the minister to table the document within 6 sitting days of this Assembly from the date he received it.

Mr Speaker, the minister received this report in late March this year. When I asked the minister a question relating to the late tabling of this report this morning, his answer was that there had been some disruption in the Department of Transport and Works following the resignation of Mr Rod Unwin as
secretary. But he then went on to say; 'I really at this stage cannot give the honourable member any reason as to why there has been a delay because there was no reason'. They were the minister's exact words this morning, 6 months after he received the report. Three months later, under the terms of the relevant act, he was supposed to table the report. Nor did the minister know the current position in relation to a statement of accounts of the Government Printing Office for the year ending 30 June 1981.

I might add at this stage that, under section 30 of the act, the time limit for presenting statements of accounts in each financial year is 6 months after the conclusion of the previous financial year. It is now 15 months after the conclusion of that financial year and the minister cannot answer the simple question of whether the statement of accounts has gone to the Auditor-General. In accordance with the act, that statement should have been made available to the Auditor-General within 6 months of the end of the financial year 1980-81.

Mr Deputy Speaker, in relation to the terms and conditions of a government loan of $3.5m to the Government Printing Office in June 1978, the shadow treasurer and member for Sanderson asked the Treasurer why there were no terms or conditions set on the loan at the time it was granted and whether terms and conditions had now been applied to that loan. According to the Auditor-General, there were no terms or conditions applied to that loan as at 16 March this year. That was nearly 4 years after it was granted. This morning the Treasurer had no idea what terms and conditions apply to this loan.

It is obvious that this government has major problems in managing public finance. Apparently these problems are continuing in relation to the Government Printing Office as evidenced by the minister's inability to inform the Assembly this morning as to the status of the accounts for 1980 and 1981. This debacle in relation to the financial administration of the Government Printing Office is yet another clear illustration of the need for a public accounts committee to be established as part of the operations of this Assembly to ensure that this government is made accountable to the Territory community for the expenditure of Territory money.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the honourable Minister for Transport and Works, if he is game to rise to his feet when I have completed, will probably attempt to answer the questions that the honourable member for Sanderson and I posed this morning. By doing so, he will compound his ignorance. He will compound his felony. If the information can be found within one day, that is further reason for condemning the minister for not carrying out his statutory responsibilities and providing the information when he was required to. In this case no excuse can hide the fact that, under the act, the buck stops with the minister. He has failed the test. He has shown himself incompetent and he deserves the greatest possible condemnation.

Mr DONDAS (Transport and Works): Mr Speaker, I would like to make some observations about queries that were raised by honourable members during the course of this sittings. The first one is the fire report on the Jape Arcade which I promised I would give this Assembly during the course of the sittings. The report that I have is as follows. The apparent cause of the fire was a lighted cigarette thrown into a plastic waste paper bin which set fire to bins and waste paper and spread to an office chair and curtains causing noxious smoke. It is undesirable to use plastic bins in offices and attention is drawn to fire safety circular regulation no 37 from the Commonwealth Fire Board recommending a metal bin with space for air circulation beneath the bin.

A summary of the examination of the fire is as follows. Hose reels on the
fourth and fifth floors were not charged. Booster pumps were incorrectly connected and details about this were to be obtained from a plumber later. The fire alarm system worked satisfactorily but was not connected to the fire brigade headquarters at the time of the fire. NTEC has a separate evacuation system. It is manual for NTEC's own area. NTEC thought the system would automatically operate the building fire alarm system but found that it was not connected to the building alarm system. Air-conditioning was turned off by manual operation in the plant room on the 5th floor by an NTEC employee before the automatic operation cut in. Pressurisation of staircase systems functioned satisfactorily on the operation of the alarm system. Workmen extinguished the fire with hand extinguishers.

A general observation was that subsequent inspections of the building on 30 September 1982 by the Northern Territory Fire Brigade found that it was safe for occupation, the means of escape were satisfactory, fire-fighting equipment was operational and accessible, fire detection systems were all functioning satisfactorily and compartmentalisation and fire penetration stopping were both satisfactory.

On 1 October 1982 a further inspection was carried out by the Northern Territory Fire Brigade on the Jape Plaza building at the request of the Chairman of NTEC and the details of this inspection accord with the above. Two items do not meet fire safety hazard standards but had been approved by the Building Board: Australian Standard 1908 part 1 in relation to fitting of fire doors mentioned and glass fitted in light wells which should be either wired glass or fire-rated glass. Mr Deputy Speaker, it is the opinion of the Northern Territory Fire Brigade that the premises now comply with current fire safety standards except on these 2 points.

The other question that was asked of me during the course of the Assembly sittings concerned a gate or fence crossing the Bynoe Harbour Road. My investigations reveal that there are no fences or gates across the Bynoe Harbour Road. However, a gate placed across the Finniss River Station Road may be illegal. We are investigating whether or not it is legal.

I would like to bring to the attention of the Assembly the recommendations of the report of the Youth Needs Survey in the northern suburbs. Most members would be aware that, early this year, the Chief Minister and I held a public meeting at the Casuarina High School with a number of people to discuss the needs of youth in the northern suburbs. About 200 people attended that meeting and a steering committee was set up to report back to that general meeting. A further meeting took place on 25 August and a series of recommendations were accepted. I will read them into Hansard because of the obvious need for the government to act on some of the recommendations.

The report recommended that the Casuarina High School proposal be implemented within the 1982-84 financial years and that Casuarina High School be requested to take over the management of the centre and that an appropriate sum of money be set aside from the Youth, Sport and Recreation Trust Fund for that purpose; financial and other provisions be made for the maintenance of small drop-in centres such as are operating in Nightcliff and that provision be made for the establishment and operation of at least 2 centres in the northern suburbs, that is, Malak, Dripstone or Wanguri; those government instrumentalities responsible for the provision of public transport undertake an immediate investigation into the transport needs of youth to meet their social and recreational requirements; and there should be an established association of
voluntary youth organisations which should have the full support of the government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I read those recommendations into Hansard because the next step is to involve the various departments in the implementation of those recommendations. We will have made evaluations in the very near future and once we have those I will be in a position to place them before my Cabinet colleagues for consideration.

Earlier this morning I was asked a series of questions regarding the Government Printing Office. I must admit that I had made known to members opposite that I would provide them with a full statement later today. Of course, the honourable member for Millner said that it could have taken only today to get the report. That is not true; I actually asked for a briefing regarding the report earlier in the sittings, before question time this morning, because I was concerned when I received the report.

This morning questions were raised on the financial statements of the Government Printing Office. I believe that it is appropriate for me to make a complete statement on the financial situation of the Government Printing Office so that these issues can be placed in a proper perspective. At the same time, I will take the opportunity to respond to specific questions.

The Government Printing Office was transferred to the Northern Territory Public Service on 1 July 1978. On that date, the Government Printing Office's accounting system was based on traditional government accounting principles which do not include the preparation of commercial financial statements. An option stated is to encourage government enterprises to operate on a commercial basis. Therefore, the Treasurer directed the Government Printing Office to produce financial statements in accordance with commercial principles. The first statement was required for the 1979-80 financial year.

Members will appreciate the vast difference between traditional government accounting and commercial accounting. Government accounting recognises not only cash transactions but also current assets and liabilities; for instance, depreciation, provisions for future employment benefits, prepayments of salaries, cost of work in progress, and accounts payable and receivable. Therefore, to change from the traditional government accounting system to a commercial basis required a revised structure of costs, revenue, assets and liability information. Much of the information required was not available and necessitated examining additional records and transactions, a critical aspect of the commercial financial statement of the opening balance. However, in the case of the Government Printing Office, such a balance was difficult to ascertain for 1979-80 as no previous commercial records were kept. This factor significantly delayed the preparation of the statements.

The Department of Transport and Works recognised the difficulty of meeting the new requirement and, after a major review of the Government Printing Office accounting system in late 1980, invited a number of accounting firms to tender for a consultancy to establish an accounting system and provide timely and accurate financial statements. At the same time, the Government Printing Office employed a qualified accountant within its financial group to maintain the new system and review and update procedures. The new system was introduced on 1 July 1981 and resulted in a major improvement. Financial reports are now being produced on a monthly basis.

Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, although current financial procedures in the Government Printing Office conform with established practices, you will realise
that the issues raised today concerning the 1979-80 statement will apply to a lesser extent to the 1980-81 statement currently with the Auditor-General. You will also realise that the Darwin bus service, being subject to similar changes, has experienced similar difficulties, which will be apparent to members when I table its statement at the next sittings.

Before responding to the particular questions raised this morning, may I point out that the queries raised by the Auditor-General concern methods of accounting and do not infer impropriety. I must reiterate that we inherited a far from desirable system from the Commonwealth and members must appreciate that action now has been taken to rectify the problems inherited and new systems have been installed. As you can appreciate, Mr Deputy Speaker, it takes time to convert an operation of this magnitude to a commercial system although, on the surface, it looks as though things could have progressed more quickly.

I turn now to the specific questions asked today. The member for Millner asked me why the 1979-80 financial statements in the Auditor-General's report were not tabled in the Assembly within the statutory time prescribed in the Financial Administration and Audit Act. This was due to an administrative error within the department. The report was filed away after completion of auditing in March and regrettably not tabled until this sittings. I might add that there is no excuse for that. The member for Millner also asked what steps had been taken for the Government Printing Office's general ledger to be kept in accordance with commercial practice. I believe I have answered that in my general statement. Basically, the department has now adopted a new accounting system which satisfies both the Auditor-General's requirements and commercial principles.

The member for Sanderson asked for an explanation of the accumulated loss of the Government Printing Office as at 30 June 1979. The accumulated loss of $223,918 was a difference between assets and liabilities as at 30 June 1979. This procedure was required to balance the books and locate a commencing balance.

The member for Millner also inquired about the situation with the 1980-81 financial statement. As previously advised, this statement has already been submitted to the Auditor-General.

Finally, the member for Sanderson asked a question of the Treasurer concerning the terms under which a loan of $3.5m had been made to the Government Printing Office. No actual loan has been made to the Government Printing Office. What I assume the honourable member is alluding to is the fixed asset borrowing mentioned in the financial statement. This borrowing is equivalent to the cost of providing the Government Printing Office building, machinery, equipment and furniture and fittings. As the Government Printing Office is operating on a commercial basis, it is necessary for a nominal repayment to be made and the terms of such a repayment are still under consideration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not denying the fact that I was caught short in providing information to honourable members this morning when I was asked questions. In most cases, when a minister is unable to provide such information, he usually requests the honourable member to place the question on notice. Because of the gravity of the situation, I told honourable members that I would provide that information to them during the course of the sittings.

Unfortunately, I cannot think of any parliamentary term with which I could describe the honourable member for Millner and get away with it. The point is that he dashed straight out after question time and issued a press release calling for my resignation. He may continue to do so.
Mr MacFARLANE (Elsey): Mr Deputy Speaker, the beautiful Katherine Gorge is not really wanted by Aborigines. I spoke with Mr Raymond Fortymile some time last week and he indicated that they would go ahead with the claim but that they did not even want the area. What they want is employment of 2 Aboriginal rangers and they want the rock paintings which are not sacred but which have a significance. They have no complaint with the way they have been looked after for the past 15 to 20 years. They want an area of land near the visitors' centre in the gorge proper for a museum and artefacts centre.

What is happening is that the Aboriginal Land Rights Act is giving Aborigines land they do not really want and to which they already have as much right as all other Territorians. We are all Territorians. We all live in the Territory and have the same rights as one another, except that Aborigines have greater rights. Apparently, the Chief Minister saw the 60 Minutes program and he sent this telex to the Chairman of the Northern Land Council:

I was very interested to see the 60 Minutes program on TV last night regarding the Katherine land rights claim. As I understood it from the interview, Raymond Fortymile indicated the claimants really did not want to pursue the claim. They simply wanted the following 3 conditions met: 1.- Aborigines employed as rangers of the Katherine Gorge National Park; 2.- rock paintings of the park protected; and 3.- a museum devoted to local Aboriginal culture established at the park.

Never at any time has this point of view been put to the Northern Territory government. This situation illustrates the misunderstandings and racial tension brought about by the restrictions imposed and implied by the Aboriginal Land Rights Act on parties being able to negotiate direct with the traditional owners. The government has always felt constrained by the provisions of the Land Rights Act to negotiate only with and through the land councils. I should like to indicate to you that the government is immediately prepared to agree to the terms proposed by Mr Fortymile. I would also point out that at no time has the NLC representative appointed to the Territory Conservation Commission for the Territory Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council drawn the situation as outlined by Mr Fortymile to the attention of either of these bodies.

I would suggest that talks to implement the agreement be held as soon as convenient to you and I nominate Dr Goff Letts and Mr Creed Lovegrove to represent the Territory government. I propose inviting the 60 Minutes team to focus their attention on some other land claims over national parks in the Northern Territory. It seems that their direct approach may successfully cut through the red tape which so often strangles negotiations between this government and some land councils. This whole situation exemplifies the sorry state that the Territory is being brought to by ambit claims being lodged rather than the true interests and wishes of the traditional land owners being put forward in a frank and candid manner. I will await your urgent advice.

Paul Everingham, Chief Minister.

The Katherine Gorge is a big money earner for Katherine. It appears that in excess of $2m in direct expenditure by tourists is being earned at the gorge. This represents takings from the caravan park and camping area, boats, and proceeds of bussing visitors to the gorge. It includes $1.3m which represents an average single night's expenditure for 55 000 people. Taking into account multiplier effects, this figure could safely be tripled so that the total value
would be between $6m and $7m. By conservative estimates, this figure represents more than half the total estimated value of tourism to Katherine.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the area above the gorge is also under claim in this same huge Katherine Area Land Claim. This area concerns me very greatly because with a dam above the gorge, estimated to cost $53m, we would have a lake 50 miles long and 30 miles wide at its widest point which would give Katherine a huge recreational area and somewhere where tourists could spend an extra day. This would double the takings from between $6m and $7m to $12m and $14m. With an annual income of that size from tourism, the figure of $53m is very reasonable, taking into account other benefits the dam would offer.

It would provide flood mitigation for the town of Katherine and the whole area downstream. I heard during the sittings that a barge is to be provided to the people at Daly River but with a dam above the Katherine Gorge, there would be no flood at Daly River, which would remove the fear and damage, and a barge would not be needed. A dam above the Katherine Gorge would keep the dam at Mount Nancar full which would one day help Darwin with electricity and possibly with a water supply. The dam also would provide soft water for Katherine which will be needed when a RAAF base is established there, and also provide water for up to 40,000 people. There would be plenty of water for irrigation. I hope I am right about this too - horticulture will take off in a big way around Katherine. The water being released from the dam to make room for storage from the next wet could be used to generate hydro-electricity and to raise the level of the river right through the gorge by another 4 feet to provide year-round use of the gorge for tourism. All in all, as well as a recreational area providing something really useful to the Top End, there would be these spin-off benefits. If I have omitted to mention any of them, I am sorry.

These facts show that Aboriginal land claims affect not only the present but also the future. I say here and now that I think we have gone too far with the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act. I think a lot of the land is being given away to people who do not really want it and it can be put to better use by Territorians - Territorians unlimited - Territorians, full stop. It was very interesting to have a talk with Raymond Fortymile and find out that, although Aborigines are proceeding with the gorge claim, they do not really want it. I said to him: 'Well, you didn't really want the Katherine Rural Education Centre and you backed off that'. He said: 'Yes, but we are going ahead with the gorge. After we get it, this is all we want: to preserve the rock paintings, 2 Aboriginal rangers and an area of land for a museum and artefacts centre'. Outside the gorge, one pastoralist is making arrangements with Aborigines to trade one area for another area. I put it to you squarely, Mr Deputy Speaker, that Aborigines are being given something by law which they do not really want. This is really causing tension around Katherine.

A year or so ago, a gentleman named Henry Peckham, whom some of you might know - his grandfather was the Fizzer - came to me and said: 'I want some land. What do I have to be, a blackfellow? Well, I don't know. I'll do my best'. Henry is a half-caste but he is now managing Beswick Station. He said he had no chance at all. We tried everything to get him some of the vacant Crown land along the Edith River. There was not a hope in the world. He was furious and virtually said: 'Well, if you can't beat them, join them'. He is managing Beswick Station now and doing a very good job. He comes in every now and again and he shakes his head and says: 'Well, I don't know, what do I have to do?' That vacant Crown land over the Edith River, alongside some of the good farming country there, is still lying idle 6 years after this act came in. There is a cut-off point. We are tying up valuable land from development. Something should
be done. Something must be done. Something will be done.

I have Aborigines working for me who want to claim land across the Roper River 4 or 5 miles away. They say that is their country. I have explained to them that that is a pastoral lease and, under the present law, they have no chance at all. But, under the Everingham package, they have a chance. They say they only want a bit of land to call their own. They do not want a big cattle station; they just want their own area. Once again, I come to this Assembly and support fully the Everingham package. I think it is time there was a cut-off point to the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act or it should be extended to cover the whole of Australia.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr SMITH (Millner): Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr SMITH: I certainly do.

Leave granted.

Mr SMITH: Mr Deputy Speaker, in his adjournment debate speech, the Minister for Transport and Works explained that I issued a press statement calling for his resignation. I wish to place on record that I am about to issue a press statement. I have not called for the resignation of the honourable Minister for Transport and Works. The Labor Party is quite happy for the minister to remain where he is.

Ms D'ROZARIO (Sanderson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I feel I must make some comment on the remarks made by the Minister for Transport and Works. The first point to be made is that we appreciate the fact that the minister gave us an explanation in this afternoon's adjournment debate as a result of questions that were asked this morning. But the point, which I thought had been made quite adequately by the member for Millner, was not that questions were asked this morning but rather that the report had been with the minister for nearly 7 months and apparently he had done nothing about it until this sittings. I stress that that was the admission of the minister himself. He said he had only sought an explanation of this report earlier in this sittings.

What we are asking is why he did nothing in the time that has elapsed since the presentation of this report to him - I believe from the imprint that he received it on 23 March - and today, 14 October. It is quite clear that the honourable minister has indeed had time to look at this report but he sought to do nothing about obtaining explanations from his officers until the sittings had come upon him. It would be a different matter if indeed the report had been presented to his department and had, as he put it, been filed away. Whilst he admits that there is no excuse for the report having been filed - and that is the reason he gave for its not being tabled within the 6-day limit required by the Financial Administration and Audit Act - this report was brought to the personal attention of the honourable minister.

I really do not think a minister can go around blaming his department when, in fact, the letter of the Auditor-General is addressed to the minister himself.

Mr Perron: Who do you think gets the minister's mail?
Ms D'ROZARIO: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Treasurer asks who gets the minister's mail. I think that the Assembly is entitled to believe that, when something has been brought to the personal attention of the minister, he would at least address himself to its contents especially when they are so damning of the operations of the Government Printing Office.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I accept some of the explanations that have been given but by no means all of them. The facts of the matter are that the Government Printing Office is in such a state that it is impossible for the Auditor-General to express an opinion on the accuracy of the accounts. I have been in this Assembly a little longer than the honourable member for Millner and by no means as long as the honourable Minister for Transport and Works but this is certainly the most damning Auditor-General's report that I have ever examined. There is not one redeeming feature in this report. The qualifications and material uncertainties that the Auditor-General has outlined strike at the very basis of the accounting procedures and it cannot be more fundamental than that.

I accept that, before the takeover of the Government Printing Office on 1 July 1978, the Government Printing Office prepared its accounts on a cash-flow basis. Notwithstanding that, the fact of the matter is that, a year after having transferred to a commercial basis, there were no accounts prepared for that financial year. The Auditor-General is very clear about this. He says: 'The Government Printing Office commenced operations on 1 July 1978 and no financial statements were prepared for the year ended 30 June 1979'. He is not saying that no accounts were prepared on a commercial basis but that no accounts were prepared on any basis. He went on to say; 'Accordingly, it is impractical to use alternative verification procedures. I am unable to form an opinion on the accumulated loss of $223,918 brought forward as at July 1979'.

The 2 points that come from this statement are that there were no accounts or alternative procedures for verification. Despite the fact that the minister has offered an explanation that the accounting basis moved from a cash to commercial basis, the Auditor-General was not able to establish the existence of the accounts and he was unable to avail himself of any alternative accounting system that had prevailed before. I think that statement stands for itself and there is no way the Minister for Transport and Works can wriggle out of that one.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the next point that we had from the minister was that he has attempted now to obtain a briefing on the matters relating to this report and presumably he had expected some questions from the opposition. I would like to ask the minister what on earth he expected when he tabled this report on Tuesday. This report has lain on members' desks since Tuesday. Apparently, the honourable minister did not expect us to ask any questions but, on the off chance that we might, he sought the briefing. If he did not expect us to ask these questions, I ask whether it is the action of a reasonable person to present a report as damning as this, which he has had for nearly 7 months, and then to criticise the opposition for asking questions and not being satisfied with the answers. I cannot say too strongly that this shows the most gross financial incompetence.

I would like to move on to another related matter. We have often heard ministers of the government criticise the opposition for questioning it on the financial operations of its various divisions. On each occasion when the opposition has called for the establishment of a public accounts committee, we have been told: 'The material is there. All you have to do is ask for it. You are lazy - that is why you want to be able to have public servants called before you to answer questions'. It now appears that the honourable ministers are embarrassed by the degree of interest that members of the opposition are showing.
in matters of financial management. This is simply not good enough.

At the next sittings, the opposition will give notice of the introduction of a bill to make the NTDC more accountable to this Assembly. We will do that because of events that have taken place in the recent past and because of our long-standing interest in this matter which goes back to 1979. That bill will embody the principles of public accountability and accountability to this Assembly that have been spoken of before in this sittings.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the next matter relates to my electorate. I have to thank the Minister for Transport and Works for having complied so promptly with the request that I brought before him during the last sittings. In the last sittings, I brought to the attention of this Assembly the plight of primary schoolchildren residing at the KOA and Malak Caravan Parks who attend the Malak School. I spoke about the traffic conditions around the crossings that had been provided for the use of these children and the ineffectiveness of the crossings. I asked the Minister for Transport and Works to prepare himself for representations from residents who had organised a letter campaign to him for the installation of a set of pedestrian-activated traffic lights. I am happy to say that, when I examined this crossing on Tuesday, I saw workmen setting out witches' hats and the installation of these lights is now taking place. I thank the honourable minister for acceding so promptly to the request of those residents who look forward to the operation of this new system of traffic lights.

Mrs O'NEIL (Fannie Bay): Mr Deputy Speaker, I have had the pleasure of attending 2 interesting functions in the last few weeks. The first was in my electorate: the arrival of Mr Dick Smith on his solo helicopter flight around the world. This was a significant occasion and recognised as such by the many hundreds of people who took the opportunity to gather on the vacant land in Parap in my electorate to welcome Mr Smith. His flight is not something which I or, I suspect, many people would wish to undertake. Perhaps it does not rival the flights of earlier aviators who arrived more than 50 years ago at the airport at Parap. Mr Smith had the advantage of radio communication, constant contact with Qantas aircraft and access to supplies around the world. Nevertheless, it is a significant achievement and I was pleased to be present on that occasion, as were very many of my constituents. We are most mindful always of the part our area of Darwin has played in the aviation history of the Territory and Australia.

Bearing that in mind, the local residents have called again for some recognition of the old Qantas hangar in Parap. In view of its historic significance, when it has ceased its function as a workshop for the Commonwealth Department of Transport, it should be preserved, perhaps as an aviation museum. I am told it still has bullet holes in it from World War 2 when Darwin was attacked from the air. I support local residents in this call. I hope for the support of the Northern Territory government and other members of the Legislative Assembly.

One thing disappointed me on the occasion of the arrival of Mr Smith. It was brought to my attention by a number of my constituents who said: 'We notice that there is no Northern Territory government representative here. Why is that?' I said: 'I really don't know'. One would have expected the Minister for Transport and Works or some other worthy person to represent the Northern Territory government. I did not have an answer to give to the people.

Subsequently, I was told that no Northern Territory government representative was present at the civil reception which the Darwin City Council saw fit to offer Mr Smith on this historic occasion. I have since been told, and it has
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not been confirmed by a member of the government, that this was in fact a deliberate government decision in view of disagreements that the Northern Territory government has had in the past with Mr Smith. I am reporting what I was told. Certainly, my constituents were disappointed by the non-attendance of a government minister on that historic occasion.

Another function that I had the pleasure to attend was the inaugural meeting in Darwin of an organisation known as Technical Aid for the Disabled. This organisation exists in the various Australian states and the South Australian chairman, Mr Terry Cody, was kind enough to address that meeting. It is a most unusual organisation and a very worthwhile one. I am informed it has no counterpart in other countries. The United States has very substantial systems for providing sophisticated equipment for all disabled people, in particular for service veterans. Sometimes this equipment is extremely expensive. But it has no organisation similar to Technical Aid for the Disabled. I am sorry the Treasurer is not interested in this but I think it is a worthy organisation. It is run by people in the community—particularly tradesmen, engineers, draughtsmen and people with useful skills—who voluntarily give their time to invent, create or manufacture in their own homes and workshops items which can be of use to disabled people to assist them to enjoy their lives to the full. Some of the items which they make are very small—others are quite substantial; for example, an electric wheelchair which is much cheaper apparently than the ones available on the commercial market.

This organisation has been established in the Northern Territory. I attended the meeting in Darwin. I am told something similar is under way in Alice Springs. I am pleased to see that many people with these skills—and I must confess that I had none to offer the organisation—were interested in assisting handicapped people in the Northern Territory. There were also representatives of the Handicapped Persons Bureau which evolved from the International Year of the Disabled Person.

Having taken the opportunity to advise honourable members of the existence of this organisation, I would like to wish it every future success.

Mr DOOLAN (Victoria River): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak very briefly this evening. I wish to comment on what the honourable member for Elsey said. He referred quite often to Mr Raymond Fortymile who now spells his name 'Fordamail'. I worked with his father some 30 years ago. His father spelt his name 'Fortymile'. At the time, I was pulling down Sydney Williams huts at the 110-mile. It was about the first job I had in the Territory.

The honourable member for Elsey said that people were quite happy about sacred sites and paintings on the walls of the Katherine Gorge. He said that they were not happy about the possibility of a dam at Katherine Gorge because it would cover the paintings by about 60 feet of water. I do not really think that people would be happy about that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Chair will be resumed at the ringing of the bells.

Mr Speaker MacFarlane resumed the Chair.

Mrs PADGHAM-PURICH (Tiwi): Mr Speaker, yesterday morning I asked the honourable Minister for Community Development for some information regarding the general rate that had been decided on for the Palmerston area and also how that compared with the general rate charged to people in the Berrimah area. The minister told me that the rate that had been decided on by the Palmerston Develop-
ment Authority for the Palmerston area was 0.75¢ in the dollar on the unimproved capital value of the land. He said that the rate charged in the Berrimah area was 1.02¢ in the dollar.

My constituents in Berrimah will not see much equity in the rates they pay when they find out the rate that the people in Palmerston will pay. If you consider the general rate for the unimproved property value of land in Berrimah as compared to that in Palmerston, it is probably fair to say that land in Berrimah is worth more than land in Palmerston. But the people in Berrimah will not see it that way. They will feel that, after paying rates year after year, they are not getting much for it. People in the Palmerston area, despite the fact that they will live a few miles further from Darwin, will have many more services than the people in Berrimah. They will have the cost of bitumen roads, concrete kerbing, street lighting and rubbish collections, water and sewerage reticulation, bus stops, and proximity to shops, clinics, recreational facilities etc considered in the assessment of their rates.

I spoke yesterday about rents charged at Jabiru to the detriment of some of my constituents out there. I speak today most strongly against the inequities of the rates for Berrimah and Palmerston. I do not know how much longer I must speak about the inequality that is presented to my constituents in Berrimah. Periodically, an increased value is put on their land, which means they pay more in rates. Mr Speaker, it could be said that, because the value of their land has gone up, if they wish to subdivide they will receive more for their land; they will receive some benefit from the increased valuation. But most of the people in Berrimah who are paying these rates are not fly-by-nighters; they are not people who want to subdivide, make a quick quid and get out. They want to stay there living as they have lived for years. All I can see is a very bleak future for them because they will not derive any benefit from subdivision of their land. They just want to stay there. They are certainly not receiving any benefit from government services and they have to pay more and more for nothing, which to me does not make much sense. It certainly does not make sense to them.

The second matter on which I would like to speak this afternoon is the Chief Minister's reply to a question regarding the protection of the Holmes Jungle and Black Jungle areas. I know the Holmes Jungle area has been of concern to the Trees Organisation for a couple of years. It took up petitions at the Garden Fair this year and last year. It is also concerned with the degradation caused by people vandalising the place, removing palms, and damage caused by fire. It is a very beautiful wildlife area. I remember years ago when we first came up to Darwin, we had friends in the Berrimah area - the Litchfields. They told us about the very interesting bird colonies in the Holmes Jungle area. Unfortunately, at that time, I was not able to take advantage of their interest and check it out for myself.

To conserve these areas so near to urban development is becoming critical. Rain forest areas are no longer very plentiful around Darwin. There was a beautiful area in Nightcliff which was vandalised in the name of progress when it was cleared to put up government houses years ago. Once such areas are cleared, they cannot be replaced and reafforested. There was another area somewhere in the Jingili area which was also cleared some time ago. The only benefit to the people who live in these areas subsequently is that they have very deep and luxuriant topsoil. Certainly, they get beautiful gardens out of it but the community loses a lovely jungle area.

There is another jungle area in my electorate. It is near Koolpinyah Station. It is called Black Jungle. I went through this area recently with a
friend in a four-wheel drive vehicle, which was necessary. We made an extensive trip right through the area. If only some of the people from the south who come up here could go through the same area; it was most beautiful. Our trip was very hurried but from a botanical point of view it was most interesting. It would be of great interest to any botanist who went through there and, indeed, any scientist interested in wildlife at all. Not only did we see the jungle area, which was unique in itself and in the flora it presented, we also saw about 5 or 6 completely different botanical eco-systems. We went at some speed because neither I nor my friend had much time to spare. It took us about 3 hours to go on this long trek from one side to the other. We went around lagoons and through dry creek beds, dry at this time of the year anyway. I had an interesting experience in that I was mistaken for a lady buffalo. There was a little orphan buffalo there. When we opened the car and I spoke to this little one, it wanted to get into the vehicle with us. I do not know whether I was making mother noises or father noises to it, but it certainly responded.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this Black Jungle area was known for a long time to people who lived in that area many years ago. In fact, by many old timers who used to live out there, it was called Aunty May's Black Jungle, after Aunty May Yates. The Yates family lived on Koolpinyah Station for many years. Unfortunately, Aunty May is dead now but Ted Yates is still alive. These people have a great knowledge of the natural history of the whole area. I hope that when the Conservation Commission institutes measures of protection for that area - and I hope it will not be only for the Black Jungle area but some of the areas around it - it contacts people like the Yates to get some knowledge of the history of what has been there. Other things have been grown there. Crops have been grown there. One can see remains of different things that have been there, parts of very old vehicles and some very old buildings.

Mr Speaker, I think there was a slight error in the Chief Minister's reply. He said that Black Jungle is near the Adelaide River. It is not; it is connected with the Howard River and some of its watercourses. The Howard River is very extensive in that area. I understand preliminary studies have already been made of the area. When the Conservation Commission continues its inspection, I hope it will find other areas of interest there which could also be protected for the use of future generations in the Northern Territory.

Mrs LAWRIE (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I have asked questions in the Assembly over the last year or so relating to the opening up of Gunn Point as a recreational area for Darwin people. I am delighted that the government thinks likewise and that action has been taken. We hope to see the tabling of the report from the Conservation Commission in the November sittings as outlined this morning by the Chief Minister.

This morning, I had wanted to ask the Minister for Lands and Housing a question in relation to Bynoe Harbour, following the one I asked on Thursday 19 August which appears on page 934 of Hansard. I was hoping this afternoon to elicit some more information from him. I am aware that the government, and the Treasurer in particular, has been concerned at the proliferation of shacks or humpy dwellings in the Bynoe Harbour area. The reply he gave me really raised more questions than it answered. He stated that it would be unpopular, and probably unwarranted, simply to move in with government powers to tear the shacks down and that the government is now working on a plan to have some land in the area released so that it can be sold and proper access provided for the increasing number of Darwinites using the area. I wanted an assurance that he was not saying that the people who have camped illegally in that area for some years are going to be given priority in the allocation of land. Otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker, I can assure him that I, along with quite a few of my Nightcliff
constituents, will race across to Bynoe Harbour and start building similar
shacks very promptly. There is a tremendous amount of community interest in
this. People want to move across the harbour to pursue, what is to some, a
preferable lifestyle there. Land values on Cox Peninsula have soared and Bynoe
Harbour is seen as the next cab off the rank.

I would like the honourable minister, before November, to instruct his
department to have a good look at what is occurring at Bynoe Harbour and, if
possible, to prepare for the Assembly a firm statement of the government's
intentions together with maps of the area, a likely time-scale for the turn-off
of land and the way in which he sees it being handled.

Mr BELL (MacDonnell): Mr Deputy Speaker, there are a number of matters I
would like to raise in the adjournment debate this evening but, before I turn to
them, I would like to pass a couple of comments on what the honourable member
for Elsey had to say today. I have spoken in 2 adjournment debates about this
matter. I do not propose to speak at length about it today.

I found it extraordinary in the extreme to hear the honourable member stand
up this evening and say: 'Look, what is the point of this land rights claim?
They do not really want it'. Those were the honourable member's words. I do
not know Katherine very well. I know a little about Aboriginal people and I am
quite sure that the undue pressure that the Nazi-type propaganda that the
honourable member has been pushing has had the effect that he desired in making
Aboriginal people feel that perhaps they are creating too much fuss and say:
'Really, all we want is that'. The honourable member has taken that to mean
that the whole concept of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act is completely pointless
and of no value to anybody. 'We are all Territorians, why should one lot of
Territorians have any greater right over an area of land than another group of
Territorians?'

As I said last night, Mr Deputy Speaker, the whole issue of who owns which
bit of land is one that I think deserves a slightly more complex understanding
than obviously the honourable member is able to give to it. Quite clearly, if
we are only going to recognise the sort of ownership that western laws, white
fellow laws, take into consideration, then the honourable member is right. But,
after 200 years in this country, if we have learnt anything, quite clearly, we
must consider different legal principles. That is what the federal Land Rights
Act attempts to do. It is a shame that the honourable member does not take a
little more time to think about the principles involved instead of shooting from
the hip and pandering to racist elements in his own electorate.

To turn to another matter, Mr Deputy Speaker, last week I visited Tennant
Creek. It was a pleasure to visit there but not under the circumstances in
which I went: because of the closure of the meatworks. That has already been
referred to in a couple of questions in this Assembly. I was to present a
petition this morning but, unfortunately, I was unable to because I was not
aware at the time of the rule that a petition must be presented to the Clerk 3
hours before the sittings commences. I certainly learnt my lesson in that
regard. I will present the petition at the next sittings.

In answer to the Dorothy Dixer this morning, the honourable Treasurer re­
ferred to population figures in Tennant Creek. He said that the allegation in
an article in last night's NT News that the population in Tennant Creek had
decreased by 17% is nonsense. He quoted figures from Northern Territory govern­
ment censuses of 1 July 1981 and 1 July 1982 which indicated that there was no
decrease of the order the article suggested. Of course, subsequently there has
been the closure of the meatworks.
The honourable Treasurer suggested that the closure of the meatworks was a seasonal thing and had no effect whatsoever. I would like to point out to the honourable member that that is not, in fact, the case. The untimely closure of the meatworks has had considerable impact on the population of the town. I had the opportunity while in Tennant Creek to spend considerable time with meatworkers and their families, doing the sorts of things that politicians do: listening to the issues that people were raising, putting them in contact with government departments and getting the sort of information that people in an isolated town like Tennant Creek have difficulty in obtaining.

For the benefit of the honourable Treasurer and the honourable member for Barkly, many of the meatworkers have not left Tennant Creek. Many are still living there. They are not all itinerants.

Mr Tuxworth: Who said they were?

Mr BELL: I heard you say it on the news.

Many of the people in Tennant Creek are being forced to apply for unemployment benefits which gives the lie to the honourable member for Barkly's assertion that they are people who move around anyway.

Mr Tuxworth: That was your line not mine.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Order!

Mr BELL: It's not my line; it's their line - your own constituents. It's about time you paid more attention to your constituents.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I would ask the member for MacDonnell to address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr BELL: To return to the honourable Treasurer's point, many of those people have been forced to move away much more quickly. This is the key point: although many of them leave when the meatworks close, many of them have been forced to give up accommodation they had in the town. Whereas in the off-season they may have been regarded still as residents of Tennant Creek, on holiday, because they no longer have premises in Tennant Creek, many of them feel they can no longer be classed as residents of that town.

The next matter I wish to raise concerns a meeting of representatives of Aboriginal organisations that the Chief Minister conducted last year. I am sorry the honourable Chief Minister is not here to hear this.

Mr Tuxworth: If it's like the other story, he's probably heard it before.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Order!

Mr BELL: I am delighted that I have managed to nettle the honourable member so severely.

Referring to this issue, it is a matter of information. I would have brought it up in question time this morning if the same honourable member had not expatiated quite so fulsomely as he did. Last year, the Chief Minister organised a meeting of representatives of Aboriginal organisations. I would be very keen to find out - and many people in Alice Springs have asked me about it - whether such a meeting will be convened this year. It is my intention to raise that with the Chief Minister either by letter or at the next sittings.
A further point I wish to raise concerns a couple of incidents that occurred in my electorate. I believe that they are of sufficient import to require being brought up in the context of a grievance debate in the Legislative Assembly. They refer to what can only be described as the unwarranted use of firearms by way of threat by a police officer. These stories came back to me and they relate to Aboriginal people in my electorate who have been known to me for many years.

One incident related to 3 young men in a motor car travelling back from Alice Springs to where they lived. They may have been in breach of dry area legislation and perhaps their apprehension by a member of the police force was quite warranted. I am personally well aware of the problems created by alcohol abuse in Aboriginal communities.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr PERRON (Treasurer): Mr Deputy Speaker, the member for Nightcliff asked about land at Cox Peninsula, in particular at Bynoe Harbour, which is a subject she and very many people in Darwin have an interest in. My response to a question she asked of me previously may have been a little vague and I apologise for that. The government is very concerned at the continuing proliferation of illegal shacks at Bynoe Harbour. I pointed out in answer to her question that, whilst being concerned at this proliferation, I personally can understand the motivations of those people who have, through frustration, built themselves an illegal weekender because the government has not moved to meet a need in this area. We propose to do so.

I have had a number of meetings with officers of the Department of Lands on various proposals to provide land at Bynoe Harbour for weekender-type structures so that people can buy land and put up a shack. There will be some constraints and these are important. Until now, it has been general government policy that we require private developers to provide full services to land before they are allowed to obtain title to it. That is clearly impractical in this situation. If the government were to provide electricity and water as well as roads to Bynoe Harbour before it released any land over there, quite clearly it would be many years before a square inch of it was released.

I am taking the punt and bending the rules a little. I have directed officers that the government will release land with specific covenants which state that the government will not be providing electricity or water to this particular area. The land will be released for weekenders. Whilst we cannot stop people moving there permanently, we want them to be under no misunderstanding that the provision of water, electricity and effluent disposal systems will be entirely at their own cost. I am sure that many people will find this quite acceptable because they are presently carting water for their weekend fishing excursions and, with modern vehicles and water tanks, that is not such a problem. It will be if people want to stay there permanently.

It seems clear from preliminary designs that have been prepared that some of the blocks to be released will be where there are illegal structures at present. I will be making it clear in press releases that this land will be released publicly and this is the only equitable way for the government to do it. Whilst I expect some lobbying from people who would like to claim prior rights, particularly if their shed happens to be on one of the blocks that is to be released, they will be given a warning and a period of time within which to move. After that time, the government proposes to move them. Government action to demolish such structures would be taken after an auction, presuming these blocks are auctioned. If a person who claims ownership of an illegal structure happens
to buy the land that it is on, it would be unfair to make him move it first and then sell the block of land to him. That should broadly satisfy the honourable member.

I am pushing to have designs etc put before the Rural Planning Authority at an early date because subdivisional and rezoning approval is necessary to enable the government to release the land. I believe that such land will be very popular and, in order not to drive prices up, I hope to release as much as I can in the area at that time. The government is not intent on earning money by releasing this land. Obviously, the money we will gain will be minute in budgetary terms. I would like to give as many people as possible the opportunity to own a block.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the honourable member for MacDonnell complained that the honourable member for Elsey does not appear to acknowledge certain principles that the member for MacDonnell feels he should in the whole Aboriginal land rights question. The honourable member for MacDonnell should reflect on this question because, if one member has an extreme point of view - and I do not say that he has - then the other probably has one too. The honourable member for MacDonnell seems to me to be blind to the fact that there could be deficiencies in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act or that any injustices could be perpetrated by the administration of that act. I think that is unfortunate.

The government of the Northern Territory has long recognised that land rights for Aborigines is a just cause and the Country Liberal Party has long supported Aboriginal land rights. However, both the party and the government have seen some very serious deficiencies in the act and serious injustices perpetrated, including injustices to some Aborigines as distinct from others. A great deal of effort has been put in over the years to reach agreement with the various parties to have the act changed. Those activities continue at present despite the quite considerable opposition which is to be expected. I say to those people who seem to think that any amendment to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act whatsoever is simply not on because it would diminish the rights of Aborigines, that that is totally unacceptable. The people who throw a lot of stones should look at their own houses.

Mr D.W. COLLINS (Alice Springs): Mr Deputy Speaker, this morning I asked a question of the Chief Minister about encouraging the use of plastic bottles instead of glass bottles. I have spoken about this before. Broken bottles are very costly to clean up. It is an expense to the ratepayer and the taxpayer and tends to add considerably to racial tension. Further, the glass bottle can be used as an offensive weapon. The Leader of the Opposition has referred to the Todd River murders. Events like these occur too frequently. Just a week ago, a white man and an Aboriginal woman were killed. I do not know if bottles were the weapons used in these cases but they have been used in the past. Many of the injuries that have been caused to people have been caused by broken bottles used as weapons. When one considers the human suffering and the financial cost, I would suggest that all members ought to give this suggestion some serious consideration. I do not believe that legislation would be necessary to implement this proposal. I think that encouragement of the beverage manufacturers to come to the party might be all that is needed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I believe that members of this Assembly would demonstrate very violently if anybody said that they did not believe in democracy. One of the cornerstones of democracy is freedom to express a point of view in a non-violent way. Even if we strongly oppose a person's point of view, if we believe in the process of democracy, we must defend that person's right to
express his view. The march in Katherine against federal legislation has been opposed in a non-democratic manner. If you did not understand the Katherine situation and listened to what has been reported and what the honourable member for MacDonnell has said, you would think the people were suggesting that Aborigines should be banned from the area. Nothing could be further from the truth. Might I suggest, Mr Deputy Speaker, that use of terms such as 'racist' and 'Nazi-type tactics' are themselves Marxist-like and designed to silence by denigration anybody who might oppose someone else's point of view. That is definitely not democratic.

Mr TUXWORTH (Barkly): Mr Deputy Speaker, I had chosen to speak this afternoon on a matter relating to horses, but the honourable member for MacDonnell has distracted my attention momentarily. The premature closure of the meatworks in Tennant Creek has caused dislocation for quite a few people. With the background that led up to the closure, I hope that we have the good fortune to have the works opened next year. But, with the cloud hanging over us, that is not going to be a spread misere. I, too, have been working very hard behind the scenes with my colleagues and other people to ensure that the meatworks reopens as soon as possible—whether it is this year to kill horses or next year to kill beef—but certainly as soon as is practicable. I support that entirely. I have said so several times.

I was in Tennant Creek on the weekend and had the good fortune to meet with representatives of the meatworkers who expressed their concern and were a bit testy that I had referred to them as itinerants. That was pretty hot news to me, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I have not referred to the meatworkers as itinerants. Anybody who has followed my activities over the last 12 months would be aware that I have been working with the meatworks proprietors to try and establish training schemes through which the meatworks could become manned wholly by local people. Whether they move in and become local or they are locals who learn to be meatworkers is irrelevant. I think it is very good to have a stable force and to try to do things to extend our seasons so that people have 48 weeks' work each year. When I asked them where they had heard this they said: 'We were told. We were told that you said it on the radio'.

When I heard it again this afternoon, it all became clear to me: the great white father had been wandering through my electorate making up stories about what the local member had said. I say to the honourable member again that, if he can produce a tape or a transcript of the member for Barkly referring to meatworkers as itinerants, I will give him $200 and, if he cannot, I invite him to give me the same amount. His reflection against me is most unparliamentary. It might even be called devious. I think if the honourable member wants to be a purveyor of untruths and a little careless with the way he handles the spoken word, then he ought to be prepared to back himself up. If he does not want to do that, then he might just stick to the truth and save everybody a lot of inconvenience. He still has not taken up the offer and I guess that means that he is not quite so sure that he heard it after all. I know that he did not.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I believe we have to find something that will help to extend the season at the Tennant Creek meatworks and provide an alternative market for us. Quite by accident, I was introduced last Friday to a representative of an organisation which had hoped to kill horses in the Tennant Creek meatworks this year and send them to Japan for human consumption. The proposal was based on the fact that the Japanese horse meat market is worth about $100m a year and has traditionally been supplied by South American countries. At this stage, those countries have a hoof and mouth cloud hanging over them and the Japanese are looking to diversify their supply points. Australia has fallen into the net.
Mr Deputy Speaker, the interesting thing in all of this is that, out of somebody else's poor fortune, there is an opportunity for us to seize. In the early days in the southern half of the Territory, a great deal of horse breeding was undertaken for the Indian army remount program. My good friend, the Senator, tells me that, when he was a boy, tens of thousands of horses were transported on the Ghan to Adelaide for shipping to India. Given that today in Japan horse meat is worth more than beef and given that the market is maturing in Australia's favour, perhaps it is an opportunity that the Territory should take up and foster. I do not see it as being an enormous market for us. I think perhaps it would be a very nice little diversification. It might enable us to kill 10,000 or 12,000 horses a year in the meatworks and ship the meat to Japan. It would give us an opportunity to utilise some of the spare barge space that we have out of Darwin to Singapore. Many opportunities exist for us to reach out and take.

I am very grateful for the initiative shown by my colleague, the Minister for Primary Production, who has formed the terms of reference for an investigation into the possibility of horse breeding and shipment to Japan. Although we may have missed the boat this year, I believe there is an ideal opportunity for us. It is in all our interests as well as the interests of the constituents in my electorate, particularly the meatworkers who have a broken season, to try to bring such a program of horse breeding to fruition.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.
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