OUTRAGE OVER HOSPITAL CHIEF. Report by ERWIN CHLANDA.

The transfer of hospital chief Joyce Bowden "with little if any consultation has rocked the foundations of the hospital and the wider community and has created an aura of general distrust within the organisation". This the view of the hospital's board of management, as expressed in its minutes, following Mrs Bowden's sudden transfer to an obscure unit of which she and one secretarial staff are the only members. Board chairman Hermann Weber says the move came as a complete surprise to him. He says he was told about it by Territory Health deputy secretary Len Notaras at about noon on Monday last week. The new head of the hospital, Roger Weckert, formerly the Director of Radiology in Darwin, arrived in Alice Springs on Tuesday to take over. Mrs Bowden, who had been in the job for 11 years, was matron in 1982, and has a wealth of experience as a health professional in The Centre, handed over on Wednesday and then went on a few days' leave. She is now the Director of Strategic Service Development. Mr Weber says to his knowledge, neither Mr Weckert's position D which has the new title of Executive Director D nor Mrs Bowden's new job had been advertised. The minutes of the board meeting last Thursday say Mrs Bowden's "unexpected Osecondment' [the document puts the word under inverted commas] is surprising and alarming, a great loss to the Alice Springs hospital". "Mrs Bowden, in her leadership, has introduced professionalism into the hospital which has raised standards of health care delivery in the southern region of the NT [to a level] not previously attained." Mr Weber says it is "incomprehensible" that the move had not been discussed in advance with Mrs Bowden nor with the board: "Things happened so quickly they forgot they had a board." He says no explanation has been given: "I can't figure it out. I'm flabbergasted." Mr Weber, a leading figure in local CLP politics, says it wasn't uncommon for Chief Ministers like Paul Everingham and Shane Stone to axe heads of departments with no or little notice: " You can do that to secretaries of departments but should not do it with other senior people." Mrs Bowden was interviewed on the ABC's 7.30 Report on Monday last week. The report dealt with the effects of alcohol abuse in the town, and the absence of new liquor supply initiatives. Mrs Bowden outlined the effects on her staff of having to cope with ongoing alcohol related trauma and disease on a large scale. She says she had permission from the public service to grant the interview, and she does not believe that her sudden secondment is linked with her on-air statements. Mr Weber says: "What she said is perfectly correct. The board is holding the same views. "There's an enormous number of trauma cases related to alcohol." Health Minister Steve Dunham did not respond to a request for comment.

THIS TRAIN IS GOING SOUTH!

As the historic "first sod" was turned yesterday for the Alice to Darwin railway, 16 Territorians was gearing up for another rail feat, this one a journey heading south on a hand operated trolley. A Centenary of Federation event, the team will leave Alice on September 8 to meet up along the way with teams from every other state and territory, all converging on Canberra. Team leader Russell Naismith says the event symbolises the coming together of Australians in Federation, and celebrates the contribution made by the railways to the social and economic bonds between Australian towns, regions, states and territories. Pictured are Harry McVeigh and John Maidment, and behind them Morgan Price and Brian Moore, in a training session last weekend. In workouts over six weekends, the team has been averaging 20 kilometres an hour. They were told to expect an average of 12kms an hour, so "we're doing pretty well," says Russell. They'll have five days to do the 831kms to Tarcoola where they meet the WA team. With support vehicles following them all the way, they plan a manpower change over every half hour. From Tarcoola, they can slow down a bit, and averaging 100 kms a day. Barclay Mowlem of the Alice to Darwin rail consortium, whose chairman was in Alice yesterday for the "first sod" ceremony, and the NT Government have sponsored the team. Meanwhile, despite efforts towards political sensitivity D including the unveiling of a plaque acknowledging that the first Aboriginal land to be
crossed by the railway is that of the local Mparntwe people, and the inclusion of local traditional owners in the ceremony. An Aboriginal protest under the banner "Shame Howard, Shame" was due to confront the Prime Minister yesterday. In a media statement organisers, representing "the Arrernte Nations of Central Australia, with the endorsement of the Native Title Holders", said: "Howard has relentlessly undermined the Reconciliation process, does not support the process toward a Treaty, has consistently refused to give a simple apology to the Stolen Generations and has even allowed his ministers to declare they don't exist." His government cruelly slashed ATSIC funding during its first budget, and he has stood by as mandatory sentencing, new increased police powers and anti-social behaviour legislation has been introduced, and as Aboriginal languages have been discouraged from the school curriculum by the abolition of bilingual studies. "The Arrernte are in support of the new railway, but not the Howard government's stance on a number of issues."

WHERE THE NEW RAILWAY COULD TAKE OUR TOURISM. Report by KIERAN FINNANE.

"Now that the Alice to Darwin railway is a given, how do we best use it to lever jobs into town? "Should we put money into developing Traeger Park as a first class venue for major sporting events? "Should we focus on upgrading the Stuart Highway or the Tanami Road?" These are some of the questions that could be answered by the Tourism Futures Project to which the town council has just allocated $25,000, says council CEO Nick Scarvelis. The project, to which the CSIRO's Sustainable Ecosystems division would bring its scenario planning expertise, could also answer questions on a micro level, such as what tourists are going to want to eat next year. Tourism is the principal focus because "we are working off the philosophy that everyone in Alice Springs lives on tourism to some degree", says Mr Scarvelis. He says the project is costed at $180,000. The CSIRO would provide $80,000 of that in "in kind" development. The council is hoping its contribution will help attract further funding support, in particular from the Northern Territory Government. A proposal to put to Cabinet has been developed by CSIRO and the Department of Industries and Business. CATIA general manager Craig Catchlove says he has written to the government to express CATIA's strong support for the project. Mr Catchlove says it would provide a "holistic way of finding out what something like sealing the Mereenie Loop road will mean further down the track". "You can't get a complete answer just through discussion. The CSIRO model allows you to think about 20 cross referenced relationships happening. "But of course, you have to get good data in to get good data out, so half of it is all about data collecting." The selling point for business, to get involved with the data collection, is that they then can access the results to plan their own development." This is not just for government." Paul Walker, a Canberra-based CSIRO research scientist, says similar projects have been developed with the Douglas Shire in Far North Queensland, and the Tapestry region focussed on Bunbury in WA. In both cases, the projects got to the stage of building interactive computer models which allow the on-going and timely collection, analysis and feedback of data. The model also allows the user to ask "what if?". It is a virtual world that is "disaster free": it allows experimentation that does not affect the real world. And it is on-going, kept current by the constant collection of data. The sort of data that will be valued by local government and community groups is the sort of data they're willing to collect, says Dr Walker. In the Douglas Shire, for example, a survey in 1999 found that 13 per cent of visitors thought that there was too much development in the area. In 2000, this figure rose to 20 per cent. "This timely data back to the community allows them to think about what the implications will be if this figure continues to increase," says Dr Walker. Without this level of information and analysis, most future development becomes simply an extension of what has happened over the past five to 10 years." But things have changed quite dramatically in that time, especially in relation to computer technology," says Dr Walker. "Our brief from CSIRO is to develop a range of tools and processes which allow a whole of government view of regional development. "So we've found a way to systematise thinking about a whole range of social, economic and environmental factors and how they interrelate. "There are lots of reports and studies on Alice Springs and Central Australia, for example, but what may be lacking is monitoring how key factors are changing through time. "We provide, in partnership with other groups in the community, a way of doing that, by developing a Osustainable data process', which can get to the stage of becoming a Ofutures simulator'. "We may not get there with this project, it depends on what the community wants, but we will be able to answer a lot of Ôwhat if' questions." A lot of planning is done using a SWOT analysis D of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats." But, what if, for instance, in pushing one strength, you undermine another?" For example, key strengths of the Douglas Shire are its natural attractions D the rain forest and the coral reef D but how do you avoid the problem of visitors, currently about 300,000 a year, loving them to death?" Our model allows you to think about this kind of interrelationship," says Dr Walker.
NT HOME BOOST.

Northern Territory and South Australia have recorded the biggest jumps in new home loan approvals of all states, latest statistics show. Figures released yesterday by the Australian Bureau Of Statistics show a 21.2 per cent increase in the number of loans approved nationally in May to finance dwelling construction which represents a total of 5,593 loans, the highest recorded in 14 months. The Northern Territory has defied the national trend by recording a 29.6 per cent increase over the same period, while South Australia recorded the second highest increase of all the states with 14.9 per cent. Australia's peak building industry body, HIA, said the doubling of the First Home Owners grant for new housing, combined with lower interest rates is rapidly pulling the industry out of the post-GST doldrums and restoring confidence among builders and buyers. "The First Home Owners Grant is clearly the tonic that builders needed to avert job losses, as this month has seen another strong rise in first-home buyer numbers, rising by 11 per cent over the month," said HIA's Executive Director for SA and NT, Brenton Gardner. Mr Gardner said the statistics were consistent with other recent figures that show the majority of activity is occurring on the outskirts of metropolitan centres where first home buyer dwellings are traditionally built. "It is important to note however, that these rapid rises in activity are not creating another boom/bust scenario but rather restoring the industry to where it was 12 months ago," he said. "Our main focus now is that this recovery be sustained. The Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Reserve Bank have acknowledged the importance of the industry to the wider economy and it is recommended that this be considered in their deliberations to extend the first home owners grant." Queensland new home loan approvals for May rose 14.6 per cent, 13.9 per cent in Victoria, 9.1 per cent in NSW, 6.2 per cent in ACT and 1.9 per cent in Tasmania.

A YARN FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

The last time there was excitement in Barrow Creek on the scale of last weekend's suspected abduction and possible murder of an English tourist, and the attempted kidnapping of his female companion, was in December 1982. A group of Aborigines, refused service in the pub because they were drunk, proceeded to smash the place to pieces. Staff barricaded themselves in a room. When a man attempted to climb in through the window one of the besieged shot him dead with a .22 rifle. Since then race relations have improved around the lonely watering hole. This is possibly because the historic telegraph station next door has been recognised as being on a significant piece of Aboriginal land, or because it doesn't make much sense having race wars when the white population roughly 10 is outnumbered by some 200 Aborigines in a 30 km radius. The pub is one of the Territory's oldest buildings, erected in 1928 by Joe Kilgariff, father of the now retired NT Senator Bernie Kilgariff. In good Catholic fashion, says Barrow Creek licensee Les Pilton, Joe built pubs and churches up and down the "track" the Stuart Highway. In true outback style the tiny bar has outstanding feats of drinking documented in dozens of photos stuck on the wall, alongside a dried piece of cattle dung, unashamedly symbolizing the tenor of local conversation. There are also several hats hanging on the wall: one shaded the head of the legendary water driller Sandy Cole, another belonged to fencer Tosser Reidy. "A bunch of cheeky ringers stole the bowler hat of undertaker Jack McCaskill while I was away," says Les, still fuming at the theft of this treasured artifact. Outside is a servo with a steel roof of a style that makes lovers of old buildings despair over how the NT celebrates its early dwellings. It's where road train drivers pull up for fuel and nick in for a beer while the huge tanks are being filled. On Sunday the place was flat out, says licensee Les, who's been there for 13 years. The day started with him having to replace the windsock, destroyed in a recent bushfire, so that police aircraft could land on the dirt strip. The road trains and caravanners got stuck at Barrow Creek when travel on the 500 km Alice to Tennant Creek section was stopped. Some 50 cops, truckies and tourists were there for most of the day, and the phone didn't stop ringing. But by 5pm all the trucks and caravans were gone, and peace returned to the pub in the scrub.

GROG AND SNIFFING A MAMMOTH TASK! Report by KIERAN FINNANE.

"The approach is, 'Look at that great big mountain of shit, okay get out your teaspoon and start moving it'."That's what you absolutely have to do," says Nick Gill, manager of DASA, member of the Australian National Council on Drugs, and now appointed, together with fellow Centralian and DASA board member Anne Mosey, to the 11-member directorate of a new national body, the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation. Also appointed was well-
known researcher Peter d'Abbs of the Territory's Menzies School of Health Research. Mr Gill agrees that The Centre's alcohol problems look enormous but says, "This is where the foundation and the alcohol and drug professionals can assist. "Okay, it looks like an impossible problem, let's just break it down into its bits and deal with one bit at a time."Ways of dealing with the "bits", such as sobering up shelters, night patrols and other community initiatives, preferably with a long-term focus, may soon have extra resources behind them thanks to the foundation. Set up following an agreement between the Australian Democrats and the Prime Minister on how to use the overpayment of beer tax in the wake of the GST, the foundation will allocate $115m nationally over four years to alcohol education and rehabilitation.

The focus has been extended to other licit substances with a strong emphasis on inhalant abuse, and at least 20 per cent of the total will be used for programs targeting Indigenous people. Says Mr Gill: "We are very clear that the major locus of Indigenous substance abuse is in the tri-state region of Central Australia. "Without preempting any decisions that the foundation may make, we can expect that a significant amount of that 20 per cent will be coming to this area."He says creation of the foundation is timely for Central Australia, because at last a Regional Indigenous Substance Misuse Strategy has been agreed upon, which looks in detail at all the substance abuse problems for Indigenous people here and "uses best practice to address these in a holistic way"."This opportunity to inject some funding into that strategy is very good timing."Anne Mosey, who has worked with remote communities on substance abuse issues for more than 10 years, says she will be arguing for proposals that have a long-term focus, that work hand in hand with other services, that have broad-based community support and enough resources to employ some community members.

She says chairman Ian Webster wants the foundation to take a proactive role, rather than to sit back and wait for submissions to come in. She says he is keen to see some new approaches taken that will add to the skill base of communities. In her experience, particularly in relation to petrol sniffing, funding of programs is very reactive: the issue comes up in the media every few years, there is public controversy, a demand that something be done, followed by the funding of a pilot program which then stops."Until now there have been no long-term strategies despite a whole series of reports, including my own, that have emphasised the need for long-term planning. "There is a very high level of frustration on communities with pilot programs."People feel that they have been asking and asking for help, they've been giving information to reports, committees, and service providers, and not getting the support they need."The Northern Territory Government has not had inhalant substance abuse very high on its agenda. "At the moment a lot of the push, and the funding, is coming from the Commonwealth and the Territory is being dragged along with it."Mr Gill emphasises the education and prevention function of the foundation. "We don't want to run around shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted." We don't want to have to spend our funds looking after people who have become paraplegic as a result of petrol sniffing, when we can more effectively spend the money making sure that young people don't take up petrol sniffing, or drinking alcohol, in the first place." But does he honestly think prevention programs can work, given the profound social causes of the problem?Mr Gill: "Yes, I absolutely do. "The other national body to which I belong [the Australian National Council on Drugs] has just commissioned and will shortly be releasing an overall strategic document which looks at addressing the social and structural determinants of substance misuse. "We recognise, of course, that one of the major determinants for people abusing substances is boredom, frustration and lack of opportunity. "I need to make it clear that the foundation will not be funding employment programs or housing programs, but the measures we will be funding will go hand in hand with measures to address those very significant structural determinants."

WE WANT TOWN TO GROW: NATIVE TITLE HOLDER.

Betty Pearce, made NAIDOC Female Elder of the Year last week, Chair of the Institute of Aboriginal Development, and a native title holder, says the native title "prescribed body corporate" (PBC) will use whatever leverage it has to argue for "turning down the liquor tap" in Alice Springs. She told the Alice Springs News that the three family estates involved in the Alice Springs native title claimÐ the Irlpmne, her own, from the Bond Springs area, the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) and Antoilya (Undoolya) Ð are "well and truly supportive of future growth and development". She said that won't necessarily mean financial gain: "We'll look at maybe exchanging land, we don't know yet, it will be up to the three family estates to tell the committee [of the PBC] what to do and how to do it."

But she firmly hopes that "respect for the native title holders" will give them leverage in the alcohol debate. Action needs to be taken on two fronts, says Mrs Pearce: "We need to work with the bush communities about the anti-social behaviour, and we need to work with CATIA about their objections to
restricted hours for alcohol sales. "We hope communities from out of Alice Springs respect the fact that the native title holders now ask them to respect the land. "In the past it's been individuals, and it's very difficult for individuals to ask for something to be done. "We hope the town council and other organisations will support us when we've got a cohesive group to deal with." Mayor Fran Erlich, speaking at Friday's annual NAIDOC rally, underlined the town council's wish to work with" local Aboriginal people" regarding "outsiders coming to town" and "the humbug" they cause. Mrs Pearce says "maybe" the native title holders can convince CATIA "that we do need restrictions". "We're not thinking about trying to stop alcohol sales because that's not possible," she says. "What we want is the way some people have been saying it, we want the tap turned down so that it goes a bit slower." Speaking to the crowd of a few hundred at the NAIDOC rally, Mrs Pearce applied the "let's get it right" theme, nationally concerned with negotiating a treaty, to local issues: "Let's make sure our young people get the best education available, both traditional and Western education. "Let's build our children's self-esteem, let them know they are loved. "This is where the alcohol issue comes in. A good education leads to good mental and physical health. "Don't blame the grog. Learn about its effects on our bodies. "If abusers can't help themselves, we must take action."There are more Aboriginal deaths per head of population than in the worst cities of America. More of our women are likely to be murdered than in any other country in the world. "We are killing each other and ourselves. "Let's get it right and take some positive steps, like putting pressure on the Liquor Commissioner [to bring in restricted alcohol sales]. "Don't wait for someone else to do it, because nine out of 10 times they do it wrong."The best way to get it right is to do it ourselves." The Northern Territory Government have not "got it right" when they argue that native title is locking up land and keeping prices high in Alice Springs, says Mrs Pearce. "We laughed when we heard that because that's only an excuse as far we're concerned," says Mrs Pearce. "We don't have all that much land in the town. "We'll have to find out from the Government what they're talking about and we haven't come to that so far." Mrs Pearce says the constitution of the PBC and the makeup of its committee for the first two year period are still being finalised. Once that is done "I think there'll be a whole lot of improvements," she says.But the committee can't do things on their own: "They've got to go back and talk to the traditional owners of each family estate. Before they take any action they have to have the full support of the three family estates."

ALICE ART DEALERS SPREAD CENTRE MESSAGE ABROAD.

Taking advantage of the thriving international interest in Aboriginal art Ð overseas bidders were among those pushing last week's Sotheby's auction to record prices Ð the Hollows family will stage another show abroad this month, this time in Rome. Michael and Shirley Hollow own the Aboriginal Desert Art Gallery in Alice, while their daughters, Maryanne and Natalie, run galleries in Melbourne and Sydney respectively. Natalie has put together the Rome show, which is likely to feature a residency by Gabriella Possum. Earlier this year Maryanne orchestrated the family's first foray into the Asian market, with a show, and a residency by Anmatyerre artist, Gloria Petyarre, in Singapore. The show included work by Michael Nelson Jagamarra, Turkey Tolson Tjupurula, and the late E. Kngwarreye and J. Warangkula. Over half the works sold, but the strategy of the show was as much to promote an awareness of Aboriginal art from the Centre. Held in the Australian High Commission atrium, its opening night was attended by some 700 people, with the High Commissioner paying tribute to "the contribution Aboriginal men and women have made to Australia's identity as a leading art nation". During the week-long show Gloria Petyarre Ð on her third visit to Singapore Ð began the large painting pictured, with its central motif of the Thorny Mountain Devil lizard. School children were invited to add motifs copied from the art on display. The completed painting was presented to the High Commission. A documentary film about collecting bush tucker was also screened and Maryanne gave lectures about Aboriginal art. The format was similar to a previous promotion staged by the Hollow family in the lobby of the United Nations building in New York.